

**Panel of Information Technology and Broadcasting
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“Building a Digitally Inclusive Information Society”

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In the last few years, use of the Internet and computers in Hong Kong has grown substantially, Internet use is increasing for people regardless of income, education, age, race, ethnicity, or gender. However, there is still a sizable segment of the Hong Kong population that does not use the Internet.

The “digital divide” is real and growing, and has profound implications. This divide is not just about access to technology; it is a deeper and more profound divide that reflects and reinforces more fundamental economic and social divides within Hong Kong.

Bridging the digital divide is not simply about giving people access to technology. It is about creating policy and regulatory environments, institutional frameworks, and human capacities that foster information flows, innovation, and effective use of the information and knowledge resources in every dimension of sustainable development, from health, medicine and education to trade and economic development, effective governance.

“Real Access” to Technology for All

Access to information and technology can improve people’s lives. But not everybody has access to information technology or the necessary skills to exploit that access. For this reason it is important to undertake a range of activities to promote digital inclusion and spread the benefits of technology as widely as possible.

In order to achieve this goal, the technology must be of the **right sort**, **people need to know how to use it** and it must **deliver useful information, advice and content**. All three issues must be addressed if technology is to deliver the services people require.

Critical Success Factors for Real Access to Technology for All (Only highlight the points in the speech)

Affordability. Is technology access affordable? Opening up the telecommunications industry and introducing competition has lowered prices and allowed more people to access technology.

Appropriate technology. What is the appropriate technology according to local conditions, and how people need and want to put technology to use? Can Smart ID project really enforce a secure and privacy transaction taken place?

Physical access. Is technology available and physically accessible?

Capacity. Do people understand how to use technology and its potential uses? How we can educate some low-educated immigrants from our Mainland to adopt technology ?

Relevant content. Is there relevant local content, especially in terms of language? Development of more Chinese language based applications should be encouraged.

Socio-cultural factors. Are people limited in their use of technology based on gender, race, or other socio-cultural factors?

Trust. Do people have confidence in and understand the implications of technology they use, for instance in terms of Privacy, Security, or Cybercrime?

Legal and regulatory framework. How do laws and regulations affect technology use and what changes are needed to create an environment that fosters its use? Can ETO cover the daily legal implication of electronic transactions?

Local economic environment. Is there a local economy that can and will sustain technology use?

Macro-economic environment. Is national economic policy conducive to widespread technology use, for example, in terms of transparency, deregulation, investment, and labour issues?

Recommendations

Role of Government: One of the key challenges is defining an appropriate role for government in addressing the digital divide. The Government's role should go beyond creating the proper policy and regulatory environment, although this is fundamentally important. Governments also have to strike a balance between fostering private sector development and entrepreneurship, on the one hand, and investing in physical and human capital in appropriate ways that foster opportunity and empower the poor without stifling private innovation.

Policy directions must be adapted to the local context. Often basic policy principles are agreed at the international level, or policies are transferred from highly industrialized countries to developing and emerging countries. The local context -- in terms of local needs and skills and local political issues -- has a significant impact on whether generally accepted policy reforms are actually adopted and put into practice. Policies and processes that are grounded in real life experience, in local circumstances, based on real user needs, and addressing the multiple issues of *real access* to ICT have been more effective than those that have not.

Overall, a pooling of resources and experiences is needed: Digital inclusion is beyond the scope of any single initiative. It is important for organizations doing community ICT projects to meet the needs of their clients as comprehensively as possible. More collaboration of ICT and IT professional associations should be encouraged.

Appropriate Government funding, donation and philanthropic programs are necessary: Numerous on-the-ground initiatives are working to provide technology access to the underprivileged groups. Many initiatives including NGOs and government departments are already providing training. The Government should continue to encourage local community bodies to organize innovative E-Inclusion projects by providing appropriate funding and resources. Large high-tech MNCs can also play larger role by providing appropriate technology and know-how.