2020

Webinar Report on

IMPORTANCE OF BROADBAND

Post

COVID-19

PREPARED BY

DUG
DIGITAL USERS GROUP

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1. Foreword

Sh. N Sivasailam, IAS –
Former Special Secretary (Logistics) -
Ministry of Commerce (Government of India)

This Webinar on the subject of 'Importance of Broadband' could not have been timed better. The Covid-19 environment has amply demonstrated the 'power of Broadband' in no small measure. Naturally, expectations of actualizing its immense potential have risen manifold.

The National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP 2018) signals a break from its earlier National Telecom Policy avatars by emphasizing Broadband networks as being the communications backbone. Only five years ago, video chats involving many participants were a rarity. Today, thanks to the Covid-19 opportunity, webinars involving more than 500 participants is commonplace. I had occasion to participate in many webinars during the lockdown period, not only as a speaker, but also to hear distinguished people hold forth on a variety of topical issues that are of special interest to me. The quality of the presentations made by the speakers and participation of those attending were no less than that in a seminar. Clearly, Broadband has made a significant entry into our lives, and we are now well and truly in the lap of the digital age.

This initiative of DUG is a significant first step towards generating the business ideas and opportunities in the area of Broadband. I thank DUG for inviting me to participate in the webinar as a speaker highlighting the policy support from NDCP 2018. It gave me an opportunity to share in detail the broad vision of the large team of stakeholders who provided significant inputs to the NDCP 2018. The exponential use of Broadband in this crisis time has opened up new opportunities which otherwise may not have arisen at all! The important point is that these changes are here to stay! Behavioural changes enabled by Broadband have been significant – contactless monitoring by Customs and Airport security are some of the commonly observed ones! While stakeholders have been pleading for the adoption of these new technologies, it happened in a jiffy these Covid times as the world needs to stay connected.

It has been an enriching experience for me to participate in the Webinar. The presentations, queries and clarifications provided by my fellow panelists provided ground level inputs that makes sense to both policy makers and entrepreneurs regarding the issues to be addressed at various levels.

I am delighted that DUG has decided to publish a White Paper as "Webinar Note" to serve as a useful reference for stake holders such as Policy Makers, Regulators, Trade Associations for addressing opportunities in Broadband.

My best wishes to DUG and its enthusiastic team.

2. Introduction

The Covid-19 crisis has brought unprecedented challenges for all of us. As we navigate this situation, the role played by broadband Internet has significantly increased. It has suddenly become the centre of our lives for work and communication, and a means to avail all the essentials services.

With the impact of Covid-19, WFH, video conferencing, online clearance of files in the Government, etc., have become the new norms in the industry. This has resulted in the increase in demand and upward movement of data consumption by the existing users.

On average, prices for mobile-voice, mobile-data and fixed-broadband services are decreasing steadily around the world, and in some countries even dramatically like India. The reduction in price relative to income is even more dramatic, globally, telecommunication and information and communication technology services are becoming more affordable. However, both trends do not translate into rapidly increasing Internet penetration rates which suggests that there are other barriers to Internet use as it is well concludes in the ITU's new statistical report, *Measuring Digital Development: ICT Price Trends 2019* released in May 2020.

28th May New Delhi: Digital Users Group of India (Affiliate to International Telecom Users Group) collaborated on World Telecommunication and Information Society Day-WTSID- by conducting webinar on "Importance of Broadband in post Covid-19", where they examined readiness at the supply side and the aspirations at the demand side.

3. Discussion

Webinar recognized that broadband is new life line of economy and has seen data growth of 25% to 45% during the lockdown. Higher broadband width is being demanded by both individual (Work from Home) and also by institutional ones. Broadband has reached 50% in India, which means, half the population still remains unconnected. The ITU and the UNESCO have set a target of connecting 75% of the world's population by 2025. Telecom Operators and infrastructure providers' are effectively playing the role of Covid front line Warriors for operating and maintaining the network and connectivity through the pandemic and speedily attending to any faults. Secretary TRAI recognized that the fault rate has gone down by 1% of BTS during Covid-19.

Shri Sivasailam said that 'We also have issues related to institutions that are being created. We need to find an institutional solution. With the revival of BSNL and MTNL, they would be perfect to create the new infrastructure. The right of way should also be supported in an institutional manner'. He further said that the E and V bands are under discussions with the government for more than 5 years this is the opportune time to unleash the uses of the bands, regulator can play a significant role in its accessibility to use. He added that there is a great deal of rural focus because of Covid-19. We are going to see a change in digital commerce, or digital business. The brick and mortar shops will get digitalized. There will be lot of things on documentation. An authenticated document can come to you only

when you are interlocked. There must be an opportunity for people to take this on.

Webinar applauded telecom industry by effectively bridging digital divide in 'telephony'. Now country is looking at us to bridge digital divide in broadband. Fiber to the Home (FTTH) and 5G are the solutions to spread high speed broadband in urban and rural areas. Speakers also flagged that women are less privileged in accessing broadband than men. Today, the CSCs are having pan India footprint which can create a rural entrepreneurship. Clubbing CSCs with MNREGA funds can help to build fibre optic network in the rural areas effectively. MNREGA has 40% component for material. Fibre can be laid and the material component can be addressed. Everything else can be taken care of by village panchayats with the help of CSC. India must focus its efforts and reinvigorate the Fiber Based broadband network readiness for times to come – The Government, Operators and the Regulator would need to play their part to ease and facilitate this country wide fiberisation.

Shri Manoj Barara said that the role of broadband & Digital infrastructure is increasingly visible in this new normal. Homes have become Offices, Classrooms in addition to virtual cafes, cinemas and creation studios – how many of us have started generating content in the form of cooking videos, Instagram and other social media challenges – to share with our loved ones? All these changes are clearly visible to the Network Service Providers – whether it is in time of the day, intensity (i.e. bandwidth usage) or the bi-directionality. While Corona virus has exposed the frailty of human kind against the tiniest organism i.e. virus, it has also brought to the fore, the resilience & wellness of our broadband networks. **Resilience** of a broadband network is defined by its capacity to carry the lockdown
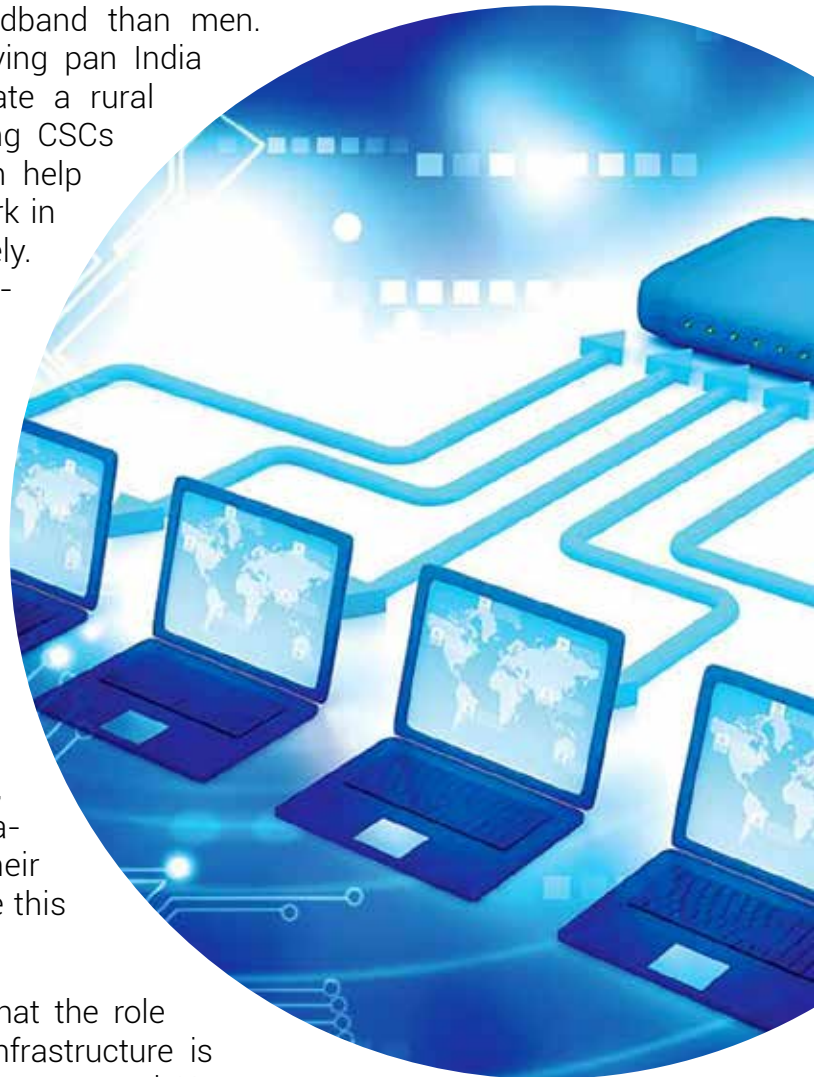
patterns of traffic for its existing subscriber base while **wellness** of the broadband network refers to the capacity of the network to serve the entire population during this WFH times. Very soon, we would see Broadband Health Indices of a service provider, locality, city, state & country being measured and published. It won't be surprising if broadband wellness and resilience index becomes a critical parameter for rankings in defining the standard of living. 5G would help with its high throughput, Ultra low latency and reliable communication and Industry 4.0 but the key to carrying the traffic from 5G nodes would still be the fiberisation of these sites. So the mantra to future is "fiberisation, fiberisation, fiberisation…"

Shri P Balaji, Chief Regulatory and Corporate Affairs Officer, Vodafone Idea, noted that we have had low teledensity for long. Today, we have over 100% teledensity in the urban areas. There has been a lot of work done by the telecom operators, equipment providers, regulators, etc. The innovation in this sector is second to none. The whole ecosystem has adapted to digital. There are solutions for MSMEs, cloud-based networks, etc. During the Covid-19 crisis, there were some extremely difficult situations on the ground. The industry is very resilient. He further said that NDCP National Digital Communications Policy is a fantastic document. The faster implementation of NDCP will allow us to roll out networks better.

Shri NK Mohapatra, CEO, Electronics Sector Skill Council of India (ESSC), added that India has been on broadband for a long time. Earlier, broadband was not considered as a necessity, like electricity. We can connect with the rest of the world through broadband. Now, everybody needs connectivity. Today, in rural areas, we also need broadband. It

will have many flavours and challenges. We need to meet the challenge of having every possible technology that delivers broadband. Everything is now done remotely. The industry will definitely deliver. He stressed on the need to have telecom companies with products localized here, in India. Service is not an area of concern. The real challenge is developing the R&D manpower. India spend appx $14.2 billion on telecom Equipment purchase per year, out of which appx $11.5 billion is import bill, which is a concern today.

Webinar informed that people across the world are looking for new online solutions like in healthcare, agriculture, financial sector and education etc. With advent of AI, AR/VR, BOT which should provide solution in new reality of social distancing and hygiene.

Shri Gokul Tandon, Executive Chairman Virtual Soft and Cloud Connect, which summarising the webinar informed that solutions based on cloud technology are becoming new norms in office automation, especially for work from home.

Shri Anil Prakash, President, Digital Group informed that the webinar recommendations will be submitted to the concerned regulators and policy makers, the webinar conclusion emerged with few streams of interest groups such as 5G, broadband QoS, manufacturing for Atmanirbhar Bharat, capacity building, MSME for innovation, blockchain, AI, AR/VR and BOT etc.

4. Recommendations

4.1   Broadband should be treated as Basic Infrastructure and all benefits related to basic infrastructure must be given to all relevant organisations for meeting unprecedented demand.

4.2   Trials in and auction of 5G spectrum with appropriate price band, maybe expedited as more than 35 telecom networks worldwide have already adopted 5G till date.

4.3   CSC and MNREGA may be used effectively for rural fiberisation work.

4.4   Telecom Service Providers have shown resilience and prudence during Covid-19. Government must extend its support to TSPs specially to BSNL and MTNL.

4.5   Local manufacturing and R&D should be given emphasis in new telecom era. This will help in developing local talent and reduction in dependency on import.

4.6   India should get ready for "Digital Commerce" and start adopting and developing (Indian Version) applications.

4.7   E & Vband should be utilised as "Fibre in Air" without any further delay.

4.8   Industry should promote new innovations by startups like Cloudbased Office Automation solutions. Government must setup a "Reserve Fund" to promote startups in telecommunications.

4.9   Govt. may monitor speedy implementation of NDPC-2018, by removing all hurdles for TSPs and IPs.

4.10   Capacity building on aggressive level, may be taken up in PPP mode.

5. About Speakers

Shri N Sivasailam, IAS, former Special Secretary, Telecom & Special Secretary (Logistics) Ministry of Commerce Govt. of India was Chief Guest. Shri S K Gupta, Secretary Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was Guest of Honour. Shri P Balaji, Chief Regulatory and Corporate Affairs Officer, Vodafone Idea, Shri NK Mohapatra, CEO, ESSCI, and Shri Manoj Barara, Director, Pre-Sales, Nokia India were leading speakers. Shri Anil Jain, former CGM, BSNL moderated the webinar discussion. Shri Anil Prakash, President, DUG gave the welcome and opening remarks and Shri Gokul Tandon, Executive Chairman, Cloud Connect gave away the webinar summary and closing remarks.

Sh. N Sivasailam, IAS – former Special Secretary (Logistics) - Ministry of Commerce (Government of India) Sivasailam is an officer of the 1985 batch of the Indian Administrative Service allotted to Karnataka Cadre. He graduated in Mechanical Engineering from Delhi College of Engineering, University of Delhi.

Sh. Sunil Kumar Gupta – An Indian Telecommunication Service (ITS) Officer. He is working as Secretary, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). He has over 35 years of experience of working in various capacity in telecom including installation, operations and management of networks.

Sh. Anil Jain – An ITS officer, served the country Telecom Sector for appx 36 years. He has worked at various assignments in DOT/ BSNL/ MTNL. He is credited to initiate/start Computerisation in DOT, Marketing, Landline Broadband, Smart City, VNOs, Social media , VOIP Calling etc. He was on NIXI board for more than 12 years.

Sh. P Balaji – Chief Regulatory and Corporate Affairs Officer at Vodafone Idea Limited. An experienced Director with a demonstrated history of working in the telecommunications industry. Skilled in Management, Leadership, Marketing, Business Development, and Strategy. Strong professional with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) focused in Marketing, Finance from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Sh. N.K.Mohapatra – CEO, Electronics Skill Council of India (ESSCI). has had 40 years of experience in research and development, Manufacturing, and sales services of communication equipment. Throughout His career, he has worked for various organizations such as Bharat Electronics, Hewlett Packard, Shyam Electronics, UT Starcom, and Midas Communication. He specializes in new product positioning in emerging market, In last 15 years of his carrier, he has introduced in establishing export business of Indian MNC in south east Asia, SAARC Countries beyond India. He is an alumnus of IIT Kharagpur where he completed his degree in Electronics and Communication Engineering in 1977, and Post-graduation in Management from IIT Delhi in 1990.

Sh. Gokul Tandan – Executive Chairman CloudConnect, Enhanced Communications & Technologies, Roam1 and MD, VirtualSoft Systems Ltd. Founding member , key growth catalyst and Sr Adviser to the Chairman of HCL Goup of Companies, now one of India's top 20 business groups with a market cap of over US 15 billion. Gokul graduated from St Stephens, Delhi and did his MBA from IIM Calcutta. His Paper on Telecom Policy Architectures was presented at ITU's World Telecom Summit in Geneva, 1995.

Sh. Manoj Barara – Director of Pre Sales in Nokia India. Manoj has 27 years of rich industry experience across R&D, Product Management and Implementation in various technology domains including legacy PSTN, GSM, VOIP, IPTV, Cable & Broadband. In the last three years at Nokia, he has been working with Telecom Service Providers and ISPs across India, helping them expand FTTH networks pan-India. He has published articles and whitepapers on "Connected Life" & "Cable Broadband".

Sh. Anil Prakash – Widely experienced in Government Relation, Regulatory and Policy framework with strong techno-commercial background in Telecom, ICT and Broadcasting digital domain with 34 years works experience. He is associated with International Telecommunications Union- ITU for more than a decade and had played an influential role in contributing towards ITU's activities in India. He is co-founder & President of Digital Users Group which functions as a Public Policy Think-Tank for Digital Users in India.

6. About Participants

Total Number of Participants **165**	Number of Countries Represented **5**

7. DUG Interest Groups

5G Eco System
Broadband & Quality of Service
Manufacturing for Atmanirbhar Bharat
Capacity Building
MSME for Innovations
Block Chain & Cyber Security
AI, AR/VR & BOT
FTTH

8. About Organising Team & Supporting Partners

Organising Team:

❖ **Shri Anil Jain,** Former CGM, BSNL | asdj1990@gmail.com

❖ **Shri Anil Prakash,** President, Digital Users Group | president@tugi.org.in

❖ **Shri Gokul Tandon,** Executive Chairman, Cloud Connect | gokul@cloud-connect.in

❖ **Shri KS Gill,** MD, Airsoft Technologies | ksgill@airsoft.org.in

❖ **Shri Niraj Dogra,** Sr Consultant, ICT | nirajdogra@gmail.com

❖ **Shri Nishith Patnaik,** Founder & Director, NHANCE NOW | nishith@nhancenow.com

Supporting Partners:

Bridge India, based out of UK, is a progressive non-profit think tank dedicated to discourse on public policy for the betterment of India.

It provides space for broad and open minded debate, with the focus on connecting India watchers and diaspora to India.

https://www.bridgeindia.org.uk/

The SCTE (Society for Broadband Professionals) is a Learned Society whose aim is to raise the standard of broadband engineering in the telecommunications industry. The Society provides a forum for the exchange of technical information and experience through formal publications and lectures as well as social interaction between members.

https://thescte.eu

Electronics Sector Skills Council of India (ESSCI) is a Not-for-Profit Organization, promoted by six Associations i.e. CEAMA, ELCINA, IESA (formerly ISA) , IPCA, MAIT & ELCOMA, with financial support by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).

To establish a structured mechanism wherein ESSCI will facilitate & collaborate with NSDC in strengthening the existing vocational education system for skills development in electronics sector & upgrade vocational training system for the industry to achieve global standards in manpower productivity.

https://www.essc-india.org/

A Conversational Customer Engagement Platform using the power of messaging, voice and AI to empower businesses to provide Self Care customer service, AI powered Business Automation and WhatsApp/Facebook/Alexa enabled consumer interactions.

https://www.nhancenow.com
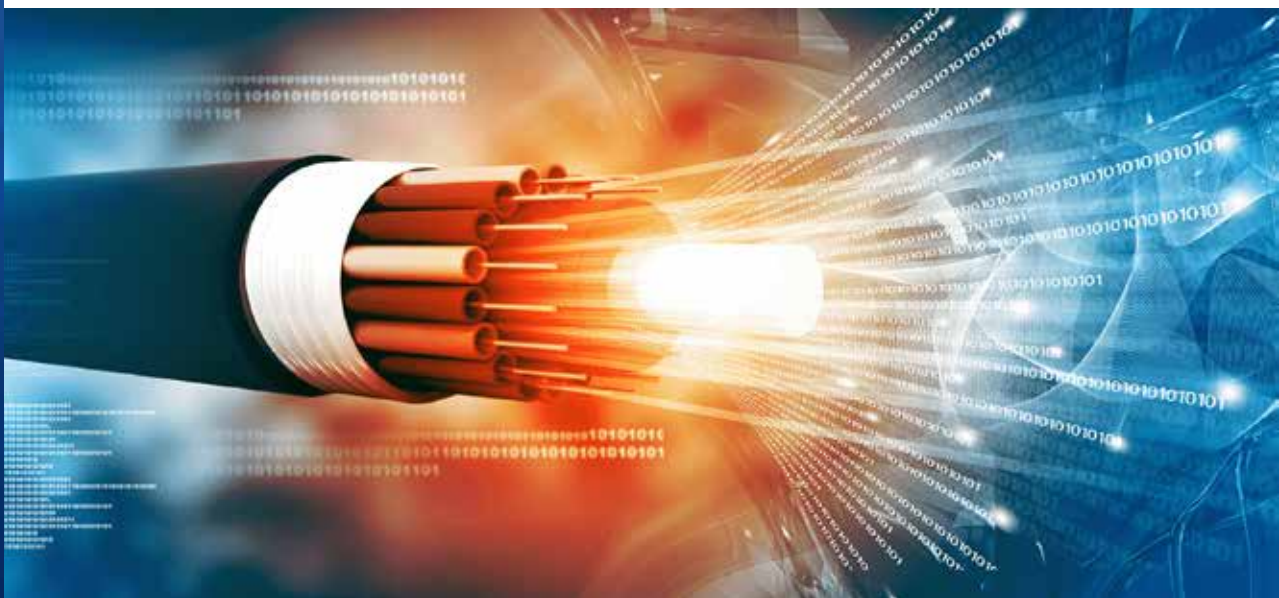
9. About Digital Users Group

A Public Policy Think Tank for Digital Users in India.

Digital Users Group is working under the Telecom Users Group of India a non-profit non-governmental membership organisation and registered as a society under the Society Act 1860, NCR Delhi in 1997, it is catering to the needs of large business users in India and work closely in association with International Telecom Users Group (INTUG) **www.intug.org**

Since 1997 TUGI has promoted digital users interest at the policy and regulatory level, Our mission is to ensure that users have access to affordable, interoperable digital communications with Quality of Services and their respective tariffs. **www.digitalusergroup.org**

10. Disclaimer

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