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OVERVIEW

The Inclusive Digital Model (IDMODEL) project aims to research into a new business model that seeks to enable marginalised people in developing countries to generate income and empower themselves by sharing their skills and experiences using a digital platform.

Bangladesh and Haate Haat App partner:

- SBK Foundation

China partner:

- University of International Business and Economics

Supporting organisations

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs , Bangladesh

- Kuaishou Technology Co., Ltd (China)

Short-video platform innovation inspires marginalised communities new ways to generate income

POLICY BRIEF   *ISSUE 3, 2021*

The 'Digital technology-based business model for inclusive development' (IDMODEL) project started in 2018. As part of this, a content-based digital platform APP named Haate Haat (Hand2Hand) was developed to help marginalised communities and grassroots entrepreneurs in Bangladesh to establish important networks and collaborations, and create business and income through the short videos that they produce themselves.

Since 2019, we have conducted the Haate Haat APP promotion and usage training programme. Our project partner SBK Foundation has established Technology (Tech) Hubs in 64 districts of Bangladesh, and has mobilised these Tech Hubs to assist our project. The hub coordinators delivered district-wide APP download campaigns, improved digital literacy and promoted the Haate Haat features and benefits. They also provided a series of training sessions to help users identify and capture opportunities in online health consultations (Health-tech), online schooling and tutoring (Edu-tech), and digitised payment (Fin-tech). Women with children and elderly family members were particularly encouraged to trial the Haate Haat via these Tech Hubs.

To examine how this content-based, short-video platform impacts marginalised communities' livelihoods, we carried out two rounds of survey to assess its impact, one before and one after the Haate Haat promotional programme. We randomly selected 530 households in 14 cities/regions of Bangladesh, covering 2120 individuals, as our respondents. We found that 38.1% of individuals in our sample adopted Haate Haat after the usage training programme and download campaign, and 60% of them reported more than 10 hours of monthly usage of the APP. Our analysis revealed the following:

- Younger adults with secondary education, merchants and females were the most active groups to adopt the Haate Haat for daily use. However, the APP was used by residents across all ages and levels of education.
- Compared with non-users, users who received the Haate Haat training programme were more willing to utilise various mobile APPs, broaden their social networks, and improve their quality of life, i.e., by searching online for information about health, fashion, cooking, and holiday destinations. They were more willing to help neighbours and communities and felt more self-confident. Our evidence reveals a positive effect ranging from 5% to 15% for different dimensions, from value creation to building social capital.

- Our training programme inspired people to run their own businesses, and improve their life skills. Haate Haat users felt confident to use other mobile APPs and to learn occupational skills such as languages, research market information, develop business ideas, and find job opportunities.

- Our results confirm that Haate Haat APP supports the creation of alternative sources of income for people from marginalised communities. As a content-based digital platform, Haate Haat enables users to operate a business by recommending products, promoting and distributing products or services, and receiving rewards and donations as a result of doing online shows or performances.

- Moreover, our programme helped residents to cope with the hardships arising from the current pandemic. Haate Haat users understood the importance of using mobile APPs to access information such as COVID-19 related health advice, mental health support, and government guidance regarding COVID-19. Importantly, Haate Haat users reported that they created an additional income of 1000 to 5000 BDT (about 12 to 60 US$) by using this APP in the last year.

- However, we found that several barriers that hinder the adoption and usage of short-video platforms. The worries of using mobile APPs (i.e., lack of confidence and security concerns) became a daunting barrier for marginal communities. Additionally, substandard infrastructure, a lack of motivation, a lack of language skills, and the cost of devices/networks were the main barriers to overcome when accessing digital platforms.

Policy recommendations

- Widely publicise the success stories and/or role models to inspire marginalised societies to use the short-video platform technology-based new business model to diversify income.

- Develop policies that encourage and enable the development and adoption of short-video platforms for content-based income generation activities. These include:

1) financial or tax policies to encourage sustainable development or poverty reduction oriented platforms;
2) building 4G network infrastructure in remote or rural communities;
3) lowering subscription fees for 4G or 5G mobile internet usage for marginalised communities;
4) providing subsidies, vouchers, or cash transfers for users in marginalised communities to purchase digital devices or pay for network subscriptions;
5) strengthening regulations to protect consumers' right and data privacy while strengthening digital security to reduce some of the consumers' worries of using mobile APPs;
6) new policies or special training programmes to enhance users' skills to produce, upload and market their short-video products.

- The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of digital platforms. Digital platforms have provided useful social and public health information to the public and supported people by connecting them at difficult times. They have been used to inspire and support marginalised communities by suggesting new ways of generating additional income or diversifying the current income sources that are crucial to coping with the current Covid19 hardships.