

NSU hosts Research Dissemination Seminar on Rethinking Accountability for Digitised Futures in Bangladesh

Dhaka, March 06, 2024: The South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), in collaboration with the University of Bath and the University of Westminster, UK, organized a research dissemination seminar on “Rethinking Accountability for Digitised Futures in Bangladesh” at North South University.

The presenters were Professor Joe Devine of the University of Bath and Dr. Ipshta Basu from the University of Westminster. The seminar was moderated by Dr. Rizwan Khair, Associate Professor, SIPG & Acting Chair, Department of Political Science & Sociology (PSS), NSU. Dr. Abdul Wohab, Assistant Professor, PSS & Coordinator, Centre of Peace Studies (CPS), NSU, gave welcome remarks. Professor Sadik Hasan, Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka, Dr. Mohoshin Ali, Member, Directing Staff, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center (BPATC) and Dr. Zulkarin Jahangir, Assistant Professor from the Department of Management at NSU were among the critical discussants in the seminar. The research, which was funded by the Covid-19 Learning, Evidence and Research Programme in Bangladesh (CLEAR) of the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, focused on how during Covid 19 innovations in digitalization of Public Service delivery have changed the organizational culture in government and, some cases, it also posed particular challenges.



Moderator Dr. Rizwan Khair started by talking about creating a bridge between the researchers and government practitioners through which they will benefit, followed by Dr. Abdul Wohab's welcome remarks.

Professor Joe Devine presented key findings and recommendations of the research. He said that the introduction of digitalization posed a challenge to traditional patron-client relationships. Our research is centered on whether digital citizenship will transform these prevailing dynamics.

Dr. Ipsita Basu said that the CLEAR program spurred the initiation of this project. Observing how Bangladesh handled the pandemic often filled me with admiration. The unity and collective response of the nation were exemplary. We also evaluated the effectiveness of the 333 national helpline and the Prime Minister's fund to gain insights into their on-ground operations and impact.

Professor Sadik Hasan said that the government's intent in establishing the Union Digital Centers (UDC) was to dismantle the 'Dalal class' within Bangladesh, where access to information was a privilege. The government aimed to democratize this privilege by the UDC.

Dr. Mohoshin Ali pointed out digitalization's significant role in bridging the gap between citizens and the government, citing COVID-19 management as a success story. Initiatives like the vaccination drive, social security services reaching millions of the poorest with direct cash incentives, and educational programs through Zoom and BTV were noted achievements. The success of Mobile Financial Services was also mentioned.

Dr. Zulkarin Jahangir said that this blend of digital and analog practices indicates that while progress has been made, the digitization journey is still incomplete and requires further refinement. To this end, he suggested the introduction of multiple entry points for applications and other digital services to enhance efficiency.

Engaging questions from the participants livened up the discussion. Participants from national and international organizations, universities, development organizations, embassies, media outlets, and other organizations attended physically and virtually. NSU and SIPG faculty members attended and provided insightful questions and commentary during the open session.