



Bangladesh

Affordability Report Highlights 2018

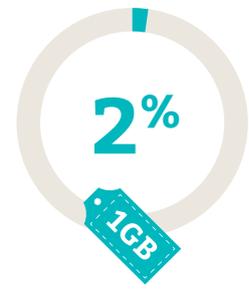
Bangladesh has made slow improvement towards affordable internet access for its citizens. The government needs to step up needed reforms to reduce the price of broadband for all, with a targeted approach towards underserved communities/groups e.g upskilling women in the informal sector with digital skills. Bangladesh lags other countries in the region in terms of having an effective broadband strategy and good spectrum management.



ONLINE POPULATION
(ITU, 2017)



MOBILE BROADBAND PENETRATION
(A4AI/GSMA, 2018)



COST OF 1GB OF MOBILE PREPAID INTERNET
(AS % OF GNI/CAPITA)
(A4AI, 2018)



63% MOBILE INTERNET GENDER GAP
(GSMA, 2018)



A global coalition working to make broadband affordable for all

www.a4ai.org

Bangladesh's Performance on the 2018 Affordability Drivers Index

Bangladesh ranks 41st (out of 61 countries surveyed) on the 2018 Affordability Drivers Index (ADI). This is the same place compared to what Bangladesh earned in the revised 2017 Affordability Drivers Index, indicating the slow pace of policy change across the country.

ADI RANK	COUNTRY	ACCESS	INFRASTRUCTURE	ADI SCORE (OUT OF 100)
41	Bangladesh	46.82	41.84	46.95

1 Regulatory Environment

Score: 4.75 / 10

The Regulator, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) authorises a wide range of services but within different categories of licensing. Nonetheless, efforts are being made towards a more flexible, simple, and unified class licensing regime. Technology neutrality was introduced in 2018 with the 4G licensing guidelines. BTRC has begun a process of revising the International Long Distance Telecommunications Services Policy (ILDTS), with a first draft submitted in March 2018.

2 Broadband Strategy

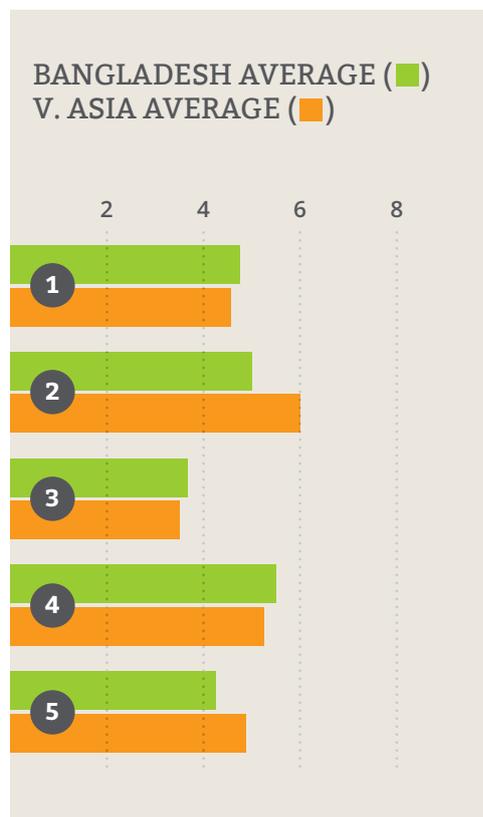
Score: 5 / 10

The draft National Telecommunication Policy 2015 includes broadband policies aimed at increasing penetration. For example it aims to increase internet penetration to 50% by 2021. However, it has yet to be formally promulgated into law. The Digital Bangladesh vision which includes goals for capacity development, private sector efficiency, and providing meaningful access to citizens would require cohesive planning and implementation. a2i and A4AI are working to jointly present a national broadband plan roadmap and strategy by 2019 that will support these goals and make affordable internet reality for all.

3 Universal & Public Access

Score: 3.67 / 10

Bangladesh's USAF, the Social Obligation Fund, was established in the Bangladesh Telecommunications Act 2001. However, funds have not yet been effectively utilised and remain without a clear strategy. The Access to Information (a2i) Programme, one of the pillars of the Digital Bangladesh strategy, has facilitated the setup of Union Digital Centers (UDC) to increase internet access in public spaces and remote areas. Scaling up of the existing UDCs, especially in public institutions such as health centres, post offices, and libraries would help to bridge the digital divide. An overarching strategy is needed to connect all these efforts and efficiently utilize these funds in a coherent manner.



4 Infrastructure Sharing

Score: 5.5 / 10

The BTRC promulgated Infrastructure Sharing Guidelines (ISG) in 2011 to maximize network facilities. Around 50% new sites have been shared among the operators since then. In 2018, the government approved tower sharing licensing guidelines that would separate telecommunication business from operators' network infrastructure business. According to the approved guidelines, four companies will get licenses to manage mobile towers in Bangladesh and the evaluation process will be conducted under the 'beauty contest' method.

5 Spectrum Management

Score: 4.25 / 10

There is no Spectrum Allocation Plan or Roadmap in place. The National Frequency Allocation Plan (NFAP) review is in process with consultation of ITU. Since 2008, spectrum bands have been assigned by the government through competitive auction processes. In February 2018, the BTRC conducted its third spectrum auction where new frequencies were allocated to two of the participating MNOs. However spectrum auctions per \$/mhz in the 1800 - 2100 were reported to be one of the highest globally¹.

Recommendations

- 1. Develop and implement a comprehensive broadband strategy** that supports affordable last-mile connectivity solutions across all 492 upazilas, enables public access models, expands digital literacy and increases infrastructure sharing between the ICT sector and other sectors.
- 2. Prioritise and expand public access initiatives** by establishing incentives and funding for new cost-effective connectivity, e.g., UDCs, public access models. Use existing public institutions with adequate broadband connectivity to quickly scale-up public access.
- 3. Utilise the Social Obligation Fund to speed up universal service** with a holistic and inclusive roadmap that supports reliable and open backbone infrastructure, innovative public access points and relevant local content. A clear focus on rural development and specific upskilling strategies to empower women matches with the goal of enhancing the participation rate of women in the labor force from 29% to at least 40% by 2021².
- 4. Bolster spectrum management.** Building on the existing positive practice of transparent spectrum auctioning, the regulator needs to infuse a long-term spectrum management plan that meets the sector's growing needs, including greater spectrum monitoring capacity. Affordable and technology-neutral allocation of spectrum is key to expanding services to change the experience of the 2018 auction where only 33% of spectrum attracted bids due to a prohibitively high price.
- 5. Update and simplify the telecommunications licensing framework** to a technology-neutral unified licensing model that supports innovation and enables new service providers. The draft ILDTS policy currently under review should incorporate investment friendly policies that encourage operators and regulators to meet QoS standards.

1 Country overview: Bangladesh Mobile industry driving growth and enabling digital inclusion
2 Perspective plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021