Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons
Roundtable #3 Tech Literacy

September 14, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The "*Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons*" (or simply *Network*) represents a coalition of stakeholders – from academia, civil society, and governments – supporting the United Nation's Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. It calls for the global community to work together to connect all people by the year 2030 by ensuring digital inclusion for all. This is especially vital for the underserved communities – including older populations – that have been impacted most by challenges brought forth by lack of access to digital services and solutions. The immediate goals of this *Network* are to: **(1)** identify scalable solutions, **(2)** elevate successful models, and **(3)** offer recommendations to address the digital inclusion barriers for older persons. Additionally, the *Network* will provide pathways to overcome these digital inclusion barriers by spotlighting effective policies and programs, strategic partnerships, emerging technologies, and useful metrics by which to measure progress. The *Network* plans to share these solutions among *Network* members and with the United Nation's Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Technology later this year.

Goals of the Three Roundtables

1. Collaborate on ideas to advance digital inclusion and to identify and overcome barriers.

2. Share successful initiatives, models, partnerships, technologies, and policies that help overcome digital inclusion barriers, with the objective of presenting to the United Nations Network-of-Networks.

3. Raise visibility for incorporating older persons into all digital equity efforts at the United Nations and beyond.

4. Disseminate opportunities, best practices, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies to member organizations.

5. Commence the "*Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons*," as a member of the United Nations Network-of-Networks.

The vision. Imagine a world when all feel empowered with digital experiences – just as college students are today – but at all ages. These experiences keep people confident as they adopt new technology, thrive with it, gaining access to work and education. Research is not just published -- but implemented at scalable levels for every world. What is different in that vision from the current world? And how can the objective be achieved?

Third Roundtable

The third (of three) Roundtable Event, Digital Literacy, was held on September 14, 2022. The Roundtable convened a group of **31** participants – representing multiple countries and constituencies – to share best practices, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies.

The digital world will play a bigger role in all societies moving forward. According to the WHO, by 2030, there will be 1.4 billion people aged 60+. The United Nations has said that digital access is a human right. The experiences, particularly challenges and lessons learned by participants in this third roundtable, were notable. Their contributions toward 'achievement of digital literacy' will lead to recommendations across the public-private sector that will accelerate tech literacy globally.

Panelist perspective: Problems and challenges. Now that healthcare is so reliant on digital tools, the need for digital literacy has become acute. In other countries, language is a barrier – so much of technology and related training is offered exclusively in English. In some countries citizens may only have power for four hours per day – which severely limits their ability to access resources. So how far are we in achieving universal digital literacy for older adults? Panelists noted that in many ways society overall has come a long way. Consider the variety of user interface options available today, from smartphones, to tablets, to voice interactions, to tablets and personal computers. All of these are less cumbersome that user interfaces were a decade or more ago. But they acknowledged that there is a long way to go. And in some ways panelists felt that reaching the goal seems to be accelerating away from those with the greatest need. Consider healthcare, as one example, and how critical the need has become to access online resources (health records, medical advice, patient peers, or filling prescriptions) in later life. According to Pew Research, one third of adults aged 65+ never use the Internet, with even lower adoption for those with household incomes below $30,000. Yet during the pandemic, older adults, their families and service providers became aware of how important connectivity was – which highlighted how digital literacy has become essential.

The topic of the roundtable. The term "Digital literacy" implies a certain level of access. It may vary depending on the degree of individual motivation and interest, combined with availability of affordable devices and resources for connectivity, training and support. However, the pace of technology change is accelerating, and today's environment is ever more fragmented by multiple and competing technology vendors, each with an incentive to

market proprietary technology. In some countries, if individuals only have a smartphone, how will they know what services they can access and for which purpose? And because of the pace of change, even with the most sophisticated technology skills, it is becoming increasingly difficult to stay current. Some say that things will be different with the baby boomers who will take their current level of technology capabilities into their later years. But it is likely that despite their current literacy combined with the accelerating pace of technology change – consider AI, robotics, and virtual reality, for example – they will likely be as puzzled by new technology in their 80s as today's 80-year-olds.

What has – or hasn't – changed? The user interface in the past was cumbersome and slow, and required significant motivation and training depth available to the most motivated end users. Today is different. The user interface on smartphones and tablets has become more intuitive – which reduces the skill required to access technology. Despite that difference, users are still pushed by their devices and software to accept new versions, whether they want them or not -- 'You must take that upgrade, now!" -- which can create a cascading level of problems, software bugs, confusing changes to methods for accessing phone and Internet services, and the need for ever-more scarce telephone or in-person support.

Example: tech literacy in Japan. Yasuko Akutso, Aging 2.0 Tokyo Ambassador, CEO of MT Healthcare, notes that digital literacy in Japan is notably high. Baby boomers are relatively comfortable with technology, supported by a system of social networks to help them. These networks assist older people in the use of technology and accessing services. But still they run into pace-of-change issues, such as how to switch from one app to another, like TikTok to WhatsApp.

Example: Didi Ben Shalom from Digital Israel. Technology competence is not just a problem that will solve itself. We do have a national program for digital literacy for older adults – most municipalities (more than half). The efforts in Israel include working with people who are homebound, independent in the community or in institutions. What we are seeing in Israel: More of the people are connected, though that may not extend to the Arab population living in Jewish areas. People are still struggling with differences and technology offerings may not be suitable to their needs. People are connected and online, using only the very basic tools and skills, not those that can promote healthy aging or connection to the community.

OTHER CHALLENGES

For some countries – the challenges could be at the federal, state, local level, or all three. However, context matters. The user interface has improved – and what is needed for individuals will vary and can likely be matched to their requirements. Training sources and availability of training vary widely by geography. Money is a key component for connectivity. – many government programs subsidize access, but awareness of these programs may be uneven. And devices and access, despite efforts to make widely available, are not connected to pace of change. 'No longer support a particular device'. Services needed may

require high speed internet access – we don't all have it, or if we have it, don't know how to get it. Possible to be overwhelmed by even admitting that you don't know. Awareness, training, access, and affordability represent key challenges. Older adults need to understand device affordability, high speed Internet pricing and available subsidies as well as location of training. Much of the training individuals require may be found in stores that sell the devices – such as phone stores or technology stores.

Tech platform pace of change implies other challenges. Interoperability an issue, or the service side of training – their development cycle of getting new training into the field must be as fast as the pace of change in new technology. We must look at the need to continue providing security updates – leaving people on 10-year-old devices. Must provide privacy and security and updates that are required – complement that with appropriate education. We are seeing new innovations – and more companies focusing on the aging demographic.

User interface pace of change. On the plus side, new interfaces such as voice tech and natural language processes mean that older adult users will be more capable of controlling their devices. These UX-UI changes solve a lot of problems – the voice era means older adults can overcome connectivity challenges and connect to the network, services and software via voice. The OSI (Open Systems Interconnection) model enables a focus on what is the most valuable – users only need to learn one layer, not the lower levels of complexity. Although it is important to recognize the infrastructure that enables access. For example, consider satellite Internet, which has its challenges, one of which may be portability of those solutions.

Overcoming the stigma about those lacking tech skills. From Yasuko: "In Japan we have a stigma about people who cannot use technology. We change that mindset. Speaking to older adults in diminishing ways cause people to retreat into a receiver role. Some training programs were created attempted to apply teaching of children to older adults – which was inappropriate. There are programs that enable people to learn how interesting and enjoyable the technology. First solve the problem of access in Japan, but also make tech an enjoyable experience. Ideally need to confront ageism with learning new technologies – noted OATS 'Aging with attitude")."

Enabling awareness of tech-enabled alternatives. Being aware of resources – people used to look for jobs in the newspaper -- now fewer and fewer jobs are even posted in the newspaper. If older adults want new employment or other resources, the resources (likely online only) must be available. Users need to understand not just how to access the resources, but why they should. A growing number of services in western countries are highly tech-dependent – foods, rides, health and social services assistance – including those services that previously were in grocery stores and neighborhood shops. People need to be aware of them.

Increasing points of entry – Stakeholders must offer a complete on-ramp to digital use and literacy, but one that has many doors of entry. Not everyone has some same goals – and may only need a subset of capabilities with limited features.

Consider the increased use of telehealth and remote patient monitoring (RPM). These changes require increased access to high speed Internet services, and/or smartphone devices for telehealth interactions. For RPM, patients need the capability to transfer in-home monitoring information to the appropriate individuals who can help when there is a health issue.

IDEAS FROM BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- **Form a consistent legislative approach to boosting tech literacy.** Consider a parallel to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1980. In each country, there is a need for a cabinet-level officer in charge of broadband and digital access.
- **Legislative initiatives need to include processes and standards that verify the safety of apps.** Spam laws are not doing a good job of preventing spam – national training programs should include how to protect against spam**.**
- **Digital literacy must include training individuals to protect themselves from fraud and exploitation online.** Fraud has become globalized – making it hard to control.
- **View context in layers –** fundamental elements, including connectivity – along the line of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – what are the optimal outcomes?
- **Connectivity providers can be more of a participant in overcoming tech literacy issues.** Training is typically available and free in stores that sell technology and connectivity. AT&T has partnered with Connected Nation to train new people who are coming only with AT&T's access technology. The company has asked how the government can subsidize and fund more programs like this.
- **Need diversification and representation of older adults in the private sector.** Add older adults, including women, on boards.
- **Transfer the lessons learned from accessibility initiatives to design and testing for the aging market segment.** This was discussed in detail in the Second Roundtable.
- **OATS example – centralizing and helping to coordinate resources, but also help disseminate tech literacy initiatives to where the people are.** For example, SF Tech Council received AARP Community Challenge Group – tech support popups for underserved older adults – in 2 hrs. saw 48 older adults in a Chinese Senior Center, received 1:1 time. Another example: in Bogota, Columbia, on a soccer field, they were running a training class from within a shipping container.
- **Volunteer Cyberacademy.** This has been launched in 18-19 countries abroad. Micro learnings are useful in training and education of young people and can work with older adults.

- **Training may happen in communities but can be scaled at a national or global level.** It requires a 3-tiered approach: 1) a funder; 2) a curriculum provider and program manager and 3) a local delivery partner. Getting local communities involved, including caregivers, is an important component of the solution – which could be enabled by companies like Microsoft or AT&T. Find people where they are – at the senior center, neighborhood, or in a store that sells technology or phone access.
- **In Israel, the national digital training program is funded by the government.** It is highly successful and older adults have high digital literacy rates. As a benefit for attending the training, participants have a tech support phone number they can call to have their questions answered – only available for people who have already attended the classes. This has been quite successful. Another example, in Israel, studying technology to start small businesses to do video production of weddings.
- **The Moovit Transit Guide (Urban Mobility) app in Israel has been very successful.** Moovit Transit Guide runs on Apple and Android, and also works with other pay options.
- **Indigenousness tribal communities offer pilots of possible solutions.** One initiative includes a Co-op of tech devices that are loaned (like a bicycle share program) and can be returned or traded up as a person needs change. Another is a communal email server with provided tech support. Hold office hours where people can get training without making appointments in advance.
- **Mexico has urged companies to comply with the UN global compact –** here is the provided link.
- **Establish baseline tech literacy measurements at the appropriate level.** Publish these metrics and report on change over time. Community-based micro environments may be where things get done.
- **How to measure success?** Start small, gains are incremental, help someone do something today that they couldn't do yesterday and live a happier healthier life– that's progress, do more of that. Where is the low-hanging fruit and go after that.
- **Curate a friendly environment and make it welcoming.** Finding use cases in a person's life that would make a person want to learn and solve a use case.

- **Help private sector participate and be part of the solution.** Allowing other sectors and categories participate – the private sector should know that access is good business practice to help people use their technologies. The role of corporations – Bank of America for banking online, for example, but training has to happen at the local level
- **How to engage designers of products and engage older members of the tech work force?** This was discussed in the Second Roundtable, which was focused on tech Design.
- **Providing hardware is not enough – even if it were possible.** Peer learning about technology from others may be one way to tackle ageism in tech training.
- **First element of success needs to happen early with older adults.** In Asia, they see where the aging community is comfortable, so within the businesses where people are already comfortable and train there.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

Center for Cyber Security and Safety

Healthy Longevity in UK – North of Tyne

Israel Digital Quality of Life Ranking

Japan Leads the Way in Technology for Elder Care

Japan: Where a Thousand Digital Eyes Keep Watch over the Elderly

Moovit Transit Guide

OATS Senior Planet from AARP

UN Global Compact

Bank of America Online Training (Virtual Reality)

Seniors Tech Services in Canada (CA)

Roundtable Participants

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