

Outline of presentation on universal service schemes in Asia, with case studies

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Universal service schemes in most countries are performing sub-optimally. Even the necessary condition of effective performance of a universal service scheme, money being disbursed in a timely manner and not accumulating in a government account is rarely satisfied.

The poor disbursement performances of several Asian universal service schemes were documented in Samarajiva & Hurulle (2019). They highlighted the need to go beyond anecdote to develop proper metrics and issue regular reports on inflows, outflows and accumulated balances that are available to the public, such as the quarterly or annual public reporting of the type mandated by the FCC (Goldstein, 2009). This would hopefully lead to questions being raised in the media and in the legislatures.

The sufficient condition of effective performance is whether the objectives defined for each universal service scheme are met. Comparative assessment of outcomes is difficult because the objectives will differ from country to country, and because objective indicators such as those proposed by Samarajiva and Hurulle (2019) are not easy to develop. However, even assessment based on anecdotes is better than no assessment.

Ideally, the basic information will be published at regular intervals. Regional organizations or think tanks may compile comparative indicators and perhaps even conduct independent assessments of outcomes and outputs to judge whether the stated objectives have been achieved.

The presentation will include case studies of publicly available information on the necessary (fund disbursement rates) and sufficient (achievements of stated objectives) conditions of several Asian universal service schemes, supplemented by information obtained through interviews where necessary.

References

Goldstein, M. L. (2009). *Telecommunications: Long-Term Strategic Vision Would Help Ensure Targeting E-rate funds to highest priority users*. United States Government Accountability Office.

Samarajiva, R. & Hurulle, G. (2019). Metrics to improve universal-service fund disbursements, *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance*, 21(2): 102-114. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPRG-07-2018-0035>