Bridging the digital divide in an ageing Vietnam

Thuy Bich Tran,
Country Director, HelpAge International in Vietnam
Email: thuytb@helpagevn.org
Rapid ageing & advancement of ITs in Vietnam
Rapid ageing in Vietnam

- 100 million population (April 2023)
- 83% OP: less than 80 years older (2019)
- 64% live in rural area

Only 25 years to move from an ageing to aged society
Advancement of digital technologies in Vietnam

- In 2017: Vietnam started to connect to the global Internet network
- After 25 years:
  - 72.1% million internet users, accounting for 71.7% of total population, ranking 13th in the world (end of 2022)
  - 70 million social network users or 71% of the total population, or 89% of the total population aged 18 and over (early 2023)
  - Mobile broadband infrastructure has reached 99.73 percent of villages nationwide
  - 94.2 million smartphone users and 82.2 million mobile broadband subscribers, accounting for 74.3 percent of the national population.
  - Around 73.5% of adults use smartphones to access the internet
  - 74.8% of those who use internet do shopping online, 97% of whom will continue to do so
- Target by 2025: Viet Nam’s digital infrastructure development will be associated with Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity and 5G technology.

## Digital divide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General population</th>
<th>Older population (60+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet access</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart phone users</td>
<td>73.5% (adult)</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop or desktop computer owners</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet owners</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network users</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>34.7% of 12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Media User Demographics in Vietnam

Note: Meta's figure as reference, 2022
Key barriers and effects for marginalized communities in accessing and using digital technologies
Key barriers

Low accessibility: Only 12.7% of OP access to internet

- Low affordability for ICT devices and internet use, due to low income
  - 15% older people (OP) live in poverty or near poverty (VNCA, 2023)
  - 54% OP: no social or contributory pensions (VNCA, 2023)

- Not age/disability friendly devices/apps (*too small font size, difficult for use/navigate, language barriers, frequent change/update ...*)
  - 20% of OP reported confident and comfortable in searching and using online applications, the remaining reported difficulties in accepting and adjusting new technologies

Source 1: VNCA 2023 first 6 month report; The Longitudinal Study of Ageing and Health in Viet Nam (LSAHV)
Key barriers … (cont.)

**Lack of digital skills**
- 53% of OP need help to use IT devices
- Almost no IT training program for OP;
- Some are not aware of advantages of Internet connectivity;
- Nearly half do not know how to use - rely on guidance by their son, daughter, spouse, grand child who are usually not patient in teaching
- Afraid of being at risk of phishing scams or identity theft

**Poor implementation of policy on supporting OP to use ITs (NPAA 2021-2030)**

**Ageism**
- See OP as unmarketable segment – lack of consultation with OP to understand their needs
- Low self esteem by OP themselves - think that they can not learn new things (IT)

*Source: VNCA 2023 first 6 month report; The Longitudinal Study of Ageing and Health in Viet Nam (LSAHV)*
Effects for older people in accessing and using digital technologies

- **Reduce loneliness & social isolation**
  - Most of OP (90.3% of those who have access to internet) use IT devices for calling friends and families; 25.8% for watching movies and TV shows, and listening to music;

- **Increase access to information, skills and services in various areas** (life long learning, online payment, health & care, employment opportunities, online business, banking....)

- **Increase self esteem & change image of OP**

- **Not left behind**

Source: The Longitudinal Study of Ageing and Health in Viet Nam (LSAHV)
3 Intergenerational self help club (ISHC) and Digital Inclusion & success factors

A successful case studies from HelpAge International in Vietnam on Promoting Digital Inclusion of Older People
What HelpAge do do address the issue?

We want every older person, everywhere, to be able to say:

“I enjoy wellbeing”  “I am treated with dignity”  “My voice is heard”

Our 10 focus areas

- Inspire a movement for change
- Create a society for all ages
- Improve income security
- Deliver inclusive humanitarian action
- Promote age-inclusive systems
- Support healthy ageing
- Challenge violence, abuse and neglect
- Take a stand against ageism
- Embrace technology
- Foster lifelong learning

We act as:

- supporter
- convenor
- thought leader
What is ISHC?

- A voluntary social organization of 50-70 members, established at village level under the overall management of Association of the Elderly (AE), with a purpose to improve the well-being of their members, majority of whom are older people (OP), women and other vulnerable groups, using intergenerational and mutual support approach.

- ISHC is the national model of Government of Vietnam to respond to rapid ageing: National Program on Older people for 2021-2030: which target by 2030, at least 80% of the communes and wards will have at least one ISHC or the like.
8 core components of the ISHC

1) Social/Cultural
2) Food & Income S.
3) Healthy Ageing
4) Community-based Care
5) Self-help & CD.
6) Life-long Learning
7) Rights & Entitlement
8) Resource Mobilization
TOT Training on how to use smart phone for ISHC’s leaders.
Training on how to make and upload videos on YouTube, Facebook, Zalo and share information using smartphone
More trainings...
Train OPs how to make video
Re-training for ISHC members by trained ISHC leaders/OP (buddy system)
Training on how to use laptop and LCD projector for ISHC monthly meetings and communication sessions.
Using digital technical by ISHCs in their communication session
Computer trainings for OP by ISHCs
Training on usage of Skype and Zoom
Flashmob Ghen Cô Vy - Câu lạc bộ Liên thế hệ Tự giúp nhau Cỏ Chẽ

ISHC’ COVID 19 Flash mob music video
Communication and Dissemination

1. Provide update and stay connected with members through regular **phone calls**

2. **Raise awareness** to community through community loudspeakers

3. Set up **online chat group** to share information

4. Provide **door to door** IEC materials and encourage good practices
COVID-19 Videos for Older People

- Frequently asked questions by the elderly about the COVID-19 vaccine
- Things the elderly need to pay attention to after getting vaccinated
- Things the elderly need to know before and during the COVID-19...
- General information about the COVID-19 vaccine for the elderly
- Things to do to protect the elderly in care centers before the pandemic
- Guiding the elderly to self-isolate at home in the context of COVID-19
- COVID-19 and Seniors: Information for loved ones and carers
- 10 things elderly people need to keep in mind during the COVID-19...
SUCCESS FACTORS:

HelpAge digital inclusion project is just small scale/pilot – have not covered all ISHCs yet, but there are some success factors:

• First, believe that OP can master ITs – remove age stereotype
• Focus on raising OP’s awareness on benefits of ITs- build their interest and confidence.
• Use intergenerational (younger teach older) and mutual support approach (OP can teach each other)
• Design age friendly training materials and guideline, use age friendly training methods (theory and practice, re-training…)
• CBOs such as ISHCs can play a big role in closing the digital skills gap for OPs in communities
Rapid growth in ISHC: potential for digital inclusion

Number of ISHC in Vietnam

- By end of 2022, more than 5,400 ISHCs have been established in all 63 provinces and cities in the country.
- With more than 270,000 members
- Directly benefiting million of people.
- Targets to have 6,500 ISHCs by 2025, and 10,000 by end of 2030 (NPAA)

PM’s Decision 1336 (New 3,000 ISHCs)

PM’s Decision 1533 (New 2,000 ISHCs)

COVID-19

Note: Prime Minister’s (PM) Decision on National Scale-up of ISHC

By end of 2022, more than 5,400 ISHCs have been established in all 63 provinces and cities in the country. With more than 270,000 members, directly benefiting million of people. Targets to have 6,500 ISHCs by 2025, and 10,000 by end of 2030 (NPAA).
How can South-South cooperation bridge the digital divide?
How can South-South cooperation bridge the digital divide?

1. Cross learning and sharing
2. Raise awareness on benefits of ICTs for OP – as win win option for every one, combating ageism/age stereotypes; opportunities of providing products and services for increasing unmet market segment of OP.
3. Promote universal design of and access to ICTs – consult with OP on their needs and preferences
4. Provide training on digital skills and literacy for OPs
5. Develop, amend and implement regional and country policies on ICTs and OPs