

25th September 2024
9th ASOSAI Symposium Opening Address by CAG of India

Secretary General of ASOSAI, Mr. Hou Kai

Keynote speaker Ms. Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri

Distinguished Delegates of the ASOSAI Assembly

Senior Management of SAI India,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- ❖ I extend my warm welcome to all of you at the 9th ASOSAI Symposium, \ being held as part of the 16th ASOSAI Assembly events. \ ASOSAI is an influential forum of the supreme audit institutions of Asian countries. \ Deliberations during successive ASOSAI symposiums \ result in laying down significant trends of public sector audit practices across the countries. \
- ❖ Theme of this year's symposium is Digital Public Infrastructure \ and Gender Divide- Issues of inclusion and accessibility. \ Digital Public Infrastructure, \ or DPI, is an evolving concept. \ However, there is a general consensus on it being an open network of technological platforms \ geared for delivering public goods and services \ vital in creating economic opportunity across many sectors \ including finance, health and agriculture. \ Digital ID, \ digital payments \ and data exchange are some of the key elements of DPI \ that provide the required digital network to governments \ to open economic opportunities for all citizens. \
- ❖ To share the experience of my own country, \ India's G20 Presidency provided a significant opportunity to set and drive the global policy discourse \ on key economic and developmental agenda. \ One of the critical enablers for the development and empowerment of people is \ technological innovations and technology-led economic transformation. \ India's Digital Public

Infrastructure comprising of digital identity \ and fast payment system along with consent-based data sharing \ has demonstrated how 1.4 billion individuals can access socio-economically important services \ in the field of finance, health, education, e-Governance, taxation, skills etc. \ This infrastructure is a result of strong partnership between the public & private sectors,\ unlocking innovations to address the size and diversity of the Indian population.\

- ❖ Digital Public Infrastructure has the power to dramatically improve the lives of citizens \ and transform governance. \ It has happened here in India, \ and it started with a national ID system (called Aadhaar), \ aimed at providing a digital identity to every Indian. \ Now, around 1.3 billion Indians possess this digital ID, \ which has led to a vast improvement in economic and social inclusion of citizens. \ For example, \ on average 10 million digital identities per day are digitally verified by the financial\ and business institutions through an electronic Know Your Customer (eKYC) system \ through Aadhar. \ Similarly, Unified Payments Interface (UPI),\ which is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)\ to ease inter-bank transactions through mobile phones, \ facilitates 13 billion digital transactions monthly, \ serving about 350 million individuals and 50 million merchants.\
- ❖ Digital literacy is increasingly seen as an essential skill for employability, \ and it has been linked to higher earning potential \ and new economic opportunities. \ Unequal digital access among citizens, \ especially the marginalised sections \ and genders fosters economic barriers and limits inclusion.\

- ❖ Innumerable studies and data on digital adoption and use show that women and girls are less likely than men and boys to access and use digital technologies. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reports that more than 50% of the world's women are offline. This is more pronounced in developing countries, where the internet penetration rate for adult women is 41%, compared to 53% for men. Boys are 1.5 times more likely than girls to own a mobile phone and 1.8 times more likely to own a smartphone. Roughly 46% of boys use the internet on their phones, compared to 27% of girls.
- ❖ Apparently, gender inequality in the physical world is replicated in the digital world too. Inequality in education represents a major contributor to the gender digital divide. Women and girls are often less likely to pursue, or have limited access to, educational opportunities in a highly digitalised economy, limiting their career options. Bridging digital gender divides not only requires removing barriers to connectivity, but also empowering women and girls with the right mix of skills to succeed in a digital world.
- ❖ Despite the advancements in recent years, a pronounced gender divide persists, which limits the actual utilization of DPI by women and the marginalised genders and their ability to harness the benefits that it offers. Limited digital literacy, socio-cultural norms, lack of access to internet, and concerns regarding privacy and security hinder full and equal participation of all genders in the digital realm.
- ❖ The issues of digital access for economic opportunities are not far from the issues of governance for providing citizen centric services. Governments at all levels are, taking steps in devising policy framework that lends itself to a practical and effective implementation for delivery of public services. Role

of sub-national and local governments is especially key in the direct delivery of services to the citizens.

- ❖ SAI India has been playing an active role in engaging with stakeholders at the national and international stage to debate and discuss the issues of emerging technologies, local governance and the opportunities and challenges that these bring for us as public sector auditors.
- ❖ A national seminar on Digital Public Infrastructure and Gender Divide- Issues of inclusion and accessibility was organised in the month of July, this year, under the aegis of my office wherein leading national experts discussed various aspects of DPIs. The seminar brought out several key learnings and ideas on the upcoming trends of DPI, some of which will be discussed in the next presentation on the Overview of the Symposium's theme.
- ❖ I am happy to state that the theme for today's Symposium has been carefully chosen, recognising its relevance to the current ASOSAI Strategic Plan of 2022-2027 and its close linkages with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Goal-1 of the ASOSAI strategic plan aims at innovative and responsive capacity development of ASOSAI and its members to enable the SAIs to effectively provide independent oversight on the achievement of SDGs. Similarly, Crosscutting Priority-3 encourages SAIs to proactively respond to emerging technological development and leverage it as opportunities to enhance audit capacity. The Strategic Goal-1 and the Cross Cutting Priority-3 of the Strategic Plan lend themselves seamlessly to the theme of this Symposium. The aspects of Gender Divide relating to DPI are aligned with SDG-5 Gender Equality.
- ❖ The objective of the Symposium is to draw attention of the ASOSAI community to the role of Digital Public infrastructure in modern day

governance, \ especially focusing on the gender-based challenges in accessing DPI. \ It seeks to emphasise the need for SAIs in the region to evaluate effectiveness of DPIs \ and assess their outcomes in terms of access and equity across genders. \ It is expected that this Symposium will shed light on audit capabilities, \ audit methods and audit approaches required to prepare SAIs \ for the purpose. \ Member SAIs will use this platform to deliberate upon various strategies \ through which the SAIs, through their audits, \ could contribute to their respective national governments' policies \ to ensure that digital advancements benefit all citizens \ and communities, leaving no one behind.\

- ❖ We have amongst us, as keynote speaker, \ a renowned personality, Mrs Lakshmi Puri, \ who has vast experience in international diplomacy \ and the United Nations. \ I am sure that all of us will be immensely benefitted by her address, \ particularly her thoughts on Gender Divide \ based on her vast experience in working for UN Women.\

I would also like to thank the speakers from the SAIs of Indonesia, \ Israel, Malaysia, Oman, and Thailand \ for willing to share their respective country experiences on the audit of DPI.\

- ❖ I am sure that this Symposium will provide valuable insights \ on how technology can be harnessed to address the specific needs \ and challenges of DPI, \ and that recommendations from the Symposium will form the basis for future Capacity Development efforts in this domain.\

I look forward to fruitful and enriching discussions.\

Thank you