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## NILPHAMARI

# Citizen-centric e-Service Design

## Consultation Report | January 2026

E-ffective Governance: Accelerating e-government and digital public services in Bangladesh

eGA BRITISH COUNCIL Cabinet Division ICT DIVISION FUTURE IS HERE

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# Executive Summary

The District Consultation on **Citizen-Centric e-Service Design (CCeD)** in Nilphamari was held on **November 13, 2025**, as part of the **E-ffective Governance** project. Funded by the European Union, the initiative is co-hosted by the **District Administration**, the **ICT Division**, and the **Cabinet Division**, with implementation led by the **British Council** and the **e-Governance Academy (eGA)** of Estonia.

The event convened a diverse range of stakeholders—including district and upazila leadership, ICT personnel, UDC entrepreneurs, and civil society—to diagnose where digital public services fail in practice. Rather than focusing on technical successes, the dialogue centred on high-demand services—such as healthcare, municipal services, and land records—characterized by **process friction** involving fragmented citizen journeys, **operational gaps** stemming from river-erosion and border-area connectivity constraints, and **frontline realities** defined by a lack of formal ICT positions in municipal organograms.

**Core Findings**

- **Institutional Structural Gaps:** A primary barrier is the lack of permanent ICT personnel in municipalities, leading to a reliance on ad-hoc support and a lack of institutional memory.
- **Geographic & Environmental Vulnerability:** Connectivity instability in border-adjacent and river-erosion zones disproportionately affects service access, requiring a more resilient, localized infrastructure strategy.
- **The Intermediary Trap:** Low digital readiness among elderly and low-literacy groups, compounded by unclear documentation requirements, reinforces a heavy reliance on informal middlemen.
- **Fragmented Ownership & Silos:** A silo mentality between departments results in contradictory datasets (e.g., NID vs. school records), creating unnecessary verification hurdles for both citizens and officials.
- **Local Innovation:** Nilphamari demonstrates potential for scalable community-driven pilots, such as telemedicine and the "Hemoglobin" blood donation network.

**Recommendations & Path Forward**

Key recommendations focused on **formalizing municipal ICT workforces**, **scaling successful health-tech pilots** (Vax-EPI and telemedicine) district-wide, and **improving infrastructure resilience** in erosion-prone unions. Participants also proposed simplifying service journeys through **visual checklists**, launching targeted **literacy outreach for women and the elderly**, and institutionalizing **district-level monitoring** to ensure system accountability and close the feedback loop between frontline offices and national policy designers.

The consultation concluded with a shared understanding that meaningful improvement will require moving beyond surface-level digitization toward coordinated reforms across **service rules, institutional roles, and delivery support structures**. The findings and recommendations from this workshop will guide the ongoing CCeD process under the E-ffective Governance project to ensure inclusive, responsive, and sustainable digital service reforms in Bangladesh.

# 1. Introduction

The District Consultation on Citizen-Centric e-Service Design (CCeD) in Kushtia was convened to gather grounded, district-level insights into the design, delivery, and actual usage of digital public services. Organized under the "E-ffective Governance: Accelerating E-Government and Digital Public Services in Bangladesh" project, the consultation aimed to ensure that national digital transformation efforts are rooted in the daily experiences of citizens and frontline service providers.

Rather than a ceremonial gathering to rehearse policy ambitions, the consultation was designed as a working dialogue. It provided a purposeful space for stakeholders to speak frankly about how digital governance functions on the ground. Participants were encouraged to confront the digital divide, interrogate gaps in transparency and cybersecurity, and reimagine how technology can serve people equitably.

Officials and citizens laid bare the hidden hurdles, such as fragmented platforms and scarce local IT support, that often undermine progress. By fostering dialogue across administrative levels and sectors, the workshop sought to strengthen a shared understanding of responsive service delivery and identify practical pathways to turn citizen-centric ideals into everyday reality.

# 2. Background & Objectives

The CCeD initiative supports the Government of Bangladesh's commitment to building a public administration that is digitally enabled, responsive, and centred on the needs of its people. It aligns with national digital transformation priorities by emphasizing usability, inclusion, accountability, and trust. This initiative reflects a growing recognition that effective digital governance requires institutional coherence and local ownership to bridge the gap between policy ambitions and the lived reality of citizens.

Kushtia district was selected as a pilot for this initiative because it serves as a microcosm of the broader socio-geographic challenges facing digital inclusion in Bangladesh. The region, characterized by riverine char lands and dispersed rural settlements, contends with fragile connectivity and frequent power disruptions that often curtail consistent digital access. The primary goal of the consultation was to capture both institutional and citizen perspectives to guide the adaptive reform of digital services across sectors such as land administration, health, identity, and transport. Specifically, the consultation sought to:

- **Map field-level experiences** and challenges in accessing and delivering e-services.
- **Identify gaps** in system usability, data integration, and service accessibility.
- Prioritise citizen and service provider feedback to inform future design improvements.
- Generate **actionable recommendations** for strengthening coordination, accountability, and local ownership; and
- Build a shared understanding of how **national digital platforms** can better respond to **local contexts**.

# 3. Highlights from Presentations

## 3.1 Digital Public Services in Nilphamari – An Overview

The district-level presentation was delivered by Abdus Samad Shiekder, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Education & ICT), who provided an overview of Nilphamari's digital public service landscape. He highlighted the widespread adoption of national digital platforms across district administration, including systems supporting land services, document management, grievance redress, procurement, and sectoral service delivery. These platforms, he noted, have improved record-keeping, transparency, and administrative efficiency, even though their use remains uneven across offices and locations.

> **Digital service effectiveness depends not only on system availability but also on the readiness and confidence of both officials and citizens.**

ADC Shiekder emphasized that digital service effectiveness depends not only on system availability but also on the readiness and confidence of both officials and citizens. He identified ICT literacy gaps among frontline staff, uneven familiarity with digital procedures, and citizen hesitation to rely on online systems as factors contributing to errors, delays, and continued dependence on intermediaries. Infrastructure constraints, particularly unstable internet connectivity, inadequate hardware, power disruptions, and the absence of dedicated technical personnel in rural unions, were highlighted as persistent challenges that undermine reliability.

The presentation also showcased examples of locally driven digital innovation, including telemedicine services, digital vaccination tracking, and the locally managed and initiated "Hemoglobin" blood donation platform. These examples illustrated how context-sensitive, locally rooted solutions can complement formal government systems and improve responsiveness when aligned with community needs. ADC Shiekder concluded by emphasizing the need to strengthen digital skills, improve infrastructure reliability, and address behavioural barriers alongside technical reforms to ensure that national digital platforms function effectively within Nilphamari's local context.

## 3.2 Citizen-Centric e-Services in Bangladesh – Making Digital Services Work for People

In his keynote presentation, Shahab Enam Khan, Professor of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University, reviewed Bangladesh's digital governance trajectory from the launch of the Digital Bangladesh vision in 2009 to the current Smart Bangladesh agenda. He acknowledged significant progress, including the expansion of Union Digital Centres and the availability of more than 800 online public services. However, he emphasized that access to digital services has not consistently translated into effective use or improved citizen experience.

Professor Khan highlighted recurring breakdowns in the digital "citizen journey," noting that processes are frequently disrupted by inconsistent connectivity, limited user awareness, repetitive documentation requirements, and system errors. He explained that such friction points often erode citizen trust and push users back toward manual processes or reliance on intermediaries. He further pointed to persistent fragmentation across government platforms, including weak integration between land services, civil registration, and NID-related systems.

A key concern raised in the keynote was the absence of clear accountability and institutional ownership for digital systems. Many platforms are developed through vendor-driven or project-based arrangements, with limited responsibility for long-term maintenance, performance monitoring, or user experience improvement. He described mid-level public officials as critical to implementation but constrained by rigid mandates and limited authority, rather than a lack of willingness to innovate. To address these challenges, he emphasized the importance of interoperability, stronger data governance, and principles such as the Once-Only Principle. He concluded by stressing that technology alone cannot transform governance, underscoring trust, accountability, and institutional coherence as central to sustainable digital reform.

# 4. Summary of Thematic Group Discussions

Following the keynote presentation, participants were divided into six groups, each facilitated by an experienced moderator. The groups were tasked with identifying key challenges and proposing practical recommendations from their respective institutional perspectives. They also mapped the existing digital services available within their departments and localities. The outcomes of these discussions were later consolidated and analysed under five thematic areas:

- Digital Infrastructure and System Integration
- Human Capacity and Digital Literacy
- Governance, Accountability, and Service Delivery
- Inclusion, Access, and Citizen Trust
- Localization, Innovation, and Sustainability

Across the five thematic areas, the Nilphamari consultation revealed that the challenges facing digital public service delivery are not primarily driven by a lack of platforms, but by weak alignment between system design, institutional capacity, and citizen realities. Infrastructure instability, fragmented systems, and unclear accountability combine with limited human capacity and low digital confidence to produce unpredictable service experiences. These constraints disproportionately affect marginalized and rural populations, reinforcing reliance on intermediaries and undermining trust.

> **Challenges facing digital public service delivery are not primarily driven by a lack of platforms, but by weak alignment between system design, institutional capacity, and citizen realities.**

At the same time, the discussions highlighted strong local problem-solving capacity and community-driven innovation, demonstrating that digital services are most effective when they are

context-sensitive, supported by continuous capacity development, and anchored in clear ownership at the local level. Together, these insights underscore the need to move from isolated digital solutions toward coordinated, locally grounded reforms that prioritize usability, inclusion, and sustainability.

# 4.1 Digital Infrastructure and System Integration

Discussions in Nilphamari highlighted that challenges in digital infrastructure and system integration are shaped by local geography, system design choices, and weak coordination across platforms. While digital services are increasingly available, participants emphasized that unreliable performance and fragmentation continue to undermine trust and effective use.

## 4.1.1 Connectivity Constraints in an Erosion-Prone District

Participants consistently identified unstable internet connectivity as a defining constraint, particularly in border-adjacent and erosion-affected unions. Recurrent river erosion and power disruptions frequently interrupt connectivity, making routine tasks such as updating birth registration records, accessing NID data, submitting land mutation applications, or processing online grievances unreliable. These disruptions result in repeated visits, long queues, and a reversion to manual processes, despite the formal availability of digital systems.

## 4.1.2 Hardware Limitations and the Mobile–Desktop Mismatch

Many UDCs and government offices continue to rely on outdated computers, limited power backup, and insufficient maintenance support. Even when connectivity is available, weak hardware slows processing and increases errors. Participants also emphasized a mismatch between system design and user behaviour: most national platforms are optimized for desktop use, while citizens primarily access services through mobile phones. Combined with high internet costs, this design gap discourages independent use and reinforces reliance on intermediaries.

## 4.1.3 Fragmented Platforms and Interoperability Failures

System fragmentation emerged as a central concern. Sectoral services, including land administration, civil registration, licensing, education, and social protection, operate on separate platforms without shared standards or data exchange. Participants highlighted frequent inconsistencies between NID, birth registration, and school records, which delay service delivery and contribute to rising grievance submissions.

Several groups noted that platforms are built using different technical architectures and programming languages, making interoperability difficult even where coordination is desired. Officials also reported limited awareness of systems used by other departments, leaving citizens uncertain about which platform to use and where responsibility lies. Participants emphasized the need for a unified access point or coordinated data-sharing mechanism to reduce duplication and confusion.

## 4.1.4 Data Quality, Informal Intermediation, and Security Risks

Concerns about data quality and security were prominent. Participants reported that data entry practices often prioritize quantity over accuracy, particularly in birth registration and NID-linked services. Vendor-driven

data entry was identified as a source of persistent errors, with unclear accountability and limited correction mechanisms.

Reliance on third-party computer shops and intermediaries was highlighted as a significant risk. Citizens frequently share sensitive personal information, including NID details and mobile banking information, to complete applications, increasing exposure to data misuse and fraud while distancing users from direct engagement with digital systems.

### 4.1.5 Weak Maintenance Ownership

Participants noted that system maintenance responsibilities are often unclear or absent. Many district and upazila websites contain outdated information or inactive features because no officer is formally responsible for updates. Limited server capacity and frequent slowdowns during peak usage further undermine reliability. The absence of routine maintenance practices, such as audits and backups, means systems gradually deteriorate even after successful rollout. Overall, participants emphasized that Nilphamari's digital infrastructure challenges are deeply context specific. Without addressing connectivity instability, design mismatches, interoperability gaps, and unclear maintenance ownership, further expansion of digital platforms is unlikely to improve citizen experience or trust.

## 4.2 Human Capacity and Digital Literacy

Discussions in Nilphamari highlighted that limitations in human capacity and digital literacy are as significant as infrastructural constraints in shaping the effectiveness of digital public services. Participants emphasized that without adequate skills, confidence, and continuity among both service providers and citizens, digital systems remain underused and vulnerable to error.

### 4.2.1 Capacity Gaps and Staffing Continuity

Frontline service providers across district, upazila, and union levels reported persistent challenges in managing digital platforms due to limited ICT expertise. Many municipalities operate without designated ICT positions, leaving technical responsibilities to staff who lack formal training or authority to resolve system issues. At the upazila level, frequent staff transfers further weaken continuity, as officials trained on specific platforms are often reassigned before applying their skills, while replacements arrive with little exposure to the systems.

Participants noted that this creates heavy dependence on a small number of technically capable individuals within offices. When these individuals are absent or transferred, service delivery slows, errors increase, and confidence in digital processes declines.


*Figure 1: Thematic group discussions ended with group presentations.*

## 4.2.2. Training Without Practice and Troubleshooting Support

Although digital training opportunities are available, participants described them as largely one-off events with limited follow-up. Initial training rarely translates into sustained proficiency because staff have few opportunities to practise skills or receive refresher support. When systems are updated or new modules introduced, officials often learn informally or through trial and error, contributing to recurring mistakes, particularly in data entry.

A recurring concern was the absence of structured troubleshooting mechanisms. When portals freeze, servers fail, or data mismatches occur, frontline staff have no clear guidance beyond escalating issues to central authorities. This leaves local officials unable to resolve problems independently, prolongs service delays, and increases citizen frustration.

## 4.2.3 Citizen Digital Literacy and Confidence

Low digital literacy among citizens was identified as a major barrier to inclusive service uptake. Participants noted that many citizens, particularly women, elderly residents, and rural communities, struggle to understand digital procedures or lack confidence using online platforms independently. As a result, they rely heavily on intermediaries, increasing exposure to misinformation, informal fees, and data errors.

Citizens often arrive without required documents because they do not fully understand online application steps. Minor inconsistencies, such as mismatched birthdates or spelling errors, are frequently perceived as serious faults, further eroding trust in digital systems. Participants emphasized that fear of making mistakes discourages direct engagement with e-services.

### 4.2.4 Building Familiarity Through Exposure and Support

Participants stressed that improving digital literacy requires more than awareness campaigns. They emphasized the importance of repeated exposure and supportive learning environments where citizens can observe and practise digital transactions. Suggested approaches included demonstration sessions at UDCs, school-based ICT activities, and small group orientations in community spaces.

Across discussions, there was consensus that building confidence among both service providers and citizens is essential for reducing dependence on intermediaries and improving service outcomes. Participants emphasized that without sustained capacity development and practical support, further expansion of digital platforms will continue to outpace the ability of users to engage with them effectively.

## 4.3 Governance, Accountability, and Service Delivery

Discussions in Nilphamari highlighted that governance and accountability arrangements have not evolved at the same pace as the expansion of digital platforms. As a result, frontline service delivery is frequently constrained by unclear authority, fragmented responsibilities, and procedures that remain poorly aligned with citizen needs.

### 4.3.1 Frontline Responsibility Without Authority

Participants emphasized that frontline officials are held accountable by citizens for service delays and failures yet lack the authority or tools to address many system-level problems. Issues such as server downtime, system upgrades, and data mismatches, particularly between NID, birth registration, and school records, are centrally managed, leaving local officials with limited ability to intervene. In most cases, staff can only escalate issues and wait, even when delays involve minor corrections.

This imbalance between responsibility and authority contributes to citizen frustration and staff demotivation. Frontline officials reported that repeated complaints about issues beyond their control weaken trust in local offices, despite the problems originating elsewhere in the system.

> **Frontline officials are held accountable by citizens for service delays and failures yet lack the authority or tools to address many system-level problems.**

### 4.3.2. Unclear Accountability for System Maintenance

Participants noted that accountability for maintaining digital systems is often diffuse or undefined. In platforms developed or managed by external vendors, responsibility for data errors, outdated features, or system failures is difficult to trace. As a result, local offices must manage the consequences of technical failures without the ability to correct underlying problems.

The absence of clear escalation pathways and response timelines further complicates service delivery. Participants stressed that without defined roles for maintenance and problem resolution, system failures persist longer than necessary, increasing service backlogs and grievance volumes.

### 4.3.3 Procedural Complexity and Service Delays

Many digital services were described as overly complex, with long approval chains, repeated verification steps, and unclear documentation requirements. Participants cited examples such as birth registration corrections, NID updates, and land mutation, where minor errors can trigger multiple office visits and prolonged processing times. Even when services are available online, system errors or data inconsistencies often force citizens back into in-person follow-up.

Participants emphasized that such complexity undermines the intended efficiency of digital services and increases reliance on intermediaries. Simplifying workflows, clarifying instructions, and reducing unnecessary procedural steps were widely viewed as critical to improving service delivery and citizen experience.

### 4.3.4 Grievance Redress and Administrative Burden

The consultation also highlighted growing pressure on grievance redress mechanisms. Participants observed an increase in complaints linked to misinformation, incorrect data entry, and system failures. At the same time, officials noted a rising number of baseless or intentionally harassing complaints that must still be processed within fixed timelines. Managing both legitimate and frivolous grievances places a significant administrative burden on frontline offices. Because staff often lack the authority to correct underlying system errors, many complaints remain unresolved for extended periods. This reinforces public perceptions that digital systems are unresponsive, while diverting time and resources away from genuine service issues.

## 4.4 Inclusion, Access, and Citizen Trust

Discussions in Nilphamari underscored that the success of digital public services depends not only on technical functionality, but on whether citizens perceive systems as accessible, fair, and responsive. Participants emphasized that gaps in access and trust continue to shape who benefits from digital services and who remains excluded.

### 4.4.1 Uneven Access and the Digital Divide

Participants observed that digital exclusion in Nilphamari disproportionately affects women, elderly citizens, low-literacy users, and residents of rural or erosion-prone areas. Poor connectivity, unstable electricity, limited access to devices, and high internet costs compound these barriers. Even basic tasks, such as checking application status, correcting birth registration records, or submitting land-related information, become difficult when users struggle to navigate online forms or understand procedural requirements.

These challenges were not viewed as temporary adoption issues, but as structural barriers that require simpler, mobile-friendly service designs and more realistic assumptions about user capacity.

### 4.4.2 Intermediary Dependence and Trust Deficits

A recurring theme across groups was heavy reliance on intermediaries, including UDC entrepreneurs and private computer shops. While intermediaries help citizens navigate complex systems, participants noted that dependence on third parties increases exposure to misinformation, informal fees, and data errors. For many


citizens, intermediaries have become the default interface with digital services, distancing them from direct engagement and reducing transparency.

Participants emphasized that trust in digital systems is fragile. System errors, unclear requirements, and inconsistent outcomes reinforce perceptions that digital services are unpredictable or unfair, discouraging independent use and reinforcing reliance on intermediaries.

### 4.4.3 Grievance Experiences and Perceptions of Responsiveness

Participants highlighted that grievance redress mechanisms play a significant role in shaping citizen trust. While increased grievance submissions reflect greater awareness of digital channels, participants noted that slow responses and unresolved complaints contribute to frustration. Citizens often perceive delays as indifference, even when frontline officials lack the authority to resolve underlying system issues.

At the same time, officials expressed concern about grievance fatigue, as high volumes of minor, repetitive, or unfounded complaints strain limited administrative capacity. This dynamic weakens confidence on both sides and reduces the effectiveness of grievance mechanisms as tools for accountability.

### 4.4.4 Engagement as a Trust-Building Strategy

Participants emphasized that trust cannot be built through system reliability alone. Meaningful engagement with citizens was seen as essential to improving understanding, confidence, and uptake. Suggested

approaches included demonstration sessions at UDCs, school-based ICT awareness activities, and small group orientations in marketplaces and community institutions.

Participants also highlighted the importance of using familiar communication channels, particularly local Facebook pages and community networks, to share accurate service information and updates. Clear, simple, and regularly updated information was viewed as critical to reducing confusion, lowering reliance on intermediaries, and rebuilding confidence in digital public services.

Overall, participants agreed that improving inclusion and trust in Nilphamari will require sustained engagement, simpler service designs, and more predictable service outcomes. Without addressing these factors, digital services risk deepening existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

# 4.5 Localization, Innovation, and Sustainability

Discussions in Nilphamari emphasized that digital transformation must be grounded in local realities and designed for long-term sustainability. Participants stressed that systems which fail to reflect geographic constraints, user behaviour, and institutional capacity are unlikely to remain effective over time.

## 4.5.1 Designing for Local Conditions

Participants highlighted that many digital platforms do not adequately account for Nilphamari's connectivity constraints, particularly in unions affected by river erosion and unreliable power supply. When systems assume constant internet access or uninterrupted power, routine service delivery becomes fragile. Participants emphasized the need for low-bandwidth, mobile-first, and offline-capable designs that better reflect how citizens and frontline staff interact with digital services in practice. The mismatch between system design and local conditions was seen as a key reason why digital services often fail at the last mile, even when national platforms are technically functional.

## 4.5.2 Community-Driven Innovation and Local Solutions

A notable insight from the discussions was the role of locally developed solutions in addressing gaps left by formal systems. Participants cited examples such as telemedicine services, digital vaccination tracking, and the district administration-led "Hemoglobin" blood support initiative, designed to mobilize local networks to respond to emergency needs. These initiatives were viewed as effective because they are simple, responsive, and embedded in existing community trust structures.

Participants emphasized that such locally rooted innovations demonstrate the potential of digital tools when they are designed around real user needs rather than standardized assumptions. They suggested that lessons from these initiatives could inform the design and integration of government services, particularly in health, emergency response, and social protection.

## 4.4.3 Sustaining Digital Systems Through Local Ownership

Sustainability emerged as a major concern across groups. Participants noted that many digital tools become outdated due to the absence of regular updates, technical audits, or maintenance plans. The lack of designated ICT positions in municipalities further weakens local ownership and limits the ability to address system issues promptly.

Participants stressed that when digital systems depend solely on central management or external vendors, local offices have little control over problem-solving, leading to delays and declining trust. Strengthening sustainability will require embedding maintenance responsibilities at the local level, ensuring adequate budgets and technical staffing, and involving district actors in system rollout and updates.


*Figure 2: Participants at the Nilphamari consultation included district level representatives from key service agencies.*

## 4.4.4 Digital Transformation as an Ongoing Process

Participants emphasized that digital transformation should be treated as a continuous process rather than a one-time intervention. As citizens gradually build digital confidence and service demand evolves, systems must be adapted to reflect changing needs and behaviour. Stronger communication channels between citizens, frontline service providers, and central authorities were seen as essential to ensuring that user feedback informs ongoing improvements.

Overall, the discussions highlighted that sustainable digital transformation in Nilphamari depends on aligning system design with local realities, supporting community-driven innovation, and strengthening institutional ownership. Without these elements, digital platforms risk becoming underused, outdated, or disconnected from the communities they are meant to serve.

# 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations were directly proposed by the participants of the Citizen-Centric e-Service Delivery (CCeD) district consultation events. These insights represent the collective voices of local administrators, frontline service providers, Union Digital Centre (UDC) entrepreneurs, and community members who engaged in these sessions to identify systemic bottlenecks and suggest actionable improvements. The content below serves as a formal record of their observations and priorities, structured to reflect the specific needs and localized challenges identified within the district.

The Nilphamari consultation emphasized that digital transformation must move beyond pilot projects toward a **formalized district ecosystem**. Participants specifically highlighted the challenges of border areas and river-erosion zones, advocating for a system that is resilient to geography and inclusive of vulnerable groups like the elderly and those with low literacy.

## 5.1 Formalizing Institutional ICT Structures

A recurring theme was the lack of dedicated, permanent staff to manage digital systems, particularly in municipalities. **Municipal Organogram Reform:** Formally introduce and fund designated ICT Officer positions within municipal structures to end the reliance on ad-hoc support.

*Figure 3: While women represented only 13% of participants in Nilphamari, their valuable contributions to the consultation underscored the importance of strengthening women's participation in future engagements.*

- **Stability in Staffing:** Reduce the frequency of transfers for trained digital service staff to preserve institutional memory and technical expertise.
- **Routine Cross-Department Coordination:** Establish a regular district-level forum for all sector departments to share system issues, synchronization successes, and data-sharing solutions.
- **Scale the "Nagorik Sheba" Platform:** Expand the successful municipal citizen service platform to the Upazila level for district-wide uniformity.

## 5.2 Bridging the Literacy and Access Gap

Participants noted that poor connectivity in border areas and low literacy lead to a heavy reliance on intermediaries.

- **Simplified Service Checklists:** Publish straightforward, visual checklists for high-demand services (NID, Land Mutation, Birth Registration) on Facebook and physical notice boards to reduce confusion.
- **Digital Literacy Outreach:** Launch targeted literacy sessions specifically for women, the elderly, and low-literacy groups through schools and Community Based Organizations (CSOs).
- **Strategic Awareness Campaigns:** Use district-level social media and community radio to share service instructions, costs, and timelines, reducing the space for informal intermediaries.

## 5.3 Strengthening Data Integrity and Interoperability

The current silo mentality between departments leads to contradictory datasets that stall service delivery.

- **Mandatory Data Synchronization:** Integrate NID, birth registration, school records, and land data to eliminate repetitive information requests and manual data reconciliation.
- **Priority on Data Quality:** Shift performance metrics from "quantity of entries" to "quality of data," supported by refresher training to reduce common entry errors.
- **System Triage for GRS:** Introduce a district-level screening process to quickly filter baseless complaints and fast-track genuine service delivery failures.

## 5.4 Enhancing Infrastructure in Vulnerable Zones

The district's unique geography, including river-erosion and border areas requires a tailored infrastructure approach.

- **Resilient Connectivity for Remote Unions:** Stabilize internet connections in erosion-prone and remote border unions using dedicated backups to ensure services aren't cut off during seasonal disasters.
- **Hardware and Power Backups**: Ensure that UDCs and Upazila offices are equipped with modern hardware and consistent power backups (IPS/UPS) to handle high-volume data processing without system crashes.
- **Inclusive and Mobile-First UX:** Redesign digital portals to be "female-friendly" and optimized for low-bandwidth mobile devices, using simplified language that matches the citizen's digital habits.

## 5.5 Institutionalizing Feedback and Monitoring

To maintain trust, the performance of digital systems must be visible and accountable to the local administration.

- **District-Level Performance Monitoring:** Institutionalize a system for the DC Office to monitor UDC operations and the performance of digital service delivery in real-time.
- **User-Centric Design Audits:** Include local IT and UX (User Experience) experts in the policy-making process to ensure that new systems align with the actual digital habits of Nilphamari citizens.
- **Closed-Loop Accountability:** Establish a mechanism where frontline staff receive feedback on how their reported system issues were resolved by central agencies.

# 6. Speeches and Reflections


*Figure 4 : Deputy Commissioner of Nilphamari Mohammad Nairuzzaman speaking to the participants.*

## 6.1 From Fragmentation to Integration: Rethinking How Digital Administration Works

**Mohammad Nairuzzaman, Deputy Commissioner & District Magistrate, Nilphamari**

In his opening address, Mohammad Nairuzzaman noted that digital public services in Nilphamari remain fragmented, requiring citizens and officials to navigate multiple, poorly connected systems. He emphasized that meaningful reform depends on integration rather than isolated platforms, so administrative processes become simpler and more predictable.

He highlighted the adoption of Digital Nothi (d-nothi) as a step toward improving internal workflow efficiency, particularly in file management and coordination across offices. Looking ahead, he stressed the importance of moving toward one-stop services that unify related administrative tasks and reduce unnecessary repetition for citizens.

## 6.2 Connecting District Realities to National Reform

**Md. Abu Sayed**, **Project Director, E-ffective Governance & Director General (Additional Secretary), Department of Information and Communication Technology (DoICT)**

The Project Director addressed the consultation participants remotely and emphasized that meaningful national digital reform depends on a clear understanding of how systems function at the district and frontline levels. He noted that many challenges faced by citizens do not stem from policy intent but from gaps between system design and everyday use. Without systematically capturing these realities, national reforms risk overlooking the practical constraints that shape service delivery on the ground.

He explained that the British Council, as an implementation partner, will play a central role in documenting the specific problems, barriers, and user experiences identified during district consultations such as Nilphamari. These insights will be shared with the Department of ICT so that local evidence feeds directly into system corrections and future policy decisions.

> **"If district-level realities do not shape national systems, digital reforms will never fully succeed."**

## 6.3 Digital Transformation as a Human Process

**Arsen Stepp, Team Leader, E-ffective Governance**

Arsen Stepp framed digital transformation as a human-centred process that must respond to citizens' real needs. Using the metaphor of "planting a seed," he described innovation as something that grows through collaboration between service providers and users. He cautioned against technology that is creative but impractical, likening it to inventing a square-wheeled bicycle.

He explained that participants jointly identified short-, medium-, and long-term improvements for platforms such as BDRIS, DGHS, and LGED systems. These inputs will be analysed to guide action, with a planned national-level workshop bringing together training institutions and implementing agencies.

## 6.4 Digital Health Innovations with Local Impact

**Dr. Md. Abdur Razzak, Civil Surgeon, Nilphamari**

Abdur Razzak highlighted recent progress in Nilphamari's digital health services, focusing on tools adapted to local realities. He noted that telemedicine services now connect patients in remote unions with specialist doctors, reducing travel costs and improving access to timely care.

He also described how the digitalisation of Vax-EPI services, including typhoid vaccination, has simplified registration and reporting for frontline workers. In addition, the Health Smart Bangladesh NCD-MIS has replaced manual tally books and strengthened chronic disease monitoring.

## 6.5 Delivering Policing Services Around Citizen Needs

**A.B.M. Fayzul Islam, Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime & Ops), Nilphamari**

A.B.M. Fayzul Islam reported progress in digital policing, noting that the Online GD system now allows citizens to file general diaries remotely, respond to follow-up queries, and receive feedback without repeated office visits. Officers-in-Charge can provide direct responses through the system, improving transparency. He added that a GD can be converted into cases when required and that a digital payment gateway for traffic fines is being introduced to enable online payments. These reforms, he emphasized, are designed to align policing services with citizens' needs.

## 6.6 Engaging Citizens Digitally

**Diponkor Roy, CEO, Zilla Parishad, Nilphamari**

Dipankar Roy stressed the importance of public awareness for effective digital service delivery, highlighting Facebook as a widely used communication platform in the district. He noted that both institutions and citizens rely on it for updates and engagement. He argued that digital transformation requires behavioural change alongside technical upgrades, suggesting that social media could be more deliberately integrated with formal service channels.

## 6.7 Closing the Gap Between Service Standards and Public Awareness

**Joti Bikash Chandra, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General), Nilphamari**

Joti Bikash Chandra, the chair of the event drew attention to the operational pressures that continue to affect service delivery at the district level, particularly workforce shortages that delay processing times and contribute to citizen dissatisfaction. He noted that frontline offices are often expected to deliver timely services with limited human resources, making it difficult to consistently meet public expectations.

**"A service standard or charter has little value if citizens do not know it exists or how to use it."**

He also highlighted a critical disconnect between formal service standards and citizen awareness. Although the Citizens' Charter clearly outlines procedures, requirements, and timelines, most citizens remain unfamiliar with it and therefore struggle to navigate services effectively. To close, he stressed that improving public understanding of the charter is as important as improving systems themselves, as informed citizens are better able to follow correct procedures, reduce unnecessary visits, and hold institutions accountable.

# 7. Conclusion

The Nilphamari district consultation demonstrated the value of convening a broad range of stakeholders, including district and upazila administrators, sectoral service providers, law enforcement, ICT professionals, local government representatives, civil society, and project partners, to examine how digital public services function in practice. Bringing these perspectives together helped move discussions beyond individual departmental challenges and highlighted shared bottlenecks such as system fragmentation, coordination gaps, and low public awareness.

As a next step, the insights and recommendations generated during the consultation will be consolidated and analysed alongside findings from other districts. These will inform a national-level workshop involving relevant training institutions and implementing agencies, where priorities will be refined and responsibilities clarified. This process will help ensure that district-level evidence feeds directly into coordinated system improvements and policy decisions, supporting more citizen-centric digital public services across


*Figure 5: The CCeD consultation brought together a diverse group of participants in Nilphamari.*

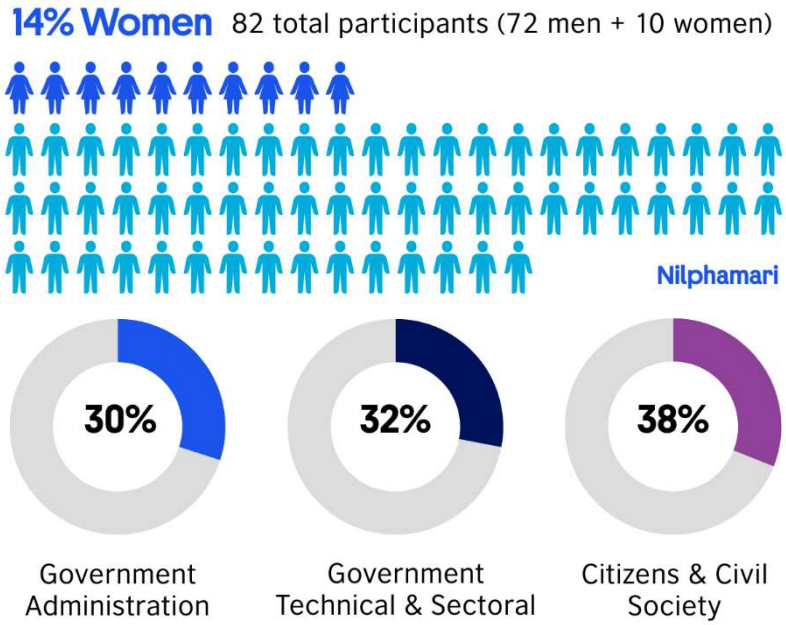
# Annex A: Event Agenda

### Nilphamari Citizen-Centric e-Service Design (CCeD) Consultation

| Time | Session & Description |
|---|---|
| **09:30 – 10:00** | **Registration** |
| **10:00 – 10:30** | **Opening (30 mins)**<br>▪ Hosted by **Md. Rayhan Uddin,** Assistant Commissioner, Nilphamari<br>▪ Inaugural speech<br>○ **Mohammad Nairuzzaman**, Deputy Commissioner, Nilphamari<br>▪ Opening remarks by Special Guests<br>○ **Md. Saidul Islam,** DDLG/ADC Revenue, Nilphamari<br>○ **Dr. Md. Abdur Razzak,** Civil Surgeon, Nilphamari<br>▪ Welcome address<br>○ **Arsen Stepp,** Team Leader, E-ffective Governance |
| **10:30 – 11:00** | **Presentations (30 mins)**<br>▪ Digital Public Services in Nilphamari: An Overview (15 mins)<br>○ **Abdus Samad Shiekder**, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Edu & ICT), Nilphamari<br>▪ Keynote Presentation: Citizen-Centric e-Services in Bangladesh, Making Digital Services Work for People<br>○ **Professor Shahab Enam Khan**, PhD, Jahangirnagar University |
| **11:00 - 11:15** | **Transition to Group Discussions (15 mins)** |
| **11:15 - 12:00** | **Thematic Group Discussions (45 mins)**<br>▪ Local experiences with digital public service delivery<br>▪ Actionable recommendations |
| **12:00 – 12:15** | **Tea Break** |
| **12:15 – 13:15** | **Group Presentations (60 mins)**<br>▪ Presentations based on Thematic Group Discussions (6x) |
| **13:15 – 13:45** | **Closing Session (30 mins)**<br>▪ Summary and Next steps<br>○ **Arsen Stepp, Team Leader**, E-ffective Governance<br>▪ Vote of thanks from Chairperson<br>• **Joti Bikash Chandra,** Additional Deputy Commissioner (General), Nilphamari |
| **13:45 – 14:00** | **Group Photos & Informal Networking** |
| **14:00 – 15:00** | **Lunch** |

# Annex B: Participant Composition Analysis

## Participant Composition




The Nilphamari District Consultation on Citizen-Centric e-Service Design (CCeD) successfully convened a diverse and multi-sectoral group of 82 participants, strategically aligned with the British Council's E-ffective Governance project objectives.

Gender representation among the total participants remained uneven, with 72 male participants (87.8%) and 10 female participants (12.2%). Within the core thematic working groups specifically, 55 participants were engaged, comprising 47 men and 8 women. This disparity indicates that while women were present, their voices were comparatively limited in the detailed thematic discussions.

Structurally, roughly two-thirds of participants were local stakeholders, while the remaining one-third represented national or central institutions. This balance ensured a dialogue that effectively bridged grassroots realities with broader policy frameworks.

The composition reflected a strategic mix of high-level government buy-in, technical expertise, and strong citizen representation across three key cohorts:

- **Government Administrative Officials (30%):** A substantial cohort comprising District Administration officers and Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) participated, comprising 30% of the total number of participants. Their presence signifies high-level buy-in from the government apparatus directly responsible for service delivery at the district and sub-district levels.
- **Government Technical Staff (32%):** The significant participation of ICT Officers and Programmers (14.5%) underscored the project's practical focus on translating citizen feedback into functional, technical e-service solutions. ICT staff along with other sectoral officials made up 32% of the total number of participants.
- **Civil Society & District Policy Forum (DPF) Members (38%):** Representing 38% of all participants, these members ensured that the consultation was anchored in citizen-centric perspectives and incorporated valuable development partnership expertise into the design process.

## Thematic Focus and Institutional Perspectives

Discussions reflected the distinct mandates and operational realities of participating institutions:

- **District and Upazila Administrators** emphasized digital services as tools to streamline workflows, reduce administrative burden, and strengthen accountability, with a focus on coordination and grievance management.
- **ICT and Technical Personnel** highlighted system interoperability, infrastructure readiness, data integration, and technical ownership as prerequisites for reliable service delivery.
- **Sectoral Service Providers** contributed service-specific insights on digital workflows, eligibility verification, data accuracy, continuity, and the need to balance efficiency with equity.
- **Union-Level Actors and UDC Entrepreneurs** focused on last-mile challenges, including low digital literacy, documentation gaps, and the continued need for human mediation in digital services.
- **Civil Society and District Policy Forum Representatives** anchored discussions in citizen experience, emphasizing inclusion, transparency, trust, and accountability in digital public services.
- **Facilitators** supported participatory dialogue and synthesis, ensuring local insights were captured and translated into actionable guidance for the CCeD process.

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