Unearthing the impact
of the Internet on democracy
in India and beyond

www.internetdemocracy.in

**internet
democracy
project**

New Delhi, 25ᵗʰ January 2015

To,

Ms. Vinod Kotwal,
Advisor (F&EA),
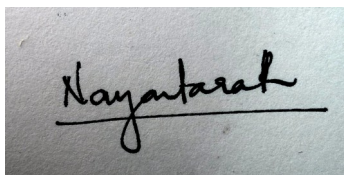Telecom Regulatory Authority of India,
New Delhi

Dear Ms. Kotwal,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit additional comments on the TRAI Consultation Paper No. 8/2015, on Differential Pricing for Data Services.

Please find below the final key points from the Internet Democracy Project (www.internetdemocracy.in) to this Consultation Paper.

We welcome TRAI's commitment to hearing all perspectives on the matter.

Thank you and yours sincerely,
For the Internet Democracy Project,

Nayantara Ranganathan,
Programme Manager- Freedom of Expression,
Internet Democracy Project

We would like to briefly highlight some key points:

Differential pricing should not be allowed in order to ensure that there is no bifurcation of data services into state-of-the art access for those who can afford to pay for an unfettered internet, and TSP/ISP-dependant cheaper/zero-rated access for those who cannot afford to pay.

This decision should be complemented by a big push towards making access an urgent need by mobilising Universal Service Obligation funds, and exploring business models that do not undermine a free, open and secure access to the internet. Net neutrality regulations should be put in place at the earliest, so that there are clear guidelines that carriers and internet businesses can follow. It would also be useful to outline network management regulations clearly, so that transparent disclosure by carriers can be examined for compliance.

TRAI should not lose sight of the bigger picture that accelerating internet access is not only a shot in the arm for persons without access, but also for the Indian economy as a whole. Inferior access to selected portions of the internet, by reducing users to consumers of content, rather that contributors, would harm India's goal of leapfrogging into the information economy. The goal of providing access should be ambitious enough to include the same quality of access for all.

The internet is a public resource and should be governed in public interest. TRAI should enable an atmosphere where all citizens can exercise citizenship equally, and not be ranked as first and second class citizens depending on their capacity to pay.

Given the speed and unpredictability of technological developments, it is difficult to predict the shape that technological innovation will take in the near future. The persons who will be coming onto the internet should be able to have a level-playing field with established internet businesses. It is hard to imagine that new businesses will be able to join zero-rated platforms on their own terms. Already entrenched big businesses should not be able to take over the internet and shape user engagement over the long term.