

Connecting the Next Billion requires more than infrastructure alone - VimpelCom

ICTs are unlocking new opportunities for economic growth, socio-economic development and the empowerment of individuals across the globe. Mobile technology is the backbone of these developments, particularly in developing countries where mobile phones are embraced as an essential piece of hardware, and where wireless networks cover wide areas with greater efficiency than other technologies. Access to these technologies can transform the way people learn, receive healthcare, work and do business.

In the countries in which VimpelCom operates there are 109 mobile subscriptions per 100 people; an increase of 16% over the past five years. Two-thirds of the population remains unconnected however, 10% more than the global average while demand for connectivity is high, particularly in emerging markets where according to GSMA the willingness to pay for 4G is generally higher than in mature markets. In Georgia for example, monthly data use increased seven-fold after the introduction of our 4G network and in many other markets data use is tripling. Continued network investments are therefore important, in particular the rollout of 4G, to bring the benefits of a digital society to customers across the globe.

Access to infrastructure is just one element of a digital society. Relevant content is what motivates people to go online. For many, mobile devices have become the primary interface with digital services, enabling access to news, financial services, healthcare, education and employment opportunities. This means a broader approach to connectivity is necessary with a focus on these (often essential) services. Telecoms are adapting to this new reality, and VimpelCom is for example transforming from a traditional telecommunications company to a consumer-centric communications and technology company. Tailored to local needs, ICTs are enabling real impact and contribute directly to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To name a few examples, VimpelCom's mobile financial services enable financial inclusion for over 30 million users; m-health applications provide information on diagnosing and treating the more common diseases in Kazakhstan, pre- and ante-natal care applications assist young mothers in Ukraine; and mobile-enabled services help agricultural workers in markets such as Bangladesh. The examples show that commercial interests and development goals can go hand in hand.

Disrupting traditional business models is the only way to move the world closer to achieving the SDGs. Besides supporting development through digital services, companies should take the responsibility to act as an engaged corporate citizens. More than ever, digitization enables the empowerment of young people to shape their future through increased access to education and entrepreneurship. Large companies can serve as a platform, enabling individuals and entrepreneurs to be active participants rather than passive beneficiaries of the digital world. VimpelCom has recently launched an incubator center in Pakistan under the National ICT R&D Fund and, in partnership with the Bangladesh Government, a Digital Incubator center to support local entrepreneurs. This shows that by taking a broad approach to doing business companies can be facilitators of bottom up innovation in addition to delivering technological development top down.

Connectivity and mobile networks are key enablers of socio-economic development. The technologies and assets of VimpelCom can be magnified when combined with the reach and creativity of partners with the knowledge and commitment required to convert development challenges into opportunities. We believe together we can have a profound positive impact on the socio-economic success of the communities in which we operate, and we will continue to work on the frontier to unlock new opportunities for all our customers as they navigate the digital world.