

Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion – Phase II: Call for Public Input

1. How would you define, or how do you understand, the theme “*Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion*”?

We think this phrase represents the goal of providing access, usage and Internet solutions appropriation to overcome current digital exclusion in the world.

2. The first phase of *Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion (2015)* identified a set of policy options aimed at the creation of enabling environments, including deploying infrastructure, increasing usability, enabling users, and ensuring affordability. What are the factors to consider when adopting these policy? options at local levels (e.g. the state of a country’s market development, the available infrastructure, level of capacity-building, etc.).

Since 2010, Colombia fixed goals related to digital inclusion, established by four interdependent dimensions from its digital ecosystem: infrastructure, users, applications and services.

Within this context, infrastructure dimension generated the expansion of high speed transportation networks, capable of coping with the increasing traffic demand. Our goal is to have this type of networks in 100% of the urban centers of the country by the end of 2018; 96% of them through optic fiber and 4% through wireless solutions.

With the objective of completing this deployment and to promote Internet breakthrough inside the neediest households, different massification initiatives related to last mile access have been executed, which have included maximum fees to make the service affordable, accomplishing monthly expenses of USD2 for the lower strata; also, the co-financing services for handsets have been offered to overcome the main access barriers. Currently, 334.623 households with limited means are being benefited through this financial assistance.

Regarding to the community Internet access, it has been possible to provide 100% services to rural communities of more than 100 inhabitants, which are located among geographic isolation and low population density conditions; this type of context usually limits the ICT market expansion. In urban centers, Internet access solutions for communities have been possible through different training alternatives to stimulate digital talent. At the moment, the country has 6.755 community access points in rural zones and 870 in urban zones.

~~From the civil society point of view, the deployment of community owned rural wireless networks can increase access to these underserved communities. It is needed that the~~

~~government facilitates these communities to access to the fiber optic infrastructure deployed by the government located in the urban centers so they can have good, affordable and stable internet connectivity. This strategy can increase the positive impact of governmental policies related to the deployment of Internet infrastructure.~~

3. How can connecting and enabling users help to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation? (SDG 9)

The project "*Zonas WiFi gratis para la gente*" (Free WiFi spots for the people) represents a bold gamble for the deployment of free Internet spots during the presidential period of President Santos, within the national territory. The community benefits from the deployment of these WiFi spots in national parks, central squares, transport terminals, iconic sites and in general, any place with high people transit. It also strengthens the development of infrastructure complementing this solution with the access to services of e – government, tourism, education and health, among others.

Again, community owned wireless networks can contribute to create resilient infrastructure that can be maintained by the community especially in underserved rural areas.

4. How can connecting and enabling users help to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns? (SDG 12)

In 2012, professor Raúl Katz made an analysis about the contribution of Broadband in the growth of the GDP in Latin American countries. In particular, the author reveals what he defines, in his study, as the economic impact of broadband. This study also identifies the effects that the broadband generates, which he defines as:

1. Positive externalities
2. Creation of Consumer surplus, and
3. Contribution of Broadband's deployment to production and employment

This study also includes a specific analysis for Colombia, in which is demonstrated how a 10% growth on the broadband connections number generates a 0.037% GDP growth.