

ITCN Asia, September 2015

Concept Paper: Delivering on the Broadband Promise

Those of us who have anything to do with ICT, know it very well that ICTs positively impact every aspect of human life. Whether it is education, healthcare, governance, commerce, entertainment ... the list goes on. We have also known all along that ICTs cannot play their role unless broadband internet is available which makes it possible for ICTs to be everywhere. That is why we have all been clamouring for spread of broadband in Pakistan – more specifically mobile -broadband, commonly referred to as 3G and 4G. Mobile/Wireless broadband was important for us because in Pakistan we do not have a large amount of old wired connections (unlike most of the developed countries). Therefore, just like voice (telephony) delivery of broadband to a large population was/is on possible wirelessly.

It took a long time, but finally it is there. 3G and 4G are spreading rapidly. From what we hear, in about a year's time, the number of mobile broadband subscribers has jumped to 17 Mln, ie 9% of the population. This is great beginning, especially when one considers that it is despite the surprises, like the withholding tax on spectrum auction fees to the most recent taxes on internet and increased federal taxes on mobile phones. Ironically the highest tax is on smartphone, which we all know is heralded all over the world as game-changer, as it is replacing the PC and thus brining computing within the reach of those who cannot afford PCs. It is as if someone sensed that “danger”.

Coming back to the original discussion, although we, the ICT professionals know it, the rest of us are asking. They would like to know that now that the broadband is there, when and how the big promise of broadband/ICT will be delivered. When and how those 900,000 forecasted new jobs will become visible on the horizon? How and when broadband would start showing its impact on education? How and when would we see the dream of remote healthcare come true? When would it become possible for citizens to impact on issues of governance, without having contacts with the high and mighty? How and when broadband would start impacting issues like poverty alleviation and gender emancipation? And so on....

Thus the time to deliver on the broadband promise is fast approaching. It can be argued that the most of vital decisions for that are to be made by the Government, as it is the Federal and Provincial Governments who control. No doubt that is true. And we must keep on reminding those in the government, unless they really start acting. But it should not be forgotten that the rest of us have a lot to do too.

This brings us to our theme of this year's ITCN 2015 Karachi which is going to be held on 15th Sep. 2015. We would like representative of every stakeholder to explain as to what, in CONCRETE terms, are we doing to deliver to the country on the broadband promise. Please note that the emphasis is on what each one of US ('us' not as individuals, but the stakeholder whom we represent) is doing (or going to do), rather than what the government should do - that we already know very well.

We are going to request a range of ICT representatives – from the government, the regulator, the service providers, the vendors, the software developers and the users - for a day of presentations and interactive panel discussion on the topic. We hope to leave the session with more knowledge and with a thinking that is more aligned and in synch with each other – in an effort to deliver on the broadband promise.