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Six Degrees of Sharing: *Innovative Infrastructure Sharing and Open Access Strategies to Promote Affordable Access for all*
GSR Consultation

1. Passive and active infrastructure sharing (e.g., mobile sharing and national fibre backbones)

It is a known fact that telecom regulators in all countries favor faster deployment and investment optimization in the telecom sector. Infrastructure sharing limits duplication of resources and manages the investment to be more effective in which it will be focused on product innovation and improved customer service.

The tool of infrastructure sharing can be used by regulators and Operators to offer better services at affordable prices through increased competition and it will also attract new entrants to invest in the country. But to get such benefits from infrastructure sharing, the regulators need to properly set the governing framework. Growing competition and encouraging new entrants will not happen without mandating and enforcing the infrastructure sharing.

Another fact that the regulators should realize is that after successful deployment of Infrastructure sharing, the Operators will focus on service innovation instead of network deployment which will improve the innovation, better customer service and better commercial offers at affordable prices.

Currently, Telecom operators are investing heavily on the passive and active components. But it is expected that the cost of active components will decrease due to high competition between telecom vendors. On the other hand, the cost of passive components is increasing very fast. To overcome the problem of such situation, the regulators need to enforce site sharing, network sharing and also spectrum sharing.

There are different forms of mobile network infrastructure sharing that have been made common such as co-location and site sharing. This is mainly due to the high costs of acquiring and running mobile sites. It has been noticed in different countries where the operators refused to share mobile sites that the regulator has either directly interfered by signing agreements with local municipalities to force the operators to share the sites or indirectly influenced the increase in site rents on the non shared sites. Once the mobile operator's Opex increases significantly to exceed both the cost of decommissioning existing sites and infrastructure sharing costs, those operators usually revert to network infrastructure sharing without the need for further regulations.

Another scenario that was successful in many countries is the formation of a new infrastructure company that can deploy fiber in the green field area's to be leased for the local operators.

In all cases, the success of Infrastructure sharing mainly depends on the following:

1. Operators: need to realize the economic benefits of sharing their infrastructure.

2. Regulators: should set regulatory framework encouraging infrastructure sharing and should collaborate with local authorities to facilitate the deployment of shared infrastructure.

It is worth mentioning as well that the local authorities responsible for land acquisition have a great role in the facility and infrastructure sharing frame work set in any country. Without their support and cooperation no model is bound to be successful. In many cases, there are obligations that have to be met by private organizations responsible for granting access to lands and infrastructure (mainly Private Developers of residential and commercial communities). Therefore, it is inevitable that any framework set by the telecom regulator must cater for different scenarios where different entities are decision makers in granting access to lands and infrastructure.

2. Open access to international capacity (e.g., submarine cable networks and their landing stations)

In general, open access model is highly encouraged. The international capacity needs to operate on an open access basis; such a policy will stimulate the bandwidth market and make available affordable bandwidth to all customers. It is a known fact that opening the access to International capacity will result in prices fall and improve in quality of service.

Telecom regulators are encouraged to allow open access to the submarine cables and they should also work with the operators to expand such capacity to avoid bottle necks. Initiatives like Internet Exchanges and Network Access Points are of great value in providing bandwidth, alternate and more affordable access and platforms for more innovative services.

3. Harmonized and regional policy and regulatory approaches to sharing:

The creation of harmonized and regional policy and regulatory approaches to sharing is one of the key building blocks in the establishment a successful Infrastructure sharing.

ITU is appreciated for creating regional initiatives (e.g. Arab states) for strengthening and harmonization of policy and regulatory frameworks in their regions.

Similarly, such harmonized regulatory approaches shall improve the deployment of Infrastructure sharing in which all Operators in the region shall realize the importance and benefits of sharing, plus the regulators can share experience with each other on effective ways for deploying a shared infrastructure.