Giga: Connecting Every School to the Internet

> **The COVID-19 outbreak has created a climate that poses a colossal threat, now and in the future, to children and their families** — a grim reality especially compounded among children already affected by poverty, disability, or social exclusion. Experts predict that, given high contagion risks and the time needed to develop and distribute a vaccine, COVID-19 is poised to be a long-term global health and welfare crisis. The current climate created by the COVID-19 outbreak has shown us the importance of **universal connectivity**[1] — from being connected to information to being connected to loved ones and our communities, and from how every hour sees ways of working and learning shifting.

The global school shutdowns and health crisis exacerbate already challenging realities for lower-income countries: with the limited or non-existent infrastructure to connect to distance learning and essential services, their current education and economic stability as well as future opportunities and welfare are significantly set back. This current situation proves how **critical** it is to now **accelerate connectivity, online learning and other initiatives for children** and their communities, and drive economic stimulus.

Giga, an initiative launched by UNICEF and ITU in September 2019 to **connect every school to the Internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice**, is supporting the immediate response to COVID19, as well as looking at how connectivity can create stronger infrastructures of hope and opportunity in the "time after COVID." The Giga team has accelerated work on key connectivity initiatives, with a focus on providing connectivity and necessary services to 13 high-impact countries in the months between April and September.

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[1] http://reports.broadbandcommission.org/state-of-broadband-2019/executive-summary/

Giga Initiatives supporting communities during COVID-19

- **Critical Software and Content:** We're identifying, strengthening, and scaling proven and new innovations in software, learning systems, and content that support telework, tele-education, tele-health, and financial services – all of which can be deployed at low-cost, scale, and customized to local languages.
- **Broadband Connectivity:** We're developing a comprehensive strategy to: map unserved schools; develop better and/or new financing programs to bring together diverse public and private funding; initiate large-scale procurement and improve transparency in monitoring.
- **Digital Financial Services:** Since Giga will use public blockchains for monitoring and managing payments, we are able to work with governments and providers to explore how connectivity infrastructure can also lead to extensions of online banking and electronic financial networks, potentially, enhancing the efficiency and accountability of government programs that disseminate payment.

Updates from Giga's work in three regions: January-May, 2020

- **Central Asia** – Kazakhstan signed on as the "Regional Lead" in January 2020 and the first financial model is being developed for this region. A Giga Regional Center and regional team in Nur-Sultan has been established to implement the initiative with a commitment to bring together countries in the region to refine financial models over a series of workshops and meetings. In Kyrgyzstan, by obtaining real-time mapping of all 2,180 public schools, the government was able to use the mapping information to go on to connect 690 public schools (~32%) of them. In Kazakhstan, we integrated 10,200 schools onto our global mapping platform which currently displays over 800,000 schools in 15 countries.
- **Eastern Caribbean** – 9 out of 11 countries in the Eastern Caribbean states (OECS) have completed mapping of their school connectivity. A Giga Regional Centre and regional team for the OECS has been established to implement the initiative. In partnership with the OECS, Giga will enhance the connectivity of schools and develop digital public goods needed to support the new digital education vision for the Eastern Caribbean.
- **East Africa** – President Kagame as co-chair of the UN Broadband Commission has confirmed Rwanda's support as Giga Africa Lead. With the governments of Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda we are mapping school connectivity in real-time, and developing financial models to make connectivity affordable and sustainable. In Kenya, we're also supporting the development of educational digital public goods to be rolled out with the introduction of a new competency-based curriculum.

Global updates

- **Digital Public Goods Alliance kicked off with Norway:** The Digital Public Goods Alliance, with the support of the government of Norway, is assessing, strengthening, and scaling a range of critical open source software and content that could address critical needs, especially during the current crisis: https://digitalpublicgoods.net/explore/.
- **Softbank Investment Advisory services joins Giga:** Through our collaboration with Softbank Investment Advisors and industry experts, we established Giga's financial model — developing a reliable, evidence-based model on the return of investment of connectivity, and providing advisory services to governments to build country-specific finance and delivery approaches.
- **GIGA is anchored and recommended: In the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation:** Recommendation 1B which calls for the UN to create and provide access to vital "Digital Public Goods," and Recommendation 1A which calls for universal access to connectivity.

What's next

Moving full-speed to connect every school, raising public and private funding to connect every school by putting forward several countries as "accelerated" actors in GIGA. Current focus countries are **Kenya, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, El Salvador, Honduras, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent. In these countries we will be:**

- Sharing key **open-source** remote education tools, as well as innovations in software, learning systems, and content that support **telework, tele-education, tele-health, and financial services.**
- Using data that is generated, for example, about school location, to provide additional insights to partners engaged in emergency response.
- Working with telecommunication / connectivity partners to use their networks and services to immediately connect disconnected schools.
- Creating **financing packages for national connectivity** and helping match with possible financing partners.

How to Get Involved

Only by working together can we make this happen. **Giga** seeks engagement and leadership from governments, businesses, civil society, technology providers, donors, and finance experts. You can find more information on how you can get involved in the attached materials or by signing up at **www.gigaconnect.org.**