Asia Pacific Digital Societies Policy Forum
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Working Together to Achieve a Digital Future

Welcome

- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. Good morning. It is a pleasure to join you all here in the beautiful and dynamic city of Bangkok for the third Asia Pacific Digital Societies Policy Forum.
- It is certainly a privilege to join distinguished representatives here, including Dr. Pansak Siriruchatapong, Deputy Minister of Digital Economy and Society for the Kingdom of Thailand; Malcolm Johnson, Deputy Secretary General for the ITU; and Areewan Haorangsi, the Secretary General of APT.
- I have also seen Chairman Sharma from Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and Dr. Shah, Chairman of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. Welcome to you and other distinguished guests.
- Over these next two days, we will hear from policy makers, regulators, industry leaders, and international and regional organisations on how we can best enable and advance digital societies.
- The GSMA feels privileged to be a part of this conversation—and to offer our insight as to how together we can explore the promise of hyper-connected societies and work to achieve a digital future for all.

The Promise of Digital Societies

- I'm heartened to see all of you in this room because—as you well know—building a digital society is no small charge. **It takes big vision. It takes big commitment.**
- But I know that we are up to the task—and we must be. **Because our cities and communities are facing bigger challenges—now more than ever before, and digital societies can help enable some of the solutions.**
- Across the Asia Pacific and in many other corners of the world, a common set of challenges prevail. Rapid urbanisation is putting strain on existing cities' infrastructure; pollution, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises need to be better monitored and managed; and there's a growing population that will require access to essential services.
- But with the digitisation of systems and services, the advent of the Internet of Things, and the creation of networks of intelligently connected devices and interoperable services, **citizens can also seamlessly interact with different aspects of their life —whether work or play— all over digital channels.**
- Already, we can see a glimpse of what impact a fully digital future will have. And we don't have to look any farther than here in the Asia Pacific:

    - In China, local governments are using IoT to monitor public busses and in turn using the data to find more effective and efficient transportation solutions—saving both money and time for commuters.
    - In Taiwan, mobile operators are collaborating with city government to use IoT technology to collect real time data on water levels and develop capabilities to improve flood control and disaster recovery.
    - In Pakistan, the government has held competitions calling on citizens to design mobile apps aimed at government services, transparency and information dissemination.
    - Building on these efforts, earlier this year GSMA launched the “Big Data for Social Good” initiative with the goal of leveraging mobile operators capabilities as an initial phase to monitor, alert, predict and manage the spread of diseases that, if unaddressed, could create epidemics. Soon Bharti Airtel and Telenor will be launching initial trials in this respect in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and here in Thailand.
- These efforts capture what a digital society is all about— using connectivity to offer innovative solutions, share information quickly, react more efficiently to identified problems and ultimately build more inclusive communities for citizens.
- While countries across the region are at varying stages of connectivity, together we can identify the roadmap to make the promise of digital societies a reality.

The Mobile Partnership

- Indeed, the mobile industry is a ready and capable partner in the pursuit of a digital future. Historically, **mobile has always been more than connectivity—it has been the platform for what is possible**.
- It is certain that mobile connectivity will be essential for successful digital societies.
- Over the past years, the mobile industry has transformed society with each successive generation of technology.
- Just over 25 years ago, the first 2G networks launched. Today there are more than 4.8 billion individual subscribers around the world. That is over 7.8 billion connections.
    - At the end of 2016, we saw **over 2.6 billion subscribers across Asia Pacific**, accounting for over 4 billion connections.
    - By 2020 there will be nearly 3.2 billion subscribers in the region, accounting for over 5.1 billion connections.
- The region is also seeing an accelerating technology migration to 4G. And technology leaders in the region—South Korea, Japan, and China—are driving the development of 5G mobile technologies.
- Today, more than ever before, the **mobile industry is committed to connecting everyone and everything to a better future**.

- That is why, when the United Nations launched its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the mobile industry was the first to come out as a sector and commit to helping achieve them. In fact, many of these align with the aims of building digital societies—as the ITU Deputy Secretary General eloquently highlighted earlier in his remarks.

Working Together to Achieve a Digital Future

- So now the big question for all of us here—how do we take advantage of the skills and resources we all have to offer and make digital societies a reality? Let me offer a few thoughts.
- First, forums, like this one, are crucial for our collective success. **Policy makers, regulators, industry players, and regional leaders must have the opportunity to share ideas and identify new ways to collaborate.**
- People guiding policy should be aware of where the industry is heading and what innovations are on the horizon—and industry leaders need to hear and understand the challenges facing policy makers as we work to shape the environment that they will have to operate in.
- **Innovation will always outpace regulation** so communication and flexible governance structures are key.
- Second, governments should **think big-picture and long-term** in planning for their digital society. A strong vision and strategy is key. The Digital India plan and commitment to smart cities is one such example. It will be important to involve stakeholders early on in the process. **Mobile operators, who are simultaneously familiar with local dynamics and international best practices, are particularly well positioned partners.**
- Third, we must recognize that **digital societies will not develop in a silo**. They will require collaboration on many fronts.
- Organisations like the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity and the ITU are essential partners to promote regional harmonisation. Mobile operators need to operate with agility and policy and regulatory harmonisation will facilitate this.
- Within governments—we must acknowledge that the impact of digitisation falls across many different sectors and agencies. Let's make sure that policy leaders across Governments are embracing the impact of digitisation and are taking into account the mobile opportunity when developing policies. As our societies become increasingly connected, this is no longer only relevant to ICT Ministers, but also to Finance, Health, Education Ministers, and the list goes on.
- **Fourth, is data, data, and more data**. Digital societies accumulate a wealth of information regarding transportation, environmental, health, and a variety of other data sets. We should use this data to drive policymaking.

In Conclusion

- Achieving a digital future will take collaboration and dedication from all of us.

- We are already seeing what that future can hold.
- Smarter transportation solutions can reduce traffic congestion, save commuters time, and reduce pollution.
- Sensors monitoring air and water quality can create healthier environments and allow for faster emergency response to extreme weather conditions.
- Smart street lighting can reduce crime and improve people's driving, enhancing the safety of communities two-fold.
- Smart grids and smart meters for energy sources can improve management of utility systems and improve business and customer relations.
- **Achieving this future will be a big task—but we are up for it. Because we must be**. And if we do, the lives of our citizens will be markedly improved. And by recognising the transformational impact of mobile connectivity, we can rest assured they will continue to improve.
- So on that note—let's get to work. Thank you all.