

The green agenda

04.

"Inefficiencies are like little rocks in the water. You don't see them until the water disappears."

Forum speaker

The need for a holistic view of communications and technology benefits is best demonstrated in one of ITU Telecom World 2009's dominant themes – the role of ICTs in climate change. For their part, many operators already have long-term emission reduction targets in place, while vendors are helping to bring to market equipment solutions that lower power consumption. Nevertheless, the green agenda itself is notably global and cross-sector in scope and this is where the industry cannot afford to be out of step, particularly when current research forecasts that energy consumption by ICT and consumer electronics will double by 2022 and triple by 2030.⁴ This is being recognized by, among others, the GSM Association, which is focusing on cross-sector learnings as part of its thought leadership program in this area. For its part, the ITU will be underlining the cross-sector work using ICT that needs to be done on a local, as well as global, basis at the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

While there are many indirect ways that ICT can catalyze a greener society, for example through the take-up of videoconferencing as an alternative to air travel, there are plenty of direct routes to change. At one level, standardization will be vital, from providing interoperable mobile phone chargers that will reduce wastage⁵ to providing deployment and security standards for smart grids, a process already under way in the United States.⁶ At another level, the industry can innovate with solutions that enable businesses and consumers to save costs while reducing their carbon footprints. Services that provide real-time observation of home energy consumption are a case in point.

For this kind of innovation to happen, high levels of interaction are required across a number of industry sectors. Government will have a central role to play, in terms of promoting cross-sector dialog and procuring greener IT equipment for the public sector. Yet a change of mindset is also required within the ICT sector.

⁴ OECD/International Energy Agency "Gadgets and gigawatts: policies for energy efficient electronics" 2009

⁵ Europa Commission welcomes industry's commitment to provide a common charger for mobile phones 29 June 2009

⁶ National Institute of Standards and Technology Commerce Secretary Unveils Plan for Smart Grid Interoperability 24 September 2009

