



SOURCE: Ministry of Telecommunications and the Information Society, Ecuador
TITLE: Broadband and its undeniable benefits, smart regulation for a broadband world

The economic and social benefits generated by broadband are of steadily growing importance. A significant impact on various areas of the economic system, increased GDP and a rise in occupancy are only some of the benefits attributed to this service, which is necessary for the integral development of societies.

The adoption of public policies for the massive deployment of broadband in all social sectors and serving to overcome the challenges and difficulties surrounding the broadband ecosystem is one of the challenges facing the efforts of all governments to manage efficient mechanisms to fund network deployment, provide investment incentives, stimulate innovative development of new applications and services and increase digital knowledge among all inhabitants.

Ecuador is certainly among the countries that attaches priority to the national objective to ensure all citizens have access to and generate information and knowledge through effective use of broadband technologies and are actively integrated into social and inclusive development, thus guaranteeing equal access to this transforming process by all sectors of society.

In order to reach all sectors of society, the government has implemented strategic plans and programmes for connectivity, recruitment and service provision that have led to a considerable increase in the penetration rates for broadband Internet service and mobile telephony, especially in areas that had been neglected and technologically isolated for many years.

The government has invested millions of dollars in connectivity and equipment for public schools, rural parishes, social rehabilitation centres, health centres, social cooperatives and infocentres throughout the country, for the benefit of over **4 688** educational establishments, **1 704 556** students and **1 310 357** citizens in rural communities and underprivileged urban areas.

The importance of broadband to society's academic development and training has been confirmed in Ecuador. Education and learning are thus the main reasons for Internet use in Ecuadorean homes: **61.3%** of POOR HOUSEHOLDS use the Internet for that purpose, whereas 35.9% of households that are NOT POOR do so.

Telecommunications have expanded rapidly in recent years, in the region and worldwide. In Ecuador, the growth rate has also been exponential. The most noteworthy indicators in the sector relate to growth in mobile communications and Internet use. Internet penetration in June 2011 was **29.49%**, i.e., the number of INTERNET users **GREW FIVEFOLD** during the Citizen Revolution Government (2006-2011). The penetration of the advanced mobile phone service has risen to **108%**, the density of active data lines grew from **0.87%** in 2009 to **9.25%** in 2011, and, significantly, **68%** of **RURAL** Ecuadorean households have a mobile telephone.

Given that broadband is not just a technological concept linked to telecommunications, but the engine driving the achievement of various objectives, such as giving added impetus to the economy and promoting innovation and social development, the government, through the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Information Society, has devised the Ecuador Digital Strategy 2.0. The strategy comprises plans, programmes and projects aimed at strengthening the government's role in the construction of a digital and inclusive society, and establishes the conditions needed for the various public and private players in this ecosystem properly to fulfil their role in achieving the goals set.

Under the Ecuador Digital Strategy 2.0, three plans are to be carried out: the National Broadband Development Plan, the connectivity strategy; the National Plan for Universal Access and e-Readiness, which is the citizens' learning and capacity-building strategy; and the National e-Government Plan, which is the strategy for bringing the government closer to the citizens. The three plans are complementary and cannot be implemented independently of each other, because they comprise the requirements for structuring a society on the path to digital revolution.

The mainstays of the National Broadband Development Plan are: efficient management of resources, appropriate market conditions for a dynamic, innovative and changing context, and equal access to and use of infrastructure and services in a socially and environmentally responsible way.

The main goals of the National Broadband Development Plan between 2012 and 2017 are: to achieve a significant drop in the price of kbit/s, to increase the number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises connected to broadband, to provide the majority of rural parishes with a broadband connection, to increase the number of Ecuadorean households in quintiles 1 and 2 with broadband access, to triple the number of broadband connections and to provide at least 75% of the country's population with broadband access.

There are countless initiatives worldwide to make broadband access more universal. They use similar policies to obtain different results. It remains a challenge for any national government to apply the policies and smart regulations suited to each country's situation in such a way as to fulfil the long-held dream of fair and inclusive societies that are technologically ready to meet the digital challenges of the future.