WHAT IS ERICSSON’S ROLE IN THE AMAZON CONNECTION PROJECT?

The Amazon Connection program has brought digital connectivity – and with it important life-saving and life-changing services – to more than 50,000 people in the remote Amazon Basin of Brazil. Using technology and expertise, Ericsson has partnered with Brazilian telecom operator Vivo and the local non-governmental organization Saúde e Alegria, to provide access to improved health care, education and economic opportunities.

The first phase of the program began in 2009 in the rural town of Belterra with a 3G site that provided 3G voice and data services for the first time ever to about 20,000 people in the Amazon.

In 2010 the coverage was extended to outfit the Abaré hospital boat with a 3G connection, improving access to medical services for the riverside communities living along the Tapajós River.

Health care providers can now consult with other medical professionals around the world, sending them X-rays and other images, and getting second opinions when required. In addition, training programs are available on the boat, and these are conducted in conjunction with local universities. The result has been the provision of quality medical assistance for thousands of people living in the Amazon.

The Brazilian Government has recognized the important social benefits that the hospital boat offers to local communities (it served 15,000 people in 73 communities in 2010), and has initiated a program to launch 100 additional riverboat hospitals.

The second phase of the Amazon Connection program was launched in 2011, expanding 3G connectivity to the village of Surucá, which lies just across the Tapajós River from Belterra. The expansion of the network has brought expanded learning opportunities to the only school in the village, Escola João Franco Sarmento. School-aged children in Surucá – which is located in a protected reserve and is off the power grid – previously had no access to the internet and the global resources that this can provide.

As a result, Ericsson and Vivo launched Connect To Learn, a program originally conceived as part of the Millennium Villages Project in sub-Saharan Africa and now deployed in other regions like the Amazon to meet the global challenge of enabling access to education for all. Volunteers, including Ericsson employees, can now provide virtual classes for students and make global resources available to the region’s schoolchildren and educators through the initiative.

As the Amazon Connection has developed, the benefits have also grown, from simple connectivity to true digital inclusion. According to a study of local businesses
conducted by Sebrae, an agency that supports entrepreneurs and small enterprises, more than half of the respondents said that telephony services have helped create jobs and businesses, and 92 percent said internet access and telephony were helping the region develop.

The partnerships that have made these advancements possible are strong. Ericsson has developed and implemented the infrastructure, services and applications, while Vivo operates and maintains the network. Saúde e Alegria then trains local people in the use of new technology, and advises other partners on how best to assist the region’s communities.

The mobile technology used along the Tapajós River is enabling vital health and education services, as well as community development programs within the fields of health care, education, forest economy, culture and communication. The project will continue connecting other remote Brazilian villages (the goal is 175) to improve the prospects of people in these remote areas, enabling a more economically active population that can support local livelihoods.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Remote reach success story: http://www.ericsson.com/jm/article/vivo_brazil_1633598732_c
Changing lives in the Amazon: http://www.ericsson.com/news/120713 Changing lives in the Amazon 244159018_c
Extreme projects Brazil: http://www.ericsson.com/thecompany/our_publications/extreme_projects
Connecting communities in the Amazon: http://www.ericsson.com/news/120619 Connecting communities in the Amazon 244159019_c
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Ericsson Corporate Communications
Phone: +46 10 719 69 92
E-mail: media.relations@ericsson.com