

Myanmar Connect 2016: In the Future, Even Water Buffalo Will Be Online

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Press Release

(Nay Pyi Taw, 14 September 2016)- Myanmar's mobile network is closing in on nearly 100% population coverage, and is striving for ever increasing geographical coverage. So much so that even future generations of water buffalo in remote areas will be tracked online as part of the "internet of things", said Lars Erik Tellmann, CEO of Telenor Myanmar.

He was speaking at the 4th annual Myanmar Connect telecommunications conference, where over 400 delegates from nearly 200 organizations gathered in Nay Pyi Taw's Myanmar International Convention Centre (MICC2).

This year the attention was not just on celebrating the telecommunications sector's stellar growth, but on how fierce competition amongst mobile and fixed line operators is creating a quality service for customers – despite significant challenges ahead.

Seo Thein, Director General of Posts and Telecommunications Department said, "This conference will help international companies to understand how Myanmar works. With mobile networks reaching approximately 100% of population this year, competition has created jobs and reduced prices – telecommunications has the potential to boost the economy, and all sectors have become more vibrant because of competition."

"Growth has been huge," he continued "but it is just beginning; there are more opportunities for investment for national and international partners".

Rosalind Irving, CEO of Capacity Media who organizes the conference, also noted that much has changed in the four years since Myanmar Connect began. There are "more Myanmar national companies than ever before" in attendance, she said in her opening address on Tuesday.

One of the issues highlighted on first day of the conference, was the lack of sharing of infrastructure between telecommunications companies, particularly in rural areas, if full geographic coverage is to be achieved.

Incumbent operator MPT, now in its second year in joint operations with Japanese partners KSGM, is offering a larger, improved mobile network and is pushing ahead with fixed-mobile convergence (FMC).

"MPT is expanding B2B services, if we can provide affordable and useful services, those business customers will benefit – they will in turn create jobs, growth and improve the overall economy", said Takashi Nagashima, CEO MPT-KSGM.

Some of those services include closer links with the financial sector – the future of mobile money and its wider impact on e-commerce within the country was also a hot topic at the conference. Though Myanmar is predominantly a cash market, the first thing to do is to establish trust. Once that is there, mobile money will be a huge enabler for the country.

Day two kicked off on Wednesday with panel discussions probing the how Myanmar could leverage off regional development plans, such as the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and the Silk Road initiative, to advance the country's goal of establishing itself as a new ICT hub in Southeast Asia.

With delegates and representatives from local and international enterprises forecasting substantial growth in the country's economy, is the telecoms sector ready to support this expansion?

For answers to that question, and if indeed people will see connected buffalo in the future as Tellmann predicts, the next year until Myanmar Connect 2017 will be observed with keen interest by everyone involved with the industry.

However, all companies are working hard to grow the market in key areas such as capacity and speed, to bring new and improved services to the data hungry people of Myanmar.

"As the economy improves in Myanmar," said Chris Peirce, Chief Legal and Regulatory Officer, Ooredoo Myanmar, "the consumer is just as astute as any in the world. Services that the telcos offer need to be appealing, affordable and that the market is willing to pay for."

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