Comunidades Conectadas y Hogares Conectados

In 2010, Costa Rica's Constitutional Court positioned internet access as a human right. After this ruling, "the government adopted digital inclusion as a top priority to empower citizens to actively contribute to the nation's development. By 2012, 93% of Costa Ricans had mobile phone access, yet only 43.7% had access to the internet." Three years later, just 49.4% of the population used the internet. "One reason for the lack of progress on access was that devices and service costs were still too expensive for the country's poorest households. Beyond those dealing with poverty, Indigenous people, female-headed households, and self-employed persons experienced high levels of digital exclusion... With progress on connectivity stalling, renewed attention was given to the importance of delivering universal access for all citizens. This culminated in the launch of CR Digital, a national plan designed to connect the whole country to the internet within two years. Through this plan, FONATEL received an injection of an additional $300 million dollars and was designated the lead organization for a five-phase plan." (A4AI, 2019).

Quick facts

Barriers addressed

Prerequisites
Internet/Mobile connectivity >

Cost
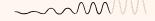Perceived and/or lack of money >
Cost of mobile/internet >

Information Availability & Capability
Digital literacy >

Segment focus

1 2 3 4

Geography

Costa Rica

Sources

A4AI, 2019; SUTEL, 2018; Comunidades Conectadas; Hogares Conectados.

Customer Journey Relevance

Key stakeholders involved

National Telecommunications Fund (FONATEL), Presidential Social Council, Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones (SUTEL), Service Providers (ICE, Tigo, Cabletica, Telecable, Coopelesca, Coopesantos, Coopeguanacaste and Cable Pacayas)

IMPACT

Comunidades Conectadas y Hogares Conectados

Key activities

The first phase of this plan, Comunidades Conectadas, aimed at "building infrastructure (fiber optic networks, telephone towers, among others) to bring telephone and Internet services to populations in coastal, rural and border areas where it was not profitable to invest for telecommunications companies." (Comunidades Conectadas). The program also brought free internet connectivity to schools, clinics and community centers.

"The second phase, Hogares Conectados or connected homes, focused on providing every Costa Rican household with fixed-line internet access and devices needed to get online and use the internet. Families eligible for the program typically include those who are poor, Indigenous, disabled, elderly, or low-income entrepreneurs. FONATEL subsidizes the cost of internet connections (up to 80%) and laptop purchases (up to 100%) for families who qualify for support based on their household finances. Program beneficiaries can visit participating service providers and the head of household signs a contract to receive their connection and equipment. After the subsidies are taken into account, families are expected to—

—cover the remaining costs... Since the program launched, private sector and civil society stakeholders have run activities, funded by FONATEL, to build awareness of the benefits of internet access, facilitate training to develop digital literacy, and show how everyday citizens can interact with their government." (A4AI, 2019).

Outcomes/results

● As of November 2021, nearly 179,000 vulnerable families throughout the country have a computer and an internet connection, thanks to the Hogares Conectados program. A total of 610,000 people have gained connectivity from this program.

● "Approximately 95% of the families who have participated in Hogares Conectados to date are female-headed households, meaning that more women than before—especially those in rural areas—are benefiting from this plan." (A4AI, 2019).

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Outcomes/results (cont.)

- Around 400 rural educational institutions have received an internet connection as part of the Comunidades Conectadas program, and reported that access has helped streamline their administrative work and provide classrooms with innovative instructional materials.

- 81% of households said that they did not have Internet and computer services before being part of the Hogares Conectados Program.

Key enabling environmental factors for the intervention

The success of this program resulted from an enabling policy environment introduced by the Government of Costa Rica. First, Costa Rica's Constitutional Court ruled internet access to be a positioned as a human right. Second, the Government of Costa Rica launched CR Digital – a plan to get universal access to the internet through five phases.

Key design elements and principles that led to successful outcomes

- The program was designed to make internet access affordable through subsidized internet connection and laptop costs. This enabled historically marginalized communities to receive internet access and gain connectivity.

- Programs implemented by the private sector and civil society run activities in parallel to Comunidades Conectadas and Hogares Conectados, funded by FONATEL, to develop digital literacy and build awareness of the internet. This component is crucial, as GSMA has stated that access to internet is not sufficient to guarantee that people will adopt it.

Potential for scale/replicability

These programs operated on a national scale and in places where telecommunications companies do not find profitable to invest in, such as coastal areas and rural zones. As the program progressed, it continued to scale, with more mobile network operators joining the–

Comunidades Conectadas
y Hogares Conectados

–programs as partners. To replicate this program in other contexts, the markets should have a conducive enabling environment and governments with a strong political will.

Challenges encountered during the program

CR Digital originally intended for all individuals to have internet access within two years of the program's launch. Although this goal was not met, the number of people accessing the internet continued to increase, digital literacy programs operated in tandem, and mobile network operators/players continued to join the program.

Recommendations from the research

The success of the program highlights the importance of serving communities and areas that are not deemed as profitable for service providers. Additionally, digital literacy trainings operating in tandem with providing internet services are crucial to equip the population with the tools and capacity needed to actually take advantage of the services provided.

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IMPACT