Is ICT technology keeping its promise as pandemic hits the world?

As the world faces an unprecedented crisis in the form of Covid-19, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is playing a critical role in bringing people together while physical distancing is being practised across the world.

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More than ever, information, unified collaboration, and telecommunication including mobile networks form a critical backbone that enables families, health workers, public safety officials, education institutions and critical businesses to stay connected during this global crisis.

ICT at this time is an open ecosystem that empowers and accelerates the ambitions of all those who meaningfully engage with it. The potential for ICT in connecting people and sharing knowledge instantly during crisis is game-changing and universal. It is also transforming many social and economic aspects of our lives, such as education, healthcare, business and professional development.

As educational institutions quickly pivot toward online learning, both students and teachers have found great value in the use of digital tools and connectivity. During this time, service providers are enabling customers to access learning environments over the cloud throughout the duration of the closed schooling period.

The use of mobile technologies in distance e-learning enables students and faculty in dispersed locations to access video, audio and text-based course materials and actively engage in online discussion forums and real-time virtual classrooms.

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ICT is also profoundly changing our cultural experience during these challenging times, not only in terms of new technology-based access, production and dissemination, but also in terms of participation and creation, and learning and partaking in a knowledge society.

More than 2,000 world-class museums and galleries are now creatively offering virtual tours and online exhibitions in an attempt to keep their audience connected from the comfort of their homes.

Many business organisations have taken a precautionary approach to limit the spread of Covid-19 by advising their employees to work from home. Some Gulf states are unblocking previously blocked conferencing and collaboration tools to help companies and schools carry out remote meetings and virtual classes effectively.

The unprecedented scale for concurrent remote access to IT platforms is putting a strain on the organizations' IT infrastructure as well as fixed and mobile communication providers. IT departments are busy scaling their gateway networks and cloud computing systems to make sure home workers can receive and send emails, access company data, participate in audio and video conferences, and collaborate effectively.

ICT's powerful role

Ericsson is committed to stay close to its customers during these challenging times and help them provide the best possible connectivity and network quality. Ericsson engineers and staff are working to keep the networks up and running. Through our partnerships, we have demonstrated the powerful role ICT can play in transforming societies as well as a humanitarian response by creating long-term solutions that support both efficiency and efficacy.

A key consideration is knowing what technology to leverage and how to best make use of equipment, data and partners. In addition to providing the basic connectivity, we are also exploring how we might implement services such as automation and data analytics to improve resilience and crisis response in the future.

Network traffic data can be an important source of near real-time data on human mobility during an emergency; for example, we know that more network traffic routed to residential areas as opposed to city centres, malls and business hubs.

While there are many crisis management preventative measures to employ during a global crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, a major focus is on technology and stabilizing its performance to accelerate and expand access to critical systems and resources.

Today we are living a new reality and as our society and daily lives transition into using even more advanced digital services, the quality of mobile networks is proven to be of greater importance to keep us connected in ways that we had not experienced before.

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