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## **Background: Private sector making inroads in ICT in developing countries**

In its official development policy Finland has stated a commitment to, along with conventional development assistance, deploy the opportunity offered by information and communication technologies to eradicate poverty.

The government cannot however carry out the task singled-handedly without the participation of the business community. It is the private sector that controls the bulk of investment capital, so the task facing governments is how to create an enabling environment that would attract private companies to invest in ICT in the developing countries, says Jyrki Pulkkinen, sector advisor on ICT at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

**Nokia charges ahead**

It so happens that one of the leading ICT companies in the world is based in Finland. Nokia is pioneering the use of digital education materials to schools with the launch of Bridgeit programme in collaboration with International Youth Foundation, UNDP and Pearson, a publishing house. The pilot programme was launched in the Phillipines in 2003.

Bridgeit, says Nokia is "fast and easy-to-use service, combines existing mobile products and satellite technologies to deliver digital, multimedia materials to teachers and students who otherwise would not have access to them". Combining their research and development resources Nokia, International Youth Foundation, Pearson and UNDP have launched a global program to deliver digital education materials to schools using mobile technology. Teachers use mobile phones supplied by Nokia to access a library of science videos provided by Pearson, one of the world's leading publishing houses. Once selected, videos are downloaded via satellite to a digital video recorder connected to a television right in the classroom.

According to Johanna Jokinen, Director of Communication at Nokia, the programme has generated an enormous interest among school kids and parents, and school attendance has increased tremendously. Indeed, she says Bridgeit has become more of community project rather than just school because parents have become very enthusiastic about it and are actively encouraging their children to attend school. The outcomes of the pilot program are so promising that the project is now doubling in scope in the Philippines and will soon expand to other countries.

**Omnitele EDGEs in**

On the other side of the globe in Africa Omnitele, another Finnish company is involved in an ICT project. Omnitele is owned by national telecom operator Finnet and provides services in wireless telecommunication. In Ghana the company has been contracted by the local telecom operator Scancom to introduce EDGE technology, the first of its kind in Africa. EDGE enables the use of internet over GSM connection. So, where there is GSM coverage and a serving base station with EDGE capability, one is able to use internet with a suitable subscription and a mobile phone.

"Building EDGE internet connection is cheaper than laying copper wires and building fixed-line internet connection in most cases", says Simo Pätäri Senior Consultant at Omnitele. EDGE enhances the data carrying capacity of GSM and therefore lays the foundation for all kinds of services including educational and healthcare material to be delivered to rural communities

over the internet.

Text by Linus Atarah

[1] Sources: <http://www.nokia.com/crr/index.html>

[2] Personal communication with Omnitele

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<http://www.futurea.fi/>