

Country:

Dominican Republic

Name of the Organization:

Instituto Dominicano de las Telecomunicaciones (INDOTEL)

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Answers to the marked questions:

1. What do you consider to be the key achievement of this country in relation to mobile communications policymaking in the past year?

The Dominican Republic is determined to promote and develop a digital transformation that spans across all areas of the government, industry, and citizens. Mobile networks play a big part of that, as the Dominican Republic boasts one of the best LTE coverages in the entire region, mobile adoption leads the way in the amount of internet accounts: over 7 million mobile broadband accounts out of the 9 million total internet accounts.

In 2021, with all its limitations, we were able to accomplish several milestones that were long overdue. Some of the most important ones are:

- Spectrum auction of the 700 MHz and 3.5 GHz bands
- Agreement of the new concession contracts with the three mobile service providers

Those actions, in addition to the regulatory work of INDOTEL of 2021, highlighted by regulations such as (a) the first Cybersecurity regulation, (b) the approval of a 5-year Master Plan for Spectrum Management, (c) a revision of the ICT/telecommunication statistics norm and (d) the approval for the regulatory process to revoke permits and licenses in cases of non-use or unlawful use of spectrum have solidified the role that INDOTEL does in providing a healthy regulatory framework in the telecom industry.

2. Which government initiatives in this country have successfully encouraged innovation and/or investment in/from the mobile industry?

As a transcendental initiative of this administration, the president of the Dominican Republic, Luis Abinader, through presidential decree 539-20, declared of high national interest the essential right of universal access to the latest generation broadband internet and the productive use of information and communication technologies (ICT). In that same order, a mandate was given to take the necessary actions to ensure the availability of the 700 MHz (698-806 MHz) and 3,300 to 3,460 GHz bands, to guarantee that these frequencies could be the subject of an auction process.

As stated earlier, the spectrum auction provides the private sector the needed to deploy 5G in the Dominican Republic. As proof that the industry had high demands for it, the auction results were published in November and already one of the companies that won spectrum in the process has launched services on their 5G network in specific areas.

INDOTEL expects this to carry over the roll out of 5G networks for the next years, as was required in the auction process.

Additionally, the signing of the new concession contract for up to 20 years provides the mobile operators with the legal security necessary to undertake higher investment levels.

3. How has this Government used mobile connectivity to drive its wider national economic and social policies (i.e. beyond Ministry of Communications)?

Due to the widespread coverage of mobile networks, mobile connectivity served as the main connection for many individuals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The government implemented several programs that counted on individuals having internet access. Overall, all conditional aid programs relied on the citizens registering online with their national ID; this program is aimed at the poorest citizens and did not present any major challenges in that regard due to the promptly response and involvement by local community leaders. The vaccination process in the Dominican Republic has been an enormous success, and part of this success is the technological backbone on which it relies. The program uses digital registration of vaccinated as well as having online, AI-powered, support through WhatsApp and other social media tools.

The Dominican Government within the framework of the new Digital Agenda 2030, which includes an Access and Connectivity Hub, has worked with the participation of the private sector and academia in the elaboration of a National Broadband Plan whose general objective is to connect all the citizens to an affordable broadband internet as a means for social inclusion, narrowing the digital divide and developing a prosperous national digital economy that contributes to sustainable economic and social development. The Working Group for this plan, besides INDOTEL, it is integrated by the Telcos, government institutions related to connectivity such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the National Police, the ICT Government Office (OGTIC), the Fiber Optic Unit of the Dominican Electricity Transmission Company (ETED), among others.

4. What has the Government done to improve mobile broadband coverage?

Through the new concession contracts, INDOTEL agreed with the three mobile network operators on their network deployment commitments. This Deployment plan has several responsibilities assigned to the mobile network operators:

- 100 new sites in areas with no or partial coverage in the provinces with lowest levels of mobile coverage. The specific sites are selected by the operators.
- 22 new sites in areas with no coverage.

5. What initiatives or reforms have been implemented to ensure the availability of sufficient and suitable spectrum?

In 2021, INDOTEL adopted the APT band plan for the 700 MHz, calling for an international public tender, and we were able to clear the 700 MHz band, previously licensed to 15 television stations, adding 90 MHz of spectrum for IMT services, plus 100 MHz in the 3 GHz band.

We also implemented a regulatory process in which under certain conditions, licensees of spectrum previously allocated and assigned for fixed services can be gain the authorization to also provide mobile services in that spectrum, this greatly helps with guaranteeing continuity of operations and a more efficient deployment of new mobile technologies. This process was successfully applied to the two (2) operators that were awarded spectrum in the 3.5GHz band. This allows the country to take advantage of the 3.3-3.6GHz segment, and both operators will be able to aggregate 100MHz of continuous spectrum for 5G mobile services.

Finally, our 5-year Master Plan has identified other bands to make available for mobile services, including the discussions of the 6GHz band and millimetric bands in 2022.

6. How is this country a role model to others that want to implement sound regulatory policies?

INDOTEL has taken a data-driven approach and has built a geographical information system (GIS) that has allowed us to cross analyze data from different fields such as socioeconomic, telecom networks, electric grid, and public institutions. This allows us to quickly identify, for example, rural communities that have at least 30 households, that have electricity, have a school, a local medical dispensary and lack any type of telecom network deployments.

The Dominican national regulatory agency, INDOTEL, is led by a 5-member council that guarantees that the interests of the government, consumers and operators are always considered. This leads to regulatory measures that ensure participation of all parties and always lookout for the greater good.

INDOTEL also participates actively in the international forums in which it is a member such as CITEL, REGULATEL, COMTELCA and ITU.

7. How has this Government embraced the role of mobile in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its wider national economic and social policies

With a focus on gender and aimed at contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 5, INDOTEL, through the Telecommunications Development Fund, is in the process of implementing a pilot project to subsidize demand, called "Social Digital Basket" as part of the Biannual Plan 2021-2022 Connect the Unconnected, which aims to provide a social digital basket that includes the partial subsidy of internet service and a smartphone, based on the fostering of mobile technology to empower poor women, women heads of households and single mothers.

Recent data on the level of poverty in the Dominican Republic point out that 62% of the total number of poor households in the country are led by a woman, an argument that supports the choice of one of the Biannual Plan projects focused on the empowerment of women through the mobile technology.

The winning bidder must propose a data plan that includes intelligent internet access equipment, which allows the beneficiaries to have quality connectivity. The project will be implemented in (10) ten provinces and fifteen (15) municipalities with high poverty rates, with low levels of fixed internet penetration and with conventional electricity.

In addition to this project and targeted at the beneficiaries of the Social Digital Basket, a digital literacy plan with a gender approach will be carried out, to promote efficient and meaningful use of mobile telephony and access to the Internet.