A Grand Challenge: Connecting the World's Rural Village

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Recommended Citation

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During the last decade, pilot studies and focused projects have established the efficacy of the Internet for increasing quality of life in rural areas of developing nations; however, connectivity remains uncommon and it is generally slow and unreliable. The developing nations are too poor to attract sufficient capital to build modern Internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.

The activity of the past decade has had positive results. All governments are now aware of the importance of telecommunication infrastructure and the relationship between infrastructure and social and economic development. Technology has also steadily improved, dramatically lowering infrastructure cost.

We feel it is time to consider a grand challenge infrastructure project: connecting the approximately 3 billion people residing in 3 million villages of the developing nations within ten years. This would be a daunting challenge, but no more so than other ambitious projects like the Apollo program, GPS system, or the US Interstate Highway system.

The panel will discuss the desirability and feasibility of such an undertaking.