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EGAT/ICT Team

Public Private Partnership with the Global VSAT Forum

During early December 2008, a new public-private partnership was put into place by EGAT's ICT Team. The MOU was signed by Juan Belt, Office Director for Infrastructure and Engineering for USAID, and by David Hartshorn, Secretary General of the Global VSAT Forum (GVF).

The signing of this MOU follows several months in which USAID and GVF discussed a number of potential benefits. For USAID this focused on exploring the potential of where deployment of satellite technologies could potentially add value to USAID's international development portfolio. For GVF the discussions were between GVF and their member companies, exploring potential interest in partnering with USAID and how GVF members' satellite-related services could add value to USAID's programs, especially those being implemented in more rural locations.

The Global VSAT Forum is a satellite industry association with over 200 members, including global satellite operators, manufacturers of satellite-related equipment, and on-the-ground licensed VSAT firms operating in over 100 countries. The geographic reach is global-wide, and the breadth of GVF's members spans the entire satellite industry.

This partnership between USAID and GVF provides the Agency with a single point of contact for pursuing deployment of satellite-based solutions, irrespective of location or program area being addressed. The partnership provides key value for those program areas that are being implemented in rural locations, but where there is a lack of broadband access that can contribute significantly to the success of the program.

Those that have worked at USAID for any period of time recognize that the Agency was a pioneer in leveraging satellite technology for education and health, going back nearly 30 years. USAID makes use of satellites for a number of radio and TV programs that support its development portfolio, where satellites serve as part of a national or even regional communications solution.

Over the past four years, through USAID's Last Mile Initiative (LMI), several of the country-level LMI projects have made use of satellites to expand rural access.

In Mongolia the LMI project worked through a local satellite operator, with USAID providing Technical Assistance, a business-financial plan, and seed capital for four pilots. These combined to demonstrate how rural communities can be served with voice and Internet services as a profitable business opportunity.

In Vietnam the LMI project supported the national universal service fund (USF) and helped it become operational. A parallel part of the project placed broadband and voice services into the rural village of TaVan, demonstrating how the combination of satellites, WiMAX, WiFi, and Voice over IP, can create a connectivity-access platform for delivering a range of socioeconomic services. This model is now being adopted for nation-wide implementation.

Those seeking additional information are encouraged to contact Joe Duncan, who serves as USAID's lead contact for this USAID-Global VSAT Forum partnership. Joe works in EGAT/I&E's ICT Team and can be reached at jduncan@usaid.gov.

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