

Social Program Expands Internet in Ecuador



Quito, April 30 (teleSUR-RHC)-- In an effort to democratize access to information in the most remote parts of the country, the Ministry of Telecommunications of Ecuador is taking Internet access to rural areas with *infocenters* throughout the country.

Cebadas, an agricultural community in the highlands, is one community benefiting from this measure. "When the children came for the first time they knew something about computers, but they were really nervous, they were afraid to use the computer. I would tell them to hold the mouse, but they began trembling a little, they had never had this direct contact with a computer," said Omar Romero, a teacher at the *infocenter* in *Cebadas*.

The community of *Cebadas* count on a fully functioning *infocenter* for training and free Internet access. The state has also increased Internet bandwidth throughout the country to better connect citizens.

Ecuador currently has nearly 26,660 miles of optic fiber, a spike from the 2,170 miles registered in 2007. Minister of Telecommunications Augusto Espin told teleSUR English: "Today we have 490 operating *infocenters*. At the end of this year, there will be 782 *infocenters* operating throughout the country. We have tried to reach all the (local) parishes in the country. I think the most important thing about this program is that we have *infocenters* (in areas) where nobody else goes. We have tried to reach all parts of Ecuador, with the hope that the technology will always be within reach of citizens."

In part, this has helped Internet access soar in recent years. Some 35 percent of citizens had access in 2012, with that number now standing at 46 percent. Investment on citizen's access to information technology has proved a tremendous success with the government seeking to double the number of digitally literate citizens in the next year.

Espin said the Ministry of Telecommunications has undertaken a study, proving the correlation between a country's gross domestic product and bandwidth. He hopes more Internet access will help diversify the national Economy.

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