



SMART BANGLADESH FOR AN INCLUSIVE TOMORROW

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Grameenphone in building a technologically smart nation

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During the 1990s, analogue phones were the prevalent mode of telecommunications and talking to someone on the phone cost, on average, Tk. 21 for every three minutes, added to Tk. 2,000 monthly subscription and Tk. 35,000 connection charge. Fast forward to 2022, you can use as low as Tk. 0.60 per 10 seconds of conversation - a significant increase in both flexibility and affordability. When landlines were still popular and mobile internet was the stuff of imagination, long-distance communication was a lengthy and tiresome process. Involving not only an active T&T number, but the person you would want to call would also need to have a wired network connection in their respective area.

Thankfully, call costs have become a lot more flexible since the olden days - possible because of the operator working and contributing to the digitalisation of the nation since their inception - Grameenphone. The brand has also provided Bangladesh with reliable access to mobile internet thanks to their expansive

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network coverage. Establishing means of high-level, uninterrupted communication is a crucial step towards realising the recently initiated goal of 'Smart Bangladesh', which entails overcoming existing barriers with the merits of modern technology.

While the government aims to achieve a smart nation by 2041, Grameenphone, since their inception 25 years ago, has been a major enabler of the same goal. By ensuring mobile access and high-speed internet to remote areas, training a future-ready workforce, and providing innovative and emerging technology such as eSim and 5G services, Grameenphone is cementing themselves as a key element in the development of what we recognise as a smart nation - a technologically enabled



country fit for the world of tomorrow.

Being a smarter nation naturally presupposes the basic requirement of telecommunication: an aspect Grameenphone wholly embodies. Being the forerunner of prepaid calling service in the country, Grameenphone's low-cost prepaid system not only helped eliminate communication barriers across the nation but also helped rid of previously existing digital divides among rural and urban areas. Instant telecommunication access also enabled low-income and rural citizens to contribute to the nationwide expansion of the accessibility of local services and businesses.

Over their lifetime, Grameenphone invested over Tk. 416 billion towards the development of Bangladesh's telecommunication sector, with Tk. 37.2 billion in 2021 alone. Since the fiscal year 2015-16 and for seven consecutive years, Grameenphone was awarded as the highest taxpayer in the telecommunication category, greatly contributing to the national revenue. With a revenue of Tk. 143,066 million in 2021, Grameenphone recorded a 2.5% growth since the previous fiscal year. Telcos as a whole contributed to 1.82% of the GDP, where the highest recorded contribution is by Grameenphone. Being the operator with the most network towers across the country, Grameenphone has also heavily invested in network development - taking initiatives to turn existing network towers into dedicated 4G towers which cover 98% of the country's population. At least 13% of the country,

including the most remote areas, is covered exclusively by the Grameenphone network - areas where telecommunication is a means of a lifeline. As such, Grameenphone uniquely positions themselves as an undeniable economic factor behind the growth of a digitally enabled Bangladesh.

A smarter Bangladesh entails a local workforce that is fit to tackle future challenges. As such, Grameenphone has contributed to the development of Smart Bangladesh with an ambition to digitally upskill youth and create employment and economic opportunities. Since their launch in Bangladesh in 1997, Grameenphone has steadily built local capacity based entirely on local talents. By 2007, the company had spent about \$4 million towards training the local workforce, still investing in acquiring future-fit capabilities and an upskilled workforce to serve Bangladesh's digital needs.

To further boost the employability of the youth, Grameenphone annually hosts training programs such as Grameenphone Accelerator for local startups and FutureNation for graduate employment, which has successfully empowered many Bangladeshi talents with the skills required to excel in the fields of technology, economics and entrepreneurship. Grameenphone Academy, the company's educational institution dedicated towards upskilling university students, has courses that combine academic knowledge with professional experience to equip graduates with practical industry-oriented skills.

This has helped expand the diversity in professional expertise in many local jobs - a diversity that is important for any smart nation. Additionally, every Grameenphone employee is required to complete 40 hours of training each year, which helps them upgrade and stay up-to-date with the latest professional skills.

Inclusiveness is a big part of building a smart nation. To assist individuals with speech and hearing impairment, Grameenphone launched a service called SignLine in 2020, which enabled sign language support on the official Grameenphone website and the MyGP app. Grameenphone's website also has sign language video tutorials where anyone can learn the basics of sign language.

Grameenphone has also been playing a key role in preparing the nation for a smarter future by introducing innovative telecommunication technology. Starting from March 7, Grameenphone made climate-friendly eSIM available to Bangladeshi customers. Grameenphone has also been a pacesetter in establishing accessible internet across the nation. In Q3 2022, Grameenphone recorded 3.2 crore active 4G users.

Taking a step further towards the 'Smart Bangladesh' goal, Grameenphone successfully conducted 5G trials in Dhaka and Chattogram on July 26, 2022. Starting on September 22, Grameenphone launched 5G services in eight divisional cities to further boost the country's digital connectivity. Grameenphone 5G services were gradually made available in different areas of Bangladesh as well, including Gulshan (Dhaka), Mirabazar (Sylhet), Kolatoli (Cox's Bazar) and regional Grameenphone offices in Khulna, Cumilla and Mymensingh. As 5G is projected to be a key proponent in driving automated manufacturing processes and making industries more cost-effective and self-sufficient, wider access to this new spectrum of the internet will enable Bangladesh to achieve more innovation and advancement in the telecommunication sector.

As a testament to Grameenphone's role in developing Smart Bangladesh, Grameenphone was the recipient of the Digital Bangladesh Award 2021 in the institutional category section. The award was given as per the company's contribution to Bangladesh's youth enablement, startup ecosystem and digital innovation sector. By enforcing a future-ready local workforce and solidifying digital connectivity across the nation, Grameenphone is helping Bangladesh come closer towards becoming a smarter nation.