

A Google employee from Kyrgyzstan explains how internet would affect the quality of life and how they are trying to make internet available to every person on Earth.

By Timur Toktonaliev

How will life of people living in Naryn and Batken regions change if they have fast internet balloons flying overhead?



Loon project experts think children living in remote and hard-to-reach areas with no schools could gain knowledge on the internet.

Internet could also help find information about diseases or contact a doctor on the internet, get advice on treatment instead of suffering from pain or postponing a visit to a hospital due to a long and tough road trip to the regional center.

A farmer could learn about new approaches and techniques of cropping to get maximum profit from their labor.

Fast internet could improve the quality of life of Naryn and Batken dwellers.

At least, this is what **Tilek Mamutov**, a native of Kyrgyzstan working at Google Corporation and involved in the Loon internet balloon project, hopes for.



Tilek Mamutov. Photo: Facebook.com/tilek

According to the International Telecommunication Union [data](#), in 2015 28.3% of Kyrgyz people use internet. According to the [report](#) of the Kyrgyz National Communications Agency of 2015, 79 per cent of people have access to the internet.

The [research](#) by M-Vector in 2012 showed that Batken and Naryn regions had the least access to internet - 5% and 2%, respectively. For comparison, Bishkek had 41% and Osh region had 15% of internet users.



Уровень проникновения интернета по регионам. (M-Vector, 2012 г.)

Level of internet access by regions. (M-Vector, 2012)

“The idea is to provide access to places where cables or towers cannot be installed”, Tilek Mamutov, Google X project manager, said. “We also use solar power in these balloons. [...] Thus, we hope to make internet cheaper”.

However, associating economic welfare of poor countries with internet access seems doubtful.

“There have been many researches on how internet affects the economy. One research was carried out by McKinsey Consulting Agency. It estimated that if all countries had internet access, some 90 per cent of users, it would improve the global economy by more than two trillion US dollars, which would create over 140 million jobs and more than 160 million people could exceed the poverty threshold.”

“This has direct impact on the human performance,” he said confidently.



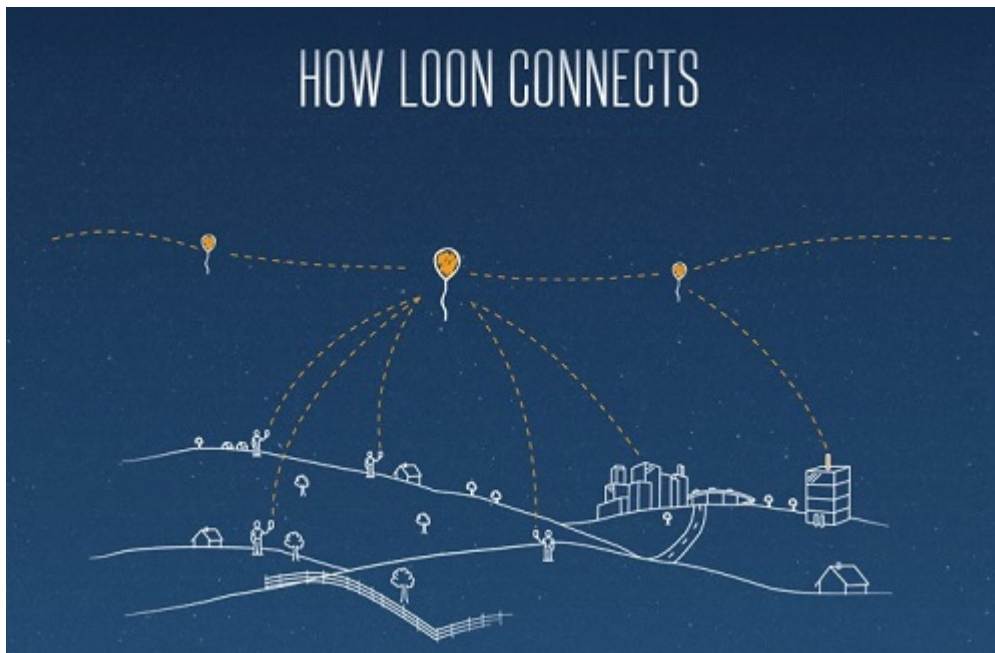
Loon project in reality. Photo: Google.com/loon

However, how a balloon will share internet connection and how it can be connected to?

The Loon project idea is that transparent balloons with a device connected to mobile phone towers will be flying 18 km above hard-to-reach areas of the earth.

People with smartphones that support 4G-LTE can connect to balloons - internet distributors - and use the web.

In Mamutov's opinion, soon such phones will cost 20 US dollars and will be available to every person.



Simplified Loon connections. Photo: Google.com/loon

“It’s like having Wi-Fi at home. It will only be a flying Wi-Fi hotspot,” Tilek explained. “We are inflating the balloon, let it go, and it flies twice as high as commercial jetliners. It can be barely seen in the sky and these balloons will be travelling across the globe.”

Loon balloons are being tested in New Zealand, the Cape, Paraguay, and USA, and locals have already tried them.

However, according to Mamutov, the Loon Project is not ready for a full-scale launch due to the lack of balloon network across the globe. The balloons can’t stay in one place, they are always moving and they should be interchangeable in remote areas to deliver stable internet.

“This would be a network in the sky. We have to improve the system. We are already developing it and our team makes progress,” Tilek Mamutov, X project manager, said.

Video: Mamutov on prospects of Loon project in Kyrgyzstan (in Russian)

Using Internet Wisely

Even if the residents of Batken and Naryn regions have a chance to use Loon internet balloons, what is the chance that people understand all the arising opportunities?

“I remember myself downloading photos back in 2000 when I got access to the internet. These were Backstreet Boys or someone else’s photos, or I played computer games,” Mamutov recalls.

“At first, I think, it all starts with entertainment. If you give the War and Peace book to a child, the child would never want to read books. If a child receives a funny book, it’s more likely that he would want to read other books. I mean it’s quite normal to start with entertainment. And then, after entertainment, people start looking for something else. Today we have so many educational but entertaining videos.”

“I think it’s quite normal when people first use [internet] for entertainment and communication, and then, and it was proved, it turns into something useful,” X company employee said with confidence.

Living in San Francisco

Tilek has been living in San Francisco for two years, where he moved from Switzerland, and before that he worked at Google in Ireland for a long time.

He thinks that cultural diversity and internal freedom are important for the development of innovations anywhere.



A canteen at the Facebook office serves as an example of the creativity of the Silicon Valley. Photo: Timur Toktonaliev

“In some countries, if you dye your hair green, you could be either beaten or laughed at, but here it’s otherwise, they like it when people are different, and I think all countries could learn to like diversity instead of liking when all people are the same,” Mamutov said.

Video: Tilek Mamutov on diversity in San Francisco (in Russian)

According to Tilek’s estimates, 10 natives of Kyrgyzstan work at the Google headquarters in Mountain View, 1 hour drive of San Francisco. There are Kyrgyz working in Microsoft, Facebook and Apple.

He is glad that Kyrgyzstan has more and more creative specialists that make interesting internet projects.

To have more specialists like that (not only in programming), Mamutov urges to invest more in quality education.

“Those parents that decide to invest in education have more successful and happier children.”

Video: Tilek Mamutov on profitable investments in education (in Russian)

But one can never rely on the university only. It's important that a person have interest in a certain subject, and develop on his own, seeking new knowledge in this area.

Tilek suggests talking to competent experts, having a look at the areas of concern of a child in order to discover the calling in life.

“Then it would be easier for a child to look for something on the internet and self-educate,” he said confidently.

“This is advice no. 1 to all teenagers and even adults who don't like what they do. They go to work from 9 am till 6 pm and they don't like their jobs. I'd advise them to find something else, it's never too late.”

Video: Tilek Mamutov on importance of self-education (in Russian)

“There are so many educational resources on the web; you can learn whatever you want to. You can learn to make sculptures, program, or fly a plane,” Tilek Mamutov said.

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