I help telecommunications company, Tigo, support public schools by providing them with connectivity, equipment, leadership training and workshops

Meet Karla Maria Rivas de Reyes, CSR and communications director for Tigo/Millicom in El Salvador

Part of the Millicom Group, TIGO is a brand that delivers affordable, available and accessible digital products in an easy-to-use, customer-focused way. Our vision is to empower all to advance in life and find joy. With presence in the emerging markets of Africa and Latin America, we believe in change, in making people’s lives easier and better through technology.

Tigo began operations in El Salvador in 1992 and is today the biggest telecommunications operator and cable company in the country.

Tigo’s impact

At Tigo El Salvador, our largest social investment program focuses on digital education, where we support public schools by providing them with connectivity, equipment, leadership training, and educational technology workshops for students, parents and teachers. The impact goes far beyond giving away computers. We are seeing lives change in the surrounding communities, where children have opportunities for success their parents did not have.

My happiness and my fears

When we open a new digital learning centre, the kids can’t wait to get inside. They run inside and say “this is mine” (referring to a computer). Watching them look at the screen as if they were in Disneyland ... that makes me really happy.

Success to me means that every Salvadoran knows what it is to “get connected” and “to chat”, is able to use their mobile phone to pay bills, save money and be safe by doing it from home. It is great to work for a company that helps make that happen.

It bothers me to know that children fight every day against fear of gangs, while walking to and from school. Gangs limit their growth and keep them prisoners in their own homes.

Accessibility gives information, information gives knowledge and knowledge gives opportunities to escape poverty. So accessibility is key for us to reduce violence and move forward.

How I imagine my profession in 10 year’s time

In 10 years everything will be digital. We can’t even imagine how different life will be. As my profession is communications and corporate responsibility, I think it will be a big challenge to promote digital inclusion and work so that the digital gap does not grow, and on the contrary, ease opportunities and accessibility for all.
What I think about collaboration

It’s all about engagement, transparency and being open-minded. It sounds simple but can be surprisingly difficult when people are used to distrusting each other’s motives. All participants should focus on common goals and cause. When it comes to child safety online, we all share the objective of empowering children to reap the benefits of digital inclusion in a safe way. What each stakeholder is able to do about it will differ and how each stakeholder will benefit from the outcome may be different. But ultimately we are together empowering a new generation.

In many areas of corporate responsibility we will have more to gain by working together with our competitors than each in our corner. Child online protection is no different. This is why in El Salvador we asked UNICEF to help us pull together all of the mobile operators in the country to sign a joint pledge to work together.

My thoughts on the leading change maker

UNICEF works for a world in which every child has a fair chance in life. UNICEF recognises that having access to the digital world is a right, and provides a lot of helpful guidance to different stakeholders on what they can do to better protect children online. With a presence around the world and working closely with both governments and the private sector, I think it is the best institution to lead the change and bring together the right allies.

My new ideas

Often, people live far from voting centres. An app which allows people to vote electronically would be great. It would allow you to have real time results, increase people’s participation and decrease risk of electoral fraud. A similar app could exist for kids, allowing them to give their vote or views on decisions adults make that affect them. As connectivity is all around, democracy prevails.

An interesting program would be to create digital public playing centres, establishing them in the middle of the city, crowded places where kids, no matter of their economic status, could go and just play with technology. Parents would have an area too, to play and learn about child online protection tips.