

Celtel to Give Internet Services to Millennium Villages

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Mobile telephone company Zain, working with the Earth Institute and telecommunications solutions provider Ericsson, will provide mobile communications and Internet connectivity to the Millennium Villages of Dertu in Kenya, Ruhiira in Uganda and Molla in Tanzania.

Zain, Ericsson and the Earth Institute first outlined the initiative in September 2007 at Columbia University.

Zain, through its wholly-owned African subsidiary, Celtel, and Ericsson, have partnered to develop an end-to-end telecommunications strategy in the villages and drive mobile phone connectivity and coverage rollout to selected areas.

In Kenya, they have installed a temporary mobile network, bringing mobile communication to 5,200 people mainly pastoral and nomadic communities in Dertu. Dertu is situated in the north of the country near the Somali border.

In this remote, pastoral and nomadic society, basic voice and data communication will be enabled over the Enhanced Data rates for GSM Evolution (EDGE) network, and will include the introduction of mobile phones for health services. EDGE is a digital mobile phone technology that allows increased data transmission rates and reliability.

In Tanzania and Uganda, Zain and Ericsson have upgraded the existing Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) network to EDGE, thus improving the basic coverage in the area.

In combination with its fixed wireless terminals, it will bring mobile Internet to schools and health centres. Ericsson also plans to extend coverage, enabling mobile communication to 73,000 people.

Uganda's Ruhiira Millennium Village is situated south of Mbarara on 338 square kilometres with a population of over 43,000. The hilly terrain and poor roads and communication systems make transport in Ruhiira difficult.

According to Chris Gabriel, Celtel's chief executive officer, people in this remote part of Africa will have access to basic but effective mobile Internet access over an EDGE network.

"Here we can see how mobile communications can play a key role in helping improve the quality of life for people even in the remotest parts of the world," he said.

"The Millennium Village project provides a unique ecosystem to demonstrate the benefits of voice and Internet. For this reason, the uptake of mobile services could be even quicker than anticipated in this environment, as the need for even basic services is so much greater," said Carl-Henric Svanberg, Ericsson's chief executive officer.