



Toll-Free Rural Phones Coming

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Telecommunication equipment provider Ericsson and mobile phone service provider Zain have adopted the new approach in a bid to stimulate the demand of mobile solutions in areas they consider commercially challenging

The two companies have entered into a partnership that will ensure they provide network access, mobile phone handsets, sim cards and toll-free emergency numbers in remote areas in order to stimulate demand for cellular phone solutions in those areas.

The initiative is being rolled out in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

In Kenya, Ericsson and Zain subsidiary, Celtel, are rolling out a pilot programme in North Garissa in Dertu village targeting some 5,200 inhabitants.

According to the President of Ericsson, Mr Carl-Henri Svanberge, the partnership also includes the Earth Institute and will benefit 400,000 people in Africa.

In the partnership, Ericsson will provide network connectivity in the identified areas, while the mobile service providers will provide the SIM cards and airtime, while the handset manufacturer Sony Ericsson will provide the handsets.

Prof Jeffrey Sachs, the director the Earth Institute, says the initiative is based on the bottom up approach to lifting rural villages out of poverty that afflicts more than a billion worldwide.

Prof Sachs says the approach will also involve learning what the community needs are and depending on their findings to model their content around this.

It is hoped the pilot programme will later lead to a viable commercial venture run by the community.

"The partnership will provide the development of a comprehensive voice to data coverage and a telecommunication strategy in the villages to drive up mobile connectivity," said Mr Svanberge.

In Kenya, the three companies have installed a temporary mobile network in Dertu.

The services will be introduced to health workers, teachers, agriculture extension officers and other social workers.

The phones will use solar charges which according to Ericsson are capable of charging 30 mobile phones a day.

