

Global body urges Africa to increase spectrum offering

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27 Jul 2016

The rapid uptake of digital services across the continent requires that the region's governments urgently release more spectrum for mobile broadband services.



Image by 123RF

This is according to a report by global mobile network operators association GSMA, which was released on Tuesday.

The lack of spectrum has hampered the rapid deployment of faster wireless network infrastructure in many parts of Africa, including SA. At the end of 2015, the continent had 557-million unique mobile subscribers, equivalent to 46% of its population. This has made Africa the second largest, but least penetrated, market in the world.

Africa's three largest national markets - Egypt, Nigeria and SA - together account for around a third of the total subscriber base.

However, Africa is barely scratching the surface of what is possible with mobile connectivity. This is so because many of the continent's communities lack mobile coverage and mobile internet access, primarily because operators do not have sufficient low- frequency spectrum.

Frequency bands below 1GHz are well suited for covering rural areas and penetrating walls.

GSMA GM Mats Granryd said: "Reducing the digital divide between urban and rural areas will boost economic activity, help to alleviate poverty, improve healthcare and education, expand financial inclusion and enhance agriculture. There is no time to lose."

Africa is heavily dependent on mobile networks to deliver the connectivity needed by citizens.

The high-speed wireless network roll-out in Africa has seen mobile subscribers migrating to mobile broadband networks and services. This has resulted in the rapid rise of mobile internet adoption, which has seen mobile internet subscribers triple in the past five years to 300-million by the end of 2015 with an additional 250- million expected by 2020.

"Mobile has emerged as the platform of choice for creating, distributing and consuming innovative digital solutions and services in Africa," said Granryd.

Many local and global innovators and tech entrepreneurs were using the expansion of advanced mobile infrastructure in the region, and the growing adoption of smart devices, to deliver mobile-based solutions that appeal to local interests and cultures, he said.

"The positive transformational impact of mobile is being felt more profoundly in Africa than anywhere else in the world."

The report also stated that the mobile industry across Africa is expected to increase its contribution to GDP to \$214bn by 2020, as countries continue to benefit from the improvements in productivity and efficiency brought about by increased uptake of mobile services.

The use of mobile technologies generated \$153bn in economic value in 2015, equivalent to 6.7% of the region's GDP.

Source: [*Business Day*](#).

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