

Kenya's Safaricom targets more fixed internet users with 5G network

Kenyan telecoms operator Safaricom launched its 5G high-speed internet service on Thursday, 27 October, becoming the first firm to deploy the technology commercially in East Africa.



Source: Reuters

The company, whose internet provision business is one of its fastest-growing, uses equipment from Nokia and Huawei to power its 5G network.

Safaricom, which is part-owned by South Africa's Vodacom and Britain's Vodafone, is initially offering Wi-Fi subscriptions first as it attempts to win a greater share of the fixed data market.

"We... view 5G as being critical in delivering new solutions that will address economic development, healthcare, manufacturing, infrastructure and even delivery of government services," said Safaricom CEO Peter Ndegwa at a launch ceremony for the network.

While Safaricom dominates the mobile data market - commanding about a 65% share - it holds only about a third of the fixed data market, data from the Communications Authority of Kenya showed.

Besides the Wi-Fi market opportunity, the initial focus on 5G Wi-Fi rather than mobile is because there are still relatively few 5G-compatible devices in Kenya, the company said.

Out of nearly 27 million smartphones in use in Kenya, Ndegwa said only about 200,000 are 5G-compatible because of the high costs of such devices.

But prices are coming down quickly and companies such as Safaricom are expanding their financing models which should expand access, he said at the launch.

Customers with compatible phones would however be able to use the network soon, the company said, when it starts selling 5G data packages.

The firm has 35 active 5G sites in Nairobi and other major cities and it plans to increase that number to 200 by March next year. It started testing the network last year.

The United States government has urged countries not to include Huawei in their 5G plans, citing security concerns which Huawei has denied.

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