

Ericsson to launch mobile innovation centre in Africa

Ericsson on Thursday, 25 September 2008, announced it will establish an innovation centre in sub-Saharan Africa to develop mobile applications that will benefit society as a whole, but with a special focus on meeting the needs of poor and rural populations.

The initiative will focus on solutions in health, education, agriculture and small business development, and is another important step in Ericsson's ongoing commitment to support the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

The Ericsson Innovation Centre will include three application development hubs, in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya. At first, the innovation centre will concentrate on mobile applications, such as m-health, where great efficiency gains stand to be made. These applications will, for example, enable health workers to gather, monitor and share data on things like births, deaths and epidemics, and to use smart mobile decision support tools in their daily work. Other applications will relate to education, agriculture, business development, finance, government services and the overall improvement of communication capabilities.

The innovation centre will also develop business cases that enable network operators to introduce and expand mobile broadband services in Africa and other emerging markets, with an emphasis on developing affordable, sustainable applications and services for rural communities.

The innovation centre aims to stimulate local entrepreneurship and business development by providing tools for local developer communities in and around the three new hubs to create their own applications. The innovation centre should also foster a good environment for the creation of new small businesses throughout Africa.

Jan Embro, President of Ericsson in sub-Saharan Africa, says: "Mobile communication significantly improves quality of life, providing the tools to deliver enormous socio-economic benefits to people in developing countries. Connectivity helps to offset a lack of resources, particularly in rural areas, and provides access to a range of services, including education and healthcare.

"More than 90% of new mobile subscriber growth will be in emerging markets. The innovation centre will employ local expertise, and encourage the creation of sustainable business models and applications relevant to Africa and other emerging markets."

The annual growth rate in mobile subscribers in Africa in 2007 was more than 40%, with more than 80 million new subscribers. Increased mobile penetration boosts economic activity, and recent studies show that increase in mobile penetration can lead to a one to five percent increase in the annual growth rate in a country's GDP.

A new report assessing m-content in Uganda and India by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), in co-operation with Ericsson, reveals that the demand for services is not being fully met. The report also shows that, in the future, healthcare and job-related services will top the list of in-demand services in Uganda, while internet over mobile, remittances and m-banking may also be in high demand in the coming years.

One of the initial focus areas of the innovation centre will be to develop applications to support the Millennium Villages, with the goal of scaling up the successful applications and associated learning to other relevant parts of Africa and globally.

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