Huawei, Microsoft for Africa

NEW YORK, USA: Microsoft announced on Tuesday (5 February) that it had teamed up with Chinese manufacturer Huawei to launch an affordable smartphone across Africa.

"Microsoft and Huawei today introduced the Huawei 4Afrika phone, a full-functionality Windows Phone 8 preloaded with select applications designed for Africa, by Africans," said Microsoft's top executive for the Middle East and Africa, Ali Faramawy, on a corportate blog.

While Africans have been enthusiastic adopters of mobile phones, the high cost of smartphones, which can be more than US$700, has kept penetration of the devices low.

Microsoft estimates that smartphone penetration in Africa is about 10%, while sales of the devices accounted for 45.5% of total mobile phone sales globally last year according to the IDC research firm.

Faramawy said the phones, which the *New York Times* reported would be sold for around US$150, would ensure Africans "affordable access to best-in-class technology", so they can access the information and tools they need to be active global citizens.

Huawei is known for building innovate and affordable phones, and the first in the series of 4Afrika phones will initially be available in Angola, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, and South Africa.

A separate blog posted on Microsoft's website showed a picture of the device that resembles many current models with forward and rear-facing cameras.

The internal memory and screen resolution are below high end models but the phone sports a fast processor and dual cameras.

Microsoft's Faramawy said the 4Afrika Initiative initiative seeks to get tens of millions of smartphones into the hands of

Africans and bring a million small and medium-sized businesses online by 2016.

The initiative could also prove a boost to Windows Phone 8 as the mobile operating system has had difficulty gaining traction in world markets.

Strategy Analytics said last month that 70% of smartphones shipped in the final quarter of 2012 used Google's Android operating system, while 22% were sold by Apple iPhones running its iOS.

Microsoft added it was partnering with Kenya's communications ministry and Internet service provider Indigo Telecom to deliver low-cost, high-speed wireless broadband access across Kenya using solar-powered base stations.

The *New York Times* cited another Microsoft executive, Fernando de Sousa, as saying its partner Nokia also plans to launch phones designed for the African market under the 4Afrika Initiative as well.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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