

Initiatives set to improve mobile access, affordability

Senior leaders from seven major mobile operator groups plan to cooperate on network infrastructure sharing initiatives that recognise the impact of mobile broadband and internet services on the citizens of both Africa and the Middle East.



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The participating operators have made this commitment in order to provide internet and mobile broadband access to unserved rural communities and drive down the cost of mobile services for all sections of the population.

"We are greatly encouraged by the shared vision of mobile operators and the common urgency to find solutions that will drive down the cost of mobile and internet services and help connect the unconnected," says Anne Bouverot, director general, GSMA. "Unique mobile subscriber penetration is only 40% in Africa and the Middle East, lower than the global average of 47%, so we need to work together to expand the reach of mobile."

The initial group of senior leaders from mobile operator groups who support this initiative includes:

- Christian de Faria, CEO Africa, Bharti Airtel
- Ahmad Julfar, Group CEO, Etisalat Group
- Sifiso Dabengwa, CEO and President, MTN Group
- Dr. Nasser Marafih, Group CEO, Ooredoo Group
- Marc Rennard, Senior Executive Vice President, Africa, Middle East and Asia, Orange
- Serpil Timuray, CEO, Africa, Middle East and Asia Pacific Region, Vodafone Group
- Scott Gegenheimer, CEO, Zain Group

They collectively manage 76 mobile network operations across 47 countries in Africa and the Middle East, where many of the unconnected population live in rural areas.

"This cooperation demonstrates that the industry is committed to innovating in order to serve the billions living in the rural areas," says Manoj Kohli, managing director, Bharti Enterprises and chair of the Public Policy Committee of the GSMA board, who also supports the initiative. "We call on governments to support and encourage the commercial infrastructure sharing arrangements that we aim to propose."

The GSMA's position is that telecom regulatory frameworks should encourage flexible commercial sharing arrangements and facilitate access to government-owned assets at preferential rates to help speed up the roll-out of new networks and support the business case to extend mobile networks into rural areas.

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