

Can the telecom industry solve Africa's power problems?

Africa is plagued by unreliable, intermittent and often non-existent access to electricity, especially in rural areas. This is a huge inconvenience and a big obstacle to economic development. Can mobile operators be the unlikely saviours, bringing power to the people in rural Africa, asks Peter Karaszi*?



Lack of power, inhospitable terrain, electricity thefts, shoddy and neglected infrastructure, mismanaged power companies, dirty coal fired stations, expensive power and frequent power cuts at best... the list of Africa's power problems is long. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the overall electrification rate in Africa is less than 42%. In rural sub-Saharan Africa, it is a shocking 14%.

To quote the IEA: "Energy alone is not sufficient for creating the conditions for economic growth, but it is certainly necessary. It is impossible to operate a factory, run a shop, grow crops or deliver goods to consumers without using some form of energy. Access to electricity is particularly crucial to human development as electricity is, in practice, indispensable for certain basic activities, such as lighting, refrigeration and the running of household appliances."

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