

# Africa world's fastest growing mobile phone market

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Mobile phone subscriptions in Africa have defied the world economic crisis by growing faster than in any other region of the world since 2003, according to a United Nations report published yesterday.

The report on global trends in the ICT industry, finds the growth reflected across other poorer nations, especially India. During the first seven months of 2009, that country registered almost 100 million new wireless subscriptions.

However, urgent action is needed to improve Africa's slow - and costly - internet access, says the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) document, to be presented today at a joint

seminar with the University of Manchester.

Monthly access in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and Swaziland to broadband, it says, is the most expensive in the world, costing more than \$1,300.

There was, it adds, a 550% surge in mobile subscriptions in Africa from 54 million to almost 350 million between 2003 and 2008.

The University's Centre for Development Informatics is hosting a visit by Torbjorn Fredriksson Head, of the ICT Analysis Section at UNCTAD, who launched the report yesterday.

Mr Fredriksson said: "Even though broadband usage is disappointing, there is a good story to tell in Africa about the astonishing growth of mobile telephony - despite the [financial crisis](#).

"We expect this progress to remain robust as the income barrier to mobile ownership continues to drop, thanks to [liberalization](#), more efficient network equipment and more affordable handsets.

"This is because operators have made significant investments in infrastructure across the continent.

"And there appears to be continued interest among investors in expanding and upgrading these networks in Africa."

Professor Richard Heeks, from The University of Manchester and Co-Director of the Centre for Development Informatics, added: "This report reflects our own research - and shows how mobile phones are invaluable to African businesses and individuals.

"In fact, for many small - and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, the

mobile phone has overtaken the computer as the most important information and communication technology (ICT) tool.

"African countries, for example, are pioneering mobile banking and electronic cash transaction services.

"And the industry itself is a major employer - over 100,000 people work in the mobile sector and related industries.

"But we must not forget that without a mobile in Africa, you are cut off socially and economically, and tens of millions of people are still in exactly that position .

The poor levels of internet use and broadband connectivity reflect Africa's poor telecommunications infrastructure, says the report.

Only five countries - Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, and Tunisia - account for 90% of all broadband subscriptions.

Mr Fredriksson added: "Critical for connecting Africa with the global economy are international fibre-optic cables.

"Sub-Saharan Africa has been largely excluded from the mesh of such cables though a number of initiatives are finally coming to fruition

"This report stresses that despite the positive trends in mobile telecommunications in Africa, there is no room for complacency.

"A long unfinished agenda must be addressed to create a truly inclusive information society for all."

Recommendations:

- Measures targeting the rolling out of broadband to areas with low connectivity to help alleviate infrastructure bottlenecks.
- Exploration of new and innovative ways to finance new and more powerful fixed and mobile broadband networks.
- More contributions from national governments, the donor community, and the private sector.

Figures from the report:

- In 2008, Gabon, Seychelles, and South Africa boasted almost 100 mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.
- In Uganda, mobile communications have transformed the country socially and economically and has risen from 0.2 per 100 inhabitants in 1995 to 23 in 2008. Operators have made significant investments in infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.
- Only five African countries - Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia - still have a mobile penetration of less than ten per 100 inhabitants.

Provided by University of Manchester ([news](#) : [web](#))

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