

Satellites improving lives in rural Africa

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Space4edu is an element of the Sway4edu project of Openet Technologies S.p.A (IT), SES Astra (LU) and ESA and is dedicated to providing an ICT-based solution for the professional training and qualification of local teachers visited by Rally to Read in South Africa. Credit: ESA

An ESA-supported project is showing how satcoms can help farmers, voters and educators in rural Africa.

The three elements of the Sway4edu project are helping to run elections, educate teachers and improve radio programming.

Satellite terminals provide Internet connectivity, with solar panels and batteries (where needed), laptops, tablets, a projector with screen, and loudspeakers.

Sway4edu is led by Openet Technologies, a small Italian company active in using satcoms for eGovernment services, working with Luxembourg's SES and supported by ESA's Advanced Research in Telecommunications Systems programme.

The Rural Radios element is developing a satellite-assisted radio service to support farmers, workers and the population of the Democratic Republic of Congo on food security, rural and farmer subsistence, and climate change.

Through the online Openet eLearning platform broadcasters can take courses, developed with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, on delivering better radio programmes.

Feedback from broadcasters during pilot tests was highly positive: "Very good initiative to provide this tool for the use of rural radios in the bid for community development," commented one.

Last September, Openet Technologies was contracted to provide Internet access for three years to 10 rural stations in DR Congo with the Federation de Radio de Proximité, which manages 400 such stations. By the end of this year, the contract could be extended to 100.



Rural Radios is an element of the Sway4edu project of Openet Technologies S.p.A (IT), SES Astra (LU) and ESA to support farmers, workers and the population located in rural and remote areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Credit: ESA

In October 2013, the company began providing a year of Internet and multicast connectivity for 26 rural [radio stations](#) in Mali. The contract was signed with the Fondation Hironnelle in Switzerland, which manages a group of 62 stations in Mali – the rest are expected to subscribe to the service by the end of this year. The multicast service is provided via the Astra-4A satellite.

Electoral eTraining is creating a core of local accredited trainers and experts in the Electoral Management Bodies of the Economic Community of Central African States to support elections.

Feedback from staff during pilot tests was very positive, as 40 completed the online courses for certification.

In August 2012, SES Broadband contracted with the Electoral Management Body of Burkina Faso to deliver connectivity and videoconferencing facilities, including installation and support for 40 provinces to support their December elections.

By mid-2013, the European Centre for Electoral Support, based in Belgium, had a contract to support Electoral eTraining in 14 African countries.

Education

Space4education is providing local teachers with interactive training and qualification via satellite. The system also opens up the Internet to local communities outside of school hours.



Pierre Claver Ndayicariye, President of Electoral Commission of Burundi as part of the LEAD (Leadership and Conflict Management for Electoral Administrations) course on 18-22 June 2012. Electoral eTraining is an element of the Sway4edu project of Openet Technologies S.p.A (IT), SES Astra (LU)

and ESA and aims to create a core group of local accredited trainers and experts known as ‘Facilitators’ in the Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) of the Economic Community of Central African States to support the electoral cycles.
Credit: ESA

The ambitions go well beyond demonstrating that satellite can deliver the Internet everywhere: the aim is to assist local communities by raising the quality of teaching in difficult-to-reach schools.

Better teachers will lead to better students with wider options, and to empowered communities. The potential gains are huge.

Teachers and local stakeholders are very enthusiastic about the project and around 25 [teachers](#) have achieved online literacy certification.

The provision of Internet services following the end of the pilot activities is being discussed with several schools from that scheme.



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All three elements of Sway4edu have something in common: they are building capacity to prepare for launching sustainable services.

"There is no doubt that the Sway4edu and the use of European technology and services have been highly successful, even in very remote and rural areas of Africa," said ESA's Davide Tomassini.

Provided by European Space Agency

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