

Facebook seeks ties with telcos in Kenya

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Facebook's plan to bring Internet access to the remote parts of the world is taking shape. This follows the completion of Aquila, a drone that beams Internet from the sky to remote communities...



Image via [123RF](#)

Facebook CEO Marck Zuckerberg said in a statement that the unmanned aircraft will supplement internet.org, Facebook's connectivity initiative which is in 13 countries including Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Ghana.

And with Aquila, Facebook last month called on Safaricom, Airtel and Telkom Kenya to partner with it so that they can benefit from internet.org.

"Facebook has made it easier for any mobile operator to sign up for and turn on internet.org in new countries through a partner portal, this will increase Internet penetration," said Chris Daniels, the vice-president of Internet.org, during a media briefing in Nairobi.

Benefit immensely

Facebook argues that telcos will benefit immensely. "Last month we completed Aquila, our unmanned aircraft that can beams Internet connectivity from the sky to remote communities. It has the wingspan of a 737 but weighs less than a car," said Zuckerberg.

The initiative comes just a few months after Facebook set up office in South Africa marking Kenya and Nigeria as its prime targets of entry. In July, Facebook held a meeting to create awareness over its internet.org, revealing that the aircraft would fly non-stop for over three months.

In Kenya, telcos are facing a rough time contributing 0.5 per cent of their annual revenue to the Universal Service Fund (USF) to help connect marginalised areas.

Internet gaps

Communications Authority (CA) Director-General Francis Wangusi said the contribution is too little and could take the country over 70 years to reach its target in closing Internet gaps in remote areas.

"We are coming up with varied interventions that will speed up the fund," said Wangusi.

As CA looks at ways of speeding up connectivity, Facebook has unveiled an offer to partner with telcos in this segment.

The move can either be a win or lose situation by telcos who have for a long time contested Facebook as one of the Over the Top (OTT) service providers.

Safaricom and Airtel have been urging the ICT ministry to intervene, even as OTT players eat up their voice and SMS revenue without paying taxes or laying infrastructure.

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