

Ericsson and Zain power Millennium Village site by wind and sun

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As part of the Millennium Villages project, Ericsson and pan-African operator Zain have built a green-powered site in a remote village in northeastern Kenya.

With the reliable and affordable mobile communication the site provides, the villagers of Dertu can make calls, access health services and education and improve their economic future.

Using a combination of wind and solar power addresses the two key deterrents to building telecommunication infrastructure in remote areas: operating costs and power supply reliability.

Jan Embro, President of Ericsson in sub-Saharan Africa says, 'The ideal climate conditions mean we expect to see an 80% reduction in energy-related operational costs for the site, compared with using diesel generators. Green sites like this one have great potential for solving the power-grid challenge across Africa to bring mobile communication to the poorest of the poor so they can improve their lives and break the poverty cycle.'

Chris Gabriel, CEO of Zain Africa added, 'With reliable and affordable mobile voice and data communication, Dertu's nomadic pastoral community of more than 5000 people has the chance to build on the economic and social gains it has made since Ericsson and Zain, partnering with the Earth Institute, first brought mobile communication to the region through a temporary network installed last year.'

Since then, rather than making the 100km journey by dirt road to the larger city of Garissa, many people from nearby communities go to Dertu to make calls, access improved health services and take advantage of new businesses - making the village an economic hub for the region.

Ahmed Mohamed, the science coordinator for the Millennium Villages project in Dertu says, 'The people of Dertu say the arrival of the mobile network is the day when Dertu was reborn; reborn because of business development. Since the mobile network came, the pastoralists who earn their living from livestock just call the neighboring town for the price of cattle, and the moment they know they can easily take the animals to the market or, if the price is low, the animals continue grazing. It's wonderful, wonderful. There is no greater support you can give a community than that.'

Pastoralists are also using their mobile phones to spread information about where to find good pasture and water, which is often hard to come by in the extremely arid region. Phones have also been used to find child herders who have become lost roaming over vast distances in search of feed.

The social impact has also been significant, bringing families closer to distant relatives, providing vital local connections for better health care and remote education, and a way to communicate quickly with government agencies to ensure timely relief in emergency situations, such as damage to the village bore, the only water supply.

The more than 3000 phone minutes logged daily have also created a market for items such as SIM cards, second-hand phones, scratch cards, charging and accessories, while local business people can slash transport costs through mobile ordering and invoicing.

Today, there are more than 4 billion mobile subscriptions globally. The Dertu experience demonstrates that connecting the next billion people, even those in the most remote parts of the world, can be achieved with a positive business case while ensuring services are affordable for those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Key to ongoing success will be combining innovative solutions, including green technology, public-private partnerships and new business models.

The Dertu project also exemplifies the strong contribution connectivity makes to the Millennium Villages objectives of reducing poverty and improving access to health and education. The Millennium Village project, which comprises villages in 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, is bringing mobile communication and the internet to more than half a million people.

Ericsson's and Zain's contribution to the Millennium Villages project has been recognized by a nomination in the Best Use of Mobile for Social and Economic Development category of the GSM Association's Global Mobile Award 2009. Ericsson's energy-lean, hybrid diesel battery solution has also been shortlisted in the Best Network Technology Advance category.

Visit Ericsson in Hall 8 at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona to learn more about the company's role in the Millennium Villages project, its sustainable energy solutions and how telecom can contribute to social and economic development as well as the creation of a more carbon-lean economy.

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