

Kenya to use Alphabet's balloon project for rural internet

Kenya is set to use Alphabet Inc's system of balloons to help bring the internet to some of the East Africa nation's rural communities, according to a report by *Reuters*. Known as Project Loon, the technology was developed by Alphabet's X, the company's innovation lab.



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The project which began as a Google project in 2013 – launches balloons into the stratosphere that are designed to act like floating mobile phone towers. They operate high enough so that they don't interfere with power lines, aeroplanes or wildlife, which of course is abundant in Kenya.

Joe Mucheru, Kenya's Information, Communication and Technology minister, told Reuters that Loon's representatives were "holding talks" with local telecom operators on the deployment of Loon's balloons.

"The Loon team are still working out contracts," Mucheru told the news service. "Hopefully, once that is done, we can be able to see almost every part of the country covered."

With more than 45 million people, Kenya's major cities and towns are covered by operator networks, but vast swathes of rural Kenya are not covered.

A Microsoft backed Kenyan start-up has been using under-utilised television frequencies to connect some of those rural communities.

“Loon is another technology that is being introduced that the licensed operators hopefully can be able to use,” Mucheru said, adding it would help the government meet its goal of reaching everyone.

“Connectivity is critical. If you are not online, you are left out.”

Google Loon has demonstrated data transmission between balloons over 100km apart in the stratosphere and back down to people on the ground with connection speeds of up to 10 Mbps, directly to their LTE phones.

Each balloon transmits internet over an area 80 kilometres in diameter. Kenya is roughly 800 kilometres east to west and 1000 kilometres north to south. About 140 Alphabet's loons would be able to blanket the country on the internet.

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