

Airtel, GSMA to empower small-holder Kenyan farmers

Airtel Africa have announced that it is working with the GSMA to initiate a project to provide approximately 250 000 small-holder farmers in Kenya reliable and relevant agricultural information via their mobile phones.



The innovative project, dubbed 'Sauti ya Mkulima' (Swahili for voice of the farmer), aims to provide farmers with access to pertinent agriculture-related information, advice and research that will help them make better decisions about their crops, increasing the productivity of their yield, as well as their potential income. It will also help create a farmer community within which peers can share experiences and exchange information about social gatherings, events, and job opportunities.

Power to transform communities

"At Airtel, we recognise innovative telecommunications solutions have the power to transform communities. This initiative is a solid testament to what partnerships that harness relevant consumer needs can achieve overcoming daily challenges. We are excited and thankful to the partners involved in birthing this initiative," explains Shivan Bhargava, managing director, Airtel Kenya.

He continues, "Our 'Sauti ya Mkulima' project will provide small-holder farmers with access to quality content information and know-how on agriculture-related activities. Gaining access to this information will be immensely beneficial to the farmers whose livelihoods are dependent on their yield. The information will allow them to make better informed decisions that will result in improved productivity."

mFarmer initiative

As part of the partnership, the GSMA mFarmer initiative - supported by USAID and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - has awarded Airtel US\$400,000 to be used towards the 'Sauti ya Mkulima' project.

The initiative aims to facilitate the rapid scaling of the use of mobile phone networks to provide farmers in developing countries with agricultural information. The funds will be used to develop a reliable database of content with the help of partners such as the Centre for Agricultural Bioscience International (CABI), an international governmental not-for-profit organisation and radio-based information provider Kilimo Media, as well as to set up the technological capabilities to execute the project with the help of world-class technology service providers.

Initially, 'Sauti ya Mkulima' will focus on small-holder Kenyan farmers engaged in maize, banana, mango, rice, beans and horticulture (tomato and black night shade) crops. Information on more crops will be added on:

quarterly basis. Airtel plans to further develop the model and eventually replicate it across all its markets on the continent.

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