

Facebook launches in Swahili

By [Titus Kaloki](#)

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In yet another move to affirm Swahili as a lingua franca, Facebook launched its own version in the language. The event took place at one of Kenya's premiere schools, the Starehe Boys Centre. It is among the top high school institutions for boys and has produced a large majority of the present day political and business leaders in Kenya.



This comes after the same social networking site launched its Arabic version, tapping into a potentially huge market in the Middle East and beyond. Facebook, based in Palo Alto, California, already has large numbers of users in the Arab world: in Egypt, where the site has 900,000 users, it has become a highly effective tool for political mobilisation, with mass demonstrations against the government organised through forums.

Similar developments are expected in the Swahili speaking regions of Eastern Africa. The language is spoken in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and DRC Congo. In Tanzania it is the official language. Collectively it has over 100 million users.

Facebook according to Wikipedia is a free-access social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can join networks organised by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.

The first company to read the cue was Google when it launched its Swahili version; UNICEF launched a Swahili online game to boost HIV prevention in East Africa; Microsoft launched a Swahili application of its software and Orange Kenya also introduced low cost phones with a Swahili user interface.

Internet users across the region are expected to increase threefold. Already Facebook is popular among the youth and even some politicians are jumping onto the bandwagon; Kenya's Premier, Raila Odinga was among the first to open an account.

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