

# **AfDB Leverages Infrastructure for Internet Access - Approves U.S.\$ 50 Million Loan for Satellites And Ground Infrastructure**

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Tunis - The Board of Directors of the African Development Bank (AfDB) has approved a USD 50-million loan to finance the design, construction, launch and operation of a scalable equatorial constellation of Middle Earth Orbit satellites and associated ground infrastructure to provide broadband internet access to some 3 billion underserved people in emerging countries including those in Africa.

"The Other 3 Billion" (O3b) project, designed exclusively for emerging markets where absence of terrestrial infrastructure such optical fiber backbones, is a well known fact, aims at providing broadband Internet access to under-served people, namely the "other 3 billion" living in Africa, Asia and South America. By offering communication services that combine the high throughput of optical fiber with the flexibility of satellite systems and their ability to serve urban and rural areas, O3b will enable operators in emerging countries to access international bandwidth at prices well below those currently available.

The project is promoted by the Société Européenne de Satellites (SES), a world leader in satellite systems; Liberty Global, a multinational cable operator; HSBC and Google, the world internet services leader. Estimated at one billion dollars, the project is funded by commercial banks under the French export credit agency (Coface) and a group of development institutions, including AfDB.

The development of international connectivity including linking up regional and national backbones is in line with the AfDB's 2008-2010 ICT Strategy, which sets out infrastructure as the first focal area. The project is also aligned with the Bank's regional integration strategy, particularly its first pillar, which recognizes the crucial role played by infrastructure in supporting intra-regional and global trade as well as market integration. In that respect, O3b links will facilitate access to high bandwidth provided by submarine cables for landlocked countries.

There is growing evidence that ICT plays a critical role in social development, in particular, in addressing the Millennium Development Goals. Direct applications are widespread in sectors such as health, education, and agriculture. In addition, the project will enhance access to mobile banking services for Africans.

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