

# Uganda: Mobile phone subscribers hit 8.2 million - up from 2 million in two years

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Kampala (Uganda) — The number of mobile phone subscribers in Uganda has now shot up to a record 8.2 million, the ICT Minister Ham Mulira said on Friday.

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The figure is almost one quarter of Uganda's total population. Mulira noted that the numbers have shot

sharply by 6.2 million from two million two years ago. This figure is expected to shoot-up even further when Orange, a French telecom, launches its services soon.

He made the announcement in while addressing a delegation of form member countries of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) who have been in the country to attend an electronic government framework conference.

The Minister also observed that there was a remarkable increase in the variety of services used by subscribers on their mobile phones.

He also said there was now variety of technological applications and models of gadgets (handsets) that were enabling advanced communication in the country because there was now better infrastructure given by service providers.

He said subscribers now had access to third generation (3G) technologies and are able to make video calls and view digital TV broadcasts.

On Video calls, Mulira particularly noted that this had enhanced the possibilities of telemedicine with several medical staff being able to compare notes on patients in real time situations.

Other services available for mobile subscribers in Uganda today include GPRS, Blackberry and Edge.

Mulira attributed the growing mobile subscriptions to the full liberalisation of the telecoms sector in Uganda. He said the liberalisation had seen an increase in competition as telecom companies struggled to woo potential subscribers with better services.

Mulira pointed out that his Ministry's project on E-government has linked all ministries in the country with infrastructure that has enabled instantaneous video communication by government officials.

The COMESA director of information ST Shoukry said the two day E-governance conference in Entebbe had recommended for the establishment of an E-government academy for the region. Shoukry said Uganda was far too advanced in e-government initiatives than other members in the COMESA.

Mulira on his part urged the delegates to lobby their governments to establish similar entities so that adequate resources can be allocated to their ICT sectors. On the cost of telecommunication, Mulira said Uganda was currently laying optical fibre around the country and this will drastically bring down the cost of making calls either for Voice, Data or Video. He however noted that the need for all these services in Uganda was growing.

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