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## As ‘mobile miracle’ transforms poorest nations, Internet use lags behind – UN



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People living in the world’s poorest countries are experiencing a surge in mobile telephone use, the United Nations telecommunications agency reported today, but cautioned that Internet usage in those nations still lags far behind.

In figures released this week at the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul, Turkey, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reported that over the past 10 years mobile connectivity in the 48 countries classed as LDCs had risen by 28 per cent, bringing increasing mobile access to almost 250 million people.

According to the ITU, the steep rise in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) exceeds the targets previously set by the Third UN Conference on the LDCs in Brussels in 2001, which called for average telephone density in LDCs to reach at least 5 per cent by 2011.

But while mobile phone access in the world’s poorest nations has mushroomed over the past decade, the ITU warned that there are still too few Internet users in the LDCs.

“People ask me if internet penetration is really such a high priority for people who, on a daily basis, face a lack of safe drinking water, rising food prices, and a chronic shortage of health care,” [said](#) Hamadoun Touré, the ITU Secretary-General.

“My answer is a resounding ‘yes.’ Because the Internet – and especially broadband – is an extraordinary enabler which has potential to massively expand the effective delivery of vital services, such as health care and education. Nowhere is this more important than in countries where people are chronically deprived of these services.”

With average internet penetration in LDC bloc countries having reached only 2.5 per cent in 2010, Dr. Touré pointed out that web access remains well below the 10 per cent target set in Brussels but expressed optimism that the trend would soon improve.

“In the past two years alone we have seen a remarkable surge in national and international bandwidth in developing countries, with several new submarine cables being landed, and new advanced technologies which can help affordably bridge the digital divide,” he said.

Identifying innovative ways to get poorer nations connected to high-speed networks will be one focus of ITU’s upcoming Global Broadband Summit in Geneva in October.

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