

MTN picks partners to expand mobile OpenRan network in Africa

By Nqobile Dladla

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South Africa's mobile and broadband operator MTN Group has selected five partners to launch an open radio access network (OpenRan in Africa to expand 4G and 5G services more quickly and cheaply, it said on 16 June.



A worker walks past an outlet of South Africa's MTN Group in Johannesburg, South Africa, 23 February 2016. Reuters/Siphiwe Sibek/File Photo

A radio access network (Ran) connects individual devices to other parts of a network through radio connections.

MTN said it aimed to roll out OpenRan by the end of 2021 with its partners, namely Voyage, India's Tech Mahindra and US-based firms Altostar, Mavenir and Parallel Wireless.

In the past, network equipment from Nokia, Ericsson, Huawei Technologies and other firms was largely proprietary, making it difficult to mix.

But US government restrictions that have hit Huawei's ability to source chips have sped the adoption of so-called OpenRan technology, where any vendor can assemble industry-standard chips and software to create inter-operable networking gear.

"This is a real game-changer for mobile advancement in emerging markets," said Amith Maharaj, MTN group's head of network planning and design.

For mobile network operators, a radio access network makes up the bulk of capital and operating costs.

MTN said it would reduce power consumption and emissions by modernising its radio access networks using OpenRan, supporting its target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040.

MTN said it first rolled out open-source technology in 2019 and deployed over 1,100 commercial sites in more than 11 countries.

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