



## Beyond the Towers: How OneWeb by Airtel is Beaming High-Speed Internet to Zambia's Forgotten Frontiers

By John Chola

In a move poised to reshape Zambia's digital landscape, Airtel Networks Zambia Plc has launched OneWeb by Airtel – a revolutionary satellite internet service promising to connect the nation's most remote and critical economic zones.

This isn't just another internet package; it's a targeted solution designed to bridge the stark connectivity gap hindering key sectors and rural communities.

Speaking exclusively, Airtel Business Director Ms. Lindiwe Banda provided deep insights into this game-changing initiative.

So, What Exactly is Airtel OneWeb?

"For a clear understanding," Lindiwe began, "OneWeb is a satellite-based solution." Airtel, on a global and Africa-wide scale, has partnered with Eutelsat to leverage the OneWeb satellite constellation.

"We are now in the business of offering internet and communication services based off a satellite solution," she explained, branding it Airtel Satellite. Adding that the solution

fundamentally differs from traditional terrestrial



services like fibre or mobile broadband that rely on physical towers and cables.

### Why Now? The Drive to Connect the Unconnected

The inspiration, Lindiwe stressed, is fundamentally market-driven. "We focus on what the requirements of the market are. We realized we've got parts of the country that are key to the economy but are not necessarily being served efficiently by our existing technology." These areas, crucial yet underserved, became the catalyst.

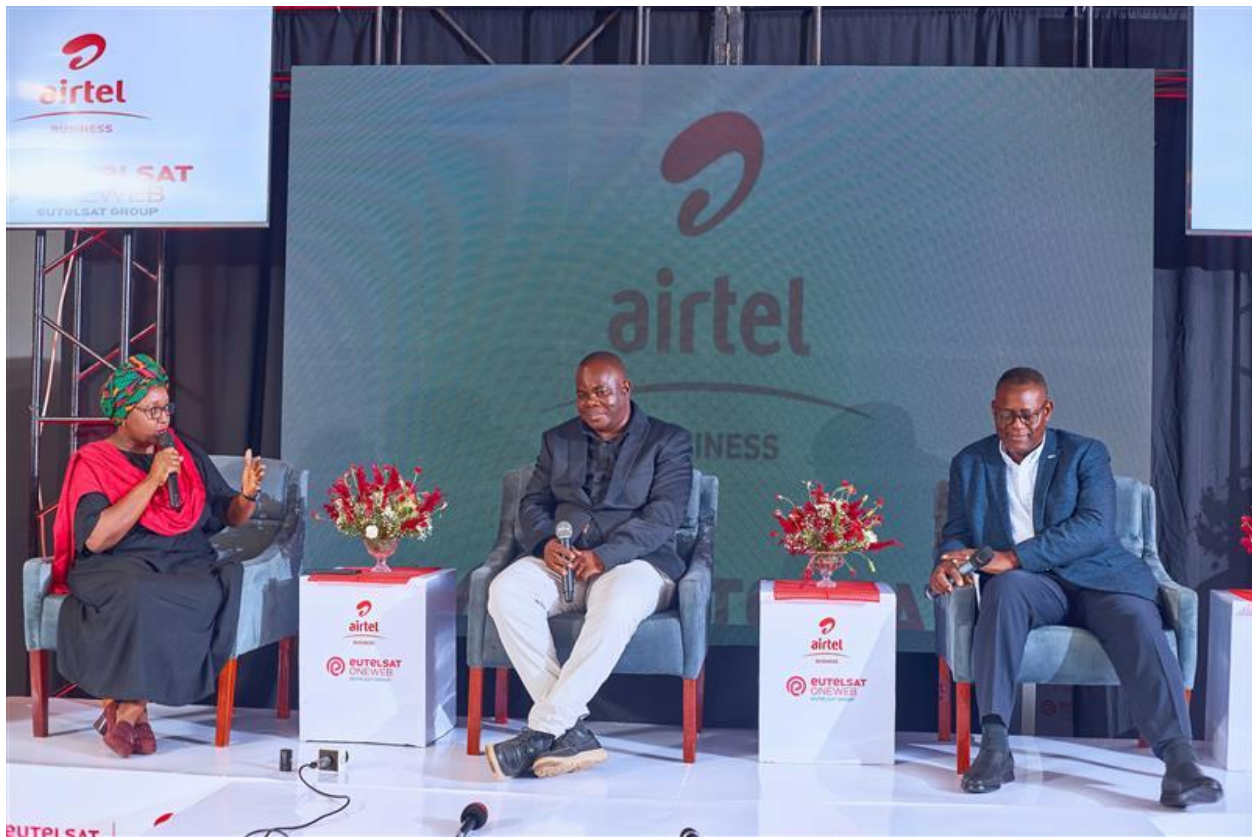
### Targeting the Gaps: Mines, Farms, and Beyond

Lindiwe pinpointed the specific beneficiaries: "Our key target sectors are... large mines, commercial farms, construction sites, manufacturing plants, [and] Oil Marketing Companies (OMC) plants in difficult locations."

She elaborated on the core challenge: traditional GSM services have limited range. Mines, often vast, suffer from dangerous "blind spots" where communication fails. Farming blocks covering huge hectares similarly lack coverage.

"If there's a particular location... not covered, the OneWeb satellite solution comes in," Lindiwe stated.

### OneWeb vs. Starlink: Understanding the Difference



With Airtel also partnering with SpaceX for Starlink, clarification was key. Lindiwe drew a clear distinction: "The key difference... is market segmentation."

OneWeb is enterprise top grade, high-grade equipment focused largely on top corporate enterprise customers that request robust Service Level Agreements (SLA's) while under the Airtel Starlink partnership, Airtel will target smaller Enterprises that may be looking for no commitment with no SLA's.

Adding: "We can sign a formal contract and guarantee certain services which we may not necessarily be able to do on Starlink," she emphasized, highlighting the premium, reliability-focused nature of OneWeb for business-critical operations.

#### Real-World Impact: Safety, Efficiency, and Inclusion

The benefits are tangible and profound. In mining, Lindiwe painted a vivid picture: "The biggest challenge, is to guarantee 100 percent safety. If they cannot communicate with people on the other side of the pit, they cannot guarantee safety." So what OneWeb does is that it eliminates these deadly blind spots, enabling real-time communication for machinery and miners, even underground or in remote pit areas. For farms and other remote enterprises, it unlocks access to data, cloud services, and operational efficiency previously impossible.

#### Aligning with Zambia's Digital Future

This initiative isn't operating in a vacuum. It directly supports the government's vision. "Government has a big digital transformation agenda," the Airtel Business Director noted. "We

are, at the infrastructure point. We are now getting into a place where we can provide a hybrid solution. This means enabling access to e-government services via Smart Zambia Institute, even in the remotest locations, aligning with Pillars 3 (Human and Social Development) and 4 (Environmental Sustainability and Good Governance) of the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) and Zambia's Vision 2030."

### Early Success and Warm Reception

Proof of concept deployments are already yielding results. "We have deployed it at a plantation site and at a mine site," Lindiwe shared, confirming successful trials.

The reception? "Quite warm." Customers familiar with technology limitations appreciate the value proposition: bridging critical connectivity gaps where other technologies falter.

### Beyond Enterprise: The Long-Term Vision for Inclusion

While initially enterprise-focused, the vision extends further. "It's our dream, that we can get some of the schools which are off-grid in rural locations connected on either OneWeb or any other satellite solution. We see OneWeb as part of a broader "hybrid" strategy to ensure that "no Zambian is left behind," Lindiwe expressed.

### Bridging the Information Gap

Awareness in remote areas is crucial. Lindiwe outlined Airtel's plan: "We spend a lot of time in the market targeting specific customers. We will be spending a lot of time in the Copperbelt, Mkushi Farming Block, and Southern Province, to make sure customers are aware and onboarding."

### A Message to Rural Zambia: "You Are Not Neglected"

Concluding with a powerful message to young Zambians in villages like Mwense, a newly posted Nurse and a Teacher in Mweniwisi Chiefdom, Mafinga District, Lindiwe offered reassurance and hope: "They should not feel neglected. We are here to serve them, and we are constantly innovating to make sure that we get to them at the earliest possible time."

### A Pivotal Moment

The launch of Airtel OneWeb, witnessed at a high-level event in Kitwe with Minister of Technology and Science, Hon. Felix Mutati and Copperbelt Minister, Hon. Elisha Matambo present, signifies more than a new product; it represents a significant leap in Zambia's digital infrastructure.

This game changer is about enabling safety in mines, efficiency on farms, access to services for remote communities, and ultimately, fueling Zambia's digital transformation journey by ensuring that geographical remoteness no longer equates to digital exclusion.