



World Bank grants \$36m to remote Pacific fibre-optic broadband projects

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The World Bank's board of executive directors has approved \$36 million in grants to help provide reliable fibre-optic broadband internet in Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).



The grants, including \$20 million for Kiribati and \$16.26 million for FSM, will finance the installation of a subsea cable system connecting Tarawa, Kiribati, to Nauru, and Kosrae state, FSM, to Pohnpei state, FSM, which is connected to global networks. The Asian Development Bank is preparing finance to support Nauru's participation in the cable system.

"We have already seen the benefits high-speed, reliable and affordable internet can bring to countries across the Pacific, and we look forward to working with Kiribati and Micronesia to bring faster and cheaper connectivity to the North Pacific," said Michel Kerf, World Bank country director for Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

"These connections will play a crucial role in linking families, creating economic and employment opportunities, reducing

transaction costs, providing remote education and healthcare, and boosting national and international coordination."

The projects are part of the Pacific regional connectivity programme, which aims to bring more reliable and affordable internet to the majority of countries in the Pacific Islands. Kiribati and Micronesia are two of the world's most remote island nations, covering six million square km of the Pacific Ocean, making access to information,

services and economic opportunities a massive challenge. The projects will help to provide broadband internet to approximately 80,000 people.

In Kiribati, the internet capacity will be sold by the wholesaler on an open access basis to ensure equal access for all fixed and mobile networks operated by local retailers in Tarawa and nearby islands, accounting for more than two-thirds of the country's population. A complementary project, supported by the World Bank, Australia and New Zealand will also help deliver mobile broadband services to more distant outer islands.

"High-speed internet will connect Kiribati to the rest of the world, bringing new opportunities into our homes and offices and promoting overall economic integration. This is crucial for our development," said Dr Teatao Tira, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Information, Communication, Transport & Tourism for the government of Kiribati. "The government has already taken important steps to reduce the cost and improve the quality of services and this cable will take those achievements to the next level."

In the FSM, both Yap and Chuuk states are already part of the Pacific regional connectivity programme through the Palau-FSM Connectivity phase. The underwater cable systems for Yap and Chuuk states are set for installation late 2017 and are expected to be ready for service by early 2018. With this additional funding, all four states in Micronesia will have access to broadband internet.

"Just a few short years ago, no one would have believed such a project was possible. Through vision, persistence and with the mutual support of our regional and donor partnerships we are now on the verge of achieving our dream of connecting our small island state communities to the world," said vice president Yosiwo George of the national government of the FSM. "This project will provide all four states with access to good quality and affordable internet connections. We look forward to being able to overcome some of the challenges our remoteness creates."

In addition to laying the fibre-optic cable, the grants will fund technical assistance provided to relevant government ministries and help develop the regulatory framework needed to promote competition and keep costs as low as possible for consumers.

The \$36.26 million grants are provided through the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's fund for countries most in need.

Source:

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