

DIGITAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Satellite Regulation in Africa: Aligning Global Frameworks with National Policy Priorities

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In Africa, where satellite connectivity is increasingly relevant to digital infrastructure strategies, the central policy question is not simply how to enable deployment, but how to do so in a manner that balances investment, competition and national regulatory priorities. As satellite technologies evolve, regulators are reconsidering whether existing licensing frameworks remain fit for purpose. This requires navigating the intersection between globally coordinated satellite systems and domestically regulated communications markets, and determining how international frameworks can be aligned with national policy objectives.

Global Policy Direction and the GSOA Framework

Satellite connectivity is increasingly recognised as an important component of modern communications infrastructure. Against this backdrop, the [GSOA Satellite Licensing Best Practices Report \(January 2026\)](#) makes a compelling case for regulatory frameworks that simplify licensing processes, promote open skies policies and align national regulatory approaches with international coordination mechanisms, reducing regulatory barriers and enabling satellite capacity to be provided across borders more efficiently.

These principles are particularly relevant in the African context, where satellite connectivity is increasingly being considered as part of national digital infrastructure strategies.

At the same time, the implementation of such frameworks inevitably takes place within broader national policy contexts. Regulators across the continent therefore often consider how enabling satellite deployment can be achieved while remaining aligned with domestic regulatory responsibilities and policy priorities.

Satellite Connectivity and Africa's Digital Infrastructure

While mobile network coverage in Africa is relatively high, structural constraints continue to limit the expansion of terrestrial broadband infrastructure in certain regions. In many areas, extending fibre or mobile networks may not be commercially viable in the near term.

Satellite systems complement terrestrial networks by enabling connectivity in areas where traditional deployment models are less viable. Satellite broadband can support access to essential digital services, including education platforms, telemedicine, financial services and e-government systems.

In this sense, regulatory frameworks that facilitate the rapid deployment of satellite services can support the advancement of national digital development strategies across the continent.

Open Skies and Market Access

One of the key themes highlighted in the GSOA report is the concept of “open skies” policies, under which satellite operators can provide satellite capacity across borders without requiring extensive national licensing procedures.

From a market perspective, such approaches may enable domestic telecommunications operators to access satellite infrastructure more easily, potentially increasing competition and expanding infrastructure choices for service providers.

For African regulators, the discussion often centres on how such frameworks can be implemented in a manner that facilitates market access while ensuring appropriate regulatory oversight of communications services provided within national territories.

In some jurisdictions, this may involve simplified landing rights regimes or registration mechanisms that enable satellite operators to provide capacity while maintaining regulatory visibility over services offered in the market.

Spectrum Management and International Coordination

Satellite communications operate within a global spectrum coordination framework managed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The GSOA report emphasises the importance of aligning national regulatory frameworks with international coordination mechanisms, including the use of the ITU Master International Frequency Register (MIFR), which underpins the global coordination of satellite spectrum resources.

Greater reliance on international coordination processes can reduce regulatory duplication and facilitate cross-border satellite operations.

At the same time, national regulators remain responsible for managing spectrum use within their jurisdictions, including coordination with terrestrial services, mitigation of harmful interference and compliance with national regulatory requirements.

As satellite and terrestrial networks become increasingly integrated, spectrum coordination between these systems may become an increasingly important regulatory consideration. These considerations are particularly important in the context of large-scale satellite deployment, where cross-border consistency can significantly affect investment and service rollout.

Licensing Frameworks and Regulatory Oversight

Many African telecommunications markets operate under unified licensing frameworks that apply to both network operators and service providers. These frameworks typically include obligations relating to consumer protection, competition, spectrum management and lawful interception.

As satellite services expand within national markets, regulators may consider how existing licensing frameworks interact with satellite network architectures, which differ in several important respects from traditional terrestrial communications networks.

Satellite systems often operate across multiple jurisdictions, rely on globally coordinated spectrum resources and may not require the same physical infrastructure within national borders as terrestrial networks. Regulatory frameworks that recognise these characteristics while maintaining appropriate oversight may help support the efficient deployment of satellite services.

This raises a broader question as to whether existing licensing frameworks should be adapted to reflect the operational characteristics of satellite systems, or whether satellite services should continue to be accommodated within existing regulatory structures.

Regulatory Efficiency and Deployment Enablers

In addition to broader policy considerations, the GSOA report also emphasises the importance of regulatory efficiency in enabling the deployment of satellite services. This includes streamlined licensing processes, predictable approval timelines and regulatory fees that are limited to administrative cost recovery.

From a practical perspective, these measures may play a significant role in determining how quickly satellite services can be introduced into national markets. Lengthy approval processes, duplicative licensing requirements or high regulatory fees may delay deployment and increase the cost of satellite connectivity.

The report also highlights the role of blanket licensing frameworks for user terminals, which allow large numbers of satellite devices with similar technical characteristics to be authorised under a single licence. Such approaches can facilitate the rapid expansion of satellite connectivity, particularly in underserved areas.

For African regulators, these considerations are particularly relevant in assessing how regulatory frameworks can support both the availability and affordability of satellite-enabled services.

In this context, regulatory efficiency is not only an administrative consideration, but a key determinant of investment attractiveness and the pace of satellite deployment in national markets.

A Continuing Policy Conversation

The policy direction outlined in the GSOA report reflects broader global trends toward simplified licensing frameworks and greater regulatory harmonisation in satellite communications.

For African regulators, the discussion may increasingly focus on how these principles can be implemented in ways that support connectivity, investment and innovation while remaining aligned with domestic policy priorities and regulatory responsibilities.

Ultimately, the policy question may not be whether satellite services should play a larger role in Africa's connectivity landscape. Rather, it is how regulatory frameworks can evolve to enable the rapid deployment of satellite connectivity while remaining consistent with national policy objectives.

As satellite technologies continue to develop, this is likely to become an increasingly important part of the regulatory agenda across African communications markets. The evolving policy landscape is already being tested by emerging technologies such as direct-to-device satellite connectivity, highlighting the importance of regulatory frameworks that can accommodate innovation while remaining aligned with national policy objectives.



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