

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

Media Contacts: Mienke Steytler

Tel: 011-482-7221 ext. 2003

Email: mienke@sairr.org.za

Cellular communications revolution holds economic and political benefits for South Africa – IRR report

A *Fast Facts* report released by the IRR last week highlighted the massive increase in cellular communications in South Africa over the past decade.

Data cited by the IRR showed that the number of cellular subscriptions in the country had increased from 8.3 million in 2000 to 76.8 million 2013, or by 822%. Over the same period the number of fixed-line telephone connections fell by 22%.

IRR analyst and head of research, Lerato Moloi, said that the increase in cellular subscriptions held both economic and political benefits: “The economic benefits relate to the cheaper and more effective access to goods and services, and South Africa's position as a leading tech industry in Africa.

“However, it’s the political benefits that are perhaps the most interesting. Increasing cell phone access promises to be a very effective antidote to State efforts at restricting access to information. Social media accessed via cell phones would help to ensure that South Africans could freely access and circulate information and ideas despite the best efforts of the State to limit this.

“Attempts, for example, to introduce media tribunals or censor content on the public broadcaster would be less effective in the era of social media than would have been the case 20 or 30 years go. Cellular communications have therefore become an important asset in maintaining South Africa's status as a free and open society.”

Ends.
