

Zimbabwe: Regulator gives cellular networks new lifeline

Zimbabwe's Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (POTRAZ) has given the country's three cell networks the right to charge for international calls in foreign currency.

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#) 23 Sep 2008

But they have been instructed not to abandon charging services in Zimbabwean currency, a POTRAZ source said.

Zimbabwe has three cellular networks, Econet Wireless, Netone and Telecel Zimbabwe. The three networks had cut off mobile subscribers, particularly those on the prepaid platform, from making international calls, arguing local tariffs were too low and that there was an outflow of foreign currency to paid offshore networks for calls made from Zimbabwe.

Econet only allowed post-paid 'Business Partner' customers to continue access to international calls, saying the Business Partner package was for corporates and business people whom it felt generated foreign currency from international business calls.

"The foreign currency that we [have] at the moment is not enough to handle all subscribers, hence we are reserving the limited that we have for business organisations... Individuals, from now onwards are no longer in a position to make international calls as they used to do due to foreign currency constraints," CEO Douglas Mboweni told subscribers.

Econet, which is listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, is the largest of the three mobile phone networks.

The move is expected to give the struggling mobile phone networks a lifeline by allowing them to raise foreign currency for critical imports for their networks.

A source said, although the networks had not been given a standing threshold for foreign currency charges, they were however expected to maintain a 75% local currency ceiling for their billing.

While Netone and Telecel were still battling to launch the necessary platforms for foreign currency-denominated charges, Econet said it had already been in the process of rolling out the new system and would start selling pre-paid cards in foreign currency under its new international calling platform soon.

Mboweni, also chairman of Telecommunications Operators Association of Zimbabwe and whose company was instrumental in the lobby for foreign currency charges on international calls, said subscribers choosing the platform would be billed on foreign currency under the new platform, which they would ensure is congestion-free.

The cards would be sold in South African rands, Botswana pula, and United States dollars.

Billing of subscribers would be done in US dollars.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.
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