

Zimbabweans queue for mobile phone lines

Hundreds of Zimbabweans joined long queues as they waited to buy mobile phone lines released on the market by Econet Wireless earlier this week. The lines are retailing at US\$25, against US\$100 on a thriving black market.

By [Sam Hungwe](#) 15 May 2009

The situation highlighted the fact that demand for mobile phone lines was still far from being met in a country where the mobile market penetration rate is at 10%, against an average of 40% for sub-Saharan Africa.

Econet released 50,000 pre-paid mobile lines as part of its network expansion programme that was targeted at increasing the subscriber base from 900,000 to 1.2 million. A spokesman said a further 500,000 new subscribers could be added, bringing the subscriber base to nearly 2 million or 75% of the market share, after a US\$95 million cash injection last month by a major shareholder.

Analysts say there is immense pent-up demand that remains unsatisfied due to the low penetration rate, caused largely by slow growth among the country's three mobile phone networks due to a decade-old economic crisis that constrained expansion.

Orascom is reportedly in talks with South Africa's MTN for the take-over of Telecel. The entry of MTN in Zimbabwe could significantly transform the mobile market and force players to ramp up their subscriber bases due to increased competition.

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