

Africans access borderless mobile phone services

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More than 400 million people in twelve African countries can now access borderless mobile phone services opened by Kenyan mobile telecommunications company Celtel International.

Celtel Marketing Director Anna Othoro said the expanded One Network service will enable customers to make calls and send short text messages across Africa's geographic borders at local rates.

Othoro said on Thursday that the customers could also top up their pre-paid phones with locally purchased airtime cards which could be purchased at more than 500,000 points of sale.

The One Network concept now incorporates Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Malawi. The concept was initially introduced in East Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Gabon in 2006.

The roll-out was announced simultaneously across all 12 countries, including Nairobi and Kampala.

Othoro said the service would be automatically activated upon crossing borders with no prior registration required or sign-up fee charged.

Celtel Kenya Chief Executive Officer David Murray said abolishment of roaming charges within the region would enhance regional integration.

"The widening and deepening of co-operation in the EAC and COMESA (East African Community and Common Market of East and Southern Africa) regions requires an equivalent investment in the telecommunication network and incentives to the populace in ensuring that business thrives.

"The inclusion of Sudan in the One Network bracket will benefit Kenyan entrepreneurs who have ventured into that country," he added.

In Kampala, the announcement of the One Network took place at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

Dr Saad Al Barrak, the managing director and deputy chairman of the MTC Group, updated the heads of government on the potential of the One Network concept in the countries served by the Celtel brand.

"The innovation behind and the expansion of the world's first borderless mobile phone network is a reflection of our dedication to the African continent and its people.

"We have revolutionized telecommunications in Africa and we intend to roll out this service to more of our operations on the African continent and in the Middle East," Dr Barrak said.

Tito Alai, Chief Commercial Officer of the Zain Group, which owns Celtel International, said: "One Network is now available to more of our customers and makes it easier for them to communicate with their families, friends and business colleagues, making their lives better."

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