

Mobile subscribers in Kenya switched off

By [Carole Kimutai](#): [@CaroleKimutai](#)

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Kenyan mobile operator Safaricom has announced the completion of the switch off exercise for mobile handset owners with fake phones. A statement from the company says it had completed blocking of all counterfeit mobile phone handsets on its network.

The Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) issued a directive compelling all service providers to ensure that counterfeit phones were blocked from accessing Kenyan mobile networks effective 30 September 2012.

More than 60% counterfeit phones targeted

Safaricom has confirmed that the mandatory exercise which began at midnight on 30 September impacted over 680 000 customers out of its 19.1 million subscriber base.

However, the service provider says it is too early to assess the financial implications of the blocking exercise but has confirmed that initial analysis of the customers impacted so far are from Nairobi, Rift Valley, Central and Eastern parts of the country. Combined, these areas account for more than 60% of the targeted counterfeit phones.

"We deeply regret the inconvenience and anxiety that this exercise has caused amongst our customers. We realise that they have little to do with presence of these counterfeit devices in the country and it is unfortunate that they have had to shoulder the negative consequences of the same. To mitigate the inconvenience, we have been contacting all affected customers and providing them with the option of purchasing affordable genuine phones or redeeming their Bonga Loyalty Scheme Points for new handsets," said Bob Collymore, CEO of Safaricom.

Not a long-term solution

Collymore noted that blocking handsets alone is not a long-term solution and called for more support to the CCK by related government agencies to block entry and sale of the counterfeit devices and step up prosecution of those who engage in their illegal importation and sale.

He further called on the government to reconsider the impending decision to impose VAT on mobile phones saying that the move would make genuine mobile phones unaffordable to the majority of Kenyans and instead fuel the black market trading of counterfeits.

ABOUT CAROLE KIMUTAI: @CAROLEKIMUTAI

Carole Kimutai is a writer and editor based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is currently an MA student in New Media at the University of Leicester, UK. Follow her on Twitter at @CaroleKimutai.
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