

Drop calls: Militants compound operators' woes

Militant activities in the Niger Delta have compounded the problems of 'drop calls' in the network of mobile operators in Nigeria as several base stations have become inaccessible in the region

By [Jonah Iboma](#) 6 Jul 2007

According to reports, about 10 generators are stolen every month from base stations of mobile phone operators in different parts of the country. These facts emerged on Friday at the Monthly Consumer Parliament briefing where operators gave fresh reasons for the continued low quality of service that mobile operators have been offering to subscribers.

The general manager of regulatory affairs at MTN Nigeria, Wale Goodluck, said that as of Friday morning, the company had 43 base stations shut down in the Delta region due to militant activities that made them inaccessible. He said with the situation, operators are unable to refuel base stations when their power runs low.

Celltel-Nigeria's marketing director, Norman Moyo, confirmed that the firm was also facing the same problems. Moyo pointed out that it was now almost impossible for operators to quickly respond to network challenges in these parts of the country as the issue of generators being stolen had become a big problem

He noted that in the past, it used to take just three or four hours for a problem in a base station to be fixed but now it takes as many as three days in the Delta region and some other parts of the country.

It also emerged that the fibre optic linking South-South and parts of the South-East in the MTN network has also been vandalised. According to Goodluck, these are some of the reasons why these parts of the country may be suffering a significant level of 'drop calls'.

He said vandals had been digging up the company's underground fibre optics, thinking that it was made of copper that can be used for other purposes. "Often the vandals dig as low as four feet to access the cable but dump on the roadside when they discover that it was made of glass."

Moyo also said that the current nationwide power problems, which operators had long identified as a major reason for the drop in network quality was still an issue, as many base stations were now running on generators fully.

He said the logistics involved in ensuring that they were maintained was very complex and with the security issues involved, operators cannot move quickly to refuel the sites.

He however added that the problem of poor quality of service to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, will not be solved easily as long as the administration of the territory did not allow for new base stations to be built there.

According to reports for almost two years, no new base stations have been allowed in Abuja. He said unless the government removed this embargo, the city may continue to experience problems of poor quality.

Meanwhile MTN Nigeria is to add about 17 more switching centres and an additional 1,000 base stations in its network.

According to Goodluck, the new base stations will increase the number. MTN Nigeria has up to 3,700 such switching stations in the country, and noting that these were part of new moves to improve the network and its services.

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