

Malawi: Mobile service providers to venture into fixed services

 By [Gregory Gondwe](#)

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Malawi's two major players in mobile phone services, Airtel Malawi and Telecom Networks Malawi (TNM), could venture into fixed telephone operations with the development of a convergence licence regime policy by the Malawi government.

The two mobile phone service providers command a 17.5 mobile teledensity which is the telecommunications penetration expressed as a percentage of population.

On the other hand, the country's two fixed telephone operators, the Malawi Telecommunication Limited (MTL) and Access Limited, which together has only managed a 0.83 fixed telephone lines teledensity, would also be able to operate mobile phone services.

Information and civic education minister Symon Vuwa Kaunda said the telecommunication sector in Malawi wants to be at par with the rest of the world.

Streamlining licensing structures

The Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA), which is developing this convergence licence regime policy, agreed with the minister saying the advancement in technology services delivery in the communications sector has enabled regulatory authorities to streamline licensing structures.

"This is a way of bringing in more services to allow applicants [to] choose a component of service to provide," MACRA's communications manager Zadziko Mankhambo told the *Daily Times* on Tuesday, 15 February 2011.

He said the regime will have four tier options which include infrastructure, network, services and content - which include broadcasting and internet.

"Infrastructures refer to things like towers, so in this coming regime an operator may choose to just manage towers, meaning there can be other operators without having to own towers but renting from another operator," explained Mankhambo.

At the moment companies control all the four tier operating services.

But he said the regime will allow one operator to incorporate all services or choose to only obtain a licence for a specific

component.

First phase - fixed migration to mobile licensing framework

He was further quoted in the daily that the first phase consists of migration of fixed line operators to the mobile licensing framework and that thereafter the sector will wait for the finalisation of the review of the Communication Act before the whole new licensing framework becomes operational.

"Licensing for the fixed line operators who wish to venture into mobile phone services will start next month," he announced, adding that MACRA had consulted widely on the regime and has also benchmarked it with Kenya, Tanzania and Malaysia where similar licensing regimes are operational.

Airtel Malawi MD Saulos Chilima said convergence regimes were now a global practice which must be embraced by the country's communication sector.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

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