

World's first borderless mobile network expands into Central Africa

Leading pan African mobile phone network expands its One Network to include Central Africa and more than 160 million people in six countries.

Nairobi - Celtel International, the pan-African mobile telecommunications company, has announced that it was expanding One Network, claimed to be the world's first borderless mobile network, to include the Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Democratic Republic of Congo. This comes nine months after the successful launch of One Network in East Africa.

In September 2006, Celtel offered its customers in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda the opportunity to move freely across geographical borders without roaming call surcharges and without having to pay to receive incoming calls. This was claimed to be the first time a mobile company was able to completely remove traditional roaming charges and offer its customers the same services abroad that they could access in their home country, such as airtime transfer from friends - Me2u, voicemail and customer service in their local languages.

Following the East Africa One Network launch a great proportion of customers in the region are now benefiting from the service. Speaking last September in Kampala, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam during simultaneous press briefings, Celtel told the public that this was only the beginning of their efforts to connect Africa as no other mobile phone operator has been able to do to date, and that their efforts would not stop within East Africa. Within a year, the company had expanded the service to include three other countries within Central Africa.

Airtime made accessible

Commenting on the expansion of One Network, Moez Daya, the company's CEO, said, 'We are delighted to bring 160 million people from East and Central Africa closer together through One Network. In a region historically dependent on freedom of movement across borders, we are now offering a communications solution that fits the needs of our customers, breaking down barriers and making life better for businesses, families and individuals from West to East. We have made the service easy to use and convenient by putting in place more than 140,000 establishments where our customers can buy airtime.'

Following the expansion of One Network the only change for users within East Africa will be the introduction of the three new Central African countries: Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Following today's One Network extension into Central Africa, post-paid and pre-paid Celtel subscribers in all six countries will now be able to make calls at local rates, receive incoming calls free of charge and top-up their pre-paid phones with

locally-bought airtime cards. Alternatively, Celtel's prepaid customers may top up their accounts with airtime cards they have brought from their home networks, whether in the Republic of Congo, Gabon, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania or Uganda. The One Network service is automatically activated upon crossing the geographic border into one of the six countries, with no prior registration required or sign-up fee charged.

Speaking about One Network, Tito Alai, Chief Commercial Officer for Celtel and the MTC Group commented, 'Nine months after the launch of One Network in East Africa, we have kept our promise of expanding this service to other countries and we shall continue in this direction. One Network showcases African innovation at its best and confirms Celtel's position as the most pioneering mobile phone network, in the fastest-growing mobile telecommunications market in the world.'

Praise from national leaders

Commenting on the impact One Network will have on the economic development for Central and East Africa, Abdoulie Janneh, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa said, '... By better linking markets across regions, by improving connectivity and lowering costs of cross border trade, we are giving domestic businesses new opportunities to grow and are encouraging larger multi-national producers to serve better-connected African markets from within the region.'

Leaders from the region have welcomed the extension of One Network to Central Africa.

The President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Joseph Kabila said that by merging its telecommunication systems across these six countries, Celtel will provide the infrastructural support needed to strengthen the economic ties between Central and East Africa.

Gabon's President El Hadj Omar Bongo said: 'One Network will now enable millions of Africans ... to keep in touch and constantly communicate. This initiative will, without doubt, contribute towards promoting unity and peace in Africa in general, and particularly in Gabon.'

Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki said, 'Lack of adequate communication has been the weakest point in Africa's regional integration. The communication network ... is therefore a major contribution towards improvement of communication in Africa. This is vital for economic, social and cultural co-operation in the wider region'.

Tanzania's President, Jakaya Kikwete said that in Africa's 'profound' past, there is a common heritage between the people. He said the new communications development is a federative tool that will 'enable us to revive this heritage and incorporate it in our development dynamics'.

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