

MACRA shifts roll-out for CELCOM

 By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

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The Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) has changed the rolling out of services of what is expected to be Malawi's fourth mobile phone service company, CELCOM.

The third company that was given a similar licence, G-Mobile Limited failed on a number of occasions to roll out despite being given grace period on three occasions before the licence was revoked, only to be saved by the courts where the matter is still yet to conclude.

The regulatory authority has again granted CELCOM a rollout grace period by six months.

MACRA issued a public notice titled 'Notice of Proposed Amendment Call for Public Representations on the Proposed Amendment to the Individual Licence to Provide Public Telecommunications services in the Republic of Malawi awarded to CELCOM Limited'.

The notice states that "the Licensee shall roll out and commence provision of its fixed or mobile voice telephony services to the general public in the Coverage Area set out in Phase One of Schedule 1 within twenty four (24) months from the Effective Date failing which this Licence may be revoked in accordance with clause 27 hereof."

Proposed amendments

The notice signed by MACRA director general Charles Nsaliwa says the proposed amendment is being made following CELCOM's application for a six months extension of network roll out from 30 October 2012 to 28 April 2013 where they cited lack of foreign exchange that hit the country in recent times as amongst the reasons for failure to meet the roll out period of 18 months from the effective date.

"The authority has therefore agreed to extend the network roll out period for six months from 31st October 2012 to 30th April 2013 to allow CELCOM provide public mobile telecommunications services within the said timeframe," says MACRA.

Commentators say despite the excuse of forex shortage, the mobile phone service provider is embroiled in controversy. In August this year, the company's executive management resigned enmass, bringing uncertainty on whether or not it will roll out.

CELCOM chief executive officer, Ted Sauti Phiri resigned together with other managers although they declined to disclose reasons for their action.

The company owned by a Mulli Brothers Holdings, whose chairperson and managing director, Leston Mulli was a close ally of the late president Bingu wa Mutharika, has declined to comment on the future of the company, claiming he stopped granting interviews to the media.

At the time of the resignations, Zadziko Mankhambo, head of communications at MACRA, said they were not interested in the resignations at CELCOM but whether they will meet the deadline to roll out or not.

In May 2011, in the face of take-off failure of Malawi's third mobile phone service provider, MACRA awarded a fourth mobile phone service licence to little known CELCOM Limited.

Mankhambo had said that CELCOM Limited beat bidders: Zambezi Africa Telecom, C-Mobile Holdings and Smart telecom Limited.

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