

Fixed mobile convergence – Regulator’s response

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More people in Africa than in any other continent are using mobile telephony as the primary form of communications resulting in a dynamic of the shift in call volume from fixed to mobile networks. The unprecedented growth of mobile telephony in Africa presents an opportunity to fill existing access gaps in the fixed network through fixed-mobile convergence (FMC).

Most regulators have different approaches for the regulation of fixed and mobile markets. However, with increased use of mobile telephony as the primary means of communication there is need for a shift in regulatory focus to deliver equality of access, promote competition between fixed and mobile operators and the use of new technologies for the ultimate benefit of consumers.

The regulator’s response to FMC particularly in Africa should be the development and implementation of appropriate policies that increase access to telecommunication services. These policies should address among other issues, artificial and historical barriers to market entry and competition, predictable tariff regulation, prohibition of abuse of dominant market position and universal services access. An enabling policy and regulatory environment will be critical to ensure fair and equitable access to communication and meet the developmental needs of the individual countries.

In implementing these policies regulators in the African region should therefore consider applying uniform rules and principles for fixed and mobile operators through technology neutral licensing to facilitate the use of new technologies

such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony and wireless networks (Wi Fi), balance demands for consumer protection against fostering competition and eliminate market distortion through cost-based interconnection/tariff regulation. The challenge for regulators is to respond pragmatically to this paradigm shift that will clearly continue to define the future of communications in the continent.