

Zimbabwe fixed-line operator probed

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

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Zimbabwe's Competition and Tariff Commission (CTC) says it has opened investigations into alleged abuse of monopoly by the state-owned fixed-line telephone service operator, TelOne. In a public notice, CTC said it would embark on the investigation in terms of the Competitions Act.

The investigation will centre on alleged engagement by TelOne in restrictive and unfair business practices.

These, said the CTC, include inflated telephone bills; excessive balances brought forward; refusal to explain the high bills carried over from the Zimbabwe dollar era; refusal to give printouts to substantiate the high bills and penalising subscribers for the settlement of accounts by cutting services without adequate notice.

Submit alleged abuses to CTC

"The Competition and Tariff Commission is therefore calling upon all interested persons or parties to submit written representations to the commission in regard to the alleged abuse of monopoly by TelOne at the commission's offices in Harare by not later than Friday, 26 November 2010," said the CTC.

Despite being the sole fixed-line operator in Zimbabwe, TelOne has struggled to assert itself in a market now dominated by mobile phone operators. Reports have previously suggested that the telecommunications firm is technically insolvent. This is in part due to stunted growth over the past years, exacerbated by use of redundant equipment due to years of neglect.

Low subscriber base

TelOne has failed to increase its subscriber base and currently has a 390,115 active lines in a country with a population of just over 12 million people.

Econet Wireless Zimbabwe, the country's largest mobile phone operator with a subscriber base of 4.6 million, this year embarked on a countrywide installation of fibre optic cables to circumvent TelOne which should ideally provide the infrastructure.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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