

## **REVIEWING NATCOM'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

**By Abdul Kuyateh**

Sierra Leone's ICT regulator is faced with a host of challenges to ensure efficient service delivery that will satisfy the ever increasing consumer demands. However, the Commission has made significant successes over the years that deserve thumbs up.

From regulatory efficiency to Quality of Service, consumer protection, capacity building and revenue assurance, the Commission has made unprecedented strides geared towards the furtherance of government ICT policy aspirations.

### ***Per Second Billing Platform***

In 2015, the newly re-constituted Board of Commissioners fixed up the perennial problem of per minute voice billing by replacing it with per second billing. In the latter, consumers are billed based on the exact airtime consumed, as opposed to per minute billing in which a consumer can be over-billed.

The Commission saw this as utterly unacceptable, unethical and cut-throat, which deserved immediate reversal. Subsequently, the newly appointed Chairman and Commissioner, Momoh Kemoh Konte within the first few months of his appointment obliged Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) to re-calibrate their billing platforms to operate on per second billing, which is now enjoyed by all consumers regardless of their political shade, colour, gender, age, region, religion or status.

### ***Internet Penetration Rate***

During his appearance before the Parliamentary Committee on Appointments in 2015 Chairman Konte vowed before the Committee to improve internet penetration from its dismal 2.3% and today the penetration rate has jumped up to 4%.

### ***Liberalized International Gateway***

The Liberalization of the International Gateway had been a key challenge of the ICT Sector and a sine qua non for improved and cost effective services. Giving it the attention it deserved, the Commission under the leadership of Chairman Konte demonstrated amazing commitment of service to the people of Sierra Leone by expediting the process of liberalizing the international gateway. The liberalization of the gateway transformed the sector in line with

international best practice. Every MNO that met the requirements now owns and operate their own gateway, ushering an era of multiple gateways. The multiple gateway scenarios under a credible monitoring system do not only improve revenue assurance and minimize fraud, but also positively impact quality of service for consumers to enjoy their monies worth.

### ***Building Capacity***

Leveraging on its positive partnership with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Commission benefited from three consultancies geared towards building capacity in the sector. Between November and December 2016, the ITU and the Commission conducted three workshops on Telecoms/ICT Laws, Spectrum Management and Assessing the efficiency of Operators. The workshops provided insight into the laws governing telecommunications and ICT in general, including the Electronics Communications draft law. The workshops benefited key players including security agencies, the BAR Association and Law Officers Department.



***ITU-assisted workshops on Telecoms Law at the Kona Lodge, Freetown***

### ***Big Data***

In a related development, the Commission in partnership with the ITU and the Japanese Government launched the Big Data project and hosted a Regional Ministerial Consultative

Conference on Ebola in the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown in August 2015. The theme of conference was ***“Leveraging Information and Communication Technology to Save Lives”***.



*Dr Cosmas Zavazava, Chief of Project Support and Knowledge Management Department of ITU*

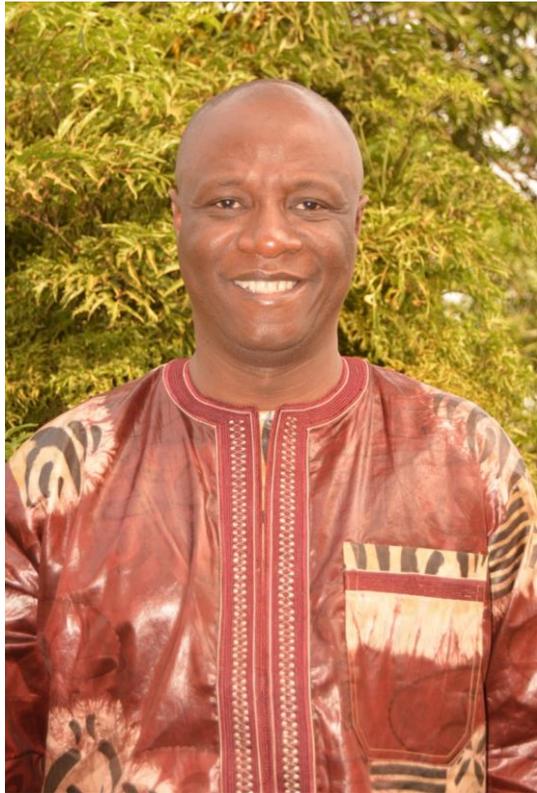
Speaking at the opening session, Dr Cosmas Zavazava, Chief of Project Support and Knowledge Management Department of ITU pledged ITU support to Sierra

Leon in the areas of capacity building, infrastructure, emergency telecommunications and regulation. The high-level event contributed to global efforts to save human life particularly by addressing emerging challenges such as Ebola.

The conference was declared open by HE President Earnest Bai Koroma. He applauded the stakeholders for organizing the unprecedented event. “We applaud the Government of Japan for this singular act of coming to the aid of the world community in utilizing the power of technology to rescue mankind. We also applaud the ITU for deciding to launch this Big Data project as a pilot in Sierra Leone. It was also great that the ITU has committed itself to Sierra Leone in other areas such as emergency communication, regulatory capacity building and infrastructure.”



*HE the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, declaring the conference open*



The Chairman of NATCOM, Momoh Kemoh Konte, expressed gratitude to ITU for coming to the aid of the country shortly after the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic by providing satellite communication facilities that enhanced response and coordination efforts in otherwise un-accessible parts of the country. *“At the peak of our Ebola scourge, the ITU gave Sierra Leone 38 hand-held satellite phones pre-loaded with USD 1000 which we used to reach very remote parts of our country where there was no GSM coverage. This gesture saved lives and one can imagine how many more lives could have been saved through the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the fight against the EVD.*

*Momoh Kemoh Konte, Sierra Leone’s ICT Regulator*

The meeting provided a platform for sharing information on the Ebola affected countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea; and officially adopted a strategy to use Big Data and Call Data Records (CDRs) before, during and after the outbreak of epidemics and diseases such as Ebola.

### ***Sierra Leone Internet Exchange Point***

Moving forward, the Commission has engaged appropriate partners in the establishment of the Sierra Leone Internet Exchange Point (SLIXP) and to regulate the Social Media, which has become a real menace to privacy and peace in society. It is important to note that while the option of blocking social media cannot be ruled out, it is far from the intent and purpose of the Commission cognizant of the immense benefits of Social Media if used in the context of development and social interaction.



*Stakeholder consultations on Social Media Regulation held at Bintumani Hotel, Aberdeen, Freetown*