Burundi

This small landlocked East African country has a competitive mobile market and more recently adopted an open access approach to its backbone market. This should enhance affordability and triggering greater access and use of ICT services and applications.

Mobile services: Following industry consolidation, there are now four operators in Burundi's mobile market: the State-owned incumbent, ONATEL; VIETTEL, a subsidiary of the Vietnamese mobile group; LACELL, owned by Kenyan and Russian investors; and ECONET LEO, a subsidiary of a South African-headquartered mobile group. While ONATEL has only a 2G network, the other operators have launched 3G and VIETTEL, and ECONET has launched LTE. Mobile-broadband is by far the most prevalent method of Internet access in the country.

Fixed services: ONATEL offers copper line telephone service, while VIETTEL and LACELL provide fixed wireless telephone service. There has been little growth in the market, with around the same fixed-telephone subscriptions as before the launch of mobile services. There are around a half dozen ISPs competing alongside ONATEL in the fixed-broadband market. Technologies are mainly fixed wireless, including one fixed LTE operator, with some ADSL and fibre-optic connections. Fixed-broadband penetration is extremely low. The Burundi Backbone System (BBS) is a joint venture between the Government of Burundi and several telecom operators on an open access basis. BBS manages the Burundi backbone and ensures connection to the landing stations of submarine fibre-optic cables in Tanzania and Kenya, passing through Rwanda and Uganda. The Burundi IXP was launched in 2014 and is managed by an association whose members include the telecommunication operators and ISPs in the country.

Government policy: The Ministry of Posts, Information Technology, Communication and Media is responsible for oversight of the sector. The National ICT Policy – featuring several strategic axes such as infrastructure development, education and universal access – guides the Ministry. There was a national broadband strategy covering the period through 2015. The Agency for Regulation and Control of Telecommunications became operational in 1998. The legal framework of the sector is framed by a telecommunication law supplemented by a number of regulations.

Key indicators for Burundi (2017)		Africa	World
Fixed-telephone sub. per 100 inhab.	0.2	0.9	13.0
Mobile-cellular sub. per 100 inhab.	54.5	74.4	103.6
Active mobile-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	17.2	24.8	61.9
3G coverage (% of population)	11.0	62.7	87.9
LTE/WiMAX coverage (% of population)	11.0	28.4	76.3
Individuals using the Internet (%)	*5.6*	22.1	48.6
Households with a computer (%)	*3.2*	8.9	47.1
Households with Internet access (%)	*3.3*	19.4	54.7
International bandwidth per Internet user (kbit/s)	9.7	11.2	76.6
Fixed-broadband sub. per 100 inhab.	0.04	0.6	13.6
Fixed-broadband sub. by speed tiers, % distribution			
-256 kbit/s to 2 Mbit/s	*90.8*	38.7	4.2
-2 to 10 Mbit/s	*7.2*	37.2	13.2
-equal to or above 10 Mbit/s	*2.0*	24.1	82.6

Note: Data in italics are ITU estimates. Source: ITU (as of June 2018).

Conclusion: Burundi has taken steps to spur greater competition in the sector and lower prices through new mobile licenses, a public–private partnership backbone and an IXP. It could further leverage Internet access in urban areas to encourage operators to make greater investments in rural areas.