

# **REPORT OF THE STAKEHOLDERS' FORUM ON GENERAL AUTHORIZATION FRAMEWORK IN NIGERIA HELD ON JULY 17, 2025**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Stakeholders' Forum on General Authorization Framework was conducted to present the draft framework, stakeholders' comments, and the Commission's responses to the comments raised. The forum was held on July 17, 2025, following the publication of the framework on the Commission's website, and expiration of the 21 days granted to stakeholders to review the framework and make comments.

## **B. STAKEHOLDERS FORUM**

The programme which was held high-bred (NCC Boardroom as the situation room and virtual participation of all other stakeholders), commenced at 11:00am, with MPA, Aiya Kigbara, as the compere and guide. All the stakeholders and participants were welcomed on behalf of the Commission and followed by a brief introduction of the NCC team.

### **1. Remark by the DLA, Usman Mamman**

As a way of an opening remark, the DLA noted that the session marked a pivotal step in the journey toward a more agile, inclusive, and innovation-driven communications sector in Nigeria. The rapid evolution of the global digital ecosystem has directly challenged the subsisting license framework with the Commission. The constant emergence of new technologies, novel business models, and innovative services, many of which do not fit neatly into existing and traditional licensing structures.

Recognizing this shift, the Commission deemed it necessary to critically re-evaluate and retool the existing regulatory toolkit. One of the key outcomes of this review is the development of the draft *General Authorisation Framework (GAF)*, a flexible, forward-looking approach to licensing that promotes innovation while ensuring regulatory oversight, consumer protection, and market integrity.

The General Authorisation Framework introduces three core pathways; (**Proof of Concept (PoC)** – to allow entities to demonstrate the viability of novel technologies or services, **Regulatory Sandbox** –to enable testing under the Commission's supervision within a controlled environment, and **Interim Service Authorisation (ISA)** – a temporary Authorisation to operate pending the creation of a full licence category.) This framework allows the Commission to be proactive rather than reactive in embracing innovation without losing regulatory grip.

The General Authorisation Framework is a manifestation of our intent to create a licensing ecosystem that is adaptive, anticipatory, and attuned to the needs of both the industry and consumers.

## **2. Opening Remarks by the EVC (Executive Vice Chairman)**

The EVC was represented by the Executive Commissioner, Stakeholders Management, Ms. Rimini Makama and presented a welcome Address on behalf of the EVC.

In the address, the EVC noted the trajectory of the growth of the telecommunications sector in Nigeria, which had been phenomenal due to the liberalization of the sector, resulting in the tremendous transformation and leading to the achievement of over 79.65% tele-density and a Broadband Penetration of 48.81 as at May 2025. Nigeria's telecommunications industry has become a symbol of innovation and progress which has revolutionized communication, improved access to information, and reshaped business operations.

Technological innovations are pushing boundaries with daring ideas, venturing into new frontiers of innovation, and expanding the possibilities of our sector. But we are now at a turning point, where the nature of innovation demands a regulatory paradigm that is not only responsive but enabling. This is an objective that lies at the core of the Nigerian Communications Commission's (NCC) latest initiative: the General Authorisation Framework that introduces a flexible and responsive regulatory licensing approach that is structured to embrace new and emerging services that fall outside the existing License Structure.

The framework introduces three key instruments: 1. Proof-of-Concept pilots to validate novel ideas in real-world environments. 2. A Regulatory Sandbox, which allows innovators to test solutions—such as Open RAN trials, or dynamic spectrum sharing—under controlled and risk-managed conditions. 3. An Interim Service Authorisation for services that do not yet fit within existing license categories.

Through the General Authorisation Framework, we are unlocking new pathways for experimentation, market entry, and growth to deepen the innovation value chain, nurture homegrown solutions, build investor confidence, and ensure that the dividends of digital transformation reach every corner of our society.

## **3. Presentation of an Overview of the General Authorization Framework**

The presentation defined the implication and scope of the General Authorization Framework as the regulatory oversight that supports innovation while safeguarding public interest, security, and compliance.

The overview covers the five main objectives of GAF, the application eligibility criteria, technical requirements, service monitoring and reporting, and General conditions for the authorization.

#### **4. Presentation of Comments received from Stakeholders prior to the Forum and NCC's Responses**

The Commission received a total of fourteen (14) comments from the stakeholders before the forum and carried out an extensive review of the comments. The comments and the Commission's responses are detailed below:

##### **4.1 Industry Consumer Advisory Forum (ICAF)**

###### **i. Comment**

The General Authorisation Framework (GAF), as currently designed, appears to be unique to Nigeria in both its structure and proposed implementation. While jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and Germany operate under similar frameworks, there are fundamental distinctions. While the Nigerian model shares similarities with these international approaches, particularly in areas such as consumer protection, data privacy, and pre-licence regulatory obligations, its transitional nature and limited scope differentiate it from the more liberal and market-driven regimes observed in the UK, Germany, and the US.

###### **Response:**

The Commission appreciates the perspectives provided by ICAF and acknowledges the fact that the Draft Framework is to meet Nigeria's peculiarities.

###### **ii. Comment**

ICAF notes that the authorization is temporary and recommends that it should be limited to a certain sphere of consumers or a controlled consumer group and should not generally be opened to all consumers and such consumers should experience the initiative for a minimum period of six months, free of any obligations, before the commencement of the General Authorization Framework (GAF). Additionally, ICAF recommends that Clause 18 on Indemnification, which currently refers to a "comfort letter," should be revised. It would be more effective to require a formal contractual indemnity agreement. This would ensure clearer accountability and provide enforceable terms in cases of harm to consumers or third parties.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of ICAF and stated that it will take ICAF recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework.

**iii. Comment**

Technical Context Observation ICAF recommends that a generic distinction be made and drawn between the basic communication platform offer and services on the respective platform in the intended regulatory reform by GAF. The emanating structure will be more effective to capture the distinction and innovations in the respective categories. In addition, ICAF also recommends that in addition to the administrative scope in the draft GAF, a substantive technical scope should be carved out around the generic distinction and technical classifications.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of ICAF and stated that it will take ICAF recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework.

**iv. Comment**

Redress Mechanism for Denial of License Post-Test Phase ICAF notes that the framework currently does not address the procedural rights of a holder if a formal licence upon the conclusion of the General Authorisation period. ICAF recommends that the Framework incorporates a clear redress and appeal process, including:

- Grounds for denial of licensing.
- Opportunity to respond to the denial.
- Timelines for submitting appeals or additional documentation (e.g., 30 days from the date of decision).
- Recourse to further regulatory or judicial review. This process should also be mirrored in Clause 14 on suspension and termination of the General Authorisation.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciated the comment of ICAF and stated that it will take ICAF recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework.

**v. Comment**

Clarification on Type-Approval Authority ICAF notes that Clause 11 under Terms and Conditions states that infrastructure and equipment deployed during the testing phase must be “Type-approved.” However, it omits reference to the specific authority or agency responsible for issuing this

approval. To avoid regulatory ambiguity and ensure compliance, the framework should specify that such approvals are to be obtained from the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) or another designated body, along with relevant procedural guidance

**Response:**

The Commission acknowledged the point raised by ICAF and stated that clarity will be provided in the final Framework.

#### 4.2 MTN Nigeria Limited

**i. Comment:**

MTN raised concerns on whether the Framework was designed to regulate all forms of innovative technologies or services conducted by Licensee of the Commission. This is because, Licensees of the Commission may innovate beyond communications technology and services, which according to Section 3(1) of the Nigerian Communications Act 2003, is the scope of the Commission responsibility. MTN Recommendation That the Framework clearly define its scope to govern only innovative communication technology and service.

**Response:**

While the Commission appreciates the comments of MTN, it also wishes to state that existing licensees are well guided by their licence scope and conditions. Hence, where they intend to go out of scope, they will require necessary regulatory reviews and approvals. These reviews and approvals may be situated within the Draft Framework upon its issuance.

**ii. Comment:**

MTN stated that each form of authorization addresses a specific industry need which may be misconstrued under the umbrella of a general authorisation. This is because while a PoC and Regulatory Sandbox facilitate the test of a new technology or service, the ISA seeks to provide temporary authorisation for a telecommunication service until the development of a formal license. Furthermore, the technology being tested in the PoC of Regulatory Sandbox is yet to be brought to the consumer market while the holder of an ISA is a temporary market player and in active competition with other individual licenses.

MTN recommend that the Commission restricts the scope of this Framework to a PoC and Regulatory Sandbox. And further recommend that a distinct

temporary licensing framework be created to authorize existing and incoming industry players to provide telecommunications service until the development of a formal license for the service.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN and also respectfully states that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework.

**iii. Comment:**

MTN makes the following recommendations, with regard to rendition of reports by holders of a General Authorisation

- The Framework should only require the holder to provide the Commission with a final report within 30 days of completing the tests.
- The Framework should exclude the requirement to provide details of revenue generated as the purpose of the testing of a new technology of service may not in all instances align with revenue generation; or
- In the alternative consider redrafting the provision to qualify the requirement based on applicability, i.e., provide the Commission with monthly reports upon service rollout, usage of network resources and revenue generated as applicable.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN and also respectfully states that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework

**iv. Comment:**

MTN states that the requirement to pay for spectrum or numbering resources for a shortterm PoC or Regulatory Sandbox initiative may deter investment and utilization of the platform provided by the Commission. The noted that the applicant is only testing the proposed product or technology and is not expected to derive financial benefits from it. MTN Recommendation: • The Framework should require an Applicant to pay only a subsidized portion of the resource fee. • The Framework should also stipulate that an authorization holder is only obligated to make such payment after the successful completion of the test or trial, and only for the resources utilized.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN and also respectfully states that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework

**v. Comment:**

MTN expressed concerns with duration of the proposed General Authorisation. It recommends:

- That framework should require applicants to propose a timeline for the Proof of Concept or Regulatory Sandbox with the Commission's approval granted for a period not exceeding 24 months.
- Alternatively, the Commission consider extending the timeline for the Authorisation to a duration between 12 and 24 months.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN stated that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework

**vi. Comment:**

MTN noted this condition and argued that it will be a burdensome task asking the Authorization Holder to submit particulars of any agreement or arrangements entered with other companies or Licensees of the Commission for the provision of communications services. MTN recommends that the Commission excludes this requirement from the Framework In the alternative, we recommend that the Commission only require the Holder to submit Agreements which they are required to submit by virtue of other existing Regulations and Guidelines of the Commission.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN and stated that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework

**vii. Comment**

MTN was of the view that allowing the Holder to make diligent and effective use of their licence—by enabling them to determine a suitable commencement schedule aligned with their planned use of the Authorisation—would better fulfil the Commission's intent. MTN recommends that the Framework should require Applicants to specify when they will start the trial or test after receiving Authorisation.

**Response:**

The Commission appreciates the comments of MTN and stated that it will take MTN recommendations into consideration in finalizing the Draft Framework

**viii. Comment:**

MTN stated that the provision to provide approval from regulatory authorities as part of the checklist requirement is unclear to them and may lead to varying interpretations among Applicants as the specific regulatory authorities or approval referenced are not defined. MTN recommends that for standardization, the Framework needs to specify the Regulatory Authorities from which an approval is required and the nature of approvals required.

**Response:**

The Commission acknowledges the point raised by MTN and clarity will be provided in the final Framework.

**5. Additional Comments**

The Stakeholders present at the forum were given the opportunity to further comment on the framework. Consequently, ten additional comments were received. The comments and the Commission's responses are detailed below:

**5.1 Executive Commissioner, technical Standard, Engr. Oshadami**

**Comment:**

The ECTS advised the Commission to review the 14-day timeline for commencement of service, advised against an open-ended timeline.

**5.2 MTN Nigeria Limited**

**i. Comments**

MTN advised the Commission to consider publishing test results that are non-confidential and non-proprietary to encourage Industry Knowledge Sharing, which will in turn enhance development and guide investment in the industry. The Commission to maintain a Database of such tests listing the developments in the country.



### **Responses**

The Commission explained that due to the existing regulations on confidentiality, it considers the provision of test results as a contractual relationship and agreement.

#### **ii. Comment**

MTN requested the inclusion of Process-Time-Flow in the Framework to clarify the start and finish time

#### **Response:**

The Commission explained that the Process-Time-Flow is part of an application check list that will come with the licence once the framework is concluded.

#### **iii. Comment**

MTN requested the inclusion of an exit strategy and post execution Plan in the framework.

#### **Response**

The Commission explained that a response has been provided already and that it will consider the comment.

#### **iv. Comment**

MTN suggested that the Commission may designate part of the USPF funds for the General Authorization services.

#### **Response:**

The Commission explained that the USPF mandate is very clear on the segment of the industry that should be handled.

### **5.3 Netovel Limited**

#### **i. Comment**

Netovel sought clarification on the approval process for the proposed three (3) level / categories of the General Authorization Licence. “Did the Commission envisage a restricted partway, if Proof of Concept (PoC) was issued to a holder, will the holder be required to go through the regulatory Sand Box and the Interim Service Authorization (ISA) or could a PoC holder upon successful execution go to their ISA straight. Would a subsequent application be required for an ISA, say if a holder successfully completes a POC, would they be required to make a subsequent application for an ISA?”

**Response:**

It was explained that the result of the test of the PoC will determine whether to develop a new Licence undertaking or to align the service to an existing Licence

**ii. Comment**

The timeline for finalization of the draft document

**Response:**

The document will be concluded within 45 days in line with the provisions of the Commission's regulatory processes.

**iii. Comment**

Do applicants applying for PoC need National Data Protection Commission (NDPC) clearance especially since they are not yet dealing with wider public data?

**Response**

It was explained that services that use consumer data are required to obtain clearance from NDPC, due to issues of confidentiality

**5.4 Noaatech Nigeria Limited**

**i. Comment**

Clarification on allocation of numbering resources for the services under General Authorization

**Response:**

It was clarified that the Numbering Regulation provides for allocation of numbers on a testing basis.

**ii. Comment**

Clarification on the issue of equipment type approval

**Response:**

The Commission explained that the new type-approval regulation, 2024, provided provisional type approval which applies specifically to General Authorization.

The equipment type approved aims to ensure all communication equipment meets the technical standards and also to protect the network integrity of existing networks.

All concerns and comments were promptly addressed. The stakeholders were then informed that the Commission is open to receiving comments by July 24, 2025, consistent with the Commission's regulatory process.

## **C. CLOSING REMARK**

### **i. Closing Remark by the ADLA, Usman Abubakar**

As a closing remark, the ADLA expressed gratitude to the participants, specifically, to the EVC, ECTS, ECSM, NCC Directors and other stakeholders for their participation in the engagement. Also, the effort of the Committee that put the event together, culminating in the successful presentation of the draft framework, was recognized. While appreciating the contributions of participants, there was the reassuring that the concerns expressed during the deliberations would be addressed as much as possible before the release of the final framework.

### **ii. The attendance list is attached as appendix to the report.**