

**STATEMENT BY
DR. P. RAMSAMY, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE
SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
(SADC),
AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL
TELECOMMUNICATION UNION (ITU)/UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA (ECA) REGIONAL
WORKSHOP ON ICT INDICATORS FOR AFRICA**

**26 - 29 OCTOBER 2004,
GABORONE, BOTSWANA**

Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Communications
Science and Technology, Mr Lash Motlhatledi

Botswana Telecommunications Executive chairman, - Mr. C.
M. Lekaukau

Botswana Telecommunications Authority Board Members
(Present)

Heads of operators and their Delegates namely; BTC, Mascom and Orange Botswana

Representatives of the ITU and ECA

Distinguished Delegates/Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel greatly honoured to have been invited to come and officiate in this undoubtedly important ICTs workshop for the African region. Allow me, on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to express our appreciation to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for organising this workshop and for entrusting Botswana with the responsibility of hosting it. By the same token, I must thank the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) for graciously agreeing to host the workshop and taking all the trouble to make all the arrangements that

we see here today. Thank you Mr. Lekaukau for this superb arrangement.

I am pleased to learn that this workshop is geared towards implementing the World Summit on the Information Society Plan of action adopted at the first phase of the summit which calls for the development of comparable statistical indicators to monitor progress towards the use of ICTs so as to achieve internationally agreed development goals. In this regards, I am given to understand that this workshop will use a harmonised framework to begin the collection of statistics on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which will be taken to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Regional Conference for Africa to be held from 2-4 February 2005, in Accra, Ghana, and to the second preparatory committee (Prepcom) meeting of the second phase of the WSIS to be held from 17-25 February 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This workshop is timely indeed. I am saying this because it has been difficult to measure the impact of ICTs on economic and social development in many developing countries due to a lack of timely and relevant statistics, disparate indicators and different statistical methods. The problem is further compounded by the relatively rapid deployment and usage of ICTs in our daily lives.

For instance, *teledensity*¹, is being challenged today as an inadequate measurement as it does not reflect emerging technologies such as mobile phone, fax, e-mail, Internet service providers, etc...

¹ (*number of telephone lines per 100 inhabitants*), an indicator for development widely used in the telecommunications sector

As we begin this workshop, it is essential that we share a common understanding of the concept of information communication technologies (ICTs). We at SADC, see ICTs as the convergence of Information and Communications being effectuated by technological innovations. This definition presupposes that where Information and Communications are separated and placed under different Ministries, they cannot effectively respond to the demands of the populace. Where this state of affairs prevails, it is difficult for the populace to realise their right to access information in order to make informed decisions.

Harmonisation of our policies, establishment of proper legal frameworks and development of predictable regulatory regimes are key to attract private sector participation in the development and expansion of the networks to increase access to ICTs. Responsiveness to customer demands and facilitation of service diversification need not be

overemphasised. Similarly, establishing operational synergy between those who drive policy and regulators, who should be guided by the existing laws in their functions is a must.

During the Africa Regional Conference for the first phase of the WSIS held in Bamako from 28-30 May 2002, the participants addressed, among other things, four key areas: What the information society brings to Africa?; What Africa brings to the information society?; What Africa wants to preserve in the information society?; How Africa can benefit from the information society?.

As these questions were being addressed from various viewpoints, there was unanimity on the fact that Africa is lagging behind in ICTs for development. It was agreed to embark on an agenda to close this digital divide in order to enable Africa to take her rightful place in the information society.

I am happy today that the ITU has heeded this call to close this digital divide and has decided to organize this workshop, which as I understand, will be divided into two parts. The first part that will be dedicated to sector ministries and regulators will discuss data collection and dissemination of statistics relating to access to ICTs. The second part dedicated to national statistical offices, will cover issues relating to the use of ICTs by households, businesses and individuals. You will agree with me that for Africa to be able to effectively measure her progress in ICTs development, it is vital that Africa should first take stock of what is currently available. This workshop is therefore relevant to us on that score.

In SADC we believe that our national operations must be based on harmonised policies, coordinated network development and regional technological consultations to

eliminate incompatibilities and consequent interfaces that only increase costs and possible fault nodes. The SADC Regional Information Infrastructure (SRII) must be complemented by dense traffic catchments in the member States to justify the investment on, and the utilisation of, the regional broadband network; the region needs affordable access to ICTs now. In addition to policy and infrastructure development, e-participation is *sine qua non* for SADC to be transformed into an information-based region; e-commerce, e-government, e-education, telemedicine, e-tourism, e-banking etc. are applications available in the global information superhighway. All we need is to change our mindset in relation to ICTs by focussing on how best to apply ICTs to gain the competitive knowledge required to modernise and transform our region.

According to the ITU's online free telecommunications basic indicators statistics in the 2003 edition, African

average teledensity stands at 8.65%, Americas 66.62%, Asia 28.52%, Europe 96.28%, Oceania 94.85%, while the World average is 40.32%.

You will agree with me that in the light of these statistics either the African teledensity average took a quantum leap from 1% at the turn of the century to 8.65% in 2003 or one of the two figures is questionable. Whatever the answer, this example proves that indeed one of the major challenges facing Africa is unavailability of accurate and reliable statistics. It is my fervent hope that by the end of this week, we will all go back to our respective countries and submit to the ITU, statistics that better reflects the state of the development of ICTs in Africa.

I am told that from here a similar workshop, A Global Indicators Workshop on Community Access to ICTs, will be held in Mexico from 16-19 November 2004. I want to

challenge all of you gathered here today to use the next two weeks to prepare accurate statistics for that workshop. If two weeks is unreasonable, then we should have the statistics ready for February next year in Accra, Ghana and subsequently Geneva, Switzerland.

With these remarks ladies and gentleman, it is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the Regional Workshop on ICT Indicators officially opened and I wish all an enjoyable and fruitful workshop.

I thank you.