

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY, HONOURABLE PELONOMI VENSON, ON THE
OCCASION OF THE WORLD TELECOMMUNICATIONS DAY, HELD
ON 17TH MAY, 2005.

Hon. MP Vista Moruti,

Molaodi,

Kgosi,

Makhanselara a a tlotlegang,

Phuthego e e ko Shakawe

Le Setshaba sa Botswana ka kakaretso

Ke a dumedisa.

I had hoped to be with you in Shakawe but work commitments have kept me in Gaborone. However, thanks to this wonderful technology, I am able to bring the message for the World Telecommunications Day from Gaborone just as if I am with you in the flesh.

This clearly demonstrates the power of this technology to bring together rural and urban communities in-line with the theme for

today's celebrations, which is 'Equitable Access to ICT – Time for Action'.

It has been established that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) opens completely new opportunities to attain higher levels of development through increased productivity, higher economic growth, job creation and increased dialogue amongst the citizens.

Access to ICT's is however today unevenly distributed between the urban and rural populations and between the rich and the poor, thus creating what is nowadays called the 'Digital Divide'. The effect of this digital divide is that those without access to technology are likely to remain poor and isolated from developments nationally and internationally. This problem also affects other marginalised sectors of our society such as women, youth and people with disabilities.

It is therefore imperative that, resources permitting, we strive to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share

information and knowledge, enabling individuals and communities to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life.

The Government of Botswana has over the years responded to this challenge by providing electricity, postal services, media coverage and telecommunications facilities to the rural areas. Despite these efforts a lot still remains to be done because many areas of this country still remain without basic ICT facilities. Many senior representatives of my Ministry and Heads of the major ICT service providers are in Shakawe today and they will be able to give you details of the numerous projects that have either been completed or are still in the pipeline. I will, for my part, restrict my address to the major policy initiatives taking place in the Ministry.

The government is facing two major challenges in providing ICT access to the whole country. Firstly, it is becoming increasingly expensive for the Government to provide for smaller, more dispersed settlements and, secondly, new technologies such as internet continue to emerge and have to be factored into the future.

In order to address these issues, Government intends to accelerate the deployment of ICT facilities to reduce the backlog and, at the same time, identify newer technologies which are cheaper and more suitable for our environment.

The draft National ICT Policy (Maitlamo), which was commissioned by my Ministry, seeks to address these two challenges but also goes further define how the technology can be used effectively for the economic advancement of the country. The main goals of the draft policy are the creation of an enabling environment for the growth of an ICT industry; provision of universal service and access to information and communication facilities; and building Botswana as a Regional ICT Hub so as to make the country's service sector globally competitive.

This draft policy is available in my Ministry and I urge you all to read it. The Ministry is also holding a stakeholder conference in Gaborone on 23rd and 24th May, and I hope that those who have been invited to

these talks will make an effort to attend and help shape the future of this nation.

My Ministry is also considering a further liberalization of the telecommunications industry to allow more companies to offer such services. The aim of liberalization is to give consumers more choice in the types of services available and provide a wider array of suppliers. In addition, it is expected that greater competition amongst service providers would result in lower prices to consumers.

The liberalization would, on the other hand, affect BTC because it would have to compete effectively in a liberalized telecommunications market without the shackles of Government. Furthermore the Corporation would need an injection of business expertise, possibly through a strategic or management partnership with a leading international telecommunications provider. BTC has therefore already taken steps to ready the organisation for privatization by engaging a Consultant to carry out a diagnostic study of the Corporation. Further consultations will take place with relevant stakeholders before the process of privatization is launched.

Regarding rural telecommunications, we have reached a conclusion that rural telecommunications could be implemented more cost-effectively taking advantage of advances in wireless technology and using a combination of fixed line and mobile technologies. In addition, a competitive tendering process would ensure that Government appoints the most efficient suppliers for implementation of such projects. Thus, for future projects, a new strategy for rural telecommunications will be developed. This will entail, among other things, producing a new roll-out plan and finalising a method of tendering for both the installation and maintenance of the rural telecommunications infrastructure. This plan is expected to be ready in December this year and tendering should start immediately thereafter.

All these strategies are meant to pave the way for this country to harness ICT for the creation of an inclusive, educated and informed society as well as a prosperous and productive nation, as Vision 2016 demands.

I wish you an educative and enjoyable World Telecommunications
Day.

PULA!