MoBE, MTC and MLGRD sign MoA for ICT equipment and internet connectivity in Kweneng schools

Alicia Mokone Permanent Secretary Ministry of Transport and Communications

Bridget John Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Basic Education

Mr Mpho Morapedi Deputy Permanent Secretary Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

Watching over the signing ceremony is Martin Mokgware, Chief Executive BOCRA and Chairman of UASF

Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA), through the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) recently held the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the Ministries of Transport and Communications (MTC), Basic Education (MoBE) as well as Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD).

The MoA seeks to continue the collaboration that dates back to 2016 when the three parties first agreed to work together in a project aimed at computerising and providing broadband Internet to primary schools in remote and underserved areas of Botswana.

Powered by BOCRA through the UASF, the project's ultimate goal is to facilitate pupils in schools and host villages to be able to play a meaningful role in the digital economy. This necessitates upgrading of existing Telecommunications infrastructure to high capacity broadband that will support delivery of education, accessibility to quality Internet and usage of ICTs.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, BOCRA Chief Executive, Martin Mokgware stated that the Fund began its inaugural programme by sponsoring the provision of WiFi hotspots in public areas around the country as its first project. He said following the successful implementation of public WiFi hotspots, the Fund identified Kgalagadi, Ghanzi and Mabutsane areas for mobile network upgrades, schools computerization and internet provision.

"Conscious that the project would not be possible without buy-in and support from MoBE, MTC and MLGRD, the Fund facilitated the signing of the first MoU between the three parties in 2016 for implementation of the project," said Mokgware.

He further stated that the collaboration paved way for installation of computers and Internet connectivity to schools in the areas he highlighted earlier. He added that the project benefitted 68 primary schools and nine secondary schools through the construction of Local Area Network (LAN) in each primary school, provision of 5 Mbps dedicated broadband Internet to each Primary School and provision of Wi-Fi enabled tablets, laptops and related peripherals such as printers and copiers. He also spoke about augmentation of computers in 9 Junior Secondary Schools with 30 laptops per identified school; and as well as employment of Information Technology (IT) officers at each primary school.

"I invite all of you here to find time to visit those areas and appreciate the quality of ICTs they are enjoying. I am aware that I am speaking to the converted, so I will not go into the benefits of ICTs for they are well documented and well known," said Mokgware.

He stated that they have already assessed the area and have determined that they will be covering 62 underserved villages and 119 schools 91 of which are primary schools.

He added that this is a project for which the partner ministries need to re-commit for its success. Lessons from the previous schools' computerisation and Internet connectivity project require that the parties increase their involvement and resources dedicated to the project for it to be successful.

"The purpose of learning is so that there can be continuous improvement to minimise the length of time and amount of resources utilised. I am confident that our partners will step-up their commitment and ensure they play their part in the implementation of this project and that it will progress smoothly having already tread along a similar path," he said.

For her part, Permanent Secretary (PS) in the Ministry of Basic Education Bridget John, said that there is need to provide opportunities for ICT based teaching and learning especially in this era of COVID19, ICT based learning will afford teachers and learners the opportunity for remote teaching and learning and support the provision of education under difficult circumstances.

She stated that the Ministry of Basic Education has embarked on a journey to transform their education and integrate ICT into teaching and learning aimed at improving the quality of education.

"As a Ministry, we see the need to prioritise internet connectivity in schools, capacitate teachers in ICT pedagogy, avail ICT gadgets for learners and teachers as well as develop eContent," said John.

She further said through their collaboration with BOCRA, they have seen 68 schools in the Kgalagadi, Gantsi and Mabutsane regions enjoying some of the best technologies in the country. She added that they are yet to experience another launch of a similar project in the Kweneng region where a batch of 119 schools, largely primary schools, shall be receiving this modern-day classroom technologies.

"It is evident that the inquisitive attitude of learners makes them gain further knowledge and understanding which is necessary to propel the growth of technology and innovation when they interact with these digital devices on a daily basis," John stated.

She believes that as MoBE they are responsible for the continued operation, maintenance and funding of internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure as outlined in the MoA.

Representing the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Mr Mpho Morapedi, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry aligned with the sentiments expressed by PS MoBE that they too were appreciative of the project as it added the ICT dimension to their rural schools' infrastructure. He pledged their commitment and support to ensure the success of the project.

The project is funded by BOCRA through the UASF, a Fund established in 2014 to subsidise the rollout of communications services to unserved and underserved areas.

Itumeleng Batsalelwang (UASF Trustee), Martin Mokgware , Bridget John, Mpho Morapedi and Mogomotsi Banabotlhe (Deputy PS MTC)