

BOCRA



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Closing the Digital gap in remote schools

**KNOW YOUR CONSUMER RIGHTS:
COMPLAINING ABOUT POOR SERVICE**

PREFACE

The Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) was established by the Parliament of Botswana to regulate the communications sector in Botswana. The Communications Regulatory Authority Act (CRA Act) mandates BOCRA to ensure that consumers of communications and ICT services are educated and protected with regards to the services and products offered and consumed. This bulletin, the BOCRA eCommunicator, seeks to inform and educate consumers, seeing as consumer education is one of the most effective ways of ensuring consumer protection.

BOCRA recognizes Consumer Protection as one of the key pillars that will help achieve its ultimate goal-to regulate the communications sector in Botswana in such a manner that Botswana will become a connected and driven society. Consumers, by definition, include us all. BOCRA recognizes the eight consumer principles that continuously guide its efforts to promote and protect consumer interests. These rights extend to consumers when they procure services and products. While these rights have been contextualized for the ICT and Communications sector, these comply with the spirit of the consumer rights as captured under the United Nations Consumer Bill of Rights. These are:

1. The Right to basic ICT and communication services.
2. The Right to be informed.
3. The Right to choice.
4. The Right to be heard/represented.
5. The Right to safe products, services and environment.
6. The Right to consumer education.
7. The Right to Redress.

Consumers are varied, and equally vast are the issues of interest to consumers. The eCommunicator recognizes that most of the consumers may not be fully aware of their rights or may be put off as some of these issues are often technical. The focus of this publication will be to bring awareness to these issues of concern. While not attempting to be an authority, the eCommunicator will provide the latest information on trending consumer interest issues within ICTs in such a manner that the information shared is useful, accurate, easy to read and understandable.

In discharging its statutory remit, the BOCRA Consumer Affairs intends to use this electronic bulletin to engage, educate and address specific issues without any particular order. It is possible that this Bulletin may not address some issues that are of interest to certain consumers. If there are such issues, we invite the public to reach out to us, as we commit to giving those issues priority address.

Happy reading.

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BOCRA Addresses South East and Ngwaketse Councils

Towards the end of the winter season, Mr Martin Mokgware, BOCRA Chief Executive Officer, and Mr Aaron Nyelesi, Director of Broadcasting and Corporate Communications were invited to address members of the South East and Ngwaketse District councils on issues relating to BOCRA and UASF mandates.

Addressing the legislators, Mokgware and Nyelesi took the opportunity to explain the relevance of ICTs and Regulatory Oversight in ensuring that people have access to communication services, especially during the COVID19 pandemic.

Botswana, like many other developing countries, faces a challenge where certain demographics such as the poor and people in rural or remote areas do not have access to ICTs and communication services – often due to lack of access to services or not being able to afford the services.

This lack of access - commonly referred to as the digital gap - worsened when the country went into lockdown in 2020. During this State of Emergency, those with access or means to afford communication services such as telephony and internet managed to stay in contact with their family and friends, and have access to important information from the Taskforce that managed the pandemic. Commonplace activities such as learning, access to health services, shopping etc. had moved to online platforms thanks to ICTs. While this unfortunate turn of events left many who could not afford or did not have access to ICTs in very precarious positions, it also highlighted an important reality – that ICTs and communication services is a basic human right.

BOCRA also took the opportunity to address areas of consumer interest such as mobile money, slow internet speeds, use of hidden identity calls, and calls to license community broadcasting services.

The Councillors appreciated the consumer education address which they expressed as a long overdue exercise. They encouraged BOCRA to make it a practice to regularly apprise District Councils on ICT developments in order to empower councillors with the knowledge to respond to questions raised by their electorates.





BOCRA Hands Over Special Education Unit – Ithuteng Primary School

The old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words is certainly still true for the Special Education Unit classrooms at Ithuteng Primary School, which boast colourful and creatively animated characters on all walls.

During the Christmas party that BOCRA staff held for the Special Education students in 2018, some of BOCRA staff noticed that the bare classroom walls were in a sorry state and that the dull setup did little to stimulate or aid learning. In 2019, BOCRA approached the School Administration with a proposal to design creative alphabet and cartoon characters, with the intention to have an animated classroom environment that could help engage and stimulate imagination, and creative expression for the special-needs children.

The School administration heartily welcomed the project and work commenced without any hesitation to engage all relevant authorities for BOCRA to have access to the buildings. Fast forward the project to early 2020, BOCRA in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, BOCRA managed to select and engage an 'up and coming' local youth artist to design and paint the walls as requested.

Once the project was completed, BOCRA and the School administration agreed to a date when representatives

could meet and handover the project. Speaking at the handover ceremony, Mrs Mpho Moletsane, Deputy Director Corporate Communications and Consumer Affairs noted the importance and significance of artistic expression and colour to preliterate children, and how these can help aid learning and expression for special-needs students. Furthermore, she noted that BOCRA, as a responsible corporate citizen, has as one of its core values People contributing to education and uplifting the lives of members of our communities that are disadvantages.

The School Head, applauded BOCRA for such an intervention noting that the art in the classrooms has provided a very refreshing and more accommodating learning environment. She also thanked BOCRA for the kind gesture of donating 27 office chairs to the Special Education Unit, noting that the furniture was still in good condition and could serve the school well. This was furniture had been in use for 2 years at BOCRA and was being replaced as per BOCRA Procurement Policy.

Attending the event, representatives from the school leadership, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Basic Education commended BOCRA for their acts of generosity.

UASF and DBS Sign MoA to Develop Media Graduate Students



On the 24 September 2020, the Universal Access and Services (UASF) and the Department of Broadcasting Services (DBS) signed a Memorandum of Agreement aimed at identifying graduate Media students, whose business and content production skills could be honed in order to produce high-quality audio-visual television content.

Speaking at the event, Mr Martin Mokgware, Chairperson of the UASF Board of Trustees and Mr Oshinka Tsiang, Deputy Permanent Secretary at Office of the President (Department of Broadcasting Services) expressed how local content had the potential to really hit the world stage while making business sense, too.

Introducing the partnership, Mr Mokgware briefly explained the choice of DBS as a partner to help find,

train and equip young talent to produce content that will be consumed locally and internationally. Mokgware also pointed out that local content is not a new idea, and that it is a government initiative that prioritizes playing of local content on our radio and TV stations. He alluded to the fact that of the two, broadcasters have managed to surpass their quota of playing 80% of local content, while TV was still challenged to reach its 55% local content quota, an understandable fact given that we have not had a lot of local productions on the small screen. The BOCRA Chief Executive Officer also called upon other institutions with expertise in other areas such as business management, entrepreneurship and marketing to lend a hand in this initiative.

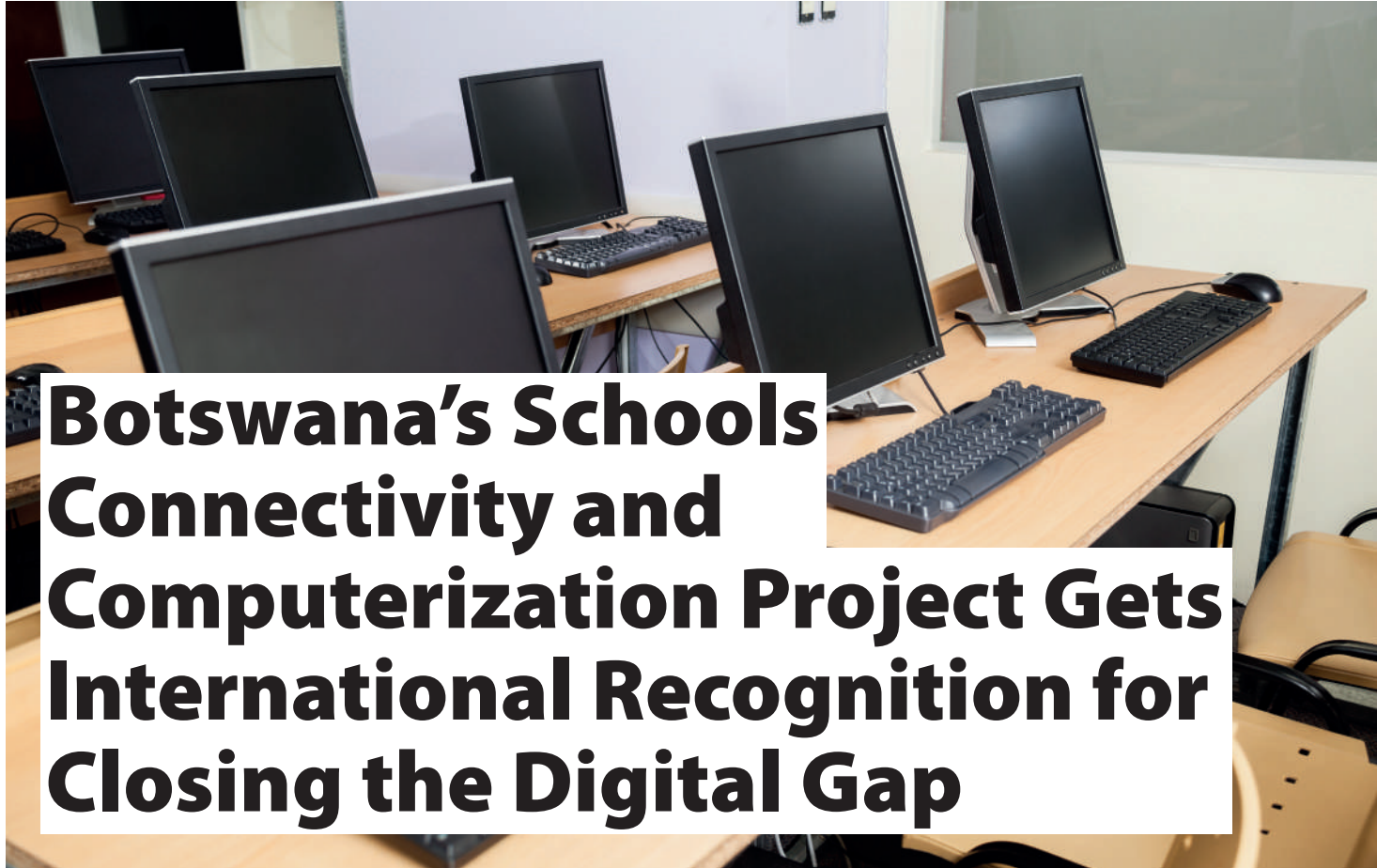
Responding to these statements, Mr Oshinka Tsiang, a veteran broadcaster, heartily welcomed the partnership

and acknowledged the dire need to develop creative talent that can contest for local and international viewership. Tsiang applauded this partnership and equally appealed for other sponsors to do their bit to develop the arts industry.

It is a known fact that content production is risky business; sunk costs, fickle viewership with appetite for foreign content, piracy, PayTV online steaming platforms, OTTs and more, and add to that list, COVID19! It is slowly dawning us how COVID19 “new normal” rules are wreaking havoc on the creative and entertainment industry. Too often we think of the creative and entertainment as writers, camera and lights crew, producers, actors and actresses, but what we don’t see

are the dozens of supporting businesses that depend on this creative industry such as designers, marketing agencies, catering companies and so many others that have all ground to halt. While established producers may be able to weather the raging storm and come out on the other side to start all over again, artists that are starting out will find success a sheer cliff face to scale.

However, not all is doom and gloom, as this effort will go some way to afford the locals an opportunity ‘to get their foot in door’, so to speak.



Botswana’s Schools Connectivity and Computerization Project Gets International Recognition for Closing the Digital Gap

“How do We Move Beyond Access to Internet and Strengthen Steps Towards Information Society”

The Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) of Botswana’s Schools Connectivity and Computerization Initiative has been awarded a prestigious, Champion of WSIS 2020 prizes, in the information and communication infrastructure category. Established in 2012, under the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the WSIS Prizes recognize the contribution of WSIS stakeholders to implement projects and initiatives that leverage the power of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to contribute to sustainable development.

It is generally agreed that access to affordable and reliable ICT infrastructure is crucial for access to information and knowledge. In this regard, Botswana’s attempts to provide access to information go back to telecentres that were set up in rural and remote locations all over the country to provide access to ICT infrastructure. Setup and handed to resident Village Development Communities (VDCs), these telecentre projects were from onset overwhelmed by challenges - lack of finance for operational expenses, poor centre management, unaffordable services etc., and it was

not long before these collapsed. Some centres were better managed, and located in areas that had regular cashflow, thrived. These were the exceptions.

This approach to provide access to ICTs for development and the 'failure to take off' bears a similar pattern across numerous developing countries. There are questions and debates still raging how to efficiently and sustainably provide rural and remote communities with access to ICTs; what technologies to employ, and how to involve the locals to identify their information needs and build their skillset to use and exploit these ICTs. And so, countries have moved focus to providing affordable and sustainable ICTs.

Similar to other developing nations, lack of access to affordable ICTs is not unique to rural and remote areas. To address lack of access within urban areas UASF funded a project to setup WIFI hotspots in distributed locations across the country. The goal was to target business centres, areas within high human traffic and hospitality facilities. Left to be managed by the Internet Service Providers, users were to purchase vouchers with which to access the Internet. Expectation was high that this would fire up access to Internet in public places, but again, stakeholders were left scratching their heads wondering where they got it wrong. In all these efforts to chase the goal of providing access to ICTs, one gets a feeling of chasing a mirage - so close, yet so elusive.

In 2016, the UASF took a different approach – collaborate with partners who shared the same values as the UASF. This partnership would pool existing resources that the stakeholders already had, and providing access to ICTs was not the aim in itself. They (ICTs) would be part of the solution to enhance delivery of other development projects, and in this case – information and education.

The new project dubbed the Schools Connectivity and Computerization Project, has funded provision of broadband internet connectivity and installation of computers of 69 schools in rural and remote villages in the Ghanzi, Kgalegadi and Mabutsane regions.

Completed in 2019, this Sixty-Eight Million Pula (P68,000,000.00) worth project involved upgrading the telecom masts within rural and remote localities to 3G capability per village, and providing 5Mbps internet broadband, 50 educational tablets for training of students, and has employed dedicated IT technicians to train these students and teachers. The project addresses very specific challenges - lack of broadband internet and computers; and low-level IT skills within Government schools. The scale of the project, goals, investment and political will are admirable. The project has hosted numerous benchmarking visits. Could this be indicative that we found the right recipe?

After a successful project rollout, the UASF and partners plan to duplicate similar projects in other parts of the country progressively, and hand these over to MoBE for running and management. And if the prestigious international recognition is anything to go by, it would seem that we are doing OK this time. But, will building partnerships; investing in ICT infrastructure; installing more computers; giving users capabilities to use ICTs lead to an increased use of the Internet?

Our national priority, so far, has been to develop infrastructure to facilitate access to ICTs. In Africa, Botswana ranks in the top 5 for ICT infrastructure development. One would assume that this would translate to an increased use of ICTs, but this is not so. Countries with less developed infrastructure outclass us when it comes to internet usage. Why? Relevant content and information are fundamental to usage of the Internet. And in the context of users within developing nations, it is important that ICTs provide access to diverse and relevant content that they can use to inform themselves, provide solutions to improve their livelihoods, and increase their knowledge.

Information is power. ICTs, coupled with relevant content represent a powerful tool that people can start harnessing to provide homebred solutions, grow entrepreneurship and reduce poverty. Until then, ICTs will always remain tools for the privileged.





Cyber Security Awareness

October is recognized as the International Month of Cyber Security Awareness. During this month, people, institutions and media engage in campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the world wide web a safer place for children, the public and businesses at large.

As more people, institutions and businesses have turned to ICTs to stay connected and access services during the COVID19 pandemic, the need to do so while staying safe and secure online has also become equally important. Research shows that lack of awareness about cyber security is what makes most people become easy targets to breach of security.

In general, these are some of the basic things that one can do to stay safe while online.

1. Keep personal information limited

Everyone who has interacted on digital platforms has had to choose what to share and how much to reveal whilst online. In day-to-day encounters, we tend to be discrete when it comes to sharing personal information. This is all predicated on a simple question – do I trust this person? This question should be our guiding principle when deciding whether to share personal information when online.

And then there is the issue of 'security' questions that people have to answer when they register or subscribe. This function adds a layer of identity authentication in the event that you have forgotten your password, and these questions range from; What is your name? What day were you born? What is the name of your pet? Providing personal information to questions such as this can itself become a security flaw.

2. Keep privacy settings on

With the increased use of wearable technology to track fitness or performance, there are third party apps that constantly ask permission to access and share our information. While privacy settings may not be a silver bullet for protection, having these enabled certainly helps control over how your information is handled or shared online. It is very important to know what app or organization is asking to collect what and how much of your personal information.

There are issues of users who are eager to tick the box 'I agree' even though they have not read the Terms and Conditions. Ask yourself what you are agreeing to first. Even if I don't agree with the Terms and Conditions, can I negotiate with Facebook or Google?

While I don't know of any user who has read every line of the Terms and Conditions before accepting them, it is good practice look up privacy settings before using a device. For example, when pairing your device with a new device. If there is no requirement to agree to pair or share information when transferring information from an old to a new device, this certainly creates a privacy risk as anyone within range can connect and read any data from your device.

3. Practice safe browsing

There are thousands of websites that are always trying to mimic genuine websites that you regularly visit. These usually contain malicious software to trick you into downloading or sharing your password. Browsers like Google and Mozilla Firefox have safe browsing features that warn users when they visit suspected or malicious sites. There are different clues to look out for that can warn you of a suspicious website or software that is attempting to gain access to your computer (this could be a pop-up window that alerts you that your device has been infected or appears to run a virus scan and requires you take immediate action to address the problem). In general, just as you avoid walking in dangerous neighborhoods, you should avoid visiting unsafe neighborhoods online because the internet is filled with hard-to-see pitfalls.

4. Choose strong passwords

I often hear people say that setting strong passwords is not their forte, or that they need an easy password to remember. It is important to note that setting a strong password will save you from financial fraud or identity theft. So, how can you create a strong password that you will not forget? First, do not use 'password' for your password! While the emphasis is on creating a password that is not easy to guess, you should avoid a password that is hard or difficult to remember as this will only defeat the purpose.

5. Make online purchases from secure sites

COVID19 has driven us online to access products and services, and many shops and service providers have moved their services and shops online. In the same manner, fraudsters have also setup fake online shops, offering 'genuine' products, at unusually low prices or unbelievable deals. A simple way of checking if the website is safe is to check if the website has https (the s stands for secure) rather than simply http. Again, secure website usually has padlock or lock icon in the address bar. This signifies a secure mode between the browser and the server. Lastly, when buying a product online, it is advised to shop around to price check, and find about the return policy before a purchase is made.

Know Your Digital Rights

Digital rights means different things to different people: from Digital Rights Management to Digital Human Rights. In this article, we explore these concepts in how they have shifted in the last 20 years, and what challenges are faced when applying such rights in cyberspace.

The shift in digital rights

In the early history of the Internet, digital rights were of little importance, since the Internet was only accessible to trusted institutions such as universities. This changed with the start of the World Wide Web in the early 90s, when the Internet was opened to everyone and in order to have a global functioning Internet, its infrastructure needed to be regulated. For example, to register domain names, which are critical to navigating websites, ICANN, a US-based organization, had a leading role in dealing with topics such as domain ownership.

With the Internet economy boom, more questions started to emerge around intellectual property rights along with the question of regulation. Do you remember when file sharing platforms such as Napster came up in the beginning of 2000, and it was first not illegal to share music online? These developments brought digital rights management (DRM) to the center of the digital rights discussion as businesses had a vital interest in protecting their digital products.

But there was a strong opposition, particularly by civil society, against business-driven digital rights management with its strict approach towards copyright. For example, how illegal it is to use music videos on YouTube to remix a new song. An alternative

to digital rights management is the Creative Commons movement, which has a "fair usage" approach towards digital products, where digital content producers can decide themselves about their license and usage of their content.

Digital human rights

A game changer was social media, or the Read-Write Web, as some called it back in 2006. Up to this point, the Internet was, with the exception of email and chats, largely a passive medium to read website content. Finally, every Internet user could publish content online. At that time, the Association for Progressive Communication developed a first draft for digital human rights with their Internet Rights Charter that aimed to widen the scope of digital rights:

- Internet access for all
- Freedom of expression and association
- Access to knowledge
- Shared learning and creation – free and open source software and technology development
- Privacy, surveillance and encryption
- Governance of the internet
- Awareness, protection and realisation of rights

The charter shows how the scope of digital rights was adjusted to the growing activities on the Internet. Throughout the years, a growing part of private and work life has migrated online. Three years later a similar approach was undertaken by the Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition (IRPC). The "charter of human rights and principles for the internet" focused on similar rights:

- Universality and Equality
- Rights and Social Justice
- Accessibility
- Expression and Association
- Privacy and Data Protection
- Life, Liberty and Security
- Diversity
- Network Equality
- Standards and Regulation
- Governance

These proposals for digital human rights were early contributions to what is now at the heart of the "Future of the Internet" debate. Freedom of speech has become a dominating topic as the Internet is not free in over 25 countries according to Freedom House International. Privacy has become central since the NSA scandal and Internet accessibility is critical when a large part of private and work life depends on it.

Until this day, there are no global digital human rights and the reasons are multifold. Firstly, if there are existing human rights, why should there be additional ones for the digital space? The United Nations Human Rights

Council reached a consensus in 2012; "that the human rights people enjoy offline, also apply online". In the following years the United Nations Human Rights Council initiated further resolutions e.g for privacy and the protection of children online. The question here is, is the UN is underestimating the great difference between "online" and "offline" or are the existing human rights sufficient in covering all activities in the Internet?

Applying laws and ensuring rights in the day-to-day usage of the Internet resides within countries until this day, although internet users' activity is surely not bound to country borders. My taxi company might be from New York (Uber), the movie platform (Netflix) from California and my music stream from Stockholm (Spotify). My data is often distributed across many countries.

There are various challenges to applying laws, and governments react in two ways: (1) applying existing law to the Internet or (2) defining new laws to regulate the Internet. Let's look at two examples to see why both approaches are challenging. Take for example the article 10 from the German constitution: "Privacy of correspondence, posts and telecommunications". That article was written in 1949, when the postal service handled the complete delivery of letters. This right protects citizens and their letters from not being opened. As email has largely replaced letters this protection is not given anymore. Without encryption, emails are like postcards, and internet service providers and email providers can read the content.

A second government approach is to define digital laws that better fit the specific circumstances. One controversial law in Germany is the "Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz" - the act to improve enforcement of the law in social networks, which shall contain the spread of illegal content (e.g. hate speech). The sheer amount of social media content makes it impossible for law enforcement authorities to monitor the web. Through the Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz, social network platforms are now responsible for removing illegal content within 24 hours. Social network providers need to define for themselves which content is illegal. Many experts criticize that this law has solved little and might even lead to wrongful censorship by social network providers.

The past 20 years of digital rights history shows how the scope of digital rights has widened. Up to to this day, governments struggle to apply laws to the borderless Internet. The European General Data Protection Regulation is one of the few exceptions. The Internet develops and transforms quickly, new business models appear daily and new services offer opportunities that weren't possible before. With the speed at which things are happening, lawmakers are far behind this dynamic. Some countries such as China, have chosen to control the Internet through mass surveillance, but that undermines the great ideas behind digital human rights.



Know Your Consumer Rights – Complaining About Poor Service

Have you experienced poor service? Do you have a complaint? As a consumer of communication services, you are protected by the Consumer Rights Acts of 2018, and it is important that you know and assert your rights. At BOCRA, we listen to and help consumers get their complaints resolved.

We often deal with complaints that include, but not limited, to:

- Billing
- Failure to provide or repair telecommunications equipment and Internet service
- Delays in repairing and connecting service to customers
- Fault repairs
- Service contracts

Guide to reporting a complaint

If you notice something wrong with your service, you should contact your service provider immediately, in order to give them an opportunity to resolve the issue. Do this as soon as you notice the problem. You can do this by phone, email or in writing.

Logging a complaint

If it's a simple complaint, you might be able to resolve it with a phone call. However, if it can't be easily resolved, you should make sure you log a formal complaint with the service provider, rather than just talking to them about your problem or complaining and not following through.

Your provider will have their own complaints procedure. Once you explain what the problem is and what you want them to do about it, they will advise on the next steps to take. At BOCRA, we discourage consumers from taking their complaints to social media platforms without first contacting the service provider in question.

We recommend that you write down the time and date of your calls, the names of the people you speak to and the details of what was said, as you may need to refer to them if you escalate the case to us. Having a record of all the communication leaves no room for confusion.

Your provider may ask for more information to help them understand and resolve the problem and they will be able to tell you exactly what they need to make sure they can process it as quickly as possible.

Escalating a complaint to BOCRA

If you are not happy with the response or manner in which your issue is handled, you may escalate the issue to BOCRA. If the complaint remains unresolved, we will carry out a full assessment of the case and base our decisions on what is fair and reasonable, taking into account:

- Both sides of the story
- Relevant regulation
- The law
- What is accepted as good industry practice

Assessments can take a long time, and some complex matters can take longer than average cases. You can speed up the process by making sure you give us all the details and evidence as soon as you escalate the complaint to us.

If you accept the resolution, the provider has to comply. Your provider is bound to the resolution if you choose to accept it. We have a specialist team on hand that works alongside providers to get the remedy implemented. If your supplier hasn't complied within reasonable time and you've chased them on the matter, you are free to enforce the resolution in court as the decision was legally binding.



The woman leading Botswana's digital transformation

At the Botswana Communications and Regulatory Authority (BOCRA), Tsaone Ruth Thebe's chairmanship is not by mistake; She is an accomplished Administrator and Manager, with extensive experience in directing the human resources, finance, administration as well as policies in the public sector for over 30 years.

It is under her leadership as Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Lands & Housing, that Government introduced the Land Administration Procedures, Capacity and Systems (LAPCAS) Programme – encompassing land administration processes, computerisation of land records, land registration and capacity building; She also served as the Permanent Secretary of the then Ministry of Transport & Communications, whose mandate included eGov and supervision of BOCRA, which she now leads as Board Chairperson

She successfully managed large organizations with employees of between 5 000 to 20,000 people. She also managed development and recurrent budgets in excess of P2 billion. At present, Thebe is but a captain of Botswana's digital transformation strategy at BOCRA. As the Board Chair, her mandate is, among others, to: promote and ensure enhanced performance in the communications sector, the very sector central to the country's digital transformation.

Further to that, she is mandated to ensure that BOCRA

imposes a universal access and service levy on identified operators for purpose of funding universal access to communications as well as promote and ensure universal access in respect to provision of communications services and effective regulation of the regulated sectors.

It is no small task. In this era of the Fourth industrial Revolution (4IR), where the world is racing towards digital transformation, only a strong and visionary leader could be mandated with such a task. Thebe is one of the first women in Botswana to be entrusted with such a mammoth task. It can only prove her as a leader extraordinaire.

She leads a Board that is mandated to, among others; promote and ensure enhanced performance in the communications sector; impose a universal access and service levy on identified operators for purpose of funding universal access to communications; promote and ensure universal access in respect to provision of communications services; and effective regulation of regulated sectors.

Most importantly, BOCRA regulates the entire communications industry, a multi-billion Pula industry which envelopes three giant mobile phone companies; Further, BOCRA regulates private radio stations. The Authority also regulates several. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Botswana. Thebe joined the BOCRA

board in March 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thebe's arrival at BOCRA is rather complemented by her vast experience in governance, administration, management, strategic leadership and most importantly project development and implementation. Having been part of a team that enabled the births of Botswana's LAPCAS and e-Government projects, her appointment could not have been more relevant.

"I knew that with my experience I would help enhance access to communication in Botswana, which is key in government's digitization plans," she opines. It was more so because her appointment came at a time when COVID-19 had just struck. Botswana at that time experienced its first lockdown. The economy was at a standstill, compelling almost all sectors to innovate and run businesses through digital means. Although COVID-19 disrupted BOCRA's planned projects, Thebe and her team were not discouraged, for they knew, the time to innovate had come.

With the entire communications industry under her stewardship, Thebe and her team, influenced for data and broadband prices to be reduced to enhance affordability. The mobile phone companies obliged, which led to ease of access to information in Botswana, especially during COVID-19 where social distance physical interactions impossible. Mobile phone penetration and data usage soared as a result.

BOCRA PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED DESPITE COVID-19

Thebe says the Universal Access Service Fund (UASF) is a funding instrument designed to achieve universal access through monies collected from identified communications service providers. She adds that the Fund periodically develops strategic plans which guide the development and implementation of specific projects to assist in achieving ubiquitous services.

"Although it is overseen and managed by BOCRA, it is an independent Fund, governed through the Board of Trustees. The UASF seeks to ensure that all Botswana have access to a set of basic yet essential communications services at affordable prices.

While guarding against market distortions, the Fund focuses its assistance on areas which are beyond the reach of communications services, enabling underserved and unserved communities to connect with other populations and take advantage of the opportunities and benefits that come with access to broadband Internet and other ICT services," explains Thebe.

To fulfil this mandate, the UASF periodically develops strategic plans that outline priority programmes or projects that would require financial assistance. This is done in consultation with industry stakeholders. Three key areas previously are schools connectivity, expansion of Voice Coverage and Expansion of Voice Coverage for Private Broadcasters.

Through the UASF Fund, one of the projects which BOCRA implemented was connectivity in 68 schools in the Kgalagadi, Mabutsane and Gantsi area. Currently, BOCRA is busy connecting schools in the Kweneng area. "We expect 119 schools to be connected. Our aim is to ensure that in areas which are beyond the reach of communications services, we bring connectivity," she notes, adding that connectivity is also extended in some instances to commercial areas like farms.

BOCRA through the fund, according to Thebe, also subsidises private radio stations to ensure connectivity in areas where to the radio stations, there is no commercial value. "What we want to do, which also in line with the United Nations (UN) requirements, is to ensure that in all parts of Botswana, there is a certain minimum requirement of communication," asserts Thebe.



BOCRA Hosts Virtual Workshop on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE)

On 26 – 29 May 2021, BOCRA, in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and United Nations University, hosted a virtual workshop on Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE).

Bringing together Statistics Botswana, Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) and the Department of Waste Management and Pollution Control, the objective of the workshop was to equip Botswana with tools to record incoming electrical and electronic goods to better estimate the quantities of electronic waste that will be produced when these products reach their end-of-life cycle and become e-waste. Botswana, currently, does not have a legislation to address to the issue of e-waste.

E-waste is a health and environmental hazard as products containing toxic additives or hazardous substances are mostly dumped or incinerated rather than being collected for treatment and re-use of recoverable substances. This is especially so among most of the developing countries.

E-waste includes discarded household or business items that have electrical and electronic circuitry components with a power or battery supply such as mobile phones, computers, printers, televisions irons, refrigerators, kettles etc.

The Global E-Waste Monitor 2020 report estimates that 53.6 million metric (Mt) tonnes was generated in 2019,

making e-waste the fastest growing domestic waste stream. The report also indicates that only 17.4 percent of the 2019 e-waste was collected and recycled.

The ITU estimates that e-waste quantities have been rising rapidly in the past 5 years due to several factor such as rapid growth of the digital society, higher consumer demand for digital devices, short life cycles and few options for repair.

According to the ITU, e-waste is a challenge and an opportunity. The ITU calls on member states to develop legislations and strong partnerships with industry and businesses to protect human health and the environment from the consequences of inadequate handling of our discarded devices.



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