

CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ICT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE, Honourable Odirile Motlhale MP, AT A NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL BROADBAND STRATEGY

Director of Ceremonies

All Protocol Observed

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good afternoon

Let me start by offering my sincere apology that I was not able to be with you yesterday due to other pressing engagements. It is however a real pleasure and great honour to give closing remarks to this remarkable workshop which is intended to shape and define the future of our country in terms of ICT.

One aspect which I applaud the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority for is being passionate and consistent in stakeholder engagement. This gives us the opportunity to thoroughly think through the issues and give proper advice on development of policies and strategies moving forward.

The development of the broadband strategy is very important for Botswana since it will ensure successful implementation of the ICT Maitlamo policy. Broadband internet will promote social

equity and facilitate the free flow of information, it will provide the ability to communicate, access and exchange online information and knowledge in real-time.

I am made aware that Honourable Minister Nonfo Molefhi highlighted that that access to Broadband internet has been made a human right issue at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Then this calls upon all stakeholders to seriously explore means of meeting this obligation. I advise the Ministry and BOCRA to implement the recommendations to avoid dust to gather on the document. I say this because ICT is a sector that evolves rapidly, what we recommend now maybe overtaken by events in a few months' time. That is the nature of technology. Failure to successfully roll-out universal broadband access will expose the country to the risk of exclusion from the economic and social benefits of broadband connectivity and innovation in essential services such as e-health and e-education.

Ladies and Gentlemen

No one can deny that Broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications are important in facilitating a long-term sustainable economic development, economic productivity and growth in our country. Therefore we need to make necessary

investments in terms of infrastructure, applications and services and also on the human capital so that we can realise benefits of broadband internet.

It however still concerns me to hear that Botswana has networks which are Broadband-capable but are not fully utilised. This non-use of the networks has been attributed mainly to lack of local content, lack of computer based skills and the relatively high cost of bandwidth. These factors are not conducive for the growth of global digital economy of the 21st century.

We should be in the same league as other countries that are making headway and enjoying low cost and affordable quality internet services. From the political perspective we are committed to seeing Botswana connected and people enjoying the provision of services through digital means. I therefore call upon operators and service providers to re-think their pricing strategies and service offerings so as to stimulate demand. On the other hand the Ministry and BOCRA should also look at the means of assisting service providers to be able to lower costs of providing services. To the public I say let us be innovative and creative to think of content that we could access.

Ladies and Gentlemen

On the 5th April 2013 the United Nations Broadband Commission for Digital Development presented an open letter to the high-level panel of Eminent Persons on the Post -2015 Development Agenda and I would like to quote a paragraph from the open letter:

“We call on the members of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel of Eminent Person on the Post-2015 Development Agenda to recognise the power and promise of broadband applications and services to expand people’s horizons and opportunities, enhance their freedom of expression and civic participation, better share their culture and hence foster understanding, enable people to engage freely in self-expression and the exchange of ideas, and sow the seeds of genuine learning, as well as quality education for all”

You will agree with me that from this statement broadband is more than just access to ICT, it touches on our social values and it will assist in our poverty eradication programme. The government will play an enabling role in the deployment of broadband networks and only intervene where there is market failure. Therefore, I have no doubt that you, as key stakeholders, have and will continue to provide the necessary

feedback in terms of comments and suggestions so that we have a robust National Broadband Strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen

With those few remarks let me officially close this workshop and encourage the Communications Authority to continue with its consultative drive the purpose of which is to help raise awareness among stakeholders.

Pula Bagaetsho