



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA



SPEECH BY THE

**MINISTER OF TRANSPORT AND
COMMUNICATIONS HON. NONOFO E. MOLEFHI,**

**AT A NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP FOR
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL BROADBAND
STRATEGY**

09 APRIL 2013

GABORONE SUN

Director of Ceremonies

Members of Parliament here present

Permanent Secretary

ICT Coordinator

Chief Executive of BOCRA and your Staff

Chief Executives here present and their respective staff

Captains of Industry

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is a great honour and privilege to be here with you this morning to discuss and map the way forward in the development of a National Broadband Strategy for Botswana. My Ministry and indeed Government as whole want to put in place a Strategy that would provide a holistic and coordinated approach in ensuring that high-speed and reliable networks are universally accessible throughout the country.

The development of broadband strategy is an important event as we strive to be among competitive countries that are using this technology to revolutionise the way services are delivered across the economy both in Government and private sector. Broadband access has been recognised worldwide as an accelerator of economic development and increasingly its connectivity is recognised as enabling major improvements in economic and social wellbeing in any economy. It is for this reason that our Government made significant investments in national ICT infrastructure development and international connectivity.

2. Ladies and gentlemen, the past fifteen years, has been an extraordinary time for the development of ICTs when we liberalised our telecommunications market by licensing two mobile service providers that is Mascom Wireless Botswana and Vista Cellular (now Orange Botswana). With the mobile revolution we have brought ICTs and their benefits within reach of virtually all of the country's people in every district and in most villages. We now have three (3) mobile service providers, being the two that I have mentioned earlier and BeMobile, a subsidiary of BTC. These companies share among themselves well over three (3) million mobile cellular subscriptions indicating a penetration level of over 150%.

The wireless technologies will continue playing a significant role in the delivery of broadband services in Botswana due to the fact that we have a sparse population and it may not be economical to universally use wireline technologies.

3. Director of Ceremonies, I am however still concerned that, despite heavy investment in ICT infrastructure there is still some “digital divide” with only limited users having access to the Internet. While we cherish the unprecedented growth of mobile services the same cannot be said about high-speed Internet or data services.

Only a paltry 10% of Botswana's population, particularly in urban centres, uses the Internet connections while the rest of the country's people still have no access to the Internet at all, let alone a broadband connection.

4. When I say broadband creates sustainable social and economic growth I am not just referring to the rich urban populace, but to every citizen, all villages, rich and poor. My Ministry advocates for the national rollout of broadband infrastructure and for the provision of equitable and affordable access to broadband for all people. That is what I call connecting Botswana.

5. It is very important that we replicate this mobile miracle for the advancement of broadband access, on a nationwide basis. As leader of the Communications sector I have a passion to connect Botswana both inland and to the rest of the world and to make our country a broadband nation. It is mainly for this reason that Government deemed it fit and proper to structurally separate BTC and form two companies that came to be known as Botswana Fibre Networks (BoFiNet) and BTC Limited. BoFiNet will serve the economy as a wholesaler for high capacity fibre while the new BTC Limited Company will focus on the downstream retail services.

BoFiNet shall service all its customers on an open access principle where all will be given equal and transparent treatment regardless of the size of the customer. I am expecting that BofiNet will be fully operational by August 2013.

6. Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to see our service providers and the public in general fully utilising this high capacity network and come up with creative and innovative business models that can allow provision of triple play services (Video, voice and data) in one platform. Remember we are in a converged technology world and we have a converged regulatory regime which will allow licensing in a liberalised and competitive market.

7. It is important that as we develop networks by using sophisticated technologies, efficiency of network operations must be broadband services. Content development is key, increased literacy on ICTs and their application and use in the daily life of a Motswana should be upscaled by industry and government. Enhanced data speeds and quality are key factors necessary for the user to derive maximum benefit from the infrastructure and services. There is need therefore to collaborate and find synergies between the sector operators and promoters if we are to offer affordable and reliable services.

8. I believe that Broadband, just like electricity that changed the world in a million ways, will deliver unexpected and unpredictable benefits. I can list a few of the benefits that we are already sure about:

- Broadband infrastructure allows the general public to enjoy the benefits of e-government services at high speed and at affordable costs. The success of our government in implementing the e-government strategy depends on the universal availability of the broadband access in the country.

- It will revolutionise the way goods and services are created, delivered and used in the digital economy.
- Broadband will help us accelerate progress towards meeting the Vision 2016 Development Goals and will further help improve people's livelihoods, especially in rural and agricultural areas. The innovative use of ICTs will play a crucial role in ensuring Botswana's 2.1 million people have affordable and equitable access to agricultural produce.
- It brings mobile banking to many people as it is already happening in Botswana particularly those who do not have conventional bank accounts.

9. Mobile phones connected to broadband networks play a key role in healthcare programmes in a growing number of countries around the world, and I believe that the proliferation of smartphones, connected to broadband infrastructure, will see progress in this area accelerate rapidly in the coming years. Botswana Health sector should follow the trend in the use of these electronic gadgets.

10. In education, ICTs are acting as one of the main platforms for disseminating knowledge. This marks perhaps the biggest shift in education since the founding of the first great ancient higher-learning institutions, which essentially depended on the model of physical lectures.

11. Some of the institutions of higher learning in Botswana today specialise in distance learning, and many of them depend mostly on online content. This could have never happened without ICTs and broadband, which have brought two crucial new forces to play: the elimination of distance and the democratisation of information and knowledge.

12. Ladies and Gentlemen, let us not forget that in our discussions we have to come up with ideas of how we can overcome the challenges that could impede broadband penetration. The challenges are many but one may highlight just a few as:
 - Lack of investment and funding in ICTs;

- Limited demand and access to online local content;
- Lack of employment opportunities for our ICT graduates;
- limited infrastructure based competition within the market; and
- Cyber crime

13. In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, we should realise that investment in undersea cable systems and optical fibre systems can only serve us well as long as access networks are fully developed. In that regard I expect to see a strategy that clearly defines and designs last mile access connectivity which will benefit all.

It should be a National Broadband Plan which will propel the realisation of long term national strategic goals. Lastly it should be implementable and realisable and value for money.

14. I wish you fruitful deliberations.

15. Pula Bagaetsho.