

**Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF)**

**Project Overview Remarks by**

**Martin Mokgware, Chief Executive of BOCRA**

**during the Occasion of the Launch of the**

**UASF Schools Competitivity and Computerization Project.**

**Lokgwabe Primary School**

**12 March 2019**

**Protocol observed**

I feel greatly privileged and honoured to join you for the third and final launch of ICT projects that have been proudly sponsored by Botswana Communications Regulatory Authority (BOCRA) through the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) across three areas of Mabutsane Sub-District, Ghanzi District and Kgalagadi District. The projects entail:

1. the Schools Computerisation and construction of Local Area Networks (LAN) in primary schools;
2. provision of Broadband Internet Connectivity;
3. Employment of One IT Officer for each of the 68 primary schools; and
4. the Upgrade of base stations to 3G/4G networks (these are high capacity telecommunications networks)

Prior to today, we held two launches in the villages of Mabutsane for the Mabutsane Sub District and Karakubis for the Ghanzi District.

These projects that we are launching have been implemented in a total of 68 villages across three regions at a cost of close to 87 Million Pula. Out of the 68 villages, the largest number, a total of thirty-five (35) are in the Kgalagadi District. The UASF will incur additional costs in excess of 30 million Pula towards employment of IT Officers on 3-year contracts.

Director of Ceremonies, BOCRA is mandated by the Communications Regulatory Authority Act, 2012 (CRA Act), ***to promote and ensure universal access with respect to provision of communications services***. To achieve this mandate, the CRA Act further mandates us to ***“impose a universal access and services levy on identified operators for purposes of funding universal access in the communications sector”***.

Following this mandate, the UASF was established through a Deed of Trust in April 2014 and is run by separate Board of Trustees. May I request members of the UASF Board of Trustees here present, to rise such that they can be recognised. It is this team of able men and women who carry the noble task of ensuring that remote areas across the country have access to communications systems and services at reasonable costs.

Today marks a significant milestone in our effort as BOCRA, the UASF and cooperating partners, to ensure access to broadband internet for all communities in unserved and underserved areas of Botswana. Back in 2017 the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Basic Education and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, come together to start the Schools’ Connectivity and Computerisation project. The project aims to contribute to the development of the education sector in the country, through providing internet connectivity and computer equipment to government schools across the three regions of Mabutsane, Kgalagadi and Ghanzi.

Each Primary School across the three regions received educational tablets and laptops, printers, photocopiers and broadband internet connection at 5 Megabits per second (Mbps). In addition, each primary school is serviced by a graduate IT Officer whose job it is to train learners and the community on the use of the equipment. Secondary schools under this project have also been provided with 5Mbps of dedicated internet connection and 30 laptops per school to add to their existing ICTs.

Thirty (30) villages in the Kagalagadi District have been connected to modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). The beneficiary villages are Kisa, Kokotsha, Makopong, Maleshe, Maralaleng, Hereford, Omaweneno, Werda, Mc Carthy’s Rust, Khuis, Kolonkwaneng, Bokspits, Gakhibana, Khawa, Rappelspan, Vaalhoek, Bogogobo, Middlepits, Hunhukwe, Inalegolo, Phuduhudu, Tshane, Ukhwi, Lehututu, Zutshwa, Lokgwabe, Monong, Maake, Ncaang and Ngwatle. We envisage that the communities exposed to these technologies will access Internet based services as espoused under our National Broadband Strategy.

Director of Ceremonies, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to, Mascom Wireless (Pty) Ltd for providing the schools with broadband Internet and upgrading the networks to high capacity. May I request the Mascom team to rise for your appreciation.

Equally, may I say thank you to Nanoline (Pty) Ltd, Beat Best Holdings and Ryder Investments for the supply and installation of computer equipment at all schools of the Kgalagadi District. May I similarly request their representatives to rise for us to appreciate them.

We take pride in our contribution to citizen empowerment through our engagement of local companies. It is through projects such as this one that private sector assists the Government in the fight against youth unemployment.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the role of cooperating partners in the successful implementation of this project. The Ministries of Transport and Communications; Basic Education as well as Local Government and Rural Development are critical partners to the success of the schools’ connectivity initiative.

I would also like to acknowledge contributors of the UASF levy, which have made the high expenditure on these projects possible. These include Telecommunications Network Operators, Private Broadcasters, Botswana Post and BOCRA.

As we hand over these projects to you:

* We appeal to all stakeholders, in particular, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Basic Education and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to implement and honour the obligations outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding;
* We ask that you take care of this equipment, so that more children continue to benefit;
* We encourage you to allow your children to learn the use these ICTs;
* We encourage parents to also take time to be taught ICT skills.

To all teachers, please take time to include ICTs in your teaching. They should become part and parcel of your everyday teaching aids and not just remain in the computer laboratories.

I thank you for your attention.

Pula bagaetsho.