

**Keynote address by Hon. Onkokame Kitso Mokaila, Minister of Transport and Communications on the occasion of the National Broadcasting Conference. 16-18 October 2018, Travel Lodge.**

Director of Ceremonies

Mr. Kabelo A. Ebineng, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Transport and Communications

Board Members here present

Mr Martin Mokgware, BOCRA Chief Executive

Chief Executives

Directors of Government Departments

Distinguished Conference facilitators

Media Fraternity

Conference Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to join you this morning as we seek to interrogate the broadcast environment guided by the theme; **“The future of broadcasting in the era of emerging technologies”**. The importance of media in our country cannot be over emphasised. Media constitute a very important pillar of our democratic process. Our National Vision 2036 espouses Prosperity For All and the media is an integral component of this ideal. Media is critical in our concerted efforts to create a knowledge base, promote freedom of expression and will continue to provide effective oversight of the performance of other arms of government.

Radio broadcasting in Botswana has come a long way starting from the 60’s when we launched AM radio broadcasting, Radio Bechuanaland in Mafikeng and the 70’s when we launched the better-quality FM broadcasting. Over time radio broadcasting evolved to even a better-quality stereo FM. Recently we have seen enhancements such as Radio Data System (RDS). Similarly, television has also experienced development over time. In 1999 we launched our analogue terrestrial television and in 2016 digital terrestrial service was rolled out. These developments led to improvements in the quality of broadcast signal and enabled value-added services like data services and mobile. Private sector broadcasting has equally grown with the licensing of 3 private FM stations and lately licensing of several broadcasting categories by our Regulator.

Government has invested heavily in broadcasting resulting in least 90% population coverage for radio and 80% with terrestrial TV. Through satellite technology, broadcasting services achieve 100% population coverage. However, media in Botswana still has a lot of room to grow in terms of geographic coverage, variety of services and diversity of content. Government is aware that our large geographic territory of our country coupled with low population density makes provision of communications services a major challenge. It is for this reason that government has approved sharing of government infrastructure with the provate sector in pursuit of Public Private Partnership (PPP).

Following the approval, all the communications transmission infrastructure has been transferred to the Botswana Fibre Networks (BoFiNet) to facilitate sharing with commercial entities. The sharing model extends to production studios to facilitate growth of the creative sector. Currently a team is carrying out due diligence on the implementation of this decision. We expect the project to be completed in ????, but we will ensure we leverage quick wins as we go through the process.

My Ministry is also working with the Attorney General’s Office to finalise the Communications Regulatory Authority Act Regulations. Consultations with all stakeholders have been held and work is in progress to finalise the regulations by December 2018 to provide a predictable and transparent regulatory environment. We are also conscious as government that a national policy on broadcasting is necessary to guide the development of a competitive broadcasting sector that offers diversity and plurality of choice. To this end, a **National Policy on Broadcasting** remains a priority of my ministry.

As we aim to diversify our economy away from minerals, government wants to exploit the potential that communications technologies including broadcasting offer in creating employment and facilitating innovation. Currently our commercial broadcasting licensees have employed 384 youth. With our institutions of learning churning graduates thousands of graduates annually. In our continued efforts to increase the contribution of broadcasting to the national economy, government recently created a television youth channel that is expected to increase demand for local content thereby facilitating growth of the creative sector.

Our objective as government is to ensure that all citizens have access to information regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic status. We also recognise that the future of broadcasting lies in provision and utilisation of broadband services. To this end, we have established the Universal Service and Access Fund (UASF) to facilitate the roll out of broadband and other broadcasting services beyond major cities and villages. I am disappointed that the commercial broadcasters have not been able to benefit from this Fund because of inability to mutually agree a common project to be funded. I suppose during this conference we will be frank enough to iron out things that hamper our growth as a sector including a critical self-introspection of individual industry players and not just criticism of government.

As I conclude Director of Ceremonies, let me reiterate that consumer expectations, coupled with the ever-changing technologies continue to change the broadcasting landscape. In this globalised world, consumers require diversity and entertainment, information and participation at local and international level. Clearly traditional broadcasting alone will not satisfy these demands. The theme of this Conference, **“The future of broadcasting in the era of emerging technologies”**, reminds us as a sector to **adapt or perish** as we live in the era of constant change with abundant opportunities. Therefore, It is opportune that we are meeting as the industry stakeholders to chat the way forward for our collective relevance and survival.

Director of Ceremonies let me conclude by wishing this conference a productive three days of deliberations and networking. To our regional and international guests, please do find time to go around and appreciate what Botswana has to offer.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Pula