

**Speech by Hon. Dorcas Makgato M.P.,**

**Minister of Transport and Communications**

**during the launch of the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF) Schools Computerisation and Broadband Connectivity project.**

**12 March 2019, Lokgwabe Primary School**

**Protocol observed!**

Good morning. I feel greatly privileged and honoured to join you on this historic day of the launch of the broadband Internet connectivity and schools Computerisation project as well as upgrading of telecommunications networks by Mascom Wireless in collaboration with BOCRA and the Universal Access and Service Fund (UASF).

In his inaugural speech, His Excellency the President, Dr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi made a commitment to “Promoting digitisation across both the public and private sectors, so as to ensure the availability of real time information in order to expedite decision-making and service delivery, as well as to grow the domestic ICT sector and create jobs particularly for the youth”. This commitment is anchored on the country’s digitisation aspiration encapsulated in the National Broadband Strategy (NBS) which has a vision “to connect every citizen, business and communities to a high-speed broadband infrastructure at appropriate quality of services and affordable prices”.

The National Broadband Strategy was envisioned to improve the broadband Internet penetration throughout the country. Its objective is to ensure that 90% of the population has access to high speed broadband connectivity to enable provision of high capacity and high-speed broadband services such as video streaming, IP television and research in institutions of learning.

Today we are gathered here to witness an initiative whose objective is to leverage broadband internet connectivity to change the lives of the people of Kgalagadi District for the better. The project is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Transport and Communications; Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. It has provided internet and ICT equipment to all primary schools of the Kgalagadi District and upgraded all mobile base stations in the area to high speed capacity of 3G or better.

As the Ministry of Transport and Communications, our commitment is to ensure that all Batswana benefit from all forms of communications regardless of their location on the map of Botswana. This is a commitment the we are pursuing with passion as we know the role that ICTs play in enabling all other sectors of the economy. It is for this reason that we targeted Kagalagadi District, together with Mabutsane and Ghanzi as our first priority in our effort to bring less ICT serviced communities closer to the better serviced parts of the country and the world. I glad that our counterparts, the Ministry of Basic Education, and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development share our vision and gladly accepted the invitation to walk this journey together.

The ICT infrastructure deployment we are witnessing today, potentially enables the people of this region to participate effectively in the global economy. However, the honours rest with the people themselves to take keen interest in learning how to use the gadgets in order to derive maximum benefit. We should not fall into the trap of using the equipment merely for entertainment and access to social media. I advise you to, instead explore and exploit the business opportunities that these gadgets offer to diversifying and sustaining your livelihoods from over reliance on subsistence agriculture.

Some of the renowned world business leaders today have made it in life through ICTs. ICTs offer business opportunities that require the least capital investment compared to most other business areas. Public Awareness and Education Campaigns; ICT research, innovation and development; Local Content Development; and Digital literacy Education programmes are some of the areas that can be exploited by someone just sitting in front of a computer.

Director of Ceremonies, it is important to highlight that the use of these ICT facilities, particularly the Internet, requires self-discipline and correct judgement call to distinguish what is good from what is bad. I should therefore, encourage anyone who will benefit from the use of the equipment to exercise that self-discipline and make correct judgement calls.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to thank our cooperating partners, Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development for conceiving and delivering a project that targets particularly young people. In years to come, Botswana will rely on ICT graduates from this area, who learnt through this very equipment, to compete and do business with leading countries in ICTs.

It will be remiss of me not to thank BOCRA and the UASF for the generous sponsorship. The advent of mobile technology in Botswana enhanced our lives in ways never before imagined and it is all thanks to the regulatory body, BOCRA. The rate at which Internet usage is also growing shows that Batswana will in a few years to come have significantly changed the way they live their lives. Therefore, investment in ICTs such as this one, is a must in today’s lives.

Finally allow me to thank Mascom Wireless, as the main contractor in the delivery of this project for its commitment to partnering with government for the development of communications in this country. This is a true example of Public Private Partnership. To all the other contractors and stakeholders, you equally deserve commendation for the success of the project.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Pula!