

**ITU Regional Workshop on ICT Accessibility for Persons
with Disabilities for the Africa Region**

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ZIMBABWE PAPER

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1. Background

As in all other countries, Zimbabwe is no exception when it comes to challenged society. In 1992, the legislative arm therefore saw it fit to look into welfare of this community and came up with regulations which are meant to promote and protect this community. These are outlined in the act known as the Zimbabwe Disabled persons Act Chapter 17:01. Since then, groups to deal with different aspect of the Act were outline. These are the government (executive), legislature (parliament) and research and academic.

The Executive, legislature and research and academic institutions have critical roles to play in the implementation of the ICTs policy.

I. Government

Government made provisions through Disabled Persons Act of 1992 for;

- a) The welfare and rehabilitation of the disabled persons
- b) Establishment of bodies the oversee the implementation of the policies thus the government has made it possible to;
 - i. Develop technical capacity for ICTs sector programme development and implementation in all public sector organisations.
 - ii. Provide leadership in the implementation of ICTs policy at all levels.
 - iii. Develop broad ICTs skills and knowledge base in the public sector.
 - iv. Develop political, institutional, economic, legal and security frameworks to facilitate development and use of ICTs.
 - v. Enact legislation to establish a National ICTs Authority and a converged National ICTs Regulator.
 - vi. Develop change and project management skills required to integrate ICTs into the public sector.
 - vii. Mobilise adequate technical and financial resources and build PPPs to implement the ICTs policy.
 - viii. Undertake continuous monitoring and evaluations of ICTs programme interventions and outcomes.
 - ix Undertake adequate policy reviews in consultation with stakeholders.

II. Parliament

In implementing the ICTs policy, the parliament advocates for the allocation of financial resources to sustain implementation as well as monitor effective utilisation of resources. It also ensures that good governance principles are applied and adhered to.

III. Research Institutions (RIs)

RIs are working on expanding and consolidating research and development in the use of ICTs. This arm also uses ICTs to extend scientific and research facilities taking advantage of the Internet. RIs assumed leadership in testing new technologies and creating networked and multidisciplinary research teams on ICTs. They are mandated to initiate and support ICTs innovation and incubation, technology transfer and its adaptation.

2. Current ICT infrastructure in Zimbabwe

The deregulation of the telecommunications sector resulted in the issuing of licenses to several players in the ICTs sector. A number of players have been issued with licenses for specific services.

The sector is composed of Government owned and Private owned players. These are divided into the following categories:

Fixed Public Telephone

Currently 1 licensee is operating while the other failed to start due to some other reasons.

Cellular (Mobile) Network

Currently 3 licensees are operating. These operate in the 900MHz and 1800 MHz bands. Competition is still weak in terms of price and products on offer to customers. Subscriber stands just above 1 million.

Public Data Service

Currently 3 licensees operating and 1 is yet to start operations.

Internet Access Services –

Currently 4 are operating and 2 are yet to start operations. Competition is still low in this category as they offer almost similar packages and none of them is innovative enough to lure more clients than the other.

3. Major concerns in the ICT Sector

Policy makers and other stakeholder in the ICT sector have the following concerns;

- Inadequate communications infrastructure
- Inadequate ICTs facilities and skills
- Inadequate institutional arrangements and financial resources
- Inadequate public and private partnerships
- Limited data management capacity national bandwidth on national gateway

4. Strategy

Studies have showed that the aged respond slowly to change and shun the use of new technologies. ICTs should accommodate these elderly and also respond to the special needs of the physically challenged to ensure their inclusion and participation. Therefore ICTs must encourage societal participation by;

1. Ensure gender equality and equity in access to and the use of ICTs across all sectors of the economy.

2. Bridge the digital divide in relation to the youths, aged/elderly, and the disabled and rural communities across all sectors of the economy.
3. Create opportunities for youths in the development and use of ICTs particularly in relation to content, employment and income generation

5. Statistics

Currently, Zimbabwe has a number of organizations taking care of persons with disabilities and some of them have managed to excel in world events. These range from mentally retarded to the blind. The society itself has more or less 10% to 12% of its population as challenged persons. Yearly there programmes meant to bring society awareness of the need to bring about development to these challenged individuals of our country, which are spearheaded by the government.

6. Conclusion.

It is of importance to taken the needs of this group into serious levels by engaging the industry (equipment vendors as well as operators) into developing accessible infrastructure and equipment the should cater for the group. In so doing, it should also be the responsibility of the government to create incentives for the industry through reductions in taxes they pay for the development in line with this societal group. By so doing, it should be possible to bring ICTs closer to them and get them to develop with the industry. It is also vital if their inputs are also taken into account as we move towards accessibility.

7. References

Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe: "Postal and Telecommunication Act [Chapter 12:05]"

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