

Contribution from Uganda's Communications Commission

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RURAL COMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

One of the functions of UCC as spelt out by the Communications Act of 1997 is to establish and administer a Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF).

The Fund is essentially intended to act as a means of intervention to ensure that basic communication services of acceptable quality are accessible, at affordable prices, and at reasonable distances, by all people in Uganda.

While setting up the Fund, the following was noted:

- a. That communication plays a key role in the social and economic development of any country.
- b. That there are communities or sections of the population, which lack "basic" access to communications.
- c. That competition alone may not always be adequate to ensure equitable distribution of basic communication services.

The following are the principles of universal access in Uganda:

1. Affordable and sustainable ICT infrastructure

This is one of the overriding objective of universal access policy in Uganda. It is done while ensuring competitive and technological neutrality as well as sustainability and scalability of the technology used.

2. Non-discriminatory but competitive provision of subsidies for ICT development

Recognising the fact that ICT services may not be commercially viable in some parts of the country, the universal access funds are used to provide minimum subsidy concessions to operators on competitive basis to provide ICT services in rural and underserved areas. The purpose of the subsidies is to leverage the investment by the private sector participants i.e. used to subsidise the uneconomic portion of the service. All this is done while ensuring transparency in all aspects of programme funding.

3. Cohesive public-private sector partnerships

In ensuring universal access, the private sector is a very important partner in the investment programme. The need to build a cohesive public-private sector partnership is very crucial for the universal access programme. The public – private sector partnerships derive their roles both on the supply and demand sides. On the supply side, the private sector operators in the ICT sector pay a percentage levy on their gross earnings into the Fund. On the demand side, the private sector receives subsidies to provide services in areas where they desirable but not commercially viable.

4. Community capacity building

Recognising the fact that ICT services might be new in some areas of the country, the Fund is used to subsidise the establishment of ICT training in specified locations. By doing this, it is one way of responding to community ICT needs.

5. Appropriate content responsive to community needs

While ensuring universality, it has been found prudent to develop content that appropriate for the community. The content ranges from education, agriculture, and health to governance, administration and trade.