WTIS-2015: MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE POLICY STATEMENT

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1. Introduction

On many occasions, people think about complicated ICT solutions where simple ones are the answer, at least for the beginning. Speakers come up with intricate theories which end up confusing those who are searching for answers to their socio-economic challenges in their respective countries. As the cycle repeats, a state of resignation sets in the minds of solution seekers. A lot of valuable time is lost as a result, and target beneficiaries of ICT innovations like marginalised communities, people with disabilities, entrepreneurs, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and big businesses suffer delays in getting reprieve.

The same observation is made in cases of research, where delays in conducting research in an identified ICT field causes loss of valuable time with consequent loss of market position, competitiveness and intellectual right. Some solution providers do not seem to seek an understanding of the needs of the communities for whom the solutions are being designed, or the appropriateness of the ICT solutions to the communities' socio-economic challenges. In the end, the ICT solutions become a misfit. Thinking big but acting small and timely at the beginning is the answer.

In addressing the three discussion topics below, my comments shall lean heavily on circumstances prevailing in Developing Countries like Zimbabwe, whose conditions are obviously different from those in Developed Economies.

A lot of information has already been collected about the role of ICT in sustainable development and its prowess to provoke the subtle innovative potential into new inventions that lead to wealth creation. While more information is always welcome, we need to synthesise what we already have into applicable and implementable knowledge and wisdom. This entails conducting research that lead to new inventions now than later. Timing is of essence in commercialising patentable innovations. It is advisable not to continuously chase the illusive hope that better information to build enough confidence to start implementation will come from the next conference or seminar. What comes out of the next symposium is more information and confusion rather than incentive to commence implementation.

2. Discussion Topics

(a) What is the role of ICT in achieving sustainable development goals including in areas such as poverty reduction, education, economic growth or inclusive societies?

The world has already witnessed ICTs and the Internet having a major impact on economic and social development. The Internet, in particular, has become a critical enabler of economic and social change, transforming how Government, business and citizens interact and offer new ways of addressing development challenges. ICTs, therefore, can support the delivery of the SDGs. Since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have now been formally agreed and translated into practical measures (Targets) that will support their implementation, the UN Agencies (UNCTAD, UNESCO

and ITU) have already begun identifying synergies between SDGs and WSIS Action Lines. In this context therefore, ICTs are enablers to achieving SDG1 (Poverty Reduction); SGD4 (Quality Education); SG8 (Decent Education and Economic Growth) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities).

ICTs enable the design of solutions that can be employed to save money and time and alleviate poverty. For example, in Zimbabwe, pensioners travel to town and urban centres to collect their monthly pay-outs. In some cases, after subtracting the amount of money each one of them requires for the round trip like $12, leaves a small take home amount like $3.00. If the pensioner tries to have some food during the day, he takes home nothing, or has to borrow more money in order for him/her to return home! There are cases where the transport expense is more that the pension pay-outs. The same is observed in re-charging electricity, where the re-charge amount is very small compared to the transport cost to travel to a re-charge point. Consequently, some people decide to abandon the pension pay-outs or in the case of electricity, resign to stay in darkness.

A simple ICT solution of creating an agency in each locality which is accessible on foot by the households in that locality is the simple answer. But more importantly, such an ICT solution is sustainable because it does not require other interventions that may lead to the collapse of the arrangement and disadvantage the communities.

In Zimbabwe the greatest collective contributor to the staple food are communal farmers, who after harvesting their maize, deliver it to the Grain Marketing Board and then wait for payment from the same organisations, with depots at specific locations around the country. The farmers can be paid through mobile money systems to prevent them from travelling to set payment centres, thereby increasing their profit margins.

A number of people who need services do not have money to buy mobile phones, and yet they also require mobile money services like receiving money from relatives in urban centres and abroad in the diaspora. This gap be can be addressed by setting up *"virtual mobile phones"*, for the purposes of receiving money, where one phone can have a database of unique numbers identified with the households in the community. The receiving agent can then arrange to *"deliver"* the money received by the agent to the relevant unique number in that community.

In summary therefore, in Zimbabwe, in order to adapt ICTs to avert the risk of exacerbating existing digital divides, it is pertinent to interrogate cost drivers for network expansion so as to facilitate faster and cheaper service roll-out to all areas. This may be possible with increased injection of funds into, and utilization of, the Universal Services Fund to assist network expansion in rural areas. Use of satellite technology, particularly the KA band, where it would take long to 'bury fiber', will be considered. Here is where innovation comes up with solutions to improve on inclusion. However, caution should be taken not to introduce inappropriate technologies, as some communication devices may not appropriate to certain communities.

(b) (i) How can ICT drive innovation and entrepreneurship?

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph that ICT solution providers must endeavour to understand ICT solutions needed by communities rather than think for them and impose on them unworkable and confusing ones. If this basic guideline is followed, the

new business opportunities that can be unlocked by the resultant innovations are immense. For example, the young people spend most of their time on the mobile phones on social media. They enjoy the multiplicity and complexity of the APPS on the mobile. Young people have plenty of time in their lives to do that. Besides, they use the gadgets to play and learn at the same time.

By comparison, the old rural folk need a simple and robust mobile phone that can withstand the rough environment and handling it can be subjected to by its old handlers. For this to be more meaningful, not many APPs are required but just only one or two to avoid confusion in their use. In general, the old rural folk who are the bread winners do not need smart phones, but simple phones that can receive and send money; receive and send calls. In this vein, an innovator can come up with a small mobile handset with one APP on it, but one that is waterproof and can withstand hot weather and dusty environments. Because of its simplicity, the small phone can be priced low, hence affordable and available to the rural folk. This can yield immense downstream benefits through inclusion of the rural folk in the mainstream economy of the country. At the same time, the innovator of the small phone stands to benefit from the small phone innovation.

The same concept can be proffered to health delivery in the rural areas where the doctor to patient ratio is very low. A workable and practical ICT solution in this case may entail providing clinics and hospitals with simple mobile phones loaded with medical databases and only one APP suitable for nurses. The nurse can consult the mobile phone when attending to patients, including complicated medical cases which require a doctor. Through this way, health delivery services could be enhanced and mortality rates improved, and yet the solution adopted is simple. It is after such rudimentary strategies have worked that better, expensive, more elaborate versions of tele-medicine can be implemented in extending the boundary of medicine or health care.

In rural areas where electricity is unavailable or erratic, some innovative ideas of re-charging phones using solar power and any mechanical device can be invented, leading to more generation of wealth by the inventors. In the same vein, ICT gadgets suitable for use by the deaf, dumb and blind can be invented if people are given the motivation, incentives and funding.

The above examples revolve around the concept of taking service to the people rather than people visiting service centres, as is currently the prevalent practice. The approach is people-centric, simple and easy to implement with observable impact in terms of service accessibility, affordability and the inclusion of marginalised communities in the mainstream economy. This can go a long way in bridging the digital divide between gap between the urban dwellers and the rural folk.

On the eve of travelling to Hiroshima for the WTIS-15, the writer of this paper asked a guy called Tafadzwa Nyamuzihwa, what his expectations were from the ICT industry and the Ministry. *His response, which is appended to the end of this statement, captured the views expressed herein, also captured the wrong assumptions about the target users of new equipment or innovations which are generally made by solution designers.*

(ii) What are the requirements and preconditions for unlocking the potential of ICT for innovation, and what is the role of businesses and the public sector?

There is a correlation between the level of ICT access and use and its potential in driving development. Low ICT access and use is linked to the reduction of the extent to which people can use the Internet to achieve the SDGs. It is not enough, however, to place ICTs onto the Development Agenda without also addressing other critical elements of the development equation. A nation's regulatory environment in particular can have a profound impact on ICT utilization and ICT industry growth. There is need for periodic and active engagement between policymakers and ICT users and the industry on a range of ICT policy issues that affect users and the industry, including such issues as property rights, international trade and investment, competition, publicly funded research, online security and privacy, technology standards, e-Government, education and digital literacy, ICT skills development, affordable financing, incentives for private-sector ICT investment, and telecommunication infrastructure and access.

It is of paramount importance to overcome the inertia of commencing new research and driving out the fear that the research may lead to failure in order to delve meaningfully and confidently into ICT research. Creation of incentives and rewards, relaxation of prohibitive legal *"irritants"* are additional pre-requisites for ICT innovations. After all this has been satisfied, availability of funds to break new grounds is a must.

But perhaps the strongest driver in unlocking the ICT potential is the researcher's mental disposition towards innovation. This requires a paradigm shift in approaching creation of knowledge and wealth for humanity. An idea must be geminated small at a microcosmic level. Consistent with *Peter Drucker's* advice, *"Big thoughts are fun to romanticize, but it's many small insights coming together that bring big ideas into the world."* Indeed, better and more information will emerge from the subsequent seminars. But a wise researcher uses such new information which is subsumed from attending many subsequent workshops, conferences and symposia, to panel beat a research already underway. The approach will hasten the creation of the new ICT invention, patent it ahead of competitors, use it to create wealth for the entrepreneur, use it to bring services and conveniences to communities and develop society. The ICT creation must be one that has observable impact by the target societal groups.

Businesses can create funds for Research and Development for Innovation and Commercialisation. For example, in Zimbabwe, a fund for Young Innovators is being set up to support young people, technical institutions and universities in coming up with new ICT inventions. Injections into the fund will come from a partnership of willing businesses, network operators and Government through Public Private Partnerships.

(c) *What data are required to monitor sustainable development, growth and innovation?*

Assumptions behind global indicators and indices currently reflect the political economy of mature economies and democracies of the North. Very different access and use trajectories in the Global South make some standard indicators meaningless and others very difficult to gather. In the Post-2015 period, there should be a deliberate effort to address the appropriateness and relevance of indicators to take into account the different levels of development. Focus should also be directed at statistics pertaining to society as a whole i.e. Development indicators relating to the rate of population change, standard of living, investment and technology development.

Currently, the UN Statistics Division is surveying National Statistical Offices to ascertain the availability of data for possible SDG indicators. Both existing and new data systems will require continuous strengthening over coming years, and many aspects of a comprehensive SDG monitoring system can only be implemented over several years. However, important decisions will need to be taken soon as the world is to start implementing the Goals in 2016. Different levels of review have been suggested - Indicators will be the backbone of monitoring the SDGs at local, national, regional and global levels. They will serve as a management tools for governments to develop, strategies, allocate resources and monitor progress effectively and efficiently as well as ensure the accountability of Governments and other stakeholders for achieving the SDGs.

Regarding Zimbabwe, and to approach the matter in a more practical and simple manner, the specific barometers that can be used to measure the impact of ICTs solutions can include

- proportion of population below USD1.25 per day
- proportion of population living below national poverty line
- differentiated by urban and rural
- proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption
- maternal mortality ratio
- neonatal, infant, and under-five years mortality rates
- primary school completion rates for girls and boys
- new socio-economic activities
- reduced mortality rates
- increased connectivity
- monetary movements and number of mobile phones
- new services and infrastructures

3. Conclusion

ICTs have brought new opportunities to people of all ages and in all countries including Zimbabwe, enabling them to achieve more in less time and to discover new ways of communicating and relaxing. The use of ICTs has fuelled astounding productivity and economic growth and has truly transformed the way people work, learn, and socialize. To date, however, the benefits of ICTs have not been spread as equally as one would have hoped. This has led some to question whether ICTs have a meaningful role to play in bridging the divide between developed and developing countries. While it is unrealistic to believe that ICTs alone can provide the solution that will solve the challenges facing the international development community, we firmly believe that ICTs hold tremendous untapped potential as an enabler of development. We also recognize that addressing the needs of underserved populations will require commitment and determination by both the public and private sectors. We are convinced that by working together, governments, industry, and the populations they serve can create new opportunities and leverage the power of ICTs to help people everywhere realize their full potential.

ANNEX 1

WHAT THE ICT SECTOR NEEDS TO DO FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

(From the eyes of a blind man ……. Tafadzwa Nyamuzihwa)
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26 November 2015.

ICT is the key to accessibility and independence. ICT is the key to accessibility of information and therefore empowerment of individuals and corporates. The world today has been taken over by technology which is a great thing to all people. Now when you look at the ICT sector, people with disabilities are a disadvantaged group within the society. If you look at the first world countries people with disabilities have access to different technologies appropriate to people with disabilities because new innovations were created because of the availability of funding from government grants and sponsorship from different stakeholders. So the pupils in the developed world literary have access to 95% of different ICT resources.

We look at the developing world and access to ICT. Technology is being released to the market every day with different models. These products are either not disability friendly to different groups with disabilities or they are beyond the reach of many disabled pupils. E.g. the blind would use the Nokia E72, E5, E63, not because it was user friendly since the features in it were not accessible but because then handsets would enable the blind to install a voice over. That aspect could assist a blind person to navigate the phone. But alas, those phones have been withdrawn from the market and replaced by smart phones with advanced features and APPs, including touch screen phone capabilities.

The best phone a blind person can use is an i-phone. But how many blind people can afford one? The world has become digital, a great development indeed because it enables one to be able to communicate like compiling this document and subsequently sending it to you. But I'm totally blind. Therefore technology gives access to information, privacy and empowerment. How many deaf, blind, physical disabled people have been denied access to information, education, independence and privacy due to lack to access of technology.

ICT policies need to be put in place and then implemented. At country level, policies need to be put in place in order for disabilities to access information using appropriate ICTs. E.g, every Internet café in the country needs to have a computer for people with disabilities in order for them to get a license to operate. By 2018 all learning institutions should have 5 computers for people with disabilities in order for such people to enroll. Companies around the world who design technology need to be told that any new product must have features that can be used by people with disabilities before it goes onto the market.

This allows the people with disabilities to make choices. Infrastructure like hotels need to have voice in escalators with buttons giving a voice output. In addition, they shouldn't be too high that one in a wheelchair is not able to reach the access buttons. The same can be said about conveniences for people with other forms of disabilities like without legs and arms.

Governments need to also have duty free on all ICT products purchased by pupils with disabilities this is to enable them to have access to these resources ICT has become the backbone to an independent living. Access to information and privacy but this can be only achieved if we all come together to draft clear policies that enable ICT and pupils with

disabilities. When drafting these policies the pupils themselves with disabilities need to be involved to ensure clear policies are drafted!