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**THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORS'
ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (TRASA) IN REGIONAL
COOPERATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Southern Africa is among the areas in the world where the need for information and communications services (info-communications) far exceeds supply. The countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) recognized that, individually, they couldn't fulfill the needs of their peoples because their markets and resources are limited. They have opted for cooperation and regional integration in order to pool resources and to create an enlarged market in an endeavor to attract investments. This presentation provides an overview on TRASA and its role in promoting regional cooperation.

THE SADC REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND CO-OPERATION

In 1996 the SADC sub-region adopted the SADC protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology. The protocol says objectives and strategic goals for the development of the telecommunications sector and the other sectors that it covers. The objectives are

- ❖ The provision of adequate service to meet the diverse needs of industry and residential users;
- ❖ Universal service for basic telecommunications service and universal access to advanced telecommunication and information services; and
- ❖ Regional and global connectivity.

The harmonization of policies and regulations, as well as regional cooperation, but without forgetting international cooperation, are among the key strategies that the SADC Member States have adopted under the Protocol for the realization of the objectives. It is in pursuance of these strategies that the protocol encourages the establishment or regional organization of regulators such as TRASA and the other stakeholders.

In 1998 the SADC countries adopted a policy on Telecommunications and Model guidelines on “Making ICT a priority in Turning SADC into an information-based Economy” National regulators undertake the supervision of the implementation of the policies enunciated in the protocol and these other regional instruments, with co-ordination at regional level.

ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANISATION OF TRASA

TRASA was inaugurated in September 1997. Its constitution became effective in April 1998 after which it gradually became operational.

- ❖ Co-ordinate regulatory matters and to exchange ideas, views and experience on all aspects of regulation of the telecommunications sector throughout the Southern Africa region.
- ❖ Promote the establishment and operational of efficient, adequate, and cost –effective telecommunications networks and services the Southern Africa region which meet the diverse needs of customers while being economically sustainable.
- ❖ Facilitate a uniform level of understanding of regulatory matters; and
- ❖ Maximize the utilization of scarce resources in specialist areas of telecommunications.

Membership : Regulatory authorities which have been set up separately from operators and from Government Ministries responsible for telecommunication policy, are eligible for full membership of TRASA. At present such autonomous regulators have been established in 11 out of 14 countries in the SADC region. These are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Governments of the other three countries which are yet to establish autonomous regulatory authorities, participate in the activity of TRASA as observer members.

ACTION PROGRAMME AND STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN

Both TRASA and its members are relatively young and lack capacity for developing the necessary regulatory tools. In 1999 TRASA adopted an Action Programme for the period 1999-2001. The Programme is an intensive initiative intended to build the capacity of TRASA as an organization and of its members individually in their formative stages. The Programme sets down strategic and time-bound actions in the following priority areas.

- a) The promotion of TRASA and advocacy for the implementation of the SADC instruments that impact its work for example the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology and the Model Telecommunication Bill.
- b) The development of the regulatory skills for the personnel of its members.
- c) The establishment of an information system that will ensure the availability of information to investors and other interested parties.
- d) The development of policy guidelines and model regulations in critical areas of regulation such as universal service. Licensing interconnection, tariffs, standards numbering frequency planning and competition.

Mindful of the need for long-term planning in order to be able to operate effectively, TRASA adopted a five-year strategic business plan in September, 2000.

CHALLENGES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE GOALS

As might be expected, TRASA has faced a number of constraints and challenges, especially the lack of financial and human resources. Most of the members of TRASA also lack resources for now. Membership contributions can hardly meet the requirements for capacity building and policy development. TRASA has depended largely on cooperating partners for assistance for the implementation of its programmes.

Despite these constraints and challenges and with the support of partners and the commitment of its members, TRASA has registered significant achievements. For example, TRASA has completed the development of model policy guidelines and regulation of tariff and interconnection as well as a SADC Region Frequency Allocation (Band) Plan. The SADC ministers responsible for telecommunications and information approved these instruments early in November, 2000. They are now ready for use by national regulators, with any necessary adaptation. Also, TRASA members have coordinated their positions at international meetings and shared their experiences with other regulatory organizations whenever possible.

TRASA plans under its strategic business plan to consolidate its gains.

In particular TRASA intends to continue building its capacity and that of its members and to harmonize policies through the adoption of appropriate model policy guidelines in all priority areas including the empowerment of women and economically disadvantaged persons. In order to achieve these goals TRASA will need continued support from cooperating partners but it is also determined to become self-sustaining as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

From its experience in co-operating at sub-regional level TRASA is fully convinced of the benefits of co-operation and would like to see mechanisms for sharing experiences, among regulators on a regular basis, established not only at continental level but also globally. TRASA will be happy to be an active partner in promoting such co-operation.

THE PRESENTER

E.J. NAMANJA, Chairman of TRASA, Director General of MACRA and Engineer with extensive experience in telecommunications operations and management.

1974-188 Telecommunications Engineer with Malawi Posts & Telecommunications Cooperation, responsible for planning, operations and projects executions.

1989-1996 Principal of an International Telecommunication Training Institution (Multi-Country Training Centre) in Blantyre, responsible for curriculum development and management of the Training funding for some SADC countries (BLMS).

1997 Participated in the development of Chapter 6 on Infrastructure including communications for vision 2020 projects, which maps out the way forward for Malawi to year 2020.

1997-1998 As National Project Coordinator spearheaded the development of the Malawi Communications Sector Government Policy Statement and its enabling Communications Act.