Botswana
COMMENTS ON SOME OF THE PROPOSED THEMES OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY.

As a member of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the United Nations, Botswana whole heartedly welcomes the holding of the World Summit on Information Society and believes that the country will benefit from the anticipated out come of the summit, namely, to “develop and foster a clear statement of political will and concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the information Society, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake.”

As outlined in the country’s long term vision, Vision 2016 and actualized in the National Development Plan 9, Botswana seeks to empower her people to fully participate in the information age. To this end, a new Ministry of Communication Science and Technology has been created which will over see the coordination and implementation of the national information vision, policy and information technology strategies.

We therefore would like to thank the Secretary General of the ITU for the Invitation to the Second Preparatory Committee meeting as well as to provide input to the first draft of the Declaration and Action plan. To this end we fully support all the proposed themes. But for the purposes of impact we focus our comments on four of the six themes, which we believe will have the greatest impact in the realisation of the Information Society.

Building the infrastructure

The role of telecommunications, investment and technology in creating the Information Society infrastructure and bridging the Digital Divide.
Clearly there cannot be any talk of an information society without the infrastructure that enables the storage, retrieval, processing and conveyance of such information. Although Botswana has made many strides in laying the communication infrastructure that supports the creation of an information society, there remains a major challenge of bridging the digital divide to ensure equitable access to the knowledge pool. Particular caution must be exercised to ensure that developing countries like Botswana do not become dumping grounds for obsolete technology that limits their participation in the information society.

Obtaining sufficient international bandwidth for delivering web pages over the Internet is a major problem in most African countries. This is said to be due to high international tariffs and lack of circuit capacity. Until recently a few countries in Africa had international Internet links larger than 64 Kilobits per second (Kbps). Botswana has outgoing links of 5 Megabits per second (Mbps) or more. However this is not adequate.

Due to this bandwidth problem a number of Botswana’s Internet sites are hosted on servers located in Europe or US. When that happens traffic between subscribers of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the same city travel to US or Europe and back.

Improvement of bandwidth would enable further growth of the local e-industry and go a long way in enabling the country to fully participate in the information super high way.

Opening the gates

- Achieving universal and equitable access to the Information Society
- Meeting the needs of the developing world
- Information as a common public good

The current inequities in income distribution threaten the achievement of universal access to the information society. It is
therefore the responsibility of nations to guarantee such access. Action to this end must be seen as a priority to enable immediate participation of the rest of our societies in the knowledge market place. The longer it takes to achieve such universal access, the wider the digital divide will become. International efforts geared towards achieving universal access, particularly in developing countries must be fully supported and individual countries should spearhead the process of ensuring universal access.

The needs of users

- Consumer protection, privacy and security
- Relevant content, reflecting cultural diversity and the right to communicate
- Ethics of the Information Society
- User training
- Worker protection and workplace privacy

For many people, participation in the information society can be hindered by lack of relevant content. Currently it is quite clear that most of the content available in the internet reflects a limited cultural and socio economic scope. It is therefore imperative that regulatory and technological measures be taken to create an enabling environment for the generation and communication of relevant content reflecting multi cultural diversity and the right to communicate. We therefore support the African position as contained in the Bamako Declaration under the heading What Africa can contribute to the Information Society.

Developing a framework

- The roles of government, the private sector and civil society in shaping the Information Society
- Information as a common public good (public domain information)
- Intellectual property rights and legal exceptions
- Freedom of expression
- Telecommunication and Internet access tariff policies

Availability of infrastructure and relevant content alone is not enough without the policies and strategies that ensure widespread access and use of information. Botswana believes that trade in information can quite easily lead to the emergence of Information Ghetos where access to the quantity and quality of information is dependant on one's socio economic status. It is therefore crucial that efforts must be taken to guarantee availability of public information.

With regards to intellectual property rights, existing International Conventions that provide the framework for the protection of intellectual property rights are welcome indeed. However, educational and material support must be provided, especially to the marginalized communities so that they do not become victims of intellectual property piracy.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our total support for this global initiative and trust that our comments will prove useful to the Preparatory Committee and be incorporated into the draft Action Plan and Declaration.

Botswana Telecommunications Authority
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