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**BACKGROUND PAPER ON DATA
COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION IN
THE GAMBIA**

PRESENTED BY

MR LAMIN CAMARA
PRINCIPAL ICT OFFICER
MINISTRY OF ICT
THE GAMBIA

BACKGROUND PAPER ON ICT DATA COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION IN THE GAMBIA

Introduction

As data or indicators are used to help formulate policies, programmes, projects, among others, or monitor their progress, it has become a necessity for ICT data to be collected and disseminated. Information and data collection is difficult and at times impossible to conduct in most developing countries not excluding The Gambia. Statistical data compilation and dissemination in the country is prevalent but not regular and consistent as it should be. With regard to the role of the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS), there is no data collection desire and /or indicators in the area of ICTs. This is due to lack of awareness and adaptation of GBoS towards present trends and the need for new indices in relation to our socio-economic realities. However, data collection on the ICT sector was facilitated by the Department of State (Ministry) for Communications, Information and Information Technology (DOSCIIT) in 2006 through the support of UNECA Scan ICT Project. This was a follow up to the e-government baseline study conducted in 2003.

ICT Profile and Data

Table 1 : ICT SUBSCRIBER BASE

Indicators	2003	2006	2007	2008
Fixed Telephony	42,000	48,000	57,000	56,900
Mobile	221,520	430,000	570,000	900,000
Internet Users	42,180	48,620	53,808	67,520

Table 2 : Basic demographic/ICT indicators

Indicators	1983	1993	2003	2006	2007	2008
*Population	687,817	1,038,145	1,360,681	1,509,928f	1,550,656f	1,600,000f
Annual growth rate (%)	3.8	4.2	2.7	2.7	2.7	3.0
Teledensity (%)			3.08	3.18	3.67	3.56
Mobile density (%) /			16.28	28.48	36.76	56.25
Internet Users (%)			3.10	3.22	3.47	4.22

*Source : *Gambia Bureau Of Statistics (GBoS); f = forecast*

The Government under its liberalization and privatization strategy in the telecommunication sub-sector has shown a significant improvement in the availability and accessibility of services to Gambians. Presently, in addition to the incumbent operator, GAMTEL, we have a very competitive mobile industry with three GSM operators (GAMCEL, AFRICELL & COMIUM) operating under a conducive and flourishing market environment that offers choice to consumers. Our mobile penetration rate has reached 56% by end 2008 (See table 1 below). We want to improve this achievement and therefore efforts have been made to reduce the cost of interconnection and telephony in general to realize our policy goals of not only available access but affordability to all citizens. DOSCIIT has also granted a fourth GSM licence to an indigenous Company called QCELL to provide 3G services such as voice, data and video. The total mobile subscribers have reached 900,000 in 2008 and fixed lines are 57,000 with a stagnant growth since the CDMA fixed wireless expansion in 2007. The CDMA has increased Internet Users by 25.5% to 67,520, which pushes this indicator to 4.22% surpassing tele-density.

Consequently, the CDMA, internet cafes and GPRS by GSM operators has increased internet access drastically in the country. Access to ICT facilities rose due to institutions with internet access, giving opportunities to employees. However, individual or household access is yet to improve. Thus, the increase uptake of GPRS services and operation of the 3G licensed operator is poised to make and impact.

Statistics Collection

Data collection on ICT infrastructure, facilities and usage in the Gambia was undertaken by applying reference indicators identified by ITU, Infodev and other internationally agreed benchmarks. Mostly, data collection is made in consultation with service providers and based on data they provide especially with regard to tele-density, mobile density and Internet users computation. Collecting data was through desk research, followed by survey of institutions and households on ICT access, utilization and exploitation. The survey was done through sampling due to limited funds and time constraint. As a result the sampling frame was small, which might not reflect our ICT status. Consequently, stratification was done using the population data and preliminary figures on electricity availability in households from the 2003 Population and Housing Census. The data collection was through primary and secondary data gathering. The latest ICT indicator survey was completed in 2006 referred to as the Scan ICT. The population forecast of 1.5million from GBoS was used as the baseline. Thus, the population count is estimated to reach 1.6 million as at end 2008.

Dissemination of Data

ICT statistical data collected are disseminated through official channels and by the use of our postal service delivery system. In order to ease and extend access opportunities to such data, the SCAN ICT survey report is uploaded on the DOSCIIT and GBoS websites. The PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) for The Gambia has a chapter on ICT, which requires indicators to be provided and updated annually for donor information and national consumption. This is another means of disseminating our statistical data on ICT

Conclusions and Recommendations

Data collection is a comprehensive and resource oriented exercise that requires adequate human resource and most importantly funds to ensure an accurate, systematic and reliable exercise. Thus, among the findings of the Scan ICT survey, The Gambia is limited in human resources, skills and know how to not only collect ICT data but analyse it in a truly representative manner. The ICT indicators are not comprehensible to GBoS personnel and this inhibits adequate and appropriate collection and analysis. Also, apparent is the inability and limitations to collect certain data annually such as computer usage. Thus, there is the need to come up with a methodology and/or yardsticks to assess access to ICTs especially on Internet use and ownership ICT devices. Apparent is the possibility for the indicators on Internet usage to leapfrog due to the GPRS and 3G services being introduced. The rural electrification programme also presents an opportunity to increase accessibility and utility of Internet. The policy intervention of government to create community access centres will boost our information society initiatives.

The following are recommendations.

- Capacity building of GBoS personnel, the regulator and staff of the ICT ministry on data collection methodology and dissemination strategies.
- Technical and financial support from ITU and other relevant institutions to establish a reference ICT data and also assist in our data collection process.
- Devise mechanisms to collect and update data annually and improve the sampling frame to make the exercise representative and reflective.
- GBoS to ensure that ICT indicators are part of its comprehensive data collection exercise, subsequent surveys and census.
- Use information centres and libraries to disseminate data.
- Surveys need to be conducted to assess methodological approaches and foundation for future or subsequent surveys on ICT.