

Statement from participants in the “Civil Society Workshop on Open Access to ICT infrastructure in Africa” convened by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) on 28 October 2007 to coincide with the Connect Africa Summit, Kigali, October 2007

Kigali, 29 October 2007. We, as African civil society delegates, academicians, researchers, consumer interest groups, and internet service providers gathered to discuss the issue of connectivity to international, regional and national networks in Africa at the Hotel Chez Lando in Kigali, Rwanda, on 28th October 2007. Our discussions were in light of the publicised commitments and goals of the *Connect Africa Summit* taking place in Rwanda, Kigali on 29th to 30th October 2007.

We acknowledge that:

- The private sector plays a key role in the deployment of infrastructure in Africa and their continued investment should be encouraged through the implementation of a stable policy environment that encourages investment as well as protect the public interest.
- The regulatory is charged with creating a competitive environment for the development of telecommunications and that this is achieved by taking into account the demands and needs of the consumer.
- The market-driven motives of the private sector with respect to network deployment leave gaps in national network coverage that require intervention by governments. The question is not whether or not governments should play a role in filling market gaps in network deployment, but how they play this role and what model such interventions should take.
- There has been failure to deliver on expectations of Universal Access (UA) in many countries. This has resulted in a continuation and in some cases a deepening of the digital divide within countries.
- That *real value* of socio-economic development is better delivered across the population of nations by extensive national terrestrial networks that are complemented by connectivity to global networks. The value of better access to international bandwidth can only be realised by African citizens and institutions if there is sufficient access at national level.
- That content and applications drive the need/demand for national backbone networks.
- The needs and priorities of the public interest value of telecommunications infrastructure continues to suffer, with business interests taking precedence. The performance of regulators in furthering the public interest and rights of consumers has been insufficient, and has resulted in an erosion of customer experiences in the sector.
- The attainment and consumer-oriented regulation of regional connectivity requires the development of regional regulatory structures and instruments that are ratified and incorporated into national laws, policies and regulations.
- The lack of data on implementation, status, and performance of telecommunications and information and communication technologies at all geographic levels need to be addressed.

We recommend that delegates at the Summit consider the following:

- The important role that private investment and public private partnerships have to play in developing ICT infrastructure in Africa calls for new forms of corporate governance that can ensure the interests of all stakeholders, but above all, the interest of African consumers and citizens.
- That whilst recognising the sovereignty of States, governments should support harmonisation of policy and regulation by adopting regional instruments and structures to manage and support the development and implementation of cross border connectivity.
- That cross border networks should be subject to different licensing regimes that are operated by a designated regional body. These networks should be regarded and managed *strictly* as infrastructure and not as service. They should be subject to a regional competition policy (incorporating arbitration mechanisms).

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- That government interventions and initiatives be implemented with the participation of all relevant stakeholder groups from civil society, communities and the private sector. We remind governments that they made concrete commitments to such a participatory approach during the World Summit on the Information Society which concluded in Tunis in 2005.
- We urge the International Telecommunications Union continue to practice the WSIS principles of participation by ensuring that civil society can participate effectively alongside business and government in its processes.
- The rethinking of how Universal Access (UA) is defined and the recognition that such access can only be sustainable if it is not only supply driven, but more demand driven and responsive to the expressed needs of target communities.
- We call for greater participation of recipient communities in access initiatives, for transparency in the selection of UA projects, and in the allocation of funds, and for consistent monitoring and evaluation of such projects.
- We propose that the conditions and criteria of Universal Service Funds be re-defined to include a wider range of initiatives towards filling the access gap, including initiatives such as community owned networks, community radio, and locally owned small-scale ICT enterprises supporting voice and data services. We believe that the redefinition of criteria, and a more open approach to their management, is essential to addressing the insufficient utilisation of such funds in many African countries.
- Give equal priority to the deployment of national backhaul networks and international access networks.
- Governments should commit to supporting the development of national data and applications by themselves becoming key providers of content and implementing initiatives that attract/encourage organisations/institutions engaged in content and/or application development.
- That the interests of the consumer be more actively protected by regulators (or, if appropriate, governments) and that civil society, media, academia, consumer associations and other related groups collaborate in creating national and regional advocacy campaigns that hold regulators /government accountable for this.
- Call for a concrete initiative around the collection of industry and consumer-oriented information (that would be publicly available) on which future recommendations can be based.

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Statement issued on behalf of the following organisations:

Association for Progressive Communications (APC) – www.apc.org

Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA) – www.osiwa.org

Collaboration for ICT Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa (CIPESA) – www.cipesa.org

Kenyan ICT Action Network (KICTANet) - www.kictanet.or.ke

African Internet Service Providers Associations (AfrISPA) - www.afrispa.org

Rwanda Research and Education Network (RERN) - <http://www.researchictafrica.net/>

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