

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, MS DINA PULE, AT THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED ICT POLICY COLLOQUIUM, Johannesburg, 19 April 2012

Programme Director, Themba Phiri,
My colleague, honourable Deputy Minister Stella Ndabeni,
Director General of the Department Rosey Sekese,
Senior government officials,
Team DOC,
Honourable Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, Mr Eric Kholwane,
Honourable Members of Parliament of the Portfolio Committee of Communications,
Chairpersons and CEOs of our State Owned Entities,
Chairpersons and CEOs of ICT companies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the media

Good morning!

I'm deeply humbled by your patriotism and your willingness to making our country, South Africa, the greatest country to live in by committing to being here in large numbers. Your presence over the next two days underscores your desire to partner with your government as we journey towards a national ICT policy environment that will secure South Africa's place amongst the greatest nations of the world for generations to come. As the Department, we are committed to ensuring that we review our policies in a manner that is consultative, open, transparent and progressive. We are doing this fully aware of our responsibility to lead and regulate this sector. Our actions should not be construed as an abdication of that noble responsibility because we are merely choosing to include all our stakeholders in this policy development process.

The outcomes of this ICT policy development process have to be aligned to the government's apex priorities of fighting crime and corruption, rural development, improving health and education and creating sustainable jobs. In other words, the final policy has to be aligned to the government's developmental goals and address challenges that this industry faces such as increasing the number of female executives and attracting younger women in ICTs. We also need greater investment in local research, development and innovation. This advancement has to be achieved in an environmentally friendly manner.

Singaporean statesman Lee Kuan Yew once had this to say when he reflected on the importance of investing in people.

"Look at the numbers and quality of the engineers and scientists they produce and you know that this is where the Research and Development will be done. The Chinese have a space program, they are going to put a man on the moon and nobody sold them that technology."

We needed to have this policy review to overhaul all the legislation in our sector such that they reflect the work that the government does and helps this country and industry to benefit from sustainable ICT development and services for the next 20 years. This review has to remove aspects of legislation that are irrelevant and are hindering economic growth and social cohesion while ushering in elements that are important now and those that will be significant into the future. Given this challenge, we couldn't afford to have a piecemeal approach to a review process that would allow us to only close policy loopholes in existing legislation and not lay a foundation for a prosperous and progressive future, enabled by ICTs. As the Department, we are committed to moving with speed in ensuring that we conclude all the legislative and Parliamentary requirements for developing policies by the end of next year and start implementing these policies in 2014.

Delegates,

This review coincides with the centenary celebrations of the African National Congress. This is a joyous moment in the history of our country because it affords us an opportunity to celebrate the men and women whose conviction was to ensure democratic freedom for all South Africans.

This gathering and review process has to lay down a marker and be a similar reference point for future generations.

It has been 18 years since South Africa attained a free, non-racial and non-sexist and democratic society. During this period, the government introduced key policies to accelerate the provision of basic services such as water, houses, health and education in the Republic, thereby ensuring a better life for all people.

The government introduced measures to ensure that telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services are accessible through the implementation of policies aimed at attaining universal access to ICTs by all South Africans. We are proud of the progress that has been achieved over the years and are alive to the challenges that lie ahead.

As a country, we adopted the White Paper on Broadcasting in 1998, which directed us to create a broadcasting system that our people enjoy today. Now digital broadcasting is upon us, which poses new opportunities and challenges. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 as well as the Electronic Communications Act of 2005 were enacted and further led to the partial privatization of Telkom and further liberalization of the telecommunications market through the licensing of more telecommunication companies to provide services to our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since my appointment as the Minister of Communications in October 2011, I have been having meaningful engagements with most of our stakeholders, such as government departments, big and small operators, the leadership of our State Owned Enterprises, civil organisations, labour as well as international ICT players. From all of these meetings, a consistent view has emerged which is that our policies need to be realigned towards a developmental state. These stakeholders informed me that broadband strategy was the biggest area of policy uncertainty. I was also informed that our strategy for investment in broadband infrastructure was unclear.

It is clear that more needs to be done, with speed, to propel our country into an advanced information society and knowledge economy.

We have therefore prioritized the need to address the ICT policy environment in the country such that it addresses existing challenges and takes us to the year 2030. We have taken a decision to start a process of developing an integrated ICT Policy working with our critical stakeholders – each one of you.

We are doing this in the comfort of knowing that we have solid partnerships within government and with the industry, labour and civil society. Your presence and engagement over the next two days is a demonstration and affirmation of these partnerships. An indicator of the healthy state of these associations is the Vision 2020 partnership between us and the industry. Together, we have committed ourselves, through the signing of the ICT Industry Competitiveness and Job Creation Compact, to achieving 100% broadband penetration and creating one million jobs by 2020.

This ICT Policy Colloquium should result in the formulation of the White Paper on Integrated National ICT Policy. We expect to consolidate all policy on broadcasting services in the digital environment; broadband and internet access; spectrum licensing framework for the country's development; new regulatory areas in all of these; funding and investment; e-Skills development;

local content development and ICT market growth. ICT policy must respond to the government priority of job creation. It must also answer questions that include:

1. How best can we influence investment in local electronics manufacturing for the future of our country?
2. How will we ensure that rural connectivity becomes a reality in the roll-out of broadband internet?

We need technology transfer to help meet the demand for technologies. We need fair competition in the market that will lead to the lowering of the costs of communications.

The debate about the cost to communicate is trending, or very popular, to those who are older and use the old language on social networks. Therefore, we must have honest and progressive discussions on this matter. Everybody must come forward and explore answers to this important business and social question. We also need investment in this sector to create jobs, especially in the rural areas.

The numbers tell this story quite starkly. Between 2003 and 2005 South Africa's average ICT expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 9.13%, among the highest rates in the continent. The sector contributed 4.3% to the GDP in 2008, a rate that is lower than the world average of 5.4% contribution. This needs to improve and today marks the start of a process that will lead to the sector contributing a lot more to the economic growth of our country and to eradicating poverty.

We have a golden opportunity to do this. The global economic forces are realigning and developing countries have become increasingly important. South Africa is a member of the BRICS countries that include Brazil, Russia, India and China. The government has opened up this opportunity for the country and it is up to small and big businesses to fully exploit it for the benefit of the people continent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this point, I would like to call upon all of us to reflect on the road we have travelled in implementing ICT policies and legislations. The process we are embarking upon today, the comprehensive policy overhaul, is a critical step in assisting us to design the future we want to see. It provides an opportunity to all South Africans to input in the development of a shared and common vision for the ICT sector. I would like to invite all South Africans to contribute towards the development of this common vision.

The late ICT luminary and Apple founder Steve Jobs valued reflecting on what had happened in the past as one plans for the future.

“Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.”

And what a life he had!

The following objectives should guide us in our deliberations:

- The provision of universal service and access to ICTS to all,
- Transformation of the ICT sector, focusing on human resource, products and services;
- Gearing the ICT sector to create jobs and fight poverty and underdevelopment;
- Ensuring real and effective competition in various market segments of the sector;
- Creating effective partnerships in the growth and development of the sector and the economy;
- Building responsive and effective institutions;
- Ensuring affordability of ICT services across the value chain; and
- Ensuring uptake and usage of ICTs in the Republic.

In closing, we acknowledge that there are numerous challenges regarding the policy development process for the telecommunications, broadcasting, multimedia and postal sectors that we must deal with. As we summon our resources to tackle this challenge, we must always be mindful that the policies we create need to assist us to fight poverty and underdevelopment, reduce unemployment and provide basic services such as health and education to our people. All this has to evolve in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner. This can only happen if our national ICT policy addresses the value chain in the ICT sector and positions it for a prosperous future for all of our citizens.

Delegates,

The Department continues to provide opportunities for international cooperation, partnerships and investment for the industry. That is why the Department will be hosting the inaugural International ICT Indaba in Cape Town from 04 to 07 June 2012, supported by our partners in BRICS. This is an opportunity for ICT companies to showcase the future technologies and ICT tools and services to the world. It is also an opportunity to push for the African ICT agenda. The ICT Indaba has also received blessings from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). We expect that ITU Secretary General, Hamadoun Toure, will join us at the ICT Indaba.

We want our local talent as well as entrepreneurs from the continent to come and showcase their best products and services to the world in the continent's only regional ICT conference of this magnitude. Our local multinationals and SMMEs must come to explore further opportunities across the continent, BRICS countries and beyond and build on their business relations.

After the ICT Indaba, the participants must have learnt or contributed something to develop South Africa and the continent.

I wish you well in our deliberations during these two days. Go on and play your part.

Thank you very much.