

**Submission from Mauritius Information and Communication Technologies Authority
(ICTA)**

**STATEMENT FROM NATIONAL REGULATORY AUTHORITIES TO WSIS
PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND
COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT)**

1. Introduction

Universal access of ICT services is a social obligation that the Government of every country usually endorses. The whole issue of universal access may mean different things in different countries subject to the local context, social climate, ICT penetration and its accessibility and availability, as well as the point in time where the issue is being raised.

2. The key principles for universal access

The ICT Authority of Mauritius believes that the key principles for promoting universal access to ICTs from a regulatory perspective are based on:

1. **accessibility** – uniform non-discriminatory tariff throughout the country so as to ensure that most of the users of those services are able to get access to them. Incentives to deploy network should be there in order to enable reasonably sufficient means to access the services. Technology may be a major player in this endeavour; wireless which ensures connectivity at any point and any time, and which is fast approaching wire-line quality of service may be promoted.
2. **availability** – provision of adequate ICT service, whenever and wherever required. This should ensure that the services are made available even in places which may not be economically viable. In this respect the regulator may impose conditions in the licences of operators so that they ensure some pre-established level of service availability in a timely manner.
3. **affordability** – ICT services should be priced so that most users can reasonably afford. This is initiated by having a reasonable cost model for price determination of services, followed by a proper tariff exercise. To ensure affordability of basic services then the regulator will inevitably allow for some below-cost service provision. The deficit that is thus created has to be compensated by defining some proper mechanism within the regulatory framework. This of course means that some form of subsidy is

required. The regulator is bound to ensure that the above-mentioned cross-subsidy is only for the sake of affordability, and nothing else.

4. **sustainability** – any basic service which is provided should remain there for some time so that subscribers are not deprived of any such services to which they have been made accustomed. This is of utmost importance especially in situations where the service providers face financial constraints, and consequently as a purely economic remedy decides to close down the service provision. In this respect the regulator has a key role in making good assessment of prospective candidates who would like to be licensed for ICT services. Sustainability of projects should be given due consideration.
5. **liberalisation** – bringing in effective competition so that there is diversity and choice of products to the subscribers. The whole idea of competition may be to bring about many of the above mentioned measures. However the regulator should ensure that competition is not only in terms of pricing or economic viability. Other elements such as diversity of products, as well as the quality of the service being provided should be given due consideration. Furthermore, the regulator has now the choice of deciding on which operator to assign the universal service obligation. Some sort of bidding may be put in place and with the lowest bidder being assigned the responsibility, along with some dispensation from the regulator as a means of compensation. The regulator should however also ensure that this approach is not misused.

3. Conclusion

The ICT Authority of Mauritius strongly believes that the above-mentioned principles are the key elements in promoting universal access to ICT. Once established in a country it may take some time to start producing the intended results, but the underlying benefit is that it becomes part of the ICT culture in the country, so that ICT itself is no longer viewed as a purely economic sector, but one with the potential to make the life of mankind better.