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TITLE: Smart Regulation for a Broadband World

This contribution presents how Rwanda has been preparing itself for the development of Broadband in the country since year 2000, our achievements up to date and our future plans for the next five years.

Rwanda ICT4D policy and plans

In order to accelerate the country's socio-economic development, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) adopted in 2000 an ICT for development (ICT4D) policy commonly known as National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) to be implemented in four five-year rolling plans. The first plan named NICI I implemented from 2001 to 2005 was placed on creating a conducive environment by establishing institutional framework, putting in place legal and regulatory mechanism, introduction of competition into the telecommunications sector for the purpose of improving quality of service, attracting investors and protection of consumers, liberalization of the telecom market, reduction of entry barriers to the telecom market as well as an effective implementation and coordination mechanism.

The second plan NICI II (2006 -2010) focused on laying down a National Backbone Broadband Network which now links and provides broadband connectivity to all government entities in the capital Kigali (Kigali Metropolitan Network) which are also being interconnected with other sites in all the 30 districts of Rwanda via the National Backbone Network. Although the backbone has been deployed and fully funded by the Government of Rwanda other licensed operators may use it to extend their network throughout the country and outside through an infrastructure sharing agreement supervised by the regulator. The GoR believes that the backbone network constitutes an important element in Rwanda's digital infrastructure. It is as important for Rwanda today as was the railroad was to the West in the 19th century. Aside from the implementation of the National Backbone Network, other projects were developed and implemented by the government mainly:

- ❖ The national Data Center which is expected to provide a modern computing facility to meet Government's ICT Infrastructure needs for both hardware and applications, as well as facilitating interconnectivity between Government institutions;
- ❖ The national ID and Smartcard project which aimed at providing every Rwandan with a national ID implemented on an electronic card which contains information about the citizen such as marital status, health information, social security, tax data among other items.
- ❖ Rwanda Communications Infrastructure Project (RCIP): This project aims at extending the geographic reach of broadband networks beyond the core urban centers, provide connectivity to public institutions, and ensure that a basic package of internet access is available at an affordable price. The project is funded by the World Bank. It began in January 2009 and will run until January 2014.
- ❖ Rwanda national e-government Portal and GoR website presence aiming at developing an official gateway to all government and non-governmental information and procedures

The third plan NICI III (2011 – 2015) is built on the two previous phases and emphasizes on accelerating the development of ICT services. This plan is considered as the most critical to Rwanda's transformation into a knowledge based economy as investments of the past ten years are expected to yield tangible results. Major objectives are to improve government services and enhance business productivity through ICT technology. NICI III programs focuses on five major areas dealing with crosscutting issues, through which Rwanda is to be attained. These are: Skills development, Private sector development, Community development, E-government and Cyber security. Many electronic applications such as e-procurement, e-payment system, document tracking and workflow management system, Rwanda National Portal, health insurance information system are planned during this phase to improve government business processes while it increases citizen participation in the country's socio-economic development.

By the time that NICI IV period begins (2016), Rwanda expects to be well on the path towards achieving development goals, and the fourth plan is expected to consolidate the nation's ICT transformation.

Broadband regulation

In order to attract more investors and increase competition both on infrastructure side and service side, the licensing framework has been reviewed to take into account convergence of technologies and services. The ICT bill under adoption in the parliament provides four types of license:

- Network facility license: This license is delivered to entities wishing to construct, provide, own and make available network facilities to other licensed operator.
- Network service license: delivered to entities that operate communications networks.
- Applications license: delivered to entities wishing to provide ICT services while having no network facility nor operate any network.
- Content service license; delivered to entities wishing to provide electronic media.

With the above licensing framework and the national backbone already in place, new investors shall be attracted by the possibility of providing ICT services without being limited by the heavy investment of network roll out. To facilitate negotiations between service providers, a Reference Infrastructure Sharing Offer has been drafted by the regulator.

To foster the expansion of telecom and internet services to rural areas and other disadvantages areas, Rwanda has established a Universal service fund managed by the regulator where each licensed operator contributes (2% of its turnover).
