

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON. DR. BENJAMIN
AGGREY NTIM, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, AT
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The global economic environment has historically challenged developing countries like Ghana to devise innovative strategies for development without compromising the basic tenets of human existence. After going through changing fortunes and surviving the traumas of disruptions in the development agenda, the continent of Africa is today looking into the future with hope and confidence.

It is therefore, perhaps ironic that today, the developed world is indicting itself by recognizing that Africa remains a scar on the conscience of the rest of the world.

Ghana has since the 1950s, developed and implemented a number of socio-economic development programmes and plans. Six of the national development Plans were from 1951 to 1980, for varying periods ranging between two years and seven years.

The pre-1980 development plans all set out to, among other things:

- improve the well-being of all Ghanaians,
- reduce poverty and facilitate equitable distribution of income,
- improve access to education, health and housing and reduce the level and impact of unemployment,

- stimulate overall economic growth, improve agriculture and promote industrialization,
- enhance human, rural and urban development etc.

The post 1980 era saw the development of Vision 2020, the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, immediately followed by the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of 2002-2004 aimed at developing a broad based socio-economic development framework.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Notwithstanding the noble objectives at the time these development plans were prepared, the overall impacts have suffered from external trade shocks and also from political instability that engulfed the country and cumulatively whittled away any remaining confidence to break through the poverty cycle and low-income bracket.

Today, the world economy is experiencing the impact of globalization and emerging Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resulting in the increase in the spread of knowledge and information.

These technologies are offering less developed agricultural countries like Ghana the opportunity to transform their economies and societies. Ghana, like other developing countries, is equally placed to take advantage of the new technologies to facilitate socio-economic

development process and possibly leap-frog the phases of development that were lost in the preceding decades.

It is clear that in the new economic order, the fundamental basis of poverty reduction, wealth creation and national prosperity is information and knowledge. Rapidly growing economies depend more on the creation, acquisition, distribution, and use of information and knowledge.

The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development Policy represents the vision for Ghana in the information age. The policy statement fully takes into account the aspirations and the provisions of key socio-economic development plans undertaken in earlier times.

The Policy Statement sets out the roadmap for the development of Ghana's information society and economy and provides a basis for facilitating accelerated national development.

The Ghana ICT-led Socio-Economic Development Policy process was begun in 2002 out of the conviction to make Ghana an active participant of the Information Revolution and also to ensure that the benefits of ICT are made available to all citizens no matter their location in the country.

With the policy, Ghana has pledged to further develop the country's ICT ambitions focusing on improving the quality of its entrepreneurs and status as an outsourcing destination.

It seeks to create more young entrepreneurs and improve the capabilities of Ghanaian companies to be ready to compete globally and to capitalize on Ghana's position as an attractive destination in Africa.

In pursuit of this objective, a strategy has been developed to simultaneously target the development of the ICT sector and industry as well as use ICTs as a broad-based enabler of developmental goals to aid all other key sectors of the economy.

The Policy document identifies 14 priority areas, (referred to as the 14 ICT4AD Pillars) along with key drivers of the policy.

The priority areas include: Accelerated human resource development; promoting ICTs in education; facilitating Government Administration; facilitating development of the private sector; modernisation of agriculture; deployment and spread of ICTs in the Community; promotion of National Health; rapid ICT physical infrastructure development; legal, regulatory and institutional framework; facilitating national security and law and order; etc.

Government's broad objectives have been to facilitate the development, deployment and exploitation of ICTs within the

economy and society, and therefore, various Sector-Specific ICT implementation Strategies set within the wider context of the national ICT4AD Policy have been developed for:

- Electronic commerce and Trade Development Strategy,
- Electronic Government and Governance Strategy,
- Telecom and Communications Sector
- National ICTs in Education Strategy,
- National ICTs in Health Strategy,
- National Strategy on ICTs and Gender, and
- National Electronic Security Strategy.

This part of the process witnessed the development of a pro-business National Telecommunications Policy, a revision of Regulations to reflect modern day convergence of telecommunications technologies, electronic security framework, and an electronic government framework for the country. The latter has led to the implementation of the e-government project.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having developed the ICT4D roadmap, and a National Telecommunications Policy, Ghana is proceeding to provide broadband for the ubiquitous application and deployment of ICT services in the country. The vision is to build a nationwide fibre optic backbone infrastructure as an open-access and non-discriminatory facility to support communications service providers.

The broadband infrastructure will provide seamless, integrated multimedia services anytime, anywhere with lower fee to broadband internet by the year 2012 in with the Kigali Resolutions and Undertakings. The construction of the fibre optic transmission network is being undertaken in two phases covering over 4,000 kilometres. The first phase has since been completed and is undergoing testing before full operation.

The infrastructure plan is also complemented by the construction of 230 Community Information Centres in all the parliamentary constituencies over the country as access points for ICT in the rural and underserved communities in Ghana. Of this number 90 were completed by the end of 2007.

With the provision of ICT access points all over the country the provision of new services will become possible, and the Government's vision realizable. The services envisaged include digital multimedia broadcasting, e-Government services, interactive distance education, tele-health and tele-medicine, financial transaction services and most important, Business Process Outsourcing services.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the relative short period since the development of our national ICT vision, Ghana has witnessed appreciable growth in the ICT sector. telephone subscription has hit the eight million mark, giving a tele-density of nearly 40%. More and more of our citizens are being

trained in ICT and BPO skills, while greater employment opportunities are being provided in the sector.

To be able to totally realize our vision, the challenges of youth unemployment and our capacity to transform these into valuable assets in the new economy, and the desire and willingness on the part of the population to adopt ICT for development, among other things, will remain significant success factors. There is also the need for increased investment from the public and private sectors to ensure that our vision becomes a reality and also for us to bridge the digital divide within our country.

In conclusion, we recognize that this involves partnership with several stakeholders and that is why the Ghana vision begun by engaging in extensive nationwide consultations. If the programmes and projects outlined in the national ICT roadmap are adequately pursued, there is every assurance for Ghana to break out of the poverty cycle and into the middle-income bracket in the not-too-distant future.

We will therefore continue to participate in International Telecommunication Union (ITU) activities, particularly the Standardisation Bureau's activities, to ensure accelerated deployment of new networks and services and also bringing connectivity to cities and towns as well as to the remote areas.

Standardisation should contribute to the lowering of capital and operational expenditure in the deployment and expansion of core network. As the ITU convenes for the World Telecommunication Standardisation Assembly in October this year, Ghana would be particularly interested in the treatment of issues on: how to accommodate emerging technologies, International Telecommunication Regulations, Next Generation Network (NGN), IPTV, Cybersecurity including Identity Management, ubiquitous networks, performance and Quality of Service issues.

We accordingly welcome the participation of new partners such as our universities in Standardisation activities and other initiatives that should help bridge the standardization gap in Ghana.

I thank you for the audience.