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Identifying priorities and responsibilities of ICT stakeholders (Government, Industry and Consumers) in a digital environment

Prepared by: Tebogo Ruth Mangadi, Deputy Director, Customer Care BOCRA.

Introduction:

Most people use the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for obtaining and disseminating information, participating in cultural life, venturing into business, interacting with friends and government. This free and easy use of ICT calls for protection of the user's privacy, data protection, protection against fraud and misuse amongst other things. The protection of the user is a challenge that needs the participation of all the stakeholders.

This paper seeks to discuss the tripartite partnership of the government, industry and consumers in the digital environment and the role of each partner considering the that no one sector can deliver the complexities of sustainable development alone and how the alliances are important for aggregating the resources and competencies of each party in solving the key challenges of ICT. In this regard, the stakeholder partnership approach is viewed as a strategic management tool that enables the players to understand the level of roles and operations.

Priorities and Responsibilities of Government:

The role of government is critical in the rollout of ICT and it is through government policies and strategic direction that a country would determine the uptake of ICTs. The policies should be intended to amongst other things:

- protect the internet universality, integrity and openness

- protect and maximise the rights and freedom of the users

- Protect user data and privacy whilst promoting democracy and diversity

- protect and empower children and young people.

- strengthen international cooperation, preventing terrorism and enhancing the rule of law and cooperation against cybercrime.

  The Internet has become an essential tool for many people in their everyday lives. It is imperative that people be able to use the Internet with freedom and confidence as would be derived from the government policies and strategic direction. It is therefore very

important that the abovementioned three key players should come up with strategies that will enhance the usage of ICTs in a way that would improve their lives rather than be disadvantaged.

Priorities and Responsibilities of the Industry:

The industry here refers to both the regulator and the operators. The duo have a very important obligation which is to protect the users of the ICT. The regulator, as guided by the policy and legal framework has a role of ensuring that the businesses in the ICT sector operate in a conducive environment by advising government on the appropriate policy and on issues that would not inhibit the growth of the industry while protecting the human rights of the consumers and users.

Further, the regulatory regime should attract investment that could deliver affordable ICT solutions by creating room for competition.

Similarly, the operators would be expected to be transparent in their business dealings while providing good quality of service to the consumers. This could be done through delivery of profitable business models for rural ICT access and by exploiting the diversity of technologies on offer and providing the relevant content to the various groups. This would enable the uptake of ICTs and reduce the digital divide between urban and rural places, rich and poor consumers as well as narrow the gender disparity gap. It will also reduce rural to urban migration which emanates from the absence of jobs and other amenities of life that are found in urban areas.

Priorities and Responsibilities of the Consumer:

Consumers play a vital role of consuming the services offered to them; however this consumption comes with certain responsibilities on their part. While generally most countries have Consumer Protection legislation the consumers have to know that they too have an obligation towards themselves and be aware of the advantages and disadvantages that come with ICTs.

It is important therefore that consumer attitudes, skills and knowledge should change to make them understand the positives and negatives that ICTs can provide. Consumers should be responsible users and producers of content based on the respect for human rights and human

dignity. This could be brought about through awareness, education and knowledge on the usage of ICTs and the implications of improper use.

Conclusion:

The three stakeholders are dependent on each other to drive the digital environment albeit at different levels. This is important for purposes of clarity in roles and accountability.