SOUTH AFRICA CONNECT:

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES, ENSURING INCLUSION

South Africa's National Broadband Policy

International Expert Meeting, Pretoria 11 - 12 November 2013

Report by the South African Communications forum

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1. Summary:

Following an invitation extended to the SACF by the Department of Communications to participate in the most recent phase of public consultation on the National Broadband Policy formulation, SACF submits this brief report for the benefit of SACF members who were not able to attend. The workshop specifically targeted international experts, who were asked to review South Africa's draft Broadband Policy from their own experiences and from similar international experiences and practices that are known to have worked. International expert guests covered the following countries and organizations:

Participating International Organizations: Columbia University; the World Bank; the Broadband Commission for Digital Development; ANACOM Portugal; Uganda ICT Ministry; New Zealand; Malaysia; ITU; Mauritius; Nigeria; Wik Consult of Germany; Indonesia; Brazil; CISCO; Estonia; Poland; Ghana; LIRNEasia; BRICS consultant;

The South African Broadband Experts Group established by Yunus Carrim, South Africa's Minister of Communications, facilitated the Workshop and comprised representatives from the Department of Communications; the CSIR; BMI Tech; Research ICT Africa; Pygma Consulting; and ICASA. This Ministerial Broadband Expert Group was responsible for finalising the Broadband Policy in readiness for submission to Parliament in mid-December 2013.

The Workshop was opened by Ms Rosey Sekese, Director-General of South Africa's Department of Communications (DoC), with the keynote address delivered by Hon. Yunus Carrim, South Africa's Minister of Communications. The major concerns highlighted by the Minister in his keynote address were:

a. Affordability;
b. Broadband speeds which determine the quality and quantity of information and knowledge accessed by South African citizens;
c. Funding models, a major element of disagreement in South Africa;
d. The need for a "strong" Regulator, quoting the example of France where the effectiveness of the Regulator has led to 86% broadband household penetration;
e. The level of duplication driven by Infrastructure that continues to contribute towards high capital costs of broadband development;

f. South Africa's continuing decline in ICT competitiveness, in spite of the significant intellectual and operational resource base available in South Africa.

g. Acknowledgment that the National Broadband Policy formulation process has mutated from a static policy document that must be completed and submitted to Parliament in early December 2013, to a dynamic document subject to continuous change driven by technological changes, business and economic imperatives, demand side market development and needs, and improvements in knowledge and understating at all hierarchical levels of South Africa's ICT ecosystem.

h. The National Broadband Policy (NBP) of 2013, once finalized and approved by Parliament, must be seen as a continuing work in progress, integrating and merging smoothly with the National Broadband Plans and Strategies that have yet to be developed, and with the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP). The 2013 NBP is therefore a new starting point of lengthy national process that will change over time in line with socioeconomic, technological, and national knowledge and skills developments.

2. Additional background information not covered specifically during the Workshop:

In considering the progress made at this Workshop, it is useful to briefly review the timeline of South Africa's broadband development. The text boxes that follow reveal that the process has been in progress since the Telecommunications Act of 1997. Sixteen years after the identification of a national broadband policy vacuum, which included several broadband and general ICT policy approvals, amendments and reviews by South Africa's parliament, South Africa's global competitiveness, even when compared to the countries developing peer nations, continues to decline. This suggests that much more effort must be directed towards the process itself, rather than repeat past attempts to solve the national development challenge through static policy directives and provisions.

Text Box 1: Year 1997 to 2001: *"Broadband has been on the South African telecommunications agenda since it was identified as a vacuum in the policy framework that culminated in the 1997 Telecommunications Act. But it is only with increasing demands from bandwidth-strapped users and service providers that it has become a public issue. The strategic objectives of broadband networks in South Africa are the subject of a new policy process currently underway which should be finalised by mid-2001. Of particular interest in the policy process will be the consideration given to broadband technologies that favour the developing country environment. These were not specifically mentioned in the recently cabinet approved policy directions"* Professor Alison Gillwald, co-author of the South African Broadband Case Study in the "ITU NEW INITIATIVES PROGRAMME" of May 2001

Year 2010: *DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS: No. 617 13 July 2010: POLICIES AND POLICY DIRECTIONS DRAFTED IN TERMS OF SECTION 3(1) OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS ACT. 2005 (ACT NO. 36 OF 2005) I, Gen (Ret) Siphiwe Nyanda Minister of the Department of Communications, in terms of section 3(1) of the Electronic Communications Act, 2005 (Act No. 36 of 2005), hereby publish the National Broadband Policy, contained in the schedule attached hereto.*

Draft broadband policy – 2010 Broadband policy revised and published for comment in April 2013: Revision on basis of public submissions & early evidence emerging from international broadband plans
- *Need to understand broadband as ecosystem*
- *Lack of reference to role of regulator*
- *Narrowness/outmoded definition/targets*
- *Absence of demand stimulation measures*
- *Identification of strategies, mechanisms to achieve objectives*
- *Specificity on who does what – co-ordination, operations, enforcement*
- *National, provincial and municipal co-ordination*

Professor Alison Gillwald, member of the Panel of Experts assisting the Department of Communications to revise the National Broadband Policy of 2010.