

ADDRESS BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE NAHAS
ANGULA, PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF
NAMIBIA,

ON

THE OCCASION OF THE 10TH ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING OF THE COMMUNICATIONS REGULATORS'
ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (CRASA) HELD IN
WINDHOEK ON 29 MARCH 2007,
WINDHOEK COUNTRY CLUB HOTEL AND RESORT

Director of Ceremonies

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is gratifying to see that the pan-African synergy that helped carry all African nations to victory in the struggle for political emancipation remains at work now that the challenge is the social, educational and economic upliftment of our people. It is in this context that the Government of Namibia extends a warm welcome to the representatives from the various member states of SADC. I am honoured to have been invited to deliver a statement at this 10th annual general meeting of the Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa.

I am informed that CRASA's mandate is to promote competition in the communication sector through removal of entry and exit barriers; to ensure fair competition and ethical behaviour by licensees; to safeguard the interests of consumers; to foster a favourable environment to attract private investment; and to encourage innovation in the sector.

That our regulatory authorities are doing well in carrying out this mandate is beyond dispute, especially considering the adverse socio-economic legacies most countries in SADC continue to face. To see how favoured we are with communication technology, one simply has to compare our infrastructure and services to most other developing countries in Africa, South America, Europe, and Asia, even to the odd developed country. For this, we congratulate our regulators.

Today, however, I would like to reflect on whether the interface between the communications sector and the particular needs of our region can be further optimised. While the backdrop to my thoughts is Namibia, I am sure that there will be significant overlap with the situation in other SADC states.

Director of ceremonies,

You will be aware that since gaining political independence 17 years ago, Namibia has transformed itself into a haven of peace, stability, unity and participatory democracy. Having consolidated these prerequisites for sustainable development, The Government's priority now is socio-economic transformation and the overall development of the Namibian nation.

In the medium term, the Government's focus is on poverty reduction and employment creation, addressing income distribution inequalities, curbing HIV/AIDS, broadening access to education and economic opportunities, and addressing development and gender imbalances and income disparities. These objectives are elaborated in Namibia's third medium-term national development plan, NDP3, which becomes operational later this year.

The long-term development goals the Namibian nation has set itself are enumerated in Vision 2030. In a nutshell, it reflects the Namibian nation's desire to take its place amongst the developed nations of the world, having by then addressed the challenges that impede our progress at the moment.

This is an ambitious target indeed, but it is one that we as a nation believe is attainable. It will, however, require a sustained national effort, the full commitment of Government and every Namibian individual and corporate citizen, as well as the support of all our development partners.

The challenges impeding developing countries' progress are not the preserve of Africa at large, nor of Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Quite the contrary: the UN Millennium Declaration, adopted by 189 UN member states at the Millennium Summit in 2000, recognises them as global problems requiring global interventions.

It is general knowledge that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the road map for implementing the Millennium Declaration, while the Millennium Project of 2002 is intended to serve as the implementation vehicle for addressing the key development challenges of the world .

The significance of these documents is that they target the communications sector as a key player in the development of global partnerships for development, one of the eight critical goals of the Millennium Project. More specifically, they charge the telecommunications sector, in partnership with the private sector, with broadening access to information and communications technology (ICT).

The Namibian Government fully endorses this recognition of the communications sector, particular the telecommunications sector, as a driver of development. In conditions such as ours, where landscapes are vast and populations widely dispersed, a modern, efficient communications sector is vital for development.

Namibia is fortunate that despite a highly dispersed population of below 2 million people, it enjoys an amazing range, variety and standard of communications services, including:

- 2 cellular network operators with substantial foreign shareholding and management inputs,
- a raft of internet service providers,
- 3 broadband internet options, two of which operate off wireless platforms,
- satellite TV offering dozens of local and international channels, and
- a host of privately-owned commercial radio stations and newspapers.

Faced with these statistics, one could be forgiven for thinking that Namibia has already achieved the communications-related development indicators targets set in the Millennium Project, and which I referred to earlier.

The reality is that most of these communication services are accessible to mainly the more affluent members of Namibian society, more specifically those living in the capital and other urban centres. I appreciate that service providers cannot be blamed if some members of the population cannot afford the new equipment, standard subscription fees or regular service charges associated with some of the services in question.

Director of ceremonies,

I would nevertheless like to challenge service providers, and indeed our regulators, whose mandate includes encouraging innovation and safeguarding the interests of all consumers, to seriously consider the following questions: are we doing all we can to make these services more accessible to lower income groups, and to people living in the rural areas? Are we encouraging innovation and facilitating optimum synergy between stakeholders, even between competitors? Are we taking time to study how other industries have responded to similar challenges, and here the

principle of cross-subsidisation springs to mind. What I am propagating, ladies and gentlemen, is more lateral thinking, of the kind that created the pre-paid airtime solutions that have had such an impact on broadening cellular telecommunications access in our region.

Lest they become complacent though, one must ask why competitors in that industry resist sharing existing infrastructure where possible. One wonders why new entrants to the market, instead of spending hundreds of millions of dollars largely replicating infrastructure that already exists, could not instead be tasked with erecting new infrastructure that would extend the national transmission infrastructure? Would such a regulation, if possible at all, not dramatically accelerate network coverage and service provision to rural and remote areas?

There is also another aspect that the communications sector should perhaps consider if it wishes to optimise its contribution to development. I am not referring merely to financial support for development projects and so on. My concern is more with exploiting opportunities to engage more meaningfully in the development process.

Director of ceremonies,

Here I would like to be more specific in terms of suggesting some opportunities. The telecommunications industry, for example, could

consider availing some of its facilities – spare channels, off-peak airtime or bandwidth, video conferencing networks, and so on - to development agents such as extension officers, social workers, training staff, workshop facilitators, health workers, SME business incubation experts, et cetera, for programme broadcasts, telecasts, interactive workshops, video conferences, etc. This would allow them to reach infinitely larger audiences than they would have even if they travelled to each and every settlement in this vast country. They may even be able to hold community meetings, conduct educational campaigns, training workshops, or even have operational meetings with their field workers. This would significantly increase the productivity of those concerned, save much time in travelling, and save Government and its development partners and agents, such as the University and Polytechnic who both conduct extensive open learning programmes, a fortune on S&T allowances and at least as much again on vehicle costs and maintenance. Best of all though - support of this nature from service providers in the communications sector would guarantee an exponential increase in maximising the benefits of development programmes for rural and remote communities.

Director of ceremonies

I believe that for the Communication Technology or ICT community to truly live up to its international reputation as driver of socio-economic

development in our region, it has to take up the challenge of becoming more fully engaged in the pursuit of development as a whole. It is not enough to deliver the technology and the service.

In conclusion, therefore, I would like to urge the members of CRASA to consider ways of encouraging innovation and providing incentives to licensees to engage more actively and sustainably with development programmes. If they succeed in this goal, our regulators themselves will added considerable value to the already excellent service they render to SADC at large and the member states they serve.

I would like to wish the delegates a productive AGM, and an enjoyable stay in Namibia.

It is now my honour and privilege to declare this 10th annual general meeting of CRASA officially open.

I thank you.