

**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE SPECIAL ADVISOR TO
THE NAMIBIAN INFORMATION AND
BROADCASTING MINISTER, MR NVULA YA
NANGOLO, 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**

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia,
Comrade Nahas Angula,**

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Permanent Secretaries of Ministries present here today,

**Mr David Imbili, Chairperson of the Namibian Communications
Commission,**

**Distinguished delegates to the 10th Annual General Meeting of the
Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa,**

Distinguished invited guests,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me start by thanking CRASA and the organisers for inviting me to deliver a few remarks at this event. The honour of officiating at gatherings where Namibia's long-time friends and allies are represented is always a source of pleasure to me. That pleasure increases when the order of business of the occasion coincides with issues close to my heart, as is the case here today.

While I share in the general excitement about the amazing information communications technologies being rolled out in Namibia and elsewhere in the region, a deep unease has been growing in me. My unease stems from the realisation that these technological advances are largely lost to rural communities at present, together with ICTs' acclaimed potential as vehicles for and drivers of development.

Given that the theme of Namibia's third national development plan, NDP3, is *"Accelerated Economic Growth through Deepening Rural Development"*, I consider this lost potential a grave threat to NDP3. Moreover, considering that Key Result Areas Number 7 of NDP3, one of only 8 KRAs, is to build *"A Knowledge Based and Technology Driven Nation"*, it stands to reason that the achievement of KRA 7 depends on our ICT sector extending its services into all rural areas, where the vast majority of the population live. If not, the impact of ICT as a catalyst for transformation and development will bypass the rural masses, condemning KRA 7 to failure at the outset.

It is against this background that I was delighted to hear that the AGM programme includes a workshop featuring the results of a UNDP-sponsored project in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda

that investigated community-owned networks as a means of providing effective but low-cost ICT services in "underserved" rural areas. I take it that "underserved" is a politically correct UN term for "historically neglected"!

There is no doubt that the single largest obstacle to increasing ICT access in rural areas is the question of affordability. The masses our development efforts, such as Namibia's NDP3 have to reach if we are to achieve our national development objectives, are the tens of thousands of impoverished subsistence farmers living in traditional homesteads, the thousands of farm workers and their dependents eking out a living on farm rations and minimum wage and often below that, and the thousands struggling to fend off starvation from day one day to the next in villages and settlements riddled by unemployment. it is imperative that national development programmes aimed at promoting, for example, literacy programmes, basic and adult education, health, job-creation, skills training, SMME development, environmental resource management, HIV-AIDS prevention and mitigation, and so on, should reach these people. In a country as vast as Namibia, modern Information and Communications Technologies such as satellite and wireless communications, are almost tailor-made for this task. They can make it possible to reach just about every single homestead, settlement and village in the most outlying rural area where almost no traditional communication infrastructure such as telephone lines or proper roads exists. But, as I've said, the single biggest obstacle to them accessing information and being reached via modern ICTs is their poverty. Perhaps we need to consider means of facilitating special dispensation to allow communities can obtain collective ownership of

the infrastructure, licenses or subscriptions they cannot afford individually.

Ladies and gentlemen, this solution is one that requires just a little more goodwill, a little more flexibility, and a little more social responsibility on the part of operators, supported by a facilitative regulatory environment that could perhaps add an incentive or two for participating operators. With these in place, I am sure that you will find your Governments more than ready to play their part in facilitating what would be a breakthrough of immense value to our countries.

It is therefore my fervent hope that the workshop, and related aspects of your deliberations, will generate practical proposals on interventions that could help to resolve this serious obstacle to the achievement of Namibia's national development objectives. Given that other countries represented in CRASA face largely similar development constraints, I am certain that any workable proposals you may arrive at will find favour throughout the region.

I would like to conclude by wishing you fruitful deliberations, particularly in your efforts to identify tools and mechanisms that will enhance regulators' capacity to carry out their responsibilities more effectively, and in respect of the increasingly topical subject of regulators' role in dispute resolution in the burgeoning ICT sector.

I thank you.