

MANA launches online service

By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

15 Aug 2012

Government journalists in Malawi were ecstatic on Monday, 13 August 2012, when Malawi government launched www.manaonline.gov.mw, forty-six years after government established Malawi News Agency (MANA), to disseminate government information.



The journalists spread across Malawi, working under the MANA banner for years, have been a frustrated group. All stories and features they've written would not see the light of day as government had no official media outlet designed to take on board MANA media products.

In addition, Information and Civic Education Minister Moses Kunkuyu also announced that government has finished preparations for another website which will become the hub of Malawi Government Information and Communication Services and is expected to go live on 20 August.

Kunkuyu said while the world has known MANA as Malawi Government's news gathering and dissemination organ under the Ministry of Information, but they have failed to recognise that MANA is the only media house in the country that is available full time in all Malawi's 28 districts.

Milestone for the government

"The MANA website will now offer a platform for newsmakers, especially those based in the rural areas to be heard, just like those in urban centres and cities," declared Kunkuyu at the launch.

He said the unveiling of two Information Communication Technology (ICT) related initiatives, that will be used as tools for disseminating and communicating public information, is a government milestone.

"Today is a special day in the sense that my ministry has opened another new chapter in its mandate of ensuring that Malawi is an informed nation at all times," said Kunkuyu.

During the testing of the website, director of Information and Civic Education, Isaac Ziba explained that the website would give Malawians an opportunity to read stories anytime they wanted.

Ziba said with the website, government has created a platform for the citizenry to keep abreast of what is happening both locally and internationally besides giving Malawians and the world at large an opportunity to know development projects and other important issues that Malawi government is undertaking.

One-stop information centre

With the unveiling the Central Office of Information (COI) website, Kunkuyu said government is making COI the one-stop information centre for the Malawi government.

"The COI will therefore provide a platform for the entire Malawi Government Structure to communicate to and inform the nation and the world about the policies and programmes that the government is implementing," he said at the launch.

Kunkuyu disclosed that the COI website will also facilitate the free flow of information and communication between the government and the citizenry as well as providing a forum for feedback from the people to their government on all government policy matters and decisions.

"The launch of these two websites tonight [Monday, 13 August], reaffirms once more that the government of Her Excellency Mrs. Joyce Banda is founded on openness and disclosure, rather than secrecy and concealment," said Kunkuyu.

Through initiatives like these, the information minister said government, through his ministry, is an opportunity to know fully what it is doing and gives an opportunity to all Malawians to provide their feedback on all government undertakings.

"You may all agree with me that to build inclusive societies today, societies of individuals who can fully participate in public affairs, require that we fully and collectively harness the power of communication technology for social engagement," he said.

"Thus, this government will always be open to any and all forms of dialogue on issues that affect Malawians, whom we swore to serve with honesty and diligence," he added.

Citizens urged to make use of websites

Kunkuyu said government would therefore like to see many Malawians engaging it through various ICT tools such as the two websites to provide the alternative, if not main solutions for transforming their lives.

"This is consistent with the views of Tim Barnes Lee, the founder of the World Wide Web," said Kunkuyu.

The minister said Barnes had spurred an ICT democratic revolution when he acknowledged his creation: "Ultimately, a more powerful democracy and whole new forms of government but at the same time for each person a self-expression and potential to growth".

Kunkuyu urged Malawians to make full use of both the Central Office of Information Website and the Malawi News Agency website.

The minister further urged Anthony Livuza, principal secretary for Information, Olive Chikankheni who is the principal secretary for e-Government in the president's office and all officers behind the two initiatives to ensure continuity.

"It is one thing getting a vehicle on to the road and a totally different task to steer it to a destination safely," observed Kunkuyu before imploring for continuity.

"My plea to the principal secretary, the director of information and all officers in my ministry is that while we have cranked the vehicle; let us take it to the road permanently. The hard part of these initiatives starts now after this launch."

He beseeched his fellow government officials to strive not to let the nation down by failing to provide the public a service that they are pledging to do by launching the websites.

Updated on 16 August 2012 at 9.58am

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