

Malawi set to increase broadband internet user penetration



By Gregory Gondwe: @Kalipochi

2 Nov 2011

Malawi is resolute to reduce the cost of international connectivity thereby increasing both telephony and broadband internet user penetration through the ongoing Regional Communication Infrastructure Programme - Malawi Project (RCIPMW).

Government designated the Privatization Commission (PC) as the Project Implementation Unit for the project. In view of its role the PC has been hosting stakeholders' consultative conferences on the project in the country's three major cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu.

The objective of these consultative conferences which is drawing together service providers in the ICT sector, government officials, banks, financial houses, civil society organisations, and media practitioners among others is briefing the gathering on project objectives, besides updating them on progress to date and obtain feedback on various aspects of the project.

CEO of the Privatization Commission, Jimmy Lipunga told Bizcommunity that the government led intervention, in the ICT sector, whose objectives are to support policy and legislative reforms and to provide quality and affordable internet capacity to the nation, and this why, in all the meetings which started on 31 October 2011 in Blantyre, the guest of honour is information and civic education Minister Patricia Kaliati.

The next two such meetings will take place today, 2 November and on Friday 4 November 2011, in Lilongwe and Mzuzu respectively.

Malawi to be linked to the world

Lipunga said this is the project where Malawi is linked to the international world through the optic fiber cable. He said this is happening because government saw the critical role the ICT plays in fostering socio-economic development and empowering the poor and that is why it secured a loan from the World Bank to implement the project.

Malawi, like many countries in Africa, has under-developed communications infrastructure that is characterized by high charges, low penetration levels and poor service provision history. Lipunga says these, in turn, contribute to the high cost of doing business, limited innovation and poor information flow in the country.

Improve quality, availability and affordability

"The overall of the project is to improve quality, availability and affordability of broadband within Malawi for both public and private users," he says and that this will be accomplished by using a government pre-purchase agreement to motivate specific operator behavior in the market.

He explained that the project will be implemented through a Public Private Partnership (PPP) model following pro-competition and open access principles.

"The project will also facilitate the review of the policy and legal framework of the ICT sector. The scope of the project also includes the strengthening of the regulatory capacity of the Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) and the operating capacity of information and civic education," he said.

Malawi's commitment

At the Blantyre conference Kaliati said the basic premise that is driving Malawi's commitment to the project initiative is the universally acknowledged fact that ICT is one of the requisites of socio-economic development in the global economy.

She said it is undeniable that the world economy is increasingly becoming ICT-driven and therefore countries that do not offer appropriate ICT environments may not attain long-term economic growth objectives.

She added that this is why Malawi, in collaboration with the World Bank, is embarking on the project to improve the quality, availability and affordability of communications services in the country while at the same time improving Malawi's connectivity to international communications services.

In June 2009, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved an International Development Association (IDA) credit of US\$20 million (MK3 billion) for Malawi to carry out its bit in the regional project.

Price of services reduced

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) has placed a high priority on developing the ICT sector.

A PC statement says the project will also seek to reduce price of services to make them affordable to more people through competition and cost reduction measures.

"The project will help remove cost bottlenecks to international connectivity and other bottlenecks at the national and local levels," it says. "In the long run the government of Malawi, through the project, aims at improving productive capacity and reducing the cost of doing business, positioning creativity as a tool for shared growth and creating incentives for private sector investment."

This will be done by using the government's power as a purchaser of international connectivity to stimulate the development of intra-regional connectivity, thereby ensuring that Malawi has access to the submarine cables along the East coast of Africa.

"It will link Malawi to the world by fibre-optic cable through underwater wires in the Indian Ocean to be accessed through the east coast in Tanzania," PC says.

ABOUT GREGORY GONDWE: @KALIPOCHI

Gregory Gondwe is a Malawian journalist who started writing in 1993. He is also a media consultant assisting several international journalists pursuing assignments in Malawi. He holds a Diploma and an Intermediate Certificate in Journalism among other media-related certificates. He can be contacted on gregorygondwe@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @Kalipochi.

- Malawi internet freedom report - 14 Oct 2013
- More resources demanded for digital migration - 26 Nov 2012
- Independent national TV to switch on in 2014 - 19 Nov 2012
- Govt. tells journos to try self-employment - 19 Nov 2012
- MISA trains journos on child reporting - 16 Nov 2012

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>