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The Southern African
ICT for Education Summit 2012

26-27 January, Victoria Falls

Welcome

Dr Sam Kundishora
Permanent Secretary, Information & Communication
Technology, Zimbabwe

Good morning everybody. I wish to recognise the presence of the Honourable Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, the Honourable Senator David Coltart and I also want to recognise Honourable Ministers, Deputy Minister and senior government officials from Zimbabwe and outside Zimbabwe who are here present.

Fellow participants in the education, ICT and partners who were invited to the Summit, conference organisers and invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

What I will try and do in the short space of time is just to give you an overview of our perceptions and also our activities so far as ICTs in the education sector are concerned. It is our pleasure to have been invited to this Summit, and I must thank the Minister of Education for remembering the Ministry of ICT in this regard. We often hear of gatherings discussing ICTs from newspapers or from radios, and yet I think it is only in order that whenever there is any event regarding ICTs that we be contacted here or elsewhere where our locals are participating. I think it is only fair if we are also informed because we indeed can contribute to the debates and discussions that are going on in those forums.

When I looked at this particular Summit I saw that it was talking about ICTs in education and also in Southern Africa, and as a Ministry we are also very much involved in other aspects which promote the use of ICT in education. I'm talking about the infrastructure; I'm talking about the application when we collaborate with other partners within the region. And so we are so delighted, and Guest of Honour, the Minister, we thank you very much for inviting us.

I want to reflect a little bit on the origins and importance of the ICTs per se, not specifically focusing on education in this regard. I'm sure some of you recall that there was a move in the whole world to try and sensitise nations to ICTs, which culminated in the World Summit on the Information Society. The World Summit on the Information Society took place in Geneva in the summer of 2003, and the heads of governments who attended that Summit appended their signatures to a document that has become the foundation of the information and knowledge society. This document speaks very clearly as to how the nations are expected to adopt and deploy and use the ICTs for national transformations. We in Zimbabwe have been fortunate because not only were we represented at that Summit, but also we were tasked to do something as a nation. I wish to read for you some of the objectives, goals and targets which we agreed in their plan of action in WSIS, Geneva 2003.

They say here, I quote, "to connect villages with ICTs in established community access points"; "to connect secondary schools and primary schools with ICTs" and then "to connect scientific and research centres with ICTs". I have taken only three, but there is also a fourth one which I think is also important: "to connect public libraries, cultural centres, museums, post offices and archives with ICTs." And then it talks about the heath sectors, but there is one which I think is very important which speaks to "adapt all primary and secondary school curriculums to meet the challenges of the information society, taking into account the national circumstances". There is also "to encourage the development of content and to put in place the technical conditions in order to facilitate the presence and use of all world languages on the internet". I have selected these targets and goals as reflected in the plan of action 2003.

The ones I have read to you are really central to what this Summit is focusing on. When we talk about connecting schools, secondary schools, research centres and universities, we are talking education. When we are talking about the development of appropriate content and putting it on the internet to be accessed by the majority, either nationally, and even you, we are talking about education, and I think this is very important to consider. When ICTs come in, they are only enablers, facilitators, but otherwise the core rests with the Ministry of Education in this instance, and also the educators in general. We believe as a Ministry we have a role to play. We are not the experts in the education sector. But I believe in the provision of ICT tools and the resources, I think this is something that we have to stand up to and provide unreservedly. As a Ministry we have therefore developed a strategic plan that spans five years from 2010

to 2014 and in that strategic plan we reflect clearly our intention to assist the education sector to achieve its mandate through the provision of ICT tools and also expertise. We have taken this and transmitted it into reality.

Honourable Minister, you will recall from your many discussions with the Minister of ICT that we intend assisting you with the computerisation of the education sector. And from last year we are trying to come up with a blueprint as to how we will roll out a computerisation programme for the education sector. And we have been working with the Ministry of Education very closely through the office of the Permanent Secretary and also the officials in the Ministry of Education, to the extent that we have come up with a list of the pilot schools we are going to focus on in the first phase. We have also come up with a model of how we see the computerisation of schools programme executed, in particular the computer lab itself. We believe that some of the comments made by the Honourable Minister are very serious there, and provoking to us a Ministry. We want to see the computer availability in schools raised, and a 40-seater lab which we have come up with – there is a model in Mashonaland East in a school which we identified courtesy of your Ministry - and this is a state-of-the-art lab. We are planning to do the same in the 80 schools which we have been given by your Ministry, spread country wide – there are eight schools per province. Even as we travelled to Victoria Falls we passed through Tsholotsho because there is also a lab there which we are setting up as a model. We can assure you that if all goes well and if our plans are not disturbed, we wish to cover half of your schools with this standard model in the next two years.

There are also cooperating partners who are willing to support us in this endeavour and we may exceed our targets. But we are truly grateful. We are trying to translate our strategic plan in response to the WSIS Declaration and ask ourselves how is Zimbabwe going to viewed when the analysis and the final discussion on the WSIS programmes ends.

We also believe that when we demonstrate the 40-seater computer lab at a school we are mindful of electricity challenges – the power challenges you mentioned, Guest of Honour the Honourable Minister – and we are going to demonstrate alternative sources of energy through solar. This is something that we would want and we are working very closely with the private sector co-operating partners to ensure that we are providing electricity through solar for those schools that are in the remote areas where there is no electricity grid. We are also working to try and provide content, and each of them is going to be connected to the internet, that is standard, it will also have a projector, it will also have a printer – that is standard. And we strongly believe such a good model is really a starting point for the computerisation and the ICTs in education.

Let me also say, this is what we can do as a Ministry of ICT, invite the Ministry of Education and its co-operating partners to look into the development of necessary content, because I think this is your responsibility. Of course we will assist where possible, but I think this is the contribution which we would very much want to see. And I also agree with the Minister that this Summit comes at a time when all stake holders assist with the question of how we can collectively equip and effectively prepare the students to succeed in the 21st century. This cannot be done by the Ministry of Education alone but through the other partners – public, private and even international players. I also believe that there are opportunities for private sector players in not only the Education sector but in this instance also covering the ICT sector. We need infrastructure - communications infrastructure to reach out to the schools because we also are in the process of establishing community information centres and there is a need to provide infrastructure. We also believe that once you have provided the infrastructure there are other supporting value addition services that should be providing, and this also goes for investors to pay particular attention to.

I wish to conclude by saying the Ministry if ICT is not an expert in education sector, once again, but we feel that we are the experts in the provision of the tools which you require in the education sector. With these tools you will actually enhance your operations. We also wish to thank you for the continued help between our Ministry and the Ministry of Education and the private sector and ourselves, and we together will achieve the goals which we have set ourselves.