

## **A Legislator's Perspective on some of the ICT Developments in Kenya**

The Chair, Honorable Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Sammy Weya, a Member of Parliament from Kenya. We are four members in our delegation. This is the second time to attend such a meeting, the first being in Thailand in 2004.

Many poor women in developing countries are unable to manipulate their mobile phones and IT, making it work for them in order to generate income and alleviate poverty. Africa is not burdened by many old technologies so it is easy to leapfrog into new (ICT) ones. The problem of access in rural areas is a key area of concern.

Kenya is one country in Africa that has the greatest potential for ICT developments, but we did not pursue it keenly in the past. Even little countries like Rwanda were way ahead of us in the year 2002.

However, in the last 3 years there have been significant breakthroughs with more liberalization of the sector, the establishment of a ministry dedicated to ICT matters, finalization of an ICT policy, the development of an ICT Bill and a lot of ICT developments in our parliament.

We are in the process availing all our parliamentary proceedings online. This will include order papers, questions, Bills and Motions. In addition, the Hansard Report will also be digitized. These are significant firsts in our country and link us more closely with the citizens and the global village in general

Currently, all Members of Parliament in Kenya have computers in their offices though they have largely been stand-alone but there are major developments to have all connected to the Internet. There is however a cybercafé in Parliament. In addition, there is in-house training available for any MP to be computer literate.

We have established an E-Parliament Committee and are in the process of amending the Standing Orders to provide for an ICT Committee within Parliament.

From a National Perspective, in the last 4 years, Kenya became one of the few African countries after Egypt to have a ministry dedicated solely to ICT issues. This is the Ministry of Information and Communication. In most countries ICT issues fall under many other infrastructural issues, the last ministry responsible was the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

The ICT Policy is available as of January 2005. There are two Bills currently being debated in Parliament; the Freedom of Information Bill and the ICT Bill. One of the reasons for the introduction of the ICT Bill is to allow for the creation of a universal access fund which will enhance access to rural areas.

With this fund, operators will be obligated to pay levy which will enable the government to roll out into the rural areas. It is important to note that most companies do not readily go into the rural areas as they are not profitable. Some do it for social responsibility but this is not sufficient. These people need to be connected and have access to information through affordable channels.

Thirty percent of eligible Kenyans have mobile phones and the market is still wide open as wireless communications may be the only way for many areas that do not have the infrastructure for fixed communications. Many Kenyans utilize SMS and Opinion polls on various national issues are regularly conducted via SMS.

The government has liberalized the sector and licenses are more accessible to anyone who can meet the requirements so this has seen many more players in the ICT sector.

We support collaboration between developed and developing countries like ours in enhancing our ICT environment in our bid to provide access for all.