

Connecting 80 Ugandan schools

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Uganda's Communications Commission (UCC) is to spend a total of USD\$1 million to connect 80 secondary schools to the Internet.

"We have worked with the ministry of education and sports and have selected 80 schools that would be connected in the next financial year," said the commission's executive director Eng. Patrick Masambu.

"This is one of the key targets to be achieved by the year 2010 according to the proposed telecommunications policy," he told HANA in an interview in Kampala.

Other targets the commission wants to achieve include institutional data access points of not less than 256 kilobytes per second (kbps), Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools and post primary institutions, government health units and local council (LC3), and population centres exceeding 1,200 people and establishment of public data access points of not less than 256kbps to each sub-county.

"We have also planned to establish public voice access points within each parish at LC11 level, high capacity backbone linking all district headquarters and major towns," he said. "We are also targeting increased penetration of voice services to 20% from the current 4.2% and increased Internet penetration from the present 1% to 10%."

Results from the rural communication development fund

Since the establishment of the rural communication development fund (RCDF) in 2003, 52 internet points of presence, 13 multi purpose tele-centres, 55 internet cafes, 55 ICT training centres, 54 district web portals, 1,835 pay phones, three rural research projects and rural post franchise support to 25 post offices have all been established. The government has also started laying a 2,000km² national transmission backbone cable that will be ready for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in November.

"In the first we are putting up 2,000km² of the cable that is intended to ensure high quality and low cost services and will reach all the major towns of Uganda by November this year," said the ministry's acting permanent secretary Godfrey Kibuuka. This project would introduce office automation, video conferencing, electronic mail and reduce the cost of doing business."

He also said that the present Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) infrastructure coverage has reached 745 sub-counties out of the 926.

Prolonged gains for youth

ICT Minister Dr. Ham Mulira said the youth in particular will benefit from the backbone by having access to affordable voice and data services like e-learning, telemedicine, e-commerce, and out-sourcing. The rapid growth of the sector has brought many opportunities for the youths by creating jobs and new innovations.

"Today many ICT companies employ mainly the youths because of their easy adaptability to ICT's," Mulira said. "The project however is to complement the private sector but not to compete with it and the private sector should concentrate their efforts and investments on using the infrastructure to provide several varieties of services to the public."

Mulira also pointed out that the government was also developing district information centres after the establishment of the national backbone infrastructure.

"The centres will act as information sharing and distributing points in the districts - these developments however require Ugandans to have the necessary skills to benefit fully from the ICT's," he concluded.

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