

**OPENING REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS,
DR. EDWARD OMANE BOAMAH, AT THE 1ST GHANA MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
FORUM ON AFFORDABLE INTERNET AT KOFI ANNAN ICT CENTRE OF
EXCELLENCE ON TUESDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY 2014 AT 9.00A.M**

**The Chairman,
The Executive Director of A4AI,
Other Partner Organisers of the Forum,
Distinguished Participants,
Invited Guest,
Members of the Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
All other protocols observed,**

Good Morning. Let me take the opportunity to commend the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) and its partners for organizing this forum here in Accra - bringing together many stakeholders - with the aim to make Internet affordable and accessible.

In the 21st century, broadband Internet has become a critical infrastructure prerequisite, as ICT bears considerable impact in the creation of the Information Society. Broadband serves as the foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life.

Broadband Internet access and utilization is having profound impact and changing education services delivery, the delivery of health care, the management of energy resources, delivery of public safety, the manner of engagement of government and the citizenry and above all, the provision of access to organize and disseminate information and knowledge.

As is generally known, bandwidth and Internet Protocol (IP) are regarded as the currency for the future development of a nation. A country's status of development is now being measured in terms of its bandwidth capacity. Indeed a study by the World Bank has indicated that in low and middle income countries every 10-percentage point increase in broadband penetration generates a boost of 1.38 additional percentage points to GDP growth (WB, 2010).

Having this in mind the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has thrown a '**Broadband Challenge**', calling on all Governments, industry and civil society to work together to ensure that at least 40% of their households use broadband Internet by 2015.

How is Ghana responding to this challenge? The Government recognizing the enormous benefit of ICTs to the Ghanaian Citizenry has put measures in place to ensure that we develop our ICT infrastructure to meet current technological trends. This realization has been acknowledged in Ghana since the adoption of the national ICT for Accelerated Development Policy (ICT4AD) in 2003.

Indeed last year 2013, the Ministry of Communications facilitated the review of the scope of the Ghana ICT4AD Policy Statement to include the following thematic policy areas:

- Broadband
- Cyber Security

- ICTs, Climate Change and Environment
- Geo-Information

In furtherance of this, and taking into consideration the new developmental challenges facing Ghana, the rapid technological advances in the last 10 years since the inception of the ICT4AD Policy, the Ministry has further set up a Task Team to facilitate a review of the ICT4AD policy with the view to seeking stakeholder inputs to make changes to address the digital challenges, and also to focus and the major challenges emanating from the global economy landscape that focuses on:

- Accelerated Economic Development, Growth and Job Creation
- Capacity Development, Education and Youth Empowerment
- Science, Technology, Innovation and Research
- Government Services, Systems and Security

We are optimistic that the review of the policy document should help take Ghana to the next steps of its journey towards transforming its economy and society into a fully fledged information and knowledge-based society and economy in the foreseeable future.

It is in line with this vision that we welcome the hosting of this A4AI facilitated stakeholder meeting which we are certain will help source viable inputs to enrich the ICT4AD policy review process scheduled to end by June 2014.

Fibre Infrastructure and Broadband development

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Currently, Ghana is served by five submarine cables: SAT-3 Cable; MainOne; Glo-1; WACS and the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable systems supplying more than 12.3 Terabits of submarine cable capacity.

There is also, a national terrestrial optic fibre network that is being built to cover all the Districts and Constituency areas of the country. Last year Government launched the construction of the 780 kilometre optic fibre ICT backbone infrastructure on the Eastern Corridor of the country to provide broadband infrastructure to over 200 towns and communities along the route from Ho to Bawku, with link to Tamale from Yendi. A hundred and seven kilometres (107 km) of optic fibre has so far been laid. These 200 towns that will benefit from broadband connectivity will include, but not limited to, Jasikan, Kpeve, Have, Nankpanduri, Dambai, Worawora, Garu, Zabzugu, Bimbilla, Nkwanta, Vakpo, Karaga, Nalerigu, Gambaga, Kparekpare, Nakpayili, etc.

Ghana has also responded to the ITU's Connect-Africa initiative by successfully connecting its terrestrial optic fibre with those of neighbouring sister countries of Burkina Faso and Togo. We have also established a point of presence on the western border, preparing to directly connect with La Cote d'Ivoire, in addition to the submarine link.

The optic fibre assets of the National Communications Backbone Company (NCBC)/Vodafone also provides nearly 3,000 kilometres of terrestrial fibre from Accra and the south through Kumasi, Sunyani, to Wa, Tumu, Paga, Bawku and to Tamale, Kintampo, Techiman and back to Kumasi.

With the massive investment in broadband infrastructure, Internet usage is growing steadily with increased capacity for the deployment of 4th Generation Applications. In partnership with the Internet community, Government is supporting the development of critical Internet infrastructure by arranging for the supply of additional switches for Internet Exchange Points (IXPs).

It is estimated that the Internet usage in Ghana is nearing 25% of the population, and this is largely attributed to the mobile Internet provided by the telecommunication companies, and aided by the progressive reduction in the cost of bandwidth.

Indeed, the cost of bandwidth in Ghana has witnessed substantial reduction over the years. In the year 2007 the cost of 2 Megabits bandwidth was about \$10,000 per month. In 2008, this figure fell to \$7,500, then in 2009 it reduced to \$4,500, then to \$4,000 in 2010, \$2,000 in 2011 and for last year, the cost of 2 Megabits bandwidth fell to \$1,500 per month. Right now, this is reducing to \$1,200. Let me be quick however to say that this is not certainly what we want to achieve. As a country we want to remain competitive with countries like Mauritius, Singapore, Malaysia, etc to be able to attract

investments. For example, statistics in Mauritius for the year 2012 indicated the following:

ADSL 1 Mbps Home & Business (Unlimited Volume Usage)

Residential use	Rupees 708	US\$ 23
Business use	Rupees 2,400	US\$ 78

The lowering of broadband cost is the challenge that we have as a country to facilitate the availability of the Internet at affordable rate to the citizenry. And here, I will like to urge A4AI to collaborate with the Ministry to work towards the implementation of the policy that will attract further investment (both local and foreign) in the sector and also boost uptake of the Internet. A major area of our collaboration would be to support the private sector to drive a massive innovation in content and application development to attract the local market. There is also the need for value addition to enable Ghana translate its high subscription rate of mobile phone (over 102%) into economic advantage. Needless to say we expect that after this Forum we will gain access to policy inputs that will support policy implementation for affordable broadband Internet.

Let me use this opportunity to commend the Ghana Internet Service Providers Association that has recently confirmed that currently nearly 45% of Ghana's Internet traffic is handled locally through the existing Internet Exchange Point. With the delivery of additional switches in the pipeline, it is expected that the percentage will improve and more opportunities will emerge, especially to promote content development.

Private Sector Collaboration for Infrastructure Sharing

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, quite recently, we took a tour of the facilities of the Telecom Companies to acquaint ourselves with the extent of investment into the infrastructural development. On a competitive terrain such as Ghana, it was realized that each Operator is developing their own terrestrial fibre networks to improve their operations and service quality. However, you will realize that to be able to drive down broadband internet access for households, the capital expenditure of service providers must be relatively low. The only way to achieve this is to effectively share infrastructure. When the private sector collaborates with the Government on infrastructure sharing, significant amount of investment costs could be saved and thereby prevent the duplication of similar infrastructure on the same route.

It is in this regard that I once again urge the Private Sector to partner with NITA to utilize the public infrastructure being developed along the Eastern Corridor of the country as well as in the various locations within the country as part of the e-Government network.

Under the national e-Government Platform Project, 30 existing World Wide Interoperability Microwave Access (WIMAX) sites have been upgraded to Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology. 90 more sites are being constructed to enable the deployment of advanced ICT Applications in education, health, commerce, Open

Government and other business opportunities. This infrastructure is available for sharing with the private sector to facilitate the provision of last mile solutions and value added services to our people. It is my belief that effective collaboration with the Private Sector on the development of the country's ICT infrastructure will impact greatly on the core business of the Private Sector to reduce cost of the broadband Internet.

The Contention on Broadband Affordability

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The contention on broadband affordability however is how to ensure universal broadband usage at all times at speeds capable of guaranteeing adequate capacity usage especially during peak times and affordable price irrespective of geographic location. Ghana's Broadband Policy defines broadband as bandwidth that provides internet speeds greater than **2 Megabits per second** by 2020. This target I believe can be achieved with a collective and concerted effort by Government and the Private Sector for households.

Government recently, undertook a Digital Divide Study to provide evidence about the nature and causes of the broadband divide and the reasons for its persistence. The study which has been completed collected and analyzed information in three broad areas namely:

- Penetration/diffusion of Internet and Broadband,

- Demographics, characteristics, challenges, and trends relating to Internet and Broadband usage
- Effectiveness of current policy and regulatory interventions in facilitating Ghanaians' use of Internet and Broadband.

The study has given the Ministry the baseline information to lead to improved policies, regulation, practices and ultimately, a closing of the divide within Ghana. There is however the need to sustain this study so that the gaps in universal affordability in Internet usage can be identified. And here, I urge A4AI, to collaborate with the Ministry and its agencies NITA, GIFEC and indeed the Regulator NCA to sustain the research on the Internet Divide, this year, 2014.

Collaboration with Academia for Human Resource Development

Mr. Chairman, providing affordable broadband internet without adequate applications that serves the needs of the citizenry will not achieve the desired targets we aspire to attain. This is where our collaboration with the Academia, the Civil Society, the SME, as well as the informal sector of the economy is critical. With the trend in technological changes, we must have the right caliber of trained ICT human resources with the capability of churning out local content for the networks.

We also need these human resources to maintain the networks for their sustainability and efficiently taking into consideration the huge investments made into their construction. Further to drive uptake of Internet, Government aims at facilitating

broadband Internet usage through the provision of mass access points at Airports, the commercial market centres and other key public areas to benefit the general public.

Let me also take the opportunity to place on record that the Ministry has developed an IT/IM Scheme of Service for the public sector which is available for adoption by the Private Sector and Academia so that our ICT professionals can develop their careers both in the public and private sector organizations. Already we have made the document available to the tertiary institutions and urge all of them to use it in developing the requisite skills set as the ICT environment provides avenues to create enormous job and employment opportunities for our teeming and energetic youth.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my expectation that this forum will increase constructive dialogue among sector stakeholders across Public, Private, Academia and Civil Society. I hope that the inputs generated from this forum will guide the development and implementation of robust policy and regulatory tools and instruments that are characterized by demand driven content and strong stakeholder ownership.

A4AI is indeed a worthy partner towards this course and I seize this opportunity to thank you for choosing Ghana as a collaborating country in our bid to bring the price of Internet down to meet the pocket of every citizen. This is our universal obligation and government remains committed at all times.

At this point, it is my singular honour to declare the forum opened.

Thank you.