

# MALAWI RURAL ICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Plans to develop the ICT/telecommunications sector in Malawi were initiated by the government of Malawi in 1998 under the formulation of the Communications Sector Policy. The Policy was enabled by the Communications Act 1998. Central to this policy was the growing contribution of communications to the social and economic development of Malawi and to the reduction of the disparity between the rural and urban areas. Since 1998, the Malawi Government has been putting up efforts to address this disparity.

This paper will describe briefly some of the projects or programmes being undertaken to ensure that rural masses access ICT services in the country.

## 2. ICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES /PROGRAMMES

The ICTs for Sustainable Rural Development (ISRD) Project and Infrastructure Services Project (ISP) are among other projects being undertaken in Malawi to address the disparity between the rural and urban areas.

2.1 **ISRD Project** is a project being undertaken by the Malawi Government with the support of ICS-UNIDO of Italy. The project is being coordinated by the Ministry of Information and Tourism through MACRA. The aim of this project is to reduce poverty and isolation of the rural communities by making accessible ICT enabled services through scalable and cost effective communication infrastructures. The project will be implemented by installing multi-purpose community telecentres in the rural areas. The implementation of the pilot telecentres calls upon the financing from the donor community and government as well as a public-private-partnership for the operation of the telecentres.

### 2.2 **Infrastructure Services Project (ISP)**

The ISP Project is being coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development with the support of the World Bank. The project focuses on prioritized service delivery in the water and sanitation, electricity, roads and including the ICTs in some selected rural areas

Service provision in rural and unserved areas through target interventions

will be financed by the Universal Access Fund introduced by the the Universal Access Policy (*to be formulated*). The Government will procure consulting services to advise on best approaches to improve connectivity in rural and under-served areas and creating the policy, legal, regulatory and institutional conditions for improved access. MACRA will administer the UA Fund and ensure that the Universal Access Fund place is utilize. MACRA will make regulations for rural telecommunications development (license conditions for operators)

These two projects focus on improving access to telecommunications and information services in targeted areas by providing rural telephone connections to communities, as well as multi-purpose community telecentres.

### 3

### CHALLENGES TO THE RURAL ICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Universal Access is only attainable where all concerned parties i.e. Government, Public and Private sectors and all other stakeholders are willing to show commitment to the cause. Further, rolling out the rural areas may be hectic due to different interests:

(i) the private sector is profit oriented

(ii) the public sector would ensure that services are

provided even in areas where it is not economically viable

(iii) Technological solutions may pose some challenges since other technologies are expensive to deploy causing higher tariffs to the end customer