

Opening remarks by the Secretary General at the Tallinn E-Governance Conference on 30 May 2017, Tallinn, Estonia

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It gives me great pleasure to join in welcoming you all, on behalf of the ACP Group of States, to this e-Governance Conference 2017, hosted by the Republic of Estonia. We are grateful for the hospitality accorded to us since our arrival here in the beautiful city of Tallinn. This high-level e-Governance Conference 2017 is a significant occasion, as it provides a unique opportunity for ACP Member States to engage in deliberations and share experiences with the international community on the critical issues pertaining to the embracing of e-Governance for sustainable development in developing countries.

We fully acknowledge that many institutions and organizations (public and private) in developing countries, such as ACP countries, have embraced the utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to address the various opportunities and challenges in the context of their respective development strategies. Indeed much of the support and facilitation continue to be provided at great sacrifice by national governments, through the development of the ICT infrastructure, increased connectivity and affordability of telecommunication services, as well as ensuring a broader participation of citizens in Information Technology (IT) usage.

While we note significant progress in ICT adoption at various levels in many developing countries, several factors still impede the effective utilization of ICT in the public and private sectors of their respective economies. These include; poor approaches to IT adoption, ineffective ICT policy frameworks, political and cultural diversity, lack of e-capacity and the needed infrastructure, security, poor service delivery, the ever-changing ICT environment, and market prices, among others.

It is acknowledged however, that over the past few years, the mobile communications market has astronomically grown, in developing countries; particularly in Africa, in relation to the global mobile market. Internet usage has also shown a similar trend. These developments have been robust and market-driven, meeting the needs of people who are experiencing the compelling pull of the new world of communications.

Furthermore, these high growth rates have been accompanied by innovation mainly tailored to the needs of the users in our countries. We also note that the high growth experienced in segments of the ICT sector of ACP countries, has been facilitated by the sizeable investment in infrastructure by mostly private sector organizations who took advantage of the investments in the sector by governments over a previous period of decades.

It is however important to also emphasize that the ICT sector needs to be openly and repeatedly recognized as a key economic enabler at the highest levels of governments. This recognition should be tangible and translated into specific value, be it monetary in the form of funding, fiscal incentives or tax reliefs or non-monetary measures such as positive changes in policies and laws that encourage investment, liberalization and greater productivity. Investments aimed at strengthening the ICT human capital, need to be encouraged. Further, incentives to increase ICT adoption by small and medium enterprises in order to increase national competitiveness, should also be vigorously promoted.

We also acknowledge that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is important for linking actors in the innovation system. As such, the challenges ahead of developing countries are to fulfil the commitments to increase development and use of ICT in terms of Infrastructure and expansion of skills, among others. This is consistent with SDG 9 to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

As developing countries strive to embrace e-Governance in their respective development agendas, there is need to invest in innovation processes which will adapt new technologies and practices for the benefit of their populations. We consider it important to emphasize that the ability to access, adapt and diffuse knowledge generated elsewhere, is an important prerequisite for technological progress in developing countries. Hence for us, Estonia serves as a world renowned centre of knowledge and learning,

However, it is imperative for a successful e-Governance programme to be accompanied by a vibrant innovation environment characterized by factors that include:

- 1) A skilled workforce;
- 2) A sound business environment ideas, technologies and business models, and that helps them to grow, increase their market share and reach appropriate levels of scale;
- 3) Policies that encourage innovation and entrepreneurial activity; and
- 4) A strong focus on governance and implementation.

It is also worth mentioning that, although, digital technologies are being adopted in the developing world at an unprecedented rate, lack of connectivity in many of our countries, and limited competition, make these technologies unaffordable for the majority of the population. This continues to occur, despite the fact that the world is more complex and interconnected than ever.

In recognition of this disturbing fact, the 10th EDF intra-ACP Development Cooperation Funds, co-managed by the ACP and the European Commission, responded by designing an ACP Connectivity Programme of 13 Million Euros. The specific objective of the Programme is to facilitate the creation, development and use of regional education and communication networks and internet connectivity in view of having a more inclusive information society at all-ACP, regional and national levels. The activities for the ACP Connect Programme, included the AfricaConnect Initiative, which continues to be funded under the Pan African Instrument financed by the resources from the EU.

Moreover, the promotion of public-private partnership investments in the ICT sector, to facilitate the diffusion of ICT in the social and economic sectors of our countries, is crucial to the success of all these efforts. It should however be underlined that successful partnerships in any sector are a function of overall investor confidence in the socio-political system, ease of doing business and consistency or predictability of the relevant legal frameworks. If these elements are right, it has been found that public-private partnerships will develop and flourish organically.

To this end, as the ACP countries adapt and adopt ICT systems, including e-Governance in their strategic development plans, the dividends will lead to the rolling-out of inclusive, open and secured information or connected societies. This will allow the populations in our countries to reap the benefits from the use of new emerging technologies, applications and online services as they move towards knowledge-based economies. This is the direction of the 21st century in which we intend to share and be a catalyst for all of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific regions.

In conclusion, may I wish you fruitful deliberations at this memorable event. I am sure the insights, Your Excellencies will provide at this e-Governance Conference, will greatly contribute to the efforts of our countries in their pursuit of investing in knowledge economies and their equitable integration in the world economy for the benefit of our citizens,.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Patrick I. Gomes
ACP Secretary General

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