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MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

2017/18 APPROPRIATION BILL DEBATE

29 MARCH 2017

Dep.
Honourable Speaker,

Honourable Members

It gives me great pleasure and honour to contribute to the debate on the 2017/18 Appropriation Bill.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance and his team for presenting a well crafted Appropriation Bill presented. 2017/2018 budget.

The focus of my contribution, Honourable Speaker, is on the strategic role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as enablers for equitable quality education provisioning, enhancement of effective and responsive governance, ensuring effective public service delivery, contribution to the transformations of societies, narrowing the digital divide between urban and rural populations, promoting modernisation of public and industry institutions' methods of work fit for the future digital world.

Dep.
Honourable Speaker

Honourable Members

The context of my contribution is what seems to be lack of strategic emphasis in both the fifth National Development Plan (NDP5) and the Development Budget Medium Term Expenditure Framework 2017/2018 to 2019/2020 on the vital role of ICTs as enablers for equitable quality education, effective public service delivery and as a tool for effective and participatory governance and in enhancing two-way communication.

Panellists at the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform recognised that "the spread of ICTs and global interconnectedness has great potential to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies."

They have recommended that Member States should harness the potential of ICTs to achieve each and every one of the 17 SDGs.

Programs on ICT work in the observed projects made in different ministries, e.g. MDH AF, and Ministry of Health and Social Services. It is my hope that it will be most to manifest the systems the ministries put in place

The Medium Term Expenditure Framework Development, Budget lists only two ministries namely, Agriculture, Water and Forestry and Works and Transport having budgeted for ICT-related projects.

These projects are titled: "The expansion of Intranet and the implementation of E-Governance for MAWF, and upgrading of network infrastructure and expansion of IT services to Regional Offices" respectively.

The lack of ICT infrastructure investment in the Development Budget, Honourable Speaker, ^{How} and Members, is a matter of grave concern taking into account the self-evident advantages and cost effectiveness of ICT to improve public service delivery in a vast country like Namibia.

The project of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry in the Development Budget for example, aims to establish proper communication among offices, including with regional offices and communities. The expected benefits are effective service delivery, reduction in transport costs and time spent in queues to receive public services.

The Ministry of Works and Transport project is intended to upgrade all network infrastructures at the Ministry's Head Office, Regional Offices and Government Stores in the regions.

We need to
is embracing and sustained investment in ICT infrastructure and human capital development ~~not supposed to be priorities of the State~~ *as priorities of the State* during these challenging financial times and against the backdrop of our vision of becoming a knowledge-economy?

X If yes on the basis of cost effectiveness in the long run, where is the evidence to support this claim in our budgetary provisioning?

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Members

Many countries in the world have consciously resolved to become digital, knowledge and learning-societies, hence their huge investments in ICT infrastructure and human capital development to leverage the potential of technology and innovation for economic growth and employment opportunities, and to promote accelerated and sustained social and economic development.

These countries have moved from paper to digital societies due to ICT advantage gains. Namibia cannot afford to ~~move to paper societies where others are coming from,~~ ^{be left behind} hence the need for our country to embrace and invest in ICT infrastructure and human capital development. ^{as we are moving forward.}

Parliamentarians as representatives of the people has a sacred duty to ensure that Namibia joins the digital world and that all citizens without any distinction have access to advanced technologies.

To achieve the above, Parliament and the Executive should develop ~~the~~ policies and strategies to ensure that Internet bandwidth in Namibia is affordable. This would facilitate access to equitable quality education, as schools and universities could be virtually connected and thus facilitate blended mode of teaching and e-learning methods.

Secondly, cyber security and cybercrime are major concerns in Namibia. The country is among the most affected in the world. Cybercrime includes online financial fraud, identity theft, cyber terrorism, human trafficking and online sexual exploitation.

It is important to be aware, that Namibia does not have a Computer Emergency Response Team nor a digital forensic laboratory to deal with cyber security threats.

Namibia further ^{lacks} the necessary legislation and human expertise to manage cybercrime. ~~We cannot continue to cry about lack of skills 27 years after independence as if we do not now that you build skills through education and training or you buy the skills from anywhere in the world.~~

Our universities, especially the Namibia University of Science and Technology offers programmes in Cyber Security. We, ^{however,} ~~do not adequately~~ ^{need} support our universities to produce the required skills.

They are currently sharing ICT services and software with other universities, because they cannot afford the physical infrastructure.

ICT has the potential to provide access to equitable quality education and healthcare services, especially for citizens living in rural and remote areas. Developing health information systems to effectively manage health provisioning is a key priority in Namibia.

ICT also contributes to the preservation and transmission of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in digital forms to the younger generation.

We can also use ICT technology applications that academics and students at institutions of higher education are developing or have developed to monitor and report on gender-based violence, impact of climate change on livelihood, road usage and accidents, veld fires and traffic data.

Hon^{Dr} Speaker

In conclusion, I would like to end by emphasising that partnerships between State, industry, universities and civil society organisations are key in harnessing ICT to promote sustainable development and to become a digital society. Let us make

Namibia a digital, knowledge and learning society.

with that few remarks, I support the bill

I thank you for your kind attention.

Within our limited resources