WSIS + 20 AFRICA REVIEW MEETING, COTONOU BENIN 14/05/2025

Zimbabwe presentation.

ZIMBABWE PLEDGE

Zimbabwe had pledged to connect currently uncovered rural and remote areas and to carry out Research and Development, that can assist the country in identifying gaps in its technological and policy development. Significant progress has been made in implementing the pledges.

KEY RESULTS IN ZIMBABWE

Infrastructure Development (WSIS C2, SDG9) – Smart Zimbabwe 2030 Masterplan, Mobile penetration, broadband penetration, internet penetration.
E-Government (WSIS C7, SDG 16) – E-Government Portal, E-Passport,
Financial Inclusion (WSIS C6, SDG 1&6) – Mobile Money and online/internet banking
ICT in Education (WSIS C7, SDG 4) – Digital classroom, e-learning platform

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

The following are the main sector trends for the fourth quarter of 2024:

- **Active mobile subscriptions** grew to 15,677,094 in the fourth quarter.
- **Active fixed telephone subscriptions** increased to 298,047, in the fourth quarter of 2024.
- **Fixed tele-density** increased to 1.94% in the quarter under review.
- **Active Internet/data subscriptions** grew to reach 12,493,098 in the fourth quarter of 2024**.**
- **Mobile penetration rate** increased to 102.26%.
- **Internet penetration rate** increased to reach 81.49% in the fourth quarter of 2024.

- **Broadband penetration rate** increased by 1.19 percentage points from 78.20% to 79.39%.
- **Mobile money/Financial Inclusion** has over 80% of adults on mobile money platforms such as EcoCash, OneMoney, etc.
- **ICT GDP contribution** 6.9% in 2024.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL SKILLS GAP

Key issues that need to be attended to, and can assist Zimbabwe and the rest of the developing world in bridging the digital skills gap and these include;

- Promoting affordable access to ICTs,
- Setting up digital training centres,
- Coming up with digital training programmes tailored for potential industry employees, so that skills training is not simply generalised,
- An Adult digital skills training for the ageing,
- Appropriate educational and collaboration by regulators with industry stakeholders to identify emerging digital skills needs and develop strategies to address them.

Such pro-activeness supports digital skills development and assists in creating a more skilled and competitive workforce for the digital age.

A chance to tell the world what Zimbabwe has done, and is doing to bridge the gap.

- *Zimbabwe's Girls in ICT scholarships for girls to study STEM subjects,*
- *The SHETECH initiative,*
- *The Women in ICT program,*
- *Digital skills capacity-building programs where people living with disabilities are given specialised training on basic ICT skills, and*
- *Capacitating rural schools and marginalised communities, through setting up school computer laboratories and digital innovation centres where training on ICTs is conducted.*

- *Digitruk initiative, a mobile ICT laboratory targeting rural service centres and formerly marginalised communities, aiming to train 1.5 million people in the year 2025.*
- *Innovation hackathons, robotics and AI challenges are being done in schools and communities to identify talent and potential projects, start-ups to commercialise.*

SMART EDUCATION

The need for inclusive, equitable, and quality education is essential to harness the potential of ICTs for sustainable development.

- Digital skills development, online learning platforms, ICT-based education, digital literacy, and bridging the digital divide ensure equitable access to quality education for all. *Zimbabwe has equipped over 3500 of the almost 9000 schools with ICT laboratories. Recently, to enhance connectivity and access to internet by rural schools, the government is connecting schools to the recently licensed LEO Starlink satellite network. This has seen the development of online educational platforms such as Ruzivo and AI powered chatbots have been locally developed, Ottelo, ZivAI, capable to converse in local vernacular languages.*

ICTS FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION MANAGEMENT

ICTs can mitigate disaster impacts and enhance emergency response. It emphasizes the significance of international collaboration and partnerships. Zimbabwe is one of the four nations worldwide that hosts ICT4DRM equipment.

- The use of ICTs in emergency response and disaster relief, enhancing disaster preparedness and response through digital technologies. *Zimbabwe in collaboration with ITU has developed NETP plan and has developed a ICT4DRM implementation plan. Working with ITU it has deployed ICT4DRM* equipment *recently to Mozambique and DRC requested the same to mitigate effects of floods in the region.*

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE GOVERNANCE

The need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to ensure that AI is developed and used for the benefit of all and not for destruction.

- The need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to AI governance that prioritizes human rights, ethics, and social responsibility. *Zimbabwe with support from UNESCO has developed an AI RAM (Readiness Assessment Methodology) Report on AI Ethics, adoption and governance, due for launch and publishing on the UNESCO website this year.*
- The importance of developing AI that is transparent, explainable, and accountable. *Zimbabwe is working on an AI Strategy that will provide guidelines on the development of sector specific AI policies and implementation plans.*
- The importance of addressing bias and discrimination in AI systems. *Zimbabwe government in collaboration with the academia and other key stakeholders is working on datasets that will provide localised content addressing issues of bias and discrimination as well as legislation to protect public.*
- The need for investing in AI education and re-skilling programs, to prepare workers for the changing job market. *Zimbabwe has embarked on a nationwide drive to train and reskill starting with government employees, the vulnerable groups, youths and women. The Digitruk initiative is meant to bridge the rural urban digital divide, digital skills development targeting 1.5 million individuals in 2025.*

CYBERSECURITY

This is of interest to Zimbabwe, and provide a checklist for Zimbabwe, in its management of cybersecurity.

- Developing comprehensive/robust cybersecurity governance. *Zimbabwe has enacted the Cyber and Data Protection Act and established the Data Protection Authority. Zimbabwe ICT sector regulator POTRAZ has started training and*

licensing Data Protection Officers for all institutions and businesses that collect personally identifiable data of public and individuals.

- Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs. *Zimbabwe has held multiple workshops and awareness campaigns on cybersecurity and has leveraged on the October month of cybersecurity drive to educate the citizens about safety in the digital space.*
- The development of a secure video conferencing systems. *Zimbabwe has developed a Government Communication Suite used for all critical government online meetings.*
- Protecting digital infrastructure and sensitive information. *Zimbabwe is developing a cybersecurity strategy that will give guidelines and implementation matrix for the national cybersecurity drive across all sectors of the economy.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA

Some of the points relating to Data for Zimbabwe to be cognisant of as it develops into a digital economy, include:

- The importance of harnessing the power of the digital economy for a more inclusive and sustainable future. *Zimbabwe is involved in research and development in AI and emerging technologies in its tertiary education and research institutes.*
- The importance of avoiding fragmentation of the digital ecosystem. *Zimbabwe with the support of ITU has held a Strategic Foresight co-creation workshops to build a compact national digital ecosystem for innovation and socio-economic development. Zimbabwe has also done the Digital Innovation Profile to ascertain where we are in terms of digital foot print and where we have to be in the near future vis-à-vis global ICT developments.*
- The need for international cooperation and multistakeholder engagement to develop global norms and standards for AI. *Zimbabwe is an active member of SADC, ATU and ITU family of nations.*

- The importance of creating a people-centric, inclusive, and development-oriented information and knowledge society. *The Presidium, national vision and mantra is that of leaving no one and no place behind. The reviewed Zimbabwe National ICT Policy (2022-2027) and key connectivity initiatives are bearing testimony to this people-centric ecosystem. Zimbabwe has launched the Smart Zimbabwe 2030 Materplan and the Broadband Plan to ramp up deployment and rolling out of requisite backbone and smart infrastructure across the country.*

QUICK TAKEAWAYS

The important points emanating from the initiatives.

- There is a need to infuse universally held values and ethical dimensions into the digital economy.
- Collective responsibility of all stakeholders is necessary to foster an inclusive Information Society.
- Leaders should champion the common good, and safeguard privacy.
- There is need to actively combat abusive and discriminatory behaviours, enabled by digital technologies.
- Awareness and education in the use of digital technologies is critical.
- Implementation of laws and preventive measures to ensure a respectful, secure digital environment is a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYFORWARD

We needs to:

I. Harness the power of digital technologies to achieve sustainable development and economic growth.

II. Take steps to embrace digital transformation through adopting digital technologies that drive economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development.

III. Channel more investment into digital infrastructure and develop robust digital public infrastructure to support online services, entrepreneurship, and connectivity.

IV. Achieve inclusion through bridging the digital divide by promoting access to affordable internet, digital literacy, and online opportunities for all.

V. Leverage data for development through utilising data-driven approaches to inform policymaking, track progress, and drive evidence-based decision-making.

VI. Develop strategies to enhance online safety, security, and resilience to protect citizens and digital assets, as a matter of Priority.

VII. Provide more support for start-ups, innovation hubs, and digital entrepreneurship to drive economic growth and job creation, as a way of encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship.

VIII. Continue cooperating internationally and share best practices, leverage resources, and address common challenges in the digital age, through innovation.

IX. Foster a responsible and Inclusive AI ecosystem through in-country consultations, promotion of international cooperation, robust partnerships, knowledge sharing and the development of best practices in the AI and emerging technologies space.

X. Accelerate the bridging of the digital divide through country-wide connectivity infrastructure, education and capacity-building, to ensure that the benefits of AI and emerging technologies reach marginalised and underserved communities.

XI. Establish ethical guidelines for AI that prioritises transparency, accountability and fairness in AI systems, addressing biases in AI algorithms, ensuring data privacy and developing robust mechanisms for oversight and governance.

XII. Create a comprehensive regulatory framework based on a sound policy that balances innovation with safeguards and maximises the benefits of AI and emerging technologies.

XIII. All Government ministries and regulators in Zimbabwe, need to take advantage of the drive by UN Agencies that they are affiliated to or have a working relationship with, to kickstart digital projects relevant to their portfolios, where emerging

technologies and AI are concerned, in order to help Zimbabwe achieve the SDGs, or "rescue them" as the ITU Secretary-General prefers to say it.

THANK YOU ALL!!!