

Internet costs for govt offices reduced

By Vivian Agaba

The Government has concluded the procurement of bulk Internet bandwidth for different ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), as well as local governments.

Starting early this month, the cost of Internet bandwidth has been reduced from \$300 (sh1m) to \$190 (sh600,000) per megabyte per second per month for all MDAs and local governments.

This was revealed by the Minister of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT), Frank Tumwebaze, during the first ICT stakeholders' consultative workshop at Sheraton Kampala Hotel yesterday.

Tumwebaze said the new move targets user groups such as hospitals, research institutions, outsourcing agencies and innovation hubs.

"Government intervention is done cautiously so as not to squeeze the licensed telecom operators out of business. Even then, we want this cost to go down further and in tandem with what the private operators are charging," he said.

The meeting, attended by several stakeholders, among them Intel, Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), National Information Technology Authority (NITA) and innovators, aimed at gathering views to be included in the Uganda Digital Vision.

The vision seeks to integrate all the existing ICT policies and strategies by different government MDAs into one master document called the "Digital Vision".

The vision will also set targets/milestones or ICT basic standards for MDAs on ICT-related activities.

The ministry has started a 90-day countrywide consultative process seeking different stakeholders' views that will be integrated into the vision.

The policy framework

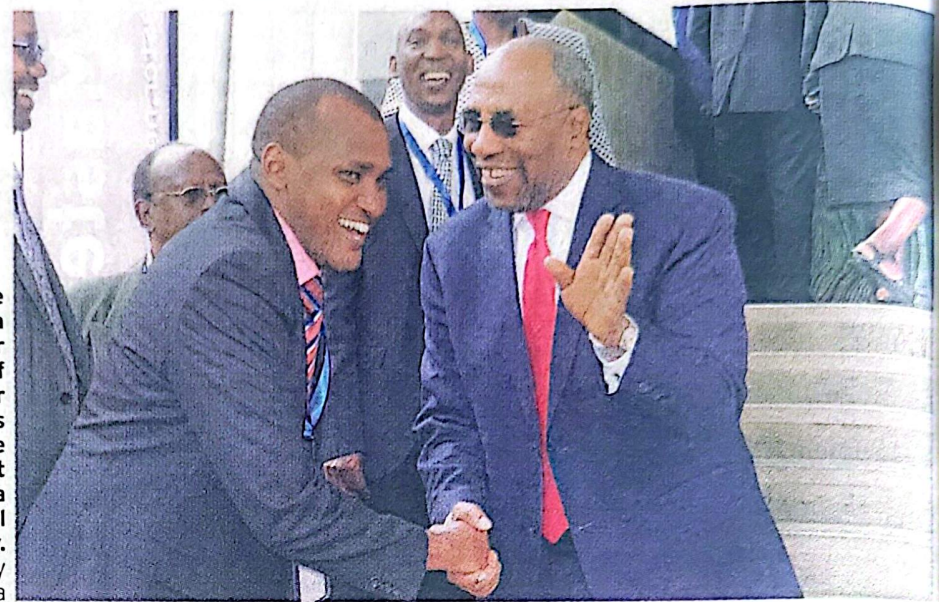
Tumwebaze explained that the policy framework will clearly spell out what, for instance, the Judiciary needs to invest in so as to run E-courts, what the health ministry should do to run E-clinics and what the financial sector should do to run a digital cashless economy (E-commerce).

"Integration of government systems aimed at increasing efficiency in the delivery of services and fighting duplication of functions, cannot be complete without a clear digital vision understood by the Government," Tumwebaze said.

"With the ever-changing demographic composition and technology trends, globalisation and increased access to knowledge by the citizenry, there is demand for seamless citizen-driven public services; boundaries are non-existent and Governments must provide access, efficiency and transparency

Tumwebaze and Rugunda interacting after the opening of the ICT sector stakeholders consultative workshop at the Kampala Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Photo by Nancy Nanyonga



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in public services which we hope to achieve through this vision," he added.

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, noted that ICT is a key sector in the development of any country, especially in this digital era.

Giving an example of his office, Rugunda said government businesses and activities may not be efficiently co-ordinated if there is slow progress

in the sector and, therefore, any measures put in place to enhance the sector are highly appreciated.

Martin Okumu of the Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked the ministry to address the issue of counterfeit phones and computers on the market.

Why now?

The ministry's permanent secretary, Vincent Bagire Waiswa, said despite various investments in the sector,

Uganda is not doing well in terms of ICT development Index (IDI).

This is an annual index published by the United Nations International Telecommunication Union based on internationally agreed ICT indicators.

Bagiire said according to the IDI 2016, Uganda is in the 157th position of the 195 countries ranked worldwide.

In Africa, Uganda is ranked 23rd, while Kenya is in the 9th position and Rwanda in the 20th position. Ghana was ranked 6th in Africa, while Mauritius took the first position.

Bagiire attributed the poor performance of the sector to lack of co-ordination among government ministries and agencies, but hopes that once they get a single framework guiding MDAs on what to do, the situation will improve.

See Tumwebaze's full speech on digitalising Uganda on page 16