

# **Report on implementation of the Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace**

## **Introduction**

The Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace has not been widely disseminated in Zimbabwe. However, policies have been pronounced at the highest levels in government to promote use of ICTs in all spheres of development. Both the public and private sectors are taking action to promote use of ICTs and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace.

The government, through the Ministry of Science and Technology, has developed a national ICT Policy document, which encourages use of ICTs for access to knowledge and information up to the grassroots level. The pace of implementation of this policy is however hindered by a number of factors which society has to grapple with for sometime e.g. the issue of universal access to cyberspace- there still exists a huge digital divide within urban settings and an even greater divide between urban and rural settings. Rural areas lag far behind because the Rural Electrification Programme has not yet reached far and seems to be stalling due to lack of foreign currency required by the programme.

## **2. Report on specific provisions of the Recommendation**

### **A. DEVELOPMENT OF MULTILINGUAL CONTENT AND SYSTEMS**

- The African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) at the University of Zimbabwe has developed monolingual dictionaries in the Shona and Ndebele languages through the ALLEX project. The two dictionaries have now been put on the internet and can easily be accessed by Shona and Ndebele speakers on <http://www.uz.ac.zw/units/alri>
- Another Shona language website has been developed on Google.Shona

Efforts have been made to formulate national language policies but not on the issue of language survival in cyberspace.

### **B. FACILITATING ACCESS TO NETWORKS AND SERVICES**

National efforts to recognize and support universal access to the Internet as well as promote access to the Internet as a service of public interest:

- The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture has set up the Better Schools Programme (BSP) which entails establishing district resource centres where teachers and pupils can access computers and information from the internet at the Centre. The communities in the district also use the centres. The BSP collaborates with WorLDLinks.

- Cyber-Café Projects have been established in the Midlands Province by the Provincial Development Committee and in the Masedu area in Plumtree. The Plumtree project is supported by Kellogg Foundation.
- As a way of encouraging the development of information and supporting community access to ICTs Head of State and First Lady have distributed hundreds of computers to schools and universities throughout the country. The computers benefit the communities as well. However these computers are available at schools that have access to electricity.

### **C. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC DOMAIN CONTENT**

- Government has adopted an e-government policy and has placed government financial management systems online using SAP software. The system is meant to control government expenditure and is accessible within government ministries. Training programmes are conducted regularly for officials to continually update their skills. ICT literacy within the public domain is high since majority of middle and senior civil servants have access to computers.
- Online accessibility of public domain information is being developed. The Research Council of Zimbabwe's Informatics Committee has an accessible portal, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education launched a CD-ROM but this needs to be updated. ZOISS has developed a new website called [Its Bhoo.com](#). Most universities have their own websites

### **D. REAFFIRMING EQUITABLE BALANCE BETWEEN INTERESTS OF RIGHTS HOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST**

- There are efforts towards amending the national copyright law to include IT distribution of copyright. However, there is need for education and awareness on these issues.

### **E. FINAL COMMENTS**

- Government has established the Ministry of Science and Technology, which spearheaded the national ICT Policy and now co-ordinates, all initiatives by various sectors of the economy. The Ministry is also working with UNESCO Harare Office to set up national WSIS chapter, which will monitor implementation of the decisions of the World Summit on the Information Society. No benchmarks have been set as yet.
- Challenges facing the government include:
  - Collaboration between Ministries responsible for Information and Communication. Currently there are four Ministries handling these aspects separately. There is need for a convergence of laws.
  - Access to hardware
  - Brain drain
  - Digital divide: intra-urban and urban-rural
  - High cost of Internet which comes through satellite. Access to the East African submarine cable could greatly reduce Internet costs in Africa.