



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

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## MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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**Statement by Hon. Dr. Peya Mushelenga, Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Namibia on the occasion of the commemoration of the 43<sup>rd</sup> African Telecoms/ICT Day 2020**

**Date: 7 December, 2020**

**Time: 11:00 – 12h30**

**Topic: Ministerial Roundtable Commemorative Forum: Country case studies on what each country is doing in relation to COVID-19, analysis of its impact while emphasizing the importance of innovation and digital skills in this era.**

Namibia like any other Country is experiencing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on both social and economic spheres. Since the arrival of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, our capabilities as an ICT sector has been put to a test regarding service delivery and business continuity. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, Namibia declared a State of Emergency and has seen new work patterns such as the adoption of “work from home strategy” with employees operating remotely from their unusual workplaces depending on ICTs to interact with colleagues and deliver services to their clients. Traditional meetings have shifted to virtual platforms such as this, which are supported by ICTs. Schools and institutions of higher learning have shifted from traditional teaching and learning to online learning methods/ virtual classrooms which could be the new normal for an undefined future. This abrupt shift demands a new set of skills and requires new ways of thinking to be able to embrace the new normal.

Due to the network congestion, telecommunication operators required more spectrum in order to meet the increasing bandwidth demands and build resilient networks to ensure reliable connectivity. Telecommunication operators introduced tailor made data packages in order to enable consumers to cope with the new normal. The ICT Regulator

at the same time plays a role of ensuring that the quality of service to the consumers is not compromised under the circumstances. Without any doubt, the new normal compels governments to ensure that robust and responsive policy and regulatory frameworks are in place to effectively respond to emerging technologies and trends.

Although the COVID-19 impact is devastating, on the other hand it has created ample opportunities for innovators to find solutions to these posed challenges. To this end, the Namibian and German governments teamed up to roll out projects related to innovation/digitalization/digital skills.

The NamibiaHacksCovid19 Hackathon was held from 17-19 April 2020 and over 100 teams of innovators, coders, programmers and critical thinkers participated to come up with solutions to challenges. Namibia was facing as a result of the COVID19 outbreak. These challenges include Health: the teams developed new innovative ideas that address and scale a range of health initiatives, including preventative/hygiene behaviors, supporting frontline health workers, scaling telemedicine, contact tracing/containment strategies, treatment and diagnosis development and Business Continuity: the teams came up with solutions to the problems that businesses are facing to stay afloat, collaborate effectively and move parts of their business online.

This includes sectors that are specially affected like tourism, construction, informal vendors, etc.

Under the COVID19 Start-up Grant: over 1800 online applications were received for this operational support measure, aimed to keep startups afloat during this difficult time. Two rounds in total disbursed 600 grants of NAD 15,000 qualifying Namibian start-ups. The grant application was done 100% online in both rounds, nudging Namibian startups to make use of technology while at the same time making the grant accessible to startups from all regions of Namibia. The entire grant management process was successfully done online, from application to evaluation with external assessors.

Under the COVID19 Youth Digital Business Programme: 200 locally manufactured Namibian Laptops were procured and will be distributed on a competitive basis to Namibian young adults aged 18-22, upon submission and evaluation of promising digital/digitally enabled business models. The selected youth will receive training on digital business models/digital skills as well as the laptop, enabling to start micro-startups in the digital economy. The programme will start in January 2021.

On the occasion of the 43<sup>rd</sup> African Telecoms/ICT Day 2020, it is with a greater sense of humility that I wish to express my profound gratitude and applause all the players in the ICT ecosystem all over Africa who keep us connected and ensure business continuity in these difficult and trying times. The pandemic has taught us hard lessons and this year's theme intentionally challenges us to position ourselves as a sector in the resumption of socio-economic activities post COVID-19.

Happy 43<sup>rd</sup> African Telecoms/ICT Day 2020 and I thank you.