Botswana to embrace ICTs

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22 Oct 2007

In its bid to catch up with the world in embracing and using information and communication technologies (ICTs), the Botswana government has sent a delegation of high-ranking officials to harness more knowledge at an ICT forum in Califronia.

And as explained by a government official who is part of the delegation, their brief is simple. It is to go and identify suitable partners to assist Botswana to become ICT compliant; quicken her pace in entering the information highway.

The delegation, led by a member of parliament, was invited by the Cisco Systems Inc in California to attend an ICT forum. Topics of discussion expected to come up at the forum include Cisco's connected government vision and country transformation through ICT initiatives being coordinated with other governments in Africa.

"America is in the top league of countries that are far much advanced in ICT. Therefore, a visit such as this one is critical. We are not going there as tourists but as messengers of the people of Botswana. We have to get as much information as possible so that when we report back, our people can be proud of having sent us there," leader of the delegation, MP Ronald Ridge said.

The delegation, which comprises of officials from varied ministries, is expected to arrive back home enlightened on information and communication technologies, architecture and design best practices suited for Botswana government needs.

Botswana only became aggressive in appreciating the value of ICTs less than six years ago when it introduced a ministry of Communications, Science and Technology.

Since its inception, the ministry has pushed for policies that encourage companies and individual Batswana to embrace the value of ICTs, even offering government employees loans to buy themselves computers.

"At times it can be best to first buy yourself a computer than a car. A computer can eventually prove to be a good investment," the minister of Communications, Science and Technology, Pelonomi Venson said at the time of announcing the 'Go buy a computer' scheme.

In addition, the ministry collaborated with the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (BTA) to develop a Draft Universal Access and Service Policy aimed at facilitating the provision of communications throughout Botswana. The emphasis of the policy will be underserved areas.

The draft policy advocates for establishment of a universal Service Fund that would assist service providers by subsidizing the installation and provision of communication service areas, which would otherwise not be commercially viable.

In their recent annual report, the Botswana Telecommunications Authority explained that the targeted service by the policy include fixed and mobile telephony, internet, data, radio and television broadcasting, postal services and print media. "The draft policy is undergoing finalization with the involvement of relevant stakeholder," according to the BTA report.

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