

Liberalise ICT sector for growth

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The 5th International Conference on Open Access opened on Wednesday in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, with a call to industry regulators to allow more players on board, if developing nations are to 'leap frog' the traditional technological stages taken by developed countries.

The three-day conference being held under the theme, 'How societies benefit from open access to ICT' has attracted academicians, ICT professionals, researchers, planners, political leaders, innovators and private sector operatives to discuss the advantages of Open Access.

The objective of this conference is to identify and share experiences on affordable and cost effective information and communication technologies (ICTs) around the globe.

Based on Open Access principles, the conference intends to address ICTs as tools that will bring developmental change to the society at large.

The Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT), in collaboration with The Royal Swedish Institute of Technology (KTH) is hosting the conference.

In his opening remarks, Tanzania's Vice-President Dr Ali Mohammed Shein, who was the guest of honour, reiterated the government's commitment to the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in order to bridge the digital divide.

"ICT is a pillar to modern economic growth as it narrows the gap between the rich and the poor," Shein noted, adding that though the ICT infrastructure is still inadequate, the government has initiated various programmes to expand the network.

"ICT is a fundamental factor of production alongside capital and labour and ultimately should be accessible free of charge," he observed.

He also stated that a developing country like Tanzania is in dire need of open access and emphasised that the government will continue to promote Kiswahili as an ICT language to ensure wider ICT dissemination.

Meanwhile, Dr Yona Zaipuna of the Tanzania Telecommunications Company Limited (TTCL) stated that Open Access is a cross cutting agenda that entails reforms in policies and regulatory frameworks. He noted that inadequate infrastructure remains a major impediment to attaining open access in Tanzania.

His sentiments were echoed by Olof Hesselmark, a Swedish ICT consultant who suggested that the government should remove all regulatory barriers that hinder more operators from coming on board.

Teddy Mwakabaga, a researcher from Wits University, Johannesburg called for increased Local Loop Unbundling (LLU) to allow more operators to use the ICT infrastructure.

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