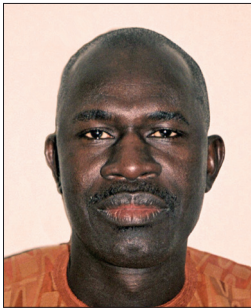


Connecting Gambia to the world

By **HON. ALHAJI A CHAM**

MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE, THE GAMBIA



ALHAJI A. CHAM served as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry prior to becoming Honourable Minister of Information and Communication Infrastructure. He also served as General Manager of the Gambia Telecommunications Cellular Company Limited (GAMCEL) for a period of 5 years. He obtained an MSc Degree in Operational Telecommunications from Coventry University, UK, and a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

In 2010, the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure (MOICI) launched its four-year strategic plan, a new framework further advancing its ongoing commitment to provide The Gambia with advanced telecoms infrastructure. This process was given a further boost last year with the launch of the government's overarching Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE).

ICT has a role to play in all areas of the economy: boosting agricultural productivity while providing the health sector with the necessary ICT infrastructure to improve delivery of services. At the same time MOICI is exploring ways to integrate the ICT needs of disadvantaged groups in society, while facilitating the deployment of ICT to support education delivery.

Recognising the driving role that ICT plays in bringing about sustained economic growth and expansion of trade, MOICI is working in partnership with the private sector and donors within a liberalised and competitive market, one that offers consumer choice.

The ministry encourages and promotes the use of ICT in all spheres of government service delivery processes to facilitate and sustain efficiency. For example, MOICI is responsible for implementing an e-government strategy. A wide-ranging e-government project proposal has been developed to give special consideration to the rural communities.

The Ministry is the executing agency of the UNDP-backed e-Government Web Portal, a gateway to government information linking all government ministries, which became fully operational in 2011. At the same time, an e-government data centre for the provision of email and web services has been completed.

In line with its vision to provide the requisite infrastructure and create the enabling environment that ensures that ICT services are within the reach of each and every Gambian at anytime, anywhere and at affordable prices, MOICI is involved in the following projects:

West Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Programme (WARCIP)

WARCIP is ushering in an infrastructural revolution in The Gambia, allowing the country to connect with the

ACE (Africa Coast to Europe) submarine cable. The ACE submarine communications cable system, which landed in September 2011, and will begin service in July 2012, connects a host of African countries across the West Coast of Africa from France down to South Africa in what could be one of the longest undersea connections on the continent, stretching more than 14,000 km. The ACE project will provide high-capacity and reliable bandwidth by providing direct connectivity to the information superhighway. Following the implementation of this project, a new Public-Private-Partnership initiative, the Gambia Submarine Cable Company, will operate and manage The Gambia's submarine cable.

ECOWAS Wide Area Network (ECOWAN) Project

The ECOWAN Project will contribute to the modernization and expansion of the national telecommunications infrastructure. This project will address critical connectivity gaps by extending communications and internet services, and provide a regional e-governance platform for interconnecting ECOWAS local offices, member states and institutions.

Capacity Building in IT

Capacity building is a priority within the context of MOICI's vision for efficient service delivery and its commitment to make The Gambia a leading regional ICT player. At the same time, the government recognises the need to develop the country's ICT skills base. Some 25 Gambian IT students recently attended undergraduate studies in Computer Science in Taiwan as part of a programme launched through the initiative of His Excellency the President of the Republic. These graduates have been redeployed to the civil service to take charge of various ICT initiatives in various government institutions.

More than 95 per cent of The Gambia's 1.7 million population are cell phone subscribers, and served by four GSM operators: Gamcell, Qcell, Comium and Africell, who provide cover to 92 per cent of the country. Qcell and Africell provide 3G services.

Through the continuous improvement of its IT systems and activities and by emulating global best practices, the Ministry of Information and Communications Infrastructure is keeping pace with current ICT initiatives and is relentlessly pursuing its goals.