

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2009

*Focus on access to online information and knowledge
– advancing human rights and democracy*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch 2009

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*Dedicated to A.K. Mahan - an activist who valued
intellectual rigour and concrete outcomes.*

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Introduction

Information in Namibia is being accessed in various ways, online access being the least popular mode. The main obstacles to online information access are the cost of access (through computers or internet-enabled mobile phones), the cost of usage and lack of skills. Therefore any advocacy around online information access would need to address these three obstacles simultaneously. The cost of access and usage is the outcome of policy and regulatory choices and the resulting telecommunication market structure.

In this report the telecommunication sector as the access provider will be discussed first. The next section discusses Namibia's policies and regulatory environment. This is then followed by a section on how Namibians access information.

Namibia's telecommunication sector

Namibia's telecommunication sector will develop from a fixed monopoly and mobile duopoly to a converged oligopoly in 2009. A second mobile licence was awarded in 2006 to CellOne. The market entry of CellOne and the resulting competitive pressure has reduced access and usage prices for consumers and led to a rapid increase in subscriber numbers.

However, the institutional set-up and the regulatory environment have been everything but ideal. Two different ministries were responsible for the regulatory supervision of the sector, one for fixed-line telephony and one for mobile telephony. The absence of an independent regulator with authority to regulate the entire sector meant that CellOne's market entry has been a risky endeavour. Namibia has since then accelerated telecommunication sector reform with an information and communications technology (ICT) ministry responsible for the entire sector, established in 2008. In 2009, parliament passed a Communications Bill which is expected to become an Act before the end of the year. An interconnection dispute was also resolved in 2009. The year 2010 will most likely see the conversion of the existing licences of Mobile Telecommunications Ltd (MTC), CellOne and Telecom Namibia into service and technologically neutral licences. This will increase the competition within the sector, which in turn will lead to lower prices, expanded service delivery and more investment. In particular, broadband access and usage and international calls can be expected to drop by a large percentage in price.

Telecom Namibia is the only fixed-line operator in Namibia and is owned by Namibia Post and Telecom Holdings (NPTH), which in turn is owned by the state. NPTH is also a majority shareholder of MTC, which was awarded a mobile telecommunication licence in 1996. In July 2006, 34% of

MTC was bought by Portugal Telecom. MTC still has about an 87% market share and subscriber numbers are increasing. CellOne launched its services in April 2007. Telecel Globe, a subsidiary of Orascom Telecom, bought 100% of CellOne in January 2009.

Telecom Namibia launched a mobile service in late 2006/early 2007 called Switch, based on code division multiple access (CDMA). Switch was restricted to fixed-wireless until May 2009 due to political pressure. CellOne and MTC had argued that Switch would be illegal and lobbied the government to stop Telecom Namibia from providing mobile services. However, this is not the case, and Telecom Namibia "voluntarily" restricted its service to fixed-wireless due to the political pressure.

MTC and CellOne use global system for mobile (GSM) to provide mobile telephony, while Telecom Namibia uses CDMA. Telecom Namibia has a statutory licence but not a statutory monopoly. It remains a *de facto* monopoly until an additional fixed-line licence is awarded, breaking Telecom Namibia's monopoly. The new telecommunications act, expected for the end of 2009, and the expected licence conversion, is likely to end Telecom Namibia's monopoly and allow CellOne and MTC to also offer fixed-line services. Neither MTC nor CellOne is likely to enter the fixed-line market. They would, however, be likely to establish their own international voice and data facilities. MTC's home phone, which was launched in 2009, is a fixed-wireless product that is based on GSM.

End-user internet access is available in the form of modem dial-up, integrated services digital network (ISDN), asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL), leased lines, Wi-Fi hotspots, line-of-sight wireless and third-generation (3G) mobile or CDMA. Telecom Namibia provides Namibia with international bandwidth through the SAT-3 cable via the Cape Town landing point and via satellite. Namibia is a non-landing consortium member of SAT-3. Telecom Namibia joined the West African Cable System (WACS) consortium. MTC and CellOne are expected to join Telecom Namibia as sub-consortium members and Botswana might join as well. Very small aperture terminal (VSAT) satellite is used by MTC and internet service provider (ISP) MWeb, among others, to provide additional bandwidth. Further international bandwidth is obtained by ISPs leasing capacity from South Africa. MTC and CellOne were awarded international data licences in 2008. Potentially, this will further increase Namibia's international data capacity.

Key challenges for the years ahead include building the institutional capacity of the new independent telecommunications regulator. The sector currently relies heavily on international management and technical expertise. The

regulator would be well advised to seek secondment from a well-established regulator in another country as well to build up the institution and build sustainable capacity on a staff and institutional level.

Creating a market structure that creates access opportunities for all Namibians at affordable costs will be a formidable task. The existing laws and policies state this as an objective, but provide little guidance on how to attain it.

Namibia's policies and regulatory environment¹

Article 21 of the Namibian constitution protects the freedom of speech and expression, including the freedom of the press and other media. Namibia does not have a freedom of information act. It was discussed on several occasions but was sidelined over the finalisation of the new Communications Bill.

The Namibian Communications Commission (NCC), established in 1992, reports to the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, and is solely funded by the government. The NCC will become a fully-fledged independent regulator for the entire ICT sector with the passing of the Communications Bill. The new Bill makes the regulator financially independent of government, allowing it to collect licence fees to fund its own operation and the universal service fund. The Bill was passed by parliament in July 2009 and was expected to become an Act later in the year.

New ICT policies dealing with broadcasting, telecommunications, information technologies (IT), licensing, and ICTs in general were finalised in early 2009. They are fairly vague with respect to freedom of expression and access to information.

The Overarching ICT and Broadcasting Policy (2008), which governs these different policies, refers in its introduction to the "ability to collectively deliberate and participate in the democratic governance of their country through freedom of expression and access to information via a pluralistic range of media and media institutions of diverse ownership and control." This statement is repeated in the foreword of the broadcasting policy.

Section 10.2 of the overarching policy deals with e-government, and states that the aims are to enhance service delivery and democratic participation (this is also referred to in section 8.1 of the IT policy). Section 10.5 stipulates that the government of Namibia will provide internet access to its citizens through information kiosks, multi-purpose regional community centres and other community projects. Section 10.6 declares the government's intent to address the e-skills issue.

The overarching policy and the telecommunications and broadcasting policies also only contain fairly vague sections about universal access. It will be left to the new regulator to define concrete objectives and design strategies to attain them. The new Communications Bill only deals with procedural matters, as it should.

Access to information in Namibia

This section makes use of a national representative household and individual e-access and usage survey conducted at the end of 2007 in Namibia by Research ICT Africa. The survey was conducted to determine household and individual ICT usage and access.

The survey targeted households and individuals aged sixteen years or older. It revealed that below 7% of Namibians sixteen years or older had an undergraduate or post-graduate degree as highest education. About 16% had no formal education. Linked to that are 17% of Namibians who cannot read or write. Another 21% have difficulties reading a newspaper. Meanwhile, 14% of Namibians sixteen years or older stated that they participate in decision making at local level (i.e., at village or municipal levels).

The radio remains Namibia's number one mass media communication technology, with 70% of Namibians listening to the radio regularly compared to about 40% who watch TV. Both radio and TV serve predominately for entertainment; 17.2% of those who watched TV and 22.7% of those who listened to the radio followed local news. Less than 10% watched educational programmes. Of those who do not watch TV and do not listen to the radio, most just cannot afford it. For 66% of those who do not watch TV, lack of electricity within the house was the main obstacle.

In conclusion, access to information through TV, newspapers and other print media is limited in Namibia. The radio remains the best channel to reach Namibians.

Online access to information in Namibia

The survey also showed that only 26.7% of Namibians sixteen years or older know what the internet is and only 8.8% actually use it. In total only 5.5% of Namibians sixteen years or older have an email address. Breaking these figures down into income categories indicates part of the problem. Among the lower three quartiles in terms of income only 16% knew what the internet was and only 4% used it. For the top income quartile the figures are 60% and 25% respectively.

Internet is predominately accessed at work (35.3%) followed by internet cafés (24.3%), home (21.7%) and educational institutions (15.7%), while 6.7% of internet users also access the internet using their mobile phones. It can be expected that mobile internet access will gain a greater share as the internet access of choice given mobile penetration rates in Namibia.

Only 10.7% of all internet users access local government information and services online. That is less than 1% of Namibians sixteen years or older, given that only 8.8% use the internet in total. This is hardly surprising since government websites offer very little updated content and interactivity.

The main reasons stated by Namibians sixteen years or older who know what the internet is but do not use it are a lack of access to a computer (63%) and not knowing how to use a computer (15.3%).

¹ See Namibian Communications Commission (NCC): www.ncc.org.na

Namibian ICT usage and access survey results		Share
Do you participate in decision making at village/city/municipal level?		13.90%
Share 16+ with mobile phone or active SIM card	National average	49.30%
	Urban	53.20%
	Rural	15.80%
Highest level of education	None	15.65%
	Preschool	1.32%
	Primary	18.80%
	Secondary	53.17%
	Tertiary	6.77%
	Traditional	2.29%
	Vocational	0.84%
Remedial	1.16%	
Can read a letter or newspaper	Easily	61.60%
	With difficulty	21.20%
	Not at all	17.10%
Can write a letter	Easily	58.00%
	With difficulty	25.00%
	Not at all	17.00%
Individuals 16+ watching TV		39.24%
Programmes being watched most	Entertainment	50.53%
	Educational programmes	9.15%
	Local news	17.20%
	International news	6.71%
	Politics	1.57%
	Sports	11.24%
Why people do not watch TV	House has no electricity	65.60%
	Cannot afford a TV set	56.90%
Individuals listening to radio		70.40%
Do you own a personal radio which you can use at any time?		62.40%
Programmes being listened to most	Music	22.40%
	Politics	3.60%
	Educational programmes	4.6%
	Programmes on local issues	22.70%
	Sports	3.50%
	News	22.70%
Those that listen to a public broadcaster		92.40%
Main reason for not listening: "I cannot afford a radio and no one I know has one"		40.70%
Internet activities	Accessing the news	42.46%
	Sending and receiving emails	45.33%
	Playing online games	16.26%
	Finding information I am interested in	48.61%
	Downloading/listening to music	28.27%
	Making internet phone calls (VoIP)	2.31%
	Education, as part of a course I was registered in	17.91%
	Education in general	18.76%
	Online banking	2.52%
	Chatting and exchanging messages	11.09%
	Paying bills online using credit cards	1.60%
	Researching as part of a training course or my education	11.70%
	Accessing local government services online	10.72%
	Getting information for a friend or family member	10.09%

Action steps

The government of Namibia does not use the internet effectively to interact with its citizens. Access and usage costs of the internet are too high for it to become an effective channel for information access. The intensity of telecommunication sector reform will accelerate in 2010. The new regulator needs to be established and institutional capacity built while critical issues need to be addressed immediately. Important issues include licence conversions, number portability, new licence and spectrum fee regimes and the establishment of a universal service fund. In 2009 Namibia set a precedent in the region for resolving interconnection disputes. Maintaining this momentum could provide an opportunity for Namibia to lead in the harnessing of ICTs for economic and social development in Africa. Additionally, the e-skills gap needs to be addressed urgently.

Many examples exist of how governments can increase service delivery through the internet. Providing e-services would also provide an incentive for the uptake of internet use, in particular for mobile internet access. ■

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH (GISWatch) 2009 is the third in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society *from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.*

GISWatch has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of the field of information and communications technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels
- **Encouraging** critical debate
- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2009** focuses on *access to online information and knowledge – advancing human rights and democracy*. It includes several thematic reports dealing with key issues in the field, as well as an institutional overview and a reflection on indicators that track access to information and knowledge. There is also an innovative section on visual mapping of global rights and political crises.

In addition, 48 country reports analyse the status of access to online information and knowledge in countries as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Switzerland and Kazakhstan, while six regional overviews offer a bird's eye perspective on regional trends.

GISWatch is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

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2009 Report

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