

UCC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT FOR WTIS DAY 2008

Today, Uganda joins the rest of the world to celebrate the World Telecommunications and Information Society (WTISD) 2008 Day, under the theme: *“Connecting Persons with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All.”*

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) welcomes this year's theme as timely and relevant because of the great importance information and communication technology (ICT) plays to empower Ugandans, including persons with disabilities (PWDs).

As a regulator of the communications sector in Uganda, UCC is cognizant of the fact that PWDs have been struggling to access information. Visually impaired persons are unable to access print materials; hearing impaired persons have problems communicating with others; and mobility impaired persons have difficulty in going out to get information.

Through the Rural Communications Development Fund (RCDF) Programme (2003 to-date), UCC has endeavoured to ensure equitable geographical distribution of telecommunications services in Uganda. RCDF is a special programme whose aim is to bring affordable and accessible communication services, especially to rural underserved areas where the majority population, including PWDs, live.

Since 2003 to-date, UCC has achieved the following through the RCDF programme:

	PROGRAMME AREA	COMPLETED	UNDERWAY
1.	Internet Points of Presence	52	24
2.	Internet Cafes	55	44
3.	ICT Training Centres	55	17
4.	Web Portals	54	24
5.	Public Pay Phones	316	2,283
6.	Research Projects	3	1
7.	Postal Support Projects	8	37
8.	Multi-Purposes Community Telecentres	4	20
9.	Schools ICT Projects	8	87
10.	Health ICT Projects	0	43
11.	Call Centres	0	1

Through the programme, therefore, UCC has been promoting the equalisation of opportunities for PWDs and the removal of access barriers to electronic and information technology.

The Commission is happy to note that due to advancement in ICTs, assistive technology is increasingly getting cheaper and affordable to the public. For example, many of the TV stations in Uganda are increasingly using captioning (displaying text as an alternative to voice) and interpreting (translating voice into sign language) to make TV news accessible for the visually impaired Ugandans.

Suffice to say, much has been done at the national and international levels to help PWDs utilise ICT. Nationally, Uganda liberalised the communications sector in the 1990s. And, since 2006, Uganda is implementing a technology-neutral licensing regime. The healthy competition accruing from the liberalised ICT sector implies that service providers have to address the needs of all Ugandans, including the estimated 2,000,000 PWDs.

While much remains to be done, UCC shall continue in its regulatory oversight to encourage service providers to make available information and communication technologies (ICTs) that promote universal and affordable access to ICT to all Ugandans.

Internationally, the Commission strives to advocate the ICT needs of all Ugandans, including people with disabilities. During the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-06), for instance, UCC actively participated in the conference to adopt internationally-accepted strategies to address the needs of, among other people, PWDs and other vulnerable groups.

Happy WTISD Day!