EACO | East African Communications Organisation

Communications for all in East Africa

NEWSLETTER

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

On behalf of EACO staff at the Secretariat I heartily extend my gratitude to the EAC governments for rare resilience, vigilance and relentless efforts exhibited to keep up a spirited COVID-19 fight. We recognize efforts like implementation of health guidelines by EAC governments to prevent further spread of COVID-19. The quick response and cooperation between partner states helped to mitigate the spread of the pandemic in the region.

Also, allow me to use this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to readers of this newsletter for your keen interest, time and internet costs.

EACO prides itself in a supportive and collaborative environment where partner states fully support our work besides ensuring that our mandate of harmonizing ICT policy and regulatory frameworks within EA region is achieved.

Aside, COVID-19 affected regional economies and halted some ongoing projects including EACO's. Thus, some activities were postponed to later dates. But, the good news is, we managed to swim upstream by using ICT to ensure business continuity while ensuring social distancing and helping the region to follow suit.

EACO is still committed to promoting development of telecommunications, broadcasting and postal sectors along developing the best strategies to achieve fast, reliable, secure, affordable and efficient communication services. With this I commend the EACO working groups continuous work in achieving activities contained in the EACO strategic plan.

I commend all professionals from our region and beyond for tirelessly developing various guidelines, regulations, and carrying out important studies to provide ICT solutions to the region'.
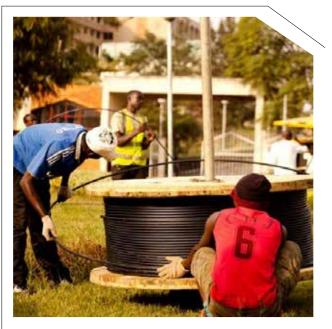
The newsletter is, thus, a highlight of our achievements across EAC region. I encourage you to read it and support EACO's work for the region to graduate to an ICT hub.

Thank you.

Dr. Ally Yahaya Simba

Executive Secretary | EACO

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Editorial

ACO takes this opportunity to convey deep sorrow to the family of Tanzania's President Magufuli and the people of the United Republic of Tanzania on the passing of H.E President John Pombe Magufuli on March17, 2021. The region lost a true, great son of Africa.

As year 2021, unfolds EACO continues to work with its members, stakeholders and partners to ensure increased access to ICT services through harmonizing ICT policy and regulatory frameworks on broadcasting, postal, and telecom. EACO reiterates its commitment to making these services affordable and convenient.

In conjunction with its members and stakeholders, With their unfailing support we believe we shall improve millions of livelihoods by enhancing development through promoting applications of ICT in finding solutions to social and economic constraints.

EACO is still committed to carrying on the COVID-19 fight by encouraging masses to observe governments' health guidelines and regulations to mitigate further spread of the pandemic.
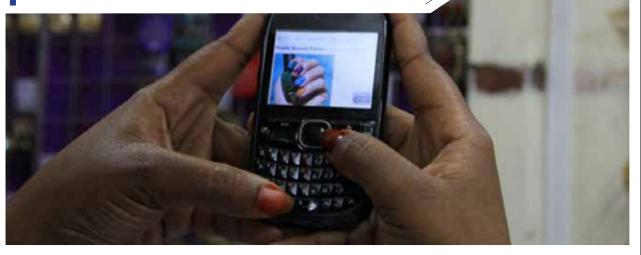

East African Community Partner States

Vision

"Access to communication services for all in East African region"

Mission

"Coordination of development of the communications sector through harmonization of policy and regulatory frameworks in the East African Community".

Centrality of ICT in post COVID-19 era

The fast growth in the number of mobile internet users in EAC in nearly one-and-a-half years taking place against a background of the COVID-19 is widely seen as great achievement in the ICT Sector.

Stakeholders partly attribute the unprecedented rise in subscriptions to mobile internet to growing awareness that ICTs play a central role in preventing further spread of the pandemic alongside managing economic recovery in the post COVID-19 era. Indeed, the panic set forth by the high scale devastation caused by the pandemic motivated masses to subscribe to mobile internet for COVID-19 updates.

Internet penetration in general, according to Internet World Stats, has been on the upward trend in Africa since 2020. As of March 2021, internet penetration stood at 43.0% up from 39.3% in 2020.

Analysts contend that this gain is a major breakthrough along the long journey to connect more EAC citizens to the mobile internet. ICTs are fast being embraced to solve challenges in sectors like education, health, banking and transport.

EACO, also, at the forefront of COVID-19 fight,

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has committed enormous efforts in promoting the development of telecommunications, broadcasting and postal sectors since its establishment in 2012.

Drawing from lessons learned when the pandemic was biting deeper into the marrows of the EAC economy, now developers in the ICT industry echo a call to stakeholders to continue encouraging the use of e-learning, e-health, e-commerce et cetera to reap the various benefits of ICT, especially in the tough times when the region is struggling to get back to its feet and manage economic recovery.

There's consensus by all stakeholders that the best practices strengthened and propagated during the pandemic like cashless transactions should be encouraged to reduce risk of catching COVID-19 and/or allay emergence of a new wave of the pandemic. The practice of paying for services electronically is becoming even more popular in the East African countries. Despite variations in levels of progress, EAC governments are doing whatever they can to digitalize economies.

Experts at EACO think that current partnership between educational institutions, telecom operators and the media should be strengthened as it promotes learning in virtual reality.

Roundtable on Accelerating Infrastructure Deployment and Achieving Universal Access

The round table discussed the following topics: Infrastructure deployment/ sharing, critical Infrastructure, Regulatory Harmonisation, E-Government, Universals access funds and Regional Harmonisation.

Covid-19 has drastically changed every sphere of our lives, including business, education, healthcare, socializing, leisure, and travel. As governments have implemented a wide range of policy responses to manage the impact of the pandemic, a unifying theme emerging from every country has been the importance of connectivity.

A joint workshop was held on 23rd March 2021 between Access Partnership and EACO that brought together representatives of the EACO community to highlight their Covid-19 policy responses, reflect on lessons learned from the crisis, and discuss recommendations to accelerate infrastructure deployment and achieve universal access.

The roundtable would build on the findings of Access Partnership's recently released whitepaper "Lessons Learned from Covid-19:

Perspectives from the Tower Industry", which analyses policy measures to enable the operation and deployment of wireless telecommunications infrastructure during the pandemic and presents international case studies and recommendations.

The roundtable workshop was attended by 33 participants who included stakeholders from regulators and operators as well as industry partners.

The round table discussed the following topics: Infrastructure deployment/ sharing, critical Infrastructure, Regulatory Harmonisation, E-Government, Universals access funds and Regional Harmonisation.

The outcomes recommendations of the roundtable can be accessed via the EACO website:

http://eaco.int/pages/conference-reports

Preparation for EACO 24th Congress, 27th Assemblies is Underway

CT experts at the East African Communications Organisation (EACO) Secretariat have confirmed that preparation for the 24th edition of the Congress and 27th edition of Assemblies is in high gear.

The officials said that unlike the previous meetings, the two events convened every two years will be held via digital platforms, which align with the health guidelines of WHO and EAC regional governments to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both meetings are scheduled on July 6th - 9th, 2021 under the theme: "Positioning East African Region To Strategize for Emerging Technologies"

"The meetings scheduled will be held virtually using the zoom platform on July 6th - 9th, 2021. The Congress is the highest decision-making organ of EACO and the biggest event for the Communications sector in East Africa," said a statement issued by EACO Secretariat headquartered in the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

The EACO Congress is held every two years while four EACO Assemblies namely: Assembly of Regulators, Assembly of Postal Operators, Assembly of Telecommunications operators and Assembly of Broadcasting Operators conduct their meetings every year.

The Congress and Assemblies meetings mark an important milestone towards achieving the objectives of EACO. This high interactive Congress week will provide information, working sessions and interaction among EACO members and its partners.

Also, the events provide an occasion for stakeholders and ICT experts to share experiences and best practices alongside finding solutions to challenges in the Sector, officials have said.

This year's event will be hosted by Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA)

In the recent past, there is a number of emerging technologies. These emerging technologies are presenting challenges to issues such as, security, privacy, regulation, taxation, et cetera. Yet, the emerging technologies are vital in prompting the growth of ICTs world over.

As the East African region embracing the use and adoption of these Emerging technologies that can create an opportunity to leap frog to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Therefore, as East African Region this theme has been identified in the need to carefully understand these technologies and create opportunities to benefit from them and also provide an enabling environment for them to thrive

The Following events will comprise the EACO Congress and Assemblies Meetings of Committees and Working Groups which will start early in May/ June 2021.

Notably, the four Assemblies meeting will take place prior to the Congress as they report to Congress:

As the East African region embracing the use and adoption of these Emerging technologies that can create an opportunity to leap frog to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Preparing the region for 5G

5G technology will provide great possibilities for our world and provide for development and digital transformation. However, in many developing countries especially in Sub-Saharan Africa 5G is yet to be realised. There are a number of challenges that are the cause of delay in having 5G deployment as well as usage.

One of EACO's objectives is to have universal, fast, reliable and affordable internet, affordable and high quality internet access. Therefore, EACO recognizes the need for the region to be positioned for 5G. The region needs the right policies and enabling environment for 5G to thrive. In

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light of thus discussion around 5G readiness are vital.

THE SPECTRUM MANAGEMENT AND 5G WORKSHOP

EACO in collaboration with GSMA held a 2020 virtual workshop on 22nd October 2020 on Spectrum management and 5G.

The workshop reached a consensus that making a breakthrough in rolling out the 5G network calls for commitment to a new harmonized mobile spectrum alongside increasing the availability of high, mid and low spectrum. The workshop recognized the EAC partner states for cooperation and

investment in the sub-sector but also noted that more is still needed to realize 5G full potential in the region.

The workshop also took cognizance of the fact that the right spectrum pricing was key in enabling rollout of and making 5G services affordable.

"EACO recognizes efforts by govts and stakeholders as pre-requisite for 5G success"

Although a long journey remains ahead, GSMA/EACO celebrated a few achievements that reflect the political will and demand to go 5G network globally. Worldwide, over 100 commercial 5G networks had been launched and the number of commercially available 5G devices had grown.

It was noted that 2G, 3G and 4G are still relevant, 5G deployment in East Africa is needed to enable the region reap from the benefits of broadband.

Other pertinent issues that were discussed during the workshop included: Cross-border Harmonisation, and Spectrum Management Best Practices. Forced roaming caused by cross border interference was cited as a problem affecting border communities in the EAC region. EACO recommended a review of the received signal level parameters under EACO mechanism for cross border frequency coordination for mobile to tackle the problem.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON 5G AND IOT

EACO, CRASA, and WATRA in collaboration with PTS and SPIDER are organizing the first of its kind virtual dialogue focusing on the Possibilities of 5G and IoT in Africa which will take place on 26th May 2021.

The workshop is intended to discuss the current status of 5G deployment in the African region and the strategies that can enhance its deployment.

With 5G, implementation of IoT is one of the expected use cases. The workshop will review Africa's readiness for IoT. It will also discuss what the prioritized areas of IoT implementation in an African context will be and any challenges.

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EAC registers a breakthrough in e-waste management, three years later

There's growing hope for close to190 million citizens in the East African Community (EAC) to see the awaited e-waste free region following tremendous achievements in implementing a 5-year EACO Regional e-Waste Management Strategy that came into force back in 2017 after it had been developed by the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) in the same year.

EACO experts on the Working Group 7 on e-waste Management and Green ICTs (WG07) appreciated the high responsiveness and political will demonstrated by EAC partner states to fast track the implementation of E-Waste Management Strategic Plan.

Along the journey, EACO provided mainly technical assistance to EAC countries, revealed Nehemia Mwenisongole, Vice Chairperson of WG07.

They say the achievements gained in e-waste management induce a smile as all countries are doing their best to meet the specific targets stipulated in E-Waste Strategic Plan before 2022 when it closes.

"We've been supportive to ensure that EAC countries move at the same pace as far implementation of E-waste Management Strategic Plan is concerned," observed Mwenisongole.

Across the region, landfills and many forms of high tech management systems were launched to manage e-electronic wastes released into the environment to minimize pollution. Success in e-waste management is mainly attributed to EACO's policy on e-Waste Management, and technocrats at the Secretariat reiterate call on EAC gov'ts to direct more resources towards implementation to achieve the goal.

EACO reiterates commitment to continue providing technical assistance during the remaining period on the five pillars - Policy, Legal and Regulatory frameworks, Infrastructure for E-waste Management, Resource Mobilization,

Coordination and Institutional Alignment, Capacity Building, Research and M&E.

Experts say that e-waste forms 2% of total waste and constitute 70% of toxic heavy metals in the landfills and negatively impacts on environment and public health.

E-waste toxins effects are visible after a long time, hence, a need for sustainable management of e-waste.

BREAKTHROUGH

EACO is impressed with the momentum and vigilance of implementation process of e-waste management strategic plan in all the six partner states. A great deal of countries is implementing legislative frameworks in order to regulate e-waste management and up-cycling for safe environments as well as promoting resource recycling and zero dumping.

Such efforts include a ban on e-waste import/export, regulations for recycling specific categories of e-waste, and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

Kenya launched West Electronical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) center with the core role of dismantling e-waste paraphernalia, processing and ensuring proper disposal of hazardous fractions. This centre is collecting e-waste from waste collection centres of telecommunications companies. WEEE destroys the data, takes inventory of e-waste stuff before they embark on dismantling the rest.

But, inadequate data on e-waste remains a challenge says Dr. Ayub Macharia, Kenya's Director, Environmental Education and Awareness at the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. Kenya had a total of 57.3 million mobile phone subscribers by June 2020, 41.5 million internet users and mobile penetration stood at 119.9%. Recycling firms engaged in e-waste recycling like Sinoment, Sigmond, Enviroserve and EWIK complement WEEE.

There're many laws that ensure Kenyan citizens participate in environment protection.

In United Republic of Tanzania, protocols related to policy, legal and regulatory frameworks on e-waste have been signed alongside creating a certified facility owned by a private entity (Chilambo), charged with establishing an environmental fund and resource mobilization.

Higher learning institutions are considering including

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e-waste management in education system, and boost capacity building in e-waste management.

Burundian e-waste collection centre GLICE collects and gives new life to electrical equipment through reconditioning, and dismantles the rest said Ouedraogo, GLICE Legal Representative. Use of short lifespan electronic equipment is discouraged for it increases e-waste load.

South Sudan is considering creation of a national steering committee to promote e-waste management. Stakeholders are in consultation on the guidelines spelt in e-waste management strategy.

Uganda, currently at consultation stage - stakeholders from national regulatory authority of ICT, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of ICT, and Ministry of Health, and international partners are in consultation to formulate e-waste management guidelines.

CALENDAR OF EACO EVENTS 2021

EVENT	DATES
Regional joint workshop on 5G and IoT	26th May 2021
Working Groups and Committee Meetings	During the months of May/June 2021
24th Congress and 27th Assemblies	6th -9th July 2021