

Phone operators urged to reduce trunk call cost

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Southern Africa fixed and mobile phone operators should seek to reduce international call costs by cutting down or scrapping termination and roaming charges between countries in a bid to increase traffic flows and revenues.

Speaking at the 10th SADC Telecommunications Operators Bilateral Meeting (STOBM) in Gaborone yesterday, newly appointed Permanent secretary in the Ministry of Transport and Communications Mabua Mabua said scrapping of these charges will benefit not only the operators through higher revenues from increased traffic flows but the consumers as well through lower tariffs.

Mabua who was the guest of honour at the meeting hosted by Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (BTC) under the auspices of Southern Africa Telecommunication Association (SATA), said a large component of the trans-border calls costs is mainly in the form of roaming or terminations charges, which have no bearing on the actual true costs of the calls.

"A lot of the roaming and termination rates are artificial costs as they are not true costs of the communication. A call from Gaborone to Shakawe which is 1300 km away is a lot cheaper than a call to Mafikeng which is very near, but the infrastructure used to communicate between the two destinations is just the same, so where does the extra costs come from? This is what the mobile operators from SATA should deliberate on and aim to reduce or terminate just like they did in the East African Community. We should



From left : Acting BTC CEO Keabetswe Segole, Transport and Communications Permanent Secretary Mabua Mabua and International Telecommunications Union (ITU) representative Chali Tumelo at the 10th SATA conference in Gaborone yesterday **PIC: MORERI SEJAKGOMO**

seriously deliberate on this option particularly within the SACU region," he said.

The PS went on to say that telecommunication and ICT is vital not only for growth but also helps countries to remain competitive within the increasingly information-oriented global economy. "Failure to develop communications will only increase the development gap between our countries and the developed world commonly known as the Digital divide," he added.

Mabua also commended the government of Botswana for having invested heavily in the development of the ICT sector, which has led to a 100 percent mobile phone penetration since

1998 while Internet penetration is also expected to increase from the current 6 percent to about 30 percent in a few years' time. "The government has also invested a lot of funds in backbone infrastructure which has proven to be a cash cow for BTC," he said.

SATA executive secretary Jacob Munodawafa also added his voice on the need for adequate investment in ICT infrastructure particularly in the developing world. "For the developing countries, the biggest impediments to development are the lack of appropriate and adequate infrastructure and services. "This deficit is not only in the information and communication technology,

but other developmental areas as well," he said.

Munodawafa urged participants at the four-day conference to also cement strategic and operational mutual relations in technical and commercial issues.

The SATA meeting will see SADC telecommunications operators negotiate on various issues including interconnection rates, technology and infrastructure connectivity, invoicing and prompt payments, bilateral traffic report and issues concerning ICT fraud among others. Countries that are attending the conference include Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and South Africa.