

Budget vote on Communications

UCDP : Hon IS Mfundisi

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

E249 at 14:00 to 16:30

Chairperson,

We in the UCDP align ourselves with the sentiment to salute the Hon Minister Padayachee who has been promoted to glory.

The value of ICT in modern life cannot be underplayed. Effective, efficient communication or ICT use has direct impact on the quality of life that people lead. It is therefore no surprise that the international bodies have proclaimed access to internet as a human right. Effective exploration of ICT also has a potential of creating jobs and increasing creative thinking and productivity of people.

Attention to the protection of human rights through the use of new communication technologies is an area of growing interest, not only from the point of view of the technology and communications sectors, but from the vantage point of those working toward the betterment of governance mechanisms and the continued development of an equitable global civil society. This includes those who work at the community grassroots level, as they form networks of collaboration that extend the span of their missions to the international stage, as well as major public/private sector and governmental entities.

We are aware of the ongoing saga regarding editorial powers and content at the SABC. We hope it will be concluded with no blood on the floor yet to the satisfaction of the public. Editorial policy has to be improved and consistent unlike present where there are clearly favoured political parties whose events are covered 100% while events or speakers of other parties are not being

beamed. The majoritarian principle applied by the SABC is scary and reminds the public of the SAUK days. In this country there is no policy of winner takes all. We have to share time and space on air and screen.

It is well and good that most public libraries in urban settings have free access to internet, however, the flip side of that coin is that it mostly serve those who would have afforded internet in the first place, whilst vast majority of our people still do not know what internet is, and are far from having access to it. It must be reiterated that people in rural settings need and must have ICT services, their lack of access to these services impacts severely on their access to many other services, even government services for that matter. It is grossly unfair that a person living in a rural area must take a taxi to nearest town to have access to internet. It is our opinion, that wherever community halls are built, where there are clinics and schools, where there is a community, there must be adequate government supported ICT services. Thusong centres are few while in some cases same are situated at places not easily accessible to the poor.

The roll out of ICT services to schools, which in theory would have been a groundbreaking achievement, has not made any significant strides worth writing home about. A couple of years ago Sentech undertook to roll out wireless broadband to 250 schools, and this would signify that telecommunication companies take their social responsibility serious, however that undertaking is still a dream in the pipeline. More than anybody, schools should have the best of ICT services and it is the department's responsibility to ensure that. After all, these are young minds that must be kept abreast with ICT developments and other technological developments as they are the future.

The Post Office is gradually growing extinct because even with the fast pace of the mailing system, the post office does not wake up to efficient customer service.

Rates for letter boxes rise by the year, queues grow longer and staff are lethargic while postal stamps are unaffordable to the poorest of the poor in the country side who depend on services rendered by this office.

Telkom is one parastatal that has to be checked closely and we cannot agree more with the chairman of the committee that costs for communication and those of land lines are shooting through the roof. It is for this reason that most people and even businesses have resorted to using cell phones because they are a lesser evil in terms of the costs.

The UCDP supports the budget vote.