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## BEST PRACTICES IN ICT POLICY

# BUILDING REGIONAL REGULATOR ASSOCIATION CAPACITY: A PATH TO IMPROVED ICT POLICY

Regulatory bodies have key roles in promoting free-market competitive responses in the delivery of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services. Regional associations of ICT regulators, such as the Telecommunications Regulators Association of Southern Africa (TRASA) and the Arab ICT Regulators Associations (AICTRN), can support these regulators in key ways, which, in turn, will increase the viability of regional and local economies.

## IMPROVING ICT POLICY IMPROVES REGIONAL ECONOMIC CLIMATES

- **ICT access, quality, and cost:** Appropriate and responsive ICT policy and regulation is measured by increased ICT access (especially by underserved areas) and quality, and reduced costs. Many regulatory bodies in developing countries have limited resources to help guide them in developing these policies or to improve their oversight capacity.
- **Interoperability and harmonized standards:** The adoption of regional standards can ensure that communication transmissions and devices accommodate other cross-border communications, allow economies of scale, and encourage entrepreneurs to do business in multiple markets with a minimum of customization, thereby encouraging investors to move into underserved markets.
- **Investment and service delivery:** Investors need to know that their investments will not be put at risk by unreasonable or inappropriate regulation. Knowing that individual countries coordinate their regulatory policies on the basis of regional priorities helps investors feel confident in their investments, increase the potential customer base, and encourage regional investments.



Regulators from several African countries learn from each other to build better ICT policies.



dot-GOV, funded by U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Internews Network, Inc. works with USAID Missions and Bureaus to promote competitive policy and regulatory reforms in telecommunications and e-commerce to enhance economic and social development, and to attain universal access to information and communications technologies (ICTs).

- **Policy research and analysis:** As policies impact markets and as markets change in response to technological, economic, political, and social shifts, the ability to measure these changes at the local, national, and regional levels is essential. Regulatory bodies need locally generated/locally analyzed market data and analysis to be able to regulate the market effectively and develop appropriate policy responses.
- **Market dominance:** The power of regionally dominant operators can be mitigated by encouraging the adoption of international best practices in standards and regulatory policies throughout a region. Mutually beneficial partnerships between different-sized economies can be developed, allowing maximization of scale economies and interoperable networks leading to expanding customer bases.

## HOW DO REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS IMPROVE ICT POLICY?

- **Standards and Frameworks:** Regional associations, with their member states, develop harmonized standards and frameworks which are then individually adapted to member country market environments, often with the ongoing support from the regional associations. Member countries feed back their experience to their regional association to help the continual evolution of those frameworks – very important in this period of rapid technological change.
- **Agenda Setting:** The regional association creates an agenda of important policy directions, goals and priorities for regulators to adopt. Not only does the association assist regulators in implementing policy decisions, it also helps them become more effective advocates within their own governments (and, perhaps, serves as a tool to fight the tendency of governments to use policy decisions for political gains).
- **Power of Advocacy:** A regional association increases the ability of the individual member states to be heard on an international stage. The association can provide a forum for discussion and debate about policy proposals made by players from outside or within the region, and allows regulators to create a coordinated response that may carry more weight than less coordinated responses from individual countries. Regional associations are also better placed to interact and inform regional economic organizations (such as TRASA in the Southern African Development Community - SADC).

### HOW IS THE SUCCESS OF A REGIONAL ASSOCIATION MEASURED?

Success of a regional association of regulators is measured through:

- An increase in the number of services offered throughout the region;
- An increase in the quality of services;
- An increase in the number of independent ICT service providers;
- Lowering costs of services and increasing number of service packages/cost structures;
- Increased access to services (disaggregated by rural/urban, gender, population type); and
- Increased acknowledgement of regional interests in international fora.

- **Policy Research:** Regional associations, working with academic institutions and other stakeholders, coordinate data collection to generate meaningful regional statistics and useful data for individual regulators. A regional association also facilitates interaction with academic institutions to help them understand the data requirements of the regulators.
- **Changing Technology:** Keeping up with technological change is especially challenging for ICT regulators. Regional regulatory associations alerts members to new developments and assists them in formulating responses in immediate and long-term challenges.

## HOW DOES USAID, THROUGH DOT-GOV, SUPPORT REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS?

- **Capacity Building:** The SIPRS project and its USAID-funded predecessors (RTRP and RAPID) worked closely with the TRASA Secretariat to build capacity of its staff and, by extension, of the member regulatory agencies. Through support for human resource development and supporting TRASA's work-plan, SIPRS helped create a strong Secretariat.
- **Knowledge Deepening:** The SIPRS project coordinated workshops on specific regional issues important for regulators, including spectrum management, consumer protection and standards, procedures for dispute resolution, information sharing, numbering, and interconnection.
- **Development of Model Policies:** Out of these workshops, TRASA worked with regulators to develop model policies for the region on numbering, human resource development, interconnection, consumer protection and data standards.
- **Ongoing Learning:** Through partnerships between African and American regulators and academic institutions, the NetTel@Africa Program has developed a formal degree program for graduate study of ICT policy for regulators. This program is delivered through a combination of online and traditional learning methods.
- **Peer Networks:** In addition to the online training, the NetTel@Africa program offers multiple opportunities for informal collaboration between regulators, private sector representatives, and academics in different countries. These individual connections are often key in developing mentoring and partnership relationships, which often results in lasting interactions between countries and regions.
- **Research and Development:** TRASA and NetTel@Africa, with USAID support, strengthened regional research capacity through the development of sectoral and regional Key Performance Indicators and through partnerships between universities, private sector partners, and regulators to conduct and analyze research.
- **Individualized Support to Member Countries:** The SIPRS project also provided support to TRASA members such as Swaziland, Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia. Each mission involved expert technical assistance to help each country harmonize their telecommunications policies with TRASA guidelines, especially in rural telephony, e-commerce development, and Internet access.

## Suggested Reading

### Telecommunications Regulators Association of Southern Africa (TRASA)

<http://www.trasa.org.bw>

### Southern Africa Telecommunications Policy and Regulatory Support Project (SIPRS).

<http://www.internews.org/siprs>

[http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/activities/activitydetails.php?activity\\_id=52](http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/activities/activitydetails.php?activity_id=52)

### Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Transport, Communications & Meteorology

<http://www.sadc.int>

### SADC ICT Policy and Regulatory Support Program (SIPRS), DOT-COM website

[http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/activities/activitydetails.php?activity\\_id=52](http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/activities/activitydetails.php?activity_id=52)

### Collaboration in ICT regulation in the Southern Africa Development Community: A Regional Approach to Capacity Building, Goulden B & Msimang M

<http://idpm.man.ac.uk/crc/>

### A Realistic Look at e-Commerce. Eric S. Johnson, COMESA ICT Forum, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2004

### The Role of Regulators on ICT Policymaking- The US FCC. Patrick Boateng, COMESA ICT Forum, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2004.

Interview with Brian Goulden, SIPRS Project Director (Full Transcript): [http://www.internews.org/activities/internet\\_issues/dotgovrep\\_goulden\\_int\\_2004-07-27.html](http://www.internews.org/activities/internet_issues/dotgovrep_goulden_int_2004-07-27.html)

### Harmonization of E-Commerce Legal Framework for Southern Africa DOT-COMments Issue 7: Spring/Summer 2004

[http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/newsletter/article.php?article\\_id=30](http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/newsletter/article.php?article_id=30)

### Protecting the Rights of African Telecommunications Consumers DOT-COMments Issue 7: Spring/Summer 2004

[http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/newsletter/article.php?article\\_id=29](http://www.dot-com-alliance.org/newsletter/article.php?article_id=29)

### West African Telecommunications Regulators Association (WATRA)

<http://www.watra.org>

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