



**Remarks of Leocadia I. Zak
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West Africa ICT Road Map to Opportunities Conference
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Good morning and welcome to our West Africa ICT Roadmap to Opportunities Conference. It is wonderful to see such a large gathering. This is the perfect forum for sharing ideas and learning from one another.

I must begin by saying it is wonderful to be back in Ghana. I had the honor to be here last year at the AGOA Forum. The event had a significant impact on me. The Forum focused on the importance of infrastructure in facilitating African participation in the global market. What I heard from delegate after delegate was that their growers, artisans and manufacturers could not fully take advantage of trade opportunities without access to adequate infrastructure, including telecommunications infrastructure. This conference is a tangible response to the call by the African community to place greater focus on infrastructure development and we at USTDA want to do everything we can to make this event a success.

I think it is especially appropriate that we meet here in Accra as we look at ways of developing ICT infrastructure in West Africa. Ghana was involved early in ICT market liberalization and development and has much experience to share with others in the region. For this reason, I am delighted that we are joined this morning by our host, His Excellency Alhaji Aliu Mahama, Vice President of the Republic of Ghana.

We look forward to your remarks in a few moments, Mr. Vice President.

I would also like to thank Minister Ntim, Ambassador Gross and Dr. Touré for your comments. Each of you all has played an important role in ICT policy development and your participation in this conference is critical to the success of our discussions over the coming two days.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize Commissioner Deborah Tate, Commissioner of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, who will be our keynote speaker at lunch today. I would also like to welcome the Ministers and senior officials present from the 12 West African countries and the U.S. equipment and service providers who are here today. Your participation provides us with an opportunity to establish a meaningful dialogue, forge lasting partnerships, and achieve significant results.

This event is the natural follow-on to the successful Africa-wide ICT conference that we sponsored in San Francisco in March 2007. That event looked at the challenges and solutions to the development of the ICT sector across Africa. We hope to continue that discussion but we would like to also focus our attention over the next few days on the unique opportunities present in West Africa.

As I considered my remarks today, I reflected on the role of ICT infrastructure in West Africa's development and USTDA's role in that process. I must tell you that my team teases me a bit because I am always saying that we can "have an impact" "change lives" even "save lives". Well, this undertaking today does have the capacity to have an impact on people's lives -- from the school child learning via the Internet, to a doctor caring for a patient through telemedicine, to a business -- small or large -- connecting to its buyers. The benefits of the technology we are going to discuss over the next few days are boundless.

For me, one of the most vivid illustrations of the power of this technology in Africa was provided, last year, during a discussion among African Ministers and Members of the U.S. Congress in Washington D.C. One of the Ministers explained how a community cell phone and access to the internet was able to provide valuable information regarding commodities prices. Traditionally, farmers were at the mercy of the buyers of their produce. However, via a community cell phone, a local farmer was able to call a friend who had access to the internet. As a result, when the farmer took his goods to market, he had a sense of the appropriate price for his goods, giving him greater bargaining power. -- This is only one example of how access to information has begun to empower producers and transform markets.

Each country represented here recognizes the importance of this sector to its development goals. As such, each is taking steps to liberalize its markets and encourage the introduction and adoption of new technologies.

What is USTDA's role in this process?

In addition to hosting this event, we offer other programs that provide host-country project sponsors with access to the U.S. private sector's experience, technology, and ingenuity in furthering sector development. Around the world, USTDA has applied these programs in facilitating the establishment of the infrastructure and institutions capable of supporting vibrant and growing economies.

We see ICT infrastructure as an essential building block in this effort. In Africa, for instance, we are collaborating with the International Finance Corporation and MTN Nigeria in funding technical assistance in the implementation of a community phone project. The project involves providing phone kits to women in rural communities to use in establishing businesses as telephone service providers in their communities. The pilot program has reached its initial targets in the 435 communities across the 22 states where it has been implemented. There are plans to install an additional 3,000 Motorola handsets in Nigeria and to expand this successful program to other African countries.

Recognizing that policy and regulatory frameworks are critical to attracting private sector investment, USTDA is also sponsoring two training programs in partnership with the U.S. Telecommunications Training Institute. Under the first training program, we are sponsoring a program for ICT leaders from across Africa on management, regulatory frameworks, and privatization. The first training under this program will start later this month. In addition, we have launched a Global ICT Executive Training Cooperation Program that will provide customized ICT technologies and regulatory policy training for newly appointed Ministerial-level officials. -- Ambassador Gross was instrumental in helping to get this program started. -- We look forward to a number of African Ministers participating in these innovative programs.

At this event, we will further efforts to expand West Africa's ICT infrastructure by highlighting near-term projects that are ready for private sector collaboration. From the smallest to the largest, each project is

designed to play an important role in the host country's goal of expanding and developing the ICT sector.

In further support of these goals, it is my pleasure to announce that, later today, USTDA will commit \$745,000 in support of ICT projects in Liberia and Niger. The first grant will fund an assessment for the Liberian Telecommunications Corporation of the technical and financial viability of the proposed metropolitan fiber optic ring around Monrovia. The second grant will support a separate study for Seaquest InfoTel Niger on the national ICT backbone.

Our mutual objectives and the purpose for being here at this conference are important, because today communications connect us not only to people in our own communities, but also to the world. The ease with which it is possible to communicate with people on the opposite side of the globe transforms the world into a smaller place. By communicating with each other, we share information, ideas and solutions. In short, technology has helped us to realize how much we have in common. This conference is designed to help establish the ICT infrastructure to allow that engine of development to reach its full potential in Africa. Your participation today has already ensured our success. My team and I and look forward to working with you to achieve our shared goal.

Thank you.

At this time, I would like to introduce His Excellency Alhaji Aliu Mahama, Vice President of the Republic of Ghana. Vice President Mahama, the Ghanaian government's plan to accelerate economic growth and improve the quality of life for all Ghanaians through open markets and private investment is widely respected throughout the world. In pursuing these goals, you have emphasized ICT as a driving force behind this transformation. In addition to serving as our host, you serve as an example. I deeply appreciate you opening our conference today.

His Excellency Vice President Mahama.