

Chapter 5

Reaching the Hard to Reach: Information Technology Reached Rural Kaudwane in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

Information Technology has become core in national development across the globe; hence, the government of Botswana decided to use ICTs to give rural people newer options of communicating, sourcing, and sharing information through the introduction of a project called Ntelelsa 2. A village, Kaudwane, whose residents have relied on the word of mouth for so long, is now communicating through mobile phones as a result of this program. This project is done under the Rural Telecommunications Strategy with a goal of providing telecommunications services to rural areas in the most cost effective, efficient, logical, and transparent manner possible. The government works in partnership with Botswana Telecommunication Centre which provides mobile services with capability to deliver Internet, voice, and data. The project also uses Public Communications Centre (PUCC) now referred to as Dikitsong Center operated by communities in partnership with Mascom or Botswana Telecommunication Center. Services include provision of an Internet café, charging individual cellular phones at a fee, and selling airtime to both locals and visitors. The result is great: employment creation and easier communication amongst individuals and visitors. However, low literacy level of some villagers limits use. Also, there are high maintenance costs due to poor roads.

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INTRODUCTION

The Botswana Government as part of the global village developed a National ICT policy whose main objective is “making Botswana a Regional ICT Hub so as to make the country’s ICT sector globally competitive” (Botswana Government, 2005, p. i). The reason being that information technology has become core in national developments across the globe hence Botswana like any other nation has to prepare for its design and implementation. As from 2004, there has been some realization that Botswana is lagging in as far as the use of ICTs is concerned. This realization gave birth to the first National policy on ICT in Botswana, known as *Maitlamo*. Interestingly, the Setswana name *Maitlamo* when translated to English means commitment. It was the beginning of a commitment that drive Botswana where it is, ranked to be high by “Rezaian’s study which focused on Sub – Saharan Africa countries, that indicates that Botswana’s network readiness is high at 3.34...Furthermore, Botswana is ranked number 1” (Cited in Lekoko, 2008) as far as connectivity is concerned. This national policy on ICTs was approved in January 2005. Among other benefits, the ICT policy is seen as a tool that can bridge the digital and information divide between the urban and the rural areas across the country. Studies done to support the implementation of this policy (Icegate Solutions Inc, 2002) reveal serious disparity in connectivity between rural and urban communities. As a result rural villages were given high priority. This necessitated the Botswana government to develop the Rural Telecommunications Strategy of June 2006. The goal of the Rural Telecommunications Strategy is “to provide telecommunications services to the rural areas in the most cost effective, efficient, logical and transparent manner possible” (Ministry of Communication Science and Technology, 2006, p. 14).

Both the ICT policy and the Rural Telecommunication Strategy have laid the foundation for

treating ICT as paramount to community development. This move has implications for budget, thus, the Botswana government has appropriated money for the improvement of rural communities through ICTs. The Ministry of Infrastructure Science and Technology provides leadership particularly in this case and generally in areas needing science and technology intervention in the country. To ensure proper implementation of the policy and strategy, the Ministerial budget has increased over the 6 year period. In addition, the Ministry has placed ICT under the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services.

It is within the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services that the project called Ntelelsa 2 operates. This is the project that this chapter draws from. It actually comes in two phases, Ntelelsa 1 and 2. Because the government of Botswana does not have the capacity and expertise to run these projects, it outsourced their services. Through a tendering or bidding system, the Botswana Telecommunication Corporation (BTC) and Mascom were entrusted to implement the project. BTC supplies, installs, operates and maintains telecommunications network in 62 villages. One of these villages was Kaudwane. These villages were in the following districts; Kweneng, Kgalagadi and Southern and they fall under Area 2 of the Ntelelsa 2 project. The project also includes Public Communications Centre (PUCC) now referred to as Dikitsisong Centre, which are to be operated by the communities in partnership with Mascom or BTC. The strategic planning of how the ICT in these projects are rolled out to the villages was the prerogative of both the BTC and Mascom as they are organizations given the capital seed money to do the job. Both operators understood that the PUCC’s were to create new employment and further develop skills in the ICT sector (Mosinyi, 2008).

This case demonstrates efforts by the Botswana government to create opportunities for access and use of ICTs in rural villages. This was done in partnership with a number of stakeholders and

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