ADDRESS BY HON. PROF. DOMINIC FOBIH, M. P. & MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE & SPORTS - GHANA ON THE NATIONAL ICT FOR EDUCATION STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME IN GHANA AT THE 2ND AFRICAN HIGH-LEVEL POLICY MAKER AND INDUSTRY LEADER ROUND TABLE AND RETREAT IN ACCRA, GHANA ON MAY 27, 2008.

Hon Chair,

Hon Ministers of Education,

Discussants,

Policy Makers,

Leaders in industry,

Distinguished Invited guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is such a special privilege and honour to host the 2nd High Level and Industry leader Round Table and Retreat and be in such a forum where we can share our experiences and initiate networks that can be of mutual benefit to the partners and ultimately bring about enhancement in the development of education in Africa.

Educators and policymakers alike agree that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are of paramount importance to the future of education and that ICT is indeed the accelerator for the development of national educational systems. The Ghana Ministry of Education, Science and Sports has been facilitating the process of integrating ICT in the educational system. The Ministry is fully committed to the deployment and exploitation of ICTs to facilitate teaching and learning at all levels within the educational system and also improve Management efficiency and service delivery to the public through the use of ICTs.

The Government of the Republic of Ghana is committed to pursuing an ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy. This national policy outlines the plans and strategies for the development of Ghana's information society and seeks to provide a framework and plan as to how ICTs can be used to facilitate amongst other objectives the national goal of "transforming *Ghana into an information and knowledge-driven ICT literate nation*". The National Policy outlines fourteen (14) pillars, of which education is highlighted, as both a critical pillar and a key socio-economic enabler. Towards this end, a number of key strategies have been identified. These include:

(i)   Promoting the deployment and exploitation of information, knowledge and technology within the economy and society as key drivers for socio-economic development;

(ii) Modernizing Ghana's educational system using ICTs to improve and expand access to education, training and research resources and facilities, as well as to improve the quality of education and training. This is to make the educational system responsive to the needs and requirements of the economy and society with specific reference to the development of information and knowledge-based economy and society; and

(iii) Improving the human resource development capacity and the Research and Development (R&D) capacity of Ghana. These are to meet the demands and requirements for developing the nation's information and knowledge-based economy and society.

Mr. Chair, the Education Sector Policy Statement (2004) has been previously defined in the National ICT4AD Policy. It has a mission to "transform *the*

educational system to provide the requisite educational, and training services and environment capable of producing the right types of skills and human resources required for developing and driving Ghana's information and knowledge-based economy and society".   Government is therefore committed to a comprehensive programme of rapid deployment, utilization and exploitation of ICTs within the educational system from primary school, including Kindergaten upwards.

Policy efforts are being directed at using ICTs to facilitate education and learning as well as promoting e-learning and life long learning. As a part of this policy commitment, Government has put in place measures to strengthen science education at all levels and to promote technical, vocational education and training with emphasis on the use of ICTs to facilitate the training and learning process.

Overall Policy Goal

Mr. Chair, the overall goal of the ICT in Education Policy is to:

Enable graduates from Ghanaian educational institutions – formal and non-formal - to confidently and creatively use ICT tools and resources to develop requisite skills and knowledge needed to be active participants in the global knowledge economy by 2015.

The Ghana Ministry of Education, Science & Sports has developed a new ICT in Education Policy (2006) with financial and technical support from the Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative (GeSCI). Microsoft supported the printing of the first three thousand copies of the policy document.

Recognising the fact that the 'sea' of ICT is very broad and that Government alone cannot do all the fishing in terms of the ICT deployment agenda , Public Private Partnerships are sought in order to help provide the enabling environment for achieving the set objectives.   The Ministry has strategic partnerships with a whole range of stakeholders including Multi-national companies, private, inter-governmental, non-governmental organisations Parent Teacher Associations and so on.

These partnerships, Mr. Chair, have led to various interventions and initiatives aimed at achieving the goals set in the new ICT in Education policy.

Some of these include:

1. The Capacity building and Training programmes for Teachers with Microsoft through the Partners in Learning(PIL) programme.

2. Incentives for teachers for exploiting ICTs for teaching & Learning through the annual Innovative Teachers Awards for the development/use of digital content since 2006 by Microsoft.

3. Development of a portal (www.skoool.com.gh) for the teaching of Mathematics and Science for Junior and Senior High Schools with Intel Corporation. (This is to be launched on Thursday May 29, 2008 at the Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT)

4. Provision of affordable Personal Computers under a high purchase agreement (Government Assisted PC Project) for schools, teachers and civil servants.

5. The establishment of a National Communications Backbone facility that provides non-discriminatory modern high speed communications services to all who require the use of the infrastructure.

The first phase that covers the southern part of the country has been completed and the second phase targeting the north is about to start. Efforts are being made to ensure that the backbone networks can easily be tapped for use in educational institutions (This is a Ghana-China Bilateral Programme).

6. Implementation of the Demonstration Project of the NEPAD e-Schools Initiative, a typical e-learning intervention, which has taken off successfully in six Senior High Schools in six of the ten Regions in Ghana.

7. There are one hundred and eight Science Resource Centres in Ghana with appreciable amounts of Educational Resources in Science, Geography, Environmental Education, General Knowledge and other areas on compact Disks available for use by students for elearning purposes.

8. Implementation of the Ghana e-Schools & Communities Initiative that serves as an umbrella programme for all ICTE initiatives in Ghana.

9. With support of the private sector nearly 100 eLearning Centres have been established in private Basic Schools.

10. The Computerised School Selection and Placement System of our Ministry has become one of the success stories in Africa.

11. Provision of Solar Energy in rural communities by the Ghana Ministry of Energy in collaboration with the Ministries of Communications and Education.

Goals

The Government of Ghana is committed to the transformation of the agro-based primary producing economy into an information rich and knowledge-based economy and society using the tools of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Given the magnitude of the task ahead of us, the government of the Republic of Ghana enjoins both the public and private sectors to join hands to ensure that our children receive high quality teaching and learning through:

- Promoting and expanding equitable access to education;
- Promoting the development and use of ICTs to enhance teaching and learning and information management;
- Promoting ICT initiatives that will transform the culture and practices of traditional memory based learning to education that stimulates thinking and creativity;
- Initiating and promoting educational practices that cater for individual differences, serve the needs of inclusive education and learning styles based on equitable access.
- Providing competent ICT literate graduates to meet the demands of the national and international labour markets.
- Creating smart partnerships for a sustainable ICT programme through collaboration with the public, private and community sectors.

Government Priorities

Mr. Chair, as we look at 'accelerating the building of ICT Infrastructure and capacities for African Educational Systems, I wish to look at the issue of infrastructure in Ghana.

One of the key priorities of Government of Ghana in achieving its vision for the ICT industry is the development of the National Telecommunications Broadband infrastructure. In particular, it refers to the establishment of a national Communications Backbone facility to provide an enabling environment to drive the national economy with ICT.

Coverage of the optical fibre network is currently inadequate as it covers only the southern part of Ghana and the capacity cannot meet the demands of the ICT service industry. This obviously impacts on the intended drive and development of ICT deployments in schools. The result is that educational institutions that cannot wait for implementation of Government programmes, go in for technology infrastructure options that are generally not sustainable considering budgetary constraints. There is a record of case stories of schools or groups of schools that have had to abrogate initial contracts with Internet Service Providers.

The national backbone transmission network is intended to support the e-government Programme through which the Government of Ghana intends to develop and build the appropriate ICT infrastructure to reach all the 138 district capitals in the country. This will improve efficiency of government, increase transparency in governance and financial management, boost the local economy and bring government to the doorstep of the citizenry. It will also provide the enabling environment for the country to harness the flourishing Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry.

The current optical fibre network covers only 800Km. It is expected to be extended to about 4000km along the National Electricity Transmission System connecting 23 power transformation substations nationwide. Under the project it is intended that the optical fibre infrastructure would be extended from the southern part of the country to the northern part and further up to the neighbouring country of Burkina Faso.

It is also intended to extend the network eastward to link Togo and to create a number of rings (loops) within the network in order to improve reliability of the system and also to be self healing. This will lead to equity and the provision of educational facilities to schools country-wide.

There is a government Networking Policy for Ministries, Departments and Agencies. The standards defined in that policy have been designed to ensure the best and most effective use of existing technologies, while serving as a basis for the development of strategies for long-term maturity in the use of future technologies.

Power or energy infrastructure is also quiet a critical issue because our reliance on the Hydro-electric power as the main source of power for industry has created great challenges for both education and industry. This is a critical factor which the ICT industry must pick as a challenge.

Mr. Chair, Hon Ministers, Industry Leaders, distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, I perceive that this is a forum where we expect industry leaders to demonstrate their commitment to supporting or initiating packages that have a potential to ultimately be mutually beneficial.

I am grateful for the audience and attention.