



The sole purpose of these 13 easy pieces (the sky is not the limit briefing notes) that I intend to publish during Dec 2018 – Dec 2019 is to share my ideas with all Somali Citizens around the world. The overall goal of these briefing notes is to encourage discussion among Concerned Somalis, those who really care about Somalia, as we move towards the National Somali Elections of 2020 (2021?). These briefing notes are apolitical as I have no intention to promote any political agenda, but only to assist promulgating at a personal level any credible idea, platform or national agenda that will move Somalia forward to a stable, progressive, peaceful country. A Somali language version will be made soon. This and related documents are also available on som-isoc.org, ayuub.org, Somaliaaway.com, on twitter (@MISomalia), youtube (MI2020), Instagram (mwze2020) and linkedIn (MI2020).

THE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF ICT AND ITS REGULATION TO SOMALIA'S NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

The impact of ICT on national economy is well researched area and there is a general consensus that the ICT sector has a huge positive economic and social impact on national economic development of both developing and developed countries. In Somalia, the standard excuse that we have entered the age of digital transformation in an unregulated format due to the chaos we inherited from the two decades with no stable functioning government, is no longer valid. We now have a functioning government, albeit with weak institutions and teething problems, not different from others who went through rebuilding a failed State. The government has passed a telecommunication law, established a National Communication Authority (NCA), leaving aside the controversial process followed to get there. What is important for all Somali citizens, and in particular my area of interest and focus is what needs to happen for us to reap the benefits of the telecommunication law and the formation of the NCA. The expectation was and remains to be, for all to enjoy and share the valuable common resources such as the dividends (as in tax) from national telecommunication assets and all other value-added platforms, i.e. mobile money, digital currencies, OTT, ISPs, digital content, and many more.

The impact of digital transformation and the interplay of ICT regulation on national economies is not difficult area to understand. For those who are interested in this area there are new-generation, mature econometric modelling techniques, they can pursue, that can help to quantify this with additional granularity. The evidence is there for all to see, there is absolutely no ambiguity of the importance of the law and regulatory authority to lead us and drive the national digital growth which will ultimately have positive impact on the growth of our national economy and prosperity for all of us.

So, what is the cause for the delay in Somali government to get on with this? In fact, recent credible research¹ highlights the importance of mobile technology (which is dominant in Somalia) and its higher economic contribution in less developed countries than in more developed countries where fixed broadband contributes more. This will enforce the point I am trying to make here, that there is absolutely no credible excuse for the Somali Ministry of ICT and its brand new NCA not to fast track getting on with implementing a fair solution to help all receive equitable distribution of the digital dividend. It is morally and ethically questionable not to use a legitimate legal tool at the government disposal, to distribute a nation's shared resources, in an equitable fashion, among its citizens. To delay or postpone this will make us all, former and current leaders, less caring human beings, and we should remind ourselves that Justice delayed is indeed Justice denied.

¹ ITU's Thematic Reports- Regulatory and Market environment, 2018. See also ICT Development Index, the World Bank Knowledge Economy Index, the World Economic Forum Network Readiness Index, and the Inter-American Development Bank Broadband Development Index

The recent consultation process is a step in the right direction, though many (including this author) rightly remain curious on the sequencing process, i.e. should consultation phase come before or after project implementation. This minor bureaucratic hiccup can be forgiven, as long as the outcome leads to a positive outcome for all Somalis. So far, the jury is out and may take a long time to produce a verdict as they are waiting for guidance from an unavailable Judge, since many believe the Jury happens to be the judge as well.

Here are the top four of a long list of suggestions that I will share over the next few months. As someone who has worked and learned from others who are familiar with this area and for all intent and purpose has no personal interest in this matter beyond positively contributing to the discussion to help us move forward, I hope this will help. All the following suggestions below can be done now if there is a will to act.

1. The Ministry and NCA must show credible leadership by convincing us, Somali citizens, they are impartial and working towards rapid solution to redistribute the dividends from the National ICT resources in an equitable way, in the form of tax, etc. A brief policy paper with timeline will do.
2. If taxation is complicated and as argued over the years has security implication for the telecoms, there are other ways, i.e. giving scholarship to say 1000 students to study medicine and STEM subject over the next few years. Contributing to Universal Service Fund, just like all other countries do, to make telecom services available beyond the big cities and towns.
3. Interconnection is not negotiable, this has been done before, even without telecommunication law and NCA. Communication is a human right and forcing the Somali citizen to carry multiple mobile phones is human rights violation as it may lead to hindering communication. Delaying implementing this does not make sense.
4. Millions of telephone numbers are in use in Somalia and millions more are reserved and are in the hands of a few telecom companies. Millions of dollars are transmitted via mobile phones. By charging 1 cent per call and per mobile money transaction, enough revenue will be collected (based on educated guess) to pay for all Somali public servants, and there will be no need for the EU or others to support us in this area.

In conclusion, research in this area, Information and communication technologies, has shown that it has been and still does continue to contribute to the national economic development of both developing and developed countries. While the original focus was to assess the deployment and adoption of telecommunication and information technology infrastructure as landline, broadband, mobile telephony, computers, etc., recent research has been gradually expanding its focus to include dimensions such as the use of digital technologies as in mobile money, digital currencies, etc.

This briefing note covered in general format, issues related to how regulated ICT can contribute to Somalia's economic development. It has also commented on recent developments in this sector and suggested some ideas that might help us move forward. There is enough evidence from the literature and also from my own experience that the four points suggested above can be done easily without any delaying excuses. If there are unavoidable and credible reasons for any delay, then the Somali citizens have a right to know them. Else, we all want to know why this cannot be done?

Stay tuned for the next briefing note on an issue of national interest, comments and feedback welcome. Peace.