

Towards an African e-Index

Alison Gillwald, Research ICT Africa (RIA!), gillwald@gmail.com

This presentation presents the findings of a household and individuals user surveys conducted in 16 African countries by Research ICT Africa! (RIA!). The research forms part of a series of supply and demand side surveys that seek to contribute to evidence-based ICT policy formulation on the continent. What these supply-and demand-side studies have demonstrated is that across the continent, even where there has been overall sector growth, sector performance has been sub-optimal: for the most part, the primary national policy objectives of delivering affordable telecommunications access have not been met.

The supply-side analysis, undertaken through the sector performance review, indicates that mobile telephony is addressing the gap between those who have voice services and those who do not. However, the divide between those who are able to access the Internet and the range of enhanced services that have become necessary for effective citizenry and consumer participation, and those who cannot, has widened. The high cost of communications not only constrains individual communication, but also inflates the input cost to business, negatively affecting national and regional economies.

The demand-side household and individual access and usage survey provides insights into the continued marginalisation of large numbers of Africans even from basic communications services and confirms the sub-optimal use of communications services due to the high cost of access to services. The demand side research is verifiable from the supply side data but also allows analysis of supply side data by for example reporting in real terms on numbers of residential user of fixed lines, and demonstrating the size of subscriber overcounting as a result of multiple SIM cards. The research provides the only data available at national level which is able to disaggregate communication users between urban and rural, on the grounds of gender, income and education. The value attached to accessing and utilising communications is evident in the considerable portion of household income spent on communications and the multiple strategies used by individuals to maintain communication access according to their cash flow and the prices of alternatives. The willingness-to-pay modelling suggests that relatively small reductions in the cost of equipment and services would result in increased uptake and usage, with a significant growth in revenues for operators. The purpose of this research is to enable informed policy formulation and regulatory practice by identifying specific and targeted points of pro-poor intervention in markets with services that are still inaccessible and unaffordable to many people on the continent.

Bio

Alison Gillwald is Associate Professor and Research Director of LINK Centre University of the Witwatersrand, which she launched in 1999 to fast track ICT policy and regulatory training in Southern Africa. She is responsible for Research ICT Africa! an Africa-wide network which aims to fill the ICT policy and regulatory research vacuum that exists on the continent.

Prior to that she was appointed to the founding Council of the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) and was responsible for establishing the Policy Department at the Independent Broadcasting Authority in 1994.

She has chaired the national Digital Broadcasting Advisory Body to the Minister of Communications and has served on the boards of the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Womensnet and the Media Monitoring Project.

She is founding editor of the Southern African Journal of Information and Communication and has published in the areas of telecommunications and broadcasting policy and regulation, gender and politics more broadly.