

NCA ORGANISES 2ND DIGITAL FORUM AND DISCUSSES DOMESTIC ROAMING AND OTT SERVICES

The National Communications Authority (NCA) on May 17, 2016 held its second Digital Family Forum with a flag-raising ceremony as part of this year's World Telecommunications and Information Society Day. This day is celebrated annually to signify the founding of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and also use to raise awareness on specify ICT-related issues.

This year's Forum, which was held at the Accra International Conference Centre, focused on addressing challenges of the communications industry to promote growth and development-concentrating on Domestic Roaming and Over the Top (OTT) Services.

Unlocking the potential of ICTs for young innovators and entrepreneurs, innovative SMEs, start-ups and technology hubs as drivers of innovative and practical solutions for catalysing progress in achieving international sustainable development goals was the focus for the theme for this year's celebrations -"ICT entrepreneurship for social impact".

Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of ITU's speech read on his behalf by Mr. William Tevie, Director General of NCA focused on mechanisms for future advances in communications, looking at a combination of forward-looking government policies and regulatory reforms, international standards, industry innovation and investment in infrastructure, and new services. He called on stakeholders to pull resources together to harness the catalytic role of ICTs in achieving sustainable development and delivering on economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance.

Mr. Abdul Hamid Yakub, representing the UN Resident Coordinator, Ghana, said Start-ups and technology hubs in the ICT sector are the drivers of innovative and practical solutions that can contribute to inclusive growth. He further stated that small to medium-sized enterprises make up more than 90 per cent of all businesses worldwide, and represent a path out of poverty for many developing countries.

He called for collaboration saying, "I call upon governments, businesses and civil society leaders to develop new technologies that have a lasting social impact. ICTs can create more inclusive societies for persons with disabilities. They can help children to learn and the elderly to stay active. And ICTs can connect people around the world in common cause."

Hon. Edward Kofi Omane-Boamah (Dr.), Minister for Communications, who graced the forum as the Guest of Honour said," One major aim of President Mahama's Government beyond the efforts being made by the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communication (GIFEC) is to consider the case

for Domestic Roaming”. Hon. Omane Boamah went on to say, ‘this service will enable mobile users to switch from one network to the other in the event of network failure. Furthermore, this will ultimately be of advantage to the police and other security officers in the event of crisis and mass information’.

He also stated that the purpose of the forum which was to afford stakeholders the opportunity to take stock of where we are as an industry and ways to improve and enhance our relationships, services and products for the collective good of society.

The first panel, consisting of representatives from NCA, GTUC, and Ghana Chamber of Telecom, focused on Domestic Roaming from the consumer, regulator, operator’s perspective outlining the advantages and disadvantages to them and the way forward for the industry. All panel members agreed that there was a need to provide telephony services to underserved and unserved areas in achieving the objective of universal access to communication. They presented participants with the following conclusions;

- Operators’ perspective by Ghana Chamber of Telecom - Domestic Roaming will not address black spots, it is complex and expensive and not commercially viable.
- Consumer perspective by Dr. Ezer Yeboah-Boateng - National Roaming will be effective in addressing underserved and unserved area or in providing better coverage and citizens will benefit from fewer rural towers.
- Regulator Perspective by NCA – In considering the objectives of universal access to telephony services in underserved areas, the Authority recommends a national roaming policy that has both mandatory and optional components but there are issues that require further technical and financial analyses.

For the second session, the second panel, consisting of representatives from NCA and Wireless Application Services Providers Association of Ghana (WASPAG) considered the possibility of regulating the OTT services. Discussions on the topic bordered around Global trends, Opportunities and threats, Regulatory imbalances and benchmarking from other jurisdictions.

All two panelists were insistent fact that OTT should not be banned like other countries, however, the industry needed to consider the type and level of regulations needed in order not to stifle innovation and deprive consumers of the benefits of using these services.

The Forum was a platform which enabled the NCA have access to the views from other stakeholders for consideration.

About the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day

The purpose of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) is to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT) can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide.

17 May marks the anniversary of the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention and the creation of the International Telecommunication Union.

World Telecommunication Day

World Telecommunication Day has been celebrated annually on 17 May since 1969, marking the founding of ITU and the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention in 1865. It was instituted by the Plenipotentiary Conference in Malaga-Torremolinos in 1973.

World Information Society Day

In November 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society called upon the UN General Assembly to declare 17 May as World Information Society Day to focus on the importance of ICT and the wide range of issues related to the Information Society raised by WSIS. The General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/60/252) in March 2006 stipulating that World Information Society Day shall be celebrated every year on 17 May.