

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITALISATION,
MRS URSULA OWUSU-EKUFUL

PRESS BRIEFING, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

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The Hon. Minister for Information Designate

Hon. Deputy Ministers

Heads of Departments and Agencies

Chief Director, Directors, and Staff of the MoCD,

Our Media friends

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for the opportunity to provide an update on three key initiatives of the Ministry of Communications and Digitalization. I'll entreat the Minister for Information to create another opportunity for us to share many more initiatives of the MOCD with the country so hopefully this is only part one of many.

We all know technological advancements have profoundly influenced our interactions with one another and our surroundings, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are fundamentally restructuring every facet of our society and altering the fabric of our daily existence.

Recognizing the importance of digitalization as a cornerstone of economic development, this government has committed itself to a relentless pursuit of innovative ICT solutions. This Ministry has systematically crafted and implemented several pioneering initiatives in alignment with the overarching vision of realizing the Digital Ghana Agenda.

Under the able leadership of President Nana Akufo Addo and championed by H.E. the Vice President Dr. Bawumia, this government has spearheaded numerous initiatives within the ICT sector, each deserving of attention. However, the focus of today's presentation, will be on only three pivotal areas:

- **The Ghana Rural Telephony and Digital Inclusion Project,**
- **The Innovative Digital Services and Payments Platform, GHANA.GOV**
- **The Revolutionary Nationwide E Government Network**

1. The Ghana Rural Telephony and Digital Inclusion Project

The Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation, through the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC), is driving the extension of mobile telephony

services into all corners of the nation where access is either lacking or insufficient, and where network operators are reluctant to expand their services to because those areas are deemed not to be commercially viable.

Between 2008 and 2016, only 78 Rural Telephony Sites were built by GIFEC.

However, upon assumption of office in 2017, this government decided to intensify efforts to ensure comprehensive network coverage across the country in line with our Digital Ghana Agenda. **Between 2017 and 2018, in collaboration with the private sector, 430 Rural Telephony Sites were built and activated. This concerted effort connected approximately 700,000 previously underserved and unserved Ghanaians in remote communities, helping to bridge the digital divide and foster inclusive development.**

Not satisfied with the pace of this and In a bid to accelerate and expand the coverage of the Rural Telephony Project, the government in 2020 secured a €155 million facility from the China EXIM Bank to start the Ghana Rural Telephony and Digital Inclusion Project in partnership with Huawei and China National Technical Import and Export Corporation (CNTIC). They engaged a local partner, Ascend Digital Solutions, to execute this project.

Under this visionary project, a total of 2,016 Rural Telephony Sites are to be constructed, to extend mobile network coverage to approximately 4 million residents of selected unserved and underserved communities, a significant step in bridging the digital divide. We are determined to leave no one behind in our quest for digital transformation.

As at February 2024, 1,010 of the planned sites have been successfully constructed, with 618 of them already operational, offering essential Voice and Data services to citizens in about 1,620 rural communities who can now make calls and use data services, thereby enhancing social and economic activities in these communities. The Ministry will build the remaining 1,006 sites, integrate, and activate them all for voice and data services to ensure reliable, affordable, and secured broadband infrastructure this year.

The GRT&DIP has been a game-changer, enabling citizens to connect seamlessly, irrespective of their chosen Mobile Network Provider. This groundbreaking achievement is due to the implementation of the National Roaming Initiative, a forward-looking policy initiated by this government. The National Roaming Service allows phones to automatically connect to the Mobile Network with the strongest signal available in any area, regardless of which Operator one subscribes to. This initiative has not only expanded access to telecommunications services but has also fostered greater inclusivity within our digital landscape.

It is worth noting that the Rural Telephony Project utilises the innovative Rural Star Technology, which was first developed by Huawei for rural connectivity in Ghana and presents up to 70% cost reduction compared to traditional masts. This makes the project both economically and financially feasible and capable of generating a decent return on investment.

This Rural Telephony Project symbolizes more than just expanded telephony coverage. It represents a significant stride toward a more connected, inclusive, and digitally empowered nation, transforming the lives of citizens in communities that were once unconnected, unserved or underserved.

The project has enhanced the ability of residents to communicate with each other and the rest of the world, with improved access to information, and increased connectivity for businesses amongst others.

It has facilitated remote learning, digital financial inclusion through mobile banking and mobile money, access to market information for farmers, and enabled small businesses to reach customers beyond their immediate vicinity, due to the availability of mobile Internet in these communities.

Prior to this intervention, basic healthcare delivery and education, among other critical services, presented a challenge, as health workers and teachers were reluctant to accept postings to certain communities due to the lack of connectivity. This situation has improved significantly due to the Rural Telephony Project.

Challenges - The COVID 19 pandemic, global supply chain disruptions, our bilateral debt restructuring and other happenings across the globe stalled the project leading to delays in completion of this project which was initially scheduled to be completed in 2022 but was extended to 2023. The Ministry is currently working on alternative funding to complete the Project this year. In fact, this Project has been added to the National Priority Infrastructure List and the 2024 Budget has approved an amount of Two Hundred and Ninety Million, Seven Hundred and Fifty-Three Thousand and Nine Cedis (GHC 290,753,009.00) for it this year.

The Rural Telephony project continues to make remarkable progress, bringing the benefits of connectivity to every corner of our nation. We remain steadfast in our commitment to digital inclusion and look forward to further advancements in the realm of technology for the betterment of all Ghanaians.

List of sites

REGION	NO. OF BUILT SITES	NO. OF INTEGRATED SITES	NO. OF SITES CAPABLE OF PASSING TRAFFIC (ON-AIR)
Ahafo	34	23	22
Ashanti	153	84	77
Bono	36	15	12
Bono East	49	40	36
Central	92	74	72
Eastern	89	65	64

Greater Accra	1	1	1
North East	28	11	9
Northern	58	41	40
Oti	58	31	31
Savannah	50	36	35
Upper East	44	33	27
Upper West	77	58	51
Volta	63	40	38
WESTERN	91	56	52
Western North	87	51	51
Grand Total	1,010	659	618

ECOWAS FREE ROAMING

Ghana has also taken bold steps to implement the ECOWAS Free Roaming initiative adopted in 2016 but suffering implementation challenges. In June 2023, Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire became the first ECOWAS countries to implement the ECOWAS Free Roaming initiative to promote greater integration among member states and decrease roaming charges within the sub-region.

This simply means that Ghanaian subscribers of any network, visiting Côte d'Ivoire, will receive calls without paying roaming charges and will be charged Côte d'Ivoire's local rates when making calls to Ghana while in Côte d'Ivoire, and vice versa. Subscribers traveling between both countries will also be exempt from international roaming charges. Following the successful execution of the Roaming Services Agreement between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Togo to start the processes of implementing the roaming service between them by the end of the first quarter of this year. The NCA has also been approached by Benin and the Gambia to establish a similar bilateral ECOWAS Roaming Service. This will facilitate trade and interactions between citizens of these countries and give meaning to regional integration.

2. The Innovative Digital Services and Payments Platform, GHANA.GOV

Let's start by Debunking the myth - e-Services Platform and Ghana.gov are not the same

The e-Services platform was deployed in 2012 under the e-Ghana project as a pilot to produce an e-Government Portal to provide relevant government services to citizens and businesses . It had a services component and a payment component.

The eServices platform was developed by Messrs IPMC at a total cost of about US\$547,000 and was then integrated with an e-Payment platform in 2014 to enable online payment for transactions. The ePayment Platform was developed by Messrs AYA Technologies at a total cost of US\$267,000. This was exclusive of annual software licensing fees.

The following agencies were actually on boarded and had some services deployed in 2014.

1. AMA
 - Application for Notice of Marriage
 - Marriage Registration
2. Births and Deaths Registry (BDR)
 - Application for a Certified Copy of Entry in Birth Register
3. Ghana Police Service GPS, Criminal Investigation Division (CID)
 - Application for Fingerprint Check/ Nominal Vetting
4. Ghana Passport
 - Passport Application
5. RGD
 - Company Registration

The e-Services Platform Challenges

Though intended to revolutionise government services delivery, it faced several challenges that made it largely non functional.

Some of the challenges were:

- Lack of technical support for the payment platform (Magento). Magento was a mere eCommerce platform deployed by Aya Technologies which could not provide the essential technology for nationwide e-Services. After sales support of the Magento platform was also poor. As a result, the payment component of the e-Services platform could not be effectively used.
- There was no sustainable business model for the e-Services project, resulting in NITA's inability to generate the needed revenue to sustain the platform.
- Lack of revenue made it difficult for NITA to renew the annual licenses and pay for operational support for the platform which made system availability and reliability a challenge.
- Limited number of banks were integrated to the platform. Only Zenith, Access, GT, and Ecobank were integrated.
- VISA card payments that were recorded as paid transactions on the platform appeared on the global payment system as unsuccessful.
- RGD payments did not reflect on their Portal and as a consequence user payments did not reflect as paid.
- Frequent downtime of the e-Services portal made the active MDAs on the portal unable to update their applications.

- The platform could not reach a broad user base, due to inadequate infrastructure or connectivity issues in significant parts of the country
- It struggled with integrating various government services resulting in a fragmented user experience and inefficiencies in service delivery.
- The user interface and experience was an issue for some sections of the public leading to difficulties for users in navigating the platform, completing transactions, or accessing relevant information.
- The platform offered only a limited range of e-services with only about 3 e-forms, the rest were just downloadable forms and informational, failing to meet the diverse needs of citizens and businesses, thereby limiting its overall impact and utility.

Transactions on e-Services Platform

A total amount of GHS 186 Million and GHS 213 Million was paid through the platform in 2016 and 2017 respectively. In 2018, only GHS 26.8 Million was paid through the platform.

A New Approach to Solving an Old Problem

Faced with the above stated challenges and having a clear vision and focus on the digital transformation of the economy, the Akufo-Addo/ Bawumia government took a totally different approach to government online service delivery by adopting a sustainable and cost effective approach. We knew we had local capacity to design and develop a robust system to address our peculiar challenges and so we empowered 3 indigenous technology firms to design a totally new portal.

Partnership and Development of Ghana.gov

The government discontinued the Ghana E-Services Payment Platform (GEPP) and entered into a partnership with a consortium of three local technology firms (Hubtel, expressPay and IT Consortium) to design, develop, deploy, and manage a one-stop-shop online services platform with an integrated payment gateway for the Government of Ghana, known as **Ghana.gov**. The consortium financed the development, deployment and management of the entire project. Now this platform serves as a shared central point for all government online revenue collection, enabling citizens and businesses to discover, consume, and pay for government services online seamlessly.

Revenue Collection and Operational Model

Under this Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement, the consortium receives a percentage of collections for their investment and operational support of the platform. It is therefore in their interest to keep this platform continually operational. This innovative model effectively addresses many of the challenges faced by the previous e-Services platform, ensuring sustainability, reliability, and efficiency in government services delivery.

Achievements of Ghana.gov

The **Ghana.gov** platform stands as a testament to the digitalization agenda of the Nana Addo/Bawumia government in modernizing governance and facilitating seamless access to government services. Through its user-friendly interface and comprehensive array of online functionalities, Ghana.gov has become a cornerstone of Ghana's digital transformation journey. 1507 institutions have been onboarded in 3 years of operation as against 13 onboarded by the eServices platform in the same amount of time, with only 5 active.

Significance of Revenue Collection

One of the most compelling indicators of the platform's success lies in its remarkable revenue collection figures. Currently, Ghana.gov has facilitated the collection of an impressive sum of **GHS 210 Billion Ghana cedis**. This substantial amount underscores the platform's pivotal role in streamlining financial transactions, enhancing transparency, and bolstering the nation's fiscal integrity. This milestone symbolises the tangible impact of digital innovation on public services delivery, economic efficiency, and citizen empowerment. By harnessing the power of technology to centralise and optimise revenue collection processes, Ghana.gov has not only expedited financial transactions but also minimised bureaucratic red tape and mitigated the risk of revenue leakages, effectively addressing the issue of public sector corruption.

The success of **Ghana.gov** also underscores the growing trust and confidence of citizens and businesses in digital government platforms. It reflects a paradigm shift towards digital-first governance, where convenience, accessibility, and accountability are prioritized in service delivery.

This achievement serves as a compelling motivation to enhance and expand the capabilities of Ghana.gov. As the platform continues to evolve, it holds the potential to catalyze even greater socioeconomic development, empower citizens, and solidify Ghana's position as a trailblazer in the digital revolution sweeping the African continent.

Summary of Ghana.gov Achievements- GHS 210 Billion and Counting

Activity	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 January	Totals
Total Receipts	5,041,267,062.47	40,314,713,166.65	62,762,419,029.62	93,631,905,358.57	8,557,569,200.01	210,307,873,817.32
Average Transaction	3,127.59	4,094.57	6,257.08	8,485.93	7,828.71	29,793.88

Transaction Count (Users)	1,611,868	9,845,907	10,051,660	11,033,786	1,093,101	33,636,322
MDAs Onboarded	26	136	169	179	179	179
MMDAs Onboarded	32	32	261	261	261	261
SOEs Onboarded	-	22	33	33	33	33
Health & Educational Sectors	0	10	1034	1034	1034	1034
Total Agencies Onboarded	60	149	1497	1507	1507	1507
Total Agencies Live with No Payments	-	21	22	22	22	22
Total Agencies Processing LIVE payments	21	51	121	133	136	136

In addition to enhanced revenue generation , it also provides access to real time data on the actual use of government services at the click of a button. GRA and the Ministry of Finance can instantly get whatever information they require in terms of daily usage and revenue generated.

All banks, savings and loans companies and even rural and community banks are connected to the system, all electronic modes of payment and mobile money operators are also connected to it. All payments made are automatically transferred to the consolidated fund account at the end of each day. With a seamless connection between the GRA, Controller and Accountant General and the Bank of Ghana, each entity can query any delay in the platforms operations at any time, enhancing its efficiency. It has facilitated predictability, enhanced transparency, reduced corruption and provided data for planning purposes as well. GRA can effectively predict its annual revenue and make accurate projections about its targets every year now.

THERE REALLY IS NO COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NDC E-SERVICES PORTAL AND GHANA.GOV. IT IS LIKE COMPARING CHALK AND CHEESE OR ABOBOYAA AND MERCEDES BENZ OR TESLA!!

3. The Revolutionary Nationwide E Government Network

Digital Super Information Highway- Governance, Performance and Connectivity Delivered @ Speed. E Gov Connectivity ...

The Akufo-Addo/Bawumia government's commitment to broadening and deepening broadband connectivity, as a catalyst for socio-economic development, underpins the E Gov connectivity program. While there have been continuous improvements in mobile broadband penetration rates, Internet user growth has been limited by the lack of a much needed national fibre fixed-line network and the high cost of connectivity. Thankfully, the government has remained focused on building broadband infrastructure, extending fast and reliable connectivity and developing computer literacy.

We intend to promote the adoption of ICT by Ghanaians in their day-to- day lives, across the full gamut of socio-economic activities, and are systematically addressing the challenges and barriers to a fully digitally enabled Ghana.

The capacity for e-governance to impact and transform lives in Ghana is fast becoming a reality across a vast spectrum of socio-economic endeavours, bringing benefits to the doorstep of more and more Ghanaians, individual and corporate. From *education to health services to sporting activities to public transportation to local government to manufacturing to law enforcement to commerce to infrastructure build and maintenance to innovation*, the prospects are infinite and leveraging them will open new and exciting opportunities for all.

In September 2021, the Ministry of Communications and Digitalization (MoCD) issued a tender to build an eGovernment Network Connectivity Infrastructure (eGovNet) under a 10-year contract.

In an open, competitive bidding process supervised by the World Bank project implementation team, AirtelTigo and Ascend Digital Solutions were adjudged winners.

The contract was awarded in September 2022, signed in December 2022 and as at January ending 2024, 95% of the entire project had been completed and is expected to be fully completed by the end of February 2024.

This connectivity project speaks to the present and the future. We have built a next-generation, future-ready infrastructure – Digital Super information Gateway (DSIG 100x) that facilitates good governance, connectivity and performance.

The DSIG 100x has been designed to deliver all the applications and services required by the government of Ghana on a backbone of 100 Gbps. It provides a strong digital infrastructural foundation on which government digital services that brings convenience, speed, reliability, transparency and accountability, supports revenue mobilization, enhances security operations and empowers local government to work efficiently across the country, are anchored.

The Project has interconnected government agencies nationwide to enable faster communication, easier access to government shared services, integrated functions and simplified processes.

The GovNet currently connects 951 government agencies on a modernized, robust, and secured fiber optic backbone and radio/wireless infrastructure.

All 261 districts of Ghana have a fibre footprint which opens them up to the digital world. From Accra to Aflao to Nkwanta to Bawku on the East, Accra to Takoradi to Elubo through the Western Corridor towns like Enchi, Juabeso, Sefwi to Goaso to Sunyani and Berekum are key hops of the fiber backbone network. Kumasi to Tamale to Bolga through Tumu to Wa, Sawla, Bamboi have all not been left out.

The government agencies interconnected include MMDAs, GIFMIS institutions, courts, metrological services, Police stations, Post offices, Schools, Hospitals etc

The key components of the DSIG 100x include:

- A new modernized and robust core infrastructure was built to serve as the foundation of this GOVNET. This core infrastructure is equipped with industry best equipment which offers capacity and advanced functionality for 4G, 5G and beyond, nationwide, to setup a shared neutral wireless access network. This will propel Ghana into new age services and become a platform for the Fourth Industrial revolution.
- High capacity 100 Gbps-ready Internet connectivity between National Data Centres in Accra and Kumasi

- 500km of new built last mile fibre connecting over 200 agencies to the main backbone network.
- Over 5000km of fibre has been provided to support the foundation of this government infrastructure with over 3000kms being newly built fibre.
- 900 high speed microwave links have been deployed to these agencies to ensure reliable and uninterrupted connectivity to the agencies,
- Satellite services (800 VSAT terminals) from one of world's leading providers have been deployed as backup to the primary fibre and high-speed microwave links.
- A fully redundant mesh core network which is expandable up to 100 Gbps capacity.
- Next generation IP Core architecture and Overlay of SD-WAN (Software Defined Wide Area Network) technology to deliver seamless and secure services.
- A state-of-the-art network operations center
- Accelerated last mile connectivity through P2P radios to support 50 – 10 Mbps throughput and Fibre
- High Availability Network for seamless and uninterrupted delivery of services and applications.

This Government network connectivity (Backbone and last mile), with a minimum of 1Gig rising to 10 Gig capacity, has been provided to 950 out of the planned 951 government institutions across the country on a 10-year indefeasible rights of use (IRU) basis. They can all utilise all manner of digital solutions now without worrying about connectivity downtimes or network challenges. They can be seamlessly networked nationwide and it will improve and enhance their efficiency. The police service for example can now work on digital solutions to support the issuance of spot fines by connecting to the ghana.gov platform, and they can also be connected to the DVLA and insurance databases to check motor infractions in real time. The baseline infrastructure has now been provided on which all manner of digital solutions can ride for the benefit of not just the connected institutions but the nation as a whole. It can also be expanded to include other institutions and forms the bedrock for a digitally connected Ghana.

This network will also be connected to the Rural Telephony Network and the current e-Government network managed by NITA/ SmartInfraco to provide a robust government owned infrastructure to facilitate the establishment of a neutral shared infrastructure company for a nationwide 4G/5G network, to be used by all current and future mobile network operators. Even private Companies which require nationwide or localised

network connectivity for their Wide or local Area networks (WAN/LAN) can also lease capacity from this network for their use. So can tech entrepreneurs with innovative solutions that require a robust network to roll out their services to the public. It is possible indeed and we are making it happen.

This project alone has built 3000 kms of backbone fibre and 500 kms of last mile fibre, compared to the Eastern corridor fibre which is only 1010 kms.

We mean business and are determined to facilitate the rapid digital transformation of our economy for sustained growth and efficiency. That is the way to encourage all sectors of the economy to be more productive and work seamlessly around the clock 24/7 if they so desire, not by empty sloganeering.

It is truly DIGITIME in Ghana and we must thank President Nana Akufo- Addo and the Vice President and Flagbearer of the NPP, our digital champion Dr. Bawumia for their visionary leadership and drive which has made all this possible. Osee e-Bawumia!!

Let me add that the list of sites connected were selected by the beneficiary institutions and not the Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation.

The institutions and the corresponding number of sites connected are follows:

	Sector	No. of sites connected
1	Courts	36/36
2	Gov. Health Facilities	97/97
3	Post Offices	175/175
4	MMDAs	274/274
5	GIFMIS institutions	79/79
6	Police	255/256
7	GMET	29/29
8	Universities	2/2
9	NITA	3/3
Total		950/951

CONCLUSION

These are only three out of numerous ground breaking strides made by this government in the realm of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which are symbolic of a nation committed to inclusive digital empowerment and economic progress. This

government under the visionary leadership of H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo has demonstrated unwavering dedication to leveraging technology to formalise our economy for the betterment of all citizens.

We have built a digital information gateway that will allow the government and people of Ghana to leapfrog the structural challenges that too often hold back African states in their pursuit of functional governance across the length and breadth of the continent. The free flow of information – vertically and horizontally – will enable knowledge acquisition, unleash innovation and our entrepreneurial spirit, grow our economy and facilitate policy deployment in a manner that will lift the yoke of ignorance and misinformation from the process of governance.

IT IS POSSIBLE!!

Thank you for your attention!