
NATIONAL UNIVERSAL ACCESS PROGRAM STRATEGY (NUAPS)
Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications
2015 – 2018

NUAPS – RL/MPT-FBN/ZT/004/2015



REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

*Action: Establishing Community Communication Access Points and other Infrastructure
across Liberia under the National Universal Access Program*

Sub Group:	Telecommunications and ICT Policy Development Unit
Summary:	This National Universal Access Program Strategy (NUAPS) identifies the compelling need to bridge access gap in the ICT sector by subsidizing basic ICT services such as voice and data in under-served and un-served areas that meet established threshold nationwide. It also provides the need to invest in infrastructures that service providers can co-share to drive the provision of universal access service. This strategy further provides guidance for the implementation of Universal Access programs as stipulated in the National ICT and Telecommunication that Cabinet adopted in June 2011.
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**MESSAGE FROM DR. FREDERICK B. NORKEH, MINISTER,
Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications, Monrovia, Liberia**

People residing in every part of Liberia deserve to have access to basic communication services such as mobile phone and internet access. With access to these services, people are more connected to each other, to their government and to other institutions and places of their choice than was the case prior to this era. Currently residents of big cities such as Monrovia, Ganta and Buchanan including a few other areas do experience these services.

As of 2013, about 68 percent of the 3.4 Million people in Liberia had access to mobile phone while 4.5 percent had access to high speed or broadband internet service. While the population with access to communication services is appreciable, the 68 percent represents 35 percent of the total land mass. Our challenge as a nation is to ensure that the 65 percent of our territory that is inaccessible, is covered with basic communication services. Against this background, we have introduced the National Universal Access Program as a strategy to facilitate the provision of service to un-served and or under-serve areas. Under this program, Government and its development partners such as World Bank will make deliberate effort to fund the Program while service providers shall contribute their respective quotas.

The benefitting communities will own the program. They must ensure that facilities constructed to provide services are safe from looting. Individuals hired to construct universal access facilities must know that the value for money will not be compromised. The fund, essentially dedicated to providing services in designated areas will be administered in a non-discriminatory and transparent manner. Guided by criteria to ensure that the program does not interfere with the market, it will be applied in areas operators fail to cover. All operators shall co-share facilities and other infrastructure constructed under this program to enable them to provide services to people in need.

Our ultimate objective for launching this program is to address the access gap. We are determined to reverse the situation which has caused some of our citizens in most parts of rural Liberia to climb trees where signals are presumed to be available before they can make call. This strategy which will be reviewed in June 2018 contains measurable indicators designed to transform the lives of our people. Together we can make the difference by adding value to the life of our people outside market areas. I thank you.

ABBREVIATIONS

No.	Acronyms	Meaning of Acronyms
1.	B&AIP	Budget and Annual Implementation Plan
2.	ECOWAS	Economy Community of West African States
3.	ICT	Information Communication Technology
4.	ITU	International Telecommunications Union
5.	LTA	Liberia Telecommunications Authority
6.	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
7.	MDGS	Millennium Development Goals
7.	MPT	Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications
8.	NUAPS	National Universal Access Program Strategy
9.	PIU	Project Implementation Unit
10.	PPCC	Public Procurement and Commission Committee
11.	SADC	Southern African Development Community
12.	UA	Universal Access
13.	UAF	Universal Access Fund
14.	UAP	Universal Access Policy
15.	WARCIP	West Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Programs
16.	WSIS	World Summit on Information Society

1 Introduction:

The approval of the comprehensive National Telecommunications and ICT Policy in 2011 (the 2010 policy) by Government of Liberia provides a mandate for the implementation of all the programs stipulated in that policy. One of such mandates is to implement the Universal Access Program. It is a policy tool that seeks to address the lack of services in areas the market has proven to be deficient in meeting the communication needs of the people either due to lack of incentives or due to the lack of ability for end users to pay. Its provision is therefore need-based rather than being demand driven.

As defined in the Telecommunications Act of 2007, “universal access” means ensuring the provision of telecommunications services and telecommunications facilities to residents and other members of the general public in Liberia, in accordance with a universal access policy developed and approved pursuant to Section 22 of the Act.

The 2010 Policy recognizes the need to promote universal access. It also provides the framework to address existing or potential legal, regulatory and other impediments to commercial investment. Outside commercially viable area (areas of market failure), the framework facilitates the need for new investment in telecommunications infrastructure that shall be co-shared amongst operators.

Universal Access Programs vary. They range from providing access to fixed line telephony in under-served areas to the provision of other ICT services. They also support the deployment and installation of telecommunications and ICT networks with the view of bridging access gap in communication. Essentially, they are people-centered and are generally subsidized by different institutions including Government and service providers.

The National Universal Access Program Strategy (NUAPS) is, in principle, open-ended. The first phase which will run from 2015 to 2018 sets the national agenda for the provision of community access to mobile telecommunications as well as access points for internet services. It shall also include efforts to improve the computer literacy skills of diverse end users.

Approved by the Universal Access Governing Board, Liberia's Universal Access Program shall be implemented by the Universal Access Implementation Committee (the committee) to achieve the Universal Access objectives stated in NUAPS, the Telecommunications Act of 2007 and Part IV of the 2010 Policy. The Implementation Committee shall be chaired by the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA).

Critical to the success of the program is the establishment, funding and operation of the Universal Access Fund. The 2010 Policy states that all licensed telecommunications and ICT service providers shall be assessed UAF fees. The assessment of UAF fees shall be driven by the need to facilitate the provision of services to un-served and under-served areas, in addition to other sources of funding. Committed to providing basic services such as voice and data to all Liberians beyond the reach of the market, effective implementation of the national Universal Access Program is a high policy priority of the Government of Liberia.

1.1 MISSION, VISION, GOALS, AND VALUES

Formulating a clear mission for the Universal Access Policy shall help to articulate its purpose. Similarly, the vision statement shall enable all stakeholders to have a shared understanding of the expected outcomes of the program. In similar vein, the goals of the program shall determine the activities required to be undertaken to achieve its objectives. All three strategic tools are driven by values critical to building a participatory and a cohesive society through the application of universal access program that takes communication to people who reside in under-served areas.

NUAPS is aligned to help achieve the common objectives of both the Agenda for Transformation 2012-2017 and the 2010 Policy, which emphasize the importance of achieving Universal Access and the need for investment in national infrastructure more efficiently. Deliberate efforts shall be made to ensure that all road constructions and or road rehabilitation nationwide contain conduits for fiber rollout and other such utilities for the good of the country²

The mission, vision, goals and values of UAP as a national priority are:

² At the validation workshop held at the Ministry on March 27, 2014, stakeholders agreed that all road construction/rehabilitation should include conduit for the laying of fiber so as to safe cost

i. Mission

To bridge access gap in communication in currently un-served or under-served areas as well as to narrow the gap between urban and rural dwellers nationwide

ii. Vision

To create a nation with broad access to ICT for communication for the conduct of business and other activities that will enhance the well-being of all Liberians.

iii. Goals

The Universal Access Program has four (4) key strategic goals. They are:

- A. To operationalize the Universal Access Fund by 2015
- B. To foster the promotion of ICT Services in inaccessible areas
- C. To promote investment in, access to and sharing of ICT infrastructure
- D. To Promote Quality of Service

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the National Universal Access Program Strategy (NUAPS) are to promote the provision of ICT services in un-served and under-served areas where commercial service is not feasible. While the un-served 65 percent of the land mass is sparsely populated, its inhabitants need access to communication services. The Universal access program therefore seeks to foster the availability of ICT services in those inaccessible areas as one of its cardinal objectives. The program objectives shall meet the following criteria:

- a) **Affordability:** service cost under universal access programs shall be affordable to enable low-income earners access them. Making it affordable is a relief to those who need it to complement their life, as access to communication is also a basic human right issue.
- b) **Accessibility:** Universal access program seeks to address access gap. It shall therefore enhance ease of access and shall be people-friendly.
- c) **Availability:** the service shall be available to users at any time
- d) **Sustainability:** the maintenance of the service is critical and shall be subject to a process of periodic reviews and adjustment mechanisms to ensure sustainability.

- e) Quality of service: services provided under the universal access program shall meet specific benchmarks to be established regarding Quality of Service.
- f) Reduce the digital divide between urban and rural areas and ensuring a more balanced distribution of ICT services to all the population.
- g) Stimulate the development of local businesses by providing suitable communication tools to facilitate business interaction between all parties concerned.
- h) Promote the expansion of ICT networks coverage and other associated benefits
- i) Minimize distortions and interference caused by each UA project to commercially available telecommunications services;
- j) Maximize efficiency and effectiveness of each proposed UA project and ensure that it is financially and technically feasible.

LTA shall formulate regulations governing the establishment and operation of the UA Fund and shall also ensure that all universal access programs:

- (a) Are administered in a legally transparent, non-discriminatory and competitively neutral manner; and
- (b) Are less burdensome for the universal access objectives to be achieved.

2 NATIONAL UNIVERSAL ACCESS PROGRAM STRATEGY

The NUAPS is developed within a broader national agenda to promote ICT infrastructure and accelerate a bundle of communication services. It is geared towards making services available, affordable and reliable where market forces are incapable to meet the needs of other end users. This program has been set through the 2010 Policy and the 2007 Telecommunication Act to remedy access gap. Access gap in communication negatively impacts the wellbeing of people. Such gap breeds poverty and lowers the standard of living of people. It also has implications on our ability to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Nationally, the performance of mobile telephony is radically improving, from 17% in 2006 to about 68% in 2013. Nonetheless, mobile telephony is yet to penetrate most part of rural Liberia. The challenge is the lack of infrastructure such as national backbone as part of the incentives to attract investment into the under-served and un-served areas.

Unlike the mobile telephony that has made some relative inroads nationwide, broadband internet services penetration remains less than 10%. Broadband internet penetration in Monrovia, the nation's capital of about 1.4 million inhabitants, remains unfavorable despite market intervention. The case is even worse in rural areas and other such places elsewhere in the country, thus creating the need for Government's intervention.

The policy agenda of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as reflected in the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), the MDGs, the ECOWAS ICT Supplementary Acts and other such protocols to which Liberia subscribes, seeks to address these policy constraints through deliberate policy. Consequently, the need to formulate strategies to align national policy objectives in meeting the needs of the people in un-served and under-served areas remains a top priority. To succeed in achieving these objectives, the strategy is not based on demand since demand goes with one's ability to pay for services or goods. It is rather based on meeting the needs of the people where services are subsidized as a guarantee to achieving the WSIS, MDGs, ECOWAS and targets set by such other bodies.

3 TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OTHER VALUES

To ensure that safeguards are in place so that the UA Fund obtains full value for the funds it expends on projects, the procedure for selecting any operator or firm to rollout Universal Access program shall be done transparently where all the processes are accounted for in line with applicable regulations. Such a process shall include all stakeholders and the information regarding the process – pre and post activities – shall be made public using print and electronic media outlets as well as palaver-hut consultations. By adopting this approach, the program seeks to achieve the following five (5) critical values:

- A. Promoting Equity
- B. Applying Transparency
- C. Encouraging Collaboration
- D. Empowerment through programs
- E. Complying with Accountability

These values shall not only help to bridge access gap in the communication sector, they shall also ensure that resources earmarked for projects are expended appropriately to bring about relief to deserving communities.

4 PUTTING PLANS INTO ACTION

During the lifetime of the Universal Access program, the UA Governing Board shall undertake periodic reviews to determine whether the objective has been realized and, based on the outcome(s) of the review, the duration of the Universal Access program may be adjusted. The implementation committee shall designate universal access programs in phases covering short-term, medium-term and long-term goals. The UA Implementation Committee shall provide an explanation as to which activity fits in what phase of the program. The following activities shall be included for implementation in the short term:

- A. Open the Escrow Account
- B. Undertake consultation to get the input of various stakeholders
- C. Determine criteria in providing access to underserved and un-served areas
- D. Publish criteria for the consumption of the public
- E. Provide investment incentives to induce would-be providers to provide services in inaccessible areas and to encourage new ideas on how they could meet set target

The Liberia Telecommunications Authority shall adopt a regulation to establish the Universal Access Fund (the UAF Regulations), which shall be approved by the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, as required by Article 23 of the Telecommunications Act 2007.

The implementation committee shall undertake a need assessment as part of its work schedule to identify regions and communities, which meet criteria established to qualify them for funding from the UAF, including but not limited to:

- a. Identify communities that meet the population threshold in line with criteria for them to benefit the first phase for the provision of Universal Access program, preferably using available data
- b. Publish the names and locations of towns that meet the criteria
- c. Clarify objectives and articulate goals for undertaking the project
- d. Provide media awareness, undertake consultation and identify stakeholders
- e. Do a need assessment of the communities to be served in terms of what services and technologies work effectively and conveniently

5 GOVERNANCE

The section which describes the governance framework adopted to enhance UA Fund accountability is defined through the following bodies and process:

5.1 THE GOVERNING BOARD

Project governance shall be guided by accountability, transparency and participation. The Universal Access Governing Board shall set the agenda and the high-level vision for achieving the provision of services in designated areas. The Governing Board shall also review and adopt the Budget and Annual Implementation Plan (B&AIP) and quarterly Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reports submitted by the LTA as Chair of the UA Implementation Committee. The Board shall comprise the following eight (8) members:

- A. The Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications as Chair of the Board
- B. The Ministry of Internal Affairs as Vice Chair of the Board,
- C. The Liberia Telecommunications Authority as Secretary to the Board
- D. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning as Member,
- E. The Liberia Chamber of Commerce as Member,
- F-H Three Major Licensed Network Operators as sector representatives (to be selected by the licensed operators).

The Board shall submit the proposed annual national budget to the National Legislature for approval. The Board shall, in consultation with the implementation committee, review and update the Universal Access regulation periodically.

5.2 THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

The National Legislature shall annually approve the budget for the Universal Access program, which shall be submitted as part of the annual budget of the Executive.

5.3 THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

The Liberia Telecommunications Authority shall chair the Universal Access Implementation Committee and it shall comprise all service providers, users groups and civil society organizations such as the Internet Society of Liberia. These service provider representatives shall include, among others, operators whose licensing terms oblige them to contribute to the Universal Access Fund as well as those that are implementing Universal Access Programs. LTA, as Chair of the Implementation Committee, shall regularly provide reports to the Governing Board concerning operational and technical programs that have been approved.

The Implementation Committee shall:

- Coordinate and oversee overall implementation of the UA program, reporting regularly to the UA Governing Board;
- Establish a Project Implementation Unit (PIU) within LTA which shall be responsible for the successful implementation of the UA policy; and
- Nominate an officer of LTA to liaise effectively with the PIU;
- Establish criteria and areas designated to benefit under the UA program;
- Review and approve the draft B&AIP and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) quarterly report prepared by the PIU;
- Adopt and sign the final version of the B&AIP and the M&E quarterly report;
- Submit the AWP&B and quarterly M&E report to the UA Governing Board for review and approval.

The functions of the UA Implementation Committee shall be further defined in the Regulations. In making the governance process more accountable, transparent and participatory, every annual project under the program shall include a) Implementation schedule, b) Areas to be covered and, c) Cost for project implementation. Procedures regarding conduct of bidding processes to award contracts, which may include subsidies from the UA Fund, shall conform to Public Procurement and Commission Committee (PPCC) regulations. End users including community leaders and other interest groups shall be consulted in the identification of potential projects that form part of the program.

5.4 THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION UNIT

The Universal Access program shall be implemented using a project implementation unit (PIU) which shall report to the UA Implementation Committee. The PIU, established as an independent unit within LTA, shall be responsible for the management and implementation of the tasks required to implement the UA policy.

The PIU shall be managed by the Universal Access Coordinator who shall report to the Chairperson of LTA, as chair of the UA Implementation Committee. The PIU shall have suitable staffing and equipment dedicated to carry out the work of the UA program. The PIU shall be staffed with professionals hired under terms of reference and with qualifications and experience satisfactory to the UA Implementation Committee, including a coordinator, a procurement specialist, technical analysis personnel, administrative support and short term consultants as necessary.

The PIU shall ensure effective and flexible coordination, management and day to day implementation of the UA program, including preparation of annual work-plans and budgets, procurement, payments, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Specifically, the PIU shall have the following functions:

a. Administration and Management

- Ensure effective and flexible coordination, management and implementation of UA projects;
- Liaise effectively with the Implementation Committee and Governing Board as required by the UA Policy Strategy and with public and private stakeholders involved in the implementation of the UA policy;
- Ensure that relevant stakeholders are well informed and involved in activities;
- In cooperation with the UA Implementation Committee, ensure effective administration and financing of the project;
- Actively facilitate coordination across sectors, including telecommunications, railways, roads, power and pipelines, of development and access to infrastructure required for telecommunications services, with particular emphasis on construction of components of the national backbone; which would be useful in providing universal access across Liberia.

b. Budget and Annual Implementation Plan (B&AIP)

- Prepare a draft B&AIP annually, sitting forth, among other things (a) the priority universal access projects; (b) a detailed description of planned activities for the PIU for the year; (c) the sources and uses of funds, including disbursement therefore; and (d) responsibility for execution of the UA projects and activities, budgets, expected start and completion date, outputs, and monitoring indicators to track progress of each project;
- Annually furnish the UA Implementation Committee, the draft B&AIP and, promptly thereafter, finalize the B&AIP taking into account the implementation Committee's views and recommendations thereon.

c. Procurement

- Management of the entire procurement process for UA projects, equipment and administrative requirements of the PIU, including preparation of procurement plan, specifications/TORs, Tender documents/Request for proposals, Invitations for Tenders/Proposals, evaluation, and contract award and contract management, reporting;

- Ensure that all goods, works and services financed out of the UA Fund are procured in accordance with the provisions of PPCC Act;

d. Financial Management

- Process all invoices for payment, with relevant supporting documentation, as required in the UAF Regulations and the procedures adopted under the UAF Regulations;
- Ensure timely disbursements and efficient use of UA Fund moneys;
- Maintain a financial management system acceptable to the UA Implementation Committee and as required in the UAF Regulations and procedures adopted under the UAF Regulations;
- Ensure the financial responsibilities of the PIU are carried out with due diligence and efficiency.

e. Project Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

- Undertake Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of both UA project progress and project outcomes against performance indicators or targets, including the establishment of standard formats and guidelines for data collection and reporting.
- Submit to the UA Implementation Committee for review and approval an M&E quarterly report reviewing each project and any corrective actions required for implementation;
- Dissemination of any internal and external audit reports required by the UAF Regulations;

Each UA project execution shall be preceded by an initial report prepared by the PIU. The initial report shall stipulate the scope of work and the time frame the project will last. The PIU shall also prepare a second and final report for each project shall outline the completion of the project and shall indicate how project cost and scope of work corroborate.

6 MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS FUND

The Universal Access Fund shall be held in a recognized national bank. The UAF Regulations shall establish the process for disbursing funds from the UA Fund and the necessary signatories of stakeholders to ensure transparency and effective monitoring of payments made and to provide checks and balances to the disbursement process.

The Universal Access Fund shall be subject to specific reporting, accounting and audit requirements established by existing laws. All licensed operators shall be eligible to obtain financing from the UAF, based on rules and procedures established by the Universal Access Governing Board.

Predictability, certainty and confidence are critical and shall be cultivated to enable stakeholders believe in the program to guarantee their support. Information on how the fund shall be used will be made available to the public prior to execution of projects. Community based and civil society organizations with focus on ICT will play a key role by helping in the selection process of programs targeting specific development goals and priorities.

7 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS FUND

There shall be several sources of funding for the Universal Access and shall include:

7.1 CORE FUNDING

The 2010 Policy states that all licensed telecommunications and ICT service providers shall be assessed UAF fees and that the fee shall range from half of one percent (0.5%) to a maximum of two percent (2%)³ of the annual gross revenues of each licensed operator. Service providers' contribution is therefore one of the core funding sources for the project. LTA shall formulate regulations from time to time to establish criteria for the designation of and setting the percentage within the range of 0.5 to 2 percent of annual gross revenues that is stated in the 2011 Policy that shall be applicable in this regard. Additional sources of funding shall be provided for through direct Budgetary Allotment for the development of ICT.

7.2 OPTIONAL SOURCES OF FUNDING

As stated in the National Telecommunication & ICT Policy 2011, the Government of Liberia shall make annual contributions to the fund through the national budget. Benefitting counties under the Universal Access program have access to a variety of funding. Some of their funding sources are the County Development Fund and the Social development Fund.

³ Part IV, section 4.4, paragraph 2 on page 25 of the national telecommunication and ICT policy adopted by Cabinet in June 2011 stipulates the UAF fees

Since the objectives of this funding is to help raise the living standard of concerned party, such funding can be accessed and applied to foster the goal of universal access service. Stakeholders from these counties can be engaged to win their support and they can subsequently indicate the percentage of their funding that could be committed to this program. The administrators of the fund shall encourage donations and contributions from local and international private organizations.

8 PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE USE OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

The use of the Universal Service Fund shall be based on values that are free of bias. These values shall clearly articulate the following principles:

- a. Neutrality – all operators, incumbent or new entrants shall be considered on the same basis regardless of the technologies used.
- b. Clear targets – it is imperative to define clearly the zones to be covered under a determined period of time. These zones shall designate un-served rural and urban areas and provide rationale in line with best practice as to why such zones are so designated.
- c. Selection process – Fund projects are to be awarded through open, competitive bidding processes wherever possible, consistent with PPCC requirements.
- d. Transparency – all activities related to the collection and the use of the universal access/service fund shall be carried out transparently.
- e. Prioritizing local content in terms of making use of potential home-grown solutions

9 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS FUND

It is crucial to know the time frame within which each phase of implementation of a universal access/service project will be completed. The PUI shall develop a project roadmap based on a SMART approach, for approval by the UA Implementation Committee. The ‘SMART’ approach provides that a proposed project shall be subject to an execution plan that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Such an approach shall provide a reliable assessment of projects covered under the Fund.

9.1 TARGETS AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

Target under this program shall comprise of both end users and the kind of services available under the program. People across society shall benefit from Universal access programs. These people shall include students, teachers, market women, persons with disabilities and other end-users. The program shall be accessible to everyone regardless of gender, age or beliefs. Accelerating communication services nationwide is in line with WSIS target to bridge digital divide. Among the priority communication services that the Fund shall promote will be access to mobile services in inaccessible areas.

The program shall also include investing in ICT infrastructure and public access facilities, equipment, applications, and capacity building, among other resources, in areas that meet the designated eligibility criteria. In addition, NUAPS will promote universal access especially in educational facilities; community health centers; local government offices; telecenters and internet cafés; and other public and private community centers.

10 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Implementation Committee shall be responsible for reviewing and approving the Monitoring and Evaluation reports prepared by the PIU of all UAF supported projects. The criteria for monitoring and evaluation shall determine whether values for money has been obtained from each project, through a determination of whether or not resources have been wisely expended, considering for example the scope of service provided, the quality of tools used, among others. Findings from the evaluation will be communicated to all parties concerned with recommendations.

11 AUDIT

The fund and its usage shall be subject to periodic reporting, accounting and audit requirements established by the Ministry of Finance in line with applicable national practice and laws. All projects implemented under the program and over a defined minimum size threshold shall also be audited for value-for-money using an independent expert to assess whether the project implementation has met the contractual requirements and ensure that the quality of equipment and its installation is to an acceptable level.

12 CONCLUSION

The National Universal Access Program (NUAPS) provides the framework for the establishment and operation of the Universal Access Fund to which operators are required to contribute. It essentially seeks to accelerate access to communication services to areas inaccessible to such services.

It shall be implemented in line with established criteria and areas designated to benefit under the program shall meet those criteria drawn up by the Universal Access Implementation Committee. Underpinned by inclusion, accountability, transparency, and credibility, these values provide safeguards to protect the integrity of the fund. By these means the NUAS shall help to raise the standard of living of residents by making direct investments in infrastructure and services that are being scarcely provided through market forces.

13 REFERENCES

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14 Appendix

September 7, 2015

Amending the Composition of the Universal Access Governing Board

1.0 Introduction

Consultation on the framework of the National Universal Access Program Strategy (NUAPS) requires that the composition of the Governing Board (with the inclusion of members of the National Legislature) be reconsidered. The Board comprises the following members:

- A. Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications – Chair
- B. Ministry of Internal Affairs - Vice Chair
- C. Liberia Telecommunication Authority - Secretary
- D. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning – Member
- E. The Liberia Chamber of Commerce – Member
- F-H Three Major Licensed Operators – Members
- Two Members of the Legislature (Senate and House Chairs on Telecom) Members⁴

2.0 Rationale for the Reconsideration of Board Composition

While there is a very cordial working relationship between the sector and members of the National Legislature, the latter has a distinct role in fostering sector governance. They provide oversight, make laws and provide representation for all in line with best practice. The NUAPS framework requires that the Legislature shall approve the budget for the Universal Access Program. It is therefore reasoned that since the role of the Board is an Executive Function, the Board membership should only be limited to the Executive and operators in the sector. Fortunately both Houses' Committees through their respective Chairs concurred with the decision and hence the rationale for the reconsideration.

2.1 Essence of the Board

The Board plays a strategic role in the governance framework of NUAPS. It shall review and adopt the Budget and Annual Implementation Plan and monitor and evaluate reports submitted by the LTA on a quarterly basis. The Board shall submit the Annual Budget of the National Universal Access Program to the Legislature.

⁴ Representation from the Legislature will not be included on Board as of this amendment

3.0 Summary of Policy Issues

Government of Liberia approved the National Telecommunications and ICT Policy that presents its policy priorities for the sector in 2011. Linking Liberia to fiber, implementing e-government programs, maintaining free-market enterprise and providing services to un-served and under-served areas through universal access program were among those priorities.

4.0 Strategy for Implementing Universal Access Program

Like each of the core priority areas, progress has been made in addressing universal access. Stakeholders from across the sector validated the policy directive on the National Universal Access Program that articulates how universal access program should be implemented. Developed through proper consultation process, it is an instrument that facilitates inclusion, guarantees accountability and assigns responsibilities and provides a sustainable strategy in addressing access gap in under-served and un-served areas of Liberia. While it shall continue to identify additional sources of funding such as the seed money (US\$400,000.00) made available by the World Bank for piloting purposes, it requires operators in the sector to contribute between 0.5 to 2 percent of their gross annual revenue for the purpose of addressing service gap in designated areas within the universal access communities.

5.0 Conclusion

Amending the composition of the Board will enhance program governance as the amendment reinforces the governance process. The significance of the amendment is that it will enable LTA to reflect the membership of the Board in the regulatory framework on Universal Access Program in such a way that such membership represents our governance practice⁵. LTA is finalizing the regulatory framework on Universal Access program and such regulation must be aligned with the principles that underpin the policy directive of NUAPS.

The Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications appreciates the support of all stakeholders as we all collaborate to transform the life of our people through the people-friendly application of ICT platform and services. With this amendment, we look forward to the regulation, consistent with policy objectives while anticipating implementation.

⁵ Membership of the Governance Board does not anymore include the Members of the Legislature