

## **Hon. Karooro Okurut's remarks for the GCIC Open Gov't Workshop, Mestil**

It's my singular pleasure and honour to be here with you today at GCIC's Inaugural Open Government Workshop.

In tandem with the session theme, "Building capacity to enhance efficiency of Government - Citizen Interaction", we will be sharing the best practices and perspectives on how to leverage the existing opportunities meant to bring the public closer to the Government of Uganda.

With my utmost appreciation, I commend Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for this strategic partnership which comes at a time when there's a high appetite for public participation in governance issues.

This workshop is timely and strengthens the efforts of the Government of Uganda towards re-invigorating citizen engagement in monitoring of public services, to deliver services to its citizens, and enable a more vibrant citizen-government engagement.

At this critical moment, the Government of Uganda has made considerable gains towards improving access to service delivery.

In pursuit of the Open Governance Agenda, the Ministry of ICT and National guidance established the Government Citizens Interaction Centre (GCIC) as a primary contact Centre for citizens.

The chief aim was to enhance the monitoring of service delivery and to provide a channel for feedback and suggestions from citizens.

Through GCIC, citizens interact with government through multiple channels including a toll-free line (900), email, social media platforms, websites, online chat and SMS. The data generated through these interactions is analyzed to inform policy decisions and guide in the formulation of policy interventions.

The significance of this Open Government Initiative is that it gives citizens access to public information. This provides citizens with opportunities to participate in the proceedings of their government which in turn promotes accountability, transparency and efficiency of government services.

We must also note that the Access to Information Act which was enacted in 2005 forms the backbone of Uganda's open government reforms. The right to access public sector information is the cornerstone of an Open and inclusive Government. This remains a crucial element for reducing corruption as well as deepening trust among citizens and their government.

Most importantly, Under the 2005 Access to Information Act, every Minister is expected to submit an annual report to the Parliament of Uganda in regards to the Information requests made to public bodies under their ministry, indicating granted and rejected requests, and reasons for the latter.

By enabling, access to information - this produces a more engaged and involved citizenry, who in turn produce accountable public institutions and systems.

An open government is better positioned to effectively manage and allocate public resources. Already, Gov't agencies such as National Medical Stores have strived to publish medical deliveries in all major Newspapers. Citizens can be able to track the transit of government drugs and hold medical officers accountable.

Through promoting transparency in government operations, a strong foundation is built for desirable use of resources and enhanced efficiency.

In addition to adopting e-governance, technology has further transformed how government interacts with citizens. Led by NITA-Uganda, which is the implementing agency for e-services, we have witnessed an increase in uptake for gov't e-services, a key function which GCIC amplifies to enable increased usage.

According to the UN E-Government survey of 2018, Uganda's online service index improved from 50% in 2016 to 57% in 2018, which puts the country in the high online service index bracket.

The UN survey also indicated that Uganda's E-Gov't development index (EGDI) improved from 36% in 2016 to 41% in 2018 which is above the African average of 34%.

Already, the Government of Uganda is making progress in ensuring automation of service delivery for Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and Local Governments.

Approximately, 248 gov't websites and 297 applications are in place. ICT has enabled government to accelerate the use of websites as tools for dissemination of information and service provision. I also commend NITA for digitizing gov't e-services. This has transformed and eased access to service delivery.

Citizens participation in government operations allows government to better understand citizens' true needs and how to appropriately respond to them.

I therefore make my impassioned plea to all the Government Communicators gathered here today to keep up the morale and continue to be the gatekeepers and conscience of public information.

We must learn to communicate effectively by putting information in the right form and in the right hands. Notwithstanding, we must also seize the opportunities that the technology offers us to improve our means of communication.