

# Sector policy footprint has chilly climate

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THE draft Telecommunications Sector policy dated August 5, 2009, which was published by the Bahamian government a week later, articulates a set of objectives and vision statement completely devoid of any reference to Climate Change.

Despite admission of deficiencies and claims of wide-ranging reform in the introduction to the draft, basically it's a "business as usual" document that adds little or no value to our capacity to meet key challenges, especially those that will be the most crucial of this century.

On a global scale, the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, which includes the electronics communications segment, plays a key role in addressing climate change and facilitating efficient and low carbon development. Not only does it facilitate other sectors, but its role in emission reduction and energy savings in the industry itself is significant. Therefore, it behooves countries such as the Bahamas, who have signed the Kyoto Protocol, to articulate the sector's creative responsibilities in this respect.

The birth of the digital age came with the invention of the transistor in the 1950s. Through this means personal computing was introduced on the one hand, and high capacity, fixed and mobile telecommunications on the other. Both technologies come together in the ubiquitous Internet.

As the use of digital technologies grows, so does the car-

bon footprint of the sector. It is appropriate for a policy paper on the sector to articulate how it will meet its footprint reduction challenge, especially in an archipelago where electronic communications are essential for development and where there is so much reliance on foreign direct investment. A reliance which should mean that governance standards set by the policymakers truly strengthen conservation capacity, even as they meet investors' expectations.

## Policy

If, as it seems, there is no policy objective that addresses the need to identify the carbon footprint of an individual piece of electronic communications hardware, such as a mobile phone, which is relatively easy to do, is it likely, then, to expect that carbon footprints from more complex and converged network services such as broadband Internet will be identified? I think not!

Electronic communications networks link the Bahamas into a global system, so one might expect a visionary outlook on the sector's role with respect to an issue as pressing and relevant to all as climate change.

What might an enabling role in climate change adaptation and mitigation in the Bahamas mean for the electronic communications sector? It could mean three things at least:

- \* Measuring the direct carbon footprint of the sector
- \* Enabling quantifiable emissions reductions through ICT applications in other sectors of the economy
- \* Identifying new market opportunities for the sector and other sectors involved with realising these reductions

This sector is unique in its ability to make energy consumption and carbon emissions visible through its products and services. Yet no link between the sector's stated objectives is made to those of other utility suppliers, such as BEC or the Water and Sewerage Corporation in this regard.

Because electronic communications products and services can enable the monitoring and mapping of energy, it is possible to know where inefficiencies occur throughout the processes and workflows of various sectors in the economy. This means that infrastructure can be radically transformed.

Points 13-17 of the draft sector policy deal with liberalisation (a subhead of the vision) as an entirely market-driven concept, when perhaps the most important point about the electronic communications industry is the benefits from the adoption of ICT technologies to influence and transform the way our society works, and the way people behave.

Hardly anything is said about the transformative aspects of the sector. Point 63 of subhead Consumer Protection deals obliquely with this in one sentence only. It states that URCA, the industry regulator, will actively promote public awareness campaigns to inform customers of their rights and obligations.

Nowhere is it stated that the opportunities for transformation and promotion of sustainable development for all (people and environment) throughout the archipelago is enhanced by electronic communications. Or that the sector's products and services are crucial components of the Bahamas' transition to a low carbon economy.