

## Note from Funders

**K**nowledge is information at work, and information can only work if there are networks! Networks that criss-cross and intertwine the globe have become the new arteries to our new lifeblood of information.

It is these networks that make possible multi-trillion dollar transactions hourly. At a fraction of the cost of an international call, a Voice over Internet (VoIP) call can connect a migrant student halfway around the globe to her rural parents back home in Africa.

These networks also make possible an emergency call to the local hospital, or an email containing an .mpeg file showing the extent of crop disease in the Eastern Cape to an agricultural research centre based anywhere in the world.

It is networks that enable a German tourist to download images of a township B&B in the Cape Flats, or the extraction from a huge relational database of an SMS back to a rural HIV-positive patient to remind him of a follow-up visit to the rural clinic, and his latest CD count.

These are what dreams are made of! We see a networked world that allows the developed and the developing worlds to engage. We see ICTs bringing empowerment. But we also see very poor levels of access to information and communication technologies and to telecommunications in developing communities. While the ITU reveals in its April 2004 statistics that 6% of all Africans have access to cellular telephony, it also points out that only one person in 50 on the continent is “wired” to the Internet.

Our work with development partners who do research into the interface between developing communities and ICTs reveals that in Africa, as in other regions, communities have to overcome high barriers of entry to participate in the ICT revolution. Telecommunications access is one of those barriers. Access to the information age equates to access to dial tone. That access also translates to affordability.

This book interrogates the technologies and the economics of telecommunications, the international and national policy contexts, the regulator and its role in broadening participation in the telecommunications sector. It goes further to bring us up to date on matters of convergence, electronic communications law and the state of play with interception and monitoring legislation in South Africa.

The IDRC is excited about the innovative approach Lisa Thornton's project team has taken by creating the opportunities for young lawyers, technologists and researchers to learn by doing the research for this book.

We also acknowledge that in many respects the liberalisation model that South Africa chose in telecommunications has been emulated by other African countries. We believe that a thorough and thoughtful analytical work of this nature would help not only South Africans but other countries to learn from the lessons of experience and of the context here appraised on their journey towards the Network Economy.

**Heloise Emdon**

**Senior Programme Officer: Acacia and Connectivity Africa, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)**