

**Statement by Mr Abdoulie Jammeh on the Launch Day - Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders - 24 March 2023**

- The Hon Secretary General of the Commonwealth
- Vice President, International Government Affairs of Intel
- Excellencies
- Senior officials
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me first thank the Commonwealth Secretariat for hosting this launch event for the Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders. I also want to thank Intel for collaborating with the Commonwealth Secretariat to launch the training program which will enhance soft digital infrastructure across the Commonwealth and thus contribute to closing the digital divide, ensuring greater digital inclusion and adoption in commonwealth member states.

I will speak on the activities of the Physical Connectivity Clusters under the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda that the Gambia is currently leading.

For The Gambia, as a least developed country, we understand the real challenges as well as the importance that infrastructure plays in the socio-economic development. Good infrastructure is key enabler to economic growth, equality, access, inclusion, supply chains and trade facilitation. The Gambia therefore volunteered to lead the Physical Connectivity Cluster of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda since its launch in 2019. Since then, The Gambia, with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat, has worked with members of the Cluster and engaged in peer-to-peer learning, promote the development of knowledge products and conducted several capacity building trainings. The

Cluster comprises of more than 40 member countries of the Commonwealth. We had also developed the “Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure” that are currently being implemented.

The Gambia is therefore happy that this digital training program being launched today is aligned with the Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure. This partnership between Commonwealth and Intel is therefore part of the efforts to implement these Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure.

We have seen that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected countries at different levels and created digital divide within and across countries. Despite the need for deeper digitalization, businesses and processes also require further adoption. A survey on the Economic Response to COVID-19 by Commonwealth Secretariat indicated that businesses in particular MSMEs, require assistance to leverage digital infrastructure in their business models to remain competitive. The study also showed the huge gender digital divide that the pandemic had brought about, including closure of businesses.

For the Physical Connectivity Cluster, the pandemic also showed the need for us to intensify work of the cluster, with infrastructure being key for post-COVID-19 recovery. As such the development of soft digital infrastructure, including the capacity of policy makers and businesses is therefore paramount towards the recovery.

The Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders will therefore complement the capacity building activities conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat under the Physical Connectivity Cluster.

The Secretariat, as part of implementation of the activities of the Cluster to enhance soft digital infrastructure skills, developed an informal network of experts to volunteer and discuss on possible areas of training, capacity building and technical deliberations. The informal network was established in August 2021 and its activities with the Secretariat led to the development of the E-Learning Course on Digital Infrastructure and Digital Divide which was launched in September 2021. To date, there are more than 2000 participants that have registered for the course.

In addition to this, and to further empower the young women and youth on the digital infrastructure and digital divide, the Secretariat organized a training workshop in November 2021 for students from 35 universities in Africa in collaboration with the African Union Students Platform.

The Physical Connectivity Cluster also explored the Digital DIVA initiative with technical leadership from the Secretariat. The aim of the initiative is to further upscale and intensify work in relation to addressing digital divide, enhancing digital inclusion, improving digital infrastructure, reducing the rural/urban divide through creation of digital village concept. At the moment further collaboration is being sought from the UNESCAP India office and the Global Policy House. We are strengthening collaboration with other partners in particular the Tech Community. The aim of the initiative is to build the work and ongoing delivery of the cluster, through delivery of technical training work in regions and national level. Further partnerships with member states and academia will be part of this initiative to deliver training and capacity building and focusing on achievement of various regional strategies relating to digital infrastructure and digital divide.

We have also made progress in the area of capacity building on Digital Infrastructure to leverage digital divide through E-Commerce and Digital Marketing. Under this initiative, the Commonwealth Secretariat partnered with the UNESCAP and are conducting training on e-commerce and digital marketing. Under this initiative, the Secretariat under the Physical Connectivity Cluster has conducted three training workshops. The 1st workshop was held in Nepal with training provided to women at grassroots level from Commonwealth Asia region. A total of 81 women participants and entrepreneurs have been trained on getting online and doing business.

The second workshop on leveraging Digital Infrastructure to Address Digital Divide, through E-Commerce and Digital Marketing, was also conducted in Maldives from in June 2022. The training workshop was expanded to include women from Commonwealth Asia and Commonwealth Africa. The workshop has been part of the implementation work of the Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure, in the PCC. The workshop also enabled women from Asia and Africa to network and also provided them with opportunities to secure trade partnerships and expand the markets for trade from Asia and Africa.

The third training was held virtually in collaboration with BRICS Women Business Alliance in partnership with Smart Digital Solutions' African Women in Digital Leadership, the Commonwealth, United Nations, and National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA). The practical training was attended by women entrepreneurs who are eager to grow their businesses and grow their access to the market by using e-commerce platforms. The training enabled the women entrepreneurs to gain skills to trade online and create networks. Women

entrepreneurs and participants from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mauritius, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda participated in the training.

In conclusion, let me once again thank the Commonwealth Secretariat and Intel for launching the Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders. It is a milestone achievement particularly for the Physical Connectivity Cluster. Through this type of collaboration, the Cluster will continue to implement the “Agreed Principles on Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure”. We look forward to the participation of many of our commonwealth member states to build the required capacities to close the digital divide and ensure greater digital inclusion and adoption in commonwealth member states.

Thank you for your attention.