

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF PAPU ON THE OCCASION OF THE 31ST PAN AFRICAN POST DAY CELEBRATIONS TO BE MARKED ON 18TH JANUARY 2012

It gives me immense pleasure to send you warm felicitations and best wishes for the New Year, 2012, taking into account that the New Year ushers in yet another opportunity to celebrate the Pan African Post Day on 18th January, in line with our annual practice.

As you are aware, the day is set aside to honour the establishment of the Pan African Postal Union (PAPU) by the African Heads of State 31 years ago, with its headquarters in Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania. This year's theme: "***The Post As A Reliable Means To Fight Poverty***" is of particular interest to our region which has the highest number of Least Developed Countries in the world.

However, notwithstanding the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa is among the regions of the world with the least per capita incomes, and also the fact that virtually all the development indicators reflect depressed economies following the spiraling energy costs, progressively adverse impact from climate change and high unemployment, there is abundance of hope in the resilience of the African people and great potential in full exploitation of their vast natural resources and mainstreaming good governance in socio-economic structures.

It is therefore imperative that all of us - the African people and their leaders and institutions - work in concert and in partnership with regional and international partners in search of solutions to the endemic socio-economic challenges that have held back our populations from achieving their full potential. Every sector in each of our countries' economies is aware of deliverables towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals that speak eloquently of the need to address issues of poverty reduction, sustainable environment and gender parity, among others, within specific time frames.

The postal fraternity in Africa and elsewhere in the world is convinced that the development challenges facing our populations, if clearly articulated and prioritized in national development plans, with allocation of resources to programmes and projects that have a wide reach could be drastically reduced. Postal projects, covering the wide spectrum of its physical, electronic and financial networks have great potential for positive trickle down effects on the underserved populations. Indeed, given its vast network of outlets, the postal sector is well positioned to facilitate delivery of services to large poor populations in both rural and urban areas.

There are over 33,000 postal outlets in Africa, linked to the global network of 660,000 outlets. This huge network provides an excellent platform to extend vital communication, financial and other services to the vast majority of people, thus contributing to socio-economic development of our societies and poverty eradication.

The post has no doubt faced challenges of reduced traffic, mainly in its traditional mail services, as a result of electronic substitution. The brighter side however, tells a different story. The postal sector is not resting on its laurels but rather it is seeking to re-position itself to ensure that it continues to add value to its diverse clientele. The post office is no longer a place where people just go to buy a stamp, post a letter, send a money order or receive a parcel, but a transformed business entity offering a wide range of ICT-based products and services, including payment of third party accounts and tracking and tracing of items. This is already happening in countries where the stakeholders have taken deliberate measures in terms of policy, resources and management autonomy to ensure that the post provides modern quality services in line with customer expectations.

It is a fact that the transformation of the post has had a positive impact on the society, particularly on young people who need accessible, affordable and secure ICT services that can help them earn a living through entrepreneurship. Under normal circumstances, the youth have limited access to credit with established banking and financial institutions, which in any case are located in major cities, far from their homes. Now they have new opportunities opened up by ICTs through easy access to virtual markets, suppliers of products and services, as well as possibilities for online/electronic payments, brought to their door step by the local post office.

Indeed the post has the capacity to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit of young people who can use the network to receive information on the market demand for agricultural produce, for example, and respond to satisfy the need by using the postal parcel/courier services. They can also receive payments for the products by use of electronic money transfer.

Furthermore, the international community has in recent years increasingly recognized the potential for migrants from developing nations to contribute to the development and economic growth of their home countries. According to IOM's World Migration Report 2008, US Dollars 251 billion of the 337 billion remitted in 2007, went to developing countries a significant number of which are in Africa. These remittances, in addition to being a key source of foreign exchange for our countries also constitute an important source of revenue for the recipients who use it for basic necessities such as food, education and medical, and also for investment, thus improving their quality of life and significantly contributing to poverty alleviation. The post office with its vast, reliable, affordable and trusted network provides an important channel for the remittances.

Due to its wide accessibility and relatively flexible operations, the postal savings bank system supplements the commercial banking sector by mobilizing rural savings and providing other financial services. By providing easy access to capital to a greater number of people who may be engaged in Small and Medium Enterprises, the post is truly a lifeline towards economic empowerment of the vast majority of people.

The post also supports the growth of these SMEs through targeted advertising via direct mail, and other services such as hybrid mail and order fulfillment, thus creating conducive environment for creation of wealth and sustainable development.

The provision of universal postal service presents greater opportunities for equitable development of our societies. It ensures affordable postal services for all, which in turn support the diverse needs of the community and development of commerce and industry at national, regional and international level.

In this regard, I call upon our governments to prioritize postal development programmes within their respective national development plans, in line with Africa's stated objectives of developing sustainable postal services and modernizing the network so as to offer products and services that meet and exceed customer expectations.

I wish you very successful PAPU DAY celebrations!