

**SPEECH BY DONALD CHARUMBIRA,
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**AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE NATIONAL
INFOKIOSK PROGRAMME**

Harare, 2ND June 2003

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are here to partake in an auspicious occasion, which marks the initiation of a significant youth empowerment project for Zimbabwe. The launching of the National InfoKiosk Programme today marks a turning point for our youth, at the district, provincial as well as national level. This day marks a new and concerted drive by the government, private sector and community to provide opportunities for youth employment.

The National InfoKiosk Programme was inspired by innovations displayed at the Youth Employment Summit in Alexandria, Egypt last September, where I met with the Hon. Minister Manyika and we came up with the idea of creating youth employment through information and communication technologies. We noted a

successful project carried out in India, that had eventually employed hundreds of youths, and also empowered rural farmers to make informed market decisions.

Our aim is to provide internet access to just about all corners of the country, and to ensure that the digital economy is driven by young people. We foresee numerous upstream and downstream benefits when the InfoKiosk Programme is underway, and when it has achieved the national presence that it endeavours to.

In the emerging world of electronic transactions and e-commerce, our hope is that the youth of Zimbabwe are not further marginalized by the digital divide. In order to leap-frog the development process, information technology is the key. This will enable a transformation from ordinary workers, to knowledge workers, from a rudimentary economy to a knowledge economy. The InfoKiosks that we will be setting up will therefore serve to develop knowledge youth, who are knowledge farmers, knowledge workers and knowledge traders.

The InfoKiosks shall be centres for the public to have access to the internet and related services, such as email, wordprocessing, database

management and so forth. They will service their communities at a district level. At the provincial and national levels, all the districts will be networked and able to exchange information on a regular basis. The network control centre, the hub of the project, is already situated here and will continuously develop content and information for the districts. On a daily basis, the Network Control Centre will provide news and updates for information relevant to the youth.

We shall employ full-time content providers, who will be tasked with sourcing information from and for the districts, specific to their community requirements. If a specific district engages in mainly wheat production, the InfoKiosk will provide comprehensive information on all aspects of wheat farming, likewise for other crops. Farmers may be able to communicate and exchange knowledge and information on their activities, and to seek advice if they face any difficulties.

Perhaps the most attractive offering that the InfoKiosk project has is that with just a single email, a message may be disseminated to all districts of the country. This will enhance communication by the government and by the communities within the districts

It is imperative for Zimbabweans to migrate into the electronic world. With its pleasures, opportunities and perils, this migration needs to be well managed to avoid threats to the economy and our national sovereignty.

Our vision is one of all sectors of the Zimbabwean economy creating value and wealth through successful participation in the emerging knowledge-driven global economy. We envisage a public service that provides people-oriented, customer-focused services electronically. At the community level, our vision is for networks of communities dynamically participating in the process of nation-building and economic development.

In terms of education, there is the potentially significant opportunity of e-learning, which will provide formal and informal networks that provide the opportunity and cultivating an ethos of life-long learning for individual, organization, institutional and societal advancement.

In terms of e-sovereignty, the InfoKiosk programme aims to cultivate a resilient national identity of Zimbabwe. In an increasingly borderless world, the free flow of information and well-packaged, slick entertainment and infotainment contributes to the possibility of

Zimbabweans to losing their national sense of identity. However, the solution to this problem cannot be the control of the information flow or access as that path will be self-defeatist in the future.

Misinformation and disinformation regarding current events may threaten the security and integrity of the nation. Using the efficiency of the Internet, we can transmit accurate information to be provided to the Zimbabwean at home and abroad, and to and the foreign media.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the InfoKiosk Project is based on the fundamentals of the equation $3w2r1a$. This stand for 3 wins, 2 shared risks and rewards and 1 agenda. There will be a win for the government, a win for the community and a win for the private sector, if we share risks and rewards and work towards one agenda. I am pleased to say that so far, we have managed to come a long way in working together with the government and community for the development of this InfoKiosk programme.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Hon. Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam, president of the World Assembly of Youth and chairman of the World Youth Foundation, for providing his support for this project.

To the Hon. Minister Elliot Manyika, thank you for your visionary ideas and dedication towards empowering the youth of Zimbabwe.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us on this occasion, and we look forward to your support to make the InfoKiosk programme a success!