

REMARKS BY HONOURABLE MLAZIE, ASSISTANT MINISTER OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, AT THE BPO & CALL CENTRE CONFERENCE ON JULY 31, 2007.

Director of Ceremonies

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

GOOD MORNING

1. It gives me great pleasure to be here, officiating at this Business Process Outsourcing and Call Centre Conference that is organised by Outsource Botswana and The Botswana International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). I am here on behalf of my colleague, Mrs Venson-Moitoi, Minister for Communications Science and Technology who had to attend to other matters of state and couldn't be here to launch this event.
2. I believe that this is the first gathering of stakeholders in the BPO and Call Centre industry in Botswana and at so I must congratulate the organisers for successfully gathering the distinguished stakeholders that I see gathered here today.
3. This conference is a milestone because it signals that Botswana is now ready to capture, in the months and years ahead, a greater share of the regional and international BPO and Call Centre business, as well as build a sustainable local industry. To this end, I also note that the new representative trade association, aptly named "Outsource Botswana" is also being launched during this conference.
4. I believe we have delegates from South Africa and the United Kingdom present here today. To you I say "welcome you to this beautiful country of ours". For those who are coming our country for the first time, I must warn you that many visitors to Botswana have found excuse after excuse to come back: such is the beauty of our country, the warmth of our people, and the abundance of opportunity!
5. I am also told that, locally, we have representatives from central government, parastatals and the private sector. I would also like to acknowledge their presence at this occasion. As stakeholders in the development of the economy of Botswana and in the financial services sector your presence at this occasion is deeply appreciated.
6. Today's event presents an opportunity for Outsource Botswana and the Botswana IFSC to interact with its stakeholders, to share with them the opportunities that are available in the BPO & Call Centre Industry in Botswana, and to discuss the key elements that are necessary to energise this industry in Botswana and set it on a sustainable growth path.
7. We are hoping that the interactions from this morning's discussions, will assist in mapping the way forward and that your valuable contributions will support the continuing efforts of the IFSC and Outsource Botswana to position

Botswana dynamically, in the fast growing international BPO & Call Centre Industry.

8. Director of Ceremonies, the IFSC tell me that it has been at great pains to explain the concept of BPO to Batswana.
9. General outsourcing has been growing in Botswana. Many public and private organisations have contracted specialist companies to provide services like litter collection, cleaning and security services to them. I am told that **BUSINESS PROCESS OUTSOURCING** - unlike other forms of outsourcing - relates to services or processes that are enabled by the use of ICT networks and carried principally on these data and voice networks, sometimes across international borders.
10. In fact, this industry is well underway domestically. For example, I learn that when one calls the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation for national directory assistance, your call is handled at the Med Rescue Call Centre. The agent who deals with your call is an MRI employee, performing a process that is outsourced by BTC to MRI. The benefit to BTC is that they are then able to concentrate their efforts on those processes that are core to their business that they can perform more efficiently.
11. Other examples abound, including the outsourcing of other customer contact services like call centres and the follow up of debt and the sale of financial products and services like credit cards, insurance and loans through an independent third party.
12. Based on extensive research conducted by Accenture on behalf of the Botswana IFSC, government believes that there is an opportunity for Botswana to develop a market in the financial services sector for a large range of back office processes. These processes include Data entry and administration, Call Centres, Salary Processing, Fund Administration and Back Office, Basic Accounting, Basic IT, Insurance Processing and Transaction Processing. It is apparent that the right combination of factors is already in place for these processes to enter the market.
13. But, Director of Ceremonies, the BPO opportunity extends beyond our shores. I am informed that experts estimate the BPO industry to be have a global value of US\$57 billion industry.
14. I have been informed that our neighbours, South Africa, and other countries like Ghana and Kenya have also been sourcing offshore BPO business from Europe and the US.
15. Ladies and Gentlemen, the most convincing reason for Botswana to increase its share of this market is in order to reap the benefits of the sustained investment that Government has made over many years in the education. We now have growing numbers of qualified, English-speaking, young Batswana, who are becoming increasingly confident and are also able to offer these services, not only in Botswana, but to regional and international markets.

16. Gainful employment of these Batswana is a government priority.
17. As I have already highlighted to you, ICT forms the bedrock of a strong domestic and offshore BPO and Call Centres industry.
18. The Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology has played, and will continue to play, a leading role in the facilitating the provision of ICT services to enable our people to become competitive in the global information society by 2016.
19. Honourable Vension-Moitoi's announcement in June last year of the further liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, which included the lifting of the ban on Voice over IP; the liberalisation of the international voice gateway; and the rebalancing of BTC tariffs sector was a giant stride in government's efforts to prepare an environment that will allow operators in the BPO and Call Centre industry access to new technologies, and improved quality of service, at lowered costs.
20. Director of Ceremonies, MCST has also embarked on projects to upgrade national terrestrial links and to increase domestic bandwidth and to give us direct links to Namibia, Zambia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.
21. To improve on international connectivity, our Government is also involved in the East African Submarine Cable System (EASSY) and the West African Festoon System (WAFS) and other undersea cable initiatives. We expect that, on completion of these projects, Botswana will be able to experience the benefits of increased bandwidth and cheaper international connectivity. This will be of great benefit to those operators offering offshore BPO services.
22. Our Government has also committed to the development of the Botswana Innovation Hub. It is our hope that this will assist in the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment in high technology businesses and that the BPO and Call Centre industry will benefit from this initiative. The Innovation Hub will, once developed, offer a world class physical cluster or zone where a range of ICT enabled science and technology applications can be conveniently based inclusive, of course, of BPO.
23. Director of Ceremonies, our role as a Government is to create an enabling environment for the entrepreneurial minds like the ones in this room this morning to flourish. The private sector too must play its role in the development of the BPO and Call Centre opportunities and must look beyond government for ways to maximise their returns.
24. I am encouraged by the partnership between Outsource Botswana (which represents the private sector) and the Botswana IFSC and trust that this relationship will bear fruits for both parties.
25. I am, further, encouraged by the global employment statistics that this industry has generated and hope that you will take this opportunity to reap the rewards

26. With that, Director of Ceremonies, let me conclude by adding that it is my singular honour and privilege to declare this BPO and Call Centre conference officially opened and wishing you the best in your discussions during the course of the day.
27. Thank you, PULA!!!!!! PULA!!!!!!