

## **CTO IN-COUNTRY MISSION ON BROADBAND STRATEGY HOLDS WORKING SESSIONS WITH NATCOM**

By Abdul Kuyateh

The first in-country mission of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization (CTO), led by Consultant Dr David Townsend, on the development and implementation of CTO funded National Broadband Strategy for Sierra Leone, has held working sessions with Sierra Leone's telecoms regulatory body, the National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM).

The National Broadband Strategy will enable the country to derive the socio-economic benefits of broadband connectivity.

Welcoming the two-man CTO project team in the Conference Room of the Commission Tuesday, 16 January 2014, the newly appointed Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Dr Tom Obaleh thanked CTO for showing interest in the development of ICTs in the country, and assured of the Commission's unflinching commitment in realizing the goals of the project.

He noted with dismay the dismal internet penetration of 1.3 % in an average of 15.6 in Africa; noting the need to connect large un-served and under-served areas of the country. He disclosed that there is no national broadband policy in the country, and that the broadband strategy can be included in the national ICT Policy.

The Deputy Director General of NATCO, Senessie Kallon, noted the tremendous drive in infrastructure and the abundant availability of the international bandwidth, adding, the challenge now remains the middle and last mile on the supply side". He said there is an urgent need to harmonize the plethora of ICT projects in the country to enhance economies of scale.

In his remarks, CTO Consultant, Dr David Townsend, said he was struck by the friendliness of the people in Sierra Leone. He said there was a lot of an opportunity to explore on what needs to be done and or can be done. He said he was impressed with the improvement in the speed of the internet as against the last time he visited Sierra Leone in 2011 on the Access Gap Study, describing it as "seconds versus hours".

In his Power Point Presentation, Dr Townsend gave an insight to the broadband strategy, describing it as a document with "shared objectives, plans and actions to promote widespread access and use of ICTs; and integrated initiatives across multiple sectors and stakeholders". He said the strategy follows an activist approach with specific targets, as against the policy, which provides the general framework.

Among other aspects captured in his presentation included broadband ecosystem approach, role and activities of the Steering Committee, Working Groups and their roles and activities. Earlier, Dr Townsend observed the non-attendance of the Ministry of Information and Communications, being a key player in the project.

The Mission concludes Friday 17 January, 2014.