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Uganda may soon be able to shoot down two birds with one stone when the re-named EASSY (The East African Submarine Cable System) project is actualized. Developments from South Africa indicate that EASSY has been renamed and is now called The Nepad Broadband Infrastructure Network (NBIN).

It is expected that once in operation, the initiative will see communication costs in Africa decreasing.

The renaming follows Kenya's refusal last year to sign the treaty/protocol establishing EASSY. Kenya has since then embarked on creating their own broadband network dubbed The East African Marine Systems (TEAMS).

“Uganda is part of the NEPAD arrangement. We are signatories to the agreement signed last year,” said a top official of the ICT Ministry in Kampala.

A leading civil society player, the CEO Bridges.org Vincent Bagiire told the New Vision that Uganda will benefit either way. He said, “If there is a connection in Kenya, it is inevitable that Uganda's telecom companies will connect to it. Many of them have regional connectivity arrangements like Celtel's regional one network, MTN's arrangement with Safaricom.”

Bagiire however observed that it will be possible for Uganda to tap into the Kenya's TEAMS under the auspices of the East African Community. He also noted that already Uganda is a signatory to the NEPAD arrangement.

NBIN is expected to provide a number of landlocked African countries, mainly on the eastern side of the continent, access to two broadband networks. One will run as backbone from South Africa through Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Uganda to terminate in the Rwandan capital of Kigali. The second is an undersea cable that will run up the African east coast and was supposed to land in Kenya. A new landing point is yet to be announced. Other signed up are Lesotho, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritius, Namibia and Madagascar.

NBIN will have all participatory countries linked up before being linked to the rest of the world, thereby integrating Africa's communication by synchronizing ICT infrastructure initiatives.

South African Communications Minister Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, is reported to have said NBIN will be controlled through a "golden share" scheme, in which African countries will retain control of the various entities that are to be created to run the entire network and keep it from falling into foreign hands.

Currently, 12 out of 23 African countries have signed the Nepad ICT Broadband infrastructure protocol, which commits them to building the network. South Africa hopes to ratify the protocol by mid 2007.