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1.0 Introduction

The National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC) of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was established by the Telecommunications Act (Cap 418) of the Revised Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2009 to efficiently regulate the telecommunications sector in collaboration with the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL). The NTRC was also mandated to manage the Universal Service Fund (USF).

1.1 What is the Universal Service Fund?

The Universal Service Fund (USF) was established under Section 42 of the Telecommunications Act (Cap 418) of the Revised Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2009. The Fund was set up to compensate any telecommunications provider who is required to provide or to promote Universal Service. Universal Services include: Public voice telephony, Internet access, telecommunication services to schools, hospitals and similar institutions, and to the physically challenged. This USF encourages efficient access to, and the use of telecommunication networks and services throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with special focus on rural, underserved and maritime areas. The provision of Universal Service will provide social, educational and economic development for our nation.

The Fund will also ensure the reasonable availability and affordability of basic and advanced telecommunication services, where commercial telecommunication markets may be unable to deliver such services in a financially viable manner independently.

The USF is mainly funded by annual payments made by telecommunication providers. The Fund may also receive income from appropriations made by Parliament and official grants, donations, bequests or other contributions if the NTRC considers it consistent with the best interest of the Fund. The annual payments received from telecommunication providers range from 0.25% of gross revenue for the first year of a license, 0.5% of gross revenue for

the second year of a license and 1% of gross revenue with respect to the third year of its license and throughout the remaining period of the license.

1.2 Regulatory Instruments of the USF

There are several regulatory instruments that govern the Universal Service Fund. They are as follows:

1.2.1 Telecommunications (Universal Service Fund) Contribution Order 2008

This was gazetted on April 22, 2008 and is retroactive to January 1, 2008.

This Order sets out the method for the calculation of payments and the deadlines for payments. This document is accessible at the following link:

http://www.ntrc.vc/regulations/USF_contribution_order.pdf

1.2.2 Telecommunications (Universal Service Fund) Regulations (Universal Service Fund) Regulations (Cap 418) of the Revised Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2009

The Regulations were gazetted on September 16, 2008 and the aim of the Regulations is to provide a broad framework for the efficient and effective management of the Fund. This document is accessible at the following link:

http://www.ntrc.vc/regulations/Universal_Service_Fund_regulations_1.pdf

1.2.3 Telecommunications (Universal Service Fund) Guidelines 2009

This document outlines specific procedures and policies for the management of the USF in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The basis for the development and use of the Guidelines are derived from the Telecommunications (Universal Service Fund) Regulations. This document is accessible at the following link:

http://www.ntrc.vc/usf/USF_guidelines.pdf

1.3 Telecommunications Act 2009

Section 42 of this Act mandates the establishment of the USF. This document is accessible at the following link:

http://www.ntrc.vc/regulations/telecom_act_2001_SRO_NO_1.pdf

1.4 USF Operating Plan

The USF Operating Plan is a policy document which outlines the priority objectives of the USF within St. Vincent and the Grenadines on an annual basis. This document summarizes the state of development of telecommunications in the country and it sets forth the broad objectives, targets and types of projects that the Fund may seek to promote during the year. It also provides a financial status of the fund to stakeholders.

1.5 USF Budget

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the Universal Service Fund was budgeted to receive a total of One Million, Three Hundred and Forty Thousand Dollars (\$1,340,000.00) from telecommunications service providers, and interest on the account was projected to be Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$2,500.00). The actual revenue received by the Universal Service Fund in 2016 was One Million, One Hundred and Ninety Three Thousand and Fifty Two Dollars and Ten Cents (\$1,193,052.10). This was due to the decline in the revenues from the telecom providers. A total of Ten Thousand and Thirteen Dollars and Fifty Three Cents (\$10,013.53) was received as interest on the account. There was also a slight increase in the interest amount obtained which is due to the fact that the commissioning of the Payphone Project was postponed thus the project payments had to be deferred.

Expenditure

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the USF budgeted to spend Three Hundred and Sixteen Thousand, Five Hundred and Fifteen Dollars and Ninety Cents (\$316,515.90) on recurrent expenditure. However, Three Hundred and Seven Thousand and Thirty Seven Dollars and Thirty Three Cents (\$307,037.33) was actually spent.

Projects:

For the year ended December 31, 2016, the USF budgeted to spend One Million and Seven Hundred and Sixteen Thousand, Three Hundred and Forty Five Dollars and Eighty Four Cents (\$1,716,345.84) for payment on projects. However, Nine Hundred and Twenty Two Thousand, One Hundred and Fifty Five Dollars and Thirty-Three Cents (\$922,155.33) was actually spent. The main reason for this is that the NTRC had budgeted for the Payphone Project commissioned in 2016. Additionally, the maintenance payment for the schools project was budgeted to be paid out in 2016. These two payments were deferred to 2017.

Figure 1

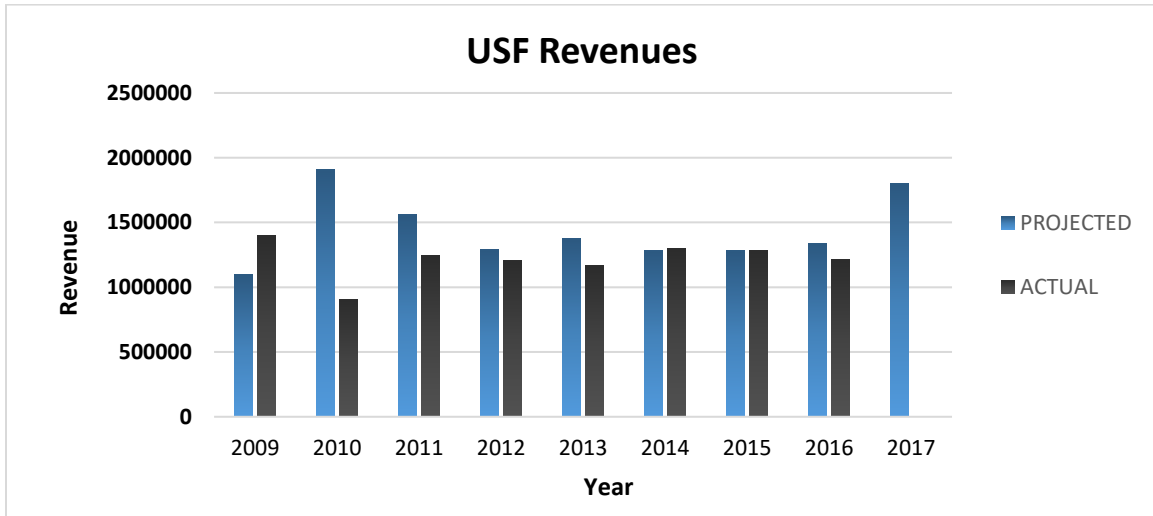


Fig 1. Shows data from the NTRC Annual Report 2016

2.0 Telecommunications in St Vincent and the Grenadines

Since 2010, citizens of St. Vincent and the Grenadines have benefitted from access to free telecommunications services, such as, free open Wi-Fi access and access to computers at various locations island wide. This is primarily due to the investment by the Government in the sector over the years with the one laptop per child program and the various projects under the Universal Service Fund. In addition to these services, the general public has also been able to access training programs at a subsidized cost. These programs are being delivered by the National Center for Technical Innovation. In 2016, the NTRC worked along with the St Vincent and the Grenadines Community College in introducing two programs, an Associate Degree program in Cyber Security and an Associate Degree in Software Engineering. The NTRC identified the need not only to provide the access to services and equipment, but to also provide the know how in developing content and securing the networks which exist. St Vincent and the Grenadines will no longer have to depend on importing the human resources necessary to deal with issues of cyber-crime or mobile app development nor will Vincentian students have to look abroad for training.

The NTRC has also conducted several ICT training courses in the rural areas which give students in these areas the ability to gain certification in coding called the MyApp summer program. Resources are utilized to have an experienced tutor in application development to deliver these courses.

2.1 Universal Service Fund (USF) Project Status

In 2016, no new contracts were signed for the implementation of new projects by the USF. This decision was made due to the unavailability of funds to embark on any new projects. So far, the USF has undertaken a total of seven projects.

2.1.1 Internet Project

The first project undertaken by the USF in SVG was called the Internet Project, and was signed with telecommunications provider LIME, at a cost of Four Hundred and Twenty-Seven Thousand, Six Hundred and Eight Dollars and Ninety-Eight Cents (\$427,608.98). Twenty-eight (28) rural locations were outfitted with wireless internal and external internet access points with minimum speeds of 8 Mbps. These locations included thirteen (13) Learning Resource Centers, nine (9) rural schools and six (6) Community Centers. This project was commissioned on July 6, 2011, and will run for a period of five (5) years. This project was combined with another project, the Community center project and was retendered in the third quarter of 2016. These two projects were amalgamated due to the fact that they provided the same services at similar locations. In addition to this, both projects were coming to an end and the NTRC saw it advantageous to merge the two projects which would save administrative cost over the long run. The new amalgamated project is called the community access project and an agreement is expected to be entered into by the second quarter of 2017.

2.1.2 Payphone Project

The second project is called the Payphone Project and was signed with LIME in 2011, at a cost of One Million, Four Hundred Thousand, Five Hundred and Seventy-Five Dollars and Forty-Five Cents (\$1,400,575.45). Twenty-five (25) payphones installed at various locations across SVG – including tourism sites, beaches and at points along the main road. Internet access will also be provided at tourism sites and beaches at a minimal cost. Overt vandal proof security cameras were also installed at selected tourism sites and at the beaches to minimize the threat of vandalism to the payphones, as well as to provide some security for visitors to these locations. All of the equipment has been installed and the Commission is working along with LIME to get this project commissioned in January of 2017.

2.1.3 Schools Project

The third, and largest project is the Schools Project – which provides internet services to all one hundred and seven (107) educational institutions via interior and exterior high-speed wireless

connections, with speeds of up to 20 Mbps. This contract was signed in 2011 with telecommunications provider Cable and Wireless, and the project was commissioned in 2012. The project is expected to come to a close in 2017 and will be retendered. The cost of this project is Five Million, Two Hundred and Thirty Thousand, Six Hundred and Twenty-Three Dollars (\$5,230,623.00) with a duration of five (5) years. There is also a content filtering system established for this project to prevent access to undesirable websites. In an effort to improve the internet connection being offered at the SVGCC Glen Campus noting the large student population, the NTRC, negotiated with Cable and Wireless and a fiber network was installed at the college with speeds exceeding 100 Mbps.

2.1.4 Maritime Project

The fourth project, which is the VHF Maritime Project, was implemented to provide access to both emergency and non-emergency communications in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of St Vincent and the Grenadines and saw the implementation of a Global Maritime Distress and Safety System in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The project is being executed out a total cost of One Million, One Hundred and Twenty Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty Dollars (\$1,125,780.00) and is being maintained for a period of five (5) years. Five Hundred and Forty Thousand Dollars (\$540,000.00) of this amount was accessed from the World Bank for the purchase and installation of the equipment. The remaining Five Hundred and Eighty Five Thousand, Seven Hundred and Eighty One Dollars (\$585,781.00) was paid by the Universal Service Fund for the maintenance of the services and equipment over the five (5) year period.

GMDSS is a set of safety procedures, types of equipment and communication protocols used to increase safety and make it easier to rescue distressed ships, boats and even aircrafts. GMDSS provides for distress alerts, distress relays, search and rescue, on scene communication and location services. This system is mandatory for all ships subject to the Safety of Life At Sea (SOLAS) convention of 1974. The basic concept of this system is that the Coast Guard, as well as vessels in the immediate area of a ship in distress, will be rapidly alerted to the emergency so that they can assist with minimum delay time. Digital Selective Calling (DSC) is one of the most

important aspects of this GMDSS system and is a standard for sending a pre-defined digital message via the pressing of one button. Noting this, the NTRC identified and implemented this project to improve the VHF maritime coverage around the country.

Under this project the control system was installed at the Coast Guard Base while three antennas and three transceivers were installed at the Mt St Andrews remote site. These two locations are also linked via a 2Mb leased circuit.

One hundred (100) VHF DSC handheld and ten (10) VHF DSC mobile radios were also procured under this project and were sold at a subsidized price of Four Hundred Dollars (\$400.00) to interested persons. The NTRC also distributed a number of the radios to registered fishermen throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Six (6) VHF base stations radios were installed at six (6) rural police stations throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines to assist in the monitoring of the GMDSS. The purpose of these six radios is to provide access to both emergency and non-emergency communications which may occur within the Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with special emphasis on those areas which were not covered by the GMDSS system.

Under this project, several training sessions were held in 2016 in collaboration with the St Vincent and the Grenadines Coast Guard Service's Fishermen in various communities were informed of the system and use of the VHF DSC enabled radios. This project will be retendered in 2017 as the current contract comes to an end in 2017.

2.1.5 Police and Health Center Project

The fifth project is the Police and Health Center Project. This project provides wireless internet access at all twenty-nine (29) Police Stations and forty-two (42) Health Centers throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines at a minimum speed of 8 Mbps. The cost of this project is Seven Hundred and Eleven Thousand, and Fifteen Dollars (\$711,015.00), and is being implemented by Karib Cable for a period of two (2) years. Thirty-one (31) computers were also installed at various clinics and fourteen (14) computers were installed at the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital. The

Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines (RSVG) Police Force Training School was also outfitted with ten (10) computers to assist the recruits and other officers with their research work. This project was commissioned on June 12, 2015 and the NTRC has been routinely monitoring the services being provided to ensure that the necessary measures can be implemented to reduce the down time of the service. The project is expected to close in 2017 and will be retendered.

2.1.6 Community Center Project

The sixth project implemented is the Community Center Project. This project provides wireless internet access at eleven (11) Community Centers in various communities throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as a Learning Resource Centre, and seven (7) group institutions and public venues, all at a minimum speed of 20 Mbps. The contract for this project was signed in 2012 with Karib Cable, at a cost of One Hundred and Nineteen Thousand, Five Hundred and Three Dollars and Twenty-Nine Cents (\$119,503.29) and is being implemented for a period of two (2) years. The project was commissioned on March 4, 2014. Under this project, the newly established Salvation Army Children's Home will be outfitted with six (6) computers and internet access to assist with the development of the children's ICT skills. All residents from the various communities, where these project sites are located, will have access to the wireless internet on a 24/7 basis.

This project was combined with another project, the Internet Project and was retendered in the third quarter of 2016. These two projects were amalgamated due to the fact that they provided the same services at similar locations. In addition to this, both projects were coming to an end and the NTRC saw it advantageous to merge the two projects which would save administrative cost over the long run. The new amalgamated project is called the community access project and an agreement is expected to be entered into by the second quarter of 2017.

2.1.7 SMART Project

The seventh and last project that is currently being undertaken by the NTRC is the SMART Project. This project will facilitate the necessary infrastructure and platforms at SVGCC to enable it to offer its existing and new courses online and in real time. Another component of this project is that three hundred and forty (340) households will benefit from subsidized internet access at a price of ten dollars (\$10) per month for a maximum of two (2) years. Additionally, a state-of-the-art computer lab containing thirty-five (35) high powered computers, including twenty (20) Apple Mac computers, were handed over to the Division of Technical Education, SVGCC. This project will be executed at a total of One Million, Six Hundred and Ninety-Eight Thousand, Nine Hundred and Ninety-Four Dollars (\$1,698,994.00) and is being implemented by LIME. This project was commissioned on September 25, 2014.

As of October 20, 2015, the three hundred and forty (340) quota for the subsidized internet service was reached. However, the NTRC is still accepting applications for the service because in the following two years, the service will be provided to a new batch of three hundred and forty (340) households. The NTRC will try and source some funds in 2017 to increase the number of households benefiting from this initiative.

The programs at the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College which include the Associate Degree in Cyber Security and an Associate Degree in Software Development are in operation now and the programs are based at the Division of Arts and General Science in Villa. The software development program was upgraded in 2016 from a certificate program to an associate degree program.

2.2 Other Projects

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines over the past years have invested significantly the ICT sector locally. One of the major programs is the Caribbean Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (CARCIP). CARCIP is a World Bank financed initiative which seeks to increase St. Vincent and the Grenadines' access to regional broadband networks, and advance the development of an ICT-enabled service industry in the Caribbean region.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has made significant progress in boosting the development of the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. To this end, grants totaling more than Two Million, Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$2,500,000.00) have been distributed to twenty-one (21) local businesses within the past year.

The funds were awarded through the Business Incubation and Training Grants programme that is a component of the Caribbean Regional Infrastructure Programme (CARCIP) SVG project that was launched in 2014. CARCIP SVG forms part of Government's initiative to increase the range of local business enterprises utilizing modern technology, support business expansion and create jobs.

Under the Business Incubation Grants programme, sixteen (16) businesses, including existing and start-up enterprises have each received funding of up to One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000.00). A total of over One Million, Four Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,400,000.00) has been disbursed. The businesses received funding for equipment, software and marketing support. The recipients are also receiving assistance in the development of skills as incubatees of the National Centre of Technological Innovation (NCTI) Business Incubator Programme. Six (6) incubatees located across St. Vincent are being supported virtually while ten (10) are residential incubatees stationed at the NCTI's Business Incubator at the Diamond Industrial Estate.

Under CARCIP SVG's Training Grants programme, six (6) businesses are benefiting from funding of up to One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$150,000.00). This programme has committed Five Hundred and Eighty-Six Thousand Dollars (\$586,000.00) in grants for Vincentian small businesses and non-government institutions. The training is improving the skills set of their

employees/members in ICT or ICT-related areas. Businesses also received equipment and software to support the training activities.

Over Three Hundred and Ten (310) Vincentians have received ICT training at the NCTI over the past year. The Government distributed approximately Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$300,000.00) in bursaries under the CARCIP Training Grants programme to cover eighty percent (80%) of the cost for courses. Courses included webpage design, mobile app design and development, graphic design, Cisco Certified Associate, Android development, Comptia A+, Security + and Network +.

3.0 Summary Market Assessment

The USF was unable to execute new projects in 2016 but has continued to maintain has three hundred and twenty-eight (328) free wireless internet access points across the country. In addition to this, the NTRC St. Vincent and the Grenadines developed two projects and will be seeking funding from the World Bank in 2017. These projects are a mixture of free wireless internet access at playing fields, hard courts and rural locations where persons congregate. Additionally, there are plans to provide ICT training in various subject areas at the Learning Resource centers nationwide and a project to provide emergency communication capabilities to senior citizens locally. In an effort to secure funding for these projects, the NTRC held meetings with the four other NTRC's to incorporate them into various aspects of the project. NTRC Dominica and NTRC Grenada have agreed to partner with us with these project initiatives. NTRC Dominica has already submitted its scope of works and NTRC Grenada is expected to complete their document and submit it to us by the end of February 2017. Following this, the NTRC will be working along with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to finalize the document to seek the funding.

3.1 Revenue of Telecom Operators

Figure 2 below shows the revenues received by the respective telecommunication operators. The revenue generated by telecommunications operators decreased by a margin of 5.6% in 2016. This was due to a decrease in Cable & Wireless' and Digicel revenues from their mobile services. While it will appear that the subscribers across both networks are stagnant, the revenues generated from the subscribers have decreased over the period.

Figure 2

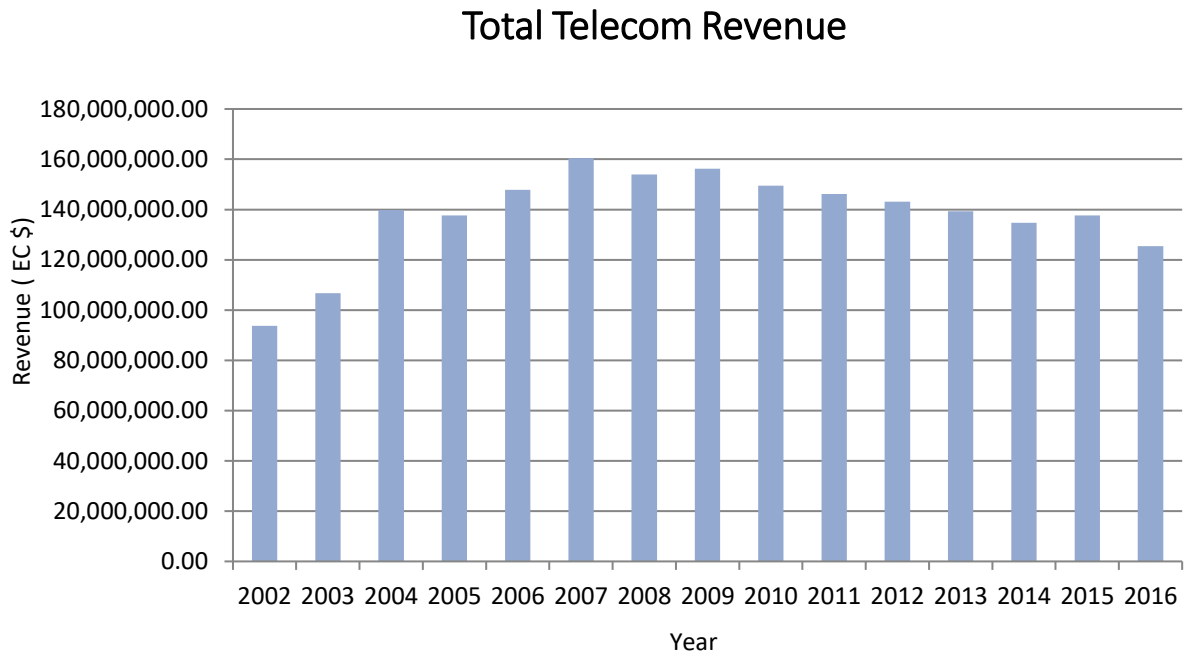


Fig 2. Shows data from the telecommunications providers in SVG

Figure 3 shows the fixed line subscribers over a six year period. In 2016, there was a decrease in the number of subscribers to Cable & Wireless (LIME) and Karib Cable.

Figure 3

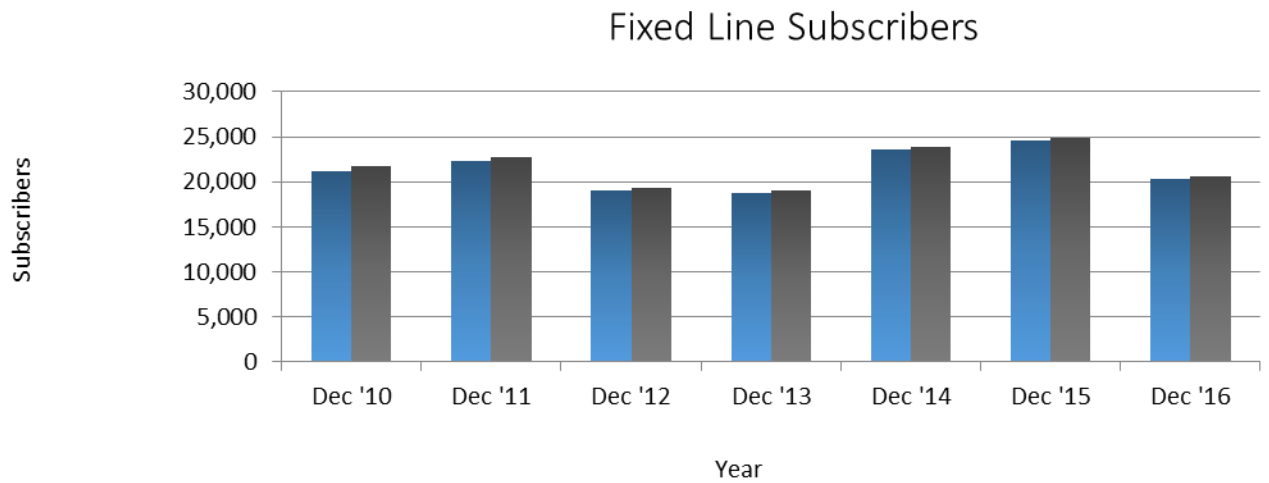


Fig 3. Shows data from the telecommunications providers in SVG

Figure 4 below shows that Broadband Internet Subscribers have increased from 2015 to 2016.

Figure 4

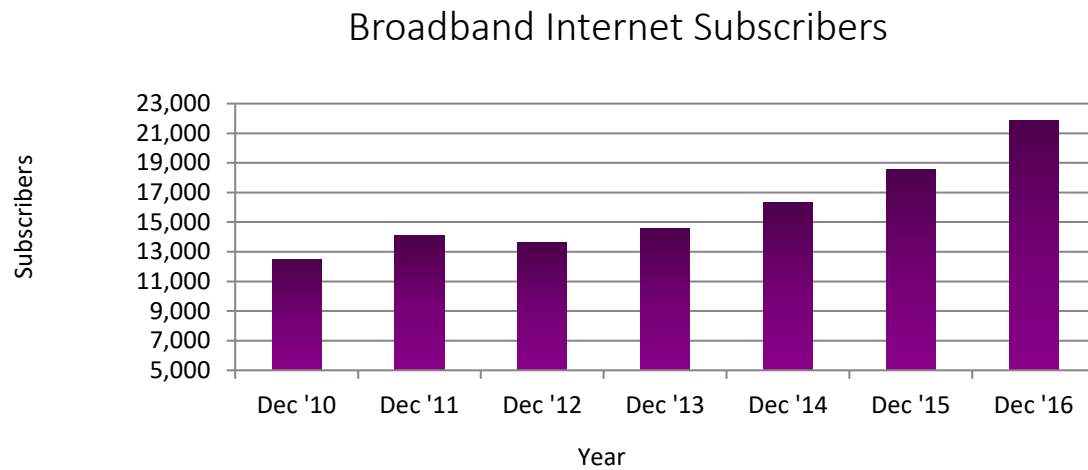


Fig 4. Shows data from the telecommunications providers in SVG

3.2 Portable computers entering St Vincent

Figure 5 depicts the number of portable computers entering St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 2016, 6189 laptops were imported in SVG. This is a significant decrease from the year 2015 where 15,415 devices were imported. This 59.85% reduction in imports can be attributed to the fact that the Government did not import any laptops as was the case in 2011, 2014 and the early part of 2015.

Figure 5

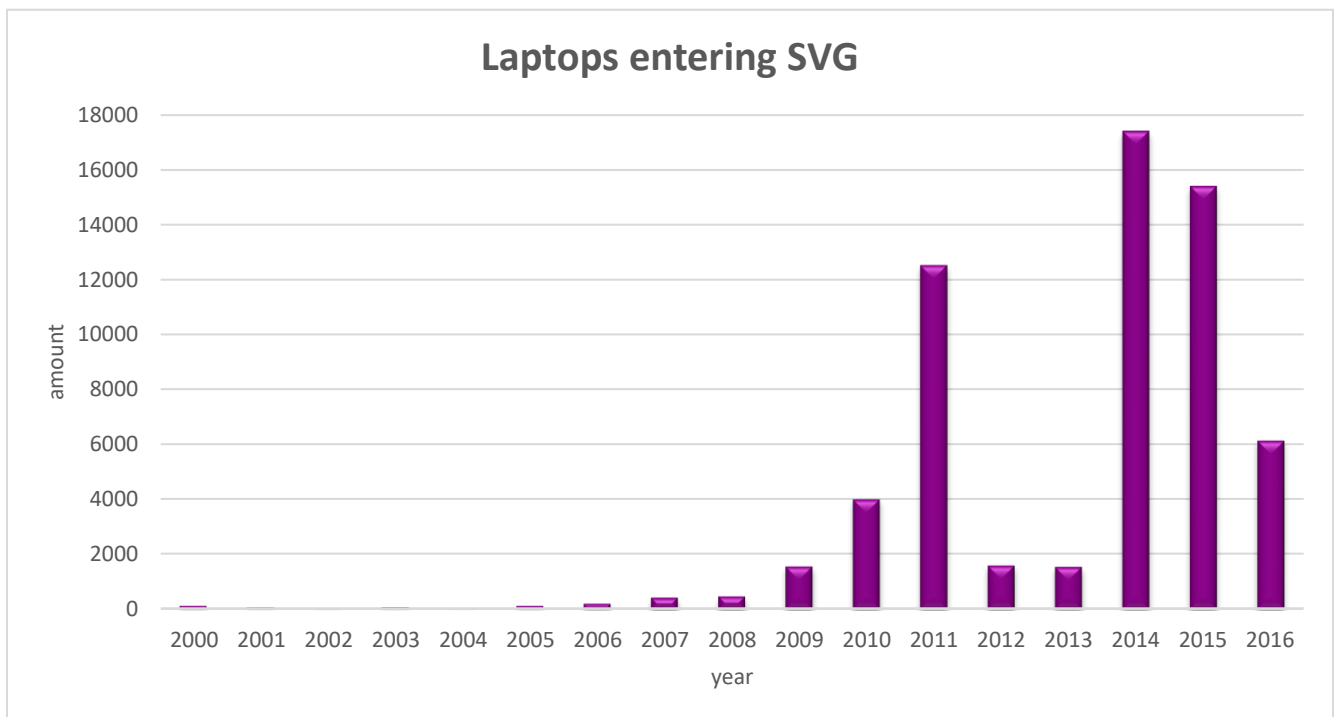


Fig 5. Shows data from the Customs and Excise Department

3.3 Desktops entering St Vincent and the Grenadines

Figure 6 below shows the number of desktop computers entering the country. The graph shows that there has been an increase in the number of desktops being imported. In 2016, there were 1,665 units which were imported. This represents a 28% increase in the figures for 2016. This can be as a result of more persons refreshing their systems as the lifespan of a Personal Computer is about five (5) years.

Figure 6

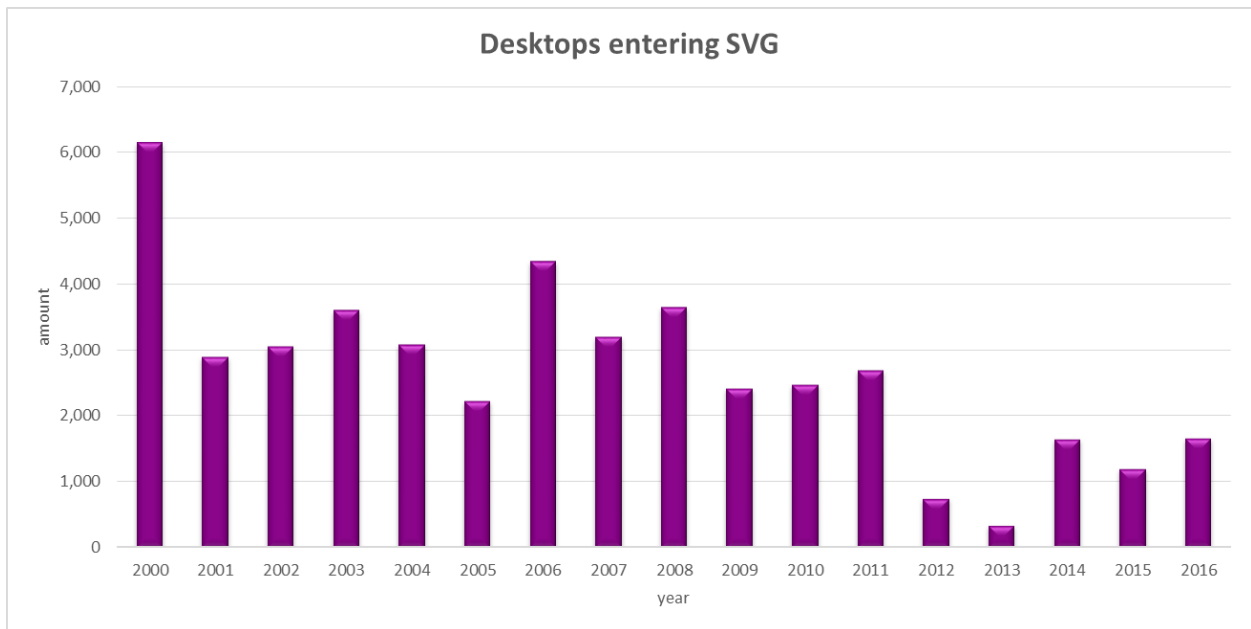


Fig 6. Shows data from the Customs and Excise Department

3.4 Mobile phones entering St Vincent and the Grenadines

Figure 7 below shows the number of mobile phones entering the country. The graph shows that there has been an increase in the number of mobile phones being imported. The figure rose from 32,774 in 2015 to 35,522 in 2016, showing a 7% increase in the number of mobile phones imported in the year 2016. This amount can be attributed to the fact that the cost for smart phones has dropped which gives the average individual the opportunity to purchase a smart phone or to buy an upgrade.

Figure 7

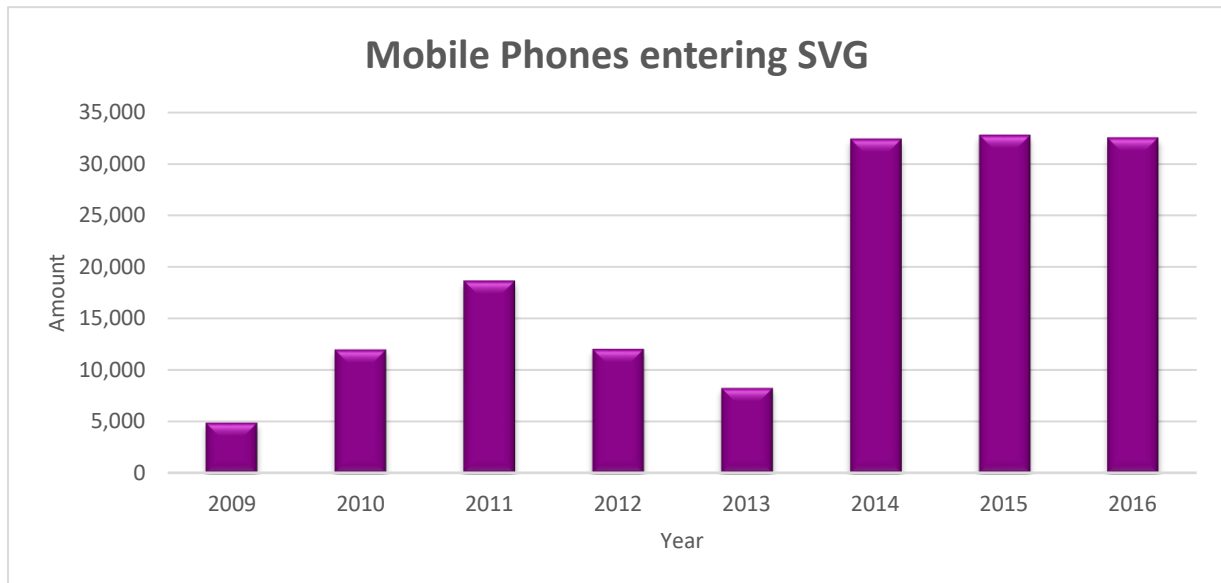


Fig 7. Shows data from the Customs and Excise Department

4.0 Priority Goals 2016

The Operating Plan for 2016 outlined one overall priority goal, which was to seek additional funding for the implementation of new projects. From this goal, two other goals were identified as priorities requiring the attention of the USF for the year 2016. This priority goal and the sub goals and their statuses are as follows:

- 1. Continue to monitor the services and equipment at the various project sites to ensure that the services are being delivered.**

This task is complete as the project sites for all of the projects implemented under the USF were regularly visited.

- 2. Conduct impact assessments at the various project sites under each project: Schools Project (107), Community Center Project (14), Internet Project (28), Police and Health Center Project (72) and to identify any steps/measures which can be implemented to improve the services to the various stakeholders accessing these services. Additionally, the NTRC will monitor the (26) sites under the Payphone Project via the camera feeds from the cameras that were installed at each location.**

This task is complete as the impact assessments for these sites were completed and measures put in place to ensure that the quality of service being delivered is kept at an acceptable standard.

- 3. An increase in the contribution rate to the USF by the telecommunication providers from 1% to 2%.**

This task is incomplete. The NTRC is currently awaiting Cabinet approval and this is expected to be granted in the first quarter of 2017.

4. Source external funding for projects to be implemented locally and regionally.

This task is incomplete as the NTRC SVG has been working along with the NTRC's in the region for them to collaborate on the projects developed. NTRC Dominica and NTRC Grenada have signaled their intention on working with us on the projects and NTRC Dominica has already submitted its scope. NTRC SVG will be working along with the Ministry of Finance with the Development of the project idea so that a funding agency can be approached. This is expected to be done in 2017.

5. Tendering of a new project to renew existing projects.

This task is complete as the Community Access project was tendered out.

6. Finalizing the commissioning process for the Payphone Project within the first half of 2016.

This task is incomplete as the process was not completed in 2016 due to some outstanding work on the part of Cable and Wireless. This is however expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2017.

5.0 USF Priority Goals 2017

The USF priority goals for 2017 are as follows:

1. The 2017 Operating Plan will be established. This plan will set out the objectives of the Fund for the operating year 2017.
2. The USF will be working on seeking funding from international donor organizations for two projects which have been developed. The USF will be working along with the regional NTRCs so that we can benefit from these projects.
3. Projects which have been implemented thus far under the USF will be routinely visited to ensure that the services and equipment being paid for are present at the various locations.
4. Public awareness activities will continue, and will include school discussions at various schools, community discussions, radio and television presentations.
5. Additional projects will be identified to be undertaken by the USF via field work and from feedback from the general public from activities carried out by the NTRC.
6. Projects which have been implemented will be monitored to ensure that all the services and equipment are operational.
7. The USF will ensure that the commissioning process for the Payphone Project is finalized within the first half of 2017.
8. The retendering of the schools project will be undertaken in the second quarter of 2017 as the current contract for this project will be coming to an end.
9. The retendering of the Police and Health Center Project will be undertaken in the second quarter of 2017 as the current contract for this project will be coming to an end.
10. The retendering of the Maritime Project will be undertaken in the fourth quarter of 2017 as the current contract for this project will be coming to an end.

11. An increase in the contribution rate to the USF by the telecommunication providers from 1% to 2%.

6.0 USF Budget Estimates

The USF is funded by contributions made by telecommunication providers as specified under the Act and by the Order of the Minister, any funds that may be directly appropriated by Parliament for the purposes of the Fund, and official grants, donations, bequests or other contributions, or transfers granted by an individual or other legal entity.

The Fund is projected to receive just under Two Million Dollars in 2017. This consists of contributions from telecommunications service providers of One Million, Five Hundred and Fifty Nine Thousand Eight Hundred and Ninety Five Dollars (\$1,559,895.00) and interest on the Fund's account of Two Thousand, Five Hundred Dollars (\$2,500.00). This projection for the interest amount is as a result of the expected project payments in 2017 which will significantly decrease the amount of funds available for the USF throughout.