

**WELCOME ADDRESS**  
**BY**  
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Since the invention of the telephone by Graham Bell in 1876, the world has continued to devote a lot of resources towards the development, improvement and expansion of telecommunications facilities; and their relevance to human existence has continued to grow unabated.

Today, we live in an information age characterized by the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) resources in nearly all aspects of human endeavor and ICT industries have taken center stage in shaping the world economy and will continue to do so far into the foreseeable future.

Regrettably however, most of the benefits derivable from telecommunications infrastructure deployment have been concentrated in the developed countries of the world where about 60% of the world's population has access to less than 6% of the network.

In 1984 the ITU published a report (The Maitland report), which identified huge disparities in the distribution of telephones around the world. The report revealed that three quarters of the world's telephones were located in just nine countries namely the major industrialised nations including the United States, Japan and the major economies of Western Europe. The report stated that there were more telephones then in Tokyo than in the whole of Africa.

The Maitland report raised major concerns on the imbalance in the provision of telecommunications services world wide. The imbalance, which was then referred to as the “missing link”, is today being described as the “digital divide.”

Despite significant progress made in the last decade, Africa still has less than 2% of the world's main lines although it accounts for more than 12% of the world's population

The last decade has seen several developing countries opening up and embracing privatization and market liberalisation to attract investment and encourage network build out.

Here in Nigeria, we have taken the vital first steps with the liberalisation of the telecom sector, licensing of competitive

network operators and the planned privatisation of NITEL. Consequently, the last few years have seen a notable increase in private sector involvement in the Nigerian Telecommunications Sector.

The next most important step is what we have assembled here to advance, which is the development of the human capital required for the digital economy.

In our industry, it has always been acknowledged that human resources are a critical factor in ICT development policies. Of all the resources required to develop and operate networks, lack of highly qualified staff can constitute a great setback to telecommunications development and quality of service.

As we liberalise our telecommunications market and introduced competition, a number of local and multinational companies are deploying different types of sophisticated equipment, most of which are imported. These companies will be looking to employing local manpower to install, operate and maintain these systems. We also need trained manpower to design and implement networks that are robust and cost effective. Networks, designed to

also take Africa's specific needs and environmental conditions into consideration.

Let me also quickly add that manpower requirements for telecommunications infrastructure development do not only stop with the engineers and technicians. The industry also requires, well-trained personnel in other specialist areas such as economic analysis, financial planning, law, arbitration, mediation, accountancy, interconnection, e-commerce, consultancy services, business management, human resource management, data-base analysis, software development, etc. Highly skilled personnel are needed in the middle and upper management levels, and they need to be well trained and up-to-date.

The Nigerian Communications Commission in its quest to address the ICT manpower issue was faced with questions such as:

- What facilities exist in our tertiary institution for HR development for the ICT industry?
- Are they still relevant and up to date?
- How can we upgrade existing facilities where necessary?
- How can we train enough people for the ICT industry?

- How can we train people to the standard of the global ICT industry?

It is in finding answers to these questions that led to the establishment of the Digital Bridge Institute.

I am confident that with this humble beginning, the “mustard seed” being sown today will grow to a “mighty oak,” providing the necessary training and research base for our march towards bridging the digital divide between the information haves and have-nots, between the information rich and the information poor, and towards contributing to building a digitally enabled information society for Nigeria.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor and pleasure to once again formally welcome you to the Digital Bridge Institute, the International Centre for Communications Studies.