



SPEECH

BY

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AT

*The 8th Anniversary Of Telecom Consumer
Parliament & 10 Years Of Telecom Revolution
In Nigeria.*

**THEME: "A Decade of Telecom Revolution in
Nigeria: The Prospects and
Challenges"**

Wednesday, October 12th, 2011

PROTOCOLS:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to welcome you all to this forum for the double celebration of the 8th Anniversary of Telecom Consumer Parliament and the 10 years of Telecom Revolution in Nigeria.

It is my expectation that this forum will provide a veritable opportunity for us to look at our industry and be able to learn a lesson from the three phases of growth. By this I mean we will look at the past, x-ray the present and project into the future. The industry is in constant growth; we need to have a check-list as we go along otherwise we get carried away by momentary achievements.

There is a part of telecom history that people would wish we forget. The part that is not so salutary, when people have to queue to make or receive international calls. Prior to 2001, a period telecom historians now refer to as Pre-GSM era, the industry was characterized by an incumbent operator and a few others with regional operations. An attempt was made to introduce analogue mobile service by the then incumbent, NITEL but the spread was very limited and provided the aspirations of Nigerians with little succour. The industry was incapable of responding well to the yearnings of the populace to have affordable, efficient and high quality telephone service in the country. Phones were literally decreed out of the shopping list of the ordinary folks as only about 400,000 landlines and another 25,000 analogue mobile lines were available to a population of over 120 million, putting us in the league of Mongolia and Afghanistan, countries that were either permanently in strife or disadvantaged by nature.

The Telecom Revolution of 2001

One day the story changed. In realization of the changes in global economy, there was full deregulation of the industry in Nigeria which paved way for other service providers to come into the sector. Nigeria has witnessed tremendous improvement in the number of operators, plethora of services available, tariff structure, accessibility, affordability and efficiency of the services being offered.

This bold step of the Federal Government climaxed in August 2001 when the first set of GSM operators rolled out services after a very successful auction of Digital Mobile Licenses that was efficiently carried out by the Nigerian Communications Commission earlier in the year. This exercise attracted worldwide approval and commendation because of the transparency with which it was carried out. That auction and the subsequent service launch marked the tipping point for the industry which since then has grown in leaps, surpassing all expectations. All of a sudden the industry has become an apple pie, attracting investors and consumers as well.

The fall out from the foregoing include the following among others:

- Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) of about \$18bn.
- Increase in the revenue to the Federation Account.
- Mass direct employment of Nigerians by service providers.
- Engagement of millions of Nigerians in the downstream sector of the industry, including the umbrella phone booths which the ITU has hailed as a unique Nigerian feature.
- International respect for the nation
- Boost in business transaction between Nigeria and other countries of the world.

Challenges

The NCC in fulfillment of the mandate by the Telecoms Act has ensured that Nigerians have access to telephone services at affordable prices and with the best quality possible. However, we are not unaware of the challenges which such rapid growth has visited on the industry. The good news is that the Commission is providing regulatory intervention to curtail such challenges.

The main challenge has been that of quality of service that has not reached the envisaged level of efficiency. Erratic public power supply, vandalism of telecom infrastructure, lack of basic infrastructure, high level insecurity, multiple taxation, militancy, all collectively affect expected performance from the industry.

Regulatory Intervention

The Commission has been issuing Regulatory Directions to the industry to ensure that stakeholders keep to the rule. There have been numerous guidelines on different services provided by service providers (Spread of Customer Care Centres, Threshold of Helplines by service providers, etc).

Because Consumer interest is considered as key to the performance of the industry, the NCC created Consumer Affairs Bureau which specifically ensures that consumers' interests are adequately protected. The Bureau has been able to discharge this responsibility through its PIE Mandate: designed to Protect, Inform and Educate the consumers on issues of interest.

One of the ways this mandate is being carried out is the Outreach programmes of the Commission. The outreach program includes the Telecom Consumer Parliament (TCP), Consumer Outreach Programme (COP) and the Consumer Townhall Meeting (CTM). These programs are implemented at three tiers, i.e Capital Cities, major urban centres and the rural areas, respectively.

At the forum for the outreach programmes, the stakeholders are able to deliberate on industry issues. It is a feedback mechanism to the Commission. It should be noted that key issues discussed at the forum have translated to policies at the Commission and also served as the basis for further regulatory intervention by the Commission. To date we have held 64 editions of TCP, 44 COP events and 4 TCM outings.

Current developments and the future ahead

What is paramount to us at the NCC is to have a telecom industry that is robust, vibrant and efficient, and which will be an impetus for greater economic development of the country. We are trying to promote an industry that will fully support the Mr. President's transformation agenda.

Permit me here to inform you of recent activities that will impact significantly on the future of the industry. The SIM Card Registration has just ended. At the moment there is a harmonization of the entire process to ensure that only the right and clean data gets into the consolidated data infrastructure. Those yet unregistered can take advantage of the harmonization window.

Number Portability will soon commence as the Commission recently licensed the consortium of Interconnect/ Saab Grintek/ Telcordia for the exercise. We have set our eyes on Mobile Banking while the next big thing is the Broadband Initiative that we are working on. Broadband is central to the development of any country and the Nigerian government is ready to promote the growth in order to take voice and data access to all ends of the country.

Our Commitment

We are committed to the growth and total transformation of the industry. It is my belief that in the next ten years there will be adequate broadband facilities available in the industry, more investments, more revenue to government, social security, more employment, and improvement in socio-economic infrastructure, etc, that will be a strong foundation upon which a viable telecom services will be built for the future.

Let me again thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for being part of the celebrations. We pray for more moments like this.

Thank you and God bless.

DR Eugene Juwah,

Lagos, October 12, 2011