

**A PAPER PRESENTED BY THE EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NCC), ENGR ERNEST NDUKWE AT THE NIGERIAN GUILD OF EDITORS CONFERENCE, HOLDING IN KADUNA FROM APRIL 2 – 5, 2009**

***ICT REVOLUTION AND VISION 2020: THE POSITION OF THE NIGERIAN EDITOR***

Let me thank the organisers of this conference, the Nigerian Guild of Editors, for this great moment to share my thoughts with you on what I consider a very relevant topic, *ICT Revolution and Vision 2020: The Position of the Nigerian Editor*.

When the Federal Government came up with the Vision 2020 package to revamp the economy of the country and put it on forward gear, the global economic meltdown was nowhere close in the horizon, the world was not facing as much uncertainty as it is today; and coming closer home, there was no panic in the financial sector nor was the crash of the Stock market envisaged.

But within a twinkle of an eye things seemed to have heated up and matters quickly came to a head beholding on all of us the need to be more circumspect in our transactions and taking decisions that will influence cutting of costs.

To every sector however, one stimulus is needed: adopting the right technology. But more specifically one area that technology can play a very visible role is in the media. So it could readily be assumed that a good percentage of members of the Guild of editors here this morning are already tech savvy, using it to enhance their trade, cut cost, remain current

and be connected to the global community regularly.

Whether you are in the print or electronic media, the advantages that adoption of ICTs as tools of trade brings are common factors, and they make life and our profession very exciting and interesting.

I will now wish to discuss and quickly run through the Agenda of the Federal Government; what my organisation, the Nigerian Communications Commission has contributed in keeping that vision alive and what indeed has to be the larger vision of the Nigerian Journalist who must master the changing faces of technology, master new tools and develop new income streams in the face of reducing advertising revenue, and dwindling number of readers and viewing audiences that are being lost to new media appeals. How will the picture of the Nigerian media be if the Agenda failed?

### **Seven Point Agenda in Retrospect**

The Seven Point Agenda consists of cardinal focus areas to tackle problems that have always been there and bring development closer to the Nigerian people wherever they may live. Specifically, the Agenda includes: Critical Infrastructure, The Niger Delta, Food Security, Human Capital Development, Land Tenure Changes and Home Ownership, National Security and Intelligence, and Wealth Creation. Well handled the Agenda can take the country out of under-development to a frontline nation by 2020.

ICTs fall under Critical Infrastructure. The plan of the administration is that by 2020 everyone in Nigeria have access to modern, affordable and good quality Communications facilities. There is no longer any question whether this is possible. What has happened in the sector in the past eight years

bear enough testimony.

A very important role reserved for us as journalists and media personalities would be to help in proper dissemination of the efforts of government by selling this programme to Nigerians through our various organisations. It is our collective responsibility to do so and ensure that people get the right information at the right time.

### **Developmental Journalism?**

The question that will necessary follow our efforts is what manner of journalism would enable us assist the efforts of government? Should we say Developmental Journalism – a genre of journalism which focuses on conditions in developing nations and ways to help improve those conditions or the other type which involves a collaborative relationship by government with media practitioners to ensure that government efforts at helping to improve situations are well documented and reported?

Some school of thought says the latter could put strings on the independence of the media and would always be repudiated by the practitioners themselves. What is obvious however is there has to be a common platform on which media practitioners and government must relate so as to tackle the issues that confront their people. There is no doubt that what will fascinate and excite the Nigerian government is to hold firmly to development journalism and ensure that Nigerians buy into the Seven Point Agenda of the Yaradua Administration.

How can the media play their role without technology? To narrow it down how can the administration achieve this without deploying modern communications technologies or what would usually be termed ICT –

Information Communications Technology?

## **TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN NIGERIA**

By mid 2001, Nigeria had only about 400,000 connected telephone lines and just 25,000 analogue mobile lines. Total teledensity stood at a paltry 0.4 lines per 100 inhabitants. Connection costs were prohibitively high and waiting time for fixed lines ran into years. Mobile phone usage was only available and affordable to just a privileged few

Today, owing to several factors including government sector reform policy, a stable regulatory regime, the worldwide trend of rapid development in telecommunications and information technology and the huge potential of the Nigerian market, the story is now very different. Over the years, the NCC has licensed Digital mobile operators, Fixed wireless Access Operators, Long Distance Operators, Internet Service Providers, a National Carrier and Unified services operators; to promote competition in all segments of the market.

This open market approach has promoted rapid deployment of ICT services nationwide, resulting in exponential growth in the number of telephone lines. It is instructive to note that while connected lines only grew at an average of 10,000 lines per annum in the four decades between independence in 1960 and end of 2000, in the ensuing seven years from 2001 to 2008, an average growth rate of 8 million lines per annum was attained. As of end of December 2008, Nigeria had attained 64 million of (fixed & mobile) active-subscriber base. Total teledensity which was less

than 0.4% (0.4 lines per 100 inhabitants) in 2000 soared to 45.7% by end of Dec. 2008 (using the current population figure of 140 million). The active-subscriber figure is estimated to exceed 80 million by end of December 2009.

This growth in lines has been propelled by a boom in private investment in the telecommunications sector. In response to a favorable operating environment in Nigeria, the private sector players have invested over \$12 billion USD into the sector since February 2001. This represents a phenomenal increase in private investment from just about USD\$50 million as at 2000. Today, investment in the telecom sector ranks second only to that in the oil sector.

Increased competition in the market has also pushed down connection fees charged by operators such that fixed line connection costs now range from \$20 to \$100 in 2008, down from as high as over \$700 in 2000. For the mobile operators, the pressure of competition and market forces, forced the operators to reduce their connection rates and today mobile connection is virtually free for anyone who can pay an upfront charge for minutes of call.

The emergence of digital mobile services has led to improvements in efficiency and productivity, reduction in transaction costs, increased service innovation and better quality of life. Over 12,000 persons have been directly employed by the telecom operators and millions of Nigerians are benefiting from indirect employment generated by the operators. The

explosion of telecom services has also created a new class of entrepreneurs who might otherwise have been unemployed. There is a nationwide network of dealers, vendors, sellers GSM accessories and the ubiquitous “umbrella-stand” operators.

Indirect employment has also been created through service contracts to construction firms, research companies, advert agencies, media consultants, etc. In the financial sector, enterprising banks have designed innovative products that leverage the use of mobile phones. The emergence of these large telecom companies, has also led to the return of significant numbers of Nigerians from abroad. These are professionals, who have acquired useful international experience and knowledge, and have been attracted back home.

The progress of the telecom industry in the last seven years is largely as a result of the liberalized market, but even in a liberalized environment, government still has a vital role to play in growing the nation's telecommunications infrastructure and ensuring a competitive environment that will reduce prices and make services more affordable. Government best serves the industry through the establishment of a strong regulatory body. In this regard, the role of the Nigerian Communications Commission has been to encourage competition, remove barriers to market entry, ensure interconnection of new operators with incumbents, monitor tariffs and quality of service, protect consumer rights and ensure the provision of telephone services for all.

The government of Nigeria is committed to positioning Nigeria among the top information-rich economies of the world within the next few years, and dedicated to providing the right environment that will attract more investment into the ICT sector.

Certain key technology areas such as wireless systems, optic fibre transmission systems and Internet/Broadband have been identified for particular attention. Digital Wireless and Mobile Communications Systems have helped Nigeria leapfrog into the circle of the world's top ten countries recording highest mobile subscriber growth.

Nigeria no doubt has cause to celebrate seven years of tremendous growth in the information and communication technologies sector. The celebration however, will only be full when all citizens have access to the vital tool of the information age. We must therefore continue to be aware of the scores of villages and communities in Nigeria that do not still have connections of any sort. They must not be isolated and deprived of the benefits of ICTs. We must strive to include all and exclude none, reach the un-reached and provide for the have-nots in our country. A special intervention vehicle, the Universal Service Provision Fund has been set up to address the peculiar requirements of rural areas, educational institutions and other identified areas of special need.

Telecommunications is an essential infrastructure of the information economy. Countries that lack sufficient access to modern telecommunications networks, find it difficult to be effectively integrated into the global economy. The Nigerian government has therefore provided the

right policy and regulatory environment to attract serious investors and encourage market forces to thrive, all aimed at attracting new sources of capital, accelerating network expansion, improving pricing, enhancing quality of service and introducing new technologies.

## **BENCHMARKING NIGERIA WITH THE WORLD**

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

We therefore live in a global village where ICTs have a direct impact on a nation's ability to improve the economic well being of her people and compete globally. We must therefore ask ourselves how well we have fared in comparison with other regions of the world in providing access to this vital infrastructure for our people. The NCC has continued to take bold measures in order to facilitate the reach of Telecommunications and ICTs even to the rural and remote ends of the country. Different programmes and projects have hitherto been introduced to ensure that a larger section of the society benefits. Some of these projects include the Wire Nigeria Project, WiN, which is aimed at putting fibre optic rings around the country; State Accelerated Broadband Initiative, SABI, which is designed to facilitate speedy rollout of broadband facilities with the private operators; and the Digital Appreciation Programme, DAP, through which the NCC provides computers and internet facilities in Secondary and Tertiary Institutions. Coincidentally, a series of formal launching of the DAP projects

were performed in Kaduna State here penultimate week by the Honourable Minister of State for Communications, Alhaji Ikra Aliyu Bilbis. About 221 schools from different parts of the country have so far benefited from DAP.

### **Availability of New Tools**

What has happened in Nigeria as in other parts of the world is that modern communications, if you like, ICTs have availed us, new tools that have application in all fields of human endeavour. It opens new doors and new opportunities. New income streams are possible and new millionaires are popping up from various ends of the earth. Only recently, Microsoft founder Bill Gates reclaimed his number one position as the richest man on earth after oil and iron ore magnates threatened his position for only a few years. What has become obvious is that across the country, wealth is being reordered and redistributed by ICT. Mobile Banking and electronic money transfers would have been impossible without a robust backbone infrastructure engendered by the recent opening up of the market to competition.

### **Where does the Media benefit?**

What is technology if not properly deployed and used? The various rollout of backbone infrastructure and services that the NCC is fostering are to ensure the various professions are able to benefit. For instance when within reach of the DAP facilities we have provided to schools around the country, the reporter can quickly get into a place, either enjoy the access to an internet cloud with his laptop or simply use the computers available on site to do his job. Or looking at it differently, the reporter is able to take

pictures with his camera phone and send very current news break pictures to his editor.

ICTs have continued to create new possibilities for the modern professional. You can do banking on the move. You can do or read your stories on the go. You can even file in televisions news stories on the move. CNN for example, has taken this technology to new heights, creating i-Report for itinerant phone users. A particular episode involving a young lady and a high ranking security personnel in Lagos last year is a case in point. Most of the pictures that were later published in the newspapers and shown on local and international television channels were taken or recorded with mobile phones.

As we speak the electronic media is going through a life-defining moment in history. The technology is being migrated from analogue to digital thus creating more opportunities for more people. In the new technology one analogue broadcaster could now have the same channel create as many as six channels and thus create heavy need and demand for programming. It means that those who create content will surely become kings, as they say in television parlance. Most countries of the world are ending their migration this year but Nigeria has put a 2012 date. How prepared are the media practitioners and what role are you playing to benefit from the opportunities that will be created?

### **A Converged World of Opportunities**

The converged world of opportunities has also come with its challenges. Even before the economic meltdown that has created its own bogey; the

story of the traditional print media was changing very fast, making it difficult for proprietors to depend on traditional revenue channels like advertising and copy sales. The readership was also shifting and growing across borders. While most people would rely on the hard copies in the past, today it is very easily possible for somebody living in Nigeria to be notified by his relation in America that there is a story about him in the papers. The reason being that modern communication has made the world a small village; people wake up in the US much earlier than we do to read nearly all the Nigerian papers on the internet.

This also means a different way of canvassing and prospecting for business. While the market would usually be Nigeria, the market created by technology is a global one with a global audience and international marketers.

I must commend the ingenuity of the Nigerian media practitioners who without waiting for backbone build out incurred heavy costs, including investments in VSAT to run their various offices across the country. Nearly all the newspapers, magazines and broadcast channels that I know have their websites where a lot of activities take place. Just reading through them is possible to see those who are in real business. But no matter what is happening, no matter how small the internet section of your business, it is the way of the future. It is also important that you are being read and heard internationally.

In fact from the design of most of the sites, it is clear they already know that theirs has become an endangered and receding business thus making it compelling to put on a life jacket that would become very valuable in the

business terrain ahead.

Daily a number of sites pop up to serve as new competition and knock the idea home that time for old media to disappear has come. Only this week, Detroit Free Press and Detroit News have taken a bold step to deliver hard copies only three times a week, days determined to be high readership. The paper only product is shifting attention to the internet where the subscribers will have to access the news.

Internet publishing and webcasting have become very gainful variables and there is the absolute need for the modern editor to master the tools of this new publishing business.

Writing on New Media New Journalism, a fellow wrote: "I used to feel confident that my undergraduate English journalism and communications courses would prepare me well for an editorial career. But it wasn't until I gained real-world experience through internships at several media companies that I realised classroom knowledge just wasn't *gonna* cut it. A wild variety of technical skills, including Web and video production, digital photography and graphic design are now necessary to remain capable in the age of digital media."

Also looking at the advent of the new media, Uche Nworah writing on *The Impact of the Internet on Journalism Practice in Nigeria*, from the UK said: "Gone are the days of notepads and blue pens, tools of the trade that now belong to the past. Although the under-resourced nature of some Nigerian media organizations have meant that some journalists have continued to cling to such relics of the past just like the old journalism and golden years

of *Iwe Irohin* (Nigeria's first newspaper) and the Nnamdi Azikiwe owned *Nigerian Pilot*.”

This will not be the portion of the Editors gathered before me this morning.

Let's revisit the theme of the paper, *ICT Revolution and Vision 2020: The Place of the Nigerian Editor*.

You already have a burden on you which is to help disseminate government handling of the Vision 2020 Project. Another burden is to survive the crunchy blow of the global economic meltdown and still be there by 2020. Will you be there to be one of those who will tell the story, just like Ted Turner of CNN would say: On the last day CNN would be there to cover the great day, sing Nearer My God to Thee and sign off?

### **Going for Survival**

Do you have the guts for that kind of bravura?

Here is what I think you need for the journey: a good knowledge of ICT tools properly shopped to get the best bargain at the best price to reduce cost of doing business, unbiased acceptance of the impact and strength of new media, diversification of income streams to include new channels of trade, a readiness to play in all the sectors like print, internet, broadcasting and general entertainment like some of you are already doing.

You will need all these tools to write the success of Vision 2020. In doing so you are also writing your success story.

The days and years ahead are going to be very tough. The meltdown may

hurt more and prices of oil may further dip. The survival of your organization will be threatened real time. Because when conditions hit hard people forget the need to read and the advertiser would want to keep all his money, as they say, save for a rainy day.

In this journey, you will need God on your side. You will also need the appropriate technology tools to make your life much easier and better.

But in everything you must let journalism live so that it can continue to chronicle the daily life of our people.