

NIGERIAN TELECOM DEVELOPMENT LECTURE (NITDEL)
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TELECOM IN THE SERVICE OF THE MODERN SOCIETY

PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, major advances in ICTs and the rapid growth of global Digital Telephony networks, the Internet and Broadband services have transformed businesses and markets and generated significant wealth and economic growth in many countries. They have also empowered individuals and communities with new ways of doing things, as well as transformed our ways of learning and sharing knowledge.

The digital revolution has progressed to usher in an advanced phase of the information age with computer networking solutions that enable resources and information sharing even on a worldwide basis. The interconnection of computers, based on the internet protocol, has brought about greater efficiency and better information sharing and management.

This revolution also means that constraints of time and distance have been virtually eliminated. Clearly, ICT is driving the global economy. People, businesses and communities with ready access to information technologies are better equipped to participate actively in the global economy.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the ICT Industry has been boosted in the last eight years with about 68 million telephone lines connected by July 2009. When compared to a total subscriber level of less than 0.5M in July 2001, the growth has no doubt been impressive. This rapid growth can be attributed largely to the enabling and conducive environment for investment with respect to government policy and regulatory regime. Market reform has helped to accelerate investment flow into this vital sector, resulting in the rapid roll out of networks. The rapid rate of deployment means faster access to telecommunications facilities and consequently a faster pace of national economic development and growth.

Today there are mobile signals in all the states of the federation; a number of our major highways are covered by mobile services; several rural communities have access to one form of telecom service or the other; our law enforcement communities have the necessary tools to keep in touch with their bases; medical practitioners have had their work facilitated by telecommunications services; businesses (large and small) have been empowered by these vital ICT tools; the Nigerian economy has been impacted positively through job creation, improved business performance, and timely information exchange.

The wide-availability of digital mobile services has also led to improvements in efficiency and productivity, reduction in transaction costs, increased service innovation and better quality of life. Close to 15,000 persons have been directly employed by the various operating companies in Nigeria; while

several hundreds of thousands of other Nigerians are benefiting from indirect employment generated by the operators.

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

Indirect employment has also been created through contracts to construction firms, research companies, advert agencies, media consultants, etc. In the financial sector, apart from the increased patronage from the operating companies seeking funding for network rollout and expansion, enterprising banks have designed innovative products that leverage the use of mobile phones. The growth that has been recorded in the sector, has also led to employment 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 eight 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 independent regulatory body. In this regard, the role of the Nigerian Communications Commission has been to encourage competition, remove barriers to market entry, oversee interconnection of new operators with incumbents, monitor

tariffs and quality of service, protect consumer rights and ensure the provision of telecom services for all.

Telecom in the service of Society

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. Therefore the Nigerian government has, over the past eight years been providing the right 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.

There is no doubt that without ICT a nation or person cannot reach her full potential in today's world. Two new reports, by the World Bank (Information and Communication for development report, 2006) and World Economic Forum (Global Information Technology report, 2005-2006), underline the fact that economic development depends on overall progress in a country's ICT sector, and that, without such progress, both economies and companies suffer. Thus the World Banks study finds that firms that use ICT grow faster, and are more productive and profitable than those that do not. Access to broadband has also been identified as key to keeping small businesses competitive in any modern economy.

Even for the poor and rural population, investments in ICT have been known to help reduce the burden of inadequate infrastructure particularly in the area of transportation. Rural areas, where the vast majority of the world's

population lives, as well as a significant proportion of poor people, tend to be greatly underserved by essential infrastructure. ICT can enable them to save both time and money if they are able to access information and services closer to home. ICT facilities are critical for local producers to coordinate activities, linkage with national and global opportunities as well as being able to withstand competition in their domestic markets. Survival and growth in these contexts increasingly depend upon their innovativeness, capacity to learn and their effectiveness in using and absorbing technology, which is becoming essential factor in production, distribution, marketing and planning processes at all levels.

Even in the case of the “informal sector”, the source of livelihoods for most of the world’s poor and for a large percentage of women, ICT can assist with the delivery of social services, with micro-finance, with strengthening coping strategies and income generation thus contributing to general sustainable development.

The NCC is also currently working on some programs that will make the use of ICT applications commonplace in government, schools and businesses.

In Education, the use of information and communication technologies continues to expand exponentially, bringing unprecedented opportunities for achieving greater educational access and success. Given this potential, the NCC has invested substantial resources to providing facilities in schools, colleges and universities around the country, thus increasing access to IT education, improving literacy and improving the quality of education generally.

Broadband and the future of Connectivity

As we strive to measure up with the rest of the world, it is important for Nigeria to keep pace with technological trends in this fast moving industry. One obvious trend is that the technological borders between telecommunications, IT and broadcasting is blurring at a quickening pace. Another fact is the trend towards the realization of a ubiquitous network society where people can access and exchange information freely, at any time, from anywhere, and from any appliance in converged ICT environment.

Two major technologies, digital mobile phones and the internet are driving a new level of connectivity that were hitherto unknown and are enabling various transactions to be carried out over high capacity modern networks on an anywhere, anytime basis. The content flowing over such modern networks includes not only e-mails and telephone calls, but also music, movies and television, demanding huge amounts of bandwidth. Broadband enables us to use one universal network to support any and all media. The mobility and freedom offered by wireless networks cuts the communications cords tying us to specific locations. Our ability to economically deliver broadband to locations not connected by fixed wires in locations such as remote villages, deserts, trains, beach huts and ocean liners means the network can finally go wherever it's needed. The Anywhere Network is a seamless network with broadband capacity and wireless ubiquity.

Connectivity in Nigeria like in most African countries is heavily biased towards wireless networks. Fast Broadband deployment for us must therefore necessarily be on a mobile platform. This is why Nigeria was ahead of many

countries of the world like India and China in issuing licenses for 3G services. When fully deployed nationally, 3G networks together with other networks based on the wide band CDMA technology will drive the nation's broadband penetration into the future.

Conclusion

The Federal Government as well as the State Governments declared their commitment to positioning Nigeria among the top twenty economies of the world by 2020, and are of necessity, required to be seen to be committed to providing the right policy and regulatory environment that will attract massive investment into the various sectors of the economy. The Telecom sector leads the way in this regard and has achieved international recognition for Nigeria as the leading country in Africa and among the top ten in the world as a result of this commitment.

Thank you.

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August 7, 2009