

Conference on Accessibility of Telecom Services To Persons Living With Disabilities (PWDs)



Keynote Address

BY

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AT

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Protocols

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this important gathering to discuss a very important subject “the **Accessibility of Telecom Services to Persons Living with Disabilities (PWDs)**. This Conference will afford the Commission the opportunity to evolve policies and regulatory guidelines that will address the concerns of these people with respect to ICTs accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, ICT is a vital element in the infrastructure of nations and economies, no modern economy can be sustained today without an adequate and pervasive ICT infrastructure. The impact of ICT in development covers various aspects of a nation’s socio-economic life.

In the new world order that is driven by knowledge and exchange of information and ideas, surviving in today’s information age therefore depends on access to national and global information technology networks.

In order to join the information rich countries of the world, the Government of Nigeria pursued a continuous, progressive and aggressive market liberalization policy that has made Nigeria perhaps the most liberalized telecoms market in Africa.

Since 2001, the telecommunications industry had experienced exponential growth, as well as rapid progress in policy and technological development, resulting in an increasingly competitive industry which has reduced and continues to shrink the nation’s digital divide. Today, we are not talking of Universal Access as we did more than 10years ago, but we are focusing and striving to achieve Universal Service.

ICT AND THE CHALLENGED GROUP

These Special Groups of Persons constitute 25% of the total Nigerian populace and therefore need special attention by the industry.

ICTs and Accessibility for Persons living with Disabilities ‘ concerns the design and supply of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) products and services with particular regard to ensuring that they can be used by people with disabilities and others (e.g. aged people) for whom the technical features of ICTs can pose barriers to their usage. The full spectrum of ICTs needs to be e-Accessible if everyone is to have equal opportunities for participation in everyday social and economic life in the Information Society. This includes ICT products (such as mobile phones, computers and the wide range of other ICT devices now part of everyday life), ICT-based network services (such as telephony and TV), the many web-based and phone-based services that are in everyday use today (such as online government and shopping, call centres and so on) and other ICT-based modes of service delivery (such as self-service terminals like ATMs and ticket machines).

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

The key objective of today’s conference is to discuss the facilitation of participation of the Telecommunication Industry in the Lagos State Special People’s Law to improve the accessibility of Persons living with Disabilities.

GLOBAL TREND ON ICT ACCESSIBILITY

Historical perspective toward the Disability Convention

The commitment of the international community to promote the rights of persons with disabilities is deeply rooted in the goals of the United Nations. It is the realization of the Charter's vision of a just and peaceful world and better standards of life in larger freedoms.

This decision to elaborate a convention did not take place "overnight." During the 1970s a substantial evolution changed the thinking about disability issues, moving from a "medical" to a human-rights-based model. This evolution manifested itself in a number of UN initiatives that embraced the growing international concept of human rights for persons with disabilities and equalization of opportunities for them. In the 1980s further progress was made by the United Nations. Through adoption of the World Program of Action concerning Disabled Persons (in 1982), the international community redefined disability as part of the international development and human rights agenda. To advance international efforts after this important momentum, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) was adopted as a major outcome of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1982-1993). The international policy framework for disability-rights has been further advanced by a series of United Nations development conferences and their respective five year reviews, the Millennium Development Goals, and other relevant international commitments and efforts for their implementation.

Within this framework, the United Nations General Assembly Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities was created in 2001.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON DISABILITY

A new chapter of history was written by those who have been struggling in pursuit of universal human rights for persons with disabilities. With resolution 61/106 of 13 December 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a milestone in the history of the UN, being the first comprehensive human rights.

The Convention – throughout its 50 articles and the Optional Protocol -reaffirms that every person with disabilities should enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it codifies a comprehensive set of rights, ranging from the civil and political to the economic, social and cultural spheres.

The focus then will shift to States Parties and their national institutions to fulfill their obligations proscribed in the Convention.

It has been said that the Convention will positively affect the lives of more than 650 million people with disabilities, but it will have a profound effect on many more, such as families and friends who should also be mentioned. Consequently, we are talking about billions that will and should be touched by a Convention that will encompass not only the rights of persons with disabilities but the society of the world.

THE NIGERIAN NATION AND THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

Chapter II SECTION 16 (2) of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that “The state shall direct its policy towards ensuring: (d) **“welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens”** .

Furthermore, the Nigerian Communications Act, 2003 provides for persons with special needs in Section 1 (h) **“ensure that the needs of the disabled and elderly persons are taken into consideration in the provision of communications services”**

Also section 15(2) of the Consumer Code of Practice Regulation (CCPR) 2007, states that **“Licensees shall comply with any specific obligations that the Commission may impose on operators in respect of special services of service arrangements for subscribers with disabilities.**

Again, Code 40 of CCPR, 2007 provides thus: **“ Licensees are encouraged to make adequate provision to ensure that people with physical disabilities or other special needs are able to access their complaint handling processes, including ensuring that consumers can be easily represented by their authorized representative in order to make a complaint”**

Recently, Senate of the Federal Republic passed a private Bill sponsored by distinguished **Senator Bode Olajumoke** entitled **“The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Bill 2009”** The Bill seeks to make it compulsory for government, individual and public organizations to ensure that in all considerations, whether it is public buildings, or they are providing facilities, that they provide for the disabled in our midst.

NCC'S INITIATIVES ON PERSONS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES - CHALLENGED GROUP

In recognition of the requirements of the Act regarding this group of people and also in line with the NCC's Consumer Centric approach to regulation, the Commission has taken a number of initiatives geared toward assisting persons with Special Needs and the Elderly in the areas of telecoms service provisioning. Lately, the Commission held fact finding meetings with the Challenged Group to establish areas of difficulty, expectations from Service Providers and for the Regulator to initiate friendly policy that will address their concerns.

Similarly, an Industry Consultative Meeting on Service Provisioning with respect to the Challenged Group was held in July, 2008 in Lagos. The aim of the meeting was to sensitize both the operating companies and equipment manufacturers on the urgent need to jointly address the challenges confronting Persons with Special Needs in our society.

The Commission's investigations revealed that current practices by the operating companies do not sufficiently address the concerns of this group of people in our society, particularly in the following areas:

- Deactivation of audio/voice prompt facility used to check credit balance
- Difficulty with surfing the websites of service providers
- Lack of disability desk at Consumer Care Centers
- Non supportive access platform to Consumer Care Centers

- Incorporation of teletype systems into service provision by Telecom Operators

As a follow up to that meeting the Commission, in its effort to ensure connectivity to all Nigerians and particularly persons with Special Needs organized a National Summit with international quintessence tagged “**ICTs and Accessibility for Persons with Special Needs and the Elderly**” on the 4th of November, 2009 at the Shehu Musa Yar’adua centre, Abuja.

The National Summit was aimed at bringing stakeholders together to ensure an all inclusive service delivery strategy to all Nigerians, with the aim of developing **policy guidelines** and **regulations** which would guide industry players.

Consequently, a high degree of confidence has been built into Persons with Special Needs and the Elderly in the Country.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It should be noted that an assistive technology is useful to a wide range of people with and without difficulties and impairments.

At the end of this conference, we will be concerned with what roles the **Government, Regulator, Operating** companies and the **Equipment manufacturers** play in the new dispensation?

CONCLUSION

To holistically bridge the existing digital divides, we should embark on a number of initiatives that will transform our society from “**Social Exclusion**” to an all **Inclusive Society** that will

guarantee level playing ground to all regardless of age or disabilities. Our gathering of today is one of such deliberate and conscious effort towards actualizing an all inclusive society.

We must leave this meeting with new commitments, with a new purpose, a paradigm shift that will make our societies more holistic, more integral and inclusive. As mentioned earlier, it is a revolutionary proposition: to change our societies.

Wishing you a fruitful deliberation.

Thank you for your attention.

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Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC).

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