

# **KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY ENGR. ABRAHAM OSHADAMI, EXECUTIVE COMMISSIONER, TECHNICAL SERVICES, NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NCC) AT THE GSMA MINISTERIAL PROGRAMME, MWC AFRICA, KIGALI 2025**

**Theme: Modernising Regulations for the Digital Era**

## **Opening Remarks**

Distinguished colleagues, Ministers, regulators, industry leaders, and partners.

It is a privilege to be here at the GSMA Ministerial Programme at MWC Africa here in Kigali, a city that symbolises Africa's digital ambition. Our theme today—Modernising Regulations for the Digital Era goes to the heart of the challenge we face as regulators and policymakers.

We are operating in a globalised environment where technology is reshaping economies and societies, often faster than regulation can adapt. Legacy frameworks, once designed for predictable markets, now struggle in an era of dynamism typified by AI, fintech, satellite broadband, cloud services, and platform ecosystems. When regulation becomes too rigid, with high compliance costs and outdated assumptions, it can hold back the very innovation, investment, and inclusion it was meant to advance.

## **From Command-and-Control to Empowerment**

For decades, regulation in telecoms was largely command-and-control. It was a cocktail of rigid rules, heavy compliance, and punitive enforcement. That model sufficed when markets were smaller and technologies slower to evolve, but it struggles to cope with the scale and dynamism of today's digital ecosystem.

Rigidity of regulation risks stifling flexibility, driving up costs, and generating resistance among operators. Even more damaging, it fails to build the trust and transparency required for sustainable outcomes.

That is why at the NCC, we are rethinking our approach to regulation not by prescribing behaviour in ever-finer detail, but by empowering markets, consumers, investors, and civil society through proactive information disclosure and transparency. In a sector that is competition driven, transparency has become a far more powerful tool than sanctions alone.

Our approach is a response to the realities of our time. The digital economy has transformed how people live, work, and interact. Boundaries that once defined commerce, education, and governance have been blurred by the digital space today;

meaning that our regulations touch every aspect of daily life, from the classroom to the marketplace, from rural farmlands to global financial networks.

- Today, a teenager in Lagos can stream video content from anywhere in the world, pay for airtime via a banking app, consult an AI tutor, and apply for a passport requiring digital identity verification—all in one sitting.
- An Irish Potato farmer in Musanze, here in Rwanda can monitor environmental conditions such as the weather forecast, receive agronomic advice on best agricultural practices and pest identification, secure digital loans, and access crop prices—all through mobile platforms.

This convergence illustrates both the promise and the challenge of the digital age. As services overlap and ecosystems merge, regulators can no longer afford to operate in silos. If we persist with sector-by-sector rules, we risk creating uneven burdens—where some operators are weighed down by multiple layers of compliance while new digital players operate with minimal oversight. Such asymmetry not only distorts competition but also discourages the very investments needed to sustain growth.

## **NCC's Response: Future-Ready Regulation**

At the Nigerian Communications Commission, our response to the innovation and dynamic nature of the digital economy is hinged on the levers of transparency, collaboration, and adaptability. I will go into detail on each:

### **1. Transparency as a Driver of Trust and Competition**

To drive practices that ensure voluntary compliance, we are shifting our approach to one that emphasizes information disclosure and increased accountability, by opening up industry activities and data to public scrutiny.

Take for example, our Major Network Outage Incident Reporting Portal which monitors and track significant service disruptions. Through this platform, operators are required to report details of major outages, including their causes, affected areas, restoration timelines, and, where necessary, compensation for consumers in cases where outages last beyond 24 hours. In addition, the Commission has issued a directive mandating mobile network operators and major internet service providers to notify consumers of any significant service disruptions as well as planned maintenance activities. This initiative is aimed at keeping consumers better informed about their networks while strengthening transparency within the sector.

In July 2025, the Commission launched its 2025 Corporate Governance Guidelines for the Telecommunications Industry—a framework that is designed to strengthen transparency, accountability and resilience in the industry. The Guidelines emphasizes balanced board structures for operators, enhanced internal controls, and

rigorous risk management practices, while also addressing critical challenges such as cybersecurity threats, climate risks, and operational inefficiencies. With effective and stronger governance boards in the telecommunications industry, operators will be more resilient and able to offer improved services to licensees.

Another initiative that is in line with the Commission's regulatory approach of transparency, accountability, and information disclosure, is our recently launched NCC Coverage Maps. These maps provide clear insights into location-level network availability and performance for consumers using crowdsourced data, enabling them to make informed choices.

This year, we will be launching a series of public reports to promote transparency, accountability, and data-driven insights into Nigeria's telecom sector. The first set focuses on three key areas: Network Performance & 5G Opportunity, Comparative Assessment of Network Quality of Service (QoS) and Quality of Experience (QoE), and Device Model Adoption & Performance Benchmarking. These reports provide an overview of network performance, 5G opportunities, device trends, and user experiences, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Through these reports and other transparency initiatives, we aim to foster informed decision-making, encourage healthy competition, and support a more equitable and efficient telecom ecosystem.

## 2. Collaboration Across Sectors and Borders

In this age, where the digital ecosystem cuts across diverse sectors regulators must adopt an approach of collaborative governance. Nigeria's journey shows what is possible when regulators see themselves as co-enablers, and not gatekeepers. As the regulator of the telecommunications sector in Nigeria, we understand the importance of collaboration in ensuring that our operators deliver quality service to consumers.

For instance, we work closely with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to secure digital payment systems and ensure that when mobile numbers are reassigned or churned, banks and telecoms are aligned to prevent fraud. In similar vein we also collaborate with the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), the agency responsible for managing Nigeria's national identity database and providing the National Identification Number (NIN), to ensure that every SIM is tied to a verified identity, thus strengthening the foundation of our digital economy.

In June 2024, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu signed a Presidential Order designating the assets and infrastructure of 13 key sectors of the economy, including telecommunications, as Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII). To operationalize this mandate, the NCC is working closely with the Office of the

National Security Adviser (ONSA) to safeguard telecom infrastructure against vandalism and sabotage. In addition, we are deepening collaboration with state governments to ensure these critical assets receive the necessary local protection and preservation.

This collaboration also extends to the work we are doing with states to harmonize Right of Way charges and streamline site approvals in their jurisdictions.

With the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), we are harmonising consumer protection across converged markets; with the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), we are enabling sustainable power for rural base stations, driving connectivity into underserved areas; and with the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), we are aligning rules where telecoms and broadcasting now overlap.

International collaborations are not left out too: Beyond Nigeria, we are active in the Smart Africa Alliance, WATRA, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, and importantly the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) where we are learning from peers and shaping the global digital agenda.

This collaborative approach has already delivered tangible results—from harmonised digital payments and reduced fraud risk, to faster fibre deployment and better consumer safeguards.

### **3. Adaptability in the Face of Emerging Technologies**

As I have said earlier today, the digital era is dynamic. Low-Earth Orbit satellites, direct-to-device connectivity, and artificial intelligence are no longer distant possibilities as we would have described them years ago; today, they are realities knocking at our door.

In line with the Commission's mandate to foster a dynamic, competitive and investor-friendly telecommunications environment, we are in the process of introducing our General Authorisation Framework which provides a licensing pathway for licensing proposals that the Commission is yet to issue license categories for. The General Authorisation Framework allows for Proof-of-Concept projects, establishes a Regulatory Sandbox; a controlled space where new ideas can be tested in real-world conditions and an Interim Service Authorisation; a temporary regulatory authorisation to provide service until the development of a license category.

Nigeria's Spectrum Roadmap, which will ensure that our policies are forward-looking, technology-neutral, and investment-friendly is being finalised. This roadmap will unlock spectrum for 5G densification, satellite broadband, and the innovations yet to come. A clear roadmap for spectrum, which is the lifeblood of

telecommunications provides certainty for operators, investors and innovators to plan and deploy next-generation technologies.

Very soon, we will publish Nigeria's first Telecom Cybersecurity Framework. This framework will strengthen operator resilience, safeguard consumer trust, and align our ecosystem with global norms at a time when cyber risks are growing daily.

And we are digitising oversight itself, using data, not just rules, to guide interventions.

## **The NCC's Regulatory Evolution**

The NCC's story of regulatory evolution is best understood through the lens of ITU's Generations of Regulation model.

- First we began in the G1 category, where regulation follows a strict command-and-control model.
- Then we moved to G2, where we began opening up the markets through liberalisation.
- By the 2000s, we had advanced to the G3 model, enabling investment and access through unified licensing.
- Today, we are firmly in G4, practicing collaborative regulation that links telecoms to national socio-economic priorities, while emphasizing data-driven regulation, consumer empowerment, public-private sector collaboration and multi-stakeholder governance.

But our ambition is clear: to become a G5 regulator—where digital transformation is enabled by holistic, collaborative, and future-ready governance. According to the ITU benchmark, Nigeria is already in the advanced threshold of G5 readiness, alongside countries like Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, and South Africa. But we know the journey to G5 is not a box-ticking exercise—it is about creating regulation that is agile, inclusive, and trusted.

## **Conclusion: Fit-for-Digital, Fit-for-Future**

Colleagues, modernising regulation is about smarter rules that are transparent, coherent, and pro-innovation.

It means reducing asymmetries so competition is fair.

It means streamlining compliance so operators can invest, not drown in paperwork.

It means safeguarding consumers, not just by sanction, but by empowering them with choice and data.

And it means enabling investment by making regulatory environments predictable, trusted, and globally aligned.

At the NCC, we no longer see ourselves as regulators of telecoms alone. We are shapers of ecosystems, enablers of inclusion, and custodians of trust in Nigeria's digital economy.

If we succeed together—as regulators, policymakers, and industry leaders—Africa will not only adapt to the digital era. We will define it.

**Thank you.**