

LEVERAGING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR
SOUTH EAST ECONOMIC RENAISSANCE

BEING PAPER DELIVERED

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Let me first thank the Sun Newspapers for convening this very important summit that affords us the opportunity to reflect on the status of economic development in the South East and to consider the best options for the full exploitation of the resources available to improve the well being of society.. I believe that it is in the place of good leaders at all levels to always consider, design and implement programs that would lead to the socio-economic development of their people. Indeed Nigeria is a blessed country that can rise to become a great country if her leaders can, with honesty and sincerity, galvanise the people to release their full potential.

I am therefore delighted to be here to discuss the role Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can play in the development of this region that is blessed with very enterprising, resourceful and industrious people.

It has been widely established that the economic development of a nation can be accelerated by improvements in the country's ICT infrastructure. That is to say that no modern economy can thrive without an integral information technology and telecommunications infrastructure. This is because ICTs provides a veritable platform for development across the social, economic and other sectors if well harnessed. ICTs not only contribute to the development of education, health and governance, but are also key enablers of sustainable human development in a more general sense.

It is this realisation of the importance of ICTs to human and economic development in the modern society that propelled the UN General Assembly through Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) to endorse the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in

Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. The main objective was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundation of an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake.

Also, a recent publication by the Global Knowledge Partnership organisation based in Malaysia had also concluded in a publication that ‘the power of ICTs can most effectively be harnessed through the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders in all sectors of society, government, civil society and private sector. Only by combining their particular competencies and resources can the massive roll out of innovative ICT-based services and the scale up of development interventions be achieved, all of which are necessary to make a lasting developmental impact”.

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 and full exploitation of such access for enhancing human life generally.

ICT DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Back home, telecommunications networks, are now making it possible for Nigeria to participate in the world economy in ways that simply were not possible in the past – by enabling the people to take fuller advantage of their intellectual, human, material and cultural resources. There is no doubt today that deployment and usage ICT resources in the South Eastern and indeed many part of today’s Nigeria, has been boosted by the quantum leap that has been witnessed in the telecom sector in the past seven years. Within this period, subscriptions to telephone services has risen from just about 400,000 to the current status of about 59 Million active connected lines. This is in addition to rapidly expanding deployment of internet and broadband facilities. This growth and advancement in telecommunication within the last seven years has improved the nation’s

teledensity from 0.4% to about 42% and has positively impacted all sectors of the nation's economy.

Nigeria has thus become one of the world's fastest growing telecommunications markets. These achievements can be attributed largely to the foresight by government and the enabling and conducive environment with respect to government policies and regulatory regime. The Nigerian Government has thus proven its commitment to promoting a regulatory environment that is independent, fair, transparent and predictable within nationally and globally defined agenda for sustainable development.

ICTs IN DEVELOPMENT

Computer networking has taken over localized computing all over the world to allow for resources and information sharing. The interconnection of computers and internet has brought about greater efficiency and better information sharing and management.

Clearly, ICT is driving the new global economy. People, businesses and communities with ready access to information technologies are better equipped to participate actively in the global economy.

Nigeria can leverage the tremendous benefits of ICTs to improve on the performance of various sectors of the economy.

Health Care

The development of mobile communications, teleconferencing facilities and multi-media capabilities of telecommunications, has been of immense benefit especially in healthcare delivery. By employing these technologies, limitations traditionally imposed by spatial differences between medical specialists, medical centres and patients have been eliminated.

It has also now become a common phenomenon for doctors on call duty not to be restricted anymore to their homes waiting for a call or within the coverage distance of a local paging facility. Today the doctor on call can move freely with his mobile phone and can easily be reached, in case of emergency, to give initial instructions on how to manage the patient while he is on his way to the hospital if necessary.

With broadband facility becoming available in Nigeria, video conferencing facilities will enable doctors and hospital staff in one part of the country, or in any part of the world for that matter, consult with other specialists in any part other world on any medical case of interest.

Education

With ICT facility, a number of educational institutions are not only able to run courses concurrently, but lectures can also be received simultaneously, as they are being delivered, in different lecture rooms that are located in places far away from the actual points of delivery.

The Internet has also become a Universal Library, where books, journals, articles and other materials can be sourced right within the confines of individual's homes in any part of the Globe.

At many Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and secondary schools, students, lecturers, etc, are afforded the benefits of constant and easy access to updated information on different subjects via the internet.

ICT also enables private tuition and learning outside the class room. Open Universities and distance learning facilities depend heavily on ICTs to succeed. The South East is known for unsatisfactory male enrollment in schools. With the cooperation and support of the governments in this part of the country, the impact of this negative trend can be reduced with the application of ICTs. This

is because ICTs can enable them receive education even while gainfully employed.

General Development

The place of telecommunications and information technology in the development of businesses and communities is generally appreciated. At all levels, concerted efforts are being made at improving access to telecommunications services in the urban and rural areas, hence the various Urban and Rural Communications and Universal Service initiatives.

ICT's enhances businesses generally. With ICTs entrepreneurs are able to buy, sell and transact businesses from locations far from their homes and locations

The availability of ICT services to all communities is essential to Nigeria. With about 80% of our population located in rural areas, improvement in communications links to our rural areas will bring the following benefits to the populace:

- i. Improvement of the living conditions of the people in the rural areas by allowing them to communicate easily amongst themselves and with relatives, friends and business associates living elsewhere.
- ii. Easier and faster access to up-to-date market and price information thereby assisting farmers and rural-based traders in their businesses.
- iii. More rural businesses and better employment opportunities that can greatly reduce the problem of rural-to-urban migration.
- iv. Better access to agricultural extension services such as prompt information on improved seeds, availability of fertilizers, weather forecasting and pest control.
- v. Improved health services including remote diagnosis and treatment advice.
- vi. More efficient handling of civil emergencies and natural disasters.
- vii. Wider access to education resources, especially through distance learning.

- viii. Easier access to government and wider awareness of government programmes and activities.
- ix. Enhanced security of lives and properties.
- x. Improved patrolling and monitoring of border villages and towns.
- xi. Reduction of rural to urban migration.

Governance and Government service

Governance and the delivery of public services can be performed more efficiently through the use of ICT, which may include mobile/fixed telephony, internet, broadband and wide area networks. ICT opens the door to e-commerce, e-education, e-health, and e-government.

A number of government agencies at both federal and state levels are deploying ICT facilities to improve service delivery, sharing of information, and reduce delay.

The Role of Government in Fast tracking ICT Development

If it has been widely acknowledge that ICT is a base infrastructure for socio-economic development in the modern society, then governments at every level must of necessity be seeking was to encourage faster deployment of ICTs in their states and local governments. Let me therefore enjoin governments of the South East from the State to Local and Community levels to assist the operators in achieving faster network rollout to enable their citizens reap the benefits that accrue from ICTs. The Commission has received reports about some areas of the country where the governments at various levels create bottlenecks in the deployment of ICT facilities by the operators, either by imposing taxes arbitrarily or obstructing the right of way for the operators. ICT infrastructure should be treated as essential public infrastructure and should be protected by the communities and states where they are installed.

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.

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

To move to the next phase of the nation's ICT policy direction in line with Mr President's seven point agenda, emphasis shall have to be placed on an ICT for economic growth policy. Such a policy framework should foster improvement in the following key areas:

- Continued Increase in teledensity to stimulate corresponding increase in productivity, social interaction and commerce, and consequently translate to increase in GDP.
- Further attraction of foreign capital (foreign direct investment) into the country;
- Stimulate of the release and activation of some local capital base and ICT talents;
- Create hundreds of thousands of new ICT-related jobs in both the public and private sector of the economy;
- Emergence of new professional fields and practices and therefore – new employment opportunities (for Software Engineers, Network Engineers, Telecom Engineers, and other ICT professionals and experts);
- Develop of new economic frontiers and opportunities within the country to foster e-commerce, e-business and e-trading to the citizens;
- increase in government revenue from Income Tax and import duty as a result of increased business activities; and
- Increase in employment opportunities which will to drop in unemployment rates. So also will crime rates and security threats to human life and property reduce.

- Such favourable socio-economic atmosphere will encourage international community to do business with the nation.

CONCLUSION

As policy makers and regulators, government is committed to providing a level playing ground to all investors so that the nation remains attractive to investors. We must also continue to create an environment for the widespread and successful implementation of digital technologies and services. To ensure that technology is adequately harnessed to maximize the reach and depth of services, the Commission will continue to pay special attention to the key parts of our regulatory framework that facilitate investment and technological innovation.

As the Federal government does its part, States and Local governments must take responsibility for ensuring that their citizens have access to this vital tool of the modern age. I hereby call on governments in the South East to do what ever is necessary to ensure that this region is not left behind in the information revolution of today. Our leaders must ensure that all schools colleges, polytechnics and Universities are adequately equipped with computers and internet facilities. In today's world no one can claim to be educated without the knowledge of the use of ICT tool. Literacy is no more defined as the ability to read and write but now includes the ability to use the computer.

This must go side by side with ensuring that all part of the states are adequately covered by telephone, internet and broadband signals. By so doing our people can be empowered to use their full potentials. THANK YOU

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