



**SPEECHES**

**BY**

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**THEME: "Telecoms: A long way from the Past  
and a great Future Ahead"**

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The giant development in the telecommunications industry is something that has almost become a cliché. Figures are copiously available in the public domain and they are regularly quoted. Less than 500,000 connected lines for a population of more than one hundred and twenty million people. But one day the story changed. And that is why I suppose we are here.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me thank the ICT Alliance, a collection of some journalists most of who were present in Abuja that very day in 2001 to write a new sector into existence. When nobody believed they kept fate with the industry, staying up with us all through the auction to the very moment the winners were announced. The gathering here is to celebrate the industry that has put Nigeria on the global map but let me say with all modesty that the gathering here should also serenade the contributions of the media sector to the growth of the telecommunications industry. From the volume of reports generated in the sector weekly one can say without equivocation that Nigeria ICT reporters are some of the best anywhere in the world.

The period before 2000 was a nightmare in terms of phones availability. Apart from a few lines being available to a huge population, phone was something unaffordable even when you had the money. There was serious monopoly practice in the face of very weak competition. Waiting time on the queue for a phone could last over a year. Nigeria was only comparable to Afghanistan and Mongolia, two countries that were either perennially at war or disadvantaged by nature.

One day the story changed. Just as it is now we used to hear the story of telecom developments in other parts of the world; that New York had more phones than the whole of Africa; just the way it is today. For instance, we are told by the ITU that by the end of 2010 there was an estimated 5.3 billion mobile cellular subscriptions worldwide. This figure includes 940 million subscriptions to 3G services. Access to mobile networks is now available to 90 per cent of the world population and 80 per cent of the population in rural areas.

The story continues. Mobile Cellular growth is slowing worldwide. In developed countries, the mobile market is reaching saturation levels with an average of 116 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants at the end of 2010. In the developing world, mobile cellular penetration has reached 68 per cent. In the African region, penetration rates were about 41 per cent at the end of 2010.

The interesting point I am coming to is that these figures being generated do no longer exclude us. We are playing a very active and significant role at the moment. With over 90 million subscribers and an investment of over \$18bn within the period, Nigeria has been taken as the fastest growing telecoms market in Africa and one of the fastest in the world. The country has the highest mobile broadband connection in the continent and has excelled in market deregulation and regulatory activities, thus leading the way for others to follow.

The Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, has become a model globally, offering mentoring services to other regulatory bodies in the continent. As we speak, a delegation from the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Commission are visiting and will be attending our Consumer Parliament in Enugu tomorrow to witness the programme. You may want to recall that the Consumer Parliament has

been hailed by the ITU in industry dispute resolution especially between consumers and operators and has recommended same to regulators across the world.

With little or no capacity ten years the regulator has activated the market in such a way that at the moment we do not only have fibre optics cable running across the country, we actually now have submarine cables by Nigerian companies running into the country from Europe and the Americas, with Nigerian companies now in a position to offer services to quite a number of countries in the continent.

But while trying to consolidate on the achievements of the past decade, we want to state however that time has come to look ahead. There is a lot happening around us globally that we just cannot fail to put ourselves in the middle as a country. This is the time to put another foot forward and be able to attract huge investments into the country. Pitching for investments is one of the cardinal agenda of Mr. President, His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.

While briefing the media after the first Executive Council meeting on July 20, 2011, the Information Minister, Mr. Labaran Maku stated that the main agenda of the administration was to attract investment to the country. "All our Embassies and High Commissions in Asia, Europe and the Americas will now promote investment . As I have jokingly told them, we don't care if the investment is in their villages. This is a clear direction we are going to pursue. We are tying foreign policy to our domestic agenda. We are going to ensure that for all foreign level visitors to Nigeria, our private sector leaders will interface with them," the Minister said.

As a regulator we have a responsibility to tie into the vision of government at all times. In most of my public outings I have stated that my focus will be on the following areas: Consolidation and Integration of Mobile Wireless Services including Quality of Service; Fixed Line and Broadband Deployment for National Development; Enhanced Competitive Market and Choice for the Consumer; Vigorous Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement of Regulations and Directives; National Connectivity for Accelerated Growth; and Enhanced International Relations.

From this foregoing however, Broadband will be the apple pie we are pushing forward for investment drive. It has always been said that we missed the opportunity to invest in broadband technology when we failed to develop our fixed line facility. But as they say, that is like crying over spilled milk. What we plan to do at the NCC is to take advantage of the situation and drive investment. The world's attention has switched to broadband technology.

An ITU document says that while the developed world is hitting 26.6 subscriptions per 100 people, the developing country remains dismally at 4.4 subscriptions per 100 people. The situation in Africa is even worse. According to the ITU, Africa still lags behind when it comes to fixed (wired) broadband. Although subscriptions are increasing, a penetration rate of less than one per cent illustrates the challenges that persist in increasing access to high-speed, high capacity internet access in the region.

Like in the early days of mobile technology, we see this adversity as an honey pot; we see broadband as a technology that can bring development and economic growth to the Nigerian people no matter their location and the Commission is ready to encourage policies and woo development partners that can share and encourage our broadband vision.

We have been all over the world looking for the best way to approach deployment. We have visited the United States, Sweden, Singapore, among others. Although there are all kinds of models, the Open Access model deployed in Singapore looks the most attractive. I can say here that we do not want to take anything for granted, which is why early in the week, we advertised for consultants who will be involved in the process. We believe that from now on, our leg is on the throttle; there is no looking back.

Please, permit me to acknowledge that even as we celebrate, problems persist in the industry. Quality of service is obviously the biggest of them all. This explains why a major area of focus by my administration is Vigorous Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement of Regulations and Directives. For this reason we have strengthened the enforcement unit of the Commission which only recently has started to engage in some activities that do not make the operators happy. But we have a responsibility to make the Nigerian telecom consumers the centre of attention by the operators; the Nigerian telecom consumers should get the value for whatever money spent on any network.

However, we believe that the quality of service issue should be addressed squarely from its foundation. What is responsible primarily for poor quality of service is congestion on the network. Apart from the KPIs that we have put in place to ensure that a certain threshold quality is maintained, we are also canvassing regulatory accounting on the part of the operators to ensure that they invest as per the number of subscribers on the network.

While that is being done the NCC is also looking at cross regulatory issues which make it possible for progress and developmental activities in the telecommunications industry to be impaired by the activities of other government agencies. For instance, were an investment to be made in base station today, that investment may not contribute to the network quality until after about one year because of the long period of time it takes to do environmental impact analysis. The NCC is aware of this development and it is being addressed.

Ladies and gentlemen I will not end this address without paying homage to important stakeholders in the growth that we are celebrating today. Let me salute the efforts and boldness of the operators who took long dive to invest in Nigeria when most people thought it was not possible here. They dared and found a great market of a good people.

We encourage others to look at what the Nigerian telecommunications market has become, and make an investment decision on the next frontier. Very soon the NCC can assure you, there will be yet another mile stone to celebrate. This time, broadband.

Thank you very much.

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