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Guest Speaker

At the
Telecom Sector Sustainability Event

On the Topic

Mitigating the Effect of Talent Exodus and its Impact on the Growth of Nigeria's Telecommunications

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen.

It is my great honour to address you today as the Keynote Speaker of the 5th Edition Telecom Sector Sustainability Forum. I will be speaking on the topic "*Mitigating the Effects of Talent Exodus and its Impact on the Growth of Nigeria's Telecommunications Industry.*"

In a time where talent serves as the lifeblood of innovation and development, our industry faces a growing challenge: the exodus of skilled professionals. The global demand for tech talent has driven a good number of our brightest minds to pursue lucrative opportunities abroad, leaving vacuums in our skills gap that potentially can threaten the sustainability of our sector. The question now is, what can we, as industry leaders, do to address this issue head-on?

The responsibility to mitigate this talent migration rests with the telecom industry itself. By fostering an environment that encourages growth, innovation, and career satisfaction, we would not only retain the talent we have but also attract new, world-class professionals to our sector. Today, I will focus on actionable steps that we, as an industry, have taken, and must take in the nearest future to address this challenge and build a resilient telecommunications ecosystem.

Impact of Talent Exodus on the Telecom Industry

According to the Association of Telecoms Companies of Nigeria (ATCON), over 500 software engineers and more than 2,000 trained telecom professionals left the country in 2022 alone. This trend, if not managed, could jeopardize our growth potential, limit innovation and slow progress in the industry.

Without sufficient human capital, companies struggle to maintain the high standards of quality service that customers expect. The loss of skilled workers means that telecom operators are forced to either hire underqualified replacements or work with offshore professionals which will indirectly impact on our drive to further grow and develop our indigenous talents.

This challenge, however, is not insurmountable. Our industry is resilient, and with the right approach, we can transform these challenges into opportunities.

Initiatives the Telecom Sector Can Implement

So, what immediate steps do we need to take to nip this trend in the bud?

1. **Building Talent Pipelines Through Partnerships:**

To ensure a steady flow of skilled professionals, the telecom sector must actively engage and partner with universities, technical schools, and training institutes to create tailored programs designed to equip graduates with industry-relevant skills. This strategy will not only help fill the talent gap but also foster a pipeline of young, ambitious professionals eager to build their careers within Nigeria.

Internships, apprenticeships, and industry-sponsored research projects can be a practical way for telecom operators to integrate students and recent graduates into the workforce, ensuring they have the competencies required to thrive in the sector.

2. **Upskilling and Reskilling the Current Workforce**:

The rapid pace of technological change in telecommunications means that professionals must continually update their skills. To mitigate talent migration, telecom companies must continue to invest in the regular upskilling and reskilling initiatives for their existing workforce.

By offering employees opportunities for professional development, companies not only enhance their workforce's competencies but also provide incentives for talent to stay, knowing they have a pathway to career advancement within their current organization.

3. **Creating Conducive Work Environments**:

Adopting flexible work policies, and fostering a culture of innovation creates an environment that attracts talents. Professionals, especially in the tech sector, seek environments where they feel valued, engaged, and given the freedom to explore new ideas. Offering remote work options, continuous learning opportunities, and collaborative spaces where creativity is encouraged will make the local telecom sector more appealing to professionals who might otherwise seek opportunities abroad.

4. **Collaboration and Industry-Wide Initiatives.**

Telecom operators must come together as a collective to tackle the problem of talent migration. Industry-wide mentorship programs, where seasoned professionals can guide younger talent, would be an effective way to encourage the transfer of skills and knowledge. Additionally, telecom companies can collaborate on initiatives like tech hubs, start-up incubators, and innovation challenges to not only cultivate local talent but also to provide platforms for professionals to showcase their skills and stay motivated within the industry.

By pooling resources, the telecom sector can create an ecosystem that nurtures talent at all stages, from entry-level to experienced professionals, and aligns with global standards.

Leveraging Technology and Innovation

The telecommunications sector thrives on innovation, and one way to retain talent is by fostering a forward-thinking, technology-driven environment. Adopting and promoting cutting-edge technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) within Nigeria's telecom industry can create excitement and opportunities for professionals who want to work with the latest innovations.

Telecom companies should invest in research and development (R&D) to create an environment where Nigerian professionals can pioneer new technologies, rather than having to seek these opportunities elsewhere. Additionally, using global digital platforms for collaborative projects can help professionals develop the expertise they need without leaving the country. This strategy allows telecom talent to stay connected with international trends while applying their skills locally.

Another key initiative is investing in localized digital infrastructure to enable remote work and collaborative projects. As the world becomes more digital, telecom companies can use these advancements to offer flexible working arrangements that appeal to tech professionals, allowing them to maintain work-life balance while working on global projects.

Retention Through Entrepreneurship Support

Supporting entrepreneurship in the telecommunications space can also play a significant role in mitigating talent exodus. By providing funding, mentorship, and incubation spaces for start-ups, telecom companies can encourage skilled professionals to stay within the country and pursue their entrepreneurial ventures.

Telecom operators can invest in start-up accelerators and innovation hubs that focus on telecommunications, digital services, and infrastructure development. These platforms can provide aspiring entrepreneurs with the resources they need to succeed in Nigeria. By fostering an ecosystem where talent can flourish locally, the sector creates opportunities for professionals to contribute to the industry's growth through innovation.

Providing access to capital, creating venture funds for tech-driven projects, and forming industry partnerships can ensure that telecom talents see a future in Nigeria. By empowering professionals to build their own companies within the sector, we not only retain talent but also stimulate broader economic growth through job creation and technological advancement.

NCC's Efforts

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) in line with the policy direction of the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy has embarked on several initiatives aimed at retaining tech talent in Nigeria's telecom industry, promoting innovation, and creating an enabling environment for growth. These efforts are centred around improving access to infrastructure, collaboration with stakeholders, MDAs, State Government, International Agencies, to create an enabling environment for digital growth and development of local talents across the country.

The Strategic Blueprint of the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy has "Knowledge" as one of its pillars to drive the diversification of the Nigerian economy through generating innovations and technologies that drive economic growth, expanding the country's pool of talent in order to drive competitiveness, improving productivity, among others. This Pillar has as one of its objective to accelerate the growth of Nigeria as a global technical talent hub.

It is in this light that the Ministry, under the leadership of Dr. Bosun Tijani is driving the 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) Program which aims to train 3 million Nigerians in digital and technical skills by 2027. The programme which is ongoing is equipping millions of young Nigerians with vital skills in networking, cloud computing, and other telecoms-relevant fields. This initiative is designed to increase the pool of technically skilled individuals, making them valuable assets to the country. The NCC is participating in the program by supporting the participants with their required training devices.

In May 2024, the NCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Nokia to provide a 4G/5G Test lab that will provide 4G/5G Technical and Vocational Trainings for young Nigerians. This initiative aims to enhance and build technical talent, as well as equip 300 to 400 young persons with 4G/5G skills required for them to be employed by out telecoms sector. An additional 200 young Nigerians would also be provided with Vocational Training under this partnership. We will collaborate with our operators and encourage absorption of these trainees into the industry, especially within their respective communities and localities to enable development across Nigeria.

In ensuring the implementation of the National Policy for the Promotion of Indigenous Content in the Telecommunications Sector (NPPIC, 2021), the NCC has been instrumental in mitigating talent migration in the telecoms sector through its strong commitment to promoting the development and adoption of indigenous content. Through the Nigeria Office for Developing Indigenous Content for Telecoms Sector (NODITS), which is domiciled in the NCC, the manufacturing of SIM Cards in Nigeria

today has been localized. These local SIM Card manufacturers are patronized by the Mobile Network Operators, with no SIMs being imported into the country anymore.

Through continuous engagement, the NCC is further driving the patronisation of other local content providers across the telecoms sector value chain. These efforts not only support local businesses but also create job opportunities, reduce dependency on imports, and strengthen Nigeria's position in the global telecoms landscape.

In addition to the above initiatives, the Nigerian National Broadband Plan (NNBP), a strategic policy document developed by the Nigerian government to guide the expansion and improvement of broadband infrastructure and services across the country aims to increase broadband penetration, ensure affordable internet access, and drive digital transformation in various sectors of the economy. The plan sets clear targets for download speeds of 25Mbps in urban areas and 10Mbps in rural regions, while covering 90% of the population with a penetration rate of 70%. It also sets a target for the deployment of at least 120,000 kilometres of fibre infrastructure by 2025. These will further create a thriving digital economy and foster opportunities for local tech talent.

Ladies and gentlemen, the exodus of talent from Nigeria's telecommunications industry poses a significant challenge, but it is one that we, as an industry, can address and minimise. We must work together and build robust talent pipelines, continuously invest in the skills of our workforce, create conducive, innovative and creative working environments, and encourage entrepreneurship to mitigate the effects of talent migration and keep our brightest minds at home.

The future of telecommunications in Nigeria is bright, but it depends on our ability to take initiative—which involves taking steps to keep and nurture our talent. By embracing innovation, fostering collaboration, and investing in our people, we can ensure that the Nigerian telecom sector remains competitive globally.

Let us all work together to create an ecosystem that not only retains our talents, but also attracts world-class professionals who sees Nigeria as a hub for technological innovation and growth.

Thank you all, and I believe this will be a productive and insightful deliberation.

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