

Contribution from Nigeria Communications Commission

PRINCIPLES NECESSARY FOR PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO ICT'S

- **Licensing of Rural Service Providers:**

Licensing of special categories of telecommunication service operators to ensure rapid provision of access in rural and underserved urban areas. This principle ensures that people of all income groups, including the low income groups, regardless of where they live should have access to modern telecommunications and information services and at reasonable/affordable costs comparable to rates obtainable in a truly competitive market situation.

- **Establishment of Universal Access Fund:**

This is to facilitate investment in commercially unviable areas – rural or underserved urban areas. The aim is to provide incentives such as finance to operators to deploy in areas where the private sector is unwilling or unable to invest. The most effective approach to realizing universal access funding is directly from contributions from operators. Other sources of fund for the Universal Access fund include the following:

- Government
- Donor agencies
- Commercial lending programmes
- Cross Subsidy (often implemented through universal access mandates imposed upon dominant or monopoly operators)

- **Affordability and Quality:** There should be insistence on good quality service, but where unavoidable, high quality level could be deemphasized as a trade-of for affordable access. This is especially so for remote locations and / or difficult terrains. Example of the application of this principle is in the deployment of technology such as VoIP, or Satellite for basic voice and data services with relatively lower grade of service output.

- **Interconnection:**

There is need to have in place a principle of mandatory interconnection as well as ensure fair pricing for interconnection between rural operators and others to encourage provision of service. Interconnection and revenue sharing agreements are immensely important to encourage provision of access to rural areas. Also, rebalancing of tariffs based on traffic pattern between the urban and rural areas is critical to rural telephony service deployment.

- **Consumer Protection:**

This principle aims to protect the interest of the consumers, such that consumers benefit optimally from service provision by ensuring adequate quality of service, fair tariffs, choice, etc.