



Nigeria is increasingly connected

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Nigeria has been one of Africa's biggest success stories in its expansion of telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICT) — this was what ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun I. Touré emphasized during his visit there in September 2009, while attending the African Telecom Development Summit, held in the nation's capital, Abuja.

From a subscriber base of less than half a million in 2000, Nigeria now has a total of over 73 million mobile and fixed connections, which is a teledensity of about 50 per cent. Investment in telecommunications has shot up to about USD 18 billion. Operators are gaining generous returns, making the country an attractive environment for further investment. In addition, Nigeria added 11 million new Internet users between 2000 and 2008 — representing close to 40 per cent of the total additions in sub-Saharan Africa during that period.

Providing all the essential factors

In addressing the summit, Dr Touré noted that today, Nigeria has one-quarter of Africa's phone subscribers. "You need to have all the conditions together for the telecommunication sector to thrive: a vibrant private sector, the technology, and a government that will take the right policy decisions. In addition, you need a referee in the game, which is the

regulator". Nigeria, the Secretary-General said, has met all those conditions.

Nigeria's auction of spectrum for mobile communications in 2001 was acclaimed as transparent and highly successful. In 2003, the Nigerian Communications Act established a Universal Service Provision Fund. Its objective is to subsidize service provision in areas (especially the rural and underserved parts of the country) where ordinary service providers would not do business.

The country has also benefited from the reforms conducted by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). It has set up structures and institutions to help people gain knowledge and skills in ICT, thus laying an important foundation for growth (see box on page 32).

The right environment

It is perhaps the regulatory framework that has contributed most to the remarkable growth in Nigeria's telecommunication industry by making it easier for companies to gain licences and enter the market. This success indicates what could be achieved in development generally. Speaking at the summit in Abuja, Minister of National Planning Shamsudeen Usman said: "I often use the development of the telecom companies in Nigeria to highlight the possibility



of change in Nigeria". He added that progress "has so far been achievable by the government creating an enabling environment, establishing good regulations, and encouraging the private sector to invest properly in telecommunications".

Promoting broadband

NCC is also looking at ways of making the Internet accessible across the country. As well as a planned licensing of the 2.3 GHz band for broadband services, it is encouraging several licensees to push forward with ambitious projects. Phase3 Telecom and Suburban Telecom are taking fibre-optic cables into West Africa, while the Glo-1 submarine cable from Europe landed in Nigeria in September 2009 and the Main One Cable, also from Europe, landed in October.

In addition, NCC is strongly promoting a project to roll out broadband services to all parts of the country — and beyond — at an achievable cost. Called "Fibre Without Borders", the project encourages the creation of cross-border fibre-optic links to build a platform across Africa. One result will be that African countries will not have to route calls through Europe in order to talk to their neighbours.

Digital broadcasting ahead of schedule

The deadline for moving from analogue to digital broadcasting in Africa was set by ITU as June 2015. In Nigeria, though, the target date has been brought forward to June 2012 and great efforts to meet it are being made by broadcasting companies.

While in Abuja, Dr Touré visited African Independent Television (AIT), which is operated on the platform of Daar Communications Plc. After appearing on one of its flagship programmes, he toured the company's facilities and saw trucks that

broadcast high-definition television, complementing the heavy studio investments by Daar. The firm is already digitally compliant, far ahead of the country's switchover date. Commencing business in 1993 in an industry deregulated a year earlier, Daar has a chain of radio and television stations across Nigeria, and by mid-2008 had added a digital satellite television service that offers subscribers more than 40 channels.

NCC programmes boost ICT in Nigeria

The Digital Appreciation Programme (DAP) is aimed at encouraging the use of ICT in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. NCC, by deploying some of the Universal Service Provision Fund, has been able to contribute computers to a number of schools across the country, as well as very small aperture terminals (VSAT) for Internet access.

The Advanced Digital Appreciation Programme (ADAPT) focuses on teachers (mostly in tertiary institutions), who must be computer literate to gain the benefits of ICT and pass on their knowledge to students. Through this programme, NCC has trained thousands of teachers across the country and has supplied some with computers.

The Digital Bridge Institute (DBI) was established to help overcome the shortage of skilled personnel that resulted from the boom in the mobile communications industry. Staffed by experts from different parts of the world, DBI has three campuses, in Abuja, Lagos and Kano.

Daar was the broadcaster for the football world championship for players up to 17 years of age, *FIFA U-17*, staged in Nigeria from 24 October to 15 November 2009. AIT worked with the service provider, Host Broadcast Services, to produce and send clean feeds to the rest of the world. The *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) has very strict specifications for equipment to cover its tournaments, because audiences anywhere in the world must be able to watch the events. A Nigerian broadcaster's ability to meet such rules has been hailed as a landmark achievement. South Africa, too, is using its hosting of a football tournament — the 2010 FIFA World Cup — to benchmark its digital switchover.

Nigeria runs one of the most liberalized broadcasting sectors in Africa. Led by the National Broadcasting Commission, in 2008 the industry started a phased transition to digital broadcasting by cable and satellite television broadcasters. Dr Touré noted that this can result in less use of energy resources, and thus

a relatively quick return on investment. However, the change cannot take place without new equipment being available, and the costs of this remain a burning issue in the developing world. The Nigerian government has promised to look into ways of possibly subsidizing costs for less wealthy citizens, so that everyone can have access to the new broadcasting system.

Extraordinary growth

Dr Touré said at the summit that “it has been an extraordinary decade for Africa. Just ten years ago, virtually nobody in Africa had a mobile phone; today mobile cellular subscription teledensity has reached 32.6 per cent, and more than 30 million people in sub-Saharan Africa can access the Internet.” Nigeria's developments are a shining example of what can be achieved, and what should be the goals for the future.

A high-definition outside broadcast trailer used by African Independent Television

