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How to bridge the standardization gap - Service Operations Perspective

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- knowledge and skills in ICT are a critical determinants for implementation, adoption and use of ICT;
- A significant number of users of broadband ICT services have difficulties using the services even when provided with service user manuals
- Standardization is pervasive. So, there is need for standardization of both ICT training and services operations to ensure that capacity is available to deploy, maintain and supply predictable service quality; and that once the users have purchased the services, they are able to use them with ease.
- creation of awareness about the services by the service provider, acquisition of appropriate skills by the user and acceptable quality of services remain high priority issues

1.2 Policy perspective

- From a policy standpoint ICT services supplied should be convenient, customer-oriented, and cost- effective.
- The implication of this requirement is that customers should be able access and use services at their convenience, according to their tastes and at an affordable price.
- Here the key considerations are:(1) how convenient are the services supplied in terms of uses and quality? (2) are these services customer driven or supplier driven?, and (3) are they at an affordable price.

1.3 Policy Example

- In the context of broadband universal service policy, goals should be to :
  - promote the availability of quality services at just, reasonable, and affordable rates;
  - increase access to advanced telecommunications services throughout the nation; and
  - Advance the availability of such services to all consumers, including those in low income, rural, insular, and high cost areas at rates that are reasonably comparable to those charged in urban areas (see also US 1996 Telecommunication Act).

2.0 STANDARDIZATION

Some imperatives

- Industry standard equipment exhibit low TCO
- There may be obsolete systems in existing networks in the region
- Migration of networks to NGN
- Competitive pressure to reduce prices while maintaining acceptable level of service
- ICT is an enabler for the other sectors of the economy
- Preference of freedom of choice of service among consumers

Some Achievements so far

- National broadband initiatives
- Individual operator's initiatives
- Rural connectivity initiatives
- ICT infrastructure for Government
- Technology converge over IP to address operations and maintenance issues and monitor end-to-end service
- Standardization has a number of benefits to both the service provider and the user or consumer of services

2.3 Benefits of Standardization

To service providers

- Low CAPEX
- Low OPEX
- Hence, low cost of acquisition and low cost of ownership i.e. low TCO

To the consumer of services

- Freedom of choice
- Better quality of service
- Affordable price
  - The key focus is standardization of service operations for ICT consumers through national and regional cooperation on access codes, service user procedures, and levels of quality of service; and empowerment of

2.4 Summary of the critical role of standardization

Factor/issue	Leads to:
• Standard ICT systems	• Low CAPEX, low OPEX therefore low cost
• Low cost	• More affordable prices
• Affordability	• More people access ICTs for more productivity

But we know:

Factor/issue	Leads to
• Access to ICT	• All sectors of the economy performing better(efficiency, growth)
• Economic growth	• Better education, better health etc = better standards of living = human development

3.0 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 Challenges

- ***Broad challenges***
  - Inadequate or lack of access to ICT across the nation
  - Limited interoperability of service across networks
  - Affordable services
  - Predictable quality of services
- ***Specific challenges***
  - Inadequate skills to use ICT services productively; and
  - Unsatisfactory quality of service
  - Limited mobility for consumers across service providers; i.e. high switching costs

3.2 Opportunities

- The challenges can be partly traced to standardization of services and service provision across networks through **collaboration and partnerships among service providers and users**
- focus more on actual consumer demands for service in terms of the convenience, quality and price.
- **standardization of networks and service** operating procedures by leveraging technology to minimize the challenges faced by both service providers and consumers in their quest for convenient, customer centred and affordable services.
- At the level of e-applications, **national and international partnerships can help to create the necessary impetus for digital bridges** when connectivity, content, capacity building, and policy components are included since this can enhance standards adoption.

4.0 HOW TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES FACING THE CONSUMERS

- **Empower the consumer through**
  - Creation of awareness about services
  - quality service
  - Freedom of choice
  - Convenience services
  - Standardized service operations procedures across networks
  - Access to ICTs by all
  - Relevant content
  - Human capacity building

- **Engagement of all key players** in customer empowerment process namely policy makers, service providers, consumers and the civil society working together for the common good.
- **Promotion of partnerships and collaboration on standardization** service operations at both national and international levels to provide impetus for digital bridges through connectivity, content, capacity building, and policy

Policy makers

- Promote universal access to all parts of the country
- Promote the open standards-based systems to ensure interoperability
- Promote ICT centers of excellence
- Strengthen consumer protection organizations
- etc

Service provider perspective

- Use cost-effective technologies to deliver services so as to achieve lower price to customers
- Service level agreements between the suppliers of services and the users
- Collaboration in use of common access codes for services
- etc

Consumers

- Articulate service requirements to service providers and policy makers
- Participate in policy processes
- Demand and negotiate service levels
- Form ICT consumer associations to champion service operations issues

Civil Society

- Constructive advocacy and engagement across all spheres of human development on matter of ICT4D

5.0 USING PAST LESSONS TO IMPROVE THE FUTURE OF SERVICE OPERATIONS

Previously,

- Multiple vendor networks with proprietary systems
- Technology based regulation
- Less demanding customers
- Supply side perspective: i.e. operators knew what customers wanted; akin to benevolence
- QoS? - take it or leave it approach
- Weak consumer associations

But now? Paradigm shift

Currently,

- Multivendor network systems that are converging over IP
- Technology neural licensing/regulation
- Customer is king in word and deed; very discerning consumer
- Service level agreement(SLA)
- The regulator is watching!
- Competition! Your competitor is at you customers' doorstep!

Therefore:

- Service providers to listen to the customer more
- Competitive pricing
- Use open of standard service platform for seamless service
- Build human capacity to handle the dynamics in ICT services operations and their productive use
- Collaborate with all stakeholders through partnerships on quality of service
- Compete and at the same time cooperate with your competitors on service operations standardization: not curtails!

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continued partnership with ITU and other regional and international organization in addressing service operations standardization issues in the following areas is emphasized:
  - Human capacity building
  - Standardization in the ICT sector
  - Facilitation of forums (like this one) for all stakeholders to engage in realization of the desired results
  - Supporting efforts by emerging markets to migrate their systems to NGN

- **B**esides accelerating the migration from legacy systems to NGNs **standardization is crucial for the realization of seemless service operations procedures across different network to the benefit of consumers and service providers as well;** therefore the African region should take every opportunity to improve her standardization disposition;
- **Human capacity building in the realm of NGN** (and standardization thereof) is critical to avoid previous service operations pitfalls;
- **Regional ICT standardization committees are encouraged** to assess service access and operations requirements and collaborate with ITU on possible interventions;
- From the perspective of service operations procedures for ICT consumers, it is suggested that in the context of NGN and broadband **standards-based services that are easy to use across all networks constitute critical digital bridges** and should be encouraged across the whole spectrum of ICT discussion in the region.

References

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Thank You