

WELCOME REMARKS BY DR. IKE ADINDE, ADMINISTRATOR, DIGITAL BRIDGE INSTITUTE ON THE OCCASION OF THE ITU ANNUAL REGIONAL HUMAN CAPACITY BUILDING (HCB) WORKSHOP AT THE SHEHU MUSA YAR'ADUA CENTRE ON MONDAY, AUGUST 27 - 29, 2018

Protocol

Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to welcome you all to the ITU Annual Regional HCB workshop for sub-Saharan Africa for this year 2018 with the theme *Strengthening Capacities in Internet Governance*.

As we gather in Abuja for three days to discuss Africa's concerns about human capacity building, we have another opportunity to focus discussions on the future of skills and knowledge as we seek to change the African landscape in this era of connected economy.

We must take strategic decisions that are implementable within the shortest possible time because of the constantly changing terrain. Africa is endowed with a talented and vibrant youth population but a high proportion of them lack the skills and opportunity to participate meaningfully in growing the economy. In this context, I mean digital skills required to play in the present competitive market place.

There is a convincing argument that if Africa wants to transform and become a global player, it must transform its human capital. We must open access to quality education and training for the young population by deliberately creating Funds that will increase access to the acquisition of digital skills such as the Smart Africa Scholarship Fund launched during the Transform Africa Summit 2015, which hosted over 2,500 delegates from 81 countries. The Fund aims to provide financial support to our youth who are seeking Post-graduate and Certification- level training at the continent's best ICT Centres of Excellence.

I am a keen advocate of the digital skills initiative by the ITU Centres of Excellence Network for Africa which recommends the reservation of a certain percentage of the Universal Service Fund for '*universal access to digital education*'. The ITU Centers of Excellence in Africa, strongly canvassed this position in 2016 at the Capacity Building Symposium in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Smart Africa Scholarship Fund and other renowned scholarship schemes on the continent can be funded and sustained through this kind of initiative. The argument is quite plausible. If we use the Universal Service Funds (USF) for universal access to service and provisioning of infrastructure without equipping the human beings that will use the infrastructure with the requisite digital skills, what have we done? We have simply prepared for war without equipping the soldiers who will fight the battle.

It is time that we make a bold decision in this direction to provide funding access for the much talked about digital skills literacy by earmarking a proportion of Universal Service Fund for digital skills literacy. This resonates strongly against the backdrop of indications that surplus balances exist in USFs across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A GSMA report in 2014 on the utilisation of USFs revealed that over half of the inactive funds [with undisbursed/surplus balances] within the 69 countries studies are based in SSA.

The report went further to state that, “if it is not possible to disband the majority of the funds and return the monies collected, then these USFs will require significant reform and restructuring in order to be transformed into functional and effective investment support vehicles for unserved and underserved areas in SSA.” One of such reforms should be to invest the Funds in digital literacy.

Digital literacy in the 21st century has become as important as the ability to read and write was in the 19th century. Indeed, policy makers and governments in Africa ought to launch an aggressive intervention into the ICT industry by investing in skills development to stimulate economic growth and tame the rising tide of youth joblessness and associated insecurity in the region.

Ironically, a few of our youth have the wherewithal to enrol for some of the human capacity training opportunities provided by the ITU centres of excellence and other tertiary institutions. This makes the case for intervention even more imperative.

The past three years has witnessed significant developments at the DBI. With the unsparing support and commitment of Professor U. G. Danbatta, Executive Vice Chairman, Nigerian Communications Commission, the Institute has been a shining example in the ITU Centers of Excellence Network. DBI is being re-positioned as the topmost African Centre of Excellence for ICT studies to take on the challenge of capacity building in the areas of Software Development, Telecommunications, ICT4D,

Internet Governance, Internet of Things (IoT), Cybercrime and Cyber Security, Digital Skills Literacy and a host of other specialties.

I am optimistic that this edition of the workshop, like the previous ones, will result in critical recommendations which will further advance ITU's numerous initiatives in leading positive policy actions in the continent.

May I welcome you very warmly to the city of Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory and hope that you not only enjoy the proceedings of this workshop but the warm hospitality of our people.

Thank you.