

ADDRESS BY PROF. UMAR GARBA DANBATTI, *FNSE*, EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRMAN, NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, AT THE USPF FOCUSED INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS FORUM AND HACKATHON AWARD CEREMONY, HELD AT EKO HOTELS AND SUITES, LAGOS, ON 21ST APRIL, 2016

Distinguished Stakeholders and esteemed guests, I am delighted to welcome you to this Forum. It is particularly significant for us as it is the first industry gathering on Universal Access/Universal Service since my appointment as the Executive Vice Chairman and Chief Executive of the Nigerian Communications Commission some months ago.

The current Management inherited what I describe as a robust USPF Strategic Management Plan (SMP) for the period 2013 to 2017. I understand that the plan is a culmination of lessons learnt from the implementation of the previous plan, and most importantly, extensive consultations and significant input from you, the stakeholders.

The USPF continues to regard partnership and collaboration with stakeholders as very strategic to the achievement of universal access in Nigeria. This explains the technical collaboration between USAID and USPF which enabled direct consultations with Operators and service/infrastructure providers to obtain their

perceptions, opinions and input going forward, shortly after the launch of Clusters of ICT Access Gap at an Industry Forum in December 2014.

We found the inputs quite insightful and subsequently reflected them in more simplified tender documents, thus increasing the number of bids we received. Similarly, we requested stakeholders to appoint focal persons in their respective organisations so that information relating to universal access and universal service in Nigeria can be seamlessly transmitted to appropriate quarters. With this, we believe that, to an appreciable extent, we have been able to communicate better with our partners.

However, we are not resting on our oars. We acknowledge the enormity of the task we have at hand to, at the least, provide telephony services to the approximately 36.8 million people identified as unserved and underserved in the clusters. These are the groups whose right to inclusive ICT services we have continued to echo by stimulating and facilitating the deployment, utilization and adoption of ICTs in their communities.

The unserved population in Nigeria has been reduced from 36.8 million (24.5%) in 2013 to 33.7million (22.5%) in 2015 based on the Access Gap study and using the 150 million

population benchmark. With effective partnerships, we can achieve more in the coming years.

Our job today, is to amplify the cohesion and collaboration required for our interventions to be notable in the quest to achieve universal access in Nigeria. We are desirous of seamless collaboration with all partners to build a sustainable universal access and universal service infrastructure that will serve as a catalyst for improving Nigerians' quality of life and promote socio-economic development.

Some of you are already aware of the Nigerian Communications Commission's 8-point agenda which I recently unveiled. It is to direct our focus on ensuring that we deliver enviable ICT services to Nigerians through our regulatory functions. The USPF will be playing significant role in achieving four of the eight points which are highlighted below:

1. Facilitate Broadband Penetration

The Commission's strategy is to facilitate and support availability of broadband services by promoting deployment of universally available fast and reliable network infrastructure that will stimulate seamless broadband penetration to drive technology innovations and overall productivity of the economy.

The USPF's Infrastructure Projects have been designed to deepen broadband penetration in the unserved and underserved areas. The projects include: Backbone Transmission Infrastructure (BTRAIN), Base Transceiver Station (BTS), Rural Broadband Initiative (RuBI) and Universities Inter-Campus Connectivity (UnICC).

2. Improve Quality of Service

The strategy includes facilitation of active infrastructure sharing amongst telecommunications Operators in ways that will encourage seamless adoption of next generation technologies and remove all barriers for smooth operations.

Two of the Fund's guiding principles are Co-location/Infrastructure sharing and Quality of Service. In this regard, the implementation of infrastructure projects are predicated on encouraging infrastructure sharing with the aim of improving cost and quality efficiency. In the BTS project, for example, the mast is constructed to be able to accommodate additional "tenants". It is expected that the final tranche of the output-based subsidy on BTS would not be paid until another Operator deploys its radio antenna on the mast.

3. Promote ICT Innovation and Investment Opportunities

The strategy is to facilitate and support the deployment and use of broadband networks as a platform for economic growth, innovation, job creation and global competitiveness by fostering increased strategic support for technology start-ups and SMEs.

USPF will continue to facilitate projects that generate innovative ICT solutions and services, develop capacity of local entrepreneurs to sustain and grow their ICT-based initiatives, focusing on Community Resource Centres (CRC) and School Knowledge Centre (SKC) beneficiaries, as well as support deployment of locally developed content.

The 2015 Hackathon is one of the ways we encouraged innovators and startups in Nigeria to create sustainable ICT solutions and at the same time, provide opportunities for investors to explore. In 48 hours, 15 solutions were created with three adjudged the best, based on set criteria. The three winning solutions were offered incubation programme at iDEA Centre (Hub) in Lagos, to get the products “market ready” with necessary mentoring and business development support for three months. As we celebrate these brilliant young innovators today, we invite you to identify the solutions that hold potentials for your business models and investment objectives. The participants are here and would welcome your support.

4. Facilitate Strategic Collaboration and Partnership

The strategy of this agenda is to foster avenue for synergy with government, MDAs, communities and relevant local and international non-state actors to advance the use of ICT for development (ICT4D) by facilitating and supporting the development, adoption and usage of technology innovations for improvements in Agriculture, Education, Healthcare and Security.

The Access Projects of the USPF are designed to create demand and promote the adoption and usage of ICT infrastructure and services in unserved and underserved communities and groups. Currently, the School Knowledge Centre (SKC), Tertiary Institution Knowledge Centre (TIKC), Community Resource Centre (CRC), Information Resource Centre (e-library), e-Accessibility, e-Health and, Local Content development projects are already contributing to the achievement of this point through partnerships with States' Ministry of Education, Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), consultations with Federal Ministry of Health, Federal Ministry of Women Development and Social Welfare etc.

In addition, this Forum, which is designed to expand partnership network for deepening ICT penetration in unserved/underserved areas of the country is part of the strategic collaboration of the USPF and key stakeholders.

In this regard, we invite you to share your perception and opinions as openly as possible in such a way that they can be clearly translated to actionable partnerships for development. While we have experienced some level of improvement over the past couple of years in responses to USPF's invitations to participate in implementing universal access and universal service programmes and projects, we believe there is still room for improvement. On our part, we assure you that your meaningful views will not end in this hall.

Thank you for honouring our invitation. We look forward to concrete resolutions that will further strengthen our collective determination to achieve equitable ICT access for all.