

**Bridging the Digital Divides by 2025**  
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Your excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me a great pleasure to make the following contributions at the High Level Meeting of the WSIS Forum 2016. I'd like to begin by thanking all the UN agencies who are actualizing the WSIS action lines, and also the ITU for its exemplary coordination role. I also thank all the WSIS Action Line facilitators for their steadfast work in this regard. Permit me also to congratulate all stakeholders, and the UN agencies, especially recognizing CSTD for the success of the 10 year review and the very excellent outcome document approved in New York last year.

From a-25year active experience in the ICT industry at the national, regional and global level, it has become obvious to me that when emerging economies do what is right, digital divides are reduced considerably. A case in point is the issue of teledensity in Nigeria with mere 0.05% penetration in 2001 compared to 106% today and that of Internet penetration of 0.001 in 2001 to 55% today. What was responsible for this transformative scenario? Major policy redirection incorporating good practices have been responsible.

Recently, 11 African countries agreed to streamline roaming and interconnection charges across East Africa in what is called Africa One Area Network, the result is increased connectivity and reduction in cost of doing business. Assuming all African regulators and telcos endorse this smart initiative, the result on the general cost of doing business will be unprecedented across Africa. Affordability as well articulated by stakeholders spurs connectivity and wider access by the under-reached and the goal of WSIS would very readily be realized.

Education for innovation, capacity development, skills development and boosting local economic resources are area of focus where the power of ICTs can be unleashed. We must also consider that capacity building to effectively use ICTs may go beyond the formal education and may require some remedial and special training, which may unleash many more contributors to the information society. Emerging economies especially those in Africa need to avail themselves of home grown and well articulated strategies to deliver on expectations. Not too long ago, a national education authority abolished all eLearning Centres in the country. What should have been done is to set operational standard, institute periodic reviews and monitoring to ensure greater goals are achieved.

I do not believe the reason for the existence of digital divide is anymore excusable. The WSIS Action lines have provided sound guide to overcoming this divide. Over the course of the next 10 years I would be glad to see emerging economies address this issue comprehensively through:

1. A multi-stakeholder approach (exemplified by ICANN and IGF) at strategy formulation, implementation and benefit assessment and realization. The newly composed M/S Cybersecurity Council in Nigeria is a step in the right direction

2. In-depth review of national e-Strategies earlier accomplished with embedded mechanism for implementation, follow-up, collation of metrics and sustainability.
3. Following 2 above, there should be active peer review engagements across sub-regions and regional economic blocks
4. International cooperation and collaboration to enrich 3 above among others

Other considerations for bridging the digital divides that face us, and which we must address include:

5. Innovative Citizen engagement initiatives – embracing all age groups and fully engaging women and girls, and men and boys
6. Institution of transparency and accountability in project implementation
7. Constant exploration of better and more cost effective alternatives through innovation
8. Expand ICT skills acquisition programmes and school curricula.
9. Create opportunity for universal access and reduce broadband cost through special tax breaks and incentives. In the word of African richest man Nigeria's Aliko Dangote on what states need to do. "They (States) can create jobs and give incentives to people to come and invest, they should assure people that they are not going to be slammed with various taxes which is what some of them do."  
Aliko Dangote

Finally, as Information Society advances and Internet of Things (IoT) phenomenon takes root, Artificial Intelligence (AI) must be accountable to humans, come what may to ensure there is no new divide between humans and machines. I spend my professional career, and my efforts to bring the voice of my continent and others from the developing countries into these global fora. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today.