

THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY OF ENGINEERS
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Communiqué

The Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), in association with the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) and the Federation of African Organisations of Engineers (FAOE), held an International Conference on Universal Access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, Nigeria from August 13 to 15, 2001.

The Conference noted that the problems of Information and Communications Technology are similar in most countries of Africa, and therefore may require a common approach and strategy. Using Nigeria as a case study, the issues discussed focused on the following:

1. Information and Communications Technology and The Future of Nigeria: Digital Technology And the Tide of Digital Divide
2. Human Resources Development For Sustainable Access to Information Technology
3. Leap Frogging or Measured Steps Options for Telecommunications Development
4. Option for Affordable Internet Services in Developing Economies
5. Access Technologies For Disabled Persons: Potential, Possibilities and Challenges For Africa

After exhaustive deliberations, the conference made the following recommendations:

1. African countries are urged to adopt and implement policies that will ensure:
 - a. Meaningful development of Information and Communications Technology and use of indigenous expertise.
 - b. That access to Information and Communications Technology is affordable to all citizens and thus promote democratic governance.
 - c. That adequate backbone network with local loop capacity is established.
 - d. That PC penetration should be increased.
2. Restructure the curricula of existing educational institutions at all levels to respond to the ICT needs of our environment and fund them appropriately.
3. Make Internet access mandatory in all educational institutions and promote distance-learning networks.
4. Create technology parks as ICT knowledge incubation centers.
5. All government institutions – ministries, parastatals, etc. – must establish and maintain websites and encourage electronic communications among their officers. To facilitate this, governments must promote a mandatory and continuous training program for all categories of workers.

6. In every country, there is a significant population of people with various disabilities, who nevertheless have considerable potentials. ICT must be used to harness these potentials and provide them with commensurate educational and other resources.
7. A comprehensive and clearly-defined licensing strategy (e.g. government's decision on four GSM operators with five-year exclusivity) that will include a network master-plan designed to achieve adequate ICT national and local backbone should be adopted. Such a strategy would not only attract investors, but would also assure the security of their investment.
8. Government should ensure a level playing field amongst all the GSM operators; the government may wish to consider adopting approaches which have been used in other countries, such as accounting separation or creation of separate companies out of the dominant carrier.
9. NSE, other professional bodies and consumer protection associations should monitor and demand timely implementation of policies in accordance with defined short, medium and long-term targets.
10. Encourage students of tertiary institutions to embark on the formation of ICT start-up companies right from the campus as a strategic window and solution for meeting future knowledge challenges, job creation and economic survival competition.
11. Establish a "Technology Recovery Programme", which involves the provision of intensive ICT training to all NYSC participants and other young graduates from which a core of the best 10% can be deployed into a 'train-the-trainers' scheme.
12. Facilitate the acquisition of ICT tools (hardware and software) for use by professionals through adequate funding and the granting of tax exemptions with respect to such tools.
13. As it is well-known that government policies do not always carry the force of law, it is advised that relevant aspects of these recommendations should be backed up by appropriate legislation

Engr. M. B. Yesufu, FNSE, mni
Executive Secretary.
Abuja.
August 15, 2001.