

**KNOWLEDGE AND THE TRANSLUCENCY OF GOVERNMENT:  
THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF eGOVERNMENT  
FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**

by

**Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., Ph.D.**  
*President & CEO*  
Telecom Africa Corporation

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank the organisers of this, the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Reinventing Government, for creating such a high-level forum for deliberation on a subject of such perpetual relevance as government. Specifically, I wish to thank the Government of Korea and the United Nations Division for Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) for the invitation to address this eminent audience. On a personal note, I take particular pleasure and honour in sharing this reflective dialogue with my friend, Mr. Jerzy Szeremeta, the brilliance of whose mind, marvelously incisive, holds a special fascination for me.

**Knowledge and Government: The Task Before Us**

If I read my invitation correctly, I believe that its intent is for me to share my views on government in general, and how it shapes the ability of those who govern to successfully deliver on their promise and responsibility. How can government expand the enabling environment for the maximum pursuit of self-actualisation, for the people on whose sole authority and by whose choice, ideally, it governs? The catalytic role of knowledge in this pursuit and dispensation, serving as both a driving force as well as the repository of lessons acquired in the process, is the aspect of the dichotomy of thought and analysis that I wish to reflect on with you this morning.

With your permission, rather, with your indulgence, I will presume the privilege to push against the limits of the envelop of current wisdom on the subject of Participatory and Transparent Government, and the enabling role of Information and Communications Technology, in other words, eGovernment. This is necessary in order to challenge some assumptions that by the very virtue of their longevity may themselves have inadvertently

come to be taken for granted as fact when their validity might yet be unproven. This is a rather difficult task, given the enthusiastic and rather uncritical glorification of eGovernment that we have witnessed over the last two days. Given the complexity of issues of Government, and the checkered record of eGovernment in its infancy, one which would suggest that the jury is still definitely out on this innovation, exercising a bit of enlightened skepticism would seem appropriate.

I should state, parenthetically, that I come from that part of the world that, in the last half century, has witnessed the wholesale force-feeding of more often than not untested ideas, ideas whose value, where there is one, accrues not to my people, but to their proponents, often enough to the detriment of my people. For me, therefore, pressing the pause button at this point before we experience the burden of yet another cycle of imposition on our already over-burdened and overwhelmed models and institutions of government and development, would seem, I believe, a critical act of responsible, participatory and enlightened citizenship, itself a fundamental tenet of good and transparent government.

### **Knowledge, Development and the African Dream**

As one of a generation of Africans who in the late fifties and early sixties left home, villages and towns alike, and headed for universities in Africa and abroad, with a single-minded objective of acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to design, build and nurture the Africa of our common dream and to transform it to one of the best and most desirable continents in the world, I have all my life been preoccupied with the interplay between knowledge and development, and the potency of the former to serve as the engine to drive the quantum and irreversible development of Africa. Young and fearless in our focus and ambition, but armed with the sense of mission and duty to our community and country, to the villagers who collected money to pay our fare, or the government that gave us scholarships, to our parents and family who simply subsumed their own dreams into our hopes and ambitions, we said those momentous farewells that remain vivid to most of us some four to five decades later. With the few clothes the neighborhood tailor had worked several nights to craft for us in the knowledge that his handiwork was going overseas even if he was not, we traveled thousands of miles to foreign lands and cultures, in search of what the people back home loved then to call “the golden fleece”.

We were hardworking students, sharp and smart even to the point of seeming arrogance, especially to those who thought that as “poor” Africans we should be humble and silent in homage. I still remember with as much vividness as if it was only yesterday, my first day in a class on Applied Mathematics at Northwestern University in the winter of 1963. I remember because it was my first experience of winter snow, that irony of beauty from inside turning into cold and slush once outdoors amidst human and automobile traffic. I had occasion to question the calculations of my professor three times in those fifty minutes. I happened to be right each time, and yet when he asked me where I was from, and added, "Son, it is good to have you here," somehow, I was never sure that he truly meant it, or that my classmates liked it.

And yet, having been raised in my boarding school in Nigeria on the importance of intellectual questioning and skepticism as the mark of a good student, I could not act otherwise, not even if I tried to. Now that I have since become a man and enjoy at least a respectable global reputation as an enlightened intellectual, I still believe, more than ever before, that an enlightened skepticism is a critical attribute of the responsible citizen, both of a nation, and of the world.

### **Africa and Democracy**

I believe that it is fair to say, without seeking to find an excuse to justify Africa's own prolonged excesses, that the malaise that we have endured for much longer than need be, is as much the result of the relentless imposition of all sorts of ideas that cover the spectrum from serious thoughts to outright reckless banalities, as it is of our own doing. The result of their implementation, especially those of the latter sort, has done nothing but deepen our development crisis. Now that Africa is poised to shape its own destiny, having in the last few years taken full responsibility for its present and future condition, we must find the courage to pause a bit, indeed for as long as it takes, to undertake a complete review of our development experience in order to determine on our own, and for ourselves, what our problems truly are. We must determine where we want to go as a people, how to get there, what resources we have to work with, and to the extent that we lack some resources, which of what is offered we really need or want. We must find the courage and courtesy to gently pass on those that we believe to be either inimical to our purpose, however generous, or that we need to set aside for a while until we either determine their strategic value, or the proper time for their absorption into our overall strategic development process.

This is, fundamentally, what responsible and transparent government is all about. Undertaking this exercise in full dialogue with the people, engaging our best minds to frame the debate and engage the people to fearlessly take count of the extent and nature of the challenges we confront, and together set the highest goals for our common future, willing and able to commit the resources and the sacrifices that such bold implementation of a shared common vision demands, is what defines participation in government. Doing all of the above, in an environment of freedom, hope, knowledge, fair play, dignity and equanimity, learning to give and take as circumstances may demand every now and then, is, in my modest opinion, the quintessence of a meaningful and palpable democracy. All other phraseology of the concept of democracy, for me, are mere variations or embellishments on this main theme.

### **Definitions**

But before we proceed with what I would like to call our quiet dialogue for a fairer, more equitable, more representative and even perhaps more perceptive view of our world and the institutions with which we govern ourselves, we should establish a few definitions. This way, we can ensure that we have the same understanding of the terms and concepts we use in this our quiet conversation this morning in this intriguing city of Seoul.

### ***Information and Knowledge***

In a contribution to the ASEAN Regional Workshop on Building Knowledge Societies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in the year 2000, I stated that "too often, *information* and *knowledge* are used as if they were synonymous. This confusion inhibits our ability to address the true nature and challenge of our knowledge society. *Information* is simply a body of facts and data, with no compelling intrinsic value or meaning. *Knowledge* on the other hand is the crystallization of lessons learnt from the study or experience of the phenomena of history. Knowledge derives from culture; and the history of knowledge within a culture becomes *civilisation*. Knowledge, therefore, embodies not only the mastery of the phenomena of life and man's innovation, but the ethics, morality and traditions of a given society and its culture.

"Where knowledge spills over beyond a given society onto a global platform, its context becomes a *global culture*. Building a knowledge society, therefore, compels the entrenchment of the essential qualities of a given culture or civilisation as the core of a new configuration of future society. Access to information, while an important component of acquiring knowledge, does not in itself constitute learning. This would suggest severe limitations in the power we implicitly grant to Internet access as the magic tool of transforming society. It must be remembered that the essential value of Internet access is the ability to access much larger chunks of information much faster and, at most times, much more easily."

### ***Knowledge, Culture, Society and Civilization---Living and learning***

I further stated that "next to the Universe, mankind, and the human spirit which drives it, remain two of the most durable phenomena of history. The context within which mankind pursues its existence is *society*. The environment within which this pursuit takes place is *culture*. The substance of culture is *knowledge*. The process by which man interacts with knowledge, extracting from it and enhancing it, is what we call *learning*. The process by which the human spirit prosecutes its survival is *living*, and the extent to which man succeeds or fails in achieving self-enhancement, the advancement of society and the enrichment of culture is what I call the *quality of life*."

"*Culture*, the accumulation of human experience and creativity," I argued, "is, therefore, the pre-eminent context of human existence, the sustaining substance of which is knowledge. Contrary to common presumption, knowledge does not derive from learning. Learning is a process by which we access knowledge. Learning is the tool with which we acquire education. Learning is a process, not a foundation. Knowledge is the tool for building societies and the foundation for that process is culture."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., *Designing Knowledge Societies: Challenges and Opportunities*, ASEAN Regional Workshop On Building Knowledge Societies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Jan 26 – 27, 2000

### *Informed Societies, Enlightened Societies and Knowledge Societies*

In the above context, we must of necessity distinguish between *Informed Societies*, *Enlightened Societies* and *Knowledge Societies*. In simple terms, Informed Societies are societies in which a large number of the people have reasonable and relatively free or affordable access to a fair amount of information with which to prosecute their daily lives. Enlightened Societies are those in which a reasonable number of the population are not only informed, but, by tradition or practice, have and exercise the capacity to routinely engage such information, publicly or privately acquired, against a spectrum of philosophies, worldviews or standards, for the purpose of forming judgements which further enhance the quality of thought and decision-making in the society. Knowledge Societies, for their part, are societies which, by virtue of an extended and extensive history of enlightenment, fuelled routinely by debate, experimentation, research, creativity and innovation, maintain a set of core values which inform their interaction with time and the challenges and opportunities of human existence.

Informed Societies are essentially the result of good media; Enlightened Societies result from good education, and Knowledge Societies are, for their part, the product of an extended experience of coping with the challenges of life, learning how to manage the tangible, while finding peace and accommodation with the intangible.

Societies need information to reflect upon in order to become enlightened; knowledge societies need enlightenment to convert information into knowledge, by integrating the enlightenment from engaging information into the fabric of their culture and socio-intellectual history. The product of an informed society is the ability to debate common issues; the product of an enlightened society is the ability to make sound judgement; the product of a knowledge society is the equanimity that comes from having a memory bank of experiences against which to compare new experiences, with the profound sense that little is new and worth splitting hairs about.

For the purpose of completion, I might add that *Wisdom* then, the crystallization of knowledge in the mastery of time and history, provides us the equanimity to weather the storm of the temporary and transient, with the full confidence in the endurance of time, knowledge and experience. This quintessential enduring nature of wisdom, epitomized in the profound equanimity of our elders of yesteryears, is the attribute we in Africa most need today as we move to engage in rapid modernization. It is this wisdom which will ensure that we do not mortgage the core of our socio-cultural, moral, ethical and philosophical beliefs, our very being, in a search for a new society at all cost. *Strategic Development* is a long-term engagement. Africa needs to migrate away from the cacophony of short-term experimentation with every idea that it thrown at it at will, causing much distraction and the wastage of limited material, administrative, intellectual and emotional resource.

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Mimicking knowledge, a common attribute of mass culture, is not the same as having knowledge. Knowledge societies are rare, and often when they occur, their most distinctive attributes might not be material.

So, when, in our programme document for this workshop, we talk about "the opportunity and challenge of mass-produced and mass-utilized knowledge," I believe that we are really talking about information, not knowledge. Which is okay, because information and communications technology does not inherently promote knowledge, but the production, aggregation and diffusion of information. To believe otherwise is to bequeath to technology what technology inherently cannot do. The knowledge development process is a human process, not a technological process.

### **The Right of Ownership of Africa's Problems and the Responsibility of Masterminding Africa's Future**

In advocating that the primary responsibility of masterminding Africa's strategy for self-development reside with Africans as is the case with all free societies, I seek, deliberately, to underpin a more fundamental strategic issue, namely *the Right of Ownership of Africa's Problems*. On September 15, 2001, barely a few days after the traumatic 9/11 tragedy in the United States, I addressed the Second International Conference on eCommerce organised by the World Intellectual Property Organization, WIPO, in Geneva. At that august gathering, I introduced the strategic concept of *the Right of Ownership of Problems as Intellectual Property*. Essentially, I postulated that creativity and innovation derive from problem-solving. Therefore, if you *steal* my problem, you cause me two problems: You deprive me of the opportunity for creativity and innovation, and in its wake, you leave me with the residual guilt of incompetence. And if you proffer your solutions to my problems and they fail, you blame me. This triple "whammy" describes the African dilemma more accurately than any I have heard or can think of in all my years as a scholar.

### **The Quintessence of Development**

In advocating the right of ownership of problems as intellectual property, I should state for the record that all my life I have always seen problems as nothing but opportunities for creativity and innovation. The fact of a problem compels the search for a solution, which in turn creates new knowledge to enhance capacity and the ability to handle a new set of problems at a perpetually higher level of engagement. This is the quintessence of development. This is the fundamental objective of research and development. The abysmal absence of research and development in Africa, as much in the social sciences and in science and technology, is a direct reflection of the discouragement of African engagement in problem-solving and, *ipso facto*, in self-development. This, in turn, undermines the development culture.

Furthermore, a moment's reflection on our own private lives reveals that all we do all day long as intelligent people is solve problems, be they financial, familial, or even romantic. Life with no problem to solve results in absolute boredom. In such a mode, the mind soon

atrophies, and it is then only a matter of time before the body follows suite. So, an Africa in which the problem-solving process is in the hands of mostly non-Africans faces the threat of atrophy. A by-product of this undesirable anomaly is increased dependency, with the collateral decline in vision, initiative, responsibility and responsiveness of governance. In a worst-case scenario, it threatens to turn leaders into supplicants, risking loss of the respect and admiration of the people so critical for enlightened and inspired leadership and development.

I also argued in the WIPO address that "besides the ownership of a problem, the definition of a problem and the parameters of its solution are also very important. The one who defines a problem defines the corresponding environment for the search for a solution, and ultimately the indicators that constitute a solution. Implicit in this are issues of solution for whom, for what, and by whom? If the definition of your problem is external to you, and the indicators of the desired solutions equally beyond you, then chances are that the solution would be irrelevant to you, with the serious possibility of causing new problems for you, in addition to those that you set out to solve in the first place."

### *The Alienation of Africa's Vast Globally Competitive Core of Experts*

From an institutional partnership point of view, much of the present African development strategy is structured either between the bureaucracy of donor and development communities and that of African governments, or between African governments and the global private sector. Excluded from this model are two of the most important strategic partners critical for African development, namely Africa's experts and the up-and-coming African private sector. Under the guise of being labelled "the brain drain", the very African experts who have been specifically trained to mastermind Africa's strategic development are either dismissed, or in a ghastly misrepresentation of fact, falsely proclaimed not to care.

Presumably, the likes of me and countless other accomplished Africans throughout the world are so enamoured of the glitter of the industrial world that we could, we are told, care less about the transformation of our own African society. Anyone who knows the soul of immigrant societies knows how patently false this popular analysis is. Indian, Chinese, Korean and indeed most of modern Asian technological miracle, especially in information and communications technology, has been driven by the singular efforts of their citizens domiciled abroad, at the epicenter of scientific knowledge and expertise.

The fact is that the group of African experts abroad, along with their counterparts at home, have neither been properly identified, quantified and qualified for strategic deployment, nor have they been provided the space and authority to engage in their legitimate capacity as the core group to mastermind Africa's self-development strategies. The result is that what Africa has invested so much to create because it realized how much it needed it, once developed, is left outside the process for reasons still unclear to many. The result of this miscalculation is that it creates a profound (even if silent)



resentment by African experts who feel that, until recently, their political leaders seemed enamoured of everyone but their own, for whatever reason.

### **Africa's Burden**

Development problems are neither mathematical nor logical. They are complex human intangibles the understanding of which requires more than academic research and a visit to the continent, armed with a prospectus of often pre-determined insights. This would ordinarily not be a problem if those who study Africa do so merely for academic purposes or even for non-strategic intervention. But to the extent that their insights and conclusions determine government strategies and policies for intervention in the African development process, to that extent their academic insights and analyses are given much more value than is justifiable. This carries with it the attendant risk that to the extent that they may be flawed, to that extent is Africa further at risk of pursuing yet another moribund approach to development--- one patently destined to fail.

### **What If?**

In reflecting on this presentation, flying from Namibia to South Africa, from Mozambique to New York, I have been preoccupied with a simple question, "What if?" What if all along, we got it all wrong? African Development, that is? What if all of the above apply to the African development experience? If this turns out to be the case, then, what do we do? Do we keep on going with business as usual? Do we find the courage to stop the clock, take a deep breath and start all over again? Do we muddle along, in the hope that somehow, somewhere, we will blunder our way to come out of the right exit point at the other end of African development? These are questions which I wish to raise for all those involved in the evolution of Africa's development paradigms and strategies. Quite simply, "What if?"

### ***The Pedigree of Seemingly Intractable Problems***

Perhaps the most serious strategic consequence of this alienation of Africa's best experts from the continent's strategic development process is the fact that those who have the instinctive, historic, emotional and cultural knowledge and expertise to capture the complexity of Africa's problems are not the ones defining the problem. The chances are that, as a consequence, the identification and definition of Africa's problems are flawed, at best, and outright wrong, at worst.

In my fascination with the pedigree of seemingly intractable problems, I have concluded that when a problem seems to elude solutions, there are six possibilities:

- It is poorly identified
- It is poorly defined
- If poorly defined, chances are that the diagnosis is flawed
- And if so, the solution will be flawed.

- If we implement a flawed solution, it will create a new problem, so that with time, a mountain of problems deriving from the implementation of flawed solutions emerges, which buries the original problem deep down, increasingly inaccessible to us.
- Or, for that matter, it was not a problem in the first place, hence it cannot be solved.

In my judgement, and increasingly in the opinion of a number of knowledgeable Africans, Africa's problems belong to one or more of the above.

### **Africa's Problem: What It Is Not**

A quick review of common wisdom regarding Africa's development problems pegs them at:

- Lack of resources
- Lack of critical mass of African expertise needed to lead strategic development
- Corruption<sup>2</sup>

Quite simply, from an African point of view, none of these is our fundamental problem.

#### ***Lack of Resource***

It does not take a rocket scientist to know that if there is something Africa does not lack, it is resources, both human and material. Not even financial resources, if we bother to quantify the liquidity of Africa's informal and not quite so informal economy. We simply have not bothered to define, quantify and qualify it, and bring it onstream.

#### ***Lack of Critical Mass of Indigenous African Expertise***

Taken globally, Africa has more globally competitive human expertise in practically all fields of endeavour than any continent would need to jumpstart its development. Again, we have never defined, quantified and qualified it. If we add the African Diaspora, one that is most keen to deliver its capacity and resources to transform Africa, both the resource level and the expert level become even more strategically profound.

#### ***Corruption***

I am inclined to distinguish between two kinds of public corruption, *ethical corruption* and *systemic corruption*.

##### ***Ethical Corruption***

At the risk of drawing fire even from some of my fellow Africans, I do not believe that corruption is our problem. As an ethical deficit, Africans by no means have any more propensity to impropriety than any other peoples do in the world. The problem is inherent in the issues I have discussed above. The most significant antidote to ethical corruption is

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<sup>2</sup> I am sure that there are many more, but why should I be the one to help undermine my own spirit!

an earnest and ardent vision, inspired leadership, a shared public dream and joint effort, a sense of destiny and relevance, the absence of cynicism, a dedication to building a legacy, and more. When so preoccupied with transforming society, people, especially when they have confidence in their tenure, will tend to seek higher accolades than material wealth. But in the boredom of less meaningful engagement, and with a low sense of what difference they can make to the fortunes of the people they serve, people will decline into corruption.

### *Institutional Corruption*

On the institutional level, which is what we seek to address when we talk about the transparency of government, I believe that institutional corruption in Africa is more systemic than ethical. Quite simply, in the colonial and post-colonial era, alien systems of administration and the distribution of public opportunities, goods and services were introduced haphazardly into Africa, deliberately obliterating centuries-old systems that had survived the passage and test of time. This wholesale imposition created a bottleneck in material and service delivery with neither a planned phased solution nor an adequate attempt to adjust it to respond to the frustration it created. With the pressing need to seek public goods and services, people were compelled to find ways *around* the "bureaucracy", thus creating the alternative supply and demand mechanism that is the basic market dynamics of public institutional corruption. The very essence of colonial administration was to prevent things from happening. So-called "natives" were not allowed to make even the simplest decisions. Everything referred to the colonial administrator, even at the local level. All letters, for example, were written and signed on his behalf. The very term "bureaucratic" in global common parlance means an institutional traffic jam or quagmire.<sup>3</sup>

I should emphasize that none of the above is intended in any manner to excuse corruption of any kind, or project blame for it unto others. On the contrary, I believe that if we reconstruct African pre-colonial systems of transparency in the delivery of public goods and services, we will find that the traditional rules of propriety and accountability were more strident and the consequences of their violation more severe than their modern counterpart, compelling compliance even if merely for reasons of enlightened self-interest.

### **Africa's Problem: What It Is**

What then is Africa's problem?

I have identified many of them throughout my analysis. They include:

- The African loss of ownership of its problems and the right and responsibility to engage them meaningfully in search of solutions.

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<sup>3</sup> You might not agree fully with me here, but I urge you to at least take it as a possibility and reflect on it with more time to spare.

- The alienation of Africa's best-trained minds and expertise from the strategic development process.
- The failure to define, quantify and deploy such expertise and internal material resources at the forefront of Africa's self-development process.
- The unholy positioning of Africa's aspirations primarily as a response to external expectations rather than to the internal dreams and expectations of the people.
- The loss of self-confidence arising from an extended period of subjugation to constant badgering with woes of failure and incompetence.
- The incessant and relentless demand on Africans and African leaders to constantly prove themselves to every Tom, Dick and Harriette other than to the African people to whom they owe their authority to govern.

### **The Divergence between Capacity Building and the Positioning of Africa's Strategic Vision**

Above all, for me, the most critical problem Africa has is the uncanny positioning of Africa's strategic vision well below the expert capacity and training of its best minds. Put simply, as a result of seriously flawed development paradigms, those which can be summarized in that embarrassing assault on human genius that says "Africans must learn to crawl before they can walk", we have pitched our strategic development sight well below the radar screen of even the most minimally trained African.

### ***Poverty Management vs. Knowledge and Culture-based Scientific Quantum Development***

Put differently, you cannot train world-class scholars, scientists, engineers, managers, economists, bankers, academics, historians and other experts, and then tell them that they must focus on poverty. These men and women were trained to create wealth not manage poverty. Poverty management is so low a strategic focus that it simply does not draw the passionate engagement of Africa's strategic experts, except when they focus specifically on the issue of poverty.

The notion of deploying knowledge to address minimalist objectives, which is what most externally devised agendas for the developing world are, is at best an oxymoron, and minimally a contradiction of intent.

In my view, and I am sure in the view of a good number of African experts, Africa's strategic development paradigm should aim at creating wealth. This wealth, in turn, through the support for education, health services, job creation and the support of second and third tier enterprises, eliminates poverty. Meanwhile, the complex network that is our extended family system ensures that such wealth is distributed three-dimensionally to support kith and kin at all socio-economic strata.

Here again, I do not wish to under-estimate the challenge of poverty, but rather wish merely to state that the only viable long-term solution to poverty is not to manage it, but to create the wealth and capacity building that would in turn eliminate it, and do so in a

more permanent way. Meanwhile, for the avoidance of confusion, we must pursue short-term support for the needy, as long as we also provide them the means for education and meaningful engagement guaranteed to provide them the opportunity to transform their social and economic status in their own generation. This was the development paradigm my country, Nigeria, pursued when we were growing up, and the acclaimed global presence of world-class Nigerian experts is the best evidence of the wisdom and success of that self-development model.

### **The Universality of the Human Instinct to Seek Excellence**

Before seeking to synthesize this humble invitation to a conversation that this presentation represents, I would like to return to global consideration of strategic issues of knowledge and development, and the implications of the pursuit of knowledge on our global geo-political environment and government.

In comments at a closed-door meeting of a handful of long-term strategic experts convened by the Chairman of IBM late last year to reflect on the future of the world (the IBM Global Innovation Opportunity (GIO)), I offered the opinion that all persons and individuals seek excellence as a basic human instinct. No one person or group of persons or nation has the exclusive right to the pursuit of excellence. The challenge to those who presently control the zenith of human scientific and technological excellence is how they adjust to this fundamental universal driving force in human nature. If they accommodate it, by strategic magnanimity and collaboration, they stand an excellent chance of broadening their capacity for the greater good of mankind. If on the other hand, they seek to prevent others from seeking excellence through knowledge, especially in the area of science and technology, they risk creating inevitable conflict.

The fact is that the epicentre of global scientific knowledge has been shifting, first infinitesimally, but now more perceptibly, away from the United States and Western Europe, sliding eastward to Asia, and south to Brazil and similar Latin American countries. Our challenge in Africa is to make this migration change course south, south-eastward and south-westward in our direction. For the United States and Western Europe, their residual scientific leadership is still so vast that there is little reason to worry. Furthermore, if we truly globalize knowledge, the search for it and its deployment for the good of all mankind, if we promote collaboration in science and technology, and indeed in other efforts, we will all share these benefits equitably. The infusion of fresh minds in the pursuit of knowledge has proved to be of strategic benefit throughout history.

### ***Knowledge as Power: When the Truth of an Aphorism Pinches the Nerves***

In this regard, the irony is that for many years, those who controlled global knowledge said routinely that knowledge was power. They meant it, but perhaps only in the context that they controlled global knowledge, and that knowledge gave them power. But many outside the industrial world took heed of what was also genuinely intended as advice to seek knowledge to enhance development. The truth is that at that time, it was never intended that the developing world seek all knowledge. Now they have, and as

knowledge is truly becoming power, there is anxiety on the part of those who once controlled such knowledge, to prevent them from acquiring the empowerment that it brings.

I further stated in that IBM Global Innovation Opportunity (GIO) session, that if we overlaid the map of the global distribution of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, on top of one of the global distribution of material wealth, they would not be identical. The differential between the two could serve as the dynamic to drive global collaboration for exponential growth, or fuel global conflict in a bid to protect old pre-emptive turfs. The emergence of China as a global economic force, especially in telecommunications and information technology, is a case in point.

### ***The Challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Threat of Knowledge Wars***

The risk that this asymmetry poses is that we could find ourselves gyrating at the brink of knowledge wars as countries break out of the mould of agro-based SMME economies to major knowledge, science and technology-based industrial economies, competing directly against western economies, as much in the developing world's market as in the latter's own backyard. The attempt to restrict the importation of cotton clothing products into the US and European Union countries that has hit the headlines in the last fortnight or so, after years of bullying the developing world to accept unlimited access to their markets with little reciprocal access, illustrates this challenge. I do not wish for a moment to under-estimate the potential trauma of losing once total control of the world's strategic knowledge and the power it embodied. The anxiety this causes, and the resistance to change and transition that it engenders, together constitute the global version of the national phenomenon of political leaders who seek to perpetually stay in power because they have not had the opportunity to prepare themselves for inevitable change---a phenomenon that we often posit as the epitome of translucent or opaque government in the developing world whenever we discuss transparency and government.

### **Some Risks and Threats of eGovernment**

eGovernment, as is the case with all technology-based enterprises, also involves certain risks or threats. Amongst these, a few examples should suffice:

- Interpersonal communication suffers from online communication. In government, as indeed in all political and social interaction, this poses a serious threat. As it is, public figures and bureaucrats already hardly create opportunities to interact face-to-face with their constituents and public. Indiscriminate and uncritical deployment of eGovernment can exacerbate this anomaly.
- The human mind is designed to manage information in small batches so that it can digest it and internalize its essence. The flood of essentially undifferentiated information that any Internet-based process creates, I believe, can serve to reduce comprehension.

- There is the tendency by those who govern to believe that the very fact that information (including data) has been made available to the public means that that is all they have to do, or that, for that matter, the veracity of such information is assured. In this regard, and with due and kind respect to the Adviser on Public Services Reform to the British Prime Minister, the gaping contradiction between her otherwise brilliant presentation on reforms in U.K. administration at the first plenary session on Tuesday, is a perfect case in point. The gaping contradiction between deploying so impressive an eGovernment platform and taking the people to war on the basis of what the majority of the British public now claims to have been misinformation, strips naked any assumption that eGovernment automatically advances participatory, transparent and consultative government.

Furthermore, the very fact that the United States, the United Kingdom and the United Nations, three global institutions with the best Information and Communication Technology and eGovernment systems in the world (besides Korea, I might add!) embroiled the world in issues of the veracity of information that led to a major war, should compel us to be more modest and circumspect about the claims we make about information and communications technology-enhanced administration (i.e., eGovernment), and its impact on transparency and participatory government. In fact, a plausible argument can be made, that electronic governance can increase the possibility of an information gap and a disconnect in public dialogue. A fall back to age-old tradition may be instructive. Back home in Nigeria, face-to-face conversation was always tied to veracity. A common expression was, "look me in the face and tell me that..."

I should state categorically that this is not a political point about the pros and cons of war, but rather an example of the limitations of eGovernment and the popular yet untenable assumption that it automatically enhances good and transparent government. The key is the intent, and the pre-eminent role of the human factor, not technology. eGovernment, depending on the objective or circumstances of its deployment, can, in fact, result in translucent or even opaque government. There have been moments in history when the very capability of efficiency served to enable the development and implementation of indecent policies and actions that haunt our human sensibility even to this day.

- eGovernment, as a technology-based enterprise, promises greater efficiency, not more transparency. Efficiency is in the realm of the scientific and technological, transparency lies at the heart of human ethics, decency and responsibility.
- As such, eGovernment is not, and cannot, be a panacea for all the challenges of bureaucratic administration and democratic governance.
- For Africa, the sheer physical limitation of the availability of terminal equipment or PCs makes the prospect of eGovernment inconceivable in a few countries, unless we apply innovation to find solutions such as mobile access.

- The wholesale exportation of eGovernment platforms, software and content to Africa, as with earlier exportations, might only serve to worsen the situation I have described in this presentation.

### **Reinventing Government in Africa: Revisiting Proven Centuries-Old Models for Efficacy, Relevance and Prospects of Natural Embrace**

Where does Africa go from here? I believe that we have a lot of homework to do in Africa in preparation for deploying ICT and other technologies in a massive way for eGovernment. We need to revisit proven centuries-old models of administrative and other government delivery of public goods and services in search of contemporary relevance and efficacy in the hope that we can construct updated models that would be naturally and instinctively embraced by Africans by virtue of their being natural and familiar home-grown processes perfected through history. This will require a comprehensive research effort that is worth the investment.

### ***Towards a Coherent and Relevant eGovernment Programme in Africa and the Role of ICT***

While this process is taking place, there is a lot that the facilitations of Information and Communications Technology bring to the formulation and deployment of Africa's strategic self-development. A few of these are worth listing:

- The online capacity of ICT will enable Africa to draw on the expertise of Africans abroad and in the Diaspora without requiring that they change their location and situation in order for them to contribute to Africa's strategic development. In this regard, we at the Telecom Africa Corporation are seeking to build the Telecom Africa Global Virtual Research Laboratory, a secure Intranet that will allow African scientific and other researchers, in collaboration with their non-African well-wishers, to engage in online Research and Development from their critical placement at the global cutting edge of their expertise. When each such research attains the level where it requires in-house physical experimentation, it will be pulled offline, and appropriate arrangements will be made to deploy a core of African male and female researchers to pursue the research by arrangement with the most appropriate laboratory for the particular research project.
- We need to build an ICT industry in Africa, because simply to create or be a market is not sustainable and does not engage African minds at the cutting edge. It also does not create the jobs and other socio-economic benefits that the adoption of technological development brings to other societies and economies. We at Telecom Africa have advocated ICT and telecommunications industrialization in Africa for almost a decade. The fact is that, learning from China's example, this will only be accomplished if African governments require it as a strategic policy. People will not go out of their way to invest in industrialisation unless compelled to do so in circumstances in which they consider the market too valuable and profitable to risk losing merely for being selfish and recalcitrant.



- Such industrialisation will help to solve the problem of the huge deficit of ICT equipment, facilities, infrastructure, applications and content in Africa.
- We need to train Africans from as early as primary school through high school to the university and other tertiary institutions in the science, technology, utilisation, management and deployment of ICT.
- We need to advance the development of eGovernment Readiness studies in Africa, nationally, sub-regionally and continentally, under the primary leadership of African experts who, in turn, train young prodigies.
- We need to build state-of-the-art broadband data networks across Africa, including access for the rural and remote populations, and with particular attention to the delivery of educational, health and other civic goods and services. Telecom Africa is presently engaged in doing so in Mozambique through EBS Telecom Africa, a data communications joint venture between Telecom Africa and Mozambique's downstream petroleum and energy parastatal, Petromoc.
- We need to engage our young talents to create adaptations of applications and content to meet the life-style of local populations
- We need to engage and support the up-and-coming African ICT private sector to grow from SMMEs into medium-level companies en route to becoming global ICT corporations.
- We need to bridge the gap between African political leadership and its scientific, professional, intellectual and other leadership, thus forming the spectrum of leadership that more truly represents the comprehensive approach to nation-building.
- We need to support bold African self-development initiatives, not only for governments, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), but those of the African private, academic, intellectual and communal sectors, as well as civil society.
- Above all, we need to facilitate the voice of every African, man and woman, boy and girl, strong and not-quite so strong, to be heard and to genuinely believe in his or her right and responsibility to engage the system in pursuit of self-actualisation and the public common good.

These are only a few ways in which we can begin to build the right paradigm for African development and the deployment of eGovernment for Africa's quantum development.

Overall, I have in the past, advocated that we must use "this new set of tools called ICT to enhance our efforts to deliver more and better governance to our people, one which has the benefit of evolving from our own strategic development paradigms and priorities. It is

eminently self-evident, upon the most perfunctory analysis, that we have had such a plethora of costly exogenous concepts, models and technologies thrown at our development process without prior strategic analysis of their relevance and efficacy by us, that the residual deficits from them today constitute a major part of our development problem. As we begin to take command of masterminding the future and destiny of the African continent clear across the full spectrum of continental transformation and modernisation, as we begin to clear the path for Africa's quantum development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we must also begin to be selective in what we embrace, how, and for what purpose."<sup>4</sup>

### **Begging the Understanding of Our Development Partners for Our Mutual Gain**

The notion of development assistance with punitive consequences for presumed recalcitrance, is a contradiction of logic and intent. The time has come, no, the time is long overdue, for Africans to take the reign of defining their present condition in the context of their checkered history, to define their future, and to craft the strategies and scenarios for taking the continent and its people from the difficult yesterdays and the troubled todays to the dream of better tomorrows, on the laurels of their own leadership, sweat, and hopefully only literally, and only when necessary, their blood. We Africans, the best and the brightest, working hand in hand with all of us, each contributing his or her own genius and mite, must lead this process, taking the risk along with the promise. It is a matter of legacy.

Once we have defined the goal, the strategy and the course, those who wish Africa well can then, taking their cue from us, join us to advance our course. Assistance, by definition, follows the direction of development set and prosecuted by the stakeholder. It does not precede it, nor does it dictate the path and the strategy. I fully recognise that in a manner not dissimilar to a woman seeking some breathing space, this paradigm shift is not an easy one to accept or adjust to. But in an environment in which there has been so much talk about donor fatigue, this approach, in as much as it holds the best prospects of a successful African transformation paradigm through self-development, holds the best promise for all.

### **The Doctor and the Needy Patient**

In trying to grasp the dilemma of how to synthesize the short-term challenges of Africa, with their attendant need for assistance, and our long-term strategic imperatives, with the attendant unprecedented and unholy competition between African self-development strategies and experts and powerful money-backed donor and trade-sponsored strategies and experts, I am haunted by a recurrent image. It is of a patient in need, intelligent and knowledgeable, though weak and tired, and a benevolent physician standing over him with a syringe ready to administer a free injection. The patient, in as much as he can speak, struggles to know what the syringe contains. The physician, conscious of his

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., *SMART e-GOVERNMENT: Adopting Information and Communications Technologies to Enhance Strategic Development Without Undermining Fundamental Human Priorities*. Keynote Address to the e-Government Africa 2003 Conference, Johannesburg, 15 September 2003.

ownership and donation of the injection, with no time to entertain the laboured protestations of the patient, tells the patient to take it or leave it. What does the patient do? The reason the patient wants to know the content of the syringe is that he is allergic to certain antibiotics. The risk is that the doctor, unwilling to listen, could administer a wrong even if free medication, and might inadvertently even though patently innocently kill the patient just by not listening.

### **Conclusion**

At the end of the day, we must all agree that a developed modern Africa is the best sort of partner the world should seek. The very hosting of this 6<sup>th</sup> Global Forum on Reinventing Government here in Seoul, Korea, a country which, from a past no less challenging than Africa's, has come of age as a global economic power to be reckoned with, makes this argument most sound.

I want to thank you for your indulgence.

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Dr. Joseph O., Okpaku, Sr.  
President and CEO  
Telecom Africa Corporation  
222 Forest Avenue  
New Rochelle, N. Y. 100804 USA

Tel: +1 914 636 6498  
Fax: +1 914 813 2503  
Email: [okpaku@aol.com](mailto:okpaku@aol.com)