



Building the Digital Bridge

Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies¹

The industrial world must allow for the slightest possibility that Africans might one day develop the scientific and technological capacity to compete effectively against the world's most powerful conglomerates. In a knowledge-based global environment, what it takes to do so is knowledge, information, intellectual capacity, access, opportunity and a level playing field. Africa's potential in this regard is enormous, given the already large numbers of leading-edge African ICT experts spread throughout the world.

—JOSEPH O. OKPAKU, SR.

Introduction

I want to thank the United Nations for the wisdom in convening these two informal panels in parallel with the Special Meeting of the General Assembly on Information and Communications Technologies for

Development, and the organisers for the privilege of being invited to participate in these deliberations.

My acceptance of the invitation is a triple recognition and acknowledgement of the honour it bestows, the urgency of the challenge we seek to master in these discussions, and the compelling importance of devising strategies for, and implementing solutions to the challenges of the Digital Divide before we become so used to them that we unconsciously begin to resist solutions for the fear of the loss that subtly accompanies the prospects of problem-solving.

Problem-Dependence

For, in a complex way too detailed to go into here, there is a part of us that disposes us to become so enamoured of certain kinds of problems that we depend on their continuing existence to give efficacy to our urgent pre-occupations. In fact, to some extent, the more we invest in such problems, which I call “seemingly intractable problems”, the more we develop a dependence on them. Some of us build major careers on our expertise on problems, not on their solutions, since the former, being easier to master, offers a more reliable path to intellectual fame. Problem-solving is more risky and promises less, in the short-term and, consequently, has a lesser ability to attract what one might call “the ambitious realist”, because it is domiciled on slippery grounds.

Significantly, perhaps unfortunately, the problems of development in the non-industrial world, particularly in Africa, and especially with respect to the handicaps of information and communications technologies capacity, fall into this category. The challenges of the Digital Divide are so intriguing, perhaps romantic in a way, that we must credit this lead 21st Century phenomenon with having created an enormous mass of scholarship, expertise, even an industry, all in the short span of only a few years from the formal birth of the expression, “the Digital Divide” in Okinawa during the G8 Summit meeting in the year 2000. As happens in

such dynamics, a tremendous amount of money and resources has been engendered and spent in the devolution of this phenomenon.

Our Challenge

The question is: What do we have to show for it? How much have we accomplished? And of what we have accomplished, how much of it has or holds the potential to have a meaningful positive impact on the quality of life and competitive capacity of the people and society of Africa and the developing world on whose behalf all of this evolved? Furthermore, if our answers to these questions are less than enthusiastic, what have we failed to do, or done wrong, or need to do differently, in order to drive a direct and logical path from the problems of the Digital Divide to their solutions? How do we ensure the recognition of these gains and their entrenchment into the permanent fabric of the African society? This, I believe, coming from the back door so to speak, is the pre-occupation of this Special Meeting of the General Assembly, and the challenge to this panel and its sister panel of yesterday.

The Metamorphosis of Problem-Solving

Solving intractable problems of the sort to which we have classified the Digital Divide requires a coherent process which, in simple terms, involves the creation of a path along which we convert problems into challenges which, in turn we re-configure as opportunities, which themselves then naturally attract the intellect, capacity and resources of problem-solving by virtue of self-evident benefits accruable from responding to them. This engineered metamorphosis of the challenge of the Digital Divide from a problem to an opportunity is, for me, the best mechanism for bridging the gap.

Our challenge here, therefore, becomes how we engineer this metamorphosis, and once the problems become opportunities, how we define and articulate the vision of an ICT-empowered developing world

(hopefully “newly-developed world” at that time). What strategies do we develop for its accomplishment, what resources do we identify and mobilise for the process, what indicators and benchmarks do we construct to guide and monitor the process, and what would also be the nature and image of the end-result we seek, so that we can identify success when we get there. These, again, are the questions before us.

Where We Are

A tremendous amount of energy and resources has been committed to the definition of the reality and scope of the handicap Africa and the rest of the developing world suffer when it comes to the equity and parity of access to the facilities and corresponding benefits of information and communications technologies.

At global, regional, national, private sector and civil society levels, there already exists such a large number of initiatives that the blurring and potential for acting at cross-purposes usually attendant to such circumstances have begun to kick-in. The United Nations ICT Task Force at the global pinnacle, alongside the G8 Dot Force Initiative, the Digital Divide Task Force of the World Economic Forum and the various continental efforts, such as the e-Africa Commission of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), are but a few. If, in spite of all of this, we still have not built the global wave of indefatigable momentum powerful and relentless enough to drive a process of transformation in and with ICT, chances are that our paradigm for bridging the Digital Divide needs corrective adjustments. The very fact of this gathering would seem to confirm this perception.

The Clarion Call

A prime element calling for adjustment is the need to commence the engineered metamorphosis of transforming the problem of the Digital

Divide into a worldwide mobilisation of our global genius to use the vast capacity of ICT to build an eminently better world. That world would be one in which most of the hopes and dreams of the United Nations Millennium Programme, a vision which encompasses the dreams of most other initiatives, are accomplished, through a global rebirth of creativity, innovation, faith and *joie de vivre* in a global 21st Century Renaissance.

For, as I have said in the past, there comes a time in the lives of a people, when no matter how embattled or handicapped, they must find the courage and the will to take their destiny in their own hands. And armed with their resources, no matter how limited, strike out with courage, hope, faith and enormous passion and genius, to create the future of their wildest dreams, with the help of friends, if possible, alone if inevitable. This passion, this courage, this right and responsibility of shaping a desired future, this opportunity of masterminding our tomorrow, this unique opportunity to enrich our today and to leave an indelible legacy to enrich the lives of those who succeed us, this is the singular strategic human and social resource we need to bridge the Digital Divide.

This clarion call to the trenches, must engender the enthusiasm and zeal of a Renaissance, not the misery and weary-laden boredom of indifference, hopelessness and disillusionment, which have been major, even if inadvertent, by-products of the relentless drumbeat of impoverishment, disadvantage and incapacity which, in turn, only undermines the confidence and capacity of Africans and others in the developing world to dream. The train of development of ICT capacity in Africa and the rest of the developing world must be out of the station. Those who wish to make a difference and preserve the right and opportunity to enjoy the benefits and accolades of promising accomplishments, must be on board.²

Building the Digital Bridge

To symbolise this paradigm shift from problem embrace to problem solving, I have chosen to proffer the concept of “Building the Digital

Bridge” to replace that of “Bridging the Digital Divide” as the proper proactive vision. I will, therefore, devote the rest of this presentation to the challenges, opportunities and strategies for *building* the Digital Bridge, allowing each society to choose the gap, river or gorge over which to build it.

The Challenges

Contrary to common wisdom and therefore to the assumptions which we take into the exercise, the challenges we face in trying to build the Digital Bridge fall into many categories, most of which are neither financial nor technological. In fact, they are primarily philosophical, ideological, cultural, intellectual and conceptual. Let us look at a few of them.

Amongst the assumptions we take to be axiomatic but which are at best debatable, are the following:

1. *The Cinderella Syndrome*

In talking about ICT and development in the Third World, we almost automatically focus on pilot or experimental initiatives and couch this inefficacious notion under the guise of the need to be “realistic”, “to crawl before you can walk”, or other reasonable facsimiles. The notion is that big initiatives are ambitious or presumptuous and guaranteed to fail.

The question is: On what evidentiary basis do we assume that small initiatives have an inherent capacity for success, as opposed to big and bold initiatives, just because they are small? Some problems are simply big. This includes Africa’s development problems. Big problems sometimes demand big solutions. In fact, it is the very enormity of big problems, which ignites the genius of the bold and innovative, and sets the necessary psychological stimulus and environment for a relentless effort to overcome them. This is what gets the juices of incurable problem-solvers flowing. I know, because I am one of them. It is, therefore, my humble submission that one reason we have not made the progress we need to make in building the Digital Bridge is that we are totally mired

in a plethora of small initiatives which, though they give us comfort, have no prospect of reasonable impact without the bold efforts that must first be made.

2. What Jack Can Do, Jack Can Do

Why do we presume that Africans lack the same ambition, genius and dream for innovation that their western counterparts have and with which they have built their own societies? How realistic was Bill Gates' dream to build Microsoft? How realistic was the dream to create the Internet? These are some of the major innovations that have created the core of ICT. If Africa and the rest of the developing world are to enter the fraternity of the mastery of ICT for social and economic transformation, they must, first and foremost, break out of the bondage of constrained dreams, possibilities and expectations, to unleash their genius and passion for the transformation of their own societies and our common world at large.

3. The Vortex of SMEs

Correspondingly, virtually all the initiatives in place, with regard to ICT and development, focus on small and medium enterprises with an almost visceral disdain for major, especially industrial, initiatives. This is strategically and conceptually flawed because, by definition, SMEs are satellite operations, which dance around core industrial enterprises. So, without building core ICT industries in Africa and the developing world, SMEs are unsustainable. They merely rotate frenetically around a vortex which will ultimately swallow them up, gulping an enormous amount of scarce resources, hope and expectations in the process.

4. Bureaucracy and Innovation: Water and Oil

We are entrenching the management and prosecution of ICT in development with bureaucracies, whether of government, international organisations or corporations. This is an intellectual oxymoron. The quintessence of bureaucracy is to maintain the *status quo* by preventing change, surprise and magic. There is hardly a single significant ICT

innovation from the industrial world, which is the product of a bureaucracy. And yet when we talk about bridging the digital divide, we run the full gamut of bureaucratic intervention from donor to recipient, literally freezing out residual creative value.

5. Systemic Exclusion of Genius

Most importantly in this regard, genius, the enabling capacity for innovation, tends to function best outside the system, outside bureaucracies and sometimes outside the most logical; hence, the validity of the old concept of the “mad scientist” to whom we owe most of our current development capacities. It is my submission that we are, in fact, by the very manner in which we are prosecuting our intervention in ICT for development, excluding the very genius that we need in order to make the critical difference. We should remember that quantum transformation is not a normal or routine process, but one of the exceptional. Africa, and for that matter, most developing nations, may not need more than a mere handful of significant innovations to drive the massive transformation of their economies and societies to the desired high quality existence.

6. The Narrow and Dysfunctional Definition of Wealth and Poverty: The Primacy of Africa's Global ICT Intellectual Wealth and Capacity

There is a flawed asymmetry in our emphasis on material resource and, at the risk of being misinterpreted, even stability, as necessary or ideal requirements for quantum development. The most important ingredient for ICT for development is intellectual capacity and the knowledge that goes with it. So stated, the assumption of Africa's merely insipient capacity for driving quantum ICT development becomes questionable. The problem is that we have not tried to quantify and qualify Africa's global ICT expertise (both male and female) as a strategic tool for driving the continent's development and transformation. It is for this reason that at the Telecom Africa Corporation, we have sought to undertake a *Global Human Resource Survey of African Male and Female Expertise in*

ICT as a key element in our *strategic toolkit* for building Africa's global competitiveness in the sector.

7. Regulators for Whom?

It has come to be presumed to be axiomatic that the role of regulators in the sector is to facilitate easy access to the markets of the developing world for large global corporations. Besides the fact that this has no historical precedence in the developed world, it has no inherent logic or validity. The first responsibility of any regulator is to mastermind the local development of the ICT sector using its regulatory powers and resources (such as spectrum) to *empower* the growth of indigenous capacity in the sector. Such empowerment then makes local sector players attractive to global players as partners without whom they cannot access these markets. That was always the American paradigm in which the sector was inaccessible to foreigners for a long time, or in the Middle-East oil countries where this is a basic partnership paradigm. It is this indigenous capacity which becomes the foundation, down the road, of that nation's competitive capacity in the global context, which is, after all, the ultimate goal of all our efforts at bridging the Digital Divide, or is it not?

8. Recognising the Digital Bridge When We Cross It

It is more than a bit of intellectual curiosity that we talk so much about bridging the digital divide, but we never define what the bridge looks like. How then do we know what we are looking for or recognise it when we find it? It is like going to the airport and asking for the next flight to anywhere. We end up nowhere of any significance. And should we get there by accident, we will continue to search because we failed to define what we were looking for in the first place. It is, therefore, important to us, *a priori*, to attempt to define, no matter how utopian in scope, this bridge we seek to throw across the river, like Aenid's Julius Caesar of old. Without a fully defined destination, it is difficult to derive or ascribe value to our journey. Tomorrow does not just happen; it is created. And

if we take the trouble to define our desired tomorrow on the basis of our most treasured dreams and expectations, we will find that not everyone wants the same tomorrow, or that their tomorrow be a sullen imitation or replica of our own checkered yesterday. This is particularly critical in our electronic age.³

9. Conditionalities Which Effectively Inhibit Development

It has always been my belief that when in doubt about what is good for others, simply interpose what is good for you. On this basis, much of what is said to be necessary before there can be ICT (or other) development in Africa, while good capacities in themselves, hold no precedence as incentives for investment or development. Never in the history of human development have so many requirements been placed on a people in dire need of self-development. Nobody ever required a particular type of Government or leader in the U.S. or Europe, or, more pertinently, in the People's Republic of China, as a condition for investing or engaging in business in these countries. The concerns that drive investment and development are not necessarily the same as those of good governance or excellent civic leadership.

This is not to suggest that Africa does not need to entrench good governance and accountability for *its own* human and social benefit and internal strength. But any casual study of the long grocery list of pre-requisite conditions for investment in Africa will reveal a striking semblance to the characteristics of Utopia, which by definition, are unattainable.

On the other hand, one can argue that economic development, and that which ICT development can greatly advance, will, in fact, reduce the stress and anxieties which inevitably create an environment fertile for conflict and political instability. Sometimes, the brandishing of this long list of conditionalities becomes little more than a faint excuse for avoiding or postponing a commitment to assist in the development process. Africa's recognition of this is important for finding the courage for self-development and competitive capacity building. Social, political and economic development goes hand in hand, not in tandem.

10. From Handicapping Pessimism to Empowering Optimism

From a psychological point of view, it is difficult to understand why we do not see that the constant badgering of Africans, even by their most ardent well-wishers, with the worst case scenario statistics of a lack of capacity and the long list of failed or unfulfilled dreams, cannot but totally depress and incapacitate Africans. People cannot dream about a better tomorrow if constantly confronted with an emblazoned litany of woes from a painful yesterday, especially by those who, or whose ancestors, played a not insignificant role in creating yesterday's nightmare! While many may require this relentless recitation as a studied prerequisite for justifying support, it often has the effect of acting like spraying a room of hungry people with debilitating vapor in advance of bringing them food.

Ownership of the Challenge of the Digital Divide

Perhaps the most important of what I consider our strategic flaws in seeking to build the Digital Bridge, is the fact that those who seek to help, first and foremost, take inappropriate ownership of the problem, leaving the stakeholders, those whose lives we seek to improve, irrelevant and destitute of the right and responsibility to mastermind and shape their own destiny. The result is that we run the risk of carrying on so gallantly with a massive Big Band Parade of commitment to transform peoples' lives while they themselves resign themselves to stroll or sleepwalk down the alleyways of our digital highway, mere bystanders and observers of the alien evolution of their own future.

This is not meant to be unkind at all. On the contrary, I have arrived at this notion as a result of a strenuous effort on my part to address the issue of the risk of frustration on the part of those, like all of us here, who have devoted so much time, energy, resource and genius, in my case much of my adult life and a fair bit of my informed youth, trying to help achieve Africa's development. It is my submission that, like it or not, and

whatever their weaknesses might be, the only paradigm of development that has efficacy, especially with regard to ICT, is that in which a stakeholder takes the driver's seat from the word go.

It is simply axiomatic, and incontrovertibly so, that one does not learn to drive by sitting in the passenger seat. In saying this, a memory long-forgotten, jumps to mind. In the 1960s and early 1970s, in the United States, there was a ubiquitous advertising jingle, which said, "Go Greyhound, and leave the driving to us". The bankruptcy of this paradigm, one more representative of our approach to African development than one would think, is attested to by the fact that the Greyhound Bus Company's African initiative, such as in Nigeria, quickly collapsed. I have discussed this issue more extensively elsewhere, and in the introduction to this volume.⁴

Building the Digital Bridge

After having raised all these problems, what do I offer as solutions other than to plead that I have run out of time and would have loved to oblige? Actually, in response to my brief for this presentation, what has my own company, Telecom Africa Corporation, as a lead strategic African private sector institution, created for the precise objective of helping drive Africa's relentless search for global competitive capacity in ICT, done or is trying to do to effect a coherent and efficacious model of an ideal strategy for global partnerships to transform Africa in and with ICT capacity?

A few examples will suffice.

1. Industrialisation

The Telecom Africa Corporation, from its inception, has sought to persuade Africa and the global support environment, of the importance of building industrial capacity in ICT in Africa, as the key to building the

Digital Bridge. This not only creates a basic indigenous science and technology capacity *in situ*, but offers the only way to effect affordability through local manufacture.

Specifically, Telecom Africa continues to explore partnerships for industrial projects in Africa. It is working with on prospects of manufacturing optical fibre equipment and cables in Africa, most probably in Namibia.

Telecom Africa is also in discussions with China's leading mobile telecommunications manufacturer, for similar efforts with respect to mobile communications equipment and handsets. We need to make handsets cheaper in order for Africans to afford them, creating the large market we need from the economies of scale.

2. Research and Development

Science and Technology have no staying power without the backstop of a robust research and development capacity. We need to customise our solutions to our specific environment. We need to create intellectual property, the main ingredient in ICT capacity. Telecom Africa continues to search for those leading companies in ICT which will have the “generosity” and courage to partner with us in setting up active research and development laboratories in Africa. This is a commercially attractive and strategic opportunity, not an altruistic pastime.

In respect of this, and to mobilise Africa's global intellectual resource in ICT, we are setting up the *Telecom Africa Virtual Research Laboratory*, with the promise of technical support from UNESCO.

3. Global Human Resource Survey of African Male and Female Expertise in ICT

I have referred to the primacy of undertaking this study. Without knowing what and whom you have to work with, you cannot begin to design the Bridge we all want to build. This is an area in which the ITU, the UN ICT Task Force, UNDP, foundations and other institutions can be eminently and beneficially helpful.

4. The Telecom Africa Continental Telecommunications Network

For purposes of continental integration as well as for compelling ICT capacity building, we must eliminate the costly practice of transmitting intra-African traffic through overseas hubs. Telecom Africa has designed a satellite-based continental network, the Telecom Africa Continental Telecommunications Network, to deliver direct access between countries for voice, data, Internet and multi-media capacity. This offers a unique opportunity for profitable partnership and investment.

5. The Digital Factory

The Telecom Africa Corporation, in partnership with Sun Microsystems and the State of California Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency, is embarking on creating the Digital Factory, a project to create high-level software development capacity in Africa along the same lines as the Indian model. That model, incubated primarily in Bangalore but now spread throughout the sub-continent, has seen India become a major global player in the software development market. Designed as a public/private initiative, the Digital Factory is expected to service not only the African market, but also the global market, through outsourcing and sub-contracting from major software companies, global institutions, corporations, governments, and international agencies and organisations.

Details of these and other initiatives of the Telecom Africa Corporation are available from projects@telecomafrika.org or www.telecomafrika.org

A New Partnership Model

Partnerships are the critical vehicles for building our Digital Bridge. In this regard, Africa should not seek partnerships just for partnerships' sake. The precise kind of partnership, its configuration, the benefits it accrues to Africa, not only in the short-term but also in the

long-term, not only tactically but also strategically, is very important. Without this carefully thought-out approach, ill-formulated partnerships, especially those that position the Western private sector merely to reap the commercial benefits of the market opportunities inherent in Africa's ICT demand, as identified by African Governments individually or as a whole (such as, for example, under the aegis of NEPAD's e-Africa Commission), without reciprocal benefit and capacity-building, would simply have the effect of destroying Africa's nascent ICT private sector. It is precisely such an eventuality that would result in condemning Africa permanently to ICT dependence, and deprive the people of the enabling opportunities of using ICT capacity to create the wealth and resources to kiss economic embattlement goodbye once and for all.

For this reason, at the Telecom Africa Corporation, we believe that Africa's strategy should not be so much to build a partnership between African governments and the Western private sector, but rather for African governments to empower the African private sector, through an internal African public-private partnership. This, in turn, would then enable the African private sector companies to mastermind an effective private-private partnership with their global counterparts. The empowerment that this creates, is what will ultimately build Africa's global competitive capacity. In this regard, the words of President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, in a special luncheon in his honour at the United Nations, in June, 2002, become most significant and efficacious. "I want to empower my people," he said, "so that they can form good partnerships with the Western private sector."

Internal, Regional and South-South Partnerships

As important as global partnerships are to the building of our Digital Bridge, internal and regional partnerships, including South-South partnerships, are also critical, both for empowerment through strength in numbers, and shared experiences and practices, as well as for expanding the foundation for global competitive capacity-building.

The World Economic Forum CEO Charter

The recently launched World Economic Forum CEO Charter has the unique advantage that it is driven by CEOs, once themselves incurable dreamers, who know what it is to want to make a major impact, and who believe in taking on big problems with passion. Some of the most important help the Telecom Africa Corporation has received from global corporations like Nortel, IBM, Siemens, the Aerospace Corporation amongst others, even if only in our conceptual phase, has been the recognition of the enormity of our the Telecom Africa Vision, and the confirmation of the possibility of its realisation. This is what Africa badly needs.

My prescription for the success of the CEO Charter is to create a Mentorship Programme whereby each CEO adopts an African entrepreneur, and grooms him or her over several years, to re-create a facsimile of his or her own dream.

Essentially, if one hundred, or even fifty, CEOs adopt an equal number of African entrepreneurs and chaperon them through the labyrinth of entrepreneurial and corporate development, serving as mentors, quick reference points, and, most important, points of last reference before succumbing to the not infrequent pressure to throw in the towel just when things might just be about to turn the corner, we would have twenty five to fifty core ICT industrial institutions in Africa allowing for fifty percent success. It is these major African corporations, then, which will trigger other such corporations and stimulate and sustain numerous small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as a response to creating the products, services and capacities to service their demand. In a less than ten-year period, with one to two hundred major corporations in Africa with global competitive capacity, the notion of assisting African development would become history, replaced by a more refreshing dialogue on how to share the opportunities of the global market more equitably. That is our dream at the Telecom Africa Corporation.

In the process of such mentoring, the corporations of the CEOs will have a lot to gain not only through the vicarious invigoration which comes from new ideas and enthusiasm, but through working

partnerships with companies with lower overheads with which they could more profitably compete for global opportunities. This is the formula for both a win-win situation, and a respectable and eminent partnership for development in what I call: “Building the Digital Bridge across the Information and Communications Divide”.

Telecom Africa has set out on this mentorship path as well. There are many such visionary initiatives by Africans and other developing world people, which offer tremendous opportunities for partnerships and investment.

The Shape of My Dream Digital Bridge

I had maintained at the outset that we must define our dreamland so that we can recognise it when we get there. What then will the Digital Bridge look like?

We would have achieved our dream of building the Digital Bridge when we have a situation in Africa and the Developing World in which the empowering capacity created by ICT would be so common place that ICT itself would disappear from our everyday consciousness, joining the backdrop that is the proper home for enabling facilities; what we commonly call utilities.

We would have infused our educational, administrative, creative, strategic, even social environment with the benefits of ICT capacity, while preserving the primacy of our culture from the potential threat inherent in any inadvertent mistake of allowing ICT itself become a culture, one which can compete with our human culture with devastating consequences.

Our Ultimate Goal

If our ultimate goal is for Africa and the rest of the Developing World to develop their capacity to become globally competitive, which

means getting a fair share of what is currently controlled by the industrial world, logic suggests that at some point we must break away from the tutelage of the industrial world in order to build the smart capabilities to compete with it. At some point, when we believe we are ready to sink or swim, we will be compelled to kiss our helpers goodbye with affection, and say, “thanks, love you, see you on the global field of competition”. It is the logic of history, and a major tenet of African cultural tradition, that if we do our job of teaching and training well, that is, of mentoring, those who come after us must transcend us. If they do not, then we have not done our job; we have not taught them well.

The industrial world must therefore allow, at least psychologically, for the slightest possibility that Africans might one day develop the scientific and technological capacity to compete effectively against the world’s most powerful conglomerates. In a knowledge-based global environment, what it takes to do so is knowledge, information, intellectual capacity, access, opportunity and a level playing field, not legacy capabilities, entrenched economic and media dominance, political power and military might. Africa’s potential in this regard is enormous, given the already large numbers of leading-edge African ICT experts spread throughout the world.

The Essential Principles of Globalisation

In the event of such a desirable eventuality, in this future dispensation, we must modify the rules of global trade to include what at the Telecom Africa Corporation, we have chosen to call “The Essential Principles of Globalisation”. Simply put, it is my fundamental belief that:

Trade amongst nations must be:

1. *Fair and Equitable;*
2. *Involve mutual access to each other’s market; and*
3. *Enhance global competitive capacity, in the absence of which, it must*

4. *Promote the development of such global competitive capacity through dedicated Affirmative Action programmes built into trade agreements.*

Conclusion

Finally, from all I have said, one might ask: Have we accomplished anything at all in all our collective efforts at promoting ICT development in Africa and the rest of the Developing World? Eminently so. We are today, quite a long way from where we were when we started to talk about the need to bridge the Digital Divide. We can take heart in the knowledge that we have done much, even though we have a long way to go. We must now change tune and shift our gears to the proactive mode of Building the Digital Bridge together. For those who might have wondered if I would conclude that we have been wasting our time, how could I say so when I have been an integral part of this global effort?

I thank you for your intellectual indulgence.

NOTES

1. On June 17–18, 2002, the United Nations held a Special Meeting on Information and Communications Technologies for Development as part of the 101st Plenary of the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, which also included two concurrent Informal Panels. This chapter was an Address to Informal Panel 2: *The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Efforts to Promote Digital Opportunity*, on June 17, 2002.
2. There are lyrics from the Negro Spirituals of the African-American heritage, which capture this compelling clarion call.
3. See Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., *E-Culture, Human Culture and In-between: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century Digital World*, ITU Conference on Creating New Leaders for e-Culture, Coventry, UK, August 20–24, 2001.
4. See Joseph O. Okpaku, Sr., *Ownership of Problems, Intellectual Property and the Digital Divide—The Enabling Challenge of Solutions*, WIPO Second International Conference on Electronic Commerce and Intellectual Property, Geneva, September 19–21, 2001.