Chapter 44
Telecommunications Regulation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the historical development of telecommunication in Nigeria, ranging from the colonial era to the present democratic dispensation and the position of Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) as the telecommunication regulatory body, are highlighted. It goes further to x-ray the current trends and benefits of deregulation of telecommunication in the county. Despite the effort being made to ensure access to telecommunication system in the country, there are still some problems that militate against it effectiveness such as poor quality of services, inadequate telecommunication infrastructure and irregular electricity supply. It also looks at the future trends of telecommunication and among the recommendations are constant supplies of electricity, conducive environment and friendly policy that will sustain the growth of telecommunication in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure has made it possible for a good number of people to have access to communication facilities globally. ICT has become the life wire of human existence. Oketunji (2001) stated that everybody needs to communicate; daily ICT has made significant changes such as promoting efficiency and pro-ductivity, reducing the whole world into a global hamlet by breaking the barriers of distance and time. Developing countries now see the urgent need to integrate ICTs in all sectors of their economy in order to bridge the digital gap and to be participants in the global information systems. A major accept of ICT is the telecommunications. Its plays a vital role in the development of any society. According to the Nigeria National Telecommunications Policy (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2000) telecommunication is a vital engine of any economy; it is an essential infrastructure

that promotes the development of other sectors such as agriculture, education, industry, health, banking, defence, transportation and tourism. The National Telecommunications Policy further stated that global telecommunications provides the opportunity for a country to share in the wave of science and technology developments and the general economy in the positive ways. There is no doubt that governments in developed and developing countries world - wide have recognized the crucial role that can be played in facilitating and accelerating development in their countries. As a result of this, Nigerians have begun to appreciate the power of telecommunications technology as a way of life. Students, civil servants, businessmen, tourists, farmers, corporate bodies, lecturers and visitors in Nigeria have become part of the global community through access to telecommunications. The Encyclopædia Britannica. (2009) defined telecommunications as the science and practice of transmitting information by electromagnetic means, through which a wide variety of information can be transferred by a telecommunications system, including voice and music, still-frame and full-motion pictures, computer files and applications, and telegraphic data. Telecommunication is the technique of transmitting a message, from one point or place to another with the typical additional attribute of being bi-directional. In practice it also recognizes that something may be lost in the process; hence the term 'telecommunication' covers all forms of distance communications, including radio, telegraphy, television, telephony, data communication and computer networking. Telecommunication can be point-to-point, point-to-multipoint or broadcasting, which is a particular form of point-to-multipoint that goes only from the transmitter to the receivers. (Knowledge rush. com, 2003)

From the definitions given on telecommunications, it could be deduced that telecommunications are the facilities provided to enable people communicate from various locations through the use of electronic means such as mobile phone, computers, internet, radio, television, telegram, fax and other information based systems offering services for storing, retrieving, and transmitting data and information. The chapter is intended to present the historical development of telecommunication in Nigeria, x-ray the trends in the deregulation of telecommunications in the county, examine the factors militating against telecommunications and regulation, look at the future trend of telecommunications, and to make adequate recommendations for improvement of the sector.

Historical Development of Telecommunications in Nigeria

The first telecommunication in Nigeria was put in place by the colonial government in 1886 using a submarine cable by the African District Telegraphy Company Limited in London. In 1895 the key and sounder system was introduced and was managed by the Public Work Department (PWD). Telecommunication services were later transferred to the Post and Telegram Department (P&T) in 1907. In 1984 Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) emerged from the merging of the Nigerian External Telecommunication (NET) and the Telecommunication arm of the Post and Telecommunication (P&T). Enabled by the Companies Decree of 1968, NITEL was formed with a mandate to provide efficient and reliable services to the nation with little profit. Its operation started in 1985 with a total of 295, 370 telephone lines, in1992 it had 149,484 digital lines thereby increasing the network capacity to 600,000. Before the advent of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the tele-density was very low. The tele-density stood at 0.33 million phones for 100 million people. This was as a result of government interference and lack of privatization and mismanagement of fund. According to Muoka (2007) an estimated sum of $6 billion was lost as a result of mismanagement by the management of NITEL. As a result, series of seminars, workshops and conferences were held by telecommunications, information

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