What Private Sector has been doing? Presentation at the 10-year review of the implementation of WSIS Outcomes by Dr Jimson Olufuye, Chair, Africa ICT Alliance (AFICTA) at the 13th Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), 14 May, 2014

1.0 Introduction

It is an honor to bring forward the voice of business, and in particular, the voice of businesses from developing countries, to this august group – the CSTD, with its important dual missions, both of which are of equal importance to business, in all countries, of all sizes - the role of STI, and the implementation of the WSIS.

Today, I am speaking as a member of the ICC-BASIS, as ARICTA, etc...

[The Private sector is a key member of the WSIS multi-stakeholder group. Since its role was recognized in the Tunis Agenda, it has continued to play its active part in the implementation of the outcomes of WSIS 2003 and 2005 meetings.]

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Business Action In Support of the Information Society (BASIS) is the private sector’s organized response bring together companies and business associations around the world, to contribute to achieving the Information Society for all.

One such association is the Africa Information and Communication Technologies Alliance (AFICTA) representing national ICT associations, companies and professionals in 14 African nations including South Africa, Namibia, DR Congo, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Niger, the Gambia and Nigeria. So, I’m pleased to say that the outcomes of WSIS gave birth to ARICTA.

2.0 Activities of the Private Sector

Both during and since the WSIS itself, the private sector has been highly involved in efforts to meet the WSIS target towards a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society. Some of our activities include:

1. Investment in Infrastructure: The private sector has invested heavily in the provision of infrastructure for the information society. The arrival of fibre undersea cables on both coasts of Africa have brought Africa closer to the rest of the world. So, the Private sector has invested in fibre rings (eg across Africa), masts, data centres, power grid, spectrum etc.

These investments are paying off in improved connectivity in much of Africa, particularly via mobiles. For example, prior to the liberalization of the telecom sector in Nigeria in 2001, teledensity was a mere 0.5%. But today, it is more than 50% due largely to private sector investment in infrastructure and mobile services.

The same account is similar in most developing nations. The proposed transnational infrastructural investment initiative by the Programme for Infrastructural Development in Africa (PIDA) Priority Action Plan (PAP) involving ICTs is another step in the right direction.

Policy liberalization by governments have provided level playing ground for businesses to invest and operate with appropriate regulatory oversight in the area of engineering competition thereby promoting people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. Business has been actively engaged with policy makers around the world, in advancing updates to key policies and legal structures which can advance the utilization of ICTs, and which can contribute to increasing access.

But more still need to be done, both in bringing affordable broadband, and fiber backbones and data sources within countries, and in particular, for many countries, reliable energy sources which can power the growth of years and applications continues to be a challenge that needs further attention.

2. Capacity Building: The private sector has also been involved in building requisite capacity for the Information Society. For example, following the liberalization of Education system in Nigeria, private investment flowed into education with the establishment of private universities and training centres thereby boosting ICT knowledge, capacity and capability. However, more still need to be done to improve the quality and standard of education, and to bring forward new skills needed to advance the capability of digital creators of content and applications, particularly in the developing countries.

Some of us are involved in cutting edge knowledge dissemination to boost Internet expansion and security. Last year, ARICTA organised in collaboration with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and other stakeholders, a DNSSEC roadshow/TRAINDING PROGRAM in Lagos. Over 40 network engineers participated in the training. The ARICTA Summit itself was focused on fulfilling the promise of the digital age in Africa - a WSIS focused theme. We also addressed the importance of business engagement in the WSIS follow up and internet governance in the summit, and a second summit will take place in Cairo, Egypt, later this year. Technical skills and Training in IPv6 by ICANN, AfriNIC etc continue as well.
3. Content Development: Lots of contents await the Internet. Examples abound in many open access materials, Wikipedia, newspapers, email services etc. Other speakers have referenced the lack, however, of non-English content, and that is indeed a continuing challenge which will make such a real difference to the next ten billion + of Internet users, who do not read or write English in their day to day activities. Much needs to be done to build content in local languages or that would meet specific local needs. Many applications with automatic language translation are emerging but it is far from reaching the over 5000 languages spoken in Africa. As an example, the creation of content that is specific to a culture is very different in usability than a translation. Both are important.

4. Engagement and cooperation: The private sector has long collaborated with diverse stakeholders notably governments to enable the realization of WSIS Outcomes: building the e-government applications in health, education, and other kinds of citizen services. Providing connectivity and services that in fact improve the management of government itself.

In our ISTD session this week, we have heard many countries describe the kinds of new services available to citizens in their countries, and the kinds of economic growth which is being enabled through the adoption of ICTs. And, the EXPANSION of the private sector and the contribution of business to make positive contributions -- is growing.

Scarcity in food, water, energy has more significant implications for developing countries, obviously, and yet ICTs, strategically applied, can provide needed solutions, and offer whole new areas of business and government collaboration.

Some of the most exciting and significant applications of ICTs lie in the agricultural area: boosting agricultural production in my own country, Nigeria, through provision of mobile information on fertilizer availability, prices, and in another important use of healthcare services, arising from sophisticated consulting between medical professionals, to mobile devices used to do simple, but highly important health monitoring of pregnant women and infants.

5. Engagement in high level cooperation but also ensuring that cooperation and exchanges occur nationally, and globally.

Business has taken seriously that the work needed to bring ICTs forward to deliver the world we want has only begun. We are engaging in a number of fora, where governments, at a national or regional level, and also globally, are also trying to address critical challenges.

ICT-INDUS member associations and companies are actively participating in the IGF, in national and regional IGF initiatives, in the WSIS +10 MPP and will be participating in the upcoming High Level Forum in June. Business is also actively engaged in the CSTD’s Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation. Recently, business, along with other stakeholders, worked together and participated in NETmundial, an innovative multi stakeholder event organized and hosted by the Brazilian government and 3inet.

I want to reinforce the importance of bringing policy home, and implementing it - doing the hard work of updating laws and policies.

I want to mention a key place where business hopes to see the Ministers and participants here engaged in the CSTD, and that is in the upcoming IGF. The Internet Governance Forum, convening once a year, and scheduled this year for September, in Istanbul, Turkey, is a KEY place where business comes together with other stakeholders, on an equal footing, and discusses the key issues of Internet public policy and governance. Each IGF now opens with a high level event on the day before the IGF, and here again, this is an opportunity for high level exchanges and interactions with business and other stakeholders.

3.0 Major Challenges facing the emergence of a people-centred, inclusive, development oriented Information society

1. Lack of buy-in by some governments. There can be many reasons for this. In some cases, governments in Africa AND OTHER COUNTRIES set up WSIS Committees which were never empowered to work. In some cases, there is a need to simply neutralize or rebalance the follow up committees at the national level. For example, this is evident in the number of countries in Africa submitting annual WSIS follow up reports. So, more is needed to revive these nationally focused committees or ESTABLISH NEW initiatives so that it may be possible to effectively monitor and evaluate progress on WSIS outcomes.

The REALITY is a lot of work is being done in several countries both in Africa, and in Latin America. Just as two examples and these successes and those in other countries deserve more visibility.

2. Lack of inter-agency and intra-agency cooperation. In many instances, at a national level, in many countries, government agencies do
not collaborate on WSSIS targets implementation; and as such, may unknowingly work at cross purposes OR WSSIS KEY LEVERSAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES. A solution may be linked to the creation of In-country WSSIS Committees OR A MULTI STAKEHOLDER Steering group OR GROUP OF KEY EXPERT ADVISORS.

In some cases, governments may have some scepticism about the value of multi stakeholder collaboration, or not yet have established consultation mechanisms at the national level.

3. Bureaucracy. The slow pace of government process is a major issue. We recognise that e-Government adoption is on the rise and we expect improvement post 2015, but governments are faced with a challenge of reforming and streamlining bureaucratic barriers to adoption of ICTs and of enabling the growth of businesses in many countries.

4. Half-hearted support for the multi-stakeholder approach for policy formulation and implementation. Certainly this inclusive approach may represent more work, initially, in establishing and maintaining the linkages across stakeholder groups, but Policy formulation process should be inclusive and bottom up as much as possible.

5. Security challenges and destruction of ICT infrastructure, both due to manmade strife and natural disasters.

At trouble zones worldwide, private sector investment has been destroyed thereby cutting off many subscribers and loss of investment. In North East Nigeria for example, base stations are burned thereby slowing progress for an inclusive Information Society. But in other countries, natural disasters such as hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, mudslides, tornados -- have claimed lives, destroyed infrastructure, and are adding to the cost burdens in countries.

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, the shared concerns now of both developed and developing nations, including small island states, about the cost and impact of natural disasters is creating a new kind of bridge and shared interest. There is a clear role for Science and technology, and innovation in monitoring, predicting, and preparing for such disasters and for science in efforts to also undertake the kinds of “hardening of infrastructures”.

6. Ideological constraints. Ideological constraints that hinder women from entering the workforce or bar girls from receiving education or prescribe what kinds of professions that women can enter is a restraint to the overall achievement of an inclusive, people-centred Information Society. All countries need their resources - both human and natural resources -- to be contributing to the well being and social and economic growth in order to achieve the information society. To limit the contribution of so much of a population has long and short term consequences that also limit the success of countries in competitiveness, and innovation.

4.0 Priorities for Stakeholders seeking to achieve WSSIS outcomes

1. Awareness and mobilization. The creation of necessary in-country awareness and mobilization should be a priority. In this regard, there is need for governments to identify in-country WSSIS Champions across many stakeholder groups who would provide the input, and collaboration, and necessary impetus for WSSIS targets to be achieved and even surpassed. Champions can come from academia, the business sector, civil society, and from within governmental agencies, with a recognition that ministries of labor, health, education and science and technology AND COMMUNICATIONS AND ICT are all contributors to achieving the Information Society.

2. Support for the Multi-Stakeholder Approach. The multi-stakeholder approach needs to be broadened to include wider inter-stakeholder engagement as exemplified by EU Vice-President for Digital Economy in her comments in the just concluded Netmundial in Brazil. Support for NYS approach would help stabilise policy which is important to business, and will build the kind of sustainable commitments that will be needed to move into post 2015, and achieve the Sustainability goals.

3. Set higher targets for WSSIS for the next 10 years. There is need to set higher targets for the next 10years with focus on more literate/illiterate stakeholder cooperation. Many countries are already making major achievements in basic goals related to the MDGs, but as the online world becomes also a new market opportunity, new kinds of skills in education and business performance are needed. On Monday, Costa Rica noted the importance of new thinking in bringing in new higher education programs that teach digital skills, such as digital arts. This creative thinking about the creation of new online goods and services, which can be created as easily by a young entrepreneur in Costa Rica, Kenya, Nigeria, or Azerbaijan or Lithuania inspires us all to recall that with science and math skills, with digital capacity and capability, that indeed, we can help to bring information access and opportunity from everywhere in the world, to our local world. This I think is the spirit of enhanced cooperation and respect for human dignity and our shared values.

4. Regular Stocktaking: This is necessary as a means of assessing progress made. It is time to assess and evaluate, and correct and adjust. Some programmes may have been rendered obsolete by changes in technology, or may not be scaling as needed. Stocktaking is something that business does regularly, and that allows the needed adjustments and
enhancements to programmes so that they can truly contribute. TO THAT 
END, BUSINESS WELCOMES THE CSTD'S WISIS - 10 REVIEW, PURSUANT 
TO ECOSOC RESOLUTION WHICH WE WILL HEAR ABOUT TOMORROW.

5. Build more capacity and capability for the Information Society. There is 
shortfall of skilled ICT professionals in developing nations. For now, 
incentives that quickly kick start capacity and capability, such as tech boot 
camps, immersion skills training can be initiated in countries willing to 
commit and invest. As a priority, in the mid-term, efforts needs to be 
based to boost skills level for teachers and lecturers because you cannot 
give what you don't have. If the instructors are SKILLED AND 
KNOWLEDGEABLE, AND EXPERIENCED, then you can expect quality 
OUTCOME IN THE SKILLS WHICH YOUTH GAIN THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL 
EXPERIENCE.

The focus is often on building policy expertise, and that is important, but 
as important is to build the capability to build, and to support, and to 
operate the infrastructures, systems, applications and services which are 
essential to the Information society.

6. Tackle cybercrime through stakeholder wide cooperation and 
collaboration at the national, regional and global levels. While cyber crime 
and cyber security are ongoing themes at many global discussions, much 
of addressing crime, and security begins at home, as we all realize from 
our daily lives. The mechanisms to help ISPs, business, network 
opponents, banking institutions, and merchants to deal with identity theft, 
malware or virus attacks are skills that can be taught, and implemented. 
For spam, malware, and many of the risks and threats in cyber space, 
awareness, tools, and resources can be deployed. This leaves still the 
importance of established national formal legal systems which address 
privacy and cooperation with law enforcement. Such legal updates are 
again a national issue, and even in an environment of any possible global 
agreements, still national legal systems have to be adopted and adapted 
to address national legal updates. As such, collaboration with 
governmental agencies, civil society and businesses and associations can 
build on existing experiences that are being tried in other countries.

Conclusion

I grew up in Nigeria, a country that has undergone, in the last ten years a 
renaissance is large part due to ICTs. I operate a successful business 
based on adoption of ICTs, and founded APICYA with like-minded business 
CEOs to draw in other business leaders from Africa to bring forward the 
voice of business from the world's second largest continent. It has been 
my privilege to address the CSTD, and to collaborate with many 
government representatives in the CSTD WG on Improvement to the IGF.

and now in the CSTD WG Enhanced Cooperation. This Commission can be 
a catalyst for change and innovation in thought and practice, just as it 
champions the role of science technology and innovation to address the 
world's major global challenges: food, energy, climate change etc.

Applying ICTs to these challenges still calls for collaboration, within 
governmental agencies, and the private sector, academia, technology 
community, and civil society. If we can harness ICTs more successfully, 
and bring ourselves to true collaboration, there is no challenge that 
cannot be overcome in delivering the Information Society to all the 
world's citizens; where the Digital Divide not a Divide can then be 
balanced as we all desire. That is a world we want, not just a web we 
want.