

## **1.0. Nigeria's Transition from Analog to Digital Technology**

The Federal Government of Nigeria courageously commenced the process of moving the country from analog to digital technology with the launch of NigeriaSat-1, a remote sensing satellite, positioned in the Low Earth Orbit (LEO) at approximately 15km above the surface of the earth, using one of Russia's decommissioned Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (IBMs) in September 2003.

This feat paved the way for the adoption of eGovernance in March 2004, a deliberate national strategy designed to move government business online. The event was preceded by a three-day national workshop for all senior government officials at the Presidential Banquette Hall, Abuja. At the end of the workshop, Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) were directed in a written communiqué to migrate their routinary activities online with a view to making them more transparent, faster, auditable and accountable; not neglecting the need for improved communication, collaboration and financial inclusion.

Other satellites were launched into the Geostationary Orbit (GEO), approximately 38km above the surface of the earth. Nigeria thus ranks amongst the few African countries with an "eye" and an "ear" in the orbit for secure broadband access, being a necessary basic input into a national IT programme.

1.1. eGovernance as a national strategy was first adopted by ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo's Administration but successive Governments have relied on its ubiquitous provisions and have even helped to popularize and broaden its application. By so doing banking in Nigeria, leisure, travel, examination, payroll, tax and other revenue collection, business registration, etc have gradually migrated online, becoming faster and more accountable. The

Treasury Single Account regime (TSA) recently introduced by President Buhari's Administration and through which approximately Three Trillion Naira is reported to have been swept into the Federation account, money that would have otherwise disappeared from the system, has more than justified the need for eGovernance. Similarly, the Bank Verification Number (BVN) programme through which ill-gotten wealth becomes impossible to conceal, another excellent value addition to the nation's fight against corruption is a good reason for eGovernance. Nigeria is not only catching up with the rest of the civilized world in modern technology acquisition, the country is even reported to have recorded one of the fastest growths in global internet and telephony penetration—thanks to the adoption of eGovernance as a national strategy.

- 1.2. The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and National eGovernment Strategies Ltd (NeGSt), NITDA's creation and sister organization are the prime movers of the electronic governance system in Nigeria. The two jointly pioneered and have relentlessly championed the course of online programmes development in Nigeria from design to deployment and won the country accolades from the United Nations and the World Bank in addition to networking with world leaders and practitioners across the globe.

## **2.0. The Pioneering Role of the Federal Ministry of Interior**

Following the Presidential directives of 2004, NeGSt approached several Ministries and Agencies of Government through the auspices of the National Planning Commission. The Interior Ministry was first to respond positively, yielding a platform that helped demystify digitalization. One of

the service arms of the Ministry, the NIS was subsequently set apart to be used to test the waters of eGovernance with the signing of the eImmigration Contract in 2007, thus giving birth to real time online processing of government-to-citizen interaction.

### **3.0. Compliance with Extant Rules & Regulations**

The tripartite eImmigration Agreement signed on 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2007 between the Ministry, Newworks (Socketworks) and NeGSt complied with all extant rules and regulations including the ICRC and the NITDA Act of 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2007. It also complied with every provision of the Due Process Office before it was presented to the Federal Executive Council through the auspices of the National Planning Commission for consideration and FEC approval was subsequently obtained.

### **4.0. Profit from the Adoption of eGovernance**

By adopting eImmigration, a sub-set of the eGovernment initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Ministry fostered an unprecedented rise of approximately 605% in FGN revenue from passport acquisition alone. Whereas the normal contribution of the Immigration Service to the Federal Government revenue from passport sales was between N500million and N800million per annum, the introduction of eImmigration online payment system increased the annual revenue yield to N14.4billion. Similar geometric increment in FGN revenue is expected to herald the implementation of the eVisa offering presently awaiting the final nod of the Ministry.

### **5.0. The Pitfalls of Online Migration**

While the online space can be a safe and comfortable place for the government and individuals to work and transact their businesses, it also

harbours great security challenges and significant danger. The banking industry for example is perennially plagued with billions of Naira in losses through internet fraud. There are also concerns about data sovereignty, critical data loss, identity theft and privacy invasion. These are the reasons for which the FGN in her wisdom appointed NITDA as IT industry Regulator and Clearing House to ensure a systematic and controlled evolution of online migration without compromising national security.

## **6.0. Systems Proliferation**

The eImmigration contract of 2007 was arranged to provide a scope for every foreseeable day-to-day activities of NIS, including CERPAC. Under normal circumstances, existing legacy systems (CERPAC and Passport production) were expected to be sorted and mainstreamed into the eImmigration platform. The Amendment Clause (18.1) made adequate provisions for this and for such other unforeseen but essential activities of the service. It is therefore unfortunate that the past leadership of the Ministry went ahead to sign new Agreements/MOUs for the same offerings already covered in an existing contract and neglected the opportunity to rework the legacy systems and make them comply with extant rules. By so doing, the Ministry made it impossible for the appointed Consultants to undertake their assigned duty of standardization and variety reduction, as well as linking the systems vertically with other national security activities of Nigeria in real time, which matter is at the heart of the entire eGovernment project. This is what has opened the system to abuse and fraud and it must be addressed urgently.

## **7.0. The Role of the Regulator**

True as it is that the ICRC has a role to play in the eImmigration and other online contracts under scrutiny, the role of the IT Regulator is even more important and ought to be brought into sharper focus.

The NITDA Act of 2007 vested the functions of the Regulator and the Clearing House of all IT related projects and acquisitions by the MDAs in NITDA, the parent body of NeGSt. But the Act appears to exist in name only, and this is responsible for the volatility we now witness.

The correct thing to do in this regard, is for the Ministry to cause the NIS, Nigeria's online pioneers to take the first shot at correcting past mistakes by recognizing the statutory roles of the Regulator.

## **8.0. The Importance of National Security**

In designing and implementing the eGovernance model for Nigeria, NITDA/NeGSt deliberately caused the use of legacy technologies to be avoided, except for the satellite design where the software of 1990s were preferred. The two organizations also shut out Foreign Service Providers and showed preference for Local Service Providers because of the security implications inherent in putting the biometrics and such other valuable data of Nigerians in the hands of foreigners. Any agreement or MOU that disrespects this arrangement must therefore be questioned for the sake of national security.

It is known everywhere that Nigerians are among the smartest people on earth. We have demonstrated our ingenuity by designing and successfully launching satellites into the LEO and the GEO whose science and engineering (rocket science) is known to be the toughest in any field of study. There is absolutely no reason therefore to doubt our ability to correctly implement a complete suite of national eGovernance offerings applying local resources.

## **9.0. The Way Forward**

There is an urgent need for the new leadership of the Ministry to clean up the disparate systems as well as the old legacy systems. Since we cannot afford to break the laws of the land, the Ministry must subject all contracts to extant rules and regulations (ICRC & NITDA Acts) standardize and make them inter-operable with other national security and eGovernance systems and also prepare an exit strategy for those ready to be handed over. In doing this however, the Ministry must avoid any situation where the country is bogged down in international litigation.

In this regard, NeGSt (working with NITDA in the background) as Consultants to the eImmigration project is ready to put her expertise, experience, integrity, pedigree and commitment to the ideals of eGovernance at the disposal of the Ministry and the nation.