Emmanuel Edet

I was born in a small town called Calabar in the southeastern part of Nigeria, shortly after the end of the Nigerian Civil war. Growing up as a child I was fascinated by the way machines work. What actually intrigued me was the fact that these machines were not alive but they could move and work with such precision. Consequently I developed a habit of taking my motorized toys apart to find out what makes machines work.

As I grew up, I never lost my interest in machines but I chose to study law because I disliked mathematics. Funny, right? After completing my law school I found law and the judicial system quite boring with the over-reliance on precedents and predictable outcomes in most cases. With my love for machines I decided to invest my time in Information Technology Law, which, at the time in Nigeria, was a relatively unknown field. I chose to work for the government under the National Information Technology Development Agency and now, about 5 years after my decision, the Canadian government through the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) provided me an opportunity to attend the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Hyderabad, India.

Internet Governance to me was a relatively unknown subject until I had the opportunity to participate in an online course organized by DiploFoundation. I soon found out that starting with the WSIS process that gave birth to the Internet Governance Forum, various interest groups were contributing to a process which was basically aimed at fostering what is now referred to as 'multistakeholder diplomacy'.
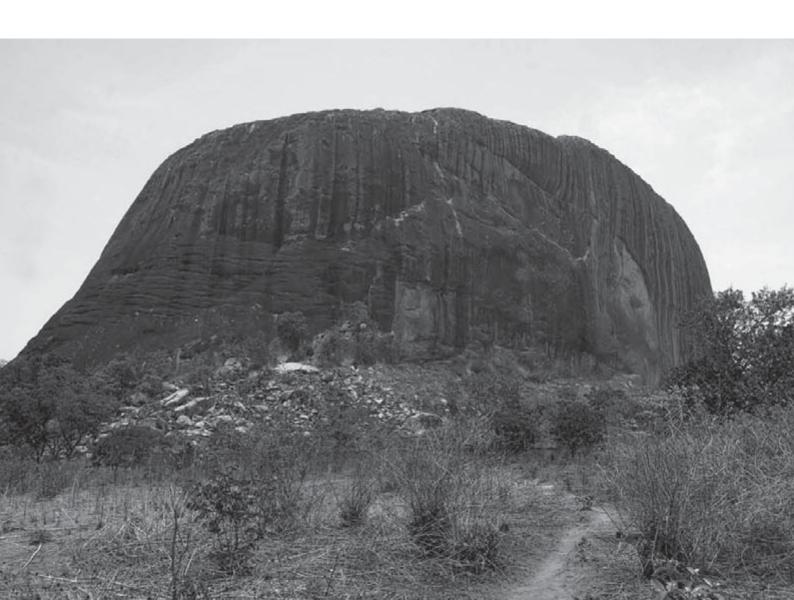
In most developing countries access to the Internet for people *without* disabilities is an issue. Thus the thought of access to people *with* disabilities is rarely considered. The IGF gave me an opportunity to learn about some technologies that assist people with disabilities to have access to information. Back here in Nigeria I have started some discussions with a view to developing standards for government websites to include accessibility features for people with disabilities.

Initially, I had imagined that the opportunity provided to me to attend the IGF in Hyderabad would give me a firsthand knowledge on how this form of diplomacy plays out. However I was ¨pleasantly disappointed¨ because the IGF did not improve my knowledge of multistakeholder diplomacy, rather it provided me with a chance to have direct contact with people and knowledge related to the development issues involved in Internet Governance.

Professionally I have always been focused on legal development, through regulations and policy. I was part of the Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group which was set up by the Nigerian Government to develop an institutional and legal framework for cyberse-curity in Nigeria. I have also been involved in the development of the legal aspects of the Nigerian ICT Strategic Action plan. Not only did the IGF provide an opportunity for networking but I also attended various workshops ranging from the legal aspects of the management of critical internet resources to capacity building models put forward by Internet governance activists.

I was also able to relate to the issues of creating enabling environments for access to the Internet and issues related to multilingualism. Of particular interest for me were the various models for enhancing security on the Internet and the role of partnerships in solving online crime.

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa and the image of Nigeria on the Internet has been that of a country of scammers and spammers. This unfortunate image has been a cause for concern to the Nigerian government. The Nigerian Cybercrime Working Group was set up to develop cyber laws for Nigeria and carry out capacity building amongst the various government law enforcement agencies. I was a secretary in this working group. These efforts had little effect and we soon discovered that outright regulation was not a very efficient way to foster online security.

At the IGF I listened to a presentation on a preventive approach to online security through government-industry partnerships. **This approach may be what is needed in Nigeria.** Since my return from the IGF I have been in discussion with various partners and we hope to launch a cybersecurity partnership in the second quarter of 2009.

Like many of us from developing countries, I find myself surrounded by policy makers who are not well informed in the area of Internet governance. The government tried to cure this by holding the first ever Internet Governance Meeting in Nigeria shortly before the IGF in Hyderabad. However the meeting did not have its desired outcome, as Nigeria was not well represented. The problem is that there is a need for sustained capacity building on Internet governance amongst the policy makers in Nigeria. I have submitted a proposal to include Internet governance as part of a current initiative by the Nigerian government for ICT training in the federal civil service in Nigeria.

Another interesting issue I was exposed to at the IGF is Internet access for people with disabilities. In most developing countries access to the Internet for people *without* disabilities is an issue. Thus the thought of access to people *with* disabilities is rarely considered. The IGF gave me an opportunity to learn about some technologies that assist people with disabilities to have access to information. Back here in Nigeria I have started some discussions with a view to developing standards for government websites to include accessibility features for people with disabilities.

The IGF really afforded an opportunity to me to attend a forum designed to discuss issues for the future as far as Nigeria is concerned. I had the opportunity to meet legends in the field of information technology development. It also provided me with networking opportunities for developmental projects. Currently I am in discussion with a Member of Parliament in the UK on how to proceed with our Cybersecurity partnership project. As a government employee I have returned with additional knowledge on issues which are out of the ordinary in some quarters of the government, and I intend to use my position as a Legal Officer to bring additional awareness to government employees.

On a lighter side I met with the famous Indian hospitality. The gala reception and the tours of famous sites in Hyderabad were all breath-taking. India is indeed incredible. My gratitude goes to the Canadian government for this opportunity through their sponsorship. Also to the ITU for the management of the sponsorship funds to provide developing country participants an opportunity to participate in the IGF, which most governments of developing countries do not regard as important. I wish to also thank DiploFoundation for the training in Internet Governance. ■

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CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:

How the Internet Governance Forum
empowered people from developing countries