



EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Maduka Attamah from Nigeria is working to strengthen the region's participation in the continued evolution of the Internet and its applications



I was born in Enugu in South-East Nigeria. Enugu is famous for the large deposits of coal that lay encrusted deep within her belly. In post-independence days, Enugu was the hotspot for coal mining. Little wonder Enugu still carries the label of the Coal City State. Enugu is also fondly referred to by its analog telephone code: 042. Although long overtaken by the GSM era, the name still sticks.

Nigeria is endowed with natural resources and fertile soil. Coal used to be one of the mainstays of the nation's economy. However, since the oil boom of the 1970s, much of Nigeria's other mineral reserves have remained largely unharnessed. Nigeria's huge petroleum reserve is a key factor in the country's economic strategies and politics.

I come from a large family with seven siblings. Lots of relatives and friends come in for vacation or longer periods of study or work. Life was fun growing up, the endless chatter, the pranks, and I was always surrounded by laughter. Loneliness was a concept I only read about in books. My father worked as an accountant on the State Board of Internal Revenue. He subsequently worked as a legal practitioner before he retired. My mother worked as a teacher in the same primary school that my siblings and I

attended. Later on, she became an educational administrator on the State Education Commission. As children, our parents did not buy many toys for us, but we had a large playground with lots of trees, and we played in large groups and told folk tales in the moonlight. We often improvised our own play objects from wood and other household materials. We had a very large farm too, such that farm work and home chores were never lacking after school.

A young, tech enthusiast

In our family, we all studied different courses at the university. However, wanting to be different was not the motivation for my choice of Electronic Engineering as an undergraduate. As a boy, I had always been thrilled by electronics. I would often work with friends to construct TV 'antennas' from household scraps to improve signal reception in our home. At the University of Nigeria, I joined a group of young tech enthusiasts in what was then called the Information Technology Academy (ITA). Not only did ITA, with demanding software programming projects, run in tandem with the school's academic sessions, the fees were much higher than my fees at the university. This was tough to support financially. However, the following year,

I got a full scholarship from Chevron-Texaco, which took me through graduation. I also started working as a part-time instructor at the academy, which earned me enough to pay for subsequent ITA sessions. I also got involved in a couple of other electronic design clubs. As such, my undergraduate years were quite intense, passionate, and full of exciting adventures.

After graduation, I was posted to a rural area in South-West Nigeria for a one-year compulsory national service under the National Youth Service Corps. During that year, which ended in early 2008, I worked as a secondary school teacher, teaching physics and mathematics. We also embarked on other community development programmes, which included rural outreach initiatives, such as refurbishing

village squares, charity farming, and educating the community on topics, such as HIV/AIDS.

At the end of my service year, I enrolled in an MSc programme at the Department of Computer Science at the University of Ibadan. Towards the end of the programme, I joined the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Unit of the university as a systems analyst. At the ICT Unit, we design, build, and maintain networks in the university, as well as develop and maintain network-based services and applications on the campus network.

Embracing Internet governance

My first substantial experience in the field of Internet governance was through the Internet Society's Next

Generation Leaders (ISOC NGL) e-learning programme, which Diplo anchored. It was a novel e-learning experience for me. Diplo's online classroom facilities and modes of interaction provided a compelling atmosphere that accelerated my learning and involvement in Internet governance issues. What happened in the following 24 weeks was a rapid and exciting exposure to new horizons and perspectives from around the world. The course involved 23 participants from the most varied backgrounds, three experienced and omnipresent tutors, and lots of interactive study, research, and debates.

ISOC NGL participants were invited to join the policy research and implementation phases of the Internet Governance Capacity Building



Programme (IGCBP) after completing the NGL e-learning programme. Since I did not know exactly what policy research was, I decided to find out. This meant committing to a further 16 weeks of study and research in a new field. The course focused on evidence-based policy research and policy implementation. At the time, this whole exercise seemed somewhat irrelevant, since my major passion was not policy-making. However, towards the end of this course, I received a fellowship from AfriNIC, the Regional Internet Registry for Africa, to participate in its 13th meeting in Johannesburg (AfriNIC meetings discuss policy proposals relating to the allocation and management of Internet number resources in the AfriNIC service region). Witnessing the open community policy development process at the AfriNIC community

led me to further appreciate the importance of the Policy Research Phase of the Diplo IGCBP. AfriNIC-13 was an eye opener on the application of public policy research and implementation by core technical people.

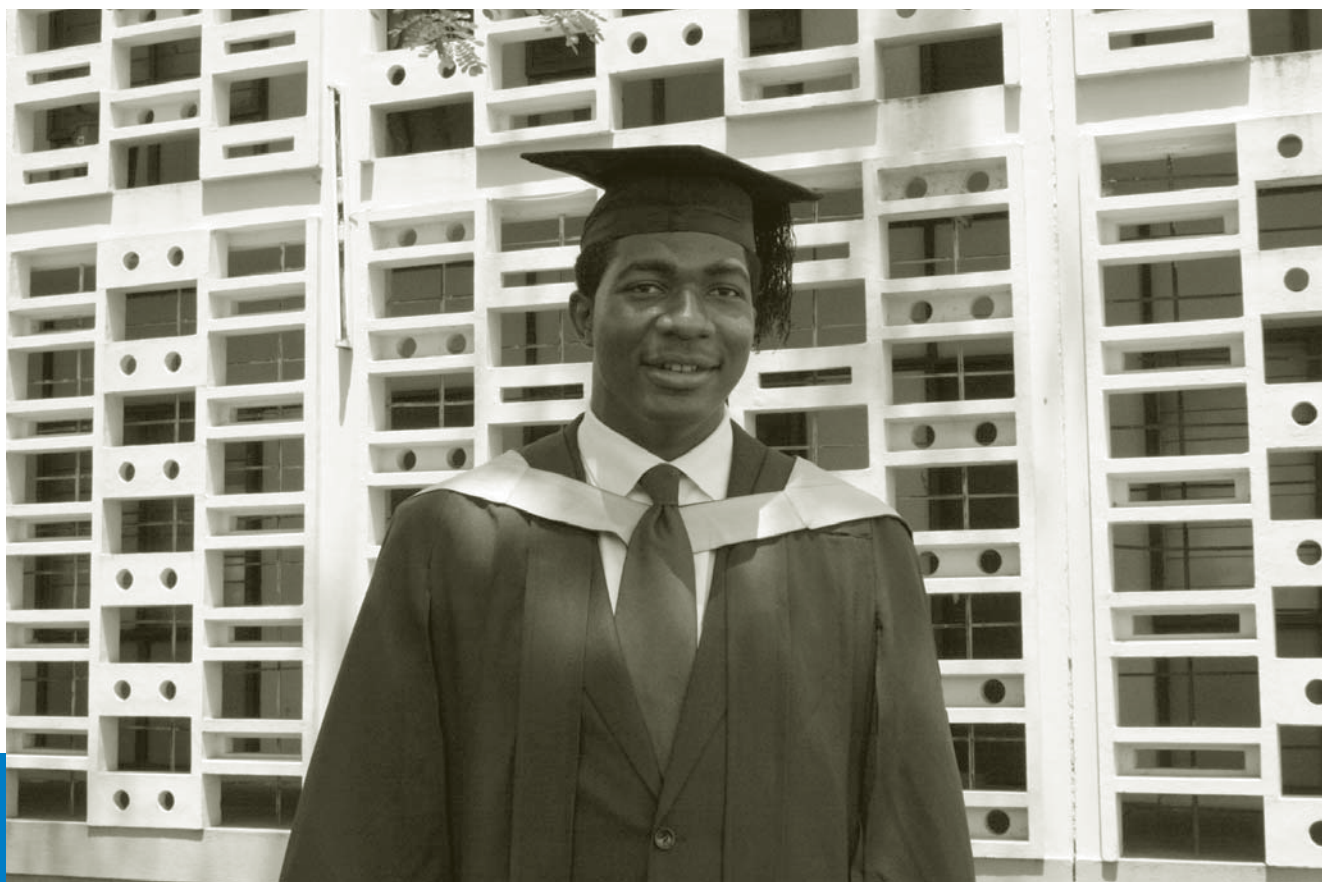
The seeds of IGCBP bear fruit

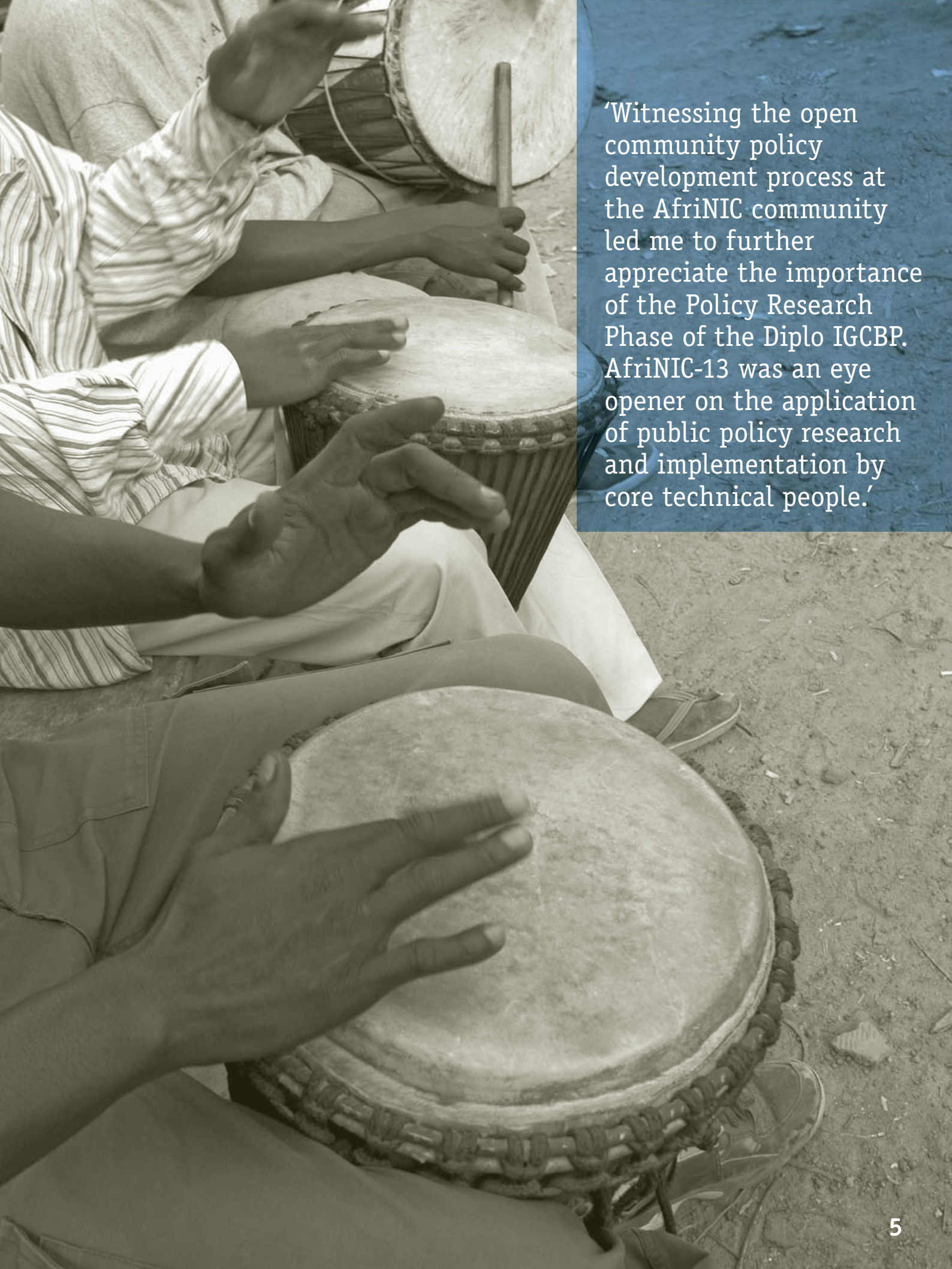
By enabling greater and more intense community involvement, the seeds of Diplo's IGCBP are yielding rich fruit at grassroots and local community level. I became more aware of and able to talk about a wide range of Internet governance issues. At the end of the research implementation phase, I had the privilege of being called to be part of the Information Technology Committee of the University of Ibadan, where I was charged with developing ICT strategies and policies and overseeing

their implementation. My experience with the capacity building programmes was good preparation for this.

The Diplo/ISOC capacity building programme strongly motivated me to develop an outlook in which a deep understanding of Internet technologies and the consequent societal issues are employed towards effective public policies. I am particularly passionate about furthering relevant scientific knowledge and about the acquisition of strong technical skills in the African region in order to strengthen the participation of the region in the continued evolution of the Internet and its applications.

Maduka Attamah is a Software Engineer and Systems Analyst at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. ■





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