*5th July, 2013*

*His Excellency*

*The Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State*

*Chief (Dr) Godswill Obot Akpabio*

*Government House, Uyo*

*Your Excellency Sir:*

***AN OPEN LETTER***

***RE: Akwa Ibom State Government to Sponsor 150 Graduates to India on ICT Training***

*Let me commence this letter by saying a big thank you for the various infrastructural development strides and transformation you have put in place in Akwa Ibom State.*

 *But it must also be understood that infrastructural transformation without corresponding human capital development creates a deficit from the standpoint of strategic economic planning.*

*I am constrained to do this letter because of the concern I have for the development of ICT in Akwa Ibom State. ICT is arguably one of the most significant technological shifts of our time. The mere idea of being able to leverage Information Technology to transform economic deliverability in most institutions is revolutionizing the IT services world and holds enormous potential for a government that embraces IT. Most informed governments are drifting towards the ICT’s promises of accountability in government business, reduced capital costs, and enhanced e-governance.*

***ICT in the context of Nigeria:***

*According to National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), the long-term strategic vision for the ICT sector was elaborated upon in the National Development Plan titled “Nigeria Vision 20:2020”. According to the document: The increasing globalization driven by ICT makes it imperative for Nigeria as an emerging market to irreversibly consider the application and promotion of ICT strategy to facilitate its rapid growth and development. This will involve the development of a vibrant ICT sector to drive and expand the national production frontiers in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors. It would also require the application of the new knowledge to drive other soft sectors: governance, entertainments, public services, media sector, tourism, etc.*

*The document further acknowledges that in respect of knowledge and digital divide the situation remains worrisome. This is, in terms of knowledge generation, penetration of ICT, access to and usage of internet and telephone penetration (fixed and mobile) and physical infrastructure. The knowledge and digital divide cuts across geographical, gender and cultural dimensions. It exists among the 36 states of the Federation plus the Federal Capital Territory, the 774 Local Governments, rural and urban areas, men and women, rich and poor, young and old, able bodied and disabled, illiterate and educated.*

*This National ICT Policy has been developed to organize the sector for performance and efficiency, so that it supports the development goals of Nigeria’s Vision 20:2020. For some countries, the emerging ICT sector is fast catching up and even exceeding the economic contribution of many traditional areas of national economies. In addition, the sector is increasingly enhancing the value of every other sector by facilitating their contribution to national socio-economic growth. The ICT sector propels economic growth directly in some instances, for example, through increased economic and other national output, employment and, over time, enhanced productivity within the sector. But in addition, the sector facilitates economic growth indirectly, for example, by enhancing the speed and quality of information flows, business efficiency, access to markets, as well as managing people and processes and propelling diffusion of innovation. The National Vision 20:2020 document indicates the role of ICT in respect of several sectors and offers specific examples as to how ICT can propel development of the national socio-economic sub sector with respect to Agriculture, Oil and Gas, Health, Education, Finance, Employment and Productivity, Governance, Infrastructure Support, Knowledge-Based Economy, and Research and Development.*

*I would like to borrow the word of the Executive Governor of Osun State, Dr Rauf Aregbesola, “****It is the aspiration of our government to make the State of Osun the hub of ICT in Nigeria. In our own modest way, much of our effort towards building a knowledge-driven economy is focused on massive investment in e-youth strategies. We believe that an investment in today’s children and youth would yield the best returns in the not-too-distant future. This is the sure path that we have resolved to follow. That is why we have invested in the Opon Imo (e-learning tablets), which is a self-study aid and a robust electronic device with uniform learning content designed for use in Senior Secondary Schools in our state.”***

*Your Excellency, you have begun your own modest way towards building a knowledge-driven Akwa Ibom State economy. This, you have started by the recent pronouncement of your plan to send 150 graduates of Akwa Ibom origin to India for a training on ICT, I quote “****Outside building the infrastructure, you must build the people that will also enjoy the infrastructure. That is why we are trying to have a mix. Yes, you are building the infrastructure, but you also think of the manpower and that is why we are beginning now to send our children abroad. We have been sending but we want to increase the tempo both for those who are going to study piloting and those who are going to do ICT.”***

*I was particularly excited reading this news content because I have always agitated within myself about the lack of or near collapse of ICT Professionals in Akwa Ibom who can advise the present government to embrace the development of ICT sector to align our dear state with the transformation that is seriously taking place in the sector.*

*There is a paradigm shift in the way government deliver services to citizens and, Akwa Ibom State cannot be left out.*

*This open letter is predicated on the premise that there are core issues that needs to be addressed by Akwa Ibom State Government (AKSG) if we must succeed to place our state amongst the comity of States in Nigeria that are developing ICT-wise.*

***The Role of National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)***

*By NITDA Act (2001, 2007), it is empowered to develop a National Framework for the development of ICT in Nigeria through regulation, monitoring and evaluation of ICT Sector in Nigeria. NITDA in implementing this vision seeks to assist STATES of the Federation to develop their own ICT Policies.*

*In view of the above, The Government of Akwa Ibom State does not currently have an ICT Policy let alone recognize ICT as a key to drive Akwa Ibom State Accelerated and Socio-Economic Development.*

***ICT in the context of Akwa Ibom State***

***STRENGHT, WEAKNESS, OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT (SWOT) ANALYSIS***

*The uppermost strength of Akwa Ibom State to embrace ICT lies on the fact that we have a listening Governor who takes time to weigh the feasibility of certain project or proposal against the impact it will have on Akwa Ibom people.*

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| ***STRENGHT*** | ***WEAKNESS*** |
| * *Free Education of this current Administration which has yielded an increased number of students with passion to learn.*
* *Number of Tertiary schools that can facilitate knowledge transmission.*
* *A willing and interested government ready to react and create the necessary manpower development for the ICT sector (Proposed India ICT Training)*
* *The existence of Willing Professionals to assist the Government to develop this sector.*
* *Low cost of investment in implementing e-education*
* *Millennium source of job and wealth creation to alleviate poverty in Nigeria.*
* *A willing and interested government ready to create the necessary policy environment.*

 | * *Lack of State ICT Policy*
* *Lack of fiscal incentives for ICT Investors, developers and solution providers*
* *Lack of legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks, education and software development*
* *Lack of intellectual Property rights, law and enforcement*
* *Lack of quality assurance and standards of software products and services*
* *Inadequate and irregular supply of electricity*
* *Inadequate telecommunication infrastructure.*
* *Inadequate testing, measurement and certification of ICT professional, products, services and markets standardization.*
* *Lack of Industry standard pay package for ICT Professional (different from Civil Service Scale)*
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| ***OPPORTUNITIES*** | ***THREAT*** |
| * *State Governor’s interest in growth of economy, improvement and quality of life and poverty alleviation.*
* *Potential of Nigeria serving as a hub for ICT Products and services in the sub-sahara Africa.*
* *Relatively cheap labour in the country which is an incentive for foreign investment that would use competent local labour.*
* *Era of business re-engineering using IT*
 | * *Inadequate focus on Education Vision, Mission and Objectives.*
* *National Attitude of excluding individuals or groups that contribute to policy formulation or strategic planning. e.g., NCS, CPN*
* *Lack of continuity of existing policy, strategic plan and implementation procedure by subsequent administration e.g., ICT and Science Park*
* *Common Piracy and copyright infringement on intellectual property.*
* *Poor adoption of e-education and pedagogy by school management.*
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*A clearer picture of the current state of Akwa Ibom State in the ICT ladder can be seen from the few SWOT Analysis examples enumerated above. The question therefore is:*

*How can Akwa Ibom leapfrog from its current traditional manual state to an ICT compliant State?*

***Akwa Ibom State ICT Policy and Strategic Plan:***

*There will be no ICT success story without an effective* ***ICT Policy and Strategic Plan/Framework*** *being developed specifically for Akwa Ibom State taking into cognizance our peculiar needs and economic strength. This policy document will be produced by no other professionals than the IT Professionals who are authorities in various bodies of knowledge in the IT industry. This calls for the pooling of interested IT professionals and development of human capacity building for the ICT sector to midwife the transformation of Akwa Ibom State ICT roadmap.*

*The Akwa Ibom State ICT Policy and Strategic Plan will address the following:*

1. *Tackling and addressing factors and challenges involved in ensuring that social and economic growth is rapid, sustainable, widespread and inclusive for the benefit of the State, Nigeria and its people.*
2. *Ensuring Akwa Ibom State becomes an information and knowledge society that enables its citizens to fully participate in the information age.*
3. *Addressing how the state can exploit and tap into the benefits of the information revolution to facilitate wealth creation, poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth redistribution, sustainable development and global competitiveness through the exploitation, development and deployment of ICTs within the society and economy, etc.*

***Office of the Special Adviser on ICT – a Call for creation***

*Your Excellency, it is therefore imperative that you consider the creation of a specialized Department under the Ministry of Science and Technology to be headed by a* ***Special Adviser on (ICT)*** *whose**functions shall include but not limited to:*

* *Development of Strategic IT Policy for the Government of Akwa Ibom State*
* *To develop appropriate strategies for the deployment of ICTs to create innovative government institutions.*
* *To develop guidelines that ensures the promotion ICT of penetration in Akwa Ibom State*
* *Ensure the establishment of a strong leadership that can facilitate and deliver with periodic reports to His Excellency, the vision and objectives of the department policy with the aim of achieving rapid penetration and effective use of ICTs in all levels of education as well as promote ICTS in public education.*
* *Promote the Establishment of a State Educational Resource Centre with responsibility for training all teachers in the use of ICTs, as well as ensure access to current e-learning resources.*
* *Ensuring adequate budgetary provision for promoting and facilitating the delivery of education and learning through the use of ICTs.*
* *This department must liaise with the relevant professional bodies e.g., CPN, NCS, ISPON, ITAN etc. for proper guidance to achieve strategic goals.*

***ICT Manpower Development:***

*It is important to note that, they should be a boundary of demarcation between politics and professionalism when it comes to selection of the manpower for the ICT Department, let me also raise a concern of paramount importance regarding the selection process for the proposed 150 graduates for the training. Information Technology discipline is a very broad area of study and for effective development of an efficient IT framework for Akwa Ibom State, there has to be a class mix of professionals vested in a variety of streams that will be proactive in delivering a state of the art ICT policies and an emerging Information Technology solution for Akwa Ibom State.*

*Therefore, it is expected that the selection produces Certified IT Professionals (CTIP) that can meet any international standards. It would just not be enough to be trained on certain IT stream, each student must be certified in specific international industry certification e.g., Microsoft, CISCO, Oracle, CISA, RedHat etc relevance to his or her concentration to help in building a sound body of knowledge in a chosen field. Registration with national and internationally recognized professional institutions will help the student to consistently build a sustained Continued Professional Development (CPD) Programme to keep abreast with emerging ICT issues. The IT areas of concern for government are enumerated thus:*

1. *Information Systems*
2. *Information Security*
3. *IT Laws and Policies*
4. *Network/Telecom Management*
5. *Software Engineering*
6. *Hardware Engineering*
7. *Web Application Development*
8. *Database Management*

*It is the prayer of this writer that your Excellency considers the content of the letter in the general interest of a greater Akwa Ibom future. It will be credited against you and our future children who will be the greatest beneficiaries of this gesture will forever remember you.*

*God bless Akwa Ibom State.*

***YOUNG, DESTINY A****. MCTS, MCITP, CCHA, CCIA, CCWA, MAITP, MACM, TMIET, MNCS, MIEEE, MBCS*

*UYO, Akwa Ibom State*

*Cc: Secretary to AKSG(SSG)*

*The Hon. Commissioner for Education*

*The Hon. Commissioner, Ministry of Science & Technology*