

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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6 November 2012

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Nigeria: Situation of the communications infrastructure in Nigeria
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

In a speech delivered in July 2012, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria expressed his opinion that weak infrastructure is Nigeria's greatest obstacle to achieving economic growth, explaining that the country spends approximately seven percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on infrastructure, which falls short of the twelve percent investment that is estimated to be necessary (Nigeria 18 July 2012). Poor infrastructure has also been identified by the World Bank as a "major constraint facing businesses" in Nigeria (EIU 24 Aug. 2012). Sources indicate that there are specific infrastructure challenges in Nigeria relating to the power supply (ibid.; Balancing Act 31 Oct. 2011; Nigeria 18 July 2012) and to communications services (EIU 26 June 2012).

2. Power

According to Nigeria's Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission, which is responsible for public-private partnerships in the federal jurisdiction, over 60 percent of the population in Nigeria has no access to electricity, and the country spends [US\$]13 billion a year on fuelling power generators (Nigeria Apr. 2012). According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), an independent business associated with *The Economist* that provides global economic, political and business intelligence and analysis (n.d.), World Bank research indicates that businesses experience an average of eight hours of power outage a day and that 90 percent of firms in Nigeria own a generator to generate their own energy (EIU 24 Aug. 2012). The EIU adds that state-provided electricity, water, Internet, and telephone services are "erratic and can often be interrupted for days, if not for weeks" (ibid. 26 June 2012).

3. Telecommunications

According to the EIU, Nigeria's telephone network is in a "poor state" and there continue to be problems connecting to land lines and between cellular phone networks (ibid.). Al Jazeera writes that cellular service problems include dropped calls, crossed lines, and poor coverage (25 May 2012). In May 2012, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the national regulatory body for the telecommunications industry (Nigeria n.d.), fined four cellular service providers a total of 1.17 billion Nigerian naira [C\$7.38 million (XE 19 Oct. 2012)] for failing to meet the minimum standard of quality of service (*This Day* 12 May 2012; *Vanguard* 12 May 2012). In July 2012, Nigeria's Senate Committee on Communications warned service providers to urgently address continued service quality issues (AT&IT 2012a; *Vanguard* 23 July 2012). The Senate committee was reportedly responding to complaints it had received from citizens about "the incessant cases of dropped calls, bad network reception, [and] unauthorised deductions of airtime" and also noted the "poor quality of ... rural telephony and fixed lines" (ibid.).

According to the NCC, there were 2.4 million connected land lines in August 2012, of which 488,088 were considered active (Nigeria [Aug. 2012]), meaning that they had been used in the preceding three months (TechLoy 22 Aug. 2012). The NCC also reported that there were 104.8 million active cellular telephone lines in August 2012 (Nigeria [2012]). However, a telecommunications expert interviewed by the Abuja-based newspaper *Blueprint* estimates that the actual number of Nigerians with cell phones is less than 40 million (31 Aug. 2012). The same source explained that the number of phone lines does not reflect the number of actual users because the "average mobile [phone] user" has a minimum of two lines (*Blueprint* 31 Aug. 2012). Other sources similarly indicate that it is

common for cell phone users to own multiple phones (Open Society Foundations 21 June 2012, 17, note 17; Balancing Act 31 Oct. 2011; TechLoy 22 Aug. 2012). According to an article by a Nigerian consultant in information and communications technology for development, published by the African technology news blog TechLoy, the "multiple phone ownership culture ... was [developed] to make up for the poor quality of service from providers but has since [become a] status symbol" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that there are 20,000 base transceiver stations supporting cellular communications in Nigeria but that 70,000 are required for adequate quality of service (*Guardian News* 5 Apr. 2012; *Business Day* 3 Apr. 2012). According to the head of the NCC, barriers to improving quality of service include the lack of infrastructure to match the growing demand for services from consumers (AT&IT 2012a).

Sources report that according to cellular service providers, quality of service is also hampered by the lack of reliable electricity in Nigeria (*Guardian News* 5 Apr. 2012; AT&IT 2012b). Africa Telecom & IT (AT&IT), an information and communications technology business magazine published in Nigeria and the UK (n.d.), indicates that the lack of regular power is reported to be responsible for at least 70 percent of the downtime for cellular service providers (AT&IT 2012b). The Lagos-based newspaper *Guardian News* reports that telecommunications companies require 25 million litres of diesel every month to fuel 20,000 generators across the country for their operations (5 Apr. 2012). Corroboration for these statistics could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Poor quality of service has also been attributed to the vandalizing of telecommunications infrastructure and equipment (*Leadership* 23 Sept. 2012; *This Day* 20 Sept. 2012). In August 2012, *Nigeria Communications Week* noted the "growing targeted attacks on ICT infrastructures and workers," which included the theft of generators, damage to fibre-optic networks, and "wilful damage perpetrated by criminal elements" (22 Aug. 2012). In September 2012, the infrastructure of several telecommunications companies in some northern parts of the country was attacked and damaged (*Leadership* 23 Sept. 2012; *This Day* 20 Sept. 2012). Sources report that at least 24 base transceiver stations belonging to at least six telecommunications companies were damaged by guns and explosives (ibid.; BBC 6 Sept. 2012). According to the Lagos-based newspaper *This Day*, the attacks took place in the states of Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi, Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Kano, and Jigawa (20 Sept. 2012). The militant Islamist group Boko Haram is reported to have claimed responsibility for the attacks (*Daily Trust* 7 Sept. 2012; BBC 6 Sept. 2012).

4. Internet

Sources indicate that there are no reliable estimates of the number of Nigerians who access the Internet (TechLoy 22 Aug. 2012; Open Society Foundations 21 June 2012, 14). A nationwide survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2011 reportedly suggested that more than 95 percent of the population may never have used a computer or the Internet before (*The Punch* 1 Feb. 2012). According to calculations by the Open Society Foundations based on data from the NCC and the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 28 percent of the population in 2009 [or 42 million people of an estimated population of 150 million] had access to the Internet, including through shared access venues such as cybercafés (Open Society Foundations 21 June 2012, 14). Other sources report estimates of 44 million (*This Day* 8 Apr. 2012) and 45 million people (*The Punch* 6 May 2012). The Abuja-based national newspaper *Leadership* reports that, according to the Minister of Communication Technology, the actual number of Internet subscribers is 14.5 million people, or nine percent of the population (30 Apr. 2012). Similarly, World Bank data from 2010 indicates that nine percent of Nigerians have Internet access at home (2010, 161). The proportion of the country with access to broadband Internet is estimated to be six (*Leadership* 30 Apr. 2012) or seven percent (*Technology Times Online* 27 July 2012; TechLoy 22 Aug. 2012). According to the Minister of Communication Technology, the average broadband speed in Nigeria is "very low" and the cost of Internet access is one of the highest in the world (*Leadership* 30 Apr. 2012).

In an interview with *Next* newspaper, an executive of the Internet Exchange Point of Nigeria (IXPN), a company that develops infrastructure to allow Internet service providers to exchange traffic between their networks (IXPN n.d.), stated that, in terms of geographic coverage, only 16 percent of the country is connected to the Internet, and access is concentrated in urban areas (*Next* 2 Oct. 2010). The National Bureau of Statistics survey indicated that 11.6 percent of urban residents had access to the Internet, as compared to 1.5 percent of rural residents (*The Punch* 1 Feb. 2012). In addition, Open Society Foundations reports that less than one percent of active Internet users are women (21 June 2012, 6). Similarly, a survey of 250 Nigerian women by a women's development worker and reporter found that 15 percent had "some knowledge" of the Internet and 5 percent had Internet access (*World Pulse* 28 June 2011).

Sources report that inadequate power supply is an obstacle to expanding Internet access (*This Day* 21 July 2011; *World Pulse* 28 June 2011). A cable Internet executive interviewed by *This Day* stated that, in addition to power issues, limited infrastructure is an obstacle to expanding the Internet capacity in Lagos to other parts of the country (21 July 2011).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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