

Building Nigeria's Digital Workforce: Developing Future-Ready Talent for the AI and Emerging Technologies Economy



Mr. David Daser

President/Chief Executive Officer, Digital Bridge Institute (DBI)



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A renaissance is not declared. It is earned. And it is earned not in conference rooms but in classrooms, in research laboratories, in the hands of trained and empowered people who possess both the skills and the opportunity to build something that lasts.

Roadmap

01

Introduction & Background

Why this moment demands a deliberate talent strategy

02

Today's vs. Tomorrow's Workforce

Characteristics of our talent base and metrics of a future-ready one

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Where Nigeria Stands

Workforce & digital economy indicators, in hard numbers

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Building Future-Ready Talent

A practical roadmap — and the barriers in its way

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Call to Action

What every stakeholder in this room must do next

Introduction

The Four Words at the Heart of RISE 2026

INCLUSIVE

Digital transformation that leaves no Nigerian behind, regardless of state, income, or connectivity



GROWTH

Building new productive capacity, not just circulating existing value among those already advantaged



ECONOMIC

Real, measurable, nationally distributed prosperity that changes daily lives



RENAISSANCE

An earned rebirth through deliberate, sustained institutional action; not just conference declarations



Background

Nigeria's Digital Paradox and the Transformation Imperative

Nigeria at a Glance — 2026



Key Digital Economy Indicators

220M+

Population

Most populous Black nation

100M+

Internet Subscribers

As at 2024

USD 900M

Fintech Investment

2023 alone

48%

GDP from MSMEs

39.6M enterprises

53%+

Youth Unemployment

Ages 15–34 (NBS)

<50%

Broadband Penetration

Rural deficit critical

133M

In Multidimensional Poverty

NBS / World Bank

<5,000MW

Electricity Generated

For 220M people

What We Have Built — Genuine Achievements

Nigeria's Demonstrated Digital Innovation Capacity

Fintech & Payments

Flutterwave (34 countries), Paystack (USD 200M acquisition), Moniepoint, OPay, PalmPay. 1.9M POS agents completing 3.5B+ transactions.

Agritech

Farmcrowdy, ThriveAgric, Releaf, Hello Tractor. Digital value chains, alternative finance, precision farming for 36M smallholder farmers.

Healthtech & Edtech

mDoc Healthcare, 54gene. uLesson reshaping secondary exam prep. IPPIS, GIFMIS, NIN-BVN linkage advancing govtech.

Digital Talent

Andela matched tens of thousands of Nigerian engineers globally. Tech diaspora generates hundreds of millions in annual services export.

Telecom Infrastructure

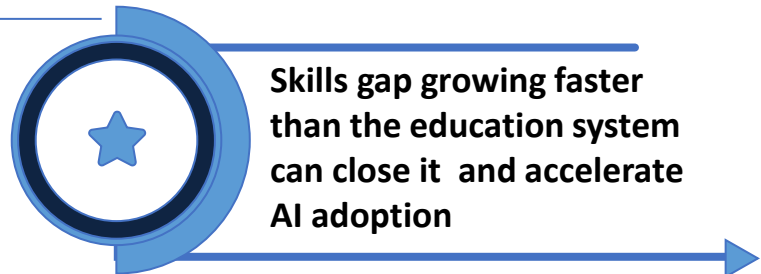
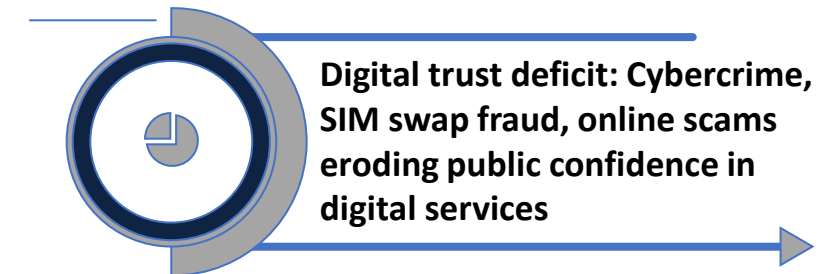
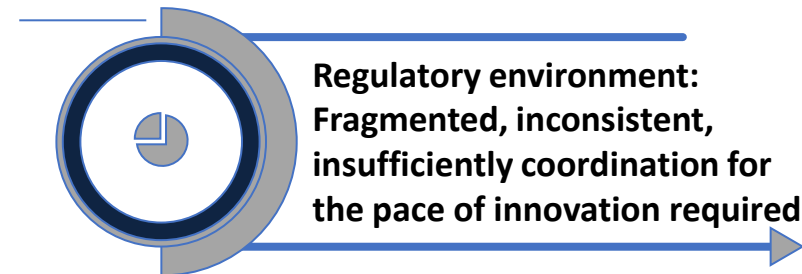
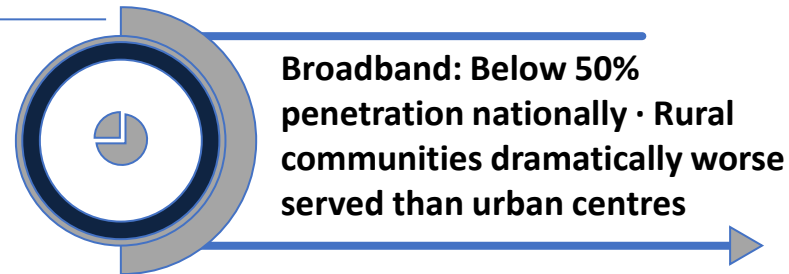
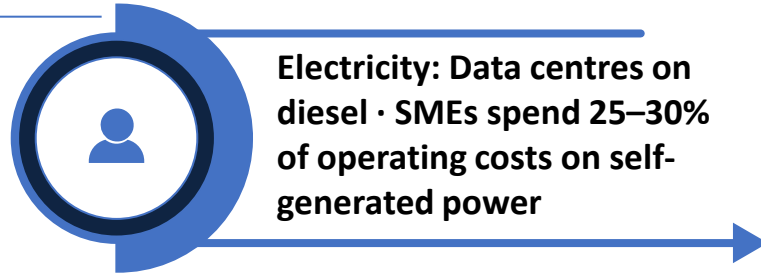
MTN, Airtel, Glo, 9mobile reaching 95%+ of LGAs. 100M+ internet subscribers. Startup Act 2022 improving the enabling environment.

E-Commerce

Jumia, Jiji, Konga plus WhatsApp/Instagram/TikTok social commerce handling hundreds of billions of naira in informal digital trade.

What We Have Not Fixed — Structural Vulnerabilities

The Honest Assessment Nigeria Must Face



Nigeria's Digital Paradox

ACHIEVEMENTS ✓

- ▶ Flutterwave · Paystack · Andela · Interswitch · PiggyVest
- ▶ Yaba — Africa's most vibrant tech cluster
- ▶ 1.9M+ POS agents · 3.5B+ transactions
- ▶ USD 900M fintech investment in 2023
- ▶ Startup Act 2022 · Nigeria AI Strategy
- ▶ MTN/Airtel reach 95%+ of LGAs

VULNERABILITIES ⚠

- ▶ 133M Nigerians in multidimensional poverty
- ▶ Graduate unemployment above 53% (ages 15–34)
- ▶ Power generation below 5,000 MW for 220M people
- ▶ Broadband penetration below 50% nationally
- ▶ Skills gap growing faster than education can close
- ▶ Regulatory fragmentation across 10+ agencies

A Convergence Nigeria Cannot Ignore

Humanity stands at the threshold of the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions simultaneously — AI, quantum computing, blockchain, robotics, biotechnology and advanced data science, converging faster than any curriculum was designed for.

Nigeria sits atop one of the world's largest reserves of untapped digital talent: roughly 70% of our population is under 35.

Government has begun to respond: a standalone digital economy ministry (2023), the 3MTT Programme, the National AI Strategy (Sept. 2025), the Nigeria Startup Act (2022), and a National Digital Economy Bill, and several other policies

Nigeria has one of the youngest populations in the world, with a median age of just 18.1 years and over half its people under 30. Each year, 3.5 million young Nigerians enter the labour market. This is one of the largest waves of youth entering any workforce globally

Building the Workforce

Actionable Steps for Digital Workforce Transformation

The Character of Nigeria's Workforce Today



Youthful, but under-skilled

A huge youth population enters the labour market without certifiable technical skills.



Informality & underemployment

Headline unemployment figures mask deep underemployment in the informal sector.



A widening academic - industry gap

Curricula lag years behind the tools and platforms industry actually uses.



Concentrated in a few cities

Lagos and Abuja capture a disproportionate share of tech jobs and training.



A persistent gender gap

Women remain under-represented in technical training and tech employment.



High mobility — the “japa” effect

Our best-trained talent is also our most mobile, and often the first to leave.

Metrics That Define Future-Ready Talent



AI fluency, not just digital literacy

Prompting, supervising and validating AI systems becomes a basic workplace skill.



T-shaped, hybrid skill profiles

Deep technical specialisation paired with business, ethics & domain breadth.



Portable, stackable credentials

Internationally recognised certifications employers can verify anywhere.



Continuous, lifelong re-skilling

Success is measured by how fast you learn again, not what you learned once.



Global market readiness

Able to win remote contracts and global roles, not only local vacancies.



Entrepreneurial & creator capability

Able to build products and ventures, not only fill employee seats.



Inclusion by design

Gender parity, rural reach and accessibility as core success metrics.



National Occupational Standard

Operationalisation of the National Occupational Standard in ICT Trade Areas.

Structural Barriers



Fragmentation of regulation, siloed agencies

NITDA, NCC, NUC, NBTE, NDPC, CBN, ITF and state agencies overlap, with inconsistent accreditation and little shared data.



The academic-industry gap

Curriculum review cycles remain far slower than the technology they are meant to teach.



Infrastructure deficits

Unreliable power, broadband still under half the population, and high data/device costs.



Digital inclusion gaps

Gender, urban-rural and disability gaps risk concentrating benefits in an already-advantaged minority.



Low R&D investment

Roughly 0.2% of GDP, against a global average above 2%, starves frontier-technology capability.



Financing & affordability constraints

Quality training, devices and connectivity remain out of reach for many low-income households.



Weak labour-market and skills data

No shared, LMIS, reliable, real-time picture of which digital skills are scarce, where.



Credential & quality-assurance gaps

Uneven bootcamp quality, with no shared national accreditation, risks devaluing genuine certification.



Persistent brain drain

Our very success in producing global-standard talent accelerates the rate at which it leaves.



Skills Scale Emergency

Development of top skills to meet emerging technology demands.

Some Ongoing Programmes

3MTT

Train 3 million young Nigerians in critical technical skills
Create 2 million tech jobs
Export surplus talent globally



Train 3 million young Nigerians in critical technical skills. Create 2 million tech jobs. Export surplus talent globally

NCDMB

Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board AI Initiative



45 young Nigerians selected for specialised Human Capacity Development. 12-month programme in Digitalization and Digitization

National Talent Export Programme (NATEP)

Evaluating the profound effects of our actions.

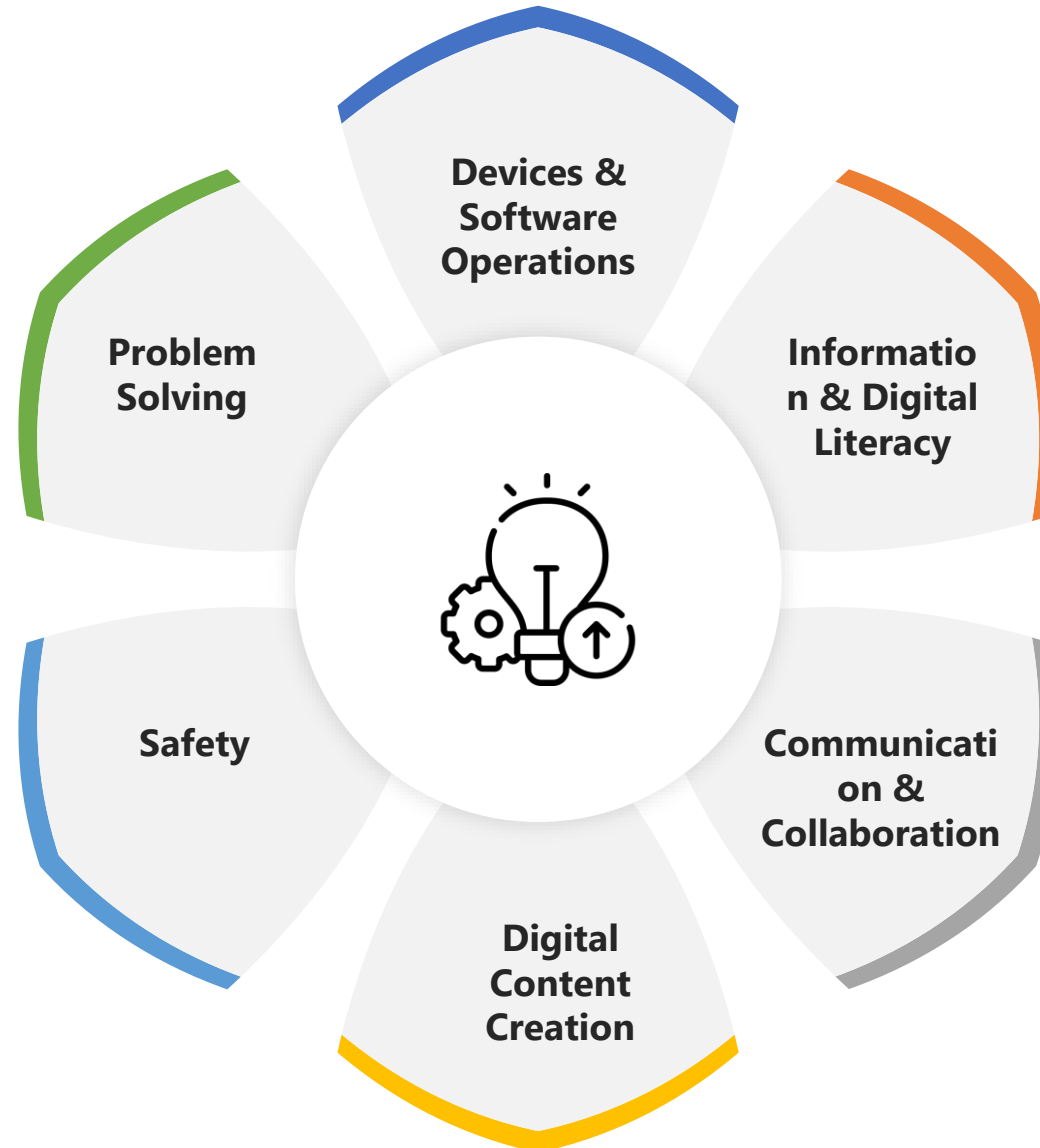


Position Nigeria as a premier global talent hub by building an enabling ecosystem through policy, platforms, promotion, and partnerships

- National Coordination Mechanism for Services Exports (NCMSE) approved by Federal Executive Council (Nov 2025).
- Nigeria Talent Accelerator Network (NTAN) launched with World Economic Forum.
- National Outsourcing Policy zero draft submitted for review.
- 90,000km fibre optic rollout.

The National Digital Literacy Framework (NDLF)

NDLF is a strategic roadmap introduced by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to standardize and drive digital education across the country. It aims to achieve 70% digital literacy by 2027 and 95% by 2030



Ambitious National Targets

- 60% digital literacy by end of 2025
- 70% digital literacy by 2027
- 95% digital literacy by 2030

Scope of Training Target

- 15 million students through formal education
- 5 million public servants
- 30 million individuals from the informal sector
- Total: 50 million Nigerians by 2027

A Practical Roadmap for Nigeria



1. Modernise curricula, anchored to industry

Co-design ICT curricula with industry; revalidate on short cycles, mapped to recognised certifications.



2. National employer-embedded apprenticeships

Institutionalise workplace attachments, with incentives for employers who host apprentices.



3. AI literacy for every discipline

Embed AI fluency beyond computer science — agriculture, health, law, the creative industries.



4. Scale proven public–private training models

Build training-provider capacity to absorb 3MTT-level demand without losing quality.



5. Rural and regional deployment

Deliberately route infrastructure, trainers and funding to underserved zones.



6. Close the gender gap deliberately

Targeted scholarships, mentorship and flexible formats for women and girls, as standard, not special projects.



7. Build a national skills-intelligence system

A shared, real-time skills-demand dashboard across NITDA, the NCC, industry and NCS.



8. Share the risk and reward in financing

Income-share agreements, employer-sponsored training bonds, and blended public–private funding.



9. Plug into the global remote-work economy

Connect certified talent to global outsourcing markets — turn brain drain into brain gain.

CONCEPTUAL MODELS

Developing Nigeria Digital Workforce

Models already exist in Nigerian soil : waiting to be replicated; waiting to be built

Case Study: Yaba — Nigeria's Original Talent Cluster



Grew organically from 2011

Co-Creation Hub (CcHub) anchored a cluster with no government master-plan: just density and proximity.



A built-in talent pipeline

University of Lagos and Yaba College of Technology supplied graduates within walking distance.



Deliberate connectivity investment

MainOne's 2013 fibre ring and the coordinated “Yaba i-HQ” effort with Lagos State gave the cluster reliable internet and power.

What it produced

Andela, early Flutterwave & Paystack, BudgIT, Konga, Paga — and visits from Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, Jack Dorsey and Jack Ma.

The limit we must learn from

Once Andela and Konga scaled, they outgrew Yaba's space and infrastructure — and relocated. An organic cluster, without deliberate reinforcement, hits a ceiling.

How We Need to Scale

Nigeria doesn't need a new miracle. It needs five more Yabas — engineered on purpose, not left to chance for industry affiliations and skills development and innovation.



 Dedicated broadband & power guarantees at every cluster.

 The Andela model of global market connection, deliberately replicated at each node.

SCALING THE LESSON

Replicating Yaba: A National Network, Engineered on Purpose



Anchor around an existing institution

A university, polytechnic or training centre that already produces graduates nearby; don't start from zero.



Guarantee infrastructure deliberately

Dedicated fibre, power and co-working space, engineered in from day one.



Co-locate government, connectivity & employers

As CcHub, MainOne and Lagos State did in Yaba one physical footprint, one coordinated push.



Plan for outgrowth from day one

So that scaling success doesn't force companies to relocate away from the ecosystem that built them.

Proposal: Six deliberately engineered clusters — Lagos/Yaba-Alaro, Abuja, Kano, Enugu, Asaba and Yola — not one accidental one.

What Made Yaba Work — The Five Replicable Factors

Understanding Success Is the Prerequisite for Replication

- Physical proximity of talent, companies, and capital in a defined, walkable geographic area
- Catalytic anchor institution: CcHub provided shared infrastructure, community, and institutional credibility
- Relatively better internet and power infrastructure than the Nigerian average i.e. a functional enabling baseline
- Critical mass creating network effects: talent circulation, informal knowledge transfer, and peer learning
- Access to Lagos consumer market providing immediate product validation opportunities

THE PROBLEM:

These five factors exist in a 10-kilometre radius in Lagos. A national renaissance requires them in SIX zones.

Special Digital Economic Zones

A National Free Zone Proposal for ICT Education, Research, Innovation, and Enterprise

Nigeria has decades of experience with export-processing and free-trade zones for manufacturing and oil & gas. Apply the same instrument, deliberately, to digital talent development and technology services.



Time-bound fiscal incentives

Tax holidays, duty waivers on training & data-centre equipment



Streamlined regulation

Simplified registration and work-permits for visiting experts



One shared regulatory sandbox

NITDA, NCC & NDPC supervising jointly, not separately



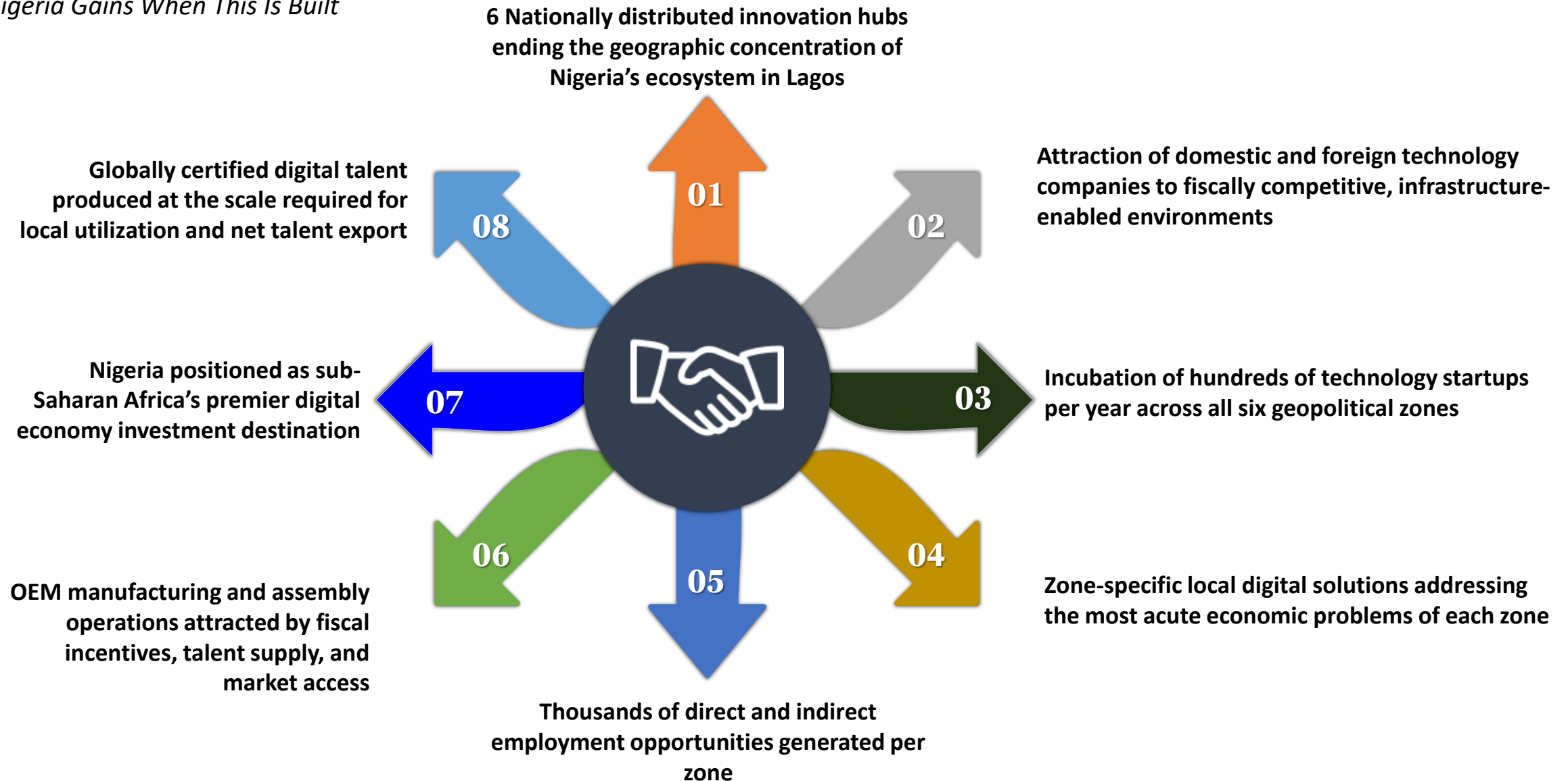
A talent obligation at the core

Incentives tied to Nigerians trained, certified & employed; not just capital invested

A zone anchored around certified training institutions, data centres and outsourcing employers gives global technology employers one predictable point of engagement with Nigeria's talent pipeline.

Expected National Outcomes — DBI Digital Economy Zones

What Nigeria Gains When This Is Built



This is a national imperative. It deserves national champions. The NCS must formally champion this proposal.

The DEZ Free Zone Fiscal and Regulatory Regime

Five Categories of Incentive Across Every Zone

Tax Incentives

10-year corporate income tax holidays · VAT exemptions on ICT equipment and software · Duty-free import of computing hardware and laboratory equipment.

Infrastructure Incentives

Priority electricity supply or renewable energy co-investment · Guaranteed high-speed broadband · Subsidised land and construction for co-located technology companies.

Academic & R&D Partnerships

University collaboration · Joint research programmes · Shared laboratory facilities · Industry-in-residence · Preferential access to government research grants.

IP & Procurement Incentives

Reduced/waived IP registration fees · First-right-of-access to government tech procurement · Export facilitation and preferential trade terms for zone-originating products.

Regulatory Flexibility

Regulatory sandbox status · Fast-track business registration · Flexible immigration for foreign R&D talent ·

WHY DBI CAMPUSES?

Already has the footprint, mandate, credibility, and relationships across all zones. No new institutions needed. Legislative will to unlock what already exists.

The Talent City Programme



Already emerging within Alaro City, Lekki Free Zone, Lagos

A purpose-built, remote-work-ready settlement combining housing, co-working infrastructure, guaranteed power and connectivity, and light-touch, free-zone governance designed specifically for a knowledge economy.

A public-private sector-anchored variant, in every geopolitical zone



**Training & certification
campus**

**Anchored to an existing centre
of excellence**



**Employer-in-residence
facilities**

**For internships and live
apprenticeships**



Affordable co-living

**For trainees and young
professionals**



**Guaranteed power &
broadband**

**At a service level fit for a
knowledge economy**

Harnessing the Efforts of Private ICT Trainings



Mandate a Unified National Framework

- **Adopt National Occupational Standards (NOS) – NBTE, CPN, ICT SSC, NCS-OVP:**

These standards should be mandated for all training programs, as they are designed to address digital skills gaps and meet global industry requirements

- **Align with Digital Competence Framework:**

These standards should be mandated for all training programs, as they are designed to address digital skills gaps and meet global industry requirements:

- **Formalise a Licensing Framework for Control, Quality Assurance and Coordination**

DBI, for instance, is already working on a certificate licensing program designed to create a network of certified providers delivering a standardized curriculum . This model ensures that only qualified institutions can offer recognized training.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Body – NCS/DBI/NITDA/CPN etc**

Centralized monitoring system to track the quality and outcomes of training, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement

By implementing these measures, Nigeria can coordinate the efforts of its private ICT training firms, ensuring they contribute to a standardized, high-quality ecosystem that properly develops skills and meets global standards. This will ultimately help close the nation's digital skills gap and empower its youth for the global digital economy

Inclusive Education: The Foundation for Digital Skills Development for Persons with Disabilities



A digitally inclusive Nigeria is only possible if the education and skills pipeline itself is built on these principles from the outset — not retrofitted after the fact:



Dignity and Autonomy

The right to learn and work independently, on one's own terms



Non-Discrimination

No learner excluded on the basis of disability



Full Participation

Active inclusion in every stage of digital skills design and delivery



Accessibility

Curricula, platforms and devices usable by all learners



Equal Opportunity

The same pathways to certification, employment and enterprise



Respect for Diversity

Recognising disability as one dimension of a wider inclusion agenda

Bridging the Gender Gap in the ICT Ecosystem

Inclusive education for PWDs must deliberately close a gender gap that compounds further for women and girls with disabilities.

Sources: Women in Tech Nigeria (2023); National Bureau of Statistics (2023); Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI). Principles adapted from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 3.

17%

of Nigeria's tech workforce is female

22%

of engineering & technology graduates are women

45M

Nigerian women lack internet access, vs. 28M men (A4AI)

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006)
- Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act (Nigeria, 2018)
- National Gender Digital Inclusion Strategy (NGDIS) (2024–2027)
- European Accessibility Act (EU Directive 2019/882)
- National Gender Policy (2021–2026)
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

Success Stories

- DBI-Sightsavers IT Bridge Academy
- Hamza Aminu Fagge – CITAD Hub, Kano
- Partners
Sightsavers Nigeria, CISCO, MTN Foundation

A National Digital Skills Compact



One coordinating framework, consisting of FMCIDE, NITDA, NCC NCS, CPN, FME & accredited training institutions

Resolving the silo problem at the heart of today's fragmentation; with one shared taxonomy, one credentialing standard, one data dashboard.



One shared skills taxonomy

Across every training provider, region and agency



One mutually recognised credential

A Kano Talent City certificate means the same as a Yaba one



One shared data dashboard

Real-time visibility into skills demand, nationwide

- Dignity and Autonomy
- Non-Discrimination
- Full Participation
- Accessibility



- Equal Opportunity
- Respect for Diversity
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The Skills Gap Crisis

Divergence Between Education and Industry — and How to Close It

Ten High-Yield Skills Areas in Nigeria's Digital Economy

- Artificial Intelligence & Machine Learning Engineering — health, agriculture, finance, public services
- Data Science & Analytics — evidence-based decision-making across every sector of the economy
- Cybersecurity — exponentially growing demand as the digital economy deepens
- Cloud Architecture & DevOps — foundational layer of all modern digital services
- Software Engineering & Full-Stack Development — Nigeria's most globally exportable technical skill
- Digital Marketing, E-Commerce & Growth Analytics — critical for MSME transformation
- UI/UX & Human-Centred Design — high-demand, high-value, globally mobile career
- Fintech & Digital Finance Solutions — payment rails, open banking, digital lending
- Digital Governance, Policy & Regulatory Affairs — governing the digital economy responsibly
- Agritech, Healthtech & EdTech Application Development — three highest-impact domestic domains

Closing the Gap — A Five-Track Strategy

Simultaneous Action on All Five Tracks Is Non-Negotiable

Track 1: Curriculum Emergency Reform

NUC/NBTE /NCCE Industry Advisory Councils with authority to mandate rapid technical content updates without the full multi-year approval cycle.

Track 2: Dual Education & Apprenticeship

Germany's Ausbildung + Singapore's SkillsFuture adapted to Nigeria. Students split time between institution and employer, building verified practical skills.

Track 3: Short-Course & Certification

Formally recognise AWS, Google, Microsoft, CompTIA, Coursera certifications as equivalent credentials for public sector employment and scholarship eligibility.

Track 4: Digital Skills Levy

Mandatory proportion of corporate income tax for tech companies above a threshold directed into a National Digital Skills Fund administered.

Track 5: Women & Underrepresented Groups

Targeted scholarships, mentoring networks, safe learning environments, and childcare support. Skills development that ignores the gender gap reproduces existing inequities.

NORTH STAR: 1 Million/Year

Train 1 million digital professionals per year to internationally competitive standards within 5 years. All five tracks must operate simultaneously to achieve this.

Nigeria as a Net Exporter of Digital Talent

The Opportunity, the Comparators, and the Four-Pillar Strategy

The Benchmark: What Comparable Economies Have Built

Nigeria Has Not Made the Same Deliberate Strategic Choice — Yet

USD 250B

India IT Services Exports Annual

5M+ professionals employed



USD 35B

Philippines BPO & Digital Services

National talent export strategy



USD 10B

Egypt's Outsourcing Target

Deliberate government-led programme



USD 24B

Nigeria Diaspora Remittances Annual



The Four-Pillar Digital Talent Export Strategy

Target: USD 10 Billion + in Annual Digital Services Export within 5 Years

Pillar 1 — Produce Skills at Scale

Train 1 million digital professionals per year to globally competitive standards through university reform + short courses + DBI coordination + employer co-investment.

Pillar 2 — Certify to Global Standards

Alignment with AWS, Microsoft, Google, CompTIA, ISO. Nigerian credentials must be recognised by global employers without individual verification friction.

Pillar 3 — Connect to Global Markets

National Digital Talent Exchange platform (Nigeria's NASSCOM): aggregates employer demand, matches certified Nigerian talent, provides legal and compliance infrastructure.

Pillar 4 — Capture Economic Value

Tax incentives for remote workers paid in Nigeria. Zero-fee remittance corridors. Recirculate digital talent earnings into the domestic economy and back into skills development.

Call to Action

Specific Asks of Every Stakeholder Group in This Room

To the Nigerian Technology Industry

Invest in Your Own Pipeline · Co-Invest, Do Not Just Complain

- The skills gap you legitimately complain about is partially a gap of your own making; invest in the ventures that produce your talent
- Partner with universities for curriculum co-design, equipment donation, research collaboration, and structured student attachment
- Take interns. Pay them fairly. Mentor them seriously. Build the ecosystem that sustains your growth for the next generation
- Support the Digital Skills as investment in your own future talent supply; not as a financial burden to be avoided

To the Federal Government of Nigeria

Establish · Designate · Legislate

- Establish a National Digital Economy Coordination Council with genuine statutory authority to align all agencies, eliminate duplication, and ensure every naira achieves maximum impact
- Designation of a focal institution for ICT education and skills development with ring-fenced funding and updated legislative mandate
- Identify locations as Digital Economy Zones with the full fiscal and regulatory regime
- Create a National Digital Skills Fund co-financed by a Digital Skills Levy on technology companies above a defined income threshold.

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To Nigerian Universities & Research Institutions

Reform Now • Partner Actively • Serve Your Students

- Begin curriculum reform today that bridge the industry academic gap.
- Embed digital skills as core curriculum requirements across EVERY faculty — not optional electives
- Partner actively with technology industry for curriculum co-design, shared laboratories, and industry-in-residence programmes
- Accelerate the implementation of the TIWES Programme (Teachers Industrial Work Experience Scheme)

Let Us Harness Our People First

Coordination, not ambition, is what we now lack: one system instead of a dozen silos, and one relentless push to reach every zone; turning Nigeria's youth into producers of technology, not only consumers of it.

What This Address Has Argued For

Specific, Interconnected, Mutually Reinforcing Interventions

- ▶ A coordinated national digital skills ecosystem anchored by a lead agency as the designated focal organisation, with adequate funding and legislative mandate
- ▶ A strategy closing the education-industry skills gap at the pace and scale Nigeria's digital economy demands
- ▶ A systematic programme replicating the conceptual models across all six geopolitical zones with zone-specific innovation clusters
- ▶ A deliberate national strategy making Nigeria a net digital talent exporter targeting USD 10 billion in annual services export within 5 years
- ▶ Designation of DBI campuses as Digital Economy Zones with a free zone fiscal and regulatory regime to attract investment and develop talent
- ▶ A National Digital Economy Coordination Council with statutory authority to end institutional duplication and align all federal agencies

*Thank
you!*