

# My Quest for an Internet

In this, the 51st installment of our weekly series at [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com), we present an excerpt from a lecture delivered in Paris (France).

Oil Tanks Exhausted, Think Tanks Needed

—Part 4 of 5

By [Philip Emeagwali](http://emeagwali.com)

Lecture video and audio are posted at

<http://www.youtube.com/emeagwali#p/a/u/1/d1mCIXleezY>

and [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com).

The man with wisdom is a shining torch that sheds light in our darkness and guides us out of our ignorance. I am often asked: "How do we build a stronger Nigeria through technological innovation?"

I came across the answer in 1963 sitting on the verandah of our house along Gbenoba Road, Agbor, Midwest Region. I was silently reciting a quotation on the

masthead of the newspaper called the *West African Pilot*. It read:

**"Show the light and the people will find the way."**

Because I was nine years old, I did not understand the deep meaning of those wise words. I now understand "the light" as a metaphor for knowledge, and "showing the light" to mean increasing the intellectual capital, the sum of

human knowledge possessed by 6.6 billion men, women, and children. We find "the way" when we've brought to fruition our dream of eradicating poverty, discovering the cure for AIDS, and inventing the internet for email communication.

A long time ago, a man asked his children,

"If you had a choice between the clay of wisdom or a bag of gold, which would you choose?"

"The bag of gold, the bag of gold," the naïve children cried, not realizing that wisdom had the potential to earn them many more bags of gold in the future.

The wealth of the future will be derived from developing the intellectual capital—the clay of wisdom—and the innovations of the younger generation to make Nigeria stronger.

Should Nigeria migrate from oil to soil, as is often suggested. I think not. It should leapfrog into the Information Age. Nigeria cannot return to an agricultural age because the West is being urbanized, the East is being eroded, and the North is being desertified. A Nigeria without oil must make the transition to a knowledge-based economy. Nollywood can redefine 21st century Africa as the continent of arts and innovation.

If Nigerians have an average of three children per couple, it will become the world's third most populous nation in 50 years. It will lag behind China and India, but will have a greater population density.

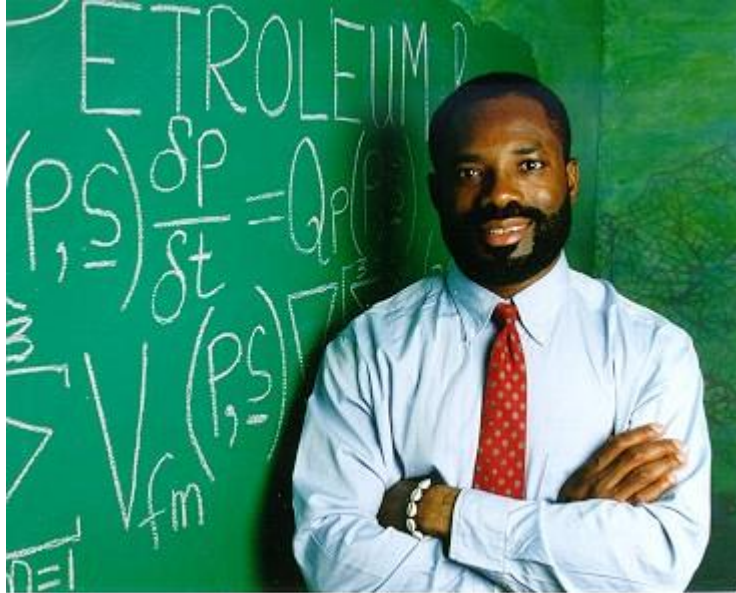
Where will we find farmland? My grandfather's farmland was located where Onitsha market now lies. For countless centuries, my Igbo ancestors were farmers. Sons walked in their father's footsteps, ploughing the same land. Their life expectancy was about 37 years.

Daughters married early, had as many children as they could, and became young widows. My mother married days after her 14th birthday and gave birth to me six days after her 15th birthday. She was born in colonial Africa, where she counted her age on her fingers and toes and by her age-grade affiliation.

Yet she had a son who could count the ages of humanity on his supercomputer, which occupies the space of four tennis courts. Her son's supercomputer computes and communicates as an internet and sends and receives answers via e-mails to and from 65,000 computers.

soil to work in knowledge-based industries.

My father and I, followed by my son, broke the tradition of walking in our ancestors' footsteps. My father was a nurse, and my son and I are computer scientists. All three of us abandoned the



[Philip Emeagwali](#)

[emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com)

[Philip Emeagwali](#) has been called “a father of the Internet” by [CNN](#) and [TIME](#), and extolled as a “Digital Giant” by [BBC](#) and as “one of the great minds of the Information Age” by former U.S. President [Bill Clinton](#).



Press [CTRL-D](#) to SAVE this page for easy revisit

Press [CTRL-P](#) to PRINT

Date: 11/25/2006, 10:54 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** olushola soji  
Gege <82.206.131.163>

**Location:** lagos

**Number:** 113

---

may the grace of GOD contiuue to be on  
you.You are a true son of your  
father,Nigeria and Africa

---

**Date:** 11/22/2006, 8:11 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Elizabeth  
Imolorhe <212.60.73.31>

**Location:** The Gambia

**Number:** 112

---

Thank you, Philip. We are proud of you.

---

**Date:** 11/21/2006, 5:34 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** olorunyomi  
akintunde <196.29.212.66>

**Location:** lagos

**Number:** 111

i'm proud to be black,the blach race will forever be grateful for having a rare gem like you.

**Date:** 11/16/2006, 5:24 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Dele Oluwole <217.118.119.69>

**Location:** London

**Number:** 110

Uncle Philip,

I am an IT professional also, but you are a rare gem.

**Date:** 11/15/2006, 9:36 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Ezra C. Mabilisa <196.209.254.2>

**Location:** Johannesburg- South Africa

**Number:** 109

Dear Sir

"Today it feels good to be an African !!"

Thanks to you

**Date:** 11/15/2006, 12:23 am, GMT +6

**Name:** Sylvester Aigbe <83.229.97.250>

**Location:** Ibadan, Nigeria

**Number:** 108

You are the original design that Nigeria is to be. If it is not too late, let us together make this design a reality.

**Date:** 11/8/2006, 2:50 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Mike Okes <196.220.8.138>

**Location:** warri delta state

**Number:** 107

may god bless all of u

**Date:** 11/4/2006, 10:28 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** CYRIL AMAMCHUKWU  
OBELE <41.204.36.61>

**Location:** ACCRA- GHANA

**Number:** 106

WORDS ARE NOT ADEQUATE TO  
EXPRESS MY JOY AT YOUR  
INNOVATIONS AND YOUR SUPER  
WEBSITE. YOU ARE A BEACON OF  
HOPE FOR AFRICANS IN DIASPORA,  
DALU NWA ADO N'IDUU

**Date:** 11/3/2006, 1:57 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Ib Hena <216.185.79.118>

**Location:** University Of Maiduguri, Borno  
state Nigeria.

**Number:** 105

Sir, i most sincerely say that we, the younger generation of Nigeria are being encouraged by what you are doing. Atleast we can show the world that goodthings can come out of Nigeria, and there are more that are yet budding so they should just be on the look out for more of your likes in nigeria... Sir, i believe that all you need to do to us the younger generation is to constantly give useful advices and lead rightly and then we'll follow diligently and explore other areas that are yet untapped then, we see who will set limits for us.... Kudos to you sir, and keep up the good work.

**Date:** 10/29/2006, 3:22 am, GMT +6

**Name:** HAnibal Athafu <71.240.152.132>

**Location:** Harrisburg pa

**Number:** 104

hey there good job on the super computer  
any way i am fighting for my future just like



you if i am lucky i will get something any way i am a friend of bills (Clintn) and i am saying hi bud

**Date:** 10/27/2006, 6:52 am, GMT +6

**Name:** Johnson  
Akadigbo <24.137.91.144>

**Location:** New Brunswick, Canada

**Number:** 103

Dear Prof. Emeagwali,

There is hope for our continent, yes, there is! People like you have given that hope and I believe generations to come can definitely tap into it. 10 of your kind, and I believe Africa will no doubt take its unique place in human history.

Prof, you've shown us that we can accomplish much if we put our minds to it.

Thank you for given the black race a ray of hope for today and tomorrow.

**Date:** 10/26/2006, 7:49 pm, GMT +6

Name: STEVE  
MADOJEMU <88.151.5.53>

Location: DUBLIN

Number: 102

I THANK GOD FOR A GREAT MIND  
SUCH AS OUR VERY OWN DR.  
EMEAGWALI. JUST READ THE  
'INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL' AND AM  
SO THRILLED AT DOCS THOTS. ALSO  
TO LET HIM KNOW AM JUST NOW  
RESEARCHING (PHD) AT ALL  
HALLOWS COLLEGE, DUBLIN - I AM  
LOOKING AT THE SOCIO-  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF  
POVERTY! THANKS DOC.

Date: 10/23/2006, 7:30 pm, GMT +6

Name: ONU PHILIP  
CHIZOBA <64.201.33.242>

Location: ENUGU STATE

Number: 101

IT REALLY INTERESTS ME WHEN I SEE THAT NIGERIANS ARE MOVING AHEAD IN THE WORLD OF TECHNOLOGY. EMEAGWALI IS A TRUE AMBASSADOR OF NIGERIA IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD. I ALSO ASKED MYSELF EVERYDAY WHEN I WILL BECOME COMPARABLY IN THIS WORLD LIKE YOU, PLEASE HELP ME TO SOLVE THIS QUESTION. MOREOVER, NIGERIAN AND THE ISSUE OF TECHNOLOGY IS BECOMING IMPERATIVE THAT SOMEBODY LIKE YOU SHOULD INTERVANE. PLEASE DO NOT FORGET YOUR COUNTRY NIGERIA.

Date: 10/23/2006, 7:14 pm, GMT +6

Name: fred owino <196.202.221.37>

Location: Kenya

Number: 100

Dear phillip,  
Am spending sleepless nights and days trying to think how Africa could be if we had about 10 fellows as yourself. me hopes the fruits of thy diligent labour is like planting a tree of whose shadows, the entire black race findeth hope and inspiration to make a gigantic leap forward in all aspects of life.  
keep up the good work OGA!!!!

Date: 10/19/2006, 11:55 pm, GMT +6

Name: LUCKY AKOLO  
ABIMIKU <86.62.9.62>

Location: ABUJA

Number: 99

HOW I WISH AFRICANS AND OF  
COURSE NIGERIANS HAVE 10 OF

YOUR KIND, THINGS WOULD HAVE  
BEEN DIFFERENT.

**Date:** 10/19/2006, 6:01 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Apeh vincent  
ogbe <80.78.16.200>

**Location:** Gowon Estate Egbeda Lagos

**Number:** 98

Emeagwali,

you are the light of the black race which is  
the origin of the entire races in the world.  
keep it up.

Vincent

**Date:** 10/16/2006, 5:26 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** chinaza nwankwo <134.146.0.6>

**Location:** warri ,delta state.

**Number:** 97

May GODBLESS U, AND ALSO YOUR

## FAMILY.

**Date:** 10/15/2006, 11:05 pm, GMT +6

**Name:** Blessing Olaifa <83.229.126.249>

**Location:** ZZ4 kigo road kaduna,Nigeria.

**Number:** 96

your works are a living hope for millions of people .pls do all you can to make sure that more people around the world have access to them.In one of your recent lectures ,you mentioned the possibilities of generations to come becoming human computers in 10000 years.I bet if the resources at the disposal of man are rightly deployed with less attention to weapons of war ,Man shall get to the place of your prediction in a 1000 years.Pls in all you do put African in mind ,the Lord will always be your strength,Mr P Emeagwali.Sooner the World will know that the journey of knowledge,deep wisdom and revelation that started in Africa can only be

delayed, but not denied. Thanks for your great works.

Date: 10/15/2006, 1:47 pm, GMT +6

Name: IKE CHIDOLUE <24.174.78.96>

Location: HOUSTON, TX

Number: 95

SIR,

MAY I SUGGEST THAT IN ADDITION TO A GUEST SIGN IN PORTION AT YOUR WEB-PAGE WE NEED A BLOGGERS CORNER. THIS SIGN IN PAGE IS NO-LONGER ADEQUATE. BECAUSE, AS WE GET STIMULATED BY YOUR CONSTANTLY CHALLENGING OUTLOOK TO LIFE & THE HOPE FOR AFRICA, WE NEED TO COMMIT OUR THOUGHTS TO WRITING IMMEDIATELY ON YOUR BLOG LEAST IT ESCAPES OUR MIND. ALTHOUGH IN A WAY, THE VISITORS PAGE STILL SERVES AS SUCH;

HOWEVER I THINK WE NEED A BLOGGERS CORNER. FURTHERMORE, MAY I USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO MY FELLOW IGBO, WHO REGULARLY VISITS THIS SITE. PLEASE PROF. EMEAGWALI IS AFRICA & NO LONGER IGBO ALONE, SO TO COME HERE AND SPEAK ABOUT BIAFRA ALONE, WILL BE A GREAT DIS-SERVICE TO OUR AFRICAN BRETHERN. COULD WE PLEASE LOOK INTO THE FUTURE WITH SOME CHALLENGING VIEWS ON HOW TO RE-MAKE BLACK AFRICA. CAN WE PLEASE CONSIDER THIS WEBSITE AS A PLACE WERE AFRICANS COME TO BE MOTIVATED TOWARDS RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF BLACK AFRICA. BRETHERN, BE IT KNOWN TO YOU THAT DR. EMEAGWALI CAN NO LONGER BE RESTRICTED TO HIS IGBONESS ANY LONGER; ALL BLACK AFRICANS HAVE A STAKE IN HIM. THERE IS A PART OF HIM THAT MOST



AFRICANS DESIRE STRONGLY. AND HE HAS CONSTANTLY USED SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPART SUCH PARTS TO THOSE OF US THAT DESIRES IT VERY STRONGLY.

DR. EMEAGWALI, I SALUTE YOU, ONCE MORE, I JUST FINISHED READING YOUR ARTICLE TITLED "WHERE IS AFRICA GOIN WRONG" & SIR, YOU HAVE FURTHER MESSED ME UP ALL OVER AGAIN, YOU`VE MADE THIS SITE LIKE THE FOOT OF THE CROSS OF MY LORD JESUS, WERE PEOPLE COME TO CAST THEIR HEAVY BURDENS UPON, WERE PEOPLE COME AND TAKE SOME ADVENTURE INTO HOPE & COURAGE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW. I SALUTE YOU SIR, AS I FINE TUNE MY VISION FOR A REGENERATED BLACK AFRICA. I REMAIN RESPECTFULLY YOURS  
IKE CHIDOLUE

Date: 10/15/2006, 12:45 am, GMT +6

**Name:** Akinwale  
Akinhanmi <80.78.16.182>  
**Location:** Port Harcourt, Rivers  
State, Nigeria  
**Number:** 94

Good day to you. I really appreciate the hand of God on you for such wonderful exploit in IT. I am very much interested in IT industrial, how do I reach you but you can get me on 234 802 742 8492

**Date:** 10/13/2006, 6:56 am, GMT +6  
**Name:** Ezekiel Eze <74.98.124.16>  
**Location:** Toronto, Canada  
**Number:** 93

Phillip,  
you are a beacon of light in a dark continent.

I have always been wondering why is it that black man can run faster, punch harder, jump higher but can not write better.

Your story loudly emphasizes the ingenuity of the black man despite the mis-education of the negroes.

Your story also brings to mind the scientific and technological achievements of Biafrans during the Nigerian civil war.

Your thunderous but yet unheard inventions breaks the jinx of black man's inferiority.

You are a great gift not only to the Ibos in particular but to Nigeria and Africa in general.

Yours have shaded light to the darkest part of every black man.

Thanks for your courage.

May God be with us.



My maternal grand mother Mrs. Obam Balonwu (*nee* Okudo) was a farmer. She was born in Nkwelle Ogidi in about 1900 and passed away on December 24, 1966.

This photo was taken at 6C Wilkinson Road, Onitsha, circa 1955, during the ceremony of her initiation into the *Otu Odu* (Ivory Society), the most prominent women organization in Onitsha.



A circa 2007 photo of Gbenoba Road.

This is a circa 2007 photo of Gbenoba Road where I lived from mid-1963 to late 1966. We later moved to the nurses quarter of the General Hospital, Agbor. In our living room parlour, my father, James, made me solve 100 maths problems an hour from an arithmetic textbook published by Longmans. I played soccer along the dusty (then unpaved) pathways off this street. My classmate, Isaac Omoille, taught me how to ride my father's Raleigh bicycle on this street. I walked along this street to Saint John's Primary School and its Roman Catholic Church.