

Service Compact (Servicom) and Its Impact on Service Delivery in Nigerian Postal Service (Nipost), 2015-2019

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Abstract: *Servicer compact popularly known as SERVICOM is a public sector reform introduced by the Nigerian government in 2004 to promote the provision of qualitative service delivery in the public sector. It was driven by government's commitment to deliver functional and efficient service to the people. This study has attempted to examine the impact of Service Compact on service delivery in NIPOST. Secondary sources of data were generated from documentary facts drawn from array of both published and unpublished materials such as textbooks, journals, newspapers and magazine, conference and seminar papers, handbook of the organization, internet material and many more. Interview was chiefly utilized as the major instrument for data collection. The study has established a relationship between Service Compact and service delivery in NIPOST. Conclusion was drawn that SERVICOM has played a significant role on the provisioning of efficient and qualitative service delivery in NIPOST. Recommendations such as the need for proper role definition, non-interference of government in the appointment of officers, regular employees training and many were proffered.*

Keywords: SERVICOM, Service Delivery, Efficiency and NIPOST

1. INTRODUCTION

Service Compact otherwise known as SERVICOM is a policy programme introduced by the Nigerian Federal Government in 2004 to address the challenges which often emanates from service delivery and to further strengthen effectiveness and efficiency in rendering services in the ministries, departments and agencies of government (MDAs) (Cohen, 2010). The essential goal behind its formation is to ensure that services taker understand their right to public services, the service standard they should expect and how to demand for the services or speak up where it is deficient or lacking in its provisioning to the users (Davidson, 2014).

Service Compact is designed to operate through a network of Ministerial SERVICOM Units (MSU) which was established in all MDAs to refocus every institution in public service toward better service delivery and also to support those MSUs to write up service charters, established complaints system at service from – lines as well as develop service improvement plan in the course of carrying out their functions (Yusuf, 2016). Inside all the MDAs, certain individuals were saddled with the onus of monitoring and evaluating the success, worth and challenge that often stand as threat and constraint to its operation (Bello, 2016).

The Obasanjo civilian administration in 2004 introduced the policy programme out of the felt need to improve the challenges that for long were hindering qualitative and efficiency service delivery in MDAs. The policy programme has aimed to ensure a strong, better alignment between government and the public, customer satisfaction, improve utilization of resources, resulting in effective cost cutting, better management of risk, service disruption and growth of a more secure and stable service environment, supporting change and flexibility (Yusuf, 2016).

This is because of the value which government has ascribed on service delivery. It is the only channel that signifies and also shows or reveals the action of government to the public. It also informs the government on whether their purported goals are on course or have already been actualized (Bello, 2016). The response from the public will depict the level of satisfaction associated with the service. When a particular policy action is appreciated; the society or the public will not only applauded the government but will be committed, loyal, productive and motivated. But when it is the contrary, productivity will decline; attitude toward work or the programme will be unconcerned and disinterested. There will be a kind of labour – management dispute, labour unrest, demonstration, protest and a lot of unhealthy activities in the work-place and so also is the general public (Bello, 2016).

Service Compact in NIPOST is a tale that is highly beholden and inclined to give both the employers and the customers of their service (i.e. the public) maximum satisfaction. Just like other MDA, NIPOST has embraced the policy programmes of SERVICOM and have further strengthened it by strategies its unit and as well exposing its personnel to modern technology through adequate training, conferences, workshops and the management of top management – employers relations (Yusuf, 2016). This for long has helped the organization to be strenuous, sturdy and resolute in providing qualitative services to the public irrespective of competition from the private sector and the continually advent in technology (Victor, 2016).

Apart from the traditional mail delivery services which the organization is known for, the introduction of SERVICOM has created room for new innovation in the form of diversification. This can be seen in the form of issuance of domestic and foreign money orders, authorization of stamp duties, express mail and many more. This development has also played crucial role in reducing politics from postal management but rather created ways for adequacy in financing activities, establishment of a postal career service, allowing collective bargaining between management and employees and the creation of an independent commission for setting postal rate and handling issues appertain to unethical activities while on the job and to the public (Nathan, 2016).

This study will attempt to access the impact of SERVICOM on service delivery in NIPOST, the innovations and yields which were accompanied with the introduction of the scheme. The study will access both the inward reflection and the outward benefits associated with the scheme and as well examine factors which tend to constitute hindrances to its operation.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ambiguity in defining of roles is one of the basic problems which have triggered this study. The defined roles which were stated with the creation of the policy programmes were not followed as defined. Roles and key actors designed with the roles are not well spelled out and where they were spelled; there are issues of conflict and avowal. NIPOST is supposed to be reporting directly to the Nodal officer directly as it was defined but this directive are only not followed but noticeably buried. The nodal officer however report to the General Manger who ideally was to only control administration and finance.

Another problem which also prompted the study is the lack of political will on the part of management to equip the SERVICOM unit with necessary materials to function effectively. At the introduction of the MSU, the then PMG/CEO was a technocrat who ensured all the requirements and facilities needed are provided. This development for long has made the units to function as it is expected. However, there is a downward spiral collapse with the appointment of politicians as PMG/CEO who has new focus and the SERVICOM units are not their issue of primacy.

Lack of adequate training and retraining is also one of the problems that motivated the study. Right from inception of SERVICOM Units in Nigeria, training and retraining of SERVICOM staff have been outlined as one of the goal of the policy programme. The purpose is to train all staff members appointed to work in the unit with necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding in order to fulfill their roles and responsibilities to improve service delivery and customer focus within the organization. NIPOST as an organization in the beginning has cued into the federal government plan but later it could not sustain the momentum on the premises of lack of funds. Instead of maintaining already trained staff, there is a continual development of these trained staff out of the unit and their replacement with untrained staff and on the foreign training scheme which were meant for the nodal officers; they were not only hijacked but restrained and discarded.

It against these backdrop that the following research questions were posited, begging for a resolve:

- a. In what ways do ambiguity in role definition affects SERVICOM on services delivery in NIPOST?
- b. How does political will constitute a challenge to SERVICOM on service delivery in NIPOST?
- c. What is the relationship between deficient training and functional service delivery of SERVICOM in NIPOST?

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The central objective of the study is to examine the impact of SERVICOM on service delivery in NIPOST.

The specific objectives are to:

- a. Examine how ambiguity in role definition affects SERVICOM on service delivery in NIPOST
- b. Access how political will affect SERVICOM on service devily in NIPOST.
- c. Ascertain the relationship between deficient training and functional service delivery of SERVICOM in NIPOST.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research relied on secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the study such as books, journals, magazines, conferences and seminar papers and newspapers. Other sources of secondary data were reports, handbook of the organization and other quantitative publications related to the problem of the study were all systematically analyzed.

The method by which data were generated for this study is the secondary source and the use of interview. There were qualitative soft publication and entries in recognized and official websites. Others include online version of international dailies, books, journals, reports, seminar and conferences paper, national newspapers etc.

Being a non-experimental research, the use of qualitative descriptive analysis is employed for the analysis of the generated data. This was done through careful analysis of the formulated research questions in line with the reviewed literature. Thus, under the findings and discussions, each discourse is based on some background assumption presented in the form of research questions and objectives.

In interpreting our data, the relationship between functional and sound administrative practices and national development in Nigeria was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, we used a qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical, providing descriptive and historical details.

This was also complemented by descriptive qualitative analysis. The qualitative and historical method provided us with clear perspective into our research problem by giving us the opportunity to understand the historical details and accurate account of the past and to use the past to discuss the present

5. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

a) The Concept of Service Delivery

The word service delivery is a nascent word which has been defined by different scholars in different ways. According to Collins (2010) in his work *public service delivery*, it is the mechanism through which public services are delivered to the public by local, municipal or federal government. He went further to list some of them to include: sewage and trash disposals, streets cleaning, public education, health care and many more. Similarly, James (2012) sees it as a component of administration that defines the interaction between providers (which could be government or private) and clients where they provide or offer a service, whether it is information or task and the client either finds value or loses value as a result of it. He went ahead to stressed that a good service delivery provides clients with an increase in value.

In another direction, Steven (2014) stressed that service delivery is a new facet of public administration that centered on the qualitative provisioning of goods and service to the public and also ensuring that they provided good and services meets the expectation and satisfaction of the public. Espousing on the same idea, Davidson (2016) has defined service delivery as an organized process of ensuring that clients, consumers or customers' needs, expectation and satisfaction are fulfilled. He went further to stressed, that the idea behind the concept of service delivery is to render qualitative service and meets the need of the target audience. Olowu (2010) sees it as mutual relationship between service provider (which could the state) and its beneficiaries (the public). He went further to stress that the primary responsibility of any responsible state is to deliver services to those who cannot afford the market price of the product. Fundamentally, the ability of a government to legitimately tax and govern people is premised on its capacity to deliver a range of service required by its population which no other player will provide. In other words, government owes their existence and their legitimacy to the fact that there are services in which the possibility of market failure is great.

The traditional explanations of government organizations begin with an analysis of what constitutes this category of services: Goods and services that require exclusion, jointers of use or consumption, and not easily divisible are regarded as public goods and services (Olowu, 2010). Increasingly, interest is shifting to the possible role of private sector, voluntary organizations, and communities in improving the delivery of public services. In particular, advance in technology has increased the possibility of greater involvement of several institutional actors in the provision of services. Moreover, the pressure toward greater citizen involvement in decision making in government has compelled government everywhere to seek to increase the quality of government services at a time when the available resources for delivering services have decline (Olowu, 2010).

6. HISTORICAL EXPLORATION OF SERVICOM

SERVICOM is an acronym for Service Compact with All Nigerians; it is an initiative of the federal government of Nigeria developed out of the consensus emerging from a special Presidential Retreat on service Delivery. SERVICOM was

established in March, 2004 during the second civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo with a focus on improving the quality of life of citizens for better development (Davison, 2016). The establishment of SERVICOM office in different institutions, ministries and Agencies is a commitment to provide the public service in Nigeria with respect, courtesy, honesty and professionalism (Nathan, 2016).

SERVICOM compliance spearheads the service delivery initiative and also monitors performance of the charter yearly and reviews the charter biannually. The management of the MDAs, customer relations is carried by providing opportunities for customer's feedback or service and compliance procedure. The units ensure that complaints and suggestions are treated within ten (10) working days from date of receipt.

The SERVICOM compliance performs the following functions:

- a. Promotion of quality assurance and best practices in Agency's performance of its functions.
- b. Provide a comprehensive and effective training policy for frontline staff and organized service delivery meeting/workshops, seminars and conferences.
- c. Disseminate best practices and other tips on service delivery improvement periodically.
- d. It serves as a link between the Agency and the SERVICOM office and is also the secretariat of the Agency's service delivery committee which meets quarterly.
- e. It facilitates a safe and conducive working environment for staff at all levels of service delivery.
- f. Respects to the Director General on performance against agreed objectives, timescales and budgets quarterly.
- g. Establish project and departmental key performance indicators (KPIs); including the establishment and maintenance of a fully functional and efficient services/help desk.

7. SERVICOM AND NATURE OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIPOST

The Nigerian postal service is an autonomous entity in the Federal Ministry of Communication Technology which came into existence on 1st January, 1985 as a department in the ministry by virtue of decree number 18 of 1987. The organization became a full – fledged autonomous body on July 1st 1992 with function such as:

- i. Developing, promoting and providing adequate and efficient coordinated and economic postal services at fair and reasonable rate and fees.
- ii. Maintaining an efficient system of collection, sorting and delivery of mail nationwide.
- iii. Providing various types of mail services to meet the needs of different categories of mail users.
- iv. Establishing and maintaining postal facilities at such character and in such location consistent with reasonable economic as will enable the public to have easy access to essential postal services.

SERVICOM began in NIPOST on 10th March, 2015. It was spearheaded by the nodal officer who is supported by three (3) major officers. These are:

- a. Charter desk officer
- b. Customer Relations/Governance redress officer
- c. Seminar improvement officer.

NIPOST has a SERVICOM Coordinator who coordinates the SERVICOM Desk officers of the seven zones. They are answerable to the coordinator and each nodal officer in turn report and give account of their activities to the zones coordinators. The tenure of these officers and their offices is decided on the basis of performance rather than political affiliations. The essence of this purpose and stipulation is to avoid needless discontinuity of the postal system (Victor, 2016). The emanation of SERVICOM in the organization has placed strict restrictions on the delivering of goods and services that have the tendency of causing injury or damage, seditions, obscene, defamatory or threatening matters. It also restricts unsolicited advertisements that are of sexually explicit nature and the authorization to prevent mail delivery to persons conducting a fraudulent business.

The NIPOST Handbook in 2015 has outlined some of the functions of SERVICOM in the organizations as:

- a. Review and monitoring performance in line with the goals and mandate of SERVICOM
- b. Provisioning of opportunities for customers feedback on services provided.
- c. Instituting appropriate market research techniques in identifying customer's needs and expectation.
- d. Ensuring comprehensive and effective employee training policy for front line staff on customer's relations and related matters.

- e. Facilitating a safe and conducive working environment for staff at the level of service delivery.
- f. Managing links with strategic partners and stakeholders on service delivery, market research, customer care and relations.

8. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

System theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study. It was first popularized by David Easton in 1954. It is one of the landmarks in the evolution of modern organization theory. According to this approach, an organization is considered a social system and thus has to be studied in its entirety. In simple words, a system is a collection of inter-related parts which receives inputs, act upon them in a planned manner and thereby produces certain outputs. The additional quality of a system is depicted in the management of control, which is the feedback mechanism (Eghe, 2003).

The foremost contributors to the systems theory contend that an organization is a total system i.e. a composite of all sub-systems which serve to produce the desired output. The basic assumption is that the elements of the organization structure and function emanated from the characteristics of human problem-solving processes and rational human choice. Therefore, an organization is conceived as a people making choices and behaving on the basis of their reaction to their needs and environment. This theory lays emphasis upon identification of the decision centre and communication media through which information is passed within the organization system (Davidson, 2010).

The system approach is based on the observation that in organized systems, the behaviour of any part ultimately affects the behaviour of every other part. All these effects are neither significant nor even capable of being detected. Therefore, the essence of this orientation lies in the systematic research for significant interactions when evaluating actions and policies in terms of an organization as a whole, i.e. their overall effect (Eghe, 2003).

According to Boulding (1926), a system's parts are constantly in a state of interaction which is dynamic or ever changing. What system analysts would hope to do is to predict the system's movement and offer the explanation or prescription for the relationship between its parts which affords it the best chance of accomplishing its goals. An important diversion of system approach is the interaction between a system and its environment. The underlying assumption is that, the system and its environment are reciprocally influencing each other and this process is a continual.

The theory is applicable to the study in the following directions:

a) Quality control

One of the essences of the creation or introduction of SERVICOM in NIPOST just like other MDAs is to ensure that the organization achieves or maintain the desired level of quality in the services it rendered to the public. The Desk officer is saddled with this role. He or she ensured that services such as collection of letters, delivering of letters, parcel post and printed matter such as books, magazines and newspapers and the issuance of domestic and foreign money order are of high standard and meets up the satisfaction of the public. The Desk officer report activities to the Nodal officers. NIPOST through the innovation of SERVICOM has also created rooms for training of its employees through workshops, conference and many more. The organization through the introduction of SERVICOM has update and brought in new tools to enhance efficient service delivery to the public.

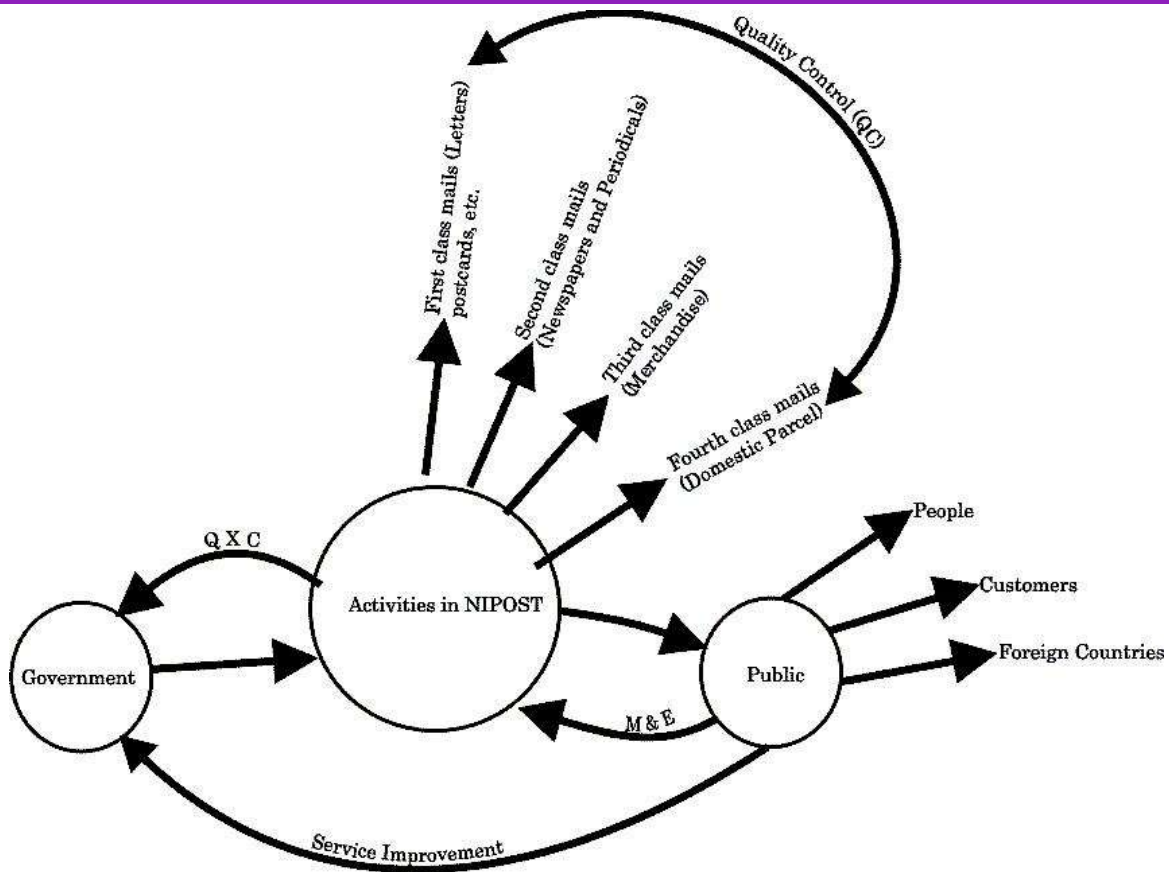
b) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

This is also one of the bases for the creation of the scheme. The focal officer of each zone ensures that there is a good relationship between the organization and the public. This task is often carried by the customer relation office and service improvement units. They access the employees on the job to enquire about their challenges. They also relates with the customers through the medium such as help line, desk help unit, after-sales services, advice and information on certain services. Apart from accessing the need of the employees on the job, they also deal with routine inquires and complaints from or disputes with customers.

c) Service Improvement

This is also one of the reasons why SERVICOM was introduced in NIPOST. A particular unit known as improvement desk under the control of the service improvement officer is planted inside the system to response to various reaction, comment and criticism of customers. It is the response to the feedback from both the employees on the job and the customers in line with some services that were rendered.

A schematic loop of SERVICOM and Service Delivery in NIPOST



The schematic loop above tries to offer explanation on the existing relationship between the three (3) units of SERVICOM in NIPOST and their respective functions. The Nodal officer work hand in hand with the existing demands to ensure that quality is controlled with respect to the first class mail, second class mail, third class and fourth class mail. The customer relations desk officer monitor and evaluate activities between the public and the NIPOST and Service Improvement Desk officer access the view of the public; deliberate with the government and sees that the discovered challenges were resolved.

9. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results and findings of this study shall be based on the usage of qualitative materials appertain to the study and interview conducted with persons with knowledgeable information on the subject under investigation. The findings uncovered a number of issues.

- a) In the course of the study, it was unraveled that ambiguity that emanated with the organizational structure for long has been a strong challenge that affects SERVICOM in ensuring a functional service delivery in the organization (NIPOST). The focal officers operate under the control of several authorities and these often create conflict and lack of commitment on the job. There is lack of distinction between the function of the focal or nodal officer and a director in the organization. The law of its creation categorically stated that the nodal officer is to report to the MSUs coordinator but that is not what is seen in the organization. The executive director tends to dominate the role of the SERVICOM officer and this practice for long has made the focal officer to be redundant, detached on their role and committed on the job. It is the executive director instead of the focal officer that communicates with the MSUs instead of being an observer, consultant and an intervener between the focal officer and the MSUs. An interview with 3 nodal officers (Names withholds) has shown that ambiguity in form of poor role definition for long has being a threat to operation of SERVICOM in NIPOST. One of the officer enthused:

The post of a focal officer of SERVICOM in NIPOST in Nigeria operates under the influence or direction of the executive director as against what has been written in its law of operation. Apart from the intimidating influence of the control on the office, the objective defined for the organization differs from the objectives

often forced on the officers. Thus, the CEO for long has failed to find a clear sense of direction and government intentions are compromised.

- b) In the course of the study, it was uncovered that political interference is a serious threat to SERVICOM and service delivery in NIPOST. A cross sectional survey of three (3) zones have shown that unlike it was before, technocrat who are with wealth of experience are often sidelined and replaced with politicians as zonal coordinators and unit officers of the scheme. Board members knowing that what qualified them for the job is partisan political activity tend to see the organization as venue for employing party loyalists. Apart from these, series of informal discussions have also shown that there is no security of tenure for the SERVICOM officers. Almost always, appointed officers chosen to spearhead come and go with the government that appointed them. These officers are normally sacked just as they are getting to understand the working of the organization; just as their experience is being increasingly enhanced and just as their relationship with top management is becoming more functionally cordial. A new government or the same political actor appoints a new officer to spearhead the SERVICOM unit in the organization and the new members start all over again only to be sacked at the time they are ripe enough to be useful to the organization. The effect of all these on the organization is better imagined than expressed.
- c) The study also found that the tempo and scale of training in the organization still fall short of normal requirement for efficient public service. Attention appears to be focused on just the senior management training to the relative neglect of the numerous other levels of employees. There is still too much work by routine, apathy and a general lethargy to government work among any of the lower level of employees in the organization. There are often even barely concealed hostility or downright coldness or rudeness to members of the public who approached some of these frustrated employees in the lower levels for information or service. Even at the higher levels to which some attention has been devoted, the training given is quite inadequate.

10. CONCLUSION

The roles of which SERVICOM has played on service delivery in NIPOST can never be overemphasized. SERVICOM for a longer period of time has helped the organization in providing qualitative service to the customers by ensuring that they derived maximum satisfaction on the services they paid for. However, SERVICOM which was implanted in the organization to boost qualitative and efficient service to the public have been beset with the problem of inefficiency. The inefficiency stemmed from peculiar problems such as conflict on role definitions, political interference and inadequate training. These menaces have impacted negatively on the functionality of SERVICOM in providing qualitative service to the public.

There is the need to curtail some of these anomalies so as to enable the organization meet the yearning need of the public and as well provide efficient and qualitative services to the public.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sets of recommendations were proffered:

- a) SERVICOM should properly be structured in NIPOST in such a way to reduce the conflict of role under which they operate.
- b) Optimum autonomy should be given to the SERVICOM so as to help them perform. The functions of the different authorities under which the organization operate should clearly be stated and the exact nature of their involvement with the management should be specified.
- c) There should be massive programme of staff training and development in the organization. The programmes should be sustained and should be on a continuous process for as long as the employees are in the service.
- d) Appointees of SERVICOM in the organization should have security of tenure for at least a fixed period of several years and appointment should be staggered so that appointees are not released with the change in power. This would also allow for policy stability and effective continuous control, monitoring and supervision of these organizations.

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