

Charles C Soludo: Promoting effective and efficient customer service delivery - the role of the Central Bank of Nigeria branches

Opening address by Professor Charles C Soludo, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, at the 26th Annual Controllers' Conference of the Central Bank of Nigeria, held at the Central Bank of Nigeria head office, Abuja, 30 March 2005.

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Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome our branch controllers and guests to Abuja on this occasion of the 26th Annual Controllers' Conference. I wish to use this opportunity to congratulate the organisers of this unique conference which serves as a platform for interaction among the Branch Controllers and Currency Officers, and the Head office staff.

More importantly, as the link between the Head Office, the banking and host communities, this forum affords you a golden opportunity to continually update your knowledge on the recent developments in the Bank and the economy, generally, as well as on the practical aspects of your assignments, so you can become better ambassadors of the Bank in your respective jurisdictions.

The theme of this year's Conference, ***Promoting Effective and Efficient Customer Service Delivery: The Role of the CBN Branches***, is auspicious in the light of the on-going re-engineering and restructuring programme in the Bank - the **Project EAGLES**. The acronym EAGLES, as you all know, stands for Efficiency, Accountability, Goal Orientation, Leadership, Effectiveness, and Staff Motivation and is a key component of the comprehensive reform programme of the Nigerian financial sector. A strong and an efficient CBN is critical for a stable and sound financial system.

On July 6, 2004, I unveiled a 13-point reform agenda for the banking sector, which included the recapitalization of the deposit money banks and their consolidation through mergers and acquisitions. The agenda is a preemptive and proactive measure to prevent a systemic crisis and collapse of the banking industry, and permanently stop the boom and burst cycles that have characterized the history of the industry. More fundamentally, the reforms are aimed at ensuring a sound, responsive, competitive and transparent banking system, appropriately suited to the demands of the Nigerian economy and the challenges of globalization.

I am pleased to note that so far the reform programme has received an overwhelming support from the operators, international community and other stakeholders. In our consolidation effort, 16 banks are already sure to make the new capital requirement compared to only 2 banks as at 6 July 2004. It is also good news that fresh funds are flowing into Nigeria in response to the emerging investment opportunities in the Nigerian banking sector as a result of the consolidation exercise. Many MOUs for consolidation have been signed and progress on their implementation is steady.

The CBN branches nationwide have a very prominent role to play both in the reform process and in fulfilling the Bank's major challenge of being an efficient service provider to its customers. During this conference, you will be faced with the task of identifying possible areas of improvement in the quality of our service delivery. For this reason, I understand that some guest speakers have been invited to highlight customers' perception of our services. This will afford us the opportunity of appreciating customers' expectations as a basic guide to improving the quality of our services.

Our quest for excellence in service delivery could be measured by five basic principles that both private and public sector agencies have to comply with to be able to deliver effective customer services, namely:

- Embracing change and persistently striving to improve on it;
- Continually asking the target customers what they want and then giving it to them;
- Harnessing the power of information;
- Establishing an enabling infrastructure; and
- Empowering, supporting and rewarding the personnel.

The new CBN service delivery charter will emphasize these principles.

Part of the change being introduced under Project EAGLES has been necessitated by the deficiencies in the Bank's old structure which included duplication of functions and non-optimal span of control. Hence we have introduced a new structure in which our Departments have been reduced from 23 to 17, with the aim of improving the efficiency of our service delivery. The activities of Project EAGLES are continuing and have entered the third and final phase which involves such activities as implementing the IT programme, reform of the budget and procurement processes and staff realignment.

Our efforts to ensure efficiency in service delivery to customers are not limited to the internal activities of the Central Bank. The restructuring exercise at the Nigerian Security Printing and Minting (NSPM) Plc - the Mint will be of interest to the Branch Controllers and Currency Officers. In line with the Federal Government's approval, the Central Bank has taken over the Mint and has developed a Business Plan to restructure and strengthen the company as a world class competitive firm. Our goal is to stop importing finished banknotes within three years and to meet the banknote and security printing requirements of the Nigerian economy and those of West and Central Africa in the longer-term.

Despite the milestones we have achieved on various aspects of our reform programme, there are still challenges ahead in several areas which include:

- Staff redeployment to place round pegs in round holes;
- Full implementation of the IT programme;
- Operationalization of the new Economic Policy Department;
- Reform and restructuring of the Security Services Division;
- Reform of the Budget and Procurement Processes;
- Out-sourcing of some non-core functions;
- Restructuring of the training programme to ensure value for money; and
- Implementing a staff welfare package that ensures a motivated work force.

The task of meeting these challenges is enormous. The Bank is currently facing budget constraints, arising from increasing costs, the financing of the Project EAGLES, the implementation of the Banking Sector consolidation programme, and the take-over and restructuring of the Mint, all in the face of shrinking revenues - as monetary policy becomes efficient. But we shall strive to fulfill our mission and to keep to our promises. On the part of staff welfare, as I said in my 2004 end of year address, staff welfare remains our Number One priority and in spite of the dwindling resources we shall continue to meet our commitments to staff.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me note that the strategic position of the Currency and Branch Operations Department under the new structure derives from the fact that the branches are expected to serve as front offices for the other departments in the Bank, while the branch network is expected to serve as an effective delivery channel for banking services to the customers. To this end, Branch Controllers and Currency Officers must see themselves as the ambassadors of the Bank.

Before I conclude, let me restate that, as the Bank's representatives in your respective branches and offices, Management expects you to maintain high standards of professionalism and integrity in your conduct, while upholding the Bank's values. We are concerned over the increasing rate of fraud in the Bank in recent times. While we are improving processes and procedures and strengthening internal controls, we need to closely monitor the activities of staff, to achieve zero tolerance for fraud, at each branch level and bank wide. For the avoidance of doubt, Management is firmly committed to stamping out corruption in the Bank and will take every necessary measure to protect the Bank's assets.

May I urge you all to participate actively in this very important Conference in order to derive the maximum benefits from it which you will find useful in improving the quality of services in your respective branches and currency centres. On this note, I declare the 26th Annual Branch Controllers' Conference open and wish you fruitful deliberations.