
THE PERSPECTIVES AND STRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS OF THE NIGERIAN POSTAL SERVICE: A NEOLIBERAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, nobody is very comfortable with the way the Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST) works. The issue is not only that lesser people now visit NIPOST but that NIPOST actually has less to offer them. It is even much harder to imagine this, especially when NIPOST is conveniently and enviously staffed, workers take-home packages intimidating, and staff training – regular and superb. Even so, the organization is in the verge of collapsing. There are genuine fears that it may be haplessly thrown into private hands, as did her contemporaries. Upon this bleak premise, this paper seeks to link between the structural defects of the NIPOST human resource capacity and poor service delivery. The qualitative methods of data collection and analysis are applied. We conclude, relying upon the neoliberal framework, that the structuring of NIPOST is not so amenable to the prevailing postal market operation. Such inherent conflict poses serious obstacles on qualitative service delivery. However, we are optimistic that NIPOST can perform efficiently, ownership status notwithstanding, provided it is well restructured alongside the pervasive market patterns, like those privately owned.

Keywords: *NIPOST, Service Delivery, Mails, Remuneration, Postal Market, Human Resource etc.*

INTRODUCTION

The Postal Service in Nigeria dates back to the 19th century. The first post office was established by the British colonial masters in 1852. It was considered to be a branch of the London General Post Office up to 1874 (Igbokwe, 2008). Thereafter, the relinquishment of the postal operation by the British gave rise to the takeover of postal services by two private companies, the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and the British Post Office. The Royal Niger Company (RNC) set up its own postal system in Akassa in 1887, Calabar in 1891, Burutu in 1897 and Lokoja in 1899. While the British Post Office established post offices at Badagary, Epe, Ikorodu, Ijebu-Ode, Ibadan and Abeokuta in 1898 (www.nipost.gov.ng/ accessed 8/12/2011). During this period, mails were being moved from these trading stations to and from Lagos by a weekly mail boat. In 1925, Royal Airforce planes flew from Kano to Cairo carrying mail for the first time outside the country. However, from January 1, 1900, the Southern Nigeria Government took over the responsibility of running the postal system in the entire country. Though, there were not too many good roads in those days, as such mails were conveyed by canoes, launchers and runners, which could only operate at intervals of two weeks or less. Internal AirMail flights started in 1931. By 1906, about 27 Post Offices

were operating in the country, and at the time of independence in 1960, about 176 Post Offices, 10 Sub-Post Offices and 1,000 Postal Agencies were in the country (Igbokwe, 2008; *Voice of Nigeria*, December 19, 2011). Remarkably, by the dawn of independence and up to 1970s, the dominant paradigm was that markets failed to perform efficiently in developing countries. Thus, the emphasis was on the need for active government intervention in economic activity to offset market failures (Ake, 1981). Besides, there was an urgent desire of the emergent national petit-bourgeoisies who found that they only had little economic power, to create an economic base for its political power (Okolie, 2005). And consequently, "this led to the expansion of public enterprises, after independence and widespread adoption of economic planning, supported actively by international agencies... It was felt that African countries could rely on state-owned enterprises..." (Ake, 1981:21). Therefore, by late 1960, postal services came under the direct administration of the Telecommunications Department, under the aegis of Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST). The Federal Government by Decree No. 22 of 1966 further made the department a quasi-commercial organization.

However, the issue of inefficiency has been a part and parcel of public enterprises in Nigeria (Adamolekun, 1983; Ezeani, 1995). NIPOST is not insulated from this inherent challenge. According to the Chairman, Senate Committee on Communications, Senator Sylvester Anyanwu, NIPOST has been a drain on government coffers, as the Federal Government spends about N4 billion on annual basis to cater for the remuneration of the workers (*Weekly Trust*, January 22, 2010). Various institutional adjustments and antidotes directed towards preempting this oddly seem not to have properly arrested the situation. As a result, effective and qualitative service delivery remains elusive (Agu, 2010). The 17th Quality of Mail Service Assessment, conducted in August 2010, showed that NIPOST performed below average, with individual and corporate mail items taking days on end before they are delivered, necessitating the delivery time to drop considerably (*The Post News*, Jan-Feb, 2011). Hence, the volume of mails handled has remained very low despite its very low prices (Orolugbagbe, 2011). In a nutshell:

The market perception of the organization has remained poor, NIPOST continues to face many challenges, which are impeding its ability to face competition and to motivate patronage. One of the main weakness of NIPOST is low efficiency. The number of mails handled per employee is tiny compared with similar organizations. Absence of trust is another obstacle, which the organization has to contend with. Other problems of NIPOST include absence of autonomy for management, undue political interventions, absence of capital structure, and poor funding (Orolugbagbe, 2011:28).

Conquering the rising market challenges in this ugly enmeshment has yet become of more worrisome concern. Practically, over 250 private courier services are in competition. Thereto, the over-development and shrewdness of the postal market have become extremely hostile to NIPOST, resulting to tripling losses and deficits in excess of N4 billion per annum (Nigerian Postal Service, 2007). However, several efforts to reequip and regroup NIPOST in a fashion to conquer this challenge have failed woefully. Mail targets are never met and qualitative

service delivery has remained elusive. Therefore, this paper is an effort to analyze the dialectics in the structure and distribution of the NIPOST human resource and its real and potential threat on qualitative service delivery.

Conceptual Perspectives on the Structure of NIPOST

According to the Council for Trade in Services of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a public owned postal service could be distinguished in relation to the four items of services which they offer to the public. The explicit presumption of the WTO is that all the highlighted services are supplied by national postal administrations. Below are the details of the items stipulated;

- (i) Postal services related to letters consisting of pick-up, transport and delivery services of letters, newspapers, journals, periodicals, brochures, leaflets and similar printed matters, whether for domestic or foreign destinations;
- (ii) Postal services related to parcels consisting of pick-up, transport and delivery services of parcels and packages, whether for domestic or foreign destinations;
- (iii) Post office counter services rendered at post office counters, e.g. sales of postage stamps, handling of certified or registered letters and packets, and other post office counter services; and
- (iv) Other postal services which include mailbox rental services, "poste restante" services, and public postal services not elsewhere classified (except postal giro and postal savings accounts which are classified in UNCPC under "services of monetary intermediaries") (WTO Bulletin, 1998:2).

In a more direct judgment pertaining to the structuring of NIPOST as an organization, the former Postmaster General, Nathaniel Zome, having programmed certain laudable policies in the establishment, speculates that the realization of an autonomous business units have facilitated the adaptability of staff to the exigencies of the work environment. Mr. Zome speculated thus:

The year 1992 was indeed very eventful for NIPOST as an organization. Not only because the long sought for autonomy and reclassification of the organization as a parastatal was obtained, but, also our attempt to put in place certain strategies, structures and systems, through which we hope to build the organization of our dream, started to yield result. We deliberately embarked on a process of decentralization of authority, appropriate empowerment of all levels of responsibility and general encouragement of our staff to be more creative. The end result was a more enlightened, conscious and committed workforce, a more confident and informed field Management, and a visionary Top Management and leadership.... We recorded some significant achievements in terms of revenue generation, service quality, personal training and re-orientation (Nigerian Postal Service, 1992:11).

One obvious observation likely to be drawn from Zome's experiment is that, first, in the year 1992 NIPOST was granted a sort of autonomy from the unnecessary stranglehold of government. Second, that there was a certain linkage between such emancipation or

reclassification (as accompanied by other reforms) and more committed and developed workforce. Furthermore, the Deputy Postmaster General, Ray Onwe notes that NIPOST has put in place a new organizational structure directed towards customer orientation, which is believed to reposition the entire workforce to be more customer sensitive. His takes are presented below:

...Aware that organizational restructuring is as good as the quality of skills and knowledge of the people who will effect the implementation, we have intensified our staff training programmes and re-orientation towards the new ideas of modern management as well as seeking for specialist personnel assistance for some very critical areas from without. In this light, the proposed conditions of service for NIPOST is to enhance the general welfare of our staff... to attract outsiders who may share in our vision. In conscious of the fact that our systems must be responsive enough to support the restructuring and be consistent with overall focus on customer orientation, we have subjected all facets of our systems to critical analysis through a system of adhoc committees on areas as diverse as finance and accounting, manpower requirements and needs, facilities and equipment capabilities and capacities, operating manuals, rules and regulation etc (Onwe cited in Nigerian Postal Service, 1992:15).

The above postulations point extensively and exclusively to the issue of staff needs in NIPOST. The trainings, reorientations and welfare notwithstanding, the overriding need for specialist personnel assistance in critical areas is the bottom-line. This shows that the organization may be lacking adequate skilled staff for its operations.

Beyond the subsisting issues, Emeje was much keener on the workings of NIPOST in relation to the rising competitiveness of the industry, occasioned by the influx of several private operators. He still retains unwavering faith that NIPOST, which in any case is the major player, has a firm grip of the Nigerian market and as such poses better chances of dominating the entire market if proper structures are put in place. He succinctly observed that:

NIPOST controls about 60 percent of the market from the conventional service to courier operation. We are talking about an increase in capacity as regards the volume of mail, the reach, how far can we go to get to people? How far can we utilize the present technology or what device can we put in place to increase the reach of the mail? Doing that is also to ensure that the staff are put on a higher pedestal to work. Right now, the reform is going on at NIPOST and people are assessed, regrouped and placed properly to achieve the kind of reform that we are talking about (Newswatch, January 18, 2008:1).

Definitely, Emeje had raised numerous issues of tremendous concerns for various inquisitive minds to contend with, our enthusiastic minds not discriminated. Though Emeje is opined that NIPOST controls a large chunk of the postal market which we may not be in doubt, anyway, we may adjust this thinking, adding that NIPOST may not have been able to effectively utilize and capitalize on comparative advantage of its large market coverage. Particularly, NIPOST seems to be so much in a distress with the broadening technological

encroachment into the sector. Very importantly, one must underscore the linkage between such technological interference and the need for complementary and simultaneous staff development. Here therefore, we pause to ask: at what cost? This simple question makes an issue when the teeming workforce of NIPOST is placed in proper perspective. We shall return to this delicate concern shortly.

The Structure and Human Resource Capacity of NIPOST

Human beings themselves are capital assets. In modifying nature and performing labour, men recreate wealth, either for subsistence or accumulation. It is therefore imperative that for man to eat, he must work (Ake, 1981). Invariable therefore, the expected outcome or proceeds of labour, do not only determine, ideally, the level of benefits to be derived by man, the worker; but goes ahead to decide the quanta of personnel that can be maintained within an organization. Thus, there is the primacy of effective human resource management, which should aim at proportioning input and output. The concern here is that NIPOST as a government agency has a well spread offices nationwide and they are manned by human beings.

The NIPOST has about five different office formations spread nationwide. They are as follows;

- (i) General Post Offices (GPO) - This is the highest in the hierarchy of post office establishment. Usually sited in the state capitals. It is headed by a Chief Head Postmaster.
- (ii) The Head Post Offices- This is the controlling office, for post offices in the district, into which a territory is divided. Each district has a Head Post Office. Each Head Office is usually headed by a Head Postmaster.
- (iii) The Departmental Post Offices- Departmental Post Offices are usually located in local government headquarters.
- (iv) The Sub-Post Offices- This is a community-based initiative usually owned by public-spirited persons desirous of attracting postal services to their communities. It is slightly below a departmental post office and it carries out sale of postage stamps, transactions in Postal and Money orders. It is slightly higher than a postal Agency. All the operations in a sub post office are carried out by persons other than members of staff of NIPOST. However, the office structures may be provided or equipped by NIPOST.
- (v) The Postal Agencies- These are mainly owned by an individual who sets up an outlet on behalf of NIPOST.
- (vi) The Mobile Post Offices- These are mobile vehicles that offer NIPOST services in transit for ease of access to the public (www.nipost.gov.ng.com; accessed 8/12/2011).

The following table gives us more insight on the distribution of Postal Offices across the country.

Table 1: Number of Post Offices and Postal Agencies

Year	Departmental Offices	Sub-Post Offices	Mobile Post Offices	Postal Agencies	Head Post Offices
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2003	711	174	16	1,855	235
2004	783	138	18	1,797	247
2005	786	138	18	1,708	247
2006	712	125	15	1,553	247

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Abstract

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Government of Nigeria.

If Sub-Post Offices and Postal Agencies which are staffed by persons other than NIPOST personnel are exempted, it means that by 2003 there were a total of 962 Postal offices manned by NIPOST staff, in 2004 it was 1048, 2005 about 1051 and in 2006 it stood at 974 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). In a nutshell, NIPOST maintains human resources in an average of 1000 outlets nationwide. Whereas to carry out its operations, it has a total of about 14,000 serving officers in 2001 (Nigerian Postal Service, 2001) and rising up to 20,000 in 2008 (Igbokwe, 2009). This is in preclusion of casual staff engaged. In 2001 for instance, NIPOST engaged the services of 448 casual staff comprising; Watchmen - 354, Postmen - 80, Store Assistants - 11, Drivers- 2, and Personnel Assistant - 1 (Nigerian Postal Service, 2001). It should be noted also that about 102 casual staff had their appointments regularized same year. The issue is not whether NIPOST workforce is over-bloated per se, but rather to what extent the personnel are effectively utilized in the duty. Here, our concern is not to examine if there is a job to do or not, as has been the trend in conventional research, but rather, to see if human labour is optimally maximized in tune with the available workload and not diminished, by over concentration of many individuals on relatively small tasks. Are there unnecessary workloads created in order to selfishly absorb labour?

Objective enough, we confirmed in a field work at the General Post Office in Awka, headed by the Area Manager, Anambra Territory Mr. M.G.A. Mohammed, that the General Post Office Awka has about 70 members of staff; this multiplied by 37 of such offices nationwide equals 2,590. On the other end, the field work undertaking at Head Post Office in Onitsha, headed by the Head, Onitsha District Mr. Silvanus Oyinze, confirmed that about 32 staffers are placed under him in Onitsha, this figure placed against the distribution of about 210 Head Offices nationwide equals 7,904 (i.e. minus 37 offices made General Post Offices). Likewise, with an average of 15 and 5 staffers for Departmental Offices (712) and Mobile Offices (18), we will have at least 10,680 and 90 respectively. Overall, for these 21,264 personnel and other numerous casual staff are only but few field officers. Our informants reveal that as few as 12 officers out of about 70 personnel are on field operations in General Post Office, Awka, while out of about 32 personnel only 8 are field officers in Onitsha Head Office. And out of about 15 members of staff not more than 4 are on the roads in each of the Departmental Offices around Onitsha zone foreseen by Mr. Silvanus Oyinze. If this figure is replicated nationwide, it means that as few as 444; 1,976; and 2,848 totaling a scanty 5,268 personnel are left to dispatch mails nationwide in GPOs, Ordinary Head Offices and Departmental Offices respectively. And very appallingly, yet, with as few as 206 functional vehicles, 610 motor-cycles and 66 Bicycles (*Economic Confidential*, March 8, 2012). If and unavoidably,

that the propensity of mobility impediments such as vehicles and motorcycles breakdown is considered; then, a chunk of the numbers of this field operators will be left to do nothing, and they may neither be relevant in any other task in the organization, even if it takes as many months as possible for repairs to be made. Nonetheless, field personnel works on behalf of the teeming 15,996 workforce (i.e. less numbers of field workers) who minds other managerial and official assignments. If nothing else, the number of Postmen (about 80), among the 448 casual staff recruited in 2001, shows that field operations is acutely deemphasized. By recruiting well over 354 Watchmen and only 80 Postmen, it means that the Watchman is far more important than the Postman. Incidentally, the business largely depends on the effectiveness of this very few individuals.

The faulty bureaucratization or convergence of large work groups alongside too many offices like the accounts departments, counter services, mail sorting etc. is never in anyway in tune with the ideal structure of a market oriented venture. Even though it has been traditionalized that public servants idle away in ministries and parastatals, such outplay is inherently dangerous to the continued existence of NIPOST considering the uprooting competition in the postal industry. Unless they do not in any way intend to optimize labour and promote efficiency. In any case, such over-crowding often results to unnecessary delays of services from one table to the other. This is because people must force themselves to do something, howbeit irrelevant, as people do not want to appear idle in outlook. Therefore, the question becomes why crowding NIPOST and lavishing highly valued human object of labour? Even though the government must as obligation have to pay too many 'non-performance' related staffers, that should not in any way substitute the dignity of labour, of self fulfillment, derivable from engaging in active labour. Frankly, this calls for serious sober reflection.

The Impact on Qualitative Service Delivery

Very importantly, these personnel must be genuinely remunerated in accordance with the federal salary scheme. And as salaries keeps going up, expenditure on human resources keeps rising correspondingly. The table below focuses on the difficulties faced each year by government in funding of personnel cost in NIPOST.

Table 2: Personnel Cost Received from Government and Actual Payment, 2002-2006

Year	Personnel Cost (Amount Received) (N)	Personnel Cost (Amount Paid) (N)	Difference
2002	2,694,242,280.00	2,824,657,230.69	130,414,950.69
2003	2,694,242,280.00	2,957,890,340.47	263,648,060.47
2004	3,157,109,771.00	3,980,587,608.32	223,479,837.32
2005	3,490,363,112.00	3,592,972,002.04	102,608,890.04
2006	3,776,689,945.00	4,500,556,667.17	723,866,722.17
Total	15,812,647,388.00	17,856,663,848.60	2,044,016,460.69

Source: NIPOST (2007) *Nigerian Postal Service Corporate Plan, 2007-2011*. Abuja: Nigerian Postal Service.

The table above depicts a quantum leap in personnel cost paid from N2,824,657,230.69 in 2002 to N4,500,556,667.17 in 2006. This means that lots of more personnel must have been recruited as well as lots of upward review of remunerations taken place within the period. Again, while NIPOST paid a total of N17,856,663,848.60 as personnel cost for the period (2002-2006), the Federal Government only funded N15,812,647,338.00 leaving a balance of N2,044,016,460.69, probably augmented from the internally generated revenue. This goes to show that the burden of personnel maintenance has become more disturbing on the part of the government. This is a dangerous situation. Another tangible issue emanating hereto is the inherent contentious pay and perks volume. Every now and then, the politicians, having been their culture, promise sumptuous pay reform packages to workers in a ploy to sway their votes during elections only to come at the end of the day and default in such devious

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and perks may potentially mar serious investments in service improvements for business-like enterprises like NIPOST, and failure to implement them could trigger a vehement industrial action, all detrimental to service delivery. For instance, the Senior Staff Association of Communications, Transport and Corporations (SSACTC) and the National Union of Postal and Telecommunications Employees (NUPTE) has variously displayed disaffection over the NIPOST management's inability to offset the outstanding 15% salary areas due since January, 2010, which has long accumulated for upward of 2 years. The Union is also not happy that many staffers promoted in 2005 have not had their salaries connected to the payroll. On this and other issues of pension and monetization, the union warns:

We wish to draw your attention to the inability of Pension Unit of Corporate Service Division to document and compute the benefits of 2006/2007 exited members of staff... On monetization, we insist on early payment by government. Further to a letter sent to the Management of NIPOST on the 18th of January, 2010 on Promotion of deserving staff, the Central Working Committee of SSACTAC registers their protest on another unresolved industrial relation issue which is the payment of the arrears arising from 15% increase on salaries... The payment of 3 months arrears on the 15% Federal Government directed increase in salaries, should be paid to all concerned staff along with their staff salaries and allowances due for February, 2010. We are firmly of the view that you should take necessary action to see the issues resolved along the suggested line to avoid unnecessary bickering. We are therefore ready to collaborate with other sister unions to make this payment a reality (The Post News, Jan-Feb, 2011).

The above fallout does not only point to the fact that the NIPOST management has not been able to deal protectively with the welfare of its members of staff, but tells more that the allocations for these pays may not have been available, that is, if proportionate balance must be struck between personnel welfare and improvement on the quality of service delivered. It means that footing personnel cost has become a problematic. But more importantly, the NIPOST workers union is even ready for 'bickering' or to 'collaborate with other sister unions'

to fight the management. What this informs is that the productivity level must be negatively challenged along the process and consequently, products and services rendered to the public could be seriously hampered along the line. Even if negotiation creeps in to sustain the union in their duty post, definitely, staff morals and motivation are dampened. Particularly, those few field officers are compulsorily trapped in apathy and lackadaisical approach to mail delivery. All these jeopardize quality of service delivery. For instance, Alabi (1996:5) bitterly complained thus:

Postal mail services are relatively slow and unreliable despite recent efforts by the Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST) with the introduction of the speed post. This is because bottlenecks in the system either due to lack of adequate transportation facilities or low incentives to workers, result in substantial delays in the delivery of mails.

The point being made is not that unionist activities are evil or that the workers should not utilize the forum to contest the welfare of their members. Here, we mean that the formalization of such constant management-staff bickering in an organization that has diverse competitors to contend with undermines the general output, upon which the accumulation of the market patronage is highly dependent upon. And if the opportunities of the business environment are not optimally maximized and harnessed, returns will definitely slim down. As a reverse effect, there will even be less in the purse to entertain the workers whose demands incidentally keep appreciating. If this cyclic trend sustains for too long, then the organization is bound to collapse. To be very frank, most times unionist activities are anti-qualitative service delivery. It is absolutely illogical therefore for government to tamper on the wellbeing of the union. They should know that. Besides, the cost of personnel servicing does not stop at remunerations. Human resource development always enjoys the attention of the workers. NIPOST has its own training institute located in Kaduna and Benin where staff members are sent for training in two critical area of (i) Training for increased effectiveness and efficiency in the organization; and (ii) Training for staff development. The institute was established in 1985 after the separation of NIPOST from its main body, the Post & Telecom (P&T) (www.nipost.gov.ng.com; accessed 13/12/2011). Apart from the NIPOST Training Institute, certain high level officers are also sent abroad for training. However, what baffles one is the rate at which staff members are trained. In 2001 alone, a total of 3,559 officers were trained. Incidentally, the training for each member may stretch between three weeks to three months. As Mr. Oyinze informed, the beneficiaries are not only paid for being trained but are lodged, fed and provided with necessary utilities in the course of the period. We are not against staff development but at what cost considering the personnel population and the quality of service rendered to the public at the end of the training. Hence, Baron (2009) has warned that to build an efficient and effective postal service, investments in staff development must conform to the level of perceived and/or actual return from service delivery. The following tables are imperative in telling of the adverse effects of the foregoing. Table 3 shows that overhead cost of NIPOST is jumping upward annually, thereby affecting the funding of capital projects of the organization as shown in table 4.

Table 3: Projected and Actual Overhead Cost of NIPOST, 2002-2006

Year	Projected	Actual	Difference	% Gap
2002	1,590,000,000.00	1,846,693,093.14	256,693,093.14	
2003	1,948,500,000.00	1,790,318,707.97	158,181,292.03	
2004	2,083,725,000.00	2,362,172,235.81	278,447,235.81	
2005	2,799,629,736.00	2,599,635,189.95	99,994,546.05	
2006	2,877,654,000.00	2,744,551,091.21	133,102,908.79	
Total	11,299,508,736.00	11,343,370,318.00	43,861,582.00	0.39

Source: NIPOST (2007) *Nigerian Postal Service Corporate Plan, 2007-2011*. Abuja: Nigerian Postal Service.

Table 4: Government Funding and Actual Capital Expenditure in NIPOST, 2002-2006

Year	Actual Capital Exp. (N)	Government Funding (N)	Difference (N)
2002	366,925,095.16	Nil	366,925,095.16
2003	389,646,078.16	Nil	389,646,978.16
2004	794,863,196.14	Nil	794,863,196.14
2005	983,499,002.04	Nil	983,499,002.04
2006	1,068,343,594.79	Nil	1,068,343,594.79

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As indicated in the table above, the government refused to fund any capital project between 2002 and 2006. Commonsensically therefore, the capital investments being maltreated by the government is what actually determines the expansion and quality of service delivery. NIPOST had to spend as little as N3.6 billion of its mean internally generated revenue on capital projects in a whole 5 year period. Meanwhile, only a pittance of N15,433,778,506.60 was generated as revenue during the same period. By logic, low investments in quality enhancement projects like technology and mobility facilities have in turn led to diverse deficits in revenue generation. More critically, the procurement of mobility facilities was drastically affected. The Postmaster General of Nigerian Postal Service, Mr. Ibrahim Mori Baba was very much aware of this problem. In an interview with the *Economic Confidential*, he openly confessed thus:

At the moment, we have 206 functional vehicles in addition to 610 motor-cycles and 66 Bicycles. For us to perform optimally, we require 85 additional vehicles and the fact that we were not able procure the number required in view of the embargo placed by the Federal Government on the purchase of new vehicles early this year, our quality of service particularly on intra-state mail delivery service was adversely affected (Economic Confidential, March 8, 2012:1).

Ordinarily, how would the Postmaster General have expected the Federal Government to keep investing where it does not reap? Of course, there is a strong conviction that the management has not well strategized the organization to function optimally. As such, one

was not unhappy over Dike, who unforgivingly called for a big axe upon the (mis)managers of NIPOST and other public ventures. He quarreled:

...Nigeria has been doing poorly in these areas... the civilian administration should axe those corrupt and inefficient managers of our public utilities and facilities - NEPA, NNPC, NIPOST, NITEL, the Refineries, the Ports, and other establishments that are the hub of our economy. How does one justify the payment of monthly salaries to the executives of these corporations that are not performing? No serious society can afford to do that. The salaries of our executives should be tied to their productivity – that is, the effectiveness of their policies (Dike, 2008:7).

If there is anything at all to pick from Dike, it is the fact that there may be urgent need to reconsider the salary regime of these executives and if possible tie them up to their productivity level.

The Irony of Giant Remuneration

The remuneration of NIPOST workers which is never an outcome of the market variability, rather of a certain prearranged handiwork of Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), has variously posed serious problems in payment. Often times, such 'big' package takes a number of months before they could be paid, leaving endless 'anticipations' and lots of 'has it been paid' question asking(s) on the lips of workers. The net effects of not making prompt payment of salaries to public servants are remarkable. At such periods, motivation is bitterly affected and the level of productivity reduced. In the case of a business making venture like NIPOST, low motivation seriously impinge on the quality of service rendered. For one thing, the courtesy sensitivity of workers is rumped. And incidentally, "the highest level of care that can be provided to customers within the scope of the organization, even with the best product, if it is not delivered with courtesy, the customer becomes unimpressed and seeks courtesy elsewhere" (*The Post News*, Jan-Feb 2011:9). This could completely mar or deface public confidence upon NIPOST, and the rebuilding of such damages may even demand higher corrective costs than the derivable foregone alternative. That is why excessive funds are at times wrongly invested in human resource development without considering the inherent antagonistic factors to success and optimal performance. With fewer responsive personnel, the Federal Government can comfortably bear the cost of human resource maintenance and still invest tangibly on service upgrading. The deific principle of 'he who did not labour should not eat,' having also a capitalist undertone, may have to be implemented in NIPOST which incidentally operates in a severe capitalist environment, if it must stay put and remain afloat. Nonetheless, we are not per se apostles of rightsizing, rather, of proper sizing. Problem of over-staffing could be handled by various means other than outright dismissal of personnel. Alternatively, operations could be expanded, either in density populated cities or new areas, and personnel redeployed accordingly. Take for instance, there are currently no post offices in about 237 local government areas across the country (*Daily Sun*, August 29, 2011). Therefore, post offices could be put up in these places and personnel redistributed alongside.

Infrastructural Defects and Effects on Qualitative Service Delivery

Of a great source of worry is the reality about the crying state of NIPOST offices across the country. It irritates that most post offices across the country are now in shabby and disgraceful conditions. These are however, particularly those belonging to private managers like the Postal Agencies and the Sub-Post Offices. According to the NIPOST Chairman, Chief Nwanganga, "The poor image of NIPOST over the years was not only due to poor quality of its services but also as a result of the dilapidated state of its buildings which are scattered around the country and constituting an eyesore in all nooks and crannies" (Nigerian Postal Service, 2001:13). Ironically though, such numerous eyesores mar the quality of service and even trivializes the organizations image the more. The primary concern is that while those NIPOST agents may not be very interested in refurbishing these offices themselves, as they see it as totally obligated to NIPOST, NIPOST itself as we have seen previously, may also not be in a good financial footing to fund such capital projects. That is why few of such renovations, for instance, were undertaken as way back as 2001, with less than a mere 30 post offices renovated nationwide (Nigerian Postal Service, 2001). And ever since then, up to 2008, only very few have attracted similar attention. More precisely, between 2008 and 2009, contracts for the rehabilitation of 81 major Post offices spread across the six geopolitical zones of the country were awarded in compliance with the Due Process guidelines. As at 10th December 2009, 65 of these projects have been completed and taken over while the remaining 16 have reached about 85% completion stage (*Economic Confidential*, March 8, 2012). Moreover, there is a high tendency that even after repairs, the maintenance of such facilities by agents whose commissions and/or remittances are not affected may be seriously in doubt. Of course, one should never overlook the import of office packaging. This is the soul of market breakthrough and customer magnet. Quality of service,

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wall televisions, water dispensers, good furniture, marbled floor etc on customers. In any case, these are not mere beautifications, but a very important integral aspect of market competition. Therefore, if NIPOST offices nationwide are not defined in this line, then the services performed in such offices can only be anything well below the region of qualitative service as customers would always feel depressed after making each transaction.

CONCLUSION

This paper looks at the perspectives and structural contradictions of the Nigerian Postal Service (NIPOST). Particularly, this work is driven by the reality of the operational failures and ruins that have befallen NIPOST in recent times. Mainly, this is as a result of the opening up and consequent pervasiveness of the Nigerian postal market, which have practically become damn hostile to NIPOST. Numerically, over 250 private courier services are in stiff competition, with more sophisticated electronic and digital equipment for better qualitative service delivery. Therefore, NIPOST has suffered serious malfunctioning, low customer patronage, and is regrettably run upon tripling losses and deficits in excess of N4 billion per annum. However, several efforts to reorganize NIPOST in a fashion to be amenable to the

prevailing postal market operation and conquer this challenge have proved abortive. As such, the whole essence of this work is to establish a positive link between the contradictions in human resource structure of the NIPOST and poor service delivery. Generally, we conclude that there are various structural defects in the placements and distribution of the NIPOST human resource, which is not very compatible to the postal market operation. This poses serious contradictions and obstacles on efficiency and qualitative service delivery. More closely, skewed deployment of staff, where too many staffers are indiscriminately crowded in various departments, leaving very few field personnel (only few mail dispatchers and no marketers) causes profound delays in mail delivery. Meanwhile, NIPOST has a lot of unnecessary departments merely created to accommodate its purposely bloated workforce. Incidentally, the cost of maintaining a bloated workforce impinges on budget allocations for the implementation of capital projects required for improving the quality of service delivery. Otherwise put, the load of offsetting huge remunerations of such bloated workforce i.e. non-prompt payment and defaults in meeting workers welfare usually and desperately affect staff motivation, and result to endless unionist struggles, which affect general productivity levels. To make things work, however, NIPOST should engage more of its personnel in field operations. Particularly, certain unnecessary departments should be quashed in favour of raising more dispatch officers and marketers. Operations should be diversified to areas where NIPOST is not available and idling departments/staffers condensed and redeployed accordingly. More importantly, NIPOST should make haste in the implementation of service automation in all its offices nationwide, in order to make its services more reliable, regain public confidence & patronage and achieve a competitive advantage in the postal industry.

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