



THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION (USO) AND POSTAL REGULATION IN THE ECOWAS SUB-REGION.

Tom Kwaghmande

The Postal Expert

WAPCO Secretariat, Abuja – Nigeria

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PREAMBLE

- ➡ Postal services have always been a key economic driver and enabler of communications network in most far- flung locations.
- ➡ The postal network is thus considered as a key infrastructure for delivering basic services to rural populations.
- ➡ The post indeed is a key contributor to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

PREAMBLE cont'

- Leveraging on key underlying factors of UPU's Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD) - (reliability, accessibility, relevance and resilience), the Posts in the West African sub-region have achieved SGD Goals 8 (Financial inclusion), 9 (Accessibility), 11(Resilience) and 17 (Easy access to the internet).
- The role of government in meeting the Universal Service Obligation (USO) can no longer be overlooked. Indeed, governments have defined Universal Postal Service (UPS) and are ensuring that the necessary adjustments are made in line with customer needs, market trends and technological breakthroughs.



Formation of WAPCO as a Response to USO

The West African Postal Conference (WAPCO) is a Specialized Institution of the Economic Community West African States (ECOWAS), responsible for coordinating postal sector development in the sub-region; with the Vision: **“PUT THE POST IN THE HEART OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ECOWAS AREA”**

It was this mission that informed the decision taken by the Heads of State and Government of the ECOWAS which led to the founding of WAPCO in 2012.



What Universal Service Obligation (USO) Means:

Art. 3 of the UPU's Universal Postal Convention (UPC) contains key obligations of UPU members:

To ensure that all users/customers enjoy the right to universal postal service involving the permanent provision of quality basic postal services at all points in their territory, at affordable prices.

The Synopsis of USO

In summary, the USO, as entrenched in the UPS entails:

- The delivery of at least one letter every day of the week to every addressee;
- Collection of letters every day of the week from every access point that is used to receive letters and postal packets for onward transmission;
- Provision of postal services at an affordable uniform tariff across the territory;
- Provision of registered item service at an affordable public tariff;
- Provision of a free-of-charge postal service to blind and partial-sighted people;
- Provision of basic fixed-line services at an affordable price to all citizens and customers across the defined territory.



UNIVERSAL POSTAL SERVICE

Characteristics of Universal Postal Service

Scope of Intra-ECOWAS Universal Service

Over and above the single postal territory principle enshrined in the Universal Postal Union Convention, and in line with WAPCO's vision, Member States shall adopt the necessary measures to secure access to at least the basic postal services for West African citizens. This is to ensure the delivery of accessible, affordable, equitable, high quality and efficient postal infrastructure and services, with a view to reducing postal exclusion.

The Quality of Universal Postal Service

- Quality of Service (QoS) requirements must be clearly defined, alongside quality of service standards. These standards may change over time and must be aligned with the following continental standards:
- Within and between major cities in the national territory: At least 85% of letters sent to a recipient are delivered 2 days after they are dropped.
- Between the capital and rural areas of a Member State: at least 85% of letters sent to a recipient are delivered 5 days after they are dropped.
- Between two rural areas of a Member State: At least 75% of letters sent to a recipient are delivered 5 to 7 days after they are dropped.

The Quality of Universal Postal Service cont'

- ➡ Between the capital cities of two Member States: At least 85% of letters sent to a recipient are delivered 5 days after they are dropped.
- ➡ With countries outside West Africa: At least 85% of letters sent to a recipient in a non-West African country are delivered 5 days after they are dropped.
- ➡ WAPCO conducts periodic assessments of the quality of universal service delivered to consumers and report accordingly to Member States.

POSTAL REGULATION

- All the member States of WAPCO have established National Regulatory Authorities (NRA). These NRAs are assigned responsibilities in regulating operational activities in their respective States.



Practical Experiences

- In 2018, the ECOWAS Commission on Telecommunication and Post integrated WAPCO into the telecom portal – SIGPOSTAL, for the purpose of collecting data on postal indicators.
- It appointed National Correspondence Indicators (NCIs) for each Focal Point (Member State) to collect data on postal services and populate it into the data base. This to monitor and ascertain the trends and developments of the postal sector in the sub-region.
- The Courier and Logistic Regulatory Department (CLRD) of the Nigerian Postal Service has successfully sanitized the courier space in the country. So also, the other 14 Member States.
- These measures are aimed at ensuring the provision of quality, affordable, efficient, inclusive, competitive and non-discriminatory services.

Challenges

Inadequate access to postal services

- Poor road infrastructure in the rural areas
- Dilapidated logistic for mail collection, transportation and last mile delivery
- Natural disasters that prevent service delivery – earth quakes, floods, Covid-19
- Low bandwidth and poor internet connectivity
- Lack of capacity building to develop manpower
- Inability of the NCIs to populate the data on the SIGPOSTAL portal
- Use of airlines that are not CARDIT, RESDIT and PRESCON compliant
- Inability to extend banking services to unbanked rural communities.
- Financing – non-payment of Member States' contribution.
- Low mail volume and quality of service below the UPU standard

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENT PATHS

- Development of human capacity
- Expansion of the bandwidth to improve internet connectivity.
- Improvement in the legs 1, 2 and 3 of the mail pipeline
- Adequate disaster and risk management measures
- Use of airlines that can ensure visibility of mail movement
- Use of UPU Standard M40 for capturing data events
- Execution of the WAPCO's Lagos-Abidjan Land Mail Route Project
- Real time data transmission to postal flagships and SIGPOSTAL
- Employment of relevant technologies for digitization
- Timely and up-t-date collection and uploading of data by the NCIs
- Gradual and concerted liberalization of postal services
- Embark on postal reform in order to scale-up postal activities



Conclusion:

The concept of the USO is to ensure:

- Postal services are readily available.
- The services are provided to the citizens/customers at affordable and uniform prices.
- The citizens are fairly treated through regulatory frameworks that create a level-playing ground for the operators and consumers.
- The postal services provided are of high quality and standards.
- The Member States of the WAPCO have strived hard to attain the standards of USO

The background features a stylized, light green and yellow globe centered on the left. Several thin, curved lines in shades of purple and blue orbit around the globe, suggesting a celestial or scientific theme. A solid red arrow points to the right from the left edge of the frame. On the far right, there are faint, partially visible letters 'L' and 'W' in a light blue color.

Thank You.

Merci Beaucoup.