

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY AMMBAN AT THE END OF ITS 5TH AMMBAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

THE COMMUNIQUE READS IN PART:

Communiqué issued at the end of the 5th edition of Association Of Mobile Money And Bank Agents in Nigeria (AMMBAN) National Conference with the theme: Sustaining The Gains Of Financial Inclusion: Exploring Sustainable Framework for Last Mile Drivers”, held in Abuja, from Wednesday 17th – Thursday 18th, November 2021.

The Conference was attended by AMMBAN National Executive Council, AMMBAN State Councils, Agents, Aggregators, Super Agents, PSBs, Operators, Bank, Regulators, Agencies and Parastatals, Stakeholders, Ministries and with over 1500 Delegates.

The conference, the 5th in the series was specifically organized as an all-inclusive, educative, interactive, and insightful event to address contemporary issues arising in the day to day operation of the players. It was graced by seasoned and experienced technocrats who shared knowledge and experience with participants. The conference which was streamed live via all social media platforms had robust exhibition as part of the plan to showcase activities of AMMBAN. The deliberation indeed was productive and fruitful, especially on issues that bother on the operation and welfare of the operators across the country.

Highlight of the event was the official unveiling of the AMMBAN : www.ammбан.org that features: To build an harmonized data base of agents across Nigeria, seamless payment of AMMBAN membership dues and certification, access to premium contents; access to structured trainings; generation of QR Codes; robust advertisement management system among others.

At the end of the two day deliberations, the meeting resolved as follows:

1. Self-Regulation

The continuous deployment and hawking of unregistered POS on the streets across the country has been reviewed by the annual general meeting and believes that this negative trend has not only impact negatively on the sector but become a security risk and an embarrassment to AMMBAN. POS agents are called to discharge their duties responsibly and operate within the stipulated and laid down rules and regulations. A situation where some agents operate outside the rules and quacks have a field day is an aberration and should be condemned. Council therefore feels that it is important to regulate the functions of agents because we are talking about financial transactions. It then called on the Super-Agents, Mobile Money operators, banks to beam their searchlight on operators, just as the regulators regulate the banks.

2. Need to Establish a Task-Force Team

The meeting observed that there is no restriction for entering the business space, a situation anybody can come it for quacks and yahoo boys. This, the assembly says it brings a bad name to legitimate agents, leading to frequent harassment of members. In the process, some get killed and others suffer injuries, making this a source of concern to the Association.

Council further noted with dismay an influx of untrained agents and quacks into the mobile money sector and resolved to nip the ugly trend in the bud. Council in session decides to urgently set up a task-force team intervene in this regard so as to safeguard the sanctity of the profession and to save the mobile money industry from collapse. It reiterates its position that a fraud-free and customer friendly services is needed to win the confidence of customers and as such build an enduring industry for the benefit of all stakeholders and for the nation's economy.

The Task-Force is expected to target all those operating under the trees, umbrella and those hawking POS on Okada

3. End to Indiscriminate Deployment of POS

Council observed that there is no end to indiscriminate distribution of POS devices, leading to all manner of abuses and unprofessional services and called on all Super-Agents and Aggregators to ensure that before POS is deployed, it had been properly registered for us to be able to authenticate and trace them when the need arises with verifiable addresses.

4. Security

In reviewing the contributions of AMMBAN to financial inclusion agenda of government over the years, Council noted that financial inclusion has come to stay in Nigeria. It reiterates AMMBAN's readiness to continue to play critical role in the ecosystem. And for more Nigerians to enjoy the dividends of inclusive financial services, it says more people need to be lifted out of poverty through financial services. In the course of this, it observes that many agents have fallen victims of solutions put into market by operators that had not gone through the necessary needed security architecture. It therefore advises operators to ensure that their security architecture are strong enough for them not to lose money and market. It also called for more collaboration with security agencies across the states of the federation.

5. Need for Collaboration among stakeholders

With so many players in this Mobile Money & Agency Banking space, Council realizes that the only way to succeed is through collaboration. If we must collaborate, it agrees to encourage all the players in the ecosystem to form a synergy. This involves the mobile money operators, agents, super-agent, banks, international operators, who are interested in the financial inclusion and the regulator since there are so many things that need to be done to be able to achieve financial inclusion.

6. Need to Close Gender Gaps

The wide gap that exists between men and women in the financial ecosystem is an issue of great concern and unacceptable. The assembly calls on operators to engage more women as agents to be able to influence other women, especially in the Northern region, where rural village women trust fellow women more than men. This it said could be achieved by providing financing for women, especially those who already have business but needed support to grow their businesses.

7. Collaboration with host communities

The rising cases of insecurity and soaring unemployment in the country are issues of urgent concern and AMMBAN wants the Mobile Money agents to do more for their host societies, particularly in the rural areas. To sustain these gains and guarantee the safety of agents operating in these localities, operators are encouraged to collaborate with traditional rulers and community leaders in conjunction with other relevant bodies.

8. Need to Collaborate with Security Agencies

The need to guarantee the safety of all Agents cannot be overemphasized. Council in session observed that security is very sensitive to members as major players in the financial sector and re-emphasizes that mobile money agents and bank agents are representatives of their banks in their various localities. It advises them to ensure from time to time all the security directives are adhered to. Most importantly, Council agrees that members must ensure that they always collaborate with the police and other security agencies at all levels, bearing in mind that for all members of AMMBAN are there to observe the basic security principles of doing transactions of handling money and cash.

9. Training and Re-Training

Council expresses worry with the poor performance of operators in the sector due to inadequate training. With this and other challenges militating against smooth running of POS business across the country, Council feels that the next step to take in going forward is to capitalize on building capacity and strong institutions that will stand the test of time. To be a certified agent and aggregators, it called on all Super-Agents and Aggregators to always ensure that their agents attend trainings and re-trainings courses from time to time.

10. Dispute Resolution

Due to poor network services, some operators care little about number of failed transactions on their platforms as well as agent disputes against operators. And major causes of conflicts and harassment between agents and customers were traced to issues of declined, wrong transaction by agent, KYC identity etc . Council while blaming poor quality of service (QoS) as a major cause of dispute between Agents and customers calls on stakeholder concerned to ensure stability in the system and also appealed to the regulator to prevail on banks (middlemen) to always dispense justice in every dispute presented to them as well as establishing desk that will be looking at agent disputes against their principal too.

11. Need to Take Mobile Money and Agency Banking Business as a Profession

It is obvious that most POS operators take it as part time job, but this goes beyond that. With little or no knowledge of the real impact they make in the entire financial inclusion ecosystem, Council reminds operators that they are not just people with POS doing a 100metre race but agents operating different branches of their various banks as a long distance race. It urges them to ensure the sustainability and survival of their business for the future through expansion of their financial services with different products of their banks.

12. Need for POS Operating Framework

Council commended the Central Bank of Nigeria as the regulator of the financial sector and called on the apex bank to come up with **regulatory framework** for POS operations/operator as well as Mobile Money agents, Agency Banking Agent and Agent Network Manager (Aggregator) in line with world best practice and that would stand the test of time.

13. AMMBAN to Work with Government

Council expresses profound gratitude to the Federal government for its various initiatives and policy reforms in the financial inclusion sector, particularly the National Assembly for the recent engagement between both parties and expressed its readiness to partner with Government and its agencies to build a conducive and investor-friendly environment that would be mutually beneficial for all.

The Council also made a special appeal to the CBN to include AMMBAN in the National Financial Inclusion Strategic Committee, Technical working group and any other committee as it concerns financial inclusion to engender full and proper representation.

AMMBAN also called on Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy to use the agents network in the deployment of more digital products to the last mile through agent network for deeper penetration.

14. eNaira

eNaira, which was issued by the CBN as a legal tender and digital form of the physical naira that can be used the same way as cash has come to stay. The Council urged members to see eNaira as a secure and reliable payment option designed to support the digital economy and aid financial inclusion in Nigeria, members are advised to accept it as a secure payment system with advanced cryptographic techniques against counterfeiting, cloning and other forms of breach that operates an open system that is accessible to all users based on a tiered KYC structure.”