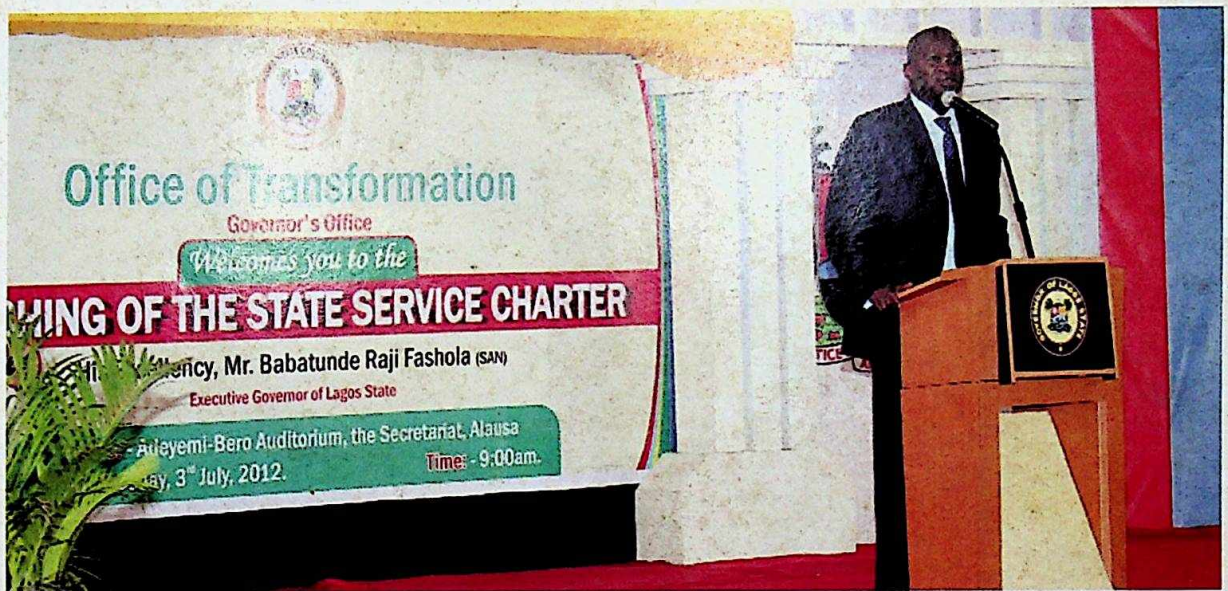


Service charters: Defining purpose and ensuring accountability to improve public services



Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola, speaking at the Service Charters Launch

Accountability is key to ensuring that Nigerian families have access to vital public services such as transport, health and education. Service charters boost accountability by requiring government bodies to publish exactly what services they aim to provide, how they will provide them, and to what standard. Through doing so, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are required to focus on the services they are delivering, and question whether these services really align to the public need.

Taking action, the Head of Service in Lagos State recently directed all MDAs to create and distribute service charters.

What is a service charter?

A service charter is a public document informing citizens exactly what services a particular department provides. It outlines the rights and

responsibilities that citizens have in relation to these services, and sets out the avenues by which they can communicate with the department – for instance, if they wish to make a complaint. It is a public pledge on behalf of government to its citizens.

A Charter has **five basic elements**:

- **A description** of the services provided by the MDA
- **Service pledges** describing the general quality of service delivery customers should expect
- **Service standards** (or service delivery targets) for key aspects of a service such as timeliness, access and accuracy
- **Complaint and redress mechanisms** for citizens to use if they feel standards have not been met
- **Fees charged for services**, detailing for transparency the associated costs to customers and stakeholders.

What are the benefits of service charters?

Service charters provide customers, stakeholders and MDA staff with clear, consistent information about what the department is meant to provide, as well as a means of monitoring and evaluating public service effectiveness.

Critically, service charters empower citizens by increasing their awareness of the government services they are entitled to, and encouraging them to demand higher standards. In doing so, they require government officials to become more sensitive to the needs of the public they serve.

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What has been done?

The Office of Transformation (OoT) was selected to guide the roll-out of service charters in Lagos State. With SPARC support, Lagos State Government produced a service charter policy, as well as guidelines to help MDAs develop and deploy their charters.

Working with a pilot group

A pilot group of 12 public service providers was engaged to kick-start the service charter initiative, including the Office of the Head of Service, Ministry of Health and Motor Vehicle Administration Agency. The OoT worked with the departments on a tight timetable of training, covering service charter development, customer service, complaints management and service evaluation.

To help drive the scheme forward, SPARC trained two Director-level officers from each participating MDA to become the core members of their department's 'Service Delivery Unit'. These units are responsible for (1) raising awareness of service delivery needs within the MDA, (2) bringing about improvements, and (3) helping to redefine services in a way that ensures customer focus. They also have the key responsibilities of monitoring and evaluating services and collecting public feedback to guide further improvements.

Producing the first charters

The pilot initiative allowed the participating agencies to successfully develop their first-ever service charters. These were launched by the Lagos State Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola at a public event on 3rd July 2012.

The pioneer network of service delivery units will continue to champion service-wide improvement and customer-focused service delivery. What's more, they will help to spread the service charter initiative throughout Lagos State.

What does Lagos State plan to do next?

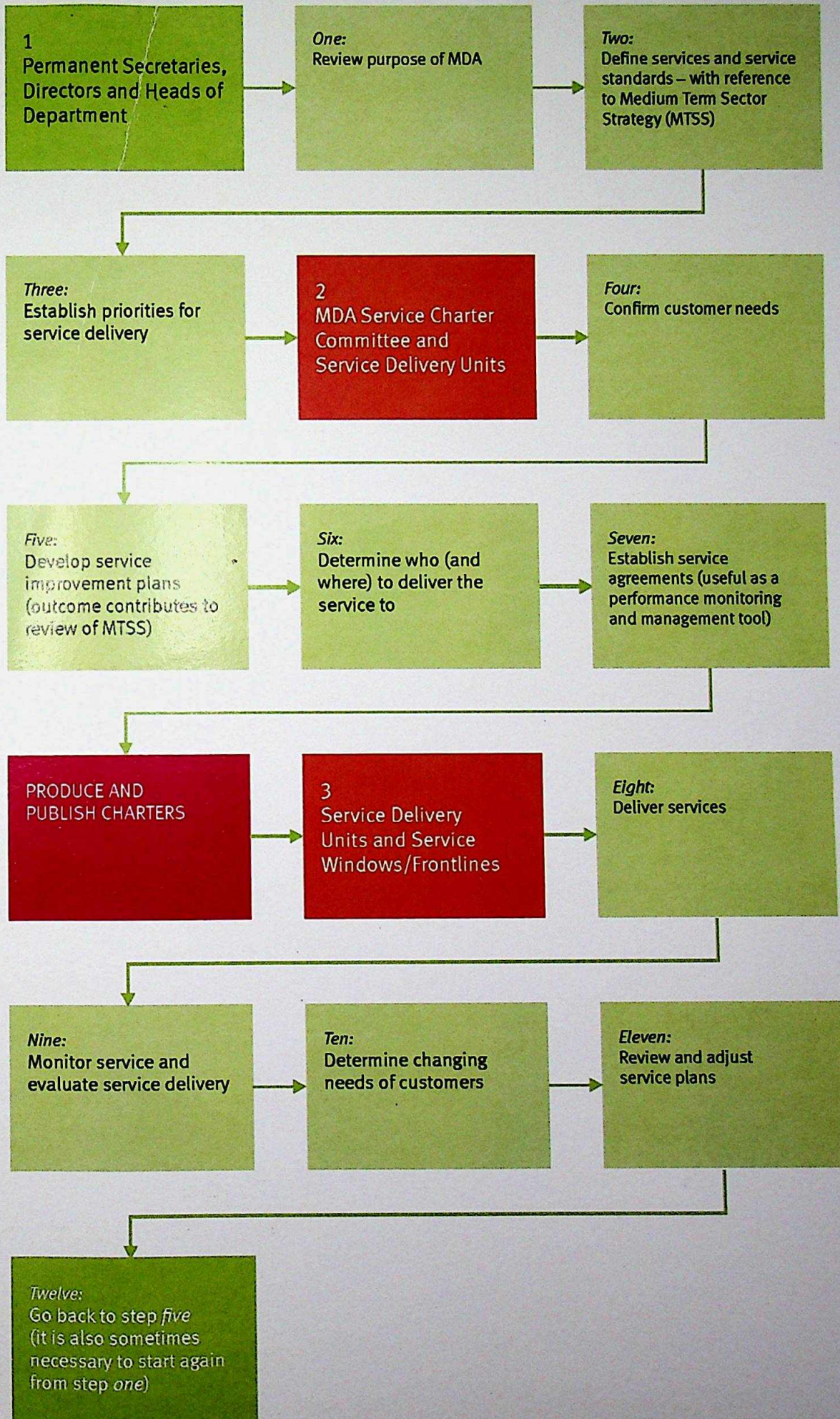
Moving forward, Lagos State's first challenge is to ensure that the pilot departments live up to their published pledges by putting in place service improvement plans they can truly sustain.

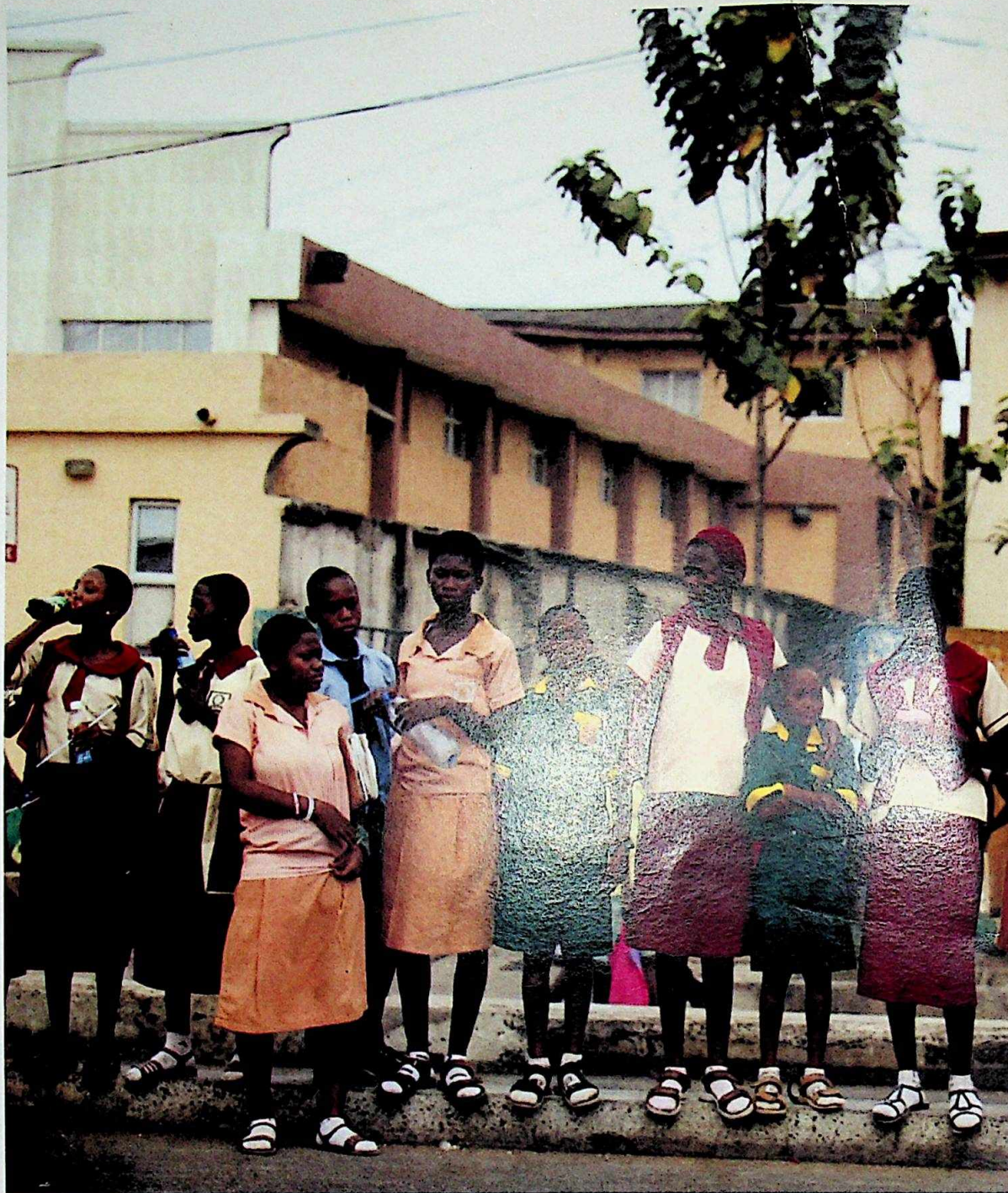
The OoT, on behalf of Lagos State Government, will work with all MDAs to publish service charters.

Who supported this work?

The UK Department for International Development's programme, State Partnerships for Accountability, Capacity and Responsiveness (SPARC) worked with Lagos State Government on the service charter initiative.

Twelve steps to produce a service charter





What lessons have we learned?

- Building a core network of service delivery specialists within a state can make a huge contribution to achieving public service reform objectives
- Gathering and sharing public perceptions of service delivery can be a valuable process when setting service delivery standards
- Service charters are not an easy fix: once published, they are a public pledge that must be honoured. What's more, the better a service gets, the higher public expectation gets – so continuous improvement should become the norm.

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The SPARC logo features the word 'sparc' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. A green, wavy line arches over the letters 'a' and 'r'.



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