

Sterling Bank Nigeria approached Path Solutions to implement the new **iMAL** version to support the bank's digital transformation initiative



Sterling Bank Plc., formerly known as NAL Bank Plc., has evolved from Nigeria's pre-eminent investment banking institution to a fully-fledged commercial bank in the last 50 years of operations. Founded in November 1960, the bank completed a merger with four other banks i.e. Indo-Nigeria Merchant Bank, Magnum Trust Bank, NBM Bank, and Trust Bank of Africa, as part of the 2005 consolidation of the Nigerian banking sector. In 2018, the bank ranked no. 26 in Top 100 Corporates to Work For in Nigeria. Sterling Bank is headquartered on Marina Road, Lagos and has over 150 branches across the country.

Known for providing impeccable services to individuals, small businesses (SMEs), and large corporations, technology at Sterling Bank stands top of their operational guidelines and is constantly undergoing improvements to satisfy customer demands. According to Bright Karuwe, Head, NIB Technology at Sterling Bank, Path Solutions had earlier executed the initial implementation of **iMAL** and had since become the bank's preferred IT partner. The bank decided to move to a newer version of **iMAL** as it was facing few operational and functional issues with the previous version. One of the primary reasons for an upgrade was to have access to a large array of online services that gives the bank the ability to accelerate its digital initiative. Hence, the bank approached Path Solutions to move to a newer **iMAL** version to benefit from the latest platform features and enhancements.

The proposed timeline for the upgrade was seven months but the bank wanted to complete the upgrade in a shorter amount of time. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was difficult to achieve. The official commencement date of the project was somewhere between January-February 2020 right before the pandemic. The bank wanted to leverage all the resources to complete the upgrade within the proposed timeline. However, with the start of COVID-19, there were concerns regarding



Bright Karuwe, Head, NIB Technology, Sterling Bank Plc.

delays in the project. But the bank successfully partnered with Path Solutions and carried out the full project engagement. The pandemic did not deter the timeline or the initial proposal in the upgrade. There were some minor glitches along the course of the implementation especially in ensuring continuous medium of communication due to network connectivity which were dealt with successfully.

From the bank's side, 10 core team members were involved in the project implementation. The bank worked with various other technical members including specialists on testing of infrastructure, servers, and network. Resources from the IT department along with over 20 participants for UAT testing were involved in the project. This was a unique successful experience as the project was executed amidst COVID-19 lockdown while resources from the bank and Path Solutions were working remotely from their homes.



“One of the major benefits the bank is experiencing since the go-live is the improved performance of the platform. Post-upgrade, specific tasks that earlier use to take a couple of hours to conclude, such as the month-end process can now be completed in less than an hour. The bank is also undertaking a series of validation to ensure every expected outcome is internally measured.

– Bright Karuwe, Head, NIB Technology,
Sterling Bank Plc.

Remote Implementation

The upgrade was bankwide and some of the modules such as Customer Service Management and Financial Accounting Management were already being used internally. The upgrade added more features to the existing applications. In addition to this, the bank

asked Path Solutions to harness the potential benefits of the Facilities Management module to improve the bank’s risk management processes internally. Besides this, the bank benefited from deploying the MTS (Multi-Threading System) for superior application responsiveness. The version R14.1 was released, and the modules implemented are mentioned below:

Module Name	Version
Financial Accounting Management System	14.1.1.15.197
Customer Service Management Admin	14.1.1.00.231
Report Designer	14.1.0.02.002
ATM Server	14.1.8.01.001
Dynamic Files Console	14.1.1.00.023
Facility Management System	14.1.1.00.043
IBIS iMAL	14.1.1.0.2681
Customer Service Management	14.1.0.0.0324
Alerts	14.1.1.0.2855
Islamic Invest	14.5.0.0.0360
Multi-Threading Scheduler	14.1.1.0.2415
Reporting	14.1.0.0.0080
System Administration & Security	14.1.1.0.1078
Islamic Profit Calculation, Accrual & Distribution	14.1.3.0.1090
Custom Integration Services	14.1.0.0.0141
Upgrade Tool	14.1.0.0.0086

Challenges Faced

One of the major challenges experienced during the implementation process was related to COVID-19 lockdown and the inability of consultants and the project team to be physically present onsite. Hence, there was increased dependence on the internet to communicate.

The challenge of working remotely was internet downtime thereby leading to delays or rework. Another task was getting the project team to respond to inquiries and conclude the assigned tasks on time followed by budget constraints due to unplanned costs related to modifications and coordinating the UAT process with remote staff.

Before COVID-19, the idea was to have team members available at the same location to execute the UAT exercise. However, due to the pandemic, the bank had to operate a full remote UAT engagement.

There were around 20 or 30 participants from various departments trying to coordinate the UAT experience, each of them facing issues with internet connectivity, VPN, and accessing applications.

To manage these challenges, follow-up calls were constantly made to ensure tasks were being executed as planned. Moreover, the team consistently held online meetings to discuss work progress, the impediments, and immediate resolution plans.

From the bank’s side, and during the implementation process, a couple of results did not meet the expectations of some internal stakeholders, but were fixed later on. The bank conducted two standard meetings every week over Microsoft Teams to ensure targets were achieved and had constant email engagements to discuss and resolve issues. Key activities were planned and executed such as open architecture platform testing, performance, and changes on the system to cater to Sterling Bank’s requirements.

Benefits Achieved

According to Bright, only a few weeks have passed since the upgrade and the bank is yet to reap the full benefits. Some of the key benefits that are expected from this implementation are highlighted here below:

	System Enhancement	Enhancement of the current system to meet the functional requirements of planned growth of the NIB business
	Increased Productivity	Increase productive efficiency of the solution to accommodate expansion and eliminate the pain-points experienced by users
	Reduced Dependency	Reduce dependency on the conventional core banking application as the business transitions
	Open Architecture	Provision of an open architecture platform to aid automation and digital initiative for NIB business and allow the bank to move to open banking facilitating different levels of integration
	Enhanced Performance	Performance enhancement and scalability
	Multi-Threading System	iMAL*MTS is an efficient software delivering high volume processing capabilities through a multi-threading approach

Some of the greatest achievements during this upgrade is the interface of **iMAL** screens based on an open architecture platform facilitating the integration of third-party systems, implementing **iMAL*MTS** through a multi-threading approach, and implementing the Alert Java application with advanced functionalities and customization.

Sterling Bank’s overall experience of working with Path Solutions has been remarkable. Path has been professional, engaging and responded to inquiries swiftly. Post-upgrade, Path Solutions has provided great support to the bank. Moreover, the bank has daily engagement with the Path Solutions’ team, and with every issue

raised by the bank, Path Solutions has been very responsive. Initially, the bank had major concerns about executing this upgrade due to the pandemic. However, both teams from the bank and Path Solutions’ side made this upgrade possible in all aspects.

KEY FACTS

- Bank:** Sterling Bank Plc.
- Headquarters:** Lagos, Nigeria
- Supplier:** Path Solutions
- Solution:** **iMAL** R14.1
- Timeline:** 7 months

