

NUPE MIGRANTS ALONG THE NIGER RIVER: INTERROGATING SHIFTING OCCUPATION IN AGENEBODE SINCE 1945

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Abstract:

This study investigates the shifting occupational system of Nupe migrants along the Niger River in Agenebode since 1945 to the present. The Nupe people, who hail from central Nigeria, have a long history of migration, with the River Niger playing an important role in their economic and social activities. This study investigates how the river has influenced the shifting occupations of Nupe migrants in Agenebode. The study investigates the complex interaction between Nupe migrants and the River Niger using a historical framework that includes oral histories, archival record and extant literature. It analyzes how the river has facilitated traditional vocations such as fishing and agriculture, as well as how changes in the river's ecosystem had resulted in diversification into trade, transportation, and craft industries. The study discovered that the River Niger has an important role in the economic adaptation and resilience of Nupe migrants. The study emphasizes the adaptive techniques used by Nupe migrants in response to environmental and socioeconomic changes, demonstrating the river's ongoing relevance to their occupational shifts. This research contributes to a better understanding of how water bodies influence economic activities and cultural relationships.

Introduction

The River Niger, one of Africa's most important waterways, is a significant geographical feature in the Agenebode area that has long influenced the economic and social life of the communities along its banks.

The Niger River at Agenebode is situated at 7°06'N and 6°42'E. Agenebode is a riverside town positioned along the banks of the River Niger in Edo State and is located in the lower section of the river. Since 1945, the river has served as both a key resource and a driving force behind the changing occupational patterns of Nupe migrants who settled in Agenebode. This article investigates the River Niger's tremendous influence on the economic activities of Nupe migrants, focusing on how its bountiful resources and natural dynamics permitted transformations in their livelihoods from fishing and aquatic hunting to cultivation, trading, and craftsmanship. This study illuminates the relationship between migration, water bodies, and changing occupational systems in Nigeria since 1945 by looking at the socioeconomic changes that have occurred within the Nupe community in Agenebode over a number of decades.

Historical Background: Nupe Migration to Agenebode

The Nupe is an ethnic group from North Central Nigeria. They constitute the largest ethnic group in Niger State and a minority in Kwara State.¹ Additionally, the Nupe is found in Kogi State and the Federal Capital Territory.² The relationship between the people of Agenebode, like other Etsako communities, and the Nupe was primarily based on trade. Before 1800, various communities in Etsako land engaged in commercial exchanges with the Nupe people. Nupe traders traveled from their homeland to Etsako, using trade routes that passed through Yoruba territories, particularly parts of Ekiti and Akoko land. Upon reaching Auchi and other Etsako settlements, the Nupe merchants introduced goods such as potash, glass, shea butter, and copper, which they exchanged for kolanut, palm oil, palm kernel oil, and camwood.³ However, beyond these legitimate trade activities, there were instances where Nupe traders seized or stole goods from Auchi merchants and other neighboring communities involved in long-distance trade. Some of the items taken included ivory tusks, slaves, yams, hoes, cutlasses, hunting traps, and livestock such as goats and sheep.⁴ Despite these challenges, trade remained a crucial aspect of the relationship between the Nupe and Etsako people, shaping economic interactions and fostering cultural exchanges over time.

Historically, the Nupe people were renowned for their agricultural expertise, especially in rice farming, as well as their proficiency in fishing and riverine trade. These activities thrived due to the fertile floodplains and abundant aquatic resources provided by the river. Agenebode, situated on the banks of the Niger River, offered rich land and access to the river, making it an appealing location for Nupe migrants. The first group of Nupe

settlers reportedly arrived in Agenebode via the River Niger in 1890 during a fishing and hunting expedition.⁵ Upon their arrival, they were warmly welcomed by the indigenous Etsako people, which encouraged them to settle in the area. The hospitable nature of the Etsako earned them the name “Zabokun,” meaning “white people,” as a reflection of their pure and kind hearts.⁶ The Niger River, which had always been central to the Nupe's way of life, continued to support their economic activities in their new home.

The Second World War (1939–1945) had a profound impact on migration patterns in Nigeria. In the aftermath of the war, large-scale movements of people were driven by economic aspirations and the effects of colonial governance. The war disrupted traditional economic structures, intensified colonial policies, and created new labor demands, leading to increased migration both within and beyond Nigeria. A key factor influencing migration during this period was the colonial agricultural policy, which prioritized cash crop cultivation over food production. This shift disrupted the traditional agrarian economy, prompting farmers to seek fertile land for growing cocoa, rubber, groundnut, and palm oil, while wage laborers moved to plantations in search of employment. The emphasis on cash crop production particularly encouraged migration from rural areas with fewer economic opportunities to regions with higher agricultural activity.⁷

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the colonial administration aggressively promoted cash crop expansion, pushing farmers to seek arable land. The availability of fertile soil, accessibility, and colonial land policies that encouraged the commercialization of rural land facilitated the movement of migrant farmers to areas like Agenebode. Positioned strategically along the Niger River, Agenebode's rich agricultural resources made it an attractive destination, particularly for the Nupe people, who had a long history of farming, fishing, and trading. To the Nupe, the Niger River was more than a waterway—it was a source of identity, a migration route, and a commercial hub, similar to its significance for other riverine communities.⁸

Again, the development of infrastructure during colonial rule played a major role in shaping migration patterns. Infrastructure was broadly categorized into Social infrastructure, (including healthcare, education, and water supply) and economic infrastructure, which focused on transportation (roads, railways, seaports) and communication networks. Between 1900 and 1960, the colonial government invested heavily in modern transport infrastructure, leading to the rapid expansion of railways, roads, and seaports. This expansion aligned with the broader colonial strategy, as

European imperial powers viewed transport development as key to the exploitation of resources. Improved transportation networks facilitated the large-scale movement of people and goods, particularly agricultural exports.⁹

The period between 1914 and 1954 was a pivotal era in seaport development in Nigeria. Lagos emerged as the leading port, alongside other key ports such as Port Harcourt, Sapele, Warri, Calabar, Bonny, Opopo, Burutu, Lokoja, Idah, and Agenebode. These ports played a crucial role in integrating Nigeria's agricultural economy into global trade, attracting migrants in search of commercial and employment opportunities.¹⁰ In the case of Nupe migrants in Agenebode, their community steadily grew over time, driven by natural population increase and successive waves of migration from Niger, Kwara, and Kogi States, as well as Abuja.¹¹

The River Niger's Role in Shaping Occupational Shifts

Upon settling in Agenebode, Nupe migrants initially focused on fishing and hunting, activities that were integral to their traditional way of life. The Niger River provided ample resources to support these occupations. However, over time, changes in the river's ecosystem, such as seasonal flooding and fluctuations in fish populations, began to impact their livelihoods. Factors like overfishing and environmental degradation further reduced the sustainability of traditional fishing and hunting practices, prompting the Nupe to adapt and diversify their economic activities. While fishing and hunting remained central to their way of life, many Nupe gradually expanded into other sectors, including farming, trading, craftsmanship, education, and professional services. This evolution reflects the adaptive nature of the Nupe's economic pursuits along the Niger River in Agenebode.

Fishing and Aquatic Hunting in Agenebode

Fishing in Agenebode has a long-standing history, with the town's proximity to the Niger River making it a prime location for fishing activities. For the Nupe people, the river served as a vital source of livelihood. Traditionally, every Nupe man was considered a fisherman before pursuing any other occupation, a necessity often dictated by the availability of fish.¹² Men and boys fished on the river every day, either alone or in organized groups led by a supervisor who decided what activities to carry out, as well as where and how to do them, based on the flood level, particularly during the flood recession period.¹³

The Niger River's diverse aquatic ecosystem, abundant with various fish species, sustained a vibrant fishing community. Some of the major fish species commonly caught in the river at Agenebode included Tilapia (*Oreochromis* spp.), Catfish (*Clarias* spp.), Nile Perch (*Lates niloticus*), Bagrid Fish (Bagridae family), Mackerel, spotted sucker (*Minytrema melanops*) and Heterotis (*Heterotis niloticus*).¹⁴

Also, hunting activities in the river extended to capturing other aquatic animals like turtles and crabs.¹⁵ Hippopotamuses were also hunted in the river with spears or harpoons from canoes.¹⁶ However, in more recent times, hunting of hippopotamuses has greatly diminished due to strict regulations against their hunting by the government who considered them a vulnerable species.¹⁷ Fishing and hunting skills and knowledge were passed down through generations as part of the local heritage.¹⁸ To this end, Imaekhai, L. explains that "Fishing in Agenebode is not just an occupation; it is also a family business and a way of life in many cases."¹⁹

Fishing methods and techniques in Agenebode as other riverine areas in Nigeria included the use of monofilament gillnets, cast nets, traps, hooks and lines.²⁰ Traditional fishing nets, often made from locally sourced materials, were used extensively in the Niger River.²¹ These nets vary in size and mesh, depending on the target species. Fish traps, typically woven from bamboo or other plant materials, were set in strategic locations along the river to catch fish as they move with the current. Also, fishing **hooks and lines** were used. Handlines and longlines were commonly used by individual fishermen.²² This method was particularly effective for catching larger fish like catfish and Nile perch. **Spearfishing was another method used** by some fishermen. Spears or harpoons were used to catch fish in shallow waters or during certain times of the year when water levels were lower. In recent years, commercially produced fishing nets made from synthetic materials had become more common. These nets were more durable and effective, particularly for larger-scale operations.

Fishing is a critical economic activity in Agenebode, providing livelihoods for a significant portion of the population. The fish caught in the Niger River was sold in local markets, both fresh and processed. Smoked and dried fish were particularly popular, as these methods of preservation allowed the fish to be stored for longer periods and transported to markets in other regions.

Fishing is financially important to Edo people at the Agenebode axis and to the families that depend upon it for their livelihood. In year 2000, Agenebode commercial fishing catch landings peaked bringing in about

154.1 million pounds of fish and shellfish to the market docks. Current statistics show that hard crabs continue to be Agenebode's top catch, bringing in an estimated 32.1 million Naira in year 2000²³

Beyond direct fish sales, the fishing industry in Agenebode sustains several related activities, such as boat construction, net production, and fish processing.²⁴ Women played a vital role in these efforts, especially in the processing and marketing of fish.²⁵ The revenue from fishing and its associated activities provided financial support for families and significantly contributed to the local economy.

Over time, several factors began to influence the traditional occupations of the Nupe community in Agenebode, resulting in notable shifts in their occupational practices. Among the most significant were environmental changes. Since the mid-20th century, the River Niger has experienced substantial ecological transformations that have directly affected the fishing activities of the Nupe migrants. Issues such as pollution and deforestation have caused fluctuations in fish populations and the deterioration of aquatic habitats.²⁶ Additionally, government regulations on hunting in the Niger River have further challenged the sustainability of traditional fishing and hunting practices, compelling many Nupe fishermen and hunters to explore alternative sources of livelihoods.²⁷

Overfishing, driven by both local practices and external pressures, has also contributed to the decline in fish stocks. As fish became scarcer, the profitability of fishing as a primary occupation diminished, prompting a shift towards other forms of livelihood.²⁸ Additionally, seasonal variations in the river's water levels, exacerbated by climate change, have made fishing and aquatic hunting increasingly unpredictable, further encouraging occupational diversification among the Nupe migrants.²⁹

Thus, Nupe fishermen and aquatic hunters in Agenebode engaged in seasonal farming due to the River Niger's Seasonality: The Niger River, which is vital for the Nupe fishermen, experiences seasonal fluctuations. During the rainy season, the water levels rise, making fishing more challenging. In contrast, during the dry season, water levels may drop, limiting the availability of fish. To supplement their livelihoods, Nupe fishermen turned to farming during these periods when fishing is less productive. Nupe migrants understood that relying solely on fishing could be risky due to uncertain fish availability. Therefore, engaging in farming helped the fishermen diversify their sources of income, ensuring they had food and resources even when fishing yields were low. In all, seasonal farming complemented the fishing activities of the Nupe in Agenebode,

ensuring food security and balancing both activities based on seasonal patterns.

Farming and the Role of the Niger

As fishing became less viable, many Nupe migrants turned to agriculture, taking advantage of the fertile lands along the Niger's banks. The pattern of flooding in the Basin enabled flow-recession farming after the flood season and dry-season cultivation along the riverbanks and in the marshes.³⁰ The river's annual flooding, while sometimes destructive, brought nutrient-rich silt to the farmlands. "The reason for this is that formation of a floodplain on a valley floor is caused by the river flowing through the valley. The river channel naturally meanders through the landscape and over time deposits sand, silt and other soil-forming material, especially during floods. These deposits provide fertile soil for agricultural production."³¹ Thereby providing ideal conditions for farming once the waters recede. These nutrient-rich lands are well-suited for growing crops, making it logical for the fishermen to take advantage of this natural resource.

The Niger River ecosystem corridor has consistently supported people's livelihoods, even during the most severe droughts. The River was occasionally utilized to irrigate various crops, offering a natural water source, particularly during dry months or when additional water was needed. This practice boosted agricultural productivity, ensured food security, and supported economic growth in Agenebode.³² The Nupe farming system in Agenebode was characterized by the cultivation of a variety of crops in the categories of tubers (like **Yam "Dioscorea spp"** and **Cassava "Manihot esculenta"**), grains (for example, **Rice "Oryza sativa"**, **Maize "Zea mays"**, **Millet "Pennisetum glaucum"** and **Sorghum "Sorghum bicolor"**) legumes (like groundnut or peanut "Arachis hypogaea") and vegetables (Okra "Abelmoschus esculentus", Tomato "Solanum lycopersicum", Chili pepper "Capsicum annum").³³

However, while the Niger River's annual flooding has its advantages, it also presents certain drawbacks. "The main downside to farming on floodplains is the inevitable risk of crop loss from flooding."³⁴ There had been several occasions when farms in Agenebode suffered damage as a result of severe flooding with farmers recording great losses. And it's not just agricultural farming affected, other settlers in agenebode have also been impacted negatively. Flooding is a major consequence of meteorological and climate changes and is widely recognized as a critical

environmental issue in developing nations.³⁵ It poses a substantial hazard to affected areas, disrupting infrastructure and essential services necessary for sustainable living. Severe flooding in populated areas often leads to loss of life, property damage, and significant disruptions to the functioning of communities. Economically, flooding can have serious consequences, with businesses facing stock losses and reduced patronage.³⁶

The 2012 flooding in Nigeria had a devastating impact on residents of Edo North, particularly those living along the Niger River, including Agenebode. Hunters returning from the forests discovered that many animals had been displaced by the floods.³⁷ The disaster resulted in severe consequences, including health challenges, deaths, loss of farmlands, livestock, and crops, as well as the inundation of schools.³⁸ Socio-economic activities were brought to a standstill, leading to financial losses amounting to millions of naira.³⁹ The flood disrupted commerce and industry, causing significant livelihood losses and emotional trauma for victims and their families.⁴⁰ The destruction of infrastructure was widespread, affecting clean water supplies, electricity, and transportation systems.⁴¹ In her survey, Isere Victoria highlighted the losses experienced by Edo North farmers, including Nupe migrants in Agenebode, by comparing their earnings before and after the flood, presenting the impacts as percentages:

601 (60.1%) respondents suffered the loss of their cultivated farmlands; ...183 (18.3%) respondents earned less than N100,000 during the farming seasons; 180 (18%) earned between N100,000 and N200,000; 541 (54.1%) earned between N200,000 and N300,000 while 98 (9.6%) earned between N300,000 and N400,000 before the floods. However, following the flood 643 (64.3%) earned less than N100,000 and 357 (35.7%) earned between N100,000 and N200,000. This reveals the huge financial loss the villages must have suffered following the loss of their cultivated farmlands.⁴²

The River Niger has significantly influenced fishing and farming activities in Agenebode over the years, prompting Nupe farmers and fishermen to engage in seasonal trading. This dual impact—both beneficial and challenging—has contributed to the development of dynamic trade patterns in the area. During periods of agricultural and fishing abundance, surplus produce fueled lively local and regional markets. Conversely, challenges like floods, pollution, or seasonal scarcities created a demand for imported goods and encouraged trade diversification, ensuring that Agenebode's economy remained active. In both scenarios, the River Niger played a pivotal role in shaping the town's trade network, facilitating regional exchanges and supporting local livelihoods.

Trade and Transportation

In addition to fishing and farming, the Nupe migrants in Agenebode also engaged in trade, facilitated by the Niger River's role as a major transportation route. The Niger has long been used for transporting goods and people. Canoes, boats, and ferries were commonly employed to move agricultural produce, fish, and other goods to markets within and outside Agenebode.⁴³ The Niger's navigable waters represented an important axis for trade, allowing for the movement of goods between various towns and regions along its course and enabling the Nupe to expand their trading networks. This trade included not only fish and agricultural produce but also textiles and crafts, which the Nupe were skilled at producing. The river's accessibility allowed the Nupe to integrate into regional trade systems, connecting them with markets in larger urban centers such as Asaba, Onitsha, Idah and Lokoja.⁴⁴ This integration into broader trade networks contributed to the diversification of the Nupe economy in Agenebode, providing additional sources of income and reducing reliance on traditional occupations.

The River Niger had a profound impact on the fishermen and farmers in Agenebode, encouraging them to engage in trade. One key factor was the abundance of resources it provided. The river offered a plentiful supply of fish, enabling local fishermen to harvest more than they required for personal use. This surplus was then utilized as a trade commodity. Fish trade proved to be highly profitable. For example, a marketing analysis of smoked-dried fish in Etsako East Local Government Area, including Agenebode, conducted by Osarenren and Adams in 2013, revealed in the table below that the marketing of smoked-dried fish was exceptionally lucrative.

Cost and return associated with smoke-dried fish marketing in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State.

Items	Amount (₦)
Total Revenue	79 000
Variable cost	
Cost of fish @ purchase	48 000
Transportation cost	1 600
Labour	2 000

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Firewood	1 800
Kerosene	900
LGA Tax	800
Association levy	1 200
Total variable cost (TVC)	56 300
Fixed cost	
Process equipment	1 200
Bowls	600
Brackets	300
Wire gauze	500
Knife	300
Total fixed cost (TFC)	2 900
Gross margin (TR – TVC)	22 700
Net profit (GM - TFC)	19 800

Source: Field survey, 2013.⁴⁵

The total variable cost was calculated at ₦56,300, while the total revenue amounted to ₦79,000. This resulted in a gross margin of ₦22,700 and a net profit of ₦19,800, indicating that the smoke-dried fish marketing business is highly profitable in the study area.⁴⁶

Additionally, the fertile lands along the riverbanks were ideal for agriculture, resulting in high crop yields. Farmers produced more than their families could consume, creating excess produce that was sold in local and regional markets. During the colonial era, a farmer grew cash crops on his farm, which were purchased by a colonial company agent or middleman. The agent verified that the produce met the required standards before transporting it to the company's warehouse for export overseas.⁴⁷

The trade of Nigerian commodities such as palm oil, palm kernel, cotton, groundnut, beniseed, shea nut, and other products was central to British empire-building in Nigeria. To facilitate this trade, European firms

established trading stations along the banks of major inland ports, including Lokoja, Baro, Agenebode, Idah, Onitsha, Warri, Asaba, and Sapele on the Lower Niger.⁴⁸ Nupe migrants in Agenebode actively participated in this trade both during and after colonial rule.

The proximity of Agenebode to the river provided easy access to riverine markets where fishermen and farmers could trade their goods. Regular interactions with traders and buyers at these markets introduced them to commerce, equipping them with skills such as pricing, negotiation, and understanding market demands. Consequently, instead of solely depending on fishing or farming—activities often prone to risks from fluctuating yields or catches—Nupe farmers and fishermen diversified into trading. This diversification not only supplemented their income but also reduced their financial vulnerability.

In response to the changing occupational patterns shaped by the Niger River, many Nupe fishermen and their families began smoking or drying their fish, while farmers and their households processed crops into value-added products such as flour.⁴⁹ These processed goods fetched higher market prices, encouraging greater participation in trade. Over time, they effectively balanced these trading activities with fishing and farming whenever the river's conditions allowed.

The River Niger played a pivotal role in the inland waterway network of Nigeria, serving as a vital communication and transportation route. During the colonial era, river ports along the Lower Niger, such as Lokoja, Baro, Agenebode, Idah, Onitsha, Warri, Sapele, Asaba, and Burutu, became hubs of activity. Ships, canoes, and vessels traveling north or south frequently stopped at these ports, with Burutu serving as the final gateway to the open sea.⁵⁰ These ports served as sub-stations for loading, offloading, and trans-shipment of goods. Lokoja, located at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers, was a frequent stop for refueling, changing pilots, and coordinating operations for the onward journey.⁵¹

Transportation on the Lower Niger continued after colonial rule due to the foundational systems and practices established during the colonial period. A key factor was the construction of river vessels entirely within Nigeria by the Marine Department. Contrary to the belief that crafts were imported, these vessels were designed and built locally, with raw materials like steel plates and frames worked into shape by African labor.⁵² This local capacity for constructing crafts ensured that the riverine transportation system could be sustained and adapted after colonial rule, with only imported engines requiring external support.⁵³

The diversity of vessels constructed, such as 70-foot and 36-foot diesel-engine touring launches, steel poling barges, and surf boats,⁵⁴ provided the necessary infrastructure for a range of riverine activities. These crafts were well-suited for navigating the Niger River's challenging conditions and were integral to maintaining key trade routes, such as the one between the southern ports and Baro. The ability to construct and maintain these vessels locally reduced reliance on imported crafts and provided continuity for transportation after colonial rule.

Another significant factor was the strategic recruitment and training of African labor during the colonial period. Africans were employed as laborers in the riverine transportation system and trained on the job in specialized roles such as pilots, captains, clerks, and porters. This training ensured a skilled workforce capable of managing and operating the riverine transport network independently. As these workers attained proficiency, they were entrusted with critical responsibilities, which allowed the transportation system to thrive even after the withdrawal of colonial administrators.

The economic importance of the Lower Niger also contributed to the continuity of transportation. Companies like John Holt relied on the river for moving goods and connecting inland regions with southern ports,⁵⁵ ensuring that the Niger remained a vital artery for trade. The reliance on African labor and locally built crafts provided a resilient and sustainable framework that allowed riverine trade and transportation to persist in the post-colonial period. The expertise of local communities in crafting canoes, barges, and other riverine vessels allowed trade and transportation to thrive. This indigenous knowledge ensured that boats and other crafts could be repaired, maintained, and replaced, keeping the riverine economy functional over time.

The combination of local craft construction, the development of skilled African labor, and the enduring economic significance of the Niger River ensured the continuity of transportation on the Lower Niger after colonial rule. These factors created a self-sufficient system that could operate effectively without external dependence, maintaining the river's role as a crucial transportation route.

Nupe migrants involved in the water transportation business were highly active during the high-water season from June to November. However, during the dry or low-water season, which spanned from December to May, their activities significantly decreased. The seasonal nature of transportation on the Lower Niger River posed a major obstacle to efficient and consistent operations. As a result, those engaged in the water

transportation trade often turned to other occupations during the off-season to sustain their financial needs.⁵⁶

In addition to water transportation, the Nupe people became involved in land transportation, such as commercial bike riding and taxi driving.⁵⁷ These transportation services were in high demand, as people needed to move goods and travel both within and beyond the community. Driving taxis or motorcycles (okada) offered flexibility, allowing the Nupe people to earn income during periods of reduced farming, fishing, or water transportation activity. This adaptability enabled them to transition seamlessly between occupations, returning to agriculture or fishing when conditions improved. By diversifying their livelihoods in this way, the Nupe people maintained a steady income, ensuring economic stability even when one source of livelihood became unproductive.

Over the years, the River Niger has not only served as a vital source for fishing and farming but also fostered an environment for trading surplus production. Its role in facilitating transportation, providing access to markets, and driving the economic need for diversification led Nupe fishermen and farmers in Agenebode to naturally transition into roles as traders and transporters.

Craftsmanship

As environmental and economic pressures led to the decline of traditional occupations, some Nupe migrants turned to artisan crafts and small-scale manufacturing as alternative livelihoods. The Nupe have a long tradition of craftsmanship, particularly in areas such as weaving and metalwork. In Agenebode, these skills were adapted to meet local demands, with Nupe artisans producing goods for both local consumption and trade. Small-scale manufacturing, such as the production of agricultural tools like, hoes, and cutlasses; fishing gear, such as nets, hooks, and boats; as well as household items; became an important part of the Nupe economy.⁵⁸

Also, fish processing techniques, such as smoking and drying, led to the emergence of artisans who specialized in these methods to prepare fish for trade.⁵⁹ Smoking, a traditional method of preserving fish temporarily, is a meticulous process. Each step is crucial not only for safe preservation but also for enhancing the fish's flavor and aroma.⁶⁰ Various types of fish were smoked, often carefully arranged in dugout pits or on platforms, typically housed in small compartments within brick-built ovens. Intense heat from burning wood produced the hot smoke necessary for drying the fish effectively.⁶¹

These activities were often carried out alongside fishing, farming or trading, providing an additional source of income and contributing to the economic resilience of Nupe households. The shift towards artisan crafts and small-scale manufacturing reflects the Nupe's ability to adapt to changing economic conditions while preserving aspects of their cultural heritage. The River Niger's impact on fishing, farming, trading and transportation led to the rise of artisans who supported these activities by creating tools, processing goods, building boats, and producing crafts for trade.

Thus, the positive impacts of the River Niger, such as fertile land and rich fishing resources, stimulated demand for tools, boats, and storage solutions, encouraging artisans to develop their crafts. Meanwhile, negative impacts like flooding, environmental changes, and seasonal variations led to innovations in farming, fishing tools, and preservation techniques, further driving the growth of artisanal skills. In both cases, artisans played a crucial role in supporting and adapting to the needs of the local economy.

Conclusion

The River Niger has been instrumental in shaping the occupational system of Nupe migrants in Agenebode since 1945. Its fertile banks and abundant fisheries initially supported the Nupe people's primary livelihoods of fishing and hunting. However, environmental changes and Nigeria's broader economic modernization have driven shifts in these traditional occupations over time. While some Nupe migrants continued to rely on fishing and hunting, many diversified into farming, trading, transportation, craftsmanship, urban-based employment, and other sectors during periods when fishing and hunting were less viable. They returned to their original occupations whenever conditions improved, demonstrating remarkable adaptability.

This ability to transition between occupations allowed the Nupe people to sustain balanced income streams, ensuring economic stability even during challenging times. This evolution highlights the resilience of the Nupe community as they navigated both opportunities and hardships, with the River Niger serving as a dynamic and enduring influence on their socio-economic development in Agenebode.

Endnotes

¹ Interview with Maliki Ibrahim Angulu, 59 years, Etsu Nupe (Nupe king) of Weppa Wanno Kingdom, Agenebode, 11/8/24

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¹³ Inger Andersen, Ousmane Dione, Martha Jarosewich-Holder, Jean-Claude Olivry, *Edited by Katherin George Golitzen*, “The Niger River Basin: A Vision for Sustainable Management”, pp. 7 - 8

¹⁴ Interview with Amina Momodu, Trader, 50 years Agenebode, 11/8/24

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¹⁶ Mohammed Alahasan- a Nupe Fisherman and farmer, 64 years, Agenebode , 11/8/2024

¹⁷ Mohammed Alahasan- A Nupe Fisherman and farmer.

¹⁸ Interview with Angulu, 59 years, Etsu Nupe (Nupe king) of Weppa Wanno Kingdom, 17/8/24

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