

TRANSPORTATION ALONG THE BENUE RIVER: AN APPRAISAL OF BOAT ACTIVITIES WITHIN MAKURDI AREA SINCE THE COLONIAL ERA

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Abstract

The Benue River has served as a medium of transportation for diverse groups since the pre colonial period. Indigenous traders and fishers along the riverine areas and merchants from far flung areas conducted commercial activities along the rivers long before the advent of the European colonial rule in the late 19th Century. The paper using historical method of enquiry such as archival documents and other relevant documentary source materials like journal and textbooks, including oral interviews seeks to interrogates the volume of trafficks or voyages along the Makurdi axis of the Benue River since the advent of British colonial rule in the area. The paper observes that the areas around Makurdi witnessed tremendous maritime activities due to the involvement of both colonial officials and foreign firms and their agents who moved to and fro in search for cash crops and mineral resources. Paradoxically since the much celebrated oil boom era in the 1970s, maritime activities in the areas had declined remarkably largely due to dwindling commercial activities and navigational challenges such as shallow depth and sand deposits. To mitigate the challenges affecting maritime activities in the area the paper suggests a two prong approach; a compressive plan of action by the government to dredge the entire Niger, Benue inland water ways to enhance commercial exchange and a deliberate

plan of action aimed at encouraging the mass of the population to embrace water transportation.

Introduction

The River Benue, previously known to European explorers in the 19th Century as the Tchadda River was formed perhaps at the same time as the other great rivers of the world. It is a major water resource in Nigeria and has been utilized by the people of the Benue Basin for time immemorial. It is the second major river in Nigeria, its origins emerge from the Cameroun Mountains from where it flows eastwards through the Nigerian states of Adamawa, Taraba, Nasarawa, Benue to join the River Niger at a Confluence at Lokoja, Kogi State. The river which spanned 1400 kilometres in length is ranked at number 99 globally, of which 900 kilometres are within Nigeria. The Benue River is divided into the Upper Benue River Basin and the Lower Benue Basin. The major tributaries include Rivers Gongola, Kilunga, Mayo Ini, Mayo Belwa, Taraba, Donga, Ankwe and Katsina-Ala. The Benue River has an extensive flood plain for all season farming. The tropical climate of the basin has two seasons, a dry and wet season, the latter occurs for about seven months from April to October. In the dry season harmattan is experienced as the weather becomes cool and chilly from December to February, and followed a period of hot temperatures from February to April. The Benue River is largely navigable during the months of the rainy season and becomes difficult to navigate except for small canoes during the months of lesser rain and during the dry season.¹

The Benue River was the site for the formation of settlements and towns on its banks and within its basin it led to the emergence of continuous peopling of the area, with constant inflows of people leading to the formation of entities, states and kingdoms in the period before the arrival of the European.² The presence of the river has attracted many ethnic groups such as Tiv, Idoma, Etilo, Jukun, Igede, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo to the Lower River Benue Basin. As a major water resource in Nigeria the river has been utilized by the people of the Benue Basin for time immemorial as a means of transportation for social and economic activities, fishing, agriculture and in post colonial era for power generation purpose. The river for most part of its existence has served as a major waterway connecting the various ethnic groups of the areas and also merchants from far flung areas from northern and southern part of Nigeria.

The arrival of the Europeans in the 19th Century and the subsequent introduction of colonial rule in the 20th Century further opened up the inland waterways of rivers Benue and Niger for military and commercial activities. With the effective pacification of the Benue areas by the British colonial authority Makurdi and its adjoining areas became more accessible to agents of European companies with interests in procuring cash crops and valuable mineral resources from the area. The deployment of fast moving steam engine boats all the way from the Atlantic Coast to the inland waterway heightened the traffic and movement of goods and services around Makurdi axis and helped in boosting the economy of the area. However, the introduction of railway lines across the Benue and Niger rivers coupled with the opening up of road infrastructure and the onset of the oil boom led to a sharp drop in the volume of traffic along the Benue River over the years. The paper aims at historicizing the importance of river transportation in the economic and social development of the Makurdi axis. In achieving this set goal, it analyses the evolution and challenges confronting boat activities along the River Benue in Makurdi area since the colonial era.

Historical Overview of Transportation on River Benue

The Makurdi axis of the River Benue long before the arrival of the Europeans in the second half of the 19th Century was inhabited by the Agatu, Jukun, Alago, Nupe and the Iharev/Masev of Tiv ethnic groups. With the exception of the Tiv who were late comers in the area and the Jukun who migrated downstream along the river from Wukari, the other ethnic groups such as Agatu, Alago and Nupe migrated and settled in the area around Makurdi and its immediate environs especially in the period 1625 - 1775, following their dispersal from Idah due to political instability and the cut throat contestations for political relevance at the time. While the Jukun and those who migrated upstream from the Niger-Benue Confluence to Makurdi and its adjoining areas took to fishing as an occupation, the main occupation of the Tiv was farming.³ For these groups of people, canoes made from local timber were the primary mode of transport, used for moving people, agricultural produce, and goods between settlements. Apart from fishing which was the main occupation of the people, a group of professional navigators and boatmen emerged who conveyed travelers along the waterways. The river being the major medium of transportation served as a natural highway, connecting inland communities to larger markets such as Abinsi, Loko, Oweto, Katsina Ala and Ibi. Transportation along the Benue River was best at the peak of the rainy season which last for five months from June to October. The River Benue above all things was considered by the

indigenous communities around it as a commercial highway and being closely allied to the River Niger it has a profound impact on the economy of the entire Lower Benue Basin. According to Wuam, “ in the nineteenth century trade on the Niger and Benue flowed both ways, showing the extent to which both Rivers were intimately connected”.⁴ The major items of trade as at the time of British penetration of the River Benue were beniseed, cotton and ivory.⁵ The Ebira and Panda held the monopoly of these trade as they operated as the middlemen in the lucrative trade between the indigenous communities and the European merchants. In the bid to bypass the Ebira and Panda middlemen and frustrate their monopoly the European merchants launched out with their own vessels to reach the sources where cash crops and valuable raw materials were produced along the Benue River. The Ebira not willing to let go of their control of the trade route without a fight reacted by attacking the British boats and the resultant consequence was the British bombardment of Panda in October of 1874 which led to their preeminent control of the Benue River trade up to its upper reaches.⁶ Thus in the 1870s the British iron boats became a regular feature in the thriving commercial activities within the Makurdi axis of River Benue. With the effective subjugation of the the Ebira and Panda by the British the coast was clear and the mission for the conquest and pacification of the Lower Benue Basin was made easy as the River Benue waterways became the route through which the British army of occupation, the West African Frontier Force(WAFF) were ferried into the area.

From the last quarter of the 19th Century European companies became more involved in the commercial activities along the Makurdi axis of the River Benue leading to the establishment of a major trade depot at the bank of the river in Abinsi. According to Anthony Danladi “by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, river ports had been constructed at Lokoja, Onitsha, Warri, and Sapele on the Lower Niger, and Makurdi, Yola, and Ibi on the Benue. To ease navigation the British colonial government through the Marine Department carried out routine blasting of rocky obstacles, dredging and clearing of the waterways for silts, rocks, hyacinths and other debris.”⁷

The Makurdi port appeared situated. in the middle of the traffics and transactions between Burutu in the Atlantic coast in the South and Garaua in the upper course of River Benue in Cameroon. All vessels coming inland up the Niger and Benue Rivers started from Burutu which is a deep river port open to the sea. The position of Burutu port was selected by the managers of the Niger company which had a large number of inland vessels which it depended on largely to do a major part of its trading activities on the Niger.⁸

The major European trading companies and owners of steam ships firms which plied the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers during the cash crop boom were the U.A.C. (successor of the Niger Company) and John Holt. Although some other trading firms owned steamers, they were usually ocean going vessels. Among the biggest and most popular of John Holt steamers were the Mungo Park, William Wilberforce, Sir George Goldie, Sir George Clerk, M.T. Bauchi, Campay, Gongola, Sokoto, Yola, Lord Trenchard, Rasin, Taraba, Askabar, Richard Lander, Naraguta, Buza, Lantern Robert, Anketa, Mayor, Skubro, others are Fantim, Nupe, Wudi, Katsina, Rubi, Apoolby, Splistby, Broughton Lordington and others.⁹

It is imperative to note that the Niger-Benue river waterway was a beehive of activities for military operations during the First World War (1914 to 1918). The two rivers, especially River Benue served as the transit routes for the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) who moved their troops and equipment upstream to Garoua in Cameroon to combat German troops. However, during this period commercial activities along the River Benue reduced drastically due to incessant attacks and military confrontations between the British and the German troops. As a result most trading firms that source their produce from the upper course of River Benue in Yola and Garoua reduced the frequency of their voyages along the lower course of River Benue.¹⁰

In the Hey days of European commercial activities along the inland waterways, river ports experienced a heavy traffic during rainy season but in the dry season when the water of the Lower Niger and Benue was at low level vessels could not come up river from the open sea at Burutu which was the ultimate hub of export. This seasonal nature of transportation along the Nigerian inland waterways in the colonial period was a set-back to serious and effective transportation business and commodity export trade. Owing to the inability of the big steamers to traverse the inland waterways when the water level is low, the method improvised required a tug or vessels of suitable draught pulling some barges up and down the Lower Niger and Benue rivers. The number of barges pulled by each tug or vessel depended upon the installed capacity of its engine. Some tugs could pull as many as ten barges.¹¹ During this period indigenous boatmen were usually called upon by European companies to ferry produce with their small dugout canoes from areas with low volume of water to areas with high volume of water.¹² Due to the seasonal variations of the channel of the Lower Niger River, Patrol men were usually sent at the beginning of every rainy season to survey the routes for navigation. Pilots were divided on a substation basis, firstly, because of the inconsistent nature of the river channels, secondly because of the distance

of the journey and thirdly to make them acquainted with the routes which they plied. No one pilot ever piloted a vessel throughout the whole length of either the Niger or Benue rivers. The survey along the Niger-Benue Rivers was divided into three operations: Lokoja-Burutu, Lokoja - Baro, and Lokoja - Garua. Each of these journeys was covered by a pilot.¹³ In other words a pilot specialized in piloting a steamer only on one of these routes.

The seasonal nature of navigation along the Niger and Benue Rivers was responsible for the establishment of several port stations or terminals along the rivers. These stations served as warehouses where cash crops were stored for onward evacuation down the river for export. The shipment of goods from up-river to intermediate station was usually done during the months of July to October when the water was at high flood, This was because by November shipment of goods down river to Lokoja could be virtually impossible by steamers. Any steamer that went up river in November stood the risk of running aground, which implied it had to wait there until the next season of high water.¹⁴ On the River Benue, operations were restricted between Lokoja and Makurdi from the month of June to November. Between Makurdi and Yola navigation was restricted to the period between July and early October; while the full voyage to Garua in Cameroun (1577km from Burutu) could only be carried out in the months of August and September.¹⁵

The challenge posed by lack of all year navigation and the increasing cost of transportation of produce along the Nigerian inland waterways led the British colonial government to devote more resources and time in finding alternative trade routes to the Niger-Benue Rivers. It was against this backdrop that the colonial government embarked on construction of railway and land roads across the country. With the construction and commissioning of the Makurdi bridge across the River Benue in 1932 the major trading and mining centres in Nigeria became integrated through the Porth- Harcourt to Jos, Kano and Maiduguri railway networks. The European companies doing business along the Lower Benue River, desirous of all year transactions latched onto the railways and began to convey produce through the Makurdi Rail Station by means of train coaches to Porth-Harcourt for export to Europe. The resultant consequence of the introduction of the railway system and the construction of trunk and feeder roads by the colonial government was the neglect of the inland waterways in terms of navigational facilities and dredging. Throughout the remaining years of colonial rule in Nigeria, transportation activities along the Lower Benue River experienced a downward trend. The government that took over from the colonial authority at independence did nothing to change the fortune of inland water

transportation, moreso that the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) which led the government at the centre and also the dominant party in Northern Nigeria was not so keen at developing infrastructure in Tiv land which they considered as the hotbed of opposition being the based of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) led by Joseph Saarwauam Tarka. While inland water transportation received less attention from the First Republic government the greatest challenge to its survival however was the oil boom economy of the 1970s which led to the neglect of agricultural production, especially cash crops which was the major driver of transportation activities along the Benue River. The neglect of the inland waterways in Nigeria has continued unabated in the post-colonial era thus limiting the size and scope of transportation in the Makurdi area of River Benue. Even though the Benue Links Transport Company ventured into boat services at some point between Makurdi and Oweto in Agatu, their operation was short lived and transport activities is currently dominated by fishers, sand miners and vegetable and rice farmers along the banks of the river.

Socio - Economic Impact of Boat Activities within Makurdi Area of River Benue

Apart from the early indigenous occupants of Makurdi and its environs, most of whom were part and parcel of boat activities such as boat building, fishing and sailing, European explorers and commercial companies used the River Benue to come in contact with the indigenous people for trade, transportation and settlements. In the process Makurdi got transformed into a port town and a commercial hub for various trade and peoples from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The peopling of Makurdi and its environs before European exploration up to the colonial era was largely dependent on the activities of the boatmen who conveyed migrants from the Niger-Benue confluence and areas along the course of River Benue and its tributaries such as Idah, Aganabode, Lokoja, Loko, Oweto, Ibi, Katsina Ala and Buruku; there were also foot migrants from the north such as Hausa, Kanuri and some of the indigenous communities of present day Nasarawa State who needed the services of boatmen to ferry them across the River in their bid to settle in Makurdi mainland.¹⁶ Makurdi as at the time of the arrival of the European in the 19th Century was already a cultural melting point due to the heterogeneous composition of the various settlement layouts.

However, the occupations of the early inhabitants of Makurdi was profoundly influenced by boat related activities such as boat making, fishing and sailing. Apart from vegetable growers along the bank of the rivers and traders, manufacturers of dugout canoes, fisher men and fish smokers and

professional boat drivers and divers all lived together along the bank of the river at Wadata, Wurukum, North Bank and Abinsi. These four settlements formed the nucleus of urbanization in Makurdi and served as the hub of commercial and social activities in the area prior to the advent of the Europeans. With the increase in population and need for European styled cement blocks housing, some of the inhabitants of Makurdi took to sand mining inside the river, hence apart from the traditional usage of canoe for fishing and transportation it also became a channel for the conveyance of sands and gravels to the river banks where they are usually stockpiled in heaps and sold to builders and the ubiquitous block moulding industries around the banks of the river.¹⁷

Boat activities in the Benue River area in the first three decades of the 20th Century can be likened to a double edged sword which on one side served as a stimulus for commercial and social activities and on the other side served as the avenue for the pacification and conquest of the Benue Basin by the British colonial authority who ultimately imposed a political control and an economic structure orchestrated for wholesale exploitation of the resources of the area.¹⁸ The Tivland expedition of 1900 and 1901 and that of 1906 - 1908 launched from Abinsi were largely organised and coordinated from the Benue waterway through the massive use of naval gunboats by the West African Frontier Force. The British colonial authority who unilaterally pronounced Nigeria as her colony, in the same year and the following year embarked on a ruthless invasion of Tivland on the ground that the Tivs questioned the presence of European Engineers engaged to work on telegram lines between Lokoja and Ibi on their territories. The scale of destruction witnessed in Tivland during the first wave of expedition was horrendous in terms of human casualties, farmlands, foodstuff and settlements. All that Lord Lugard needed to preempt a second round of expedition was a simple telegraph dispatched on 4th January 1906 to the colonial office following the clash between some Hausa agents of Royal Niger Company and the Jukuns who beckoned on their Tiv neighbours for assistance; the telegram reads thus, "Munshi tribe has destroyed Royal Niger Company's depot Abinsi. Navigation of Benue closed, making necessary preparation for strong military expedition".¹⁹ In the two years that the second invasion lasted, apart from the huge number of death recorded and widespread destruction of farmlands and the communities around Makurdi there was wide scale disruption in commercial activities and navigation along the Lower Benue Basin which impacted negatively on both local and export trade.²⁰

As the dust settled following the effective subjugation of the area along the waterway in Makurdi area trade and commercial activities picked up thus boosting both local and export trade. Lugard having consolidated his grip on the Benue River as the High Commissioner of Northern Protectorate focused on the development of the Benue inland waterways which consequently witnessed tremendous traffics.²¹ Lugard established various departments for the smooth running of his administration. He established the following departments; the Marine Department, Public Works Department, the Judicial System, Police, Military, Medical Department and Political Department. The Marine Department carried out repairs of all steamers and controlled the ferry services along the waterways to ensure safety and smooth navigation for travelers along the Niger – Benue waters.²² The Marine Department is also saddled with the responsibility of coordinating the Niger – Benue Transport founded by the colonial administration to convey people and goods across the length and breath of River Benue.

As a result of all these, coupled with the concerted efforts made by the colonial authority to dredge the river bigger vessels could sail far into the upper course of River Benue from the Confluence in Lokoja. The Rivers Niger and Benue, therefore, became the highways through which European firms started to move inland from their coastal bases. These firms established beaches at strategic locations on the rivers in places such as Onitsha, Asaba, Idah and Lokoja on the Niger and Makurdi, Katsina- Ala and Ibi on the Benue. These stations became hub of commercial activities with daily markets that witnessed transactions between foreign and Nigerian traders and producers of export commodities. These trade depots attracted patronage from neighbouring communities and helped to stimulate export production and trade within the Benue Basin. A scheduled marine transport services was introduced by the colonial government to boost administrative efficiency and trade along several inland waterways in Nigeria.²³ Leading European firms such as the Niger Company and John Holt and Co, also established their shipping lines, inclusive of several indigenous boat services. With their combined efforts the Niger-Benue Rivers witnessed unprecedented traffic and voyages that involved movement of passengers and cargoes up to the 1930s. At some point both the major owners of fleets of steamers, United Africa Company and John Holt had a combined total of about 40 powerboats and 140 barges which they used for the transportation of goods such as Livestock, Beniseed, Cotton goods (native), Cotton lint and Fibre, Kolanut, Groundnuts, Gum (Arabic and copal), Palm kernels, Potash, Rubber, Shea butter, Shea nuts, Tin ore, Bags and sacks of building materials, Flour, Provisions, European Rice, Spice, Sugar Beads, Haberdashery, Hardware,

Silk goods, Soap, Wearing apparel, Cigarettes, Salt, Wines, Kerosene, mirrors, gin, umbrellas, cutlass, knives, salt, cement and corrugated iron sheets.²⁴ During the colonial era, river transportation was pivotal in the imperialist penetration of the Benue Basin, the period witnessed the influx of European merchants along inland waterway in their quest to sell manufactured products from Europe and procure raw materials for European industries.²⁵

Though boat activities declined drastically in post-independence Nigeria due largely to shift of emphasis from water transport to railways, aviation and road transportation, it continued to serve as a major source of income and employment for indigenous fishermen, boat builders and sand miners. Local markets along the main course of River Benue and the tributaries continue to thrive essentially due to the presence of boatmen who engage in the movement of goods and passengers. In the areas around Makurdi, those who practiced farming along the bank of River Benue especially rice, sugar cane and vegetable growers have their canoes which aid their movements and help in the process of evacuating their harvests from farms to the markets. It is imperative to also point out that apart from the challenge posed by other alternative means of transportation to water transportation, most of the inland ports became moribund owing to the decline in the demand for cash crops and export commodities and the ascendancy of petro dollar economy and its debilitating effects on agro production in the Benue Basin.

Challenges Facing Boat Transportation within the Makurdi area of River Benue

Among the several challenges confronting boat transportation and navigation within the Makurdi area of River Benue is the most fundamental issue of seasonal fluctuations of water levels in the River Benue. During the dry season and the early onset of rain which last from November to June the water level recedes significantly, making navigation difficult and in some areas impossible. During this period, boats are often forced to dock for extended periods or navigate through shallow, unpredictable waters thereby increasing the risk of accidents. While the British colonial government through the Marine Service and some of the trading companies made concerted efforts to dredge the river by removing sandbars and hard deposits in the first three decades of the 20th Century, the arrival of the railway, especially the commissioning of the Railway bridge in Makurdi in 1932 led to a declining interest in navigation and water transportation, hence River Benue began to receive less attention in terms of maintenance of the

waterways and investments in modern boats and navigational facilities.²⁶ It is imperative to note that the problem of navigation along the river over the years is not only restricted to the dry season; in the rainy season, the river swells due to its shallow depth and obstructions caused by sediments which sometimes leads to flooding. At such time traffics are usually very low due to concern over safe navigation.²⁷

In addition to the natural impediments highlighted above, it has been argued forcefully by B.O Anyaoku that the construction of roads by the British colonial administration from 1919 and the expansion of the road network system in the 1940s and the improvement of the same in the 1970s by the post-independence government diverted capital from water transportation.²⁸ Inland water transportation as designed by the British colonial government was essentially to meet the need of European capitalist economy than for the benefits of the local communities. Thus where railways and roads were considered to be more efficient alternatives to water transportation efforts were deployed to advance and promote them. The gradual neglect of the inland waterway around Makurdi and its environs followed the same pattern.

The lack of adequate infrastructure to support boat transportation also a persistent issue along the Makurdi area of River Benue. With the decline in export crop business in the Benue Basin in the Post-independence era proper docking facilities, jetties, and boat maintenance services became a rarity. Poor maintenance of ports and navigational facilities has led to many boats docking on makeshift or dilapidated landing platforms which makes boarding and offloading dangerous, particularly in bad weather conditions.

Safety is a major concern in boat transportation within the Makurdi area. Overcrowding of boats, lack of safety equipment (such as life jackets), and poorly maintained vessels are common. Furthermore, many operators lack formal training or adherence to safety regulations, which further exacerbate the risks of accidents and fatalities. Wednesday 24th October 2018, 18 out of over 20 mourners travelling from Buruku to Logo in the night suffered shipwreck and lost their lives as a result of poor visibility and overloading at the exact spot where 17 passengers died when their boat capsized in 2013²⁹ On July 5th 2020 a boat with the carriage capacity for 15 passengers took onboard some passengers in addition to twenty three members of ECAN Church travelling from the bank of River Benue in Wadata to attend an annual convention but unfortunately 21 of the church members perished as the boat conveying them capsized due to overloading at Kgwathan Sule in Guma Local Government Area. Seven other passengers in the ill fated boat also lost their lives.³⁰ On Tuesday 20th September 2022,

26 passengers were rescued alive when a boat conveying 40 passengers from Guma Local Government Area to Buruku Local Government Area sank closed to Fada village in another incidence of overloading.³¹ The regulatory oversight of inland water transportation is weak, with many boat operators circumventing the few existing safety measures. The National Inland Waterway Authority (NIWA) apart from dishing out threats to operators of boat services along the Benue River in Makurdi area has not done much in terms of surveillance and sanctioning of erring operators of boat service. The Area Manager of NIWA in Makurdi, Engineer Samson Onobu while on public sensitization at the Wadata waterside in Makurdi recently disclosed the causes of boat mishaps in the area under his jurisdiction as lack of adherence to safety measures such overloading, over-speeding, night sailing, absence of life jackets or enforcement of its usage, rickety or dilapidated boats and inexperienced boat operators.³² The absence of stringent laws governing boat operations makes it difficult to enforce necessary safety protocols; the government regulatory agencies and Marine Police in the Post-colonial era has not done much to ensure safe navigation along the Benue River.

Over the years the quality of the boats plying the Benue River has been on the decline. Most of the boats operating in the Makurdi area are outdated, with many being dugout canoes and motorized boats that are inefficient and unsafe for large-scale transportation. These boats often lack modern navigation systems and safety features, making them prone to breakdowns and accidents. In addition, environmental challenges such as pollution and the accumulation of debris in the river have impacted negatively on boat transportation along the water way in Makurdi. Waste from human activities, industries, and agriculture are often dumped into the river, causing environmental degradation. This pollution not only endangers the aquatic life in the river but also poses risks to boats, which can be damaged by submerged debris.

In recent years, insecurity in form of banditry and herdsmen attacks along the banks of River Benue has posed significant risks to boat transportation in the area. Criminal activities, including robbery and attacks on communities along the waterways have become more frequent. This situation has discouraged many people from using water transport, thus limiting its economic potential in the study area.

Conclusion

Water transportation and boat activities within Makurdi axis of River Benue since the advent of the British colonial rule in the area has passed

through different phases. Though great efforts were made by the colonial government at the early stage to widened the scope of boat activities around Makurdi and adjoining communities, the momentum relapsed following the arrival of the railway and road networks in the area. The lack of sustained interest in the development of inland waterways and boat activities clearly demonstrate and explain the philosophy behind colonial infrastructural development tailored to satisfy essentially the interests of foreign investment and commerce at the expense of the interests of indigenous communities. Unfortunately, the Post-colonial government for over six decades has not done much to improve the state of inland waterways and water transportation within the Makurdi area of River Benue and the entire Benue-Niger Rivers. The perpetual and sustained neglect of maintenance of the Benue inland waterway and other navigational challenges in addition to poor regulatory measures by government agencies have been the bane of boat activities within the Makurdi area of River Benue.

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