

THE RELEVANCE OF INLAND WATER TRANSPORT TO JOB CREATION IN LOKOJA, KOGI STATE NIGERIA 1991-2024

By

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Abstract

The research investigate the relevance of inland water transport to job Creation in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria 1991-2024. In Pre-History, water transport was known to be the cheapest and major mode of transporting bulky commodities over long distances. Commercial water transport was particularly important on the Lower Niger River (L.N.R) this research is important because it addresses the problem of job creation in Lokoja. It argues that unemployment would be minimized in Lokoja if transportation on the lower Niger River is developed. The study adopts historical methodology using primary and secondary data. The study recommend: first, that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) develop inland water transportation on the Lower Niger River to make it navigable all year round to Ocean- going ships up to the confluence at Lokoja. Second, that the federal government of Nigeria in collaboration with Kogi State government adopted Public Private Partnership (PPP) to rejuvenate transportation on the Lower Niger River for job creation. Some of the research questions raised in this study are: First, in line with historical realities, how can transportation on the Lower Niger River create employment in Lokoja? Second, what role does labour play in shipping activities at Lokoja river port?

Key Word: Inland water ways, Job creation, Transport, Lokoja.

Introduction

The transportation situation in Nigeria is deplorable due to general neglect, absence of a transport policy to guide the development of the transport sector, lack of competent personnel and transport professionals to advise government on matters related to transportation development and management in the country. This research argues that the problem of unemployment in Lokoja would be minimized if transportation on the Lower Niger River is developed, such that Ocean-going ships can navigate on the Lower Niger River from the confluence of the Rivers Niger and

Benue at Lokoja, down to the open sea at Burutu on the open sea throughout the year.

The research discusses the activities of boats that plied the Lower Niger River in the hey days of European commercial water traffic on the Lower Niger River from the open sea at Burutu up to the confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue at Lokoja. The study discusses the activities of various transnational corporations which operated shipping business in the colonial period. These corporations usually employ the services of agent buyers who served as middle men that purchased cash crops from the Middle belt and the Northern part of Nigeria for onward shipment to metropolitan cities of Europe such as: London, Birmingham, Glassgow, Paris, Holland, Germany, Spain etc. Africans were employed in large number to work as clerks, Stevedore, Store Keeper, Pilot, Able Seamen, Technicians, apprentices. The study touches on the demand for labour and the scarcity of labour compare with the post-independence period when unemployment became a societal problem.

Conceptual Clarification

Transport

A.D Ali¹, in his Doctoral dissertation at the University of Lagos, 2010, defines transport as the movement of man and materials from one place to another. The movement can be by vehicles such as bicycle, cars, buses, Lorries, train (on land), aircraft (in the air), or by canoe, boat, ferry, and ship (on water). A functional transportation system is capable of supporting the growth and development of agriculture, commerce, industry, sport, military, education, tourism, etc. Transport is important because it enable man to reach somewhere and carry out further activities. The transport sector is a large and labour intensive industry. Transportation has always remained an important activity of man from the most primitive to the most advanced states.

Lokoja

A. D. Ali², In the Changing Economic Fortunes of Lokoja, conceptualise Lokoja as having a dual meaning. First, it could be used to refer to the geographical area and people in Lokoja Local Government. Second, it could be used to refer to the cosmopolitan town itself. However, before August, 1991, when Kogi State was created with Lokoja metropolis as it capital, Lokoja was broadly used to refer to the people and settlement of Lokoja town, Kotonkarfi District which embraces all Igbirra koto peoples comprising several villages, Oworo District with its headquarters in Agbaja town, including all the Oworo villages; the Kakanda, Kupa and Egan District (generally classified as Nupe by other groups). On the other hand Lokoja is a word used to refer to Lokoja town which has grown since 1854 to become a cosmopolitan capital city.

Inland Water Ways

A.D.Ali.³, in his Doctoral researches at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, identifies inland water ways as the best mode by which man Transported himself before other

modes were used. The Nigerian inland water ways comprise the coastal creeks, lagoons, lakes, and rivers.

Pegrum, Dudley F⁴ in Transportation economies and public policy, defines inland waters of a country to include rivers, lakes, canals, lagoons, and streams. Some of the inland water ways are linked to the seas. Transportation on the Inland water ways in Nigeria are under regulations by the National Inland Water Ways authority (NIWA). However, the federal government of Nigeria has failed since independence to develop inland water transportation.

Job Creation

Samson Bako⁵, in Nigeria Human Rights Report, Explain that every individual have their right to work under equitable and satisfactory condition, and shall receive equal pay for equal work. Going by the social contract theory, the citizen and the state are held together in a symbiotic relationship, where as the citizen owes allegiance to the state, the state in return shoulders the responsibility of making his life worth living. The 1979 constitution,⁶ which contains the fundamental objective and directive principles of state policy, just like the international covenant on economic social, and cultural rights and other international human rights instruments relate generally to individual welfare on the society.

Statement of research problem

A. D. Ali⁷, in Nigeria Police Academy Journal of Humanities, lamented that children born in Lokoja native town are stigmatized by migrants as "Kabawa Boys". The general impression is that "Kabawa Boys" take laws into their hands, they are incorrigible, they are cultist, drug addicts, they are notorious to coming late to school, they are possessed of witchcraft and are fetish, they are superstitious to the extent that if a motor vehicle in accident kills a person, the driver would say it was a goat he saw not a human being. This emanates from the belief that Kabawa people can materialize and dematerialize (appear and disappear) or transform into another object or animal as it is believed that they are spiritually powerful. Even at school, they go late, they fight under slight provocation, and can beat up a teacher. Consequently, they were given the name 'bad boys'.

According to Mallam Abdulkadiri Nda Yahaya,⁸

because of the many unemployed youths in Kabawa and Lokoja native town generally, who are seen as societal nuisance and menace by way of cultism, drug addiction, kidnapping, armed robbery, politicians over the years use these Kabawa youths in electioneering campaign. Thereafter, they are recruited as party thugs and placed on a monthly wage of ten thousand naira per month. Some of those Youths are rural-urban migrant unemployed labour. Most of

them live in Kabawa area at Lokoja where they reside with relatives or friends or at least are able to secure cheap accommodation and adding to the ghetto condition of Kabawa.

The aborigines

First settlers: Oworo, Bassa Nge, Nupe, and Hausa, ethnic groups were either of fishing family, canoe men family, trading family, Hunters, and famers. Some lived in a house boat constructed with wooden planks, nails and plywood. Others lived in low-lying mud house with corrugated roof, four feet high door, one window that cannot contain a human adult head. The aborigine settlement was a ghetto with many congested or closely built mud houses some of which were barricaded with mud walls especially in the Muslim unguwars or quarters.

The population is on the average of thirty persons per compound. Children born into aborigine Muslim family must complete quoranic education before attempting to receive western education. This is partly responsible for the retardation of aborigine Muslim children in western education and giving the impression that Lokoja people are backward in western education. The polygamy practice of Muslim aborigine bred many children, who could not be sent to western schools due to lack of finance.⁹

Alhaji Ali jiya lawal¹⁰ noted that most children born in native quarters of Lokoja, although, are born in an urban centre, find themselves growing up not used to toilet and bathroom facilities, this is because naturally, they are used to having their bath in the River Niger and strolling down the River Niger to defecate whenever they are pressed. To the native people, there is no shame about these activities because it has become a way of life which they were born into. To the rest of the people of Lokoja, this method of convenience adopted by the native is no longer strange but a familiar scene.

According to the African Charter on Human and People' Rights¹¹, everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable condition of work and to protection from unemployment. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity.

A Lokoja resident, Mr. Lenox Ameh, noted that the creation of Kogi State on August 27, 1991, with its capital in Lokoja, witnessed a new dimension in the nature and effects of cultism and drug abuse in the cosmopolitan city of Lokoja. Before the creation of Kogi State, the people of Lokoja, were predominantly fishermen, farmers, hunters, canoe men and blacksmiths. From 1991, Lokoja town witnessed great physical changes in aspect of urbanization and infrastructure development. Lokoja also witnessed a very high degree of population changes as migrant workers and job seekers settle on every available land space. There was a proportionate increase in market size to the extent that demand for food stuff outran supply cost of living rose comparable only to Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria.¹²

Alhaji Gambo Abdullahi, a local politician,¹³ expresses concern that youths who migrated from their villages and cannot find jobs stay put in Lokoja and became tools for politician and aspirants. All these groups have constituted themselves into pressure groups which we now call cults. They and their leaders constitute menace to others gainfully employed and those going about their legitimate business. This situation calls for urgent government intervention. Lokoja boat Rigatta (annual boat sport competition) which has come to stay as an annual festival should be encouraged to awaken the consciousness on the relevance of development of transportation on the River Niger at Lokoja. This would go a long way to generate employment for the very many young unemployed peoples of Lokoja.

The Growth of Navigation in Lokoja

Howard. Pedraza,¹⁴ in *Borioboola-Gha: The Story of Lokoja; The First British Settlement in Nigeria*, wrote that Lokoja sprang up as a real metropolitan settlement and colony in the 1850s, similar to two other colonies on the West African coast. The first was Freetown founded in 1793 as a home for liberated slaves. The second was Lagos which was original site for one of the largest slave ports of the West African coast. Freetown, Lagos, and Lokoja were founded as symbols of England.

A. D. Ali,¹⁵ in *Nigeria Police Academy Journal of Humanities* vol.1, No.1, 2016, noted that a decade after the colony of Lokoja was founded, four transnational firms established trade stations on the bank of the river. These were; Alexander Miller and Brothers (agent James Craft) with 3 steamers; The Central African Company (agent David Macintosh) 1 steamer; The West Africa Company (Agent James Crowther) with 3 steamers. They dealt mostly in palm produce as palm oil was in much demand in England as a valuable vegetable grease used for soap and railway-axle. There was also demand for ivory, shea butter, nuts, Hippopotamus teeth, wild boars tusk required by dentist. All these products were found around the confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue and were supplied to Lokoja for sale.

A. D. Ali,¹⁶ in his Doctoral researches at the University of Lagos, 2010, explained that European trading activities in the Lower Niger was aided by transportation on the River Niger. From the 1870s European trading companies such as the National African Company (which became the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and later the United African Company (UAC)), Messr Miller and Co, the Central African Trading Company, James Pinnock and Co. and other began to penetrate further up the Lower Niger and established trade stations at Aboh, Onitsha, and Lokoja.

W.N.E. Bosah¹⁷ in an interview explained that European trading companies and individual merchant companies began to acquire landed properties along the river side and ports of the various towns along the Lower Niger. In 1917, the British Cotton Growers Association (B.C.G.A) secured a lease of land at Ilushi in Kabba province. (It had earlier established a ginnery in Lokoja in 1901), the company paid a compensation of £80 (Eighty Pounds) to the indigenes.

A. D. Ali,¹⁸ in *Samuel Adegboyega University (SAU) Journal Of Humanities* Vol.2, No.1 and 2, 2014, wrote that, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of commercial companies operating at Lokoja increased and come to include

the now forgotten names of J. Fiarley and Co., Pagenstecker and Co., H. Sigler and Co., Christian S. Cole, Tin Area walkdens , all of which were later dissolved or have been incorporated into the most successful of the companies, the United African Company (UAC). In the year 1905, the Anglo -African Bank started operation in Lokoja but its business was later acquired by the Bank of Nigeria which in its turn was absorbed by the Bank of British West Africa (BBWA). By 1912, when the Kano groundnut export trade was booming, several European trading firms had established trading post at Lokoja. This includes the German company of G. L. Gaiser. The UAC, Paterson Zochonis, Societe Commerciale, de l'vest African, G. Gottsschalk and Co, London African and oversea Limited, J.F. Sick and Co; Co-operative Wholesale Society, Union Trading Company, K. Chellaram and Sons, J.T. Chanrai and Co.

Information from the National Archives Kaduna¹⁹ shows that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a large wharf had been constructed at Lokoja. Rocky obstacles and snags were blown up, and the river buoyed. The buoying made the Niger and Benue Rivers safe for navigation. Some of the major European trading firms constructed their own wharves at Lokoja beach. At Lokoja , most of the trading firms which had depot's or ware houses were situated near the beach. Hence the trading company sites were concentrated in one particular area all along the beach road and the Niger River.

A.D.Ali,²⁰ in his M.A. Thesis at the University of Jos, 1991, assert that, "Lokoja was a river port which was sub-station to Burutu where vessels from Burutu might stop over (depending on directives from the main port at Burutu) either for loading or off-loading cargoes and trans-shipment of goods. Most vessels from Burutu, however, usually stopped at Lokoja for refuelling and changing pilots and to make necessary hand over. Baro was a terminal port or the highest point of navigation on the Niger where all vessels finally stopped and return to Lokoja".

Produce Buying and Export in Lokoja Trading District

According to Alhaji Ali Nda Maka,²¹ in as much as Lokoja served as the principal In-land port and deport, supply of labour was essential to smooth operations of the ports. Before 1900, Africans were originally employed as labourers they were given on the job training in the various field of specialization, then haven attained proficiency they were left in charge as; pilots, captains, cleaners, Stewards, clerks and porters. Transportation and commerce on the Niger at Lokoja provided ready employment for Lokoja residents and immigrants from far and near. Indeed, Lokoja was noted for employment opportunities and for commercial activities. Lokoja was a nodal settlement for buying and selling for people from all parts of Nigeria and foreigners as well.

Lokoja purchasing district comprises the following stations in the Kabba province and Umaisha in the Benue provinces. Isanlu, Ankpa Ibilo, Kabba, Oguma, Okene, kwali, Kwakwa, Auchu, Yewuni, Loko, Amagede, Girinya, Mozum, Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Itobe, Agenebode and idah.

According to Alhaji Shehu Musa,²² a staff of National Inland Water Ways Authority (NIWA), in order to facilitate the purchase of export produce the various European

trading firms appointed the service of Nigerian middle men. Some of these Nigerian middle men had previously engaged in the pre-colonial long-distance trade, others were men with business acumen, while some others were merely picked because they were interpreters.

A. D. Ali²³ wrote in *Trade and Transport in the Lower Niger 1830-2011* that prominent Lokoja indigenes who participated in the colonial export trade as middle men and agent were; Audu Kenin Captain, Teedi HuKu Gishiri, Alhaji Ibrahim Dogon Aziki, Imuraina, Shehu Ture, Mallam Gana (who traded in groundnut, locust bean, and cotton from Northern Nigeria to Lokoja). Others were, Alhaji Zaria, Sharia Quaria (traded solely in kolanut between Ikare, Lokoja, Cameroun and Wuroboki in Yola).

According to Abraham K. Ohwoho of NIWA, Warri: "As far as Lokoja is concerned the history of transportation on the Lower Niger will not be complete without a mention of these middlemen. Many Lokoja men also trained as captains and pilots. They were mostly from the Nupe, Kakanda and Igbira koto ethnic groups."²⁴

A. D. Ali²⁵ researches revealed that, after the 1950s, a new generation of traders came up in Lokoja. The traders bought goods from the big merchants in the north on credit, shipped it to Lokoja and to other towns in the lower Niger for sale after which they returned the capital to their creditors. Such were the likes of Umar Danduniya, Adamu Idah, Mallam waziri Idris, Chief of Okene, Alhaji Attha Ibrahim, Alhaji kasimu Gana and Alhaji Kaka.

Demand for Labour at Lokoja Port

The river Port of Lokoja experienced a heavy traffic during the colonial days of boom in Cash Crops export. Since none of the big steamers or Ocean-going vessels could come inland at low waters. The process of transportation required a tug or vessels of suitable draught pulling some barges up and down the Niger and Benue Rivers. The commonest operating unit was one power craft with two barges towed alongside. Barges were not towed in line often because when sailing up river it would be difficult to manoeuvre a line of barges round certain bends and when sailing down river, if the power unit were to run aground, barges towed in the line would bear down on the grounded vessels and dangerous collision may occur.²⁶

Lokoja also played host to other companies such as the Niger River Transport (NRT) Company, the German company of G. L. Gaiser, Paterson Zochonis (PZ), Societe Commercial de Ovest African, G. Goltshalk and Co., London African and Overseas Limited, J. F. Sick and Co., Co-operative Wholesale Society, Union Trading Company (UTC), K. Chellaram and Sons, and J.T. Chanrai and Co. Other companies which had one or few vessels were, Compagnie de Transport et Commerce (CTC), Socony Vacuum Company (S.V.O.C.), and Du Campanie Francaise. Water transportation on the Lower Niger also increased as trade boomed.²⁷

There were several river fleets at Lokoja built in Nigeria at the boat yard of Makurdi, Opobo, and Epe. These fleets conveyed imported manufactured goods from the seaports to the hinterland. Before the 1960s, hundreds of canoes, tugs,

barges and ships owned by expatriates and indigenous merchants and traders plied the Lower Niger. Government craft or vessels at Lokoja participated in a wide range of government activities including administration, medical, ferry operations, creek services, channels demarcation and river patrols and surveys. River port infrastructural facilities such as sheds, Berths, radio, and telephone communication system were provided. Some of the major European trading firms constructed their own wharves at Lokoja beach.²⁸

It is estimated that a branch steamer was capable of carrying goods weighing 1000 tons under good circumstances that is when there is a suitable draught. Therefore, if a branch steamer or vessels was pulling or pushing four barges this would mean it was carrying loads weighing $1000 \times 4 = 4000$ tons. The size of the barges ranged from twelve feet to twenty-four feet long. Some vessels when heavily loaded had a draught of about twelve feet in the river. Baro was a terminal port or the highest point of navigation on the Niger where all vessels finally stopped and returned to Lokoja. Lokoja to Garua usually took up to ten days but less when descending.²⁹

No one pilot ever piloted a vessel throughout the whole length of either the Niger and Benue Rivers. The survey along the Niger - Benue Rivers was divided into three operations. When the Royal Niger Company administration was replaced, the colonial administration invariably objected to the use of forced labour by private firms operating at Lokoja as can be seen in the following commentary:

.....His Excellence the Governor comment as follows under date 23:3:1913:--- I do not like this compulsory labour from Bassa. The mines ___ field have to recruit their own labour and I see no reason why the trading firms in Lokoja should not do the same.³⁰

Chief Press Secretary to the Governor

As Lokoja Port was a busy port the question of the supply of labour was a very serious affair. Each company recruited its own workers throughout the period of boom. In European companies, workers were often at liberty to withdraw their service from one company to another.

LABOUR

In as much as Lokoja served as the principal In land port and deport, supply of labour was essential to the smooth operation of the port. Before 1900, Africans were originally employed as labourers. They were then given on the job training in the various field of specialization, then having attained proficiency they were left in charge; pilots, captains, cleaners, Stewards, clerks and porters. Most of them were recruited through compulsory labour in the early days from Lokoja and it's environs. However when the Royal Niger Company administration was replaced, the colonial administration invariable objected to the use of forced labour by private firms operating at Lokoja.

The S.S. Pluto was at the Lokoja wharf discharging coal when I arrived on September 26th and some difficulty was experienced in recruiting sufficient labour to discharge her cargo. I suggest that they will be required to supply labour to help discharge these ocean going and branch steamers. A representative of Native staff from Bassa and Kabba should be detailed to the contonment magistrate to send out and warn the district heads in the vicinity of Lokoja when steamers are expected, The rate of discharging coal from the Pluto was distinctly slow and would not bear comparison.....³¹

Chief Press Secretary to the Government
29th October, 1912.

Each company recruited its own workers throughout the period of boom. In European companies, workers were often at liberty to withdraw their service from one company to another.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INLAND WATER WAYS DEPARTMENT

The federal Marine Department otherwise known as the Old Marine; was formerly established at Lokoja in 1901, as a workshop for effecting repairs to steamer. After the British government had taken over the administrative and military assets of the Royal Niger Company on payment of compensation. The only means of communication and transportation into the hinterland as at that time were the Rivers Niger and Benue. The government fleet as at 1907 was as follows.

Table 3: Government Fleet 1907.

Name of ship	Date commissioned.
CORONA	1903
SAROTA	1902
EMPIRE	1896
KAPPELT	1904
KAMPALA	1901
KARONGA	1901
W-SWAN	1903
B-SWAN	1903
SNIPE	1904
STOCK	1904
PELICAN	1896

ZARTA	1907
SULTAN	1907
FIREFLY	1901
BITTERN	1901
CORMORANT	1901
LAKE CHAD	1906
DIVER	1901
EGRET	1903
OSPREY	1906
NODDY	1906
NO 1 LIGHTER	1901
NO 2 LIGHTER	1901
NO 3 LIGHTER	1901
NO 4 LIGHTER	1898
FLAMINGO	1903
GULL	1903
HAWIL	1904
IRIS	1904
JACKDAW	1904
KINGFISHER	1901
LAPWING	1905
MALLARD	1905
MURAJIFERRY	1907

Source; NEDECO Report p. 18.

The government of Northern Nigeria since 1907, maintained the only government services on the river. Steamers with an aggregate tonnage of 665 tons and lighters with a carrying capacity of 250 tons were employed.

FUNCTIONS OF THE INLAND WATERWAYS DEPARTMENT

Firstly, running and maintaining Nigeria Harbours.

Secondly, performing the functions of a Royal Naval Force. (Other services for the navy included training able seamen to be later absorbed into the Royal Naval Force or into establishment for running vessels).

Thirdly, Government Coastal/ Agency activities and fourthly inland waterways functions (i.e. survey, Hydrological/ Hydraulic engineering duties, buoyage duties, clearing of water ways of wreck and weeds, running and maintaining federal crafts and plants and other transportation services, running creeks. It also operated administrative launches for conveying colonial officials such as the District Officers, Doctors, education officers, military officers and so on in the riverine area.

There were many colonial officials who resided at Lokoja when it was a provincial headquarters. Most of these colonial administrators usually went on tour to supervise the activities, of their subordinate officials. Some of such tours is given below in table.

Table 4: Number of European and Africans employed under the Government Marine (1932)

S/N	Position.	Europeans Employed.	Africans employed
1	Director of Marine	2	
2	Deputy Director of Marine	1	
3	Personal Assistant to the Director	2	
4	Principal Marine Officers & Marine Officers.	78	
5	Gd 1 & 2	2	
6	Superintendent Engineer Principal Engineer, Engineers Grades 1 and 2, Naval Architects, Reclamation Officers,	97	
7	Technical Instructor	2	
8	Chief Accountant	1	
9	Assistant Chief Accountant	14	
10	Senior Accountant and Accountants	1	
11	. Chief store keeper	10	
12	Pilots	8	
13	Tug Master	38	
14	Foreman and Beach Master		2

Source; A.D Ali

THE RELEVANCE OF INLAND WATER TRANSPORT TO JOB CREATION IN LOKOJA

Water Transport is the oldest mode of transportation. It is the most energy efficient form of transportation and gives the lowest running cost. Less amount of energy is required to overcome friction and propel a vehicle in water than is required on land and far less than to keep a vehicle airborne. This advantage has made it possible for large quantities of bulky goods to be conveyed on water such as iron-ore, grains, liquids such as petroleum products, and steel products. About 70 per cent of international trade travels by water while the balance is carried by either land or air.³² Nigeria is fortunate to have the River Niger as a natural waterway. This natural waterway can be improved as a transport infrastructure. The Lower Niger can thus be developed for cheap movement of goods and persons between the sea port and their hinterlands. Other Inland waterways in Nigeria can be improved and made navigable and useful as means of transportation. The Nigerian government recognized this fact by establishing National In land Water Ways Authority (NIWA) to oversee the improvement of transportation in the Lower Niger. If the Lower Niger is made navigable from the confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue Ocean-going ships will be able to sail to the confluence before the goods are taken to other parts of the country. However, the federal government has not devoted enough resources to the project of dredging the Niger. Experts say that the portion of the lower Niger which requires to be dredged covers 300 km from Aboh to Lokoja. According to Engineer Muhammad Dangana:

To develop a sustainable river transport system, it requires capital Dredging of the River Niger and planned maintenance dredging which is expected to solve the problem of silting. Apart from dredging, installation of light buoys and safety apparatus along the waterways, river training works, removal of wrecks and clearing of debris and other obstructions is required.³³

The River Niger provided the main access from the coast to the hinterlands of Nigeria. In the 1950s, more than 800,000 tonnes of cargo were shipped in the Lower Niger. Unfortunately, in the 1970s the figure declined to less than 80,000 tonnes annually. Thereafter, the tonnage of the transported cargo is negligible.³⁴

River transport is suited for the movement of low-cost bulk and semi- bulk cargo over long distance. Thousands of tons can be moved on a single voyage. This is considerable economies of scale in this mode of transport. This economic advantage is seen in the greatly reduced transportation cost per unit cargo. Speaking on the freight capacity of the waterways, Engineer Petar Tolofashe, noted that:

If water transport is properly planned and operated it can take many trailers and trucks off the road. The Waterways in Nigeria are seriously underutilized. Water transport is efficient and affordable. It has a high prospect of revenue yielding. Inland water ports can generate more income by increasing their usage.³⁵

The Lower Niger could serve extensively the transportation needs of Nigerian particularly in the aspect of trading activities by the river side dwellers. The Lower Niger could also serve a useful purpose for the transportation of agricultural produce to the seaports for onward shipment to overseas. In the 1920s the Lower Niger accounted for well over 30 % of produce exported from Nigeria.³⁶

Experts say that water transport has a low capital outlay and operational cost. It is resistant to traction at moderate speed. Enumerating the benefits of water transport, Engineer Usman Nda Lada, stated that:

Water transport is the cheapest mode of transportation compared with road, rail, and air transport. Water transport is safe and suitable for carrying bulky goods like cement, steel products, timber, etc. It is environmentally friendly. If water transport is developed it is capable of taking off the much traffic from the road and minimized traffic congestion in the cities. Water transport is 5 times cheaper than rail transport, 25 times cheap than road transport and 50 times cheaper than air transport. If water transport is developed in Nigeria it is capable of diverting 30 per cent of traffic from the road.³⁷

The economic potentials of a developed water transport cannot be overemphasized. Water transport is capable of generating large revenue from tourism as obtains in technologically advanced countries. Water transport is indispensable for the conveyance of passengers and goods for the riverine communities.³⁸

Dudley F. Pegrum,³⁹ compared water transport to motor transport and highlighted their common features. He explained that the waterways have vehicles such as canoes, boats, ferries, motor lunches, and ships just like cars, buses, lorries and trucks ply on the high ways. The Waterways over which the traffic moves are similar to the public highways. The terminal facilities are comparable with the motor

parts. If the navigable waterways in Nigeria are well developed, it would not only be a means to economic development but an instrument for national integration. An improvement of the efficiency of water transportation in Nigeria would bring about an improvement in the productivity of the economy. If the waterways are developed as a cheap means of transportation it could serve as a substitute to road, rail and airways, Developing the waterways offers better prospects than the wasteful investment on the railways, roads and airways.

The argument on the advantages of water transport over other modes of transportation is further explained by pegrum that it is more convenient for heavier goods to be conveyed on water than on the highways because the waterways does not suffer traction bulky commodities such as iron ore, coal, stone, gravel, cement, forest products, grains and petroleum products are better moved on the domestic waterways. Inland water transport is most important to the industrial development of Nigeria. In the steel industry, the Ajaokuta steel Mills as well as other steel rolling mills were designed to rely heavily on water transport. Water transport is useful for the movement of heavy raw materials and finished products from the steel complexes to the open market and from the open market to the steel complex. The Aluminium smelter at Ikot-Abasi (ALSCON) in Akwa-Ibom state also relies heavily on the Imo River for the transportation of its processed aluminium ingots to the sea ports. For the expected development to take place in this sector, a fully developed and efficient Inland waterways transportation system is necessary.⁴⁰

The existence of many rivers and lakes in Nigeria facilitates water transportation particularly in the riverine areas. Till date water transportation is the only means of transport in most of the riverine areas.⁴¹

An interesting and profitable investment opportunity awaits Nigeria private investors in the Inland waterways transport sector. This is particularly in the area of commercial transportation (such as ferry services), barge bulk cargo service, large container services and regulated floating counter transport (mobile retail shop). Other profitable investment opportunities include large- scale fishing farm, tourism, solid mineral prospecting, oil field services, agro-allied linkages and water sports.⁴²

Nigeria needs to make a conscious effort at developing Inland water transport as a necessary path toward creating a new Nigeria economy. Investment in the Inland waterways would create employment opportunities for some of the 200 million people in Nigeria. It would also generate revenue for the government through regular payment of taxes and other tariffs.⁴³

Efforts are being made towards the buying of NIWA Shares as part of the privatization exercise of the government. On the issues of making the lower Niger navigable all year-round and the viability of Inland water transportation in Nigeria, some experts believed that:

Dredging will not completely solve the problem of silting of the Lower Niger. The other alternative to dredging to enhance navigation in the lower Niger is installation of river training works, river management relevant research, channel demarcation, channel patrols, channel buoyage and navigational aids installation.⁴⁴

It is the view of practitioners that if water transport is adequately developed about 45 per cent of traffic would be diverted from road and rail. Transportation is also viable for all the lakes if they are dredged or developed. Water transport is also

capable of yielding high revenue. Inland water transport serves about 30 % of Nigerians. Scholars of privatization believed that privatization of the Inland waterways' operations would bring about an improvement in water transport enterprises, institutional structures and landward connection to the ports. Effort is being made by the Federal Government to develop the Inland River ports of the Lower Niger at Lokoja, Baro, Idah, Onitsha, and Calabar. Serious effort is also being made at dredging the Lower Niger. NIWA co-ordinates all activities of the federal government in the Lower Niger.⁴⁵

Conclusion

From this Study, we have seen that transportation and commerce on the Niger at Lokoja provided ready employment for Lokoja residence and immigrants from far and near. Indeed, Lokoja, was noted for employment opportunities and for commercial activities. Lokoja was a nodal settlement for buying and selling for people from all parts of Nigeria and foreigners as well. Lokoja was a trading district headquarters where the Senior district manager with headquarters at Lokoja was controlled the Lokoja-Bida District and from where he controlled all affairs concerning imports and exports in all the areas under his district. In as much as Lokoja served as the Principal Inland Port and depot, supply of labour was essential to the smooth operation of the port. Hence, this paper recommends that transportation on the Lower Niger River be developed to make it navigable all year round to Ocean-going ships from Lokoja on the Confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue at Lokoja down to the open Sea at Buruntu.

Endnotes

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