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Chapter Twenty

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Introduction

The development of transport system in Nigeria had been a gradual one, developing with leaps and bounds with all its strains and stresses; the system went into elaboration phases and then to the present transformation stage. The advent of the British colonial administration in Nigeria seems to have been the epoch of its metamorphosis. This does not invalidate the transport system in Nigeria prior to the coming of the white man. It is pertinent to note that transportation system, prior to British intervention in the life of the people was at a very low ebb, and could not reach a standard to sustain international tourism.

The rail system seemed to have blazed the trail. The railway was primarily built as an aid to general economic development and in the interest of political administration. The railway was pushed into the hinterland to serve the main cash crop areas and population cluster, and to developed mines. The ancient market and craft centers of Kano developed rapidly after the coming of the railway in 1911 (J.C. Nwafor, 1982:126). From its inception the Nigerian railway system was operated and managed as a government department until October 11, 1955, when it was established as a public corporation and became known as the Nigerian Railway Corporation (N.R.C.) (J.C. Nwafor: 132).
Most of the traffic was derived from the populous forest zone and from the rich population centers of the cotton and groundnut belt of the North. The impact of road competition on rail passenger traffic has been increasingly felt in recent years, owing to the introduction of well organized inter-state coach services by state governments. Since independence, federal government investments in Nigerian Railway had increased. Generally to travel by rail is by far cheaper than by road, and air transportation. However, it is slower and that is the kind more suitable for tourists. But the rail transport in Nigeria today is in a state of muddle. If rail transport is to accommodate tourist industry in Nigeria, there must be a fundamental reorganization in the system. This should feature in the form of structural expansion on rail roads to reach major country sides especially the potentially tourist destinations. This will in no small measure enhance domestic tourism. High cost of transportation is an impediment to potential tourists in Nigeria.

Roads

Roads have now assumed greater importance than rail in the movement of both passengers and freight. Since independence, road transport has always had a steady rising share of capital investment in the transport sector. Modern road building started in Nigeria around 1900, (J.C. Nwafor, 1982:96), when the then existing bush paths were developed into motorable roads. But co-ordinated road development did not commence until 1925 (J.O.C. Onyemelukwe, 1982:128). As the needs of the economy increased, considerable efforts have been made towards improving upon the existing road networks and constructing new ones so as to cope with the growing traffic volumes. The construction and maintenance of roads are the responsibilities of the federal, state and local governments.

Good roads extend those underdeveloped areas to the outside world, thereby easing the mobility of people. In fact, a factor constructing good roads is a way of developing the
countryside, thereby easing the mobility of people, a factor which is tourist oriented. By improving the ports at Warri and Calabar and by building roads leading from these two towns to the far north, via Lokoja and Yola; the federal government would eventually provide Nigeria with four major import-export routes alongside a much improved internal network (Onyemelukwe 1982:128). At the international level, significant efforts are being made to link Nigeria, not only with her immediate neighbours, but also with other African countries. The ECOWAS states have this programme in their economic policy. Unfortunately, the road transport industry is largely in the hands of the private companies and individuals, both foreign and indigenous. As such their chief anxiety is profit motive, which would not be in harmony with the tourist industry. Luckily some states and local governments also participate in the provision of passenger bus services on both intra-urban and inter-city routes. Some now compete with the private commercial vehicles in the countryside. Despite all the recent developments in Nigeria’s road transport sector much are still to be done.

Most of the country’s major cities are experiencing growing traffic, chaos, congestion and unnecessary inter-city delays in movement owing mainly to the absence of a well organized mass transportation. The low quality of rural road aggravates the rising cost of living in main urban areas. Generally, the road transport is the most popular and, in fact, constitutes the bulk of overall transportation system in Nigeria. If well organized and new ones are better constructed, while old roads are maintained, the establishment of both domestic and international tourism will be highly beneficial.

River

Significant improvement on river navigation began in 1910 when the British government took over the administration of Nigeria (I.C. Nwafor 1982:132). Lagos and Port Harcourt a-d
to a lesser extent Warri and Benin are the national ports which handle traffic for both southern and northern Nigeria. Lagos (Apapa) is Nigeria's premier port, and handles more than 60% of Nigeria's imports. Port Harcourt is next to Lagos. Since the 1970s considerable improvements have been made in the country's port system. Nigeria is richly blessed with attractive ports but they are not well co-ordinated and organized. Goods are frequently lost in transit. Clearing agents are, but irresponsible elements who doctor the stealing of goods. A proper care should be taken to ameliorate this brazen insensitivity. The ports and their attractive beaches are incalculable assets in tourist industry.

Air Services

Air services within Nigeria have expanded rapidly. Nigerian Airways Ltd was constituted in 1958 (Nwafor, 1982:132). The domestic services specialize principally as passenger carriers and had captured an increasing proportion of the road and rail passenger traffic. However, everybody seems to know that air freight charges are much higher than freight charges for either road or rail. Potential tourists within Nigeria are likely to embark upon road and rail transportation. Only an insignificant few individuals can afford to travel by air within Nigeria. Nigeria has constructed many airports, an ideal biome for international tourism. Several international airlines operate between Nigeria and other parts of Africa, Europe, USA, the Middle and the Far East. All other airports in Nigeria are connected with Lagos. Next, in order of importance, are Port Harcourt and Enugu in the east; and Kano, Kaduna and Jos in the North.

Domestic air passenger traffic demand substantially exceeds available capacity. There is fear that Nigerian Airways alone may not cope effectively with the future demand for domestic air services in the country. Unfortunately, the service is incompatible with private concern. Tourism cannot flourish
without an efficient air transport system. We, therefore, need structural adjustment in the area of air travel.

Communication

One of the most noteworthy achievements of Nigeria since the mid 1960s has been the development and rapid expansion of her communication system. This positive development is illustrated by the number of newspapers, post offices and telephone exchanges and of major broadcasting and television organizations which operate in the country today; and by the range of services they render to Nigerians. The first television services (also the first in Africa) were established late in 1959 in Ibadan (J.C. Nwafor, 1982:24).

Nigeria has well-over a hundred publications which include daily and weekly newspapers, monthly magazines, quarterly and half yearly periodicals and scores of house journals published by companies and professional organizations. The telephone services in Nigeria have remained one of the most inefficient public utilities, with antiquated networks which relied largely on underground cables (Nwafor 1982:124). As a matter of expediency and urgency, view of the current interest in tourism, all inter-telecommunication links should be joined together. This involve a major transformation of existing telephone, telex television facilities. The country at present has inefficient erratic postal system and telephone services. This, if modernized, will constitute one of the constraints Nigeria's development of tourism as a viable industry so to oil.

Tourism is the movement of people temporarily from one place to another in search of relaxation and recreation. Basic definition of tourism makes it imperative for communication becomes an indispensable element. Tourism depends for growth on improved communication, higher incomes and freedom of movement.
The problem lies in the way we render services to others. It is not easy; actually, it is quite difficult to enter and travel within Nigeria. “Upon arrival at our international airports ... one is met with discourteous, indifferent immigration and custom officials and with aggressive airport touts” (A.O. Euwaraye, 1988:29). “Returning visitors to Nigeria tell tales of woe about our public transport system and about the essential services such as power supply and telephone” (Euwaraye, 1988:30).

These are some of the factors that militate against our efforts to promote international tourism. These same factors also affect local tourism. We should, therefore, device a strategy on how to improve facilities for tourism by eliminating long waiting hours at airports and bad manners in hotels. Nigeria has more than five commercial airlines which register the largest number of passenger aircrafts in Africa. Needless to mention the huge road traffic. All these have to be improved and well coordinated so as to integrate the tourist industry. Functional parts of touristic industry are: transportation (air, land, sea) and accommodation (hotel, guest house, inns, apartments) etc. Sight-seeing include: monuments, museums, parks, zoos, beaches, festivals, physical formations, antiquities etc. It can be said that the foundation for modern tourism industry was laid in the Roman Empire with the construction of roads and the establishment of cultural and social centers. “By the 18th century the holiday syndrome had caught on particularly for the aristocrats” (Ezenwa, 1988:29). With the return of peace to Europe after Napoleonic wars of the 19th century and with the industrial revolution and the development of steam engine and railway it became possible for mass tours. The development of air transportation during the world wars reduced between travel time considerably making it easier to reach other parts of the world faster.
Telephone is necessary; the internet has revolutionized communication network. Tourists want to be kept in constant touch with their families, with their business and even with friends, located in various parts of the world. How can broken down telephones perform this linkage task? Some Nigerian hotels are isolated in terms of communication, and tourists who reside in them have to travel out each time they need telephone services. However, the advent of Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) nowadays has saved this situation. Immigration laws should be relaxed so as to issue visas with minimum delay without necessarily compromising our national security. Is the immigration department aware of the economic benefit of tourism? There is need for information brochures.

Port Harcourt has an international airport which would have permitted foreigners to travel direct to the Rivers State. The airport has hardly maintained any dependable regular flights. It has no telephone links with the rest of the country, not even with the city of Port Harcourt, much more the outside world. It maintains no shuttle flight to any part of the state itself where tourism exist thus limiting its utility for the purpose of tourism development. Electricity supply is unreliable. Water supply is also a problem. Who then said that Nigeria is a tourist destination? There is need to provide potential tourist information guide, incentives in various forms, such as information by brochure, pamphlets, maps etc. Apart from these, there may be books that deal specifically with various aspects of the host country’s culture, history and social life. There is need for translators, interpreters and other cultural mediators. There is need to study international languages like French and English, if one is working in the tourist industry. Here Nigeria is not retrogressive because both English and French languages are being studied in Nigerian secondary schools. However, as Nigeria was a British colony there is more emphasis on the study of English language.
The indigenous workers and officials who will be in direct contact with tourists need special internationally bilingual skills. Of the sixteen countries that make up (ECOWAS) ten are francophone. Perhaps many still regard foreign languages with suspicion as vestiges of colonialism. The present writer would like to give one example in English language: would you mind lending me a pen? One often hears yes when the respondent actually means ‘No, I don’t mind’ foreign visitors understand the response to be a refusal. Basically, speaking therefore, the problem of information and intercultural communication between tourists and members of the visited local community should be solved is necessary.

The role of the press in publishing tourism in Nigeria is negligible. The mass media should influence potential tourists by advertising and canvassing our attractive scenery and resources. Newspapers will play more role than magazines. Finally, since they are cheaper and more widely circulated than magazines, newspapers can reach wider audience with tourism information. Uwana (1980:32) has rightly observed that “the quality and quantity of information the potential tourist has about the world’s tourist destinations can invariably determine what choices he makes ... the attributes of such pleasure choices must be effectively communicated to potential tourists in defined markets. It can be quite a rewarding exercise to invest money in an aggressive promotional campaign on tourism using newspapers in conjunction with other media of mass communication. A leaf can be borrowed from the intensive advertisements of tourist resorts in Switzerland”. In Switzerland the prizes are surprisingly less awesome than the landscape. “Switzerland specializes in high standards. So you get more for your money than elsewhere; unusually comfortable hotels, for example and vocation homes that leave nothing to be desired, a multitude of sports opportunities.
excellent cuisine, festive celebration, great sites and natural beauty all across the country" (Uwana, 1986).

Conclusion
We have seen that transport and communication play salutary role in tourism industry. Tourism, being a movement of people, a demand force must depend on these factors among others. However, it has also been demonstrated that the railway system today is at a very low ebb and is now trodding the process of attrition. The Nigeria federal government should prevent the railway system from extinction. Plane crash within Nigeria has become a monumental tragedy. Nobody undertakes to travel when he is apprehensive of reaching his destination. Road accidents on highways has also reached alarming proportions. It would have been an ill-conditioned person who does not feel his blood boil at intimately descents of thousands of responsible Nigerians in this context. The episode presents a sorry spectacle of degraded humanity. The advent of Internet and GSM have revolutionized communication and this has enhanced services in tourism outlets.

Even after the attainment of independence from the British imperialists, there was no rapid restructuring of our transportation system. The rail today is even undergoing the process of attrition. It is the cheapest way of moving from one part of the country to another, yet it is never revolutionized for better operation. The mass media both print and electronic do not give holistic reportage of events in the country. The media coverage of tourism leaves much to be desired. It concentrates mainly on political matters. What is more, the Airways is still a suspended animation. Consequently, international tourism is in state of middle. Tourism will hasten and even consummate nation building. Let us preserve this historic heritage into an imperishable legacy and set tourism industry upon a sure foundation.
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