

DEVELOPING INLAND WATERWAYS
TRANSPORTATION TO BOOST REGIONAL
SHIPPING BUSINESS, SUPPLY CHAIN AND
LOGISTICS NETWORK.

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INTRODUCTION

Water transportation has provided the mode the most effective mode for communication and commerce for human beings right through the ages. By facilitating human contact and exchange of ideas, it assisted civilisation and human development. It is not surprising therefore that many of the early civilisations we read about – be it Babylonian (Mesopotamia) in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, or Egyptian in the valley of the Nile river, or Songhai with capital at Timbuktu in the valley of the upper Niger river – were founded and nourished in the valley of the great rivers and served by inland water transportation on those rivers.

Following the end of the second world war in the mid-forties, the pace of shipping activities on the inland waterways quickened. The river transport companies began to invest in their fleet expansion and modernization. They also started to adopt more efficient towing methods, including semi-integrated tows in line with improvements from more established theatres of river transportation like the Rhine in Europe and Mississippi in the USA

The river Niger is the largest river in West Africa, with a total length of 4,100 km from its source in the Futa Jallon mountains to its mouth in the Bight of Biafra. With a total drainage area of 1,869,000 sq. km, and a maximum discharge up to 30,000 cubic metres per second, it ranks with the largest rivers in the world. It is therefore not surprising that the discovery and exploration of this great river, as a prelude to colonial trade was of great interest to early Arabian and European explorers.

Transportation on the Niger river played a key role in the penetration of the hinterlands of the coast of West Africa, in particular Nigeria. From that historic day in July 1796 when Mungo park reached the bank of the great river at Segou in present day Mali and saw **“the long sought for majestic Niger (Joliba) river flowing slowly to the east,”** excitement about this great river and enormous potential it offered for water borne trade reached fever pitch in Europe. On a subsequent journey which he started from Sansanding sailing down the river in search of the mouth of the river, Mungo park and his party reached Bussa near Jebba, some 2080 km downstream, where he perished in a shipwreck in 1805.

After many failed attempts, efforts to discover the mouth of the River Niger resulted in success in 1830 when the Lander Brothers, Richard and John came down River Niger, through the delta creeks into the Bight of Biafra and on to Fernando Po. Soon after that, merchants from Europe were sailing up the Niger and Benue River in search of produce – palm oil, ivory, shea butter, benniseed, groundnut – for sale in European markets. The trading firms were mostly British. They subsequently united to form the United Africa Company and received a charter from the British Government to become The Royal Niger Company. It set up headquarters at Akassa, from where it controlled trade and navigation on the Middle and lower Niger River Company and assumed direct control of the company's territories of influence in the Middle and Lower Niger. The rest is now history.

Nigeria's boundaries extended roughly between latitudes 4° and between longitudes 2° and 14° E. It thus cover a total landmass of 910,770 square kilometers. Notable physical features of the country include the highland plateau of Northern and western Nigeria and chain of hills and lowlands in the east. The country has four large distinct drainage systems. These are the Niger River Basin made up of the Niger-Benue systems, lake Chad Basin with its network of river and tributaries and the two Atlantic drainage systems east and west of the River Niger with coastal rivers such as the Ogun, Benue, Imo, Cross River etc. Thus, about 3000 kilometers navigable waters and creeks traverse the entire country and form the nucleus of the Nigerian Inland Waterways. The important inland waters include the Niger, Benue, Imo, Cross River etc. and they have been useful in the economic development of the country through the provision of cheap water transportation.

Freight Movement

Since the mouth of Niger River was discovered, the European firms began to send ships up river taking manufactured merchandise from Europe for disposal, and in return, bringing down local produce for export. In this way, water transportation offered the gateway for European penetration of the West African sub-region for trade and colonization.

Water borne trade continued to grow in volume and extent on Niger and Benue River into the 20th century, to the introduction of motor lorries and road transportation, inland waterways accounted for major part of all the internal freight in Nigeria. Even after the introduction of road and rail traffic, inland waterways transportation on the Niger and Benue Rivers continued to play a significant role in the evacuation of Nigerian agricultural produce to the sea ports, and on to world markets. The size of this freight is shown by the figures in Table 2.1.1

During this early period and up to the Nigerian civil war (1967 - 1970), commercial inland waterways transportation in Nigeria was dominated by three companies:-

- Niger River Transport Company, (NRT) with its base at Burutu
- Holts Transport, (HT) based at Warri
- Niger – Benue Transport Company, (NBTC) with base at Warri.

The size of their respective fleets in the late fifties is indicated in Table 2.1.2.

Inland waterways transportation as practiced by these companies was an integral part of a commercial transaction which commenced with the purchase of the product and ended with the shipment overseas. In addition to the infrastructure such as quays, cargo handling equipment, goods' shed, waterhouses and dockyards which these river transport companies developed at their base, they also had to provide basic port facilities at their major port of call up river. Their principal river ports on the Niger and Benue Rivers are given in Table 2.1.3.

Passenger Traffic

Reliable data about the number of passengers carried on the waterways, their port of embarking or their destinations have been difficult to come by. It is however known that in the riverine areas, particularly in the Niger delta where due to the nature of the terrain, other modes of transportation are difficult, the ubiquitous canoe provided the means of communication and transport, particularly for moving people and goods to and from local markets. As commercial navigation and transportation of merchandise into the hinterland grew with the opening up of the country to external trade, demand for passenger traffic over longer distances on the trunk rivers also grew. The river transport companies, in particular the NRT also

carried passengers. Figures gleaned from the Statistical and Economic Review (No. 14, 1954) of UAC Nigeria Ltd. by NEDECO during their 1954 – 57 investigation of navigation on the Niger river gives some insight on the number of passengers carried on the rivers in those days as follows:

Table 2.2.1

Passenger traffic

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of passengers</u>
1943 – 1944	53,000
1944 – 1945	29,000
1945 – 1946	23,000
1946 – 1947	7,000
1947 – 1948	9,000
1948 – 1949	8,000
1949 – 1950	5,000
1950 – 1951	4,000
1951 – 1952	6,000
1952 – 1953	5,000

(Source: River Studies by Nedeco)

The dramatic drop in the number of passengers carried on the inland waterways in Nigeria from the end of the second world war coincides with the extension of road network in the country, and the greater number of motor lorries that became available for transportation. Boat travel time became too long to offer serious competition to the now generally available lorry and bus transport for journeys between the river ports of Onitsha, Lokoja, Baro, Makurdi, etc. all the same, the significant contribution made to internal trade by inland water transportation using big wooden canoes powered by outboard motors, in moving passengers and

produce to city markets must be mentioned. To this day, these motorized canoes continue to play significant roles in communication, particularly in the Niger delta.

Establishment of National inland Waterways Authority (NIWA)

The National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) was established vide an Act of the National Assembly, CAP N47, laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN), 2004 (Decree No. 13 of 1997). It commenced operations in 1998.

Roles

The law establishing NIWA gave it the following statutory roles:

- Provide regulation for inland water navigation;
- Ensure development of infrastructural facilities for a national inland waterways connectivity with economic centre using the River ports and nodal points for inter-nodal exchanges;
- Ensure the development of indigenous technical and managerial skills to meet the challenges of modern inland waterways transportation;

There are several other functions and power of the Authority properly enunciated and documented in the laws establishing **NIWA**.

Vision

To make Nigeria the leader in Inland Water Transportation development and management in Africa.

Mission

To provide regulatory, economical and operational leadership in the nation's inland waterways system and develop infrastructural facilities for efficient intermodal transportation system in line with global best practices that is safe, seamless and affordable.

Objectives

- Improve and develop the inland waters for navigation;

- Provide alternative mode of transportation for the evacuation of economic goods and persons, and
- Execute the objectives of National Transport Policy as they concern Inland Waterways.

CONSTRAINTS

i. FUNDING:

The Authority's project activities suffer from fund constraints. While allocations of fund to the Authority need to be improved upon, the approved funds are either not wholly released and those released do not come by on time thus resulting to undue delay in project execution;

ii. OPERATIONAL/JURISDICTION CONFLICTS:

The Authority is faced with conflicts of operational jurisdiction with other sister Parastatals and other government establishments, prominent among which is

- Federal Ministry of Solid Minerals
- Lagos State Government

iii. REVIEW TO THE ENABLING ACT:

The long awaited review of the enabling act will help a lot in boosting the activities of the Authority when approved.

iv. INLAND WATERWAYS TRANSPORTATION CODE:

The approval and subsequent implementation of the Inland Waterways Transportation Code currently under consideration by the Ministry of Transport is essential to the effective monitoring and control of safety and safe navigation along the Inland Waterways.

v. SECURITY ALONG THE WATERWAYS:

There is the need to ensure the security of our waterways to make it safe for navigation all year round.

vi. LACK OF SKILLED MANPOWER:

The Authority presently is in short of skilled manpower required for the effective execution of its mandate, especially in the Technical Departments.

CONCLUSION

The maritime environment will continue to be a veritable medium of transportation, global commerce, resource exploitation and recreation. It would continue to remain relevant for the economic prosperity and development of most nations because of its abundant mineral resources and huge marine ecosystem. In this vein, Nigeria's maritime environment which span 84,000 sqm is of great strategic importance to the nation on account of the huge deposits of mineral resources and marine life contained therein.

However, the inland waterways in Nigeria, like other parts of the world, is one of the oldest economically and environmentally sustainable mode of transportation for passengers and cargoes. Inland Waterways was used in time past for purpose of sourcing raw materials to feed industries as well as bringing in finished goods to the hinterland, thereby enhancing commerce, social integration, local and international trade with neighbouring countries.

These abundant resources in Nigeria's maritime environment constitute a great source of wealth to the nation and must be protected from illegal exploitation and exploration.

- There is the need to develop a maritime strategy that would provide a frame work for inter agency collaboration to ensure optimal utilization of maritime assets and resources;
- There should be cooperation and consultation at regional, continental and international levels to harmonize policies in the area of maritime, multimodal transport and inland waterways;
- There is need for Government to embark on massive dredging of the major inland waterways to seamlessly connect the seaport;
- River training works and maintenance should be carried out on regular basis to train the rivers, prevent flooding and facilitate inland waterways transportation and ensure quick deployment of appropriate patrol boats;
- Continuous maintenance dredging of waterways should be sustained to keep the waterways open and minimize the effects of flooding as well as deepen flats along the dredged waterways. Machineries should also be set in motion for the capital dredging of area that are yet to be dredged;

- There is need for the Federal Government to allocate reasonable percentage of the annual budget to maintain and build new waterways infrastructure in the country;
- NIWA should be mandate to draw up modalities for the establishment of Search and Rescue Centre within the inland waterways in order to quickly respond to emergency situations and prevent loss of lives and wreckage of vessel / boats;
- Government should direct the Federal Ministry to Justice gazette the inland waterways Transportation Code without any further delay, to enhance safety within the inland waterways and stem the spate of incessant boat accidents on the inland waters;
- There is need to construct Barrage and Lock on rivers Niger and Benue to control river flow and guarantee all year safe navigation;
- There is need to embark on comprehensive wreck survey campaign of all coastal waters, channels and waterways;
- There is need to embark on massive wreck removal operations, in particular, those that are critical to navigation and hazardous to maritime activities so as to clear all coastal waters, channels and waterways of these obstructions;
- There is need to install luminous channel makers and buoys, reflective kilometer boards and also ensure adequate beacons and racons in our various channels waterways and channel patrols with a view to maintaining and repositioning of the channel markers, communicate and display where necessary, essential information to operators of river crafts and other river users such as; available depths, temperature, winds, current, other weather conditions, river characteristics, expected rise or fall of the river, positions of buoys and snags.