

GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE MAINTENANCE OF RURAL ROADS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The sustainable maintenance of rural roads has been a major problem in Nigeria despite the rural road network comprising a large proportion of the overall road network in the country. This has resulted in significant deterioration in the condition of rural roads and accessibility to road users. Poor condition of rural roads usually has undesirable effects not only on agricultural production but also on the entire socio-economic development of the rural areas. Over the years, both military and democratic regimes have formulated and implemented policies aimed at ensuring the sustainable maintenance of rural roads but have achieved very little results. This paper examines alternative practices that have been adopted to achieve sustainable maintenance of rural roads in Nigeria. The paper shows that the challenges associated with maintenance of rural roads in both military and democratic regimes are similar. This paper identifies these challenges and explores the possibility of ensuring the sustainable maintenance of rural roads through the labour-based rural roads maintenance strategy and community participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In both military and civilian regimes in Nigeria, different strategies have been adopted to ensure the sustainable maintenance of rural roads. This effort is made by the government because majority of Nigerians reside in rural areas. In spite of the recognition of the importance of rural roads by the government, the condition of most rural roads remains poor. This is a major problem because rural roads are necessary for increased production of goods and services, poverty alleviation, employment creation and rural development. Rural roads in Nigeria are also very important because they provide access to public health and educational institutions.

Over the years various levels of government and other agencies established by the Federal Government have formulated and implemented policies aimed at transforming the condition of rural roads in Nigeria. The inability of these institutions to ensure sustainable maintenance of rural roads makes it necessary that alternative strategies should be developed and adopted. The paper begins with the clarification of key concepts in the paper. It further examines some of the strategies and institutional framework used by the government to ensure the sustainable maintenance of rural roads. It also identifies the reasons for the inability of the efforts of the government to yield positive results over the years and how improvements can be made.

2. CLARIFICATION OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

Governance: Governance has been described as an approach or perspective that “focuses on state and societal institutions and the relationships between them, as well as on how rules are made in a society which are accepted as legitimate and enhances values that are sought by individuals and groups within the society”[1]. The British Council on the other hand espouses the view that governance is a broader notion than government, and

goes on to state that; "governance involves interaction between the formal institutions and those in civil society. Governance refers to a process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social upliftment [2]." This definition shows that governance not only encompasses but transcends the collective meaning of related concepts like the state, government, regime and good government. Many of the elements and principles underlying "good government" have become an integral part of the meaning of "governance[3]".

Rural Roads: The expression 'rural roads' is often used imprecisely. Some countries use it to define all roads which are not national or secondary roads. Others lump together tertiary roads, which are part of the publicly owned network, with other local roads which are not included under the responsibility of the government. In this paper rural roads are all publicly owned roads whose primary purpose is to provide direct access for the rural villages and communities to economic and social services [4].

Road Maintenance: Road maintenance means preserving and keeping road structures as near as possible in its original state. It consists of correcting deficiencies that have developed as a result of age or use, and taking steps to prevent the development of other deficiencies [5]. It comprises of activities aimed at keeping pavement, shoulders, slopes, drainage facilities and all the structure and property within the road margins in good condition [6]. The rationale for road maintenance is to ensure that the road provides an acceptable level of service to the users for substantial period of its service life [7].The basic objective is implicit in the word itself. It is done to ensure that the road that has been constructed, or improved, is kept in its original condition.

3. THE CONDITION OF RURAL ROADS IN NIGERIA

The road network in Nigeria is currently estimated at about 194,000 kilometres, with the Federal Government responsible for about 17 percent, State Governments 16 percent and Local Governments 67 percent. The table below shows the estimated size of the road network in Nigeria:

Table 1: Estimated size of the Road Network in Nigeria

Ownership	Road Paved	Length Unpaved	KM Total
Federal	26,500	5,600	32,100
State	10,400	20,100	30,500
Local	2,600	128,000	130,600
Total	39,500	153,700	193,200

Source: Abdulkareem and Adeoti (2004)

Table 1 shows that majority of roads (rural roads) under the jurisdiction of Local Governments are unpaved roads. However, these roads have been plagued by a number of problems, with the major ones being inadequate drainage system and poor maintenance culture, which have significantly reduced the utility of the roads. There are potholes, washing away of pavements, fallen bridges, etc, along most Nigerian rural roads. According to Buhari (2000), "as at June 1996 only 50% of the Federal roads and 20% of the State roads were in reasonably good condition. Only an estimated 5% of the local rural roads were freely motorable". The condition of rural roads is usually worse during the rainy season with most of them impassable. The state of Nigerian roads has remained poor for a number of reasons. The number one problem is poor quality roads, resulting from faulty designs, lack of gutters and very thin coatings that are easily washed away by floods and

hardly withstand heavy traffic. Secondly, funding of road maintenance has been grossly inadequate. Thirdly, corruption has contributed to the inefficient use of available resources for the maintenance of roads. In a nutshell, the poor condition of rural roads in Nigeria can be attributed to bad governance which the World Bank Report (1992) on sub-Saharan Africa emphasized as the major problem in Africa. The report defines bad governance “as the personalization of power, denial of human rights, corruption, undemocratic government, low levels of participation, etc” [8].

4. IMPACT OF POOR RURAL ROADS MAINTENANCE ON LIVELIHOOD IN RURAL AREAS IN NIGERIA

Poor rural roads maintenance often makes some rural roads to become off-roads especially during the rainy season in Nigeria. Porter defined off-road as areas located away from paved (or good gravel) road which, for at least part of the year, are inaccessible or accessible only with difficulty by motorized vehicle [9]. People living in areas where roads are poorly maintained often find it difficult to have access to basic services such as health care and transportation. The difficulty associated with reaching communities that are off-roads also discourage government workers and sometimes Nongovernmental Organizations from going to such rural areas to provide assistance. This situation encourages poverty and misery.

5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF RURAL ROADS IN NIGERIA

The importance of good roads to the Nigerian economy has been recognized by various administrations in Nigeria. For example in President Olusegun Obasanjo's inaugural address on May 29, 1999 he asserted: “... Transport is the lifeline of the economy and social interactions. An inefficient transport system implies stagnation in all sectors. Our priorities in this sector will be the design and implementing a new policy on road maintenance ...” [10] Government's response towards the construction and maintenance of roads in Nigeria dates back to 1925, when the Road Board was established by the then colonial administration. The Board had the responsibility to evolve blueprints for trunk road network, connecting major administrative centres in the colonial time. The Public Works Department (PWD) was the major governmental institution for the maintenance of roads including those in the rural areas. During the colonial days, road camps were set up and roads were maintained by road gangs on a regular basis by the then public works department (PWD). The central and regional governments had their respective ministries of works controlling the activities of the PWDS. The native authorities had their own works departments which took charge of the local roads within their domain [11].

Presently, Nigeria has a federal structure of government made up of 36 states and 774 local government areas. Nigeria's structure of government has made the road system to be classified into three broad categories: The Federal Trunk 'A' Roads i.e. roads under Federal Government ownership and maintenance. The second category is the Trunk 'B' Roads under the ownership and management of the state governments. The third category is the Local Government Trunk 'C' Roads: These are under Local Government ownership and management. Each tier of government has the responsibility for planning, construction and maintenance of the network of roads under its jurisdiction. The maintenance of rural roads is primarily the responsibility of the local governments. In a nutshell, the Federal Ministry of Works is charged with the responsibility for the planning, design, construction and maintenance of the Federal Highways. The 36 State Ministries of Works and Transport have similar responsibility for the State roads while the 774 Local

Government Works Departments have the responsibilities for Local Government roads. This means that the maintenance of rural roads in Nigeria is primarily the responsibility of the Local Governments. The performance of local government in this regard has been generally poor mainly because of under-funding, inability to generate adequate internal revenue, technical expertise and other resources to provide for efficient rural transport infrastructure and service delivery. The inability of local governments to ensure proper maintenance of rural roads has necessitated the establishment of intervention agencies mainly by the federal government. One of such intervention agencies was the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) established for the purpose of providing rural infrastructure including roads. The laws establishing the Directorate was promulgated under Decree number 4 of 1987. DFRRI sought to open up rural areas via construction of feeder roads and provision of basic amenities that would turn them into production centres for the national economy. The Directorate of food, roads and rural infrastructures (DFRRI), does not get involved in direct implementation of the programmes. Rather, for the purpose of the programme implementation, the directorate uses as its main agents, the states and the local governments, to execute its programme. The funds for the programme of the Directorate were made available directly to each state government who then sees to the disbursement of such fund to the local governments. Although DFRRI helped to improve the condition of some rural roads in Nigeria during its existence, most of its plans suffered implementation problems.

Various state governments in the country also have intervention agencies for the maintenance of rural roads. For example in Cross River State there is the Rural Development Agency (RUDA) with the responsibility of facilitating the provision of rural infrastructure such as roads [12]. In Imo state of Nigeria there is also the Imo Rural Roads Maintenance Agency (IRROMA). The agency was set up by the state government to address the needed development of the rural communities thereby providing a more reliable road access to various rural communities.

6. WEAKNESSES OF EXISTING RURAL ROADS MAINTENANCE INSTITUTIONS

Existing institutions for the maintenance of rural roads in Nigeria are deficient. The deficiency of these institutions centres around insufficient focus on road maintenance, inadequate financial resources, and community involvement. The World Bank (1992) also identified the problems associated with road maintenance in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria as follows:

1. Local participation has in most cases been implemented through local governments, which typically have a very weak revenue basis, meager technical skills, insufficient support of the Central Government and, in some cases, a lack of commitment to village level road problems.
2. Secondly, the users rather than a weak bureaucracy are better able to manage local operative assignments experience indicates that sustainability of projects, and in a large sense of development, cannot be achieved without mobilizing the beneficiaries and their institutions. Priority should therefore be given to engaging participation of the beneficiaries and strengthening of their institutions, and not so much to those of the government personnel.
3. Thirdly, given the severe lack of resources at the local level, rural road development will require central funding and commitment [13].

7. STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MAINTENANCE OF RURAL ROADS IN NIGERIA

Governance has been described as having two faces [14]: First, the leadership, which has responsibilities derived from the principles of effective governmental organization; second, the governed, that is, the citizens, who are responsible for making relevant inputs to the socioeconomic and political affairs of their society. This means that governance is a relationship between rulers and the ruled, the state and society, the governors and the governed. The two principal actors in governance must be as close as possible to ensure the legitimacy, accountability, credibility, and responsiveness of the rulers and the effective participation, cooperation, and responsiveness of the ruled [15]. Sustainable maintenance of rural roads therefore requires good governance and the adoption of effective strategies. Two relevant strategies that can help strengthen governance for the sustainable maintenance of rural roads are the labour based approach and community participation. This has become necessary because of the inability of the various levels of governments (federal, state and local) to provide and maintain rural roads.

The Labour based Approach: This is a structured method of providing or maintaining rural infrastructure (especially rural roads) to specified standards [16]. The concept is based on the principle of using manual labour to complete tasks otherwise done by the machine. These tasks include clearing of trees and bushes on the road alignment, removal of topsoil, evacuation of soil along the sides of the road to form the side drains among others. These tasks are completed by the use of hand tools such as hoes, shovels, spades, rakes and wheel-barrow. These are common tools used in agricultural activities and the rural people are familiar with them. The labour based approach is carried out through a 'lengthman system' where small and manageable tasks are allocated to individual workers according to priorities throughout the season. A labourer is employed for each section of road typically 1-2km in length. A supervisor provides the tools and at the same time monitors the condition of roads, directs operations, makes reports and authorizes payment for satisfactory work. The worker lives close to the location of maintenance activities and may therefore not require any transport. The 'lengthman system' is desirable because a continuous maintenance of the entire road can be guaranteed at all times. This system would be particularly useful in southern part of Nigeria where the cleaning of the culverts and mitre drains need to be carried out on a regular basis especially during the wet season [17].

8. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The inability of the various levels of government to ensure the sustainable maintenance of rural roads has led the rural people to revive their old traditions of collective action as a strategy for ensuring community development. Community participation and collective action involves self-organizing capabilities through which community members relate with one another in a rule-ordered relationship, sharing ideas, and using their own initiatives and institutional potentials to address problems of daily existence. Examples of local people's provision of public goods using available social capital (associations) are well documented throughout African continent [18]. The theories of collective action suggest that individuals under certain institutional arrangements and shared norms are capable of organizing and sustaining cooperation that advances the common interest of the group in which they belong [19]. This line of thought recognizes that human beings can organize and govern themselves based on appropriate institutional arrangements and mutual agreements in a community of understanding [20]. The relevance of involving the local population in rural road maintenance has been identified in a number of studies. For example in a study conducted by the World Bank, the following lessons that can help ensure effective community participation were identified:

1. The communities must be involved in the process from the planning stage. Indeed, the road to be built has to be seen by them to be something that they need and not imposed on them from outside.
2. In this respect, it clearly helps if the roads are built using local labour as the community is then involved and benefiting from its construction.
3. Some form of incentive has to be provided. This of course is best if it is cash. However, there are other forms of incentives:
 - a. If the road is to be used mainly for exporting produce some sort of levy can be made on those benefiting from the sale of the produce.
 - b. If the road is of obvious benefit to the communities then some form of maintenance fund can be set up which can be furnished from a small contribution from the communities, augmented by the local authorities. Such a fund can be used to pay the maintenance workers or to pay local contractors.
 - c. If the road specifically results in the possibility to market crops, a small levy could be introduced which could be allocated to maintenance.
 - d. The local authority could provide the basic tools such as hoes and wheelbarrows to the maintenance workers. Such tools can be used by the workers for their own activities.
 - e. Food aid can be used either directly or converted into cash as the means to pay for road maintenance. It should not be forgotten, however, in the discussion on generating local enthusiasm for executing unpaid maintenance works, that the local people certainly appreciate the improved access. However, contributing their labour freely for the maintenance of roads is an opportunity cost for them for which there is limited perceived benefit [21].

The effectiveness of community participation and collective action in rural roads maintenance can be observed from experience in Finland. Experience in Finland shows that rural people can be mobilized to maintain their access roads if some financial incentive and an appropriate legal framework are made available by the government. The implication is that more focus should be shifted from the Local Government level further down to the actual users and beneficiaries of the roads [22].

Since 1962, the Government of Finland has successfully promoted rural road maintenance using road cooperatives. A "road cooperative" is a rural road maintenance organization, either with an established legal framework or without legal definition, whereby a road is maintained by the people living along it and not by any level of government. The work of the road cooperatives, with gradually increased government support, has brought more than 97 percent of the affected roads into good, or at least fair, condition [23]. The mobilization of government financial support and the participation of road users were key factors in ensuring sustainable maintenance.

Each road cooperative has to elect a chairman and an individual, or a triumvirate, to manage the maintenance operations [24]. Each cooperative holds an annual general meeting to decide the fees, to accept new members, and to audit the previous year's accounts.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The poor condition of most rural roads in Nigeria has been of great concern to the government and the entire citizenry. This paper has identified the institutional and legal framework for the sustainable maintenance of rural roads in Nigeria. The paper shows that

the responsibility for the maintenance of rural roads falls mainly under the jurisdiction of local governments. The inability of local governments to ensure effective maintenance of rural roads has necessitated the creation of intervention agencies such as by the federal government. In spite of the activities of local governments and intervention agencies, the condition of rural roads remains poor. This present situation can be improved through the adoption of the labour-based approach, community participation and collective action.

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