

**THE IMPACT OF RURAL ROADS AND BRIDGES ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA:
AN EVALUATION**

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ABSTRACT: *Rural roads and bridges form the basis for transformation and communication. They constitute the most critical infrastructure in the rural, and by extension national development drive. Contributions of rural roads and bridges to rural development include: accelerated delivery of farm inputs and evacuation of product and reduction in the cost of transportation. On the other hand lack of rural access roads has killed the dreams and resilience of those who may have chosen to live in the villages with their villages cut away from the city and potentials in the villages wasting away, these set of people have chosen to join the rest for urban life. Since majority of economic activities in our society depend in one way or the other on road infrastructure, Akwa Ibom State Government from 1999 made an effort to provide roads and bridges. This work therefore assessed the impact of government effort in the provision of rural road and bridges on the socio-economic transformation of the State. The study adopted a historical as well as descriptive approach in data collection. The study therefore revealed that the government efforts has increased socio-economic activities in the state as people and goods now move freely from rural areas to the urban centres. The study further revealed that provision of rural roads and bridges has equally helped to reduce the cost of transportation in the state. Above all, it has reduced rural urban drift in the state. Based on this, the study recommended that the government should sustain the present tempo by increasing fund allocation in the annual budget for rural roads and bridges.*

KEYWORDS: Rural roads, Bridges, Socio-economic development, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The rural areas of Nigeria are inhabited by the bulk of the nation's population; they serve as the base for the production of food and fibre. They are also the major sources of capital formation for the country, and a principal market for domestic manufactures. In general terms, the rural areas engage in primary activities that form the foundation for any economic development, (Olatunbosun, 1975).

However, despite the importance of the rural areas, they are not attractive to live in. There is absence of infrastructure that should enhance the quality of life. Usually, there is absence of potable water, electricity and good feeder roads and bridges. The rural people have low purchasing power and standard of living. Attempt at solving rural neglects had been the concern of the Nigerian government over the years. Examples of such attempt were Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). All these efforts failed to improve rural areas in what ever form, (Olayowola and Adeleye, 2005).

The contention of the policy makers is that rural Infrastructure, if adequately provided, can enhance the quality of rural life. However, it is assumed that the rural people have benefited very little from most rural development programmes. It is against this assumption that this paper is intended to evaluate the impact of Akwa Ibom State Government effort towards rural transformation via physical infrastructure specifically roads and bridges. Since the economic development of any nation is dependent on how easy people and goods could move from one part of the country to another, road infrastructure is therefore vital to the growth of the state as well as the nation's economy.

Conceptualizing Rural Development

Rural development as a concept has a definitional problem due to its multi-dimensional approach. As conceptualised by various scholars, Williams (1978) viewed rural development as a mass effort to increase production, create and spread of employment and to root out the fundamental causes of poverty, diseases and ignorance.

Akeredolu –Ale (1995) sees rural development as a process whereby the government works in close cooperation with the people to improve the economic, social and cultural condition of their communities. Makanjuola (2000) defined rural development as a process of planned change in various aspects of a rural community with a view to attaining an improvement in the level of productive capacity, capability and general standard of living of the rural population. In other words, it is a process by which the rural population are expected to be able to judge themselves as having achieved a higher standard of living over time.

Oladipo (2008) observes that for rural development to occur and endure there has to be enhanced rural income, reduced poverty and unemployment, reduced inequalities, increased rural value, added production, enhanced good health and education, enhanced quality of life through potable water, electricity and good roads, greater integration of rural people into the political and economic process and good telecommunication services.

This study was therefore initiated to evaluate the contribution of the newly constructed rural roads and bridges to the over all socio-economic development of the study area. The study will provide a basis for comparison with other regions of the world.

The Study Area

Akwa Ibom State is one of the 36 states in the Nigerian federation (see Fig. 1). It has an estimated current population of 3.44 million. Created on 23rd September, 1987, it is the tenth largest state in the country with 31 local government areas. Akwa Ibom State covers a total area of 7,246.499 square kilometres and therefore has a population density of about 475 per square kilometre. The state is situated at the South-eastern corner of Nigeria and lies approximately between latitudes 4°32' and 5°53' North and longitudes 7°21' and 8°25' East. It is one of the few states in Nigeria with sea coast as boarder (in the south). It is bounded in the North by Abia State, in the West by Rivers State and in the East by Cross River State (Ekpo and Umoh, 2005, and Ekop, 2002).

The character and style of the Akwa Ibom people in their response to contemporary challenges of development, most importantly rural development is that of perseverance, participation by all segments of the society and consistency of action. This is evidence by past and present vision of the state which is to transform Akwa Ibom State into a prosperous, highly educated, technology – driven, ethnically harmonious, caring and pace-setting state in Nigeria, with strategic policies and programmes to accomplish it. One of such policies is the development of rural roads and bridges. Without good road network, the dreams and aspiration of the state cannot be achieved.

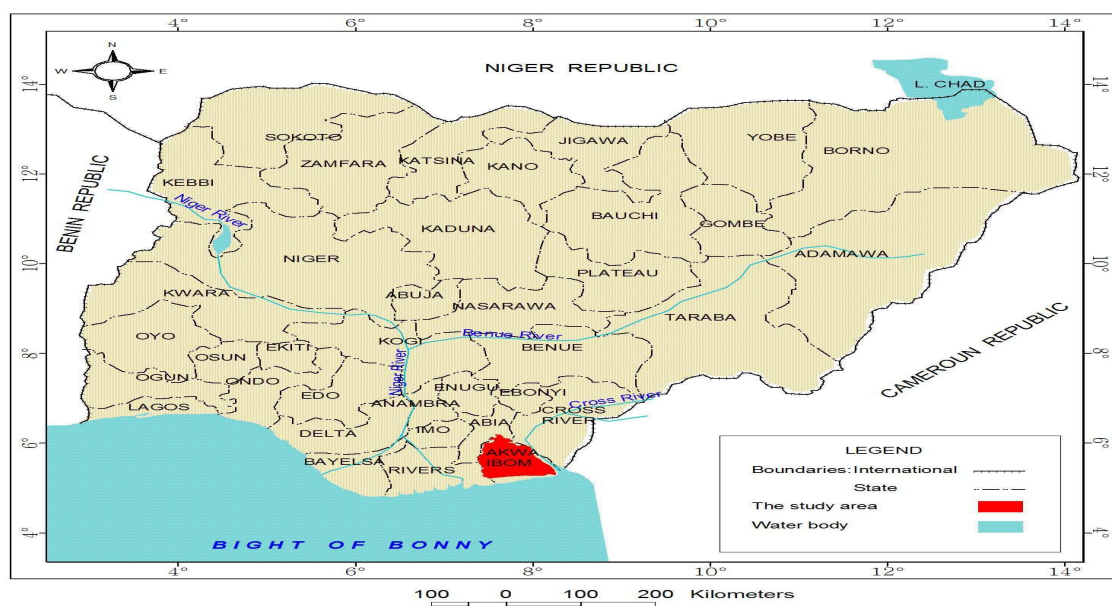


Fig . 1: The location of Akwa Ibom State on the map of Nigeria

Rural Development Efforts in Akwa Ibom State

Akwa Ibom State is the second largest oil producing state in Nigeria, but despite its position, it has remained predominantly rural made up of seventy percent of the population who dwells in the rural areas (AK-SEEDS, 2005).

In the light of the above, Abasiokong (1994) bluntly stated the underdevelopment and backwardness of the state's rural areas thus:

Three quarters of the state is rural. It is in these areas that the bulks of the less privileged, less educated and least understood population in the state live and carry on their various activities. Amenities such as medical facilities, where they exist are erratic and inadequate. Roads are narrow, seasonal, untarred and unreliable. There are virtually no effective means of communication. Recreational facilities are lacking. In areas where hospitals are built, such hospital lack health facilities. They are usually understaffed. The school buildings are always flimsy and archaic, (Abasiokong, 1994: 181).

To remedy the underdeveloped and backwardness of the state's rural areas, in 1999 Akwa Ibom State government established Ministry of Rural Development charged with the task of transforming the rural areas of the state through the provision of basic amenities namely; electricity, potable water, good access roads and bridges. What informed government decision was that good access road would enhance integrated rural development and social cohesion. Hence, government determination to link the headquarters of the 31 local government councils with a minimum 10km tarred road.

Rural Roads and bridges

Akwa Ibom is a thickly populated, close-knit area, blessed with undulating topography, which ordinarily would have made it easy to navigate the entire state in a matter of hours. However, this has not been possible because many of the local governments cum rural areas are cut off due to bad and long-neglected roads and bridges. Good road network generally have been widely acknowledge as being at the heart of any society's social and economic development. The majority of economic activities in Akwa Ibom State like other parts of the world depend in one way or the other on road infrastructure.

Rural roads and bridges form the basis for transformation and communication. A rural road consists of federal, state and local government roads (major feeder, tracks, footpaths, bridges and culverts) found in the rural areas. Rural roads constitute the most critical infrastructure in the rural, and by extension national development drive. Contributions of rural roads and bridges to socio-economic development include; accelerated delivery of farm inputs and evacuation of produce, reduction in the cost of transportation in terms of human energy, cost of portage and time loss in trekking long distances and facilitating more efficient distribution of goods and services from different locations. It enhances capacity development, promotion of allied services like car hire services and airline services. It reduces the cost of production which in turn increases production output, transportation cost is lowered which enhances better transport services, which in turn reduces prices of products and thus: boost inter and intra urban exchange of services making it possible for commercial agriculture,

industrialization and employment opportunities. Also, lower transport cost can stimulate small scale business and allows for economic diversification. This can add to a country's national income by increasing Gross Domestic Product, GDP. The realisation of the immense benefits of road infrastructure informed huge government investment in road network development.

On the other hand, lack of rural access roads has killed the dreams and resilience of those who may have chosen to live in the villages. But, with their villages cut away from the city and potentials in the villages wasting away, these set of people have also chosen to join the rush for urban life. Suffice to add that rural areas or communities in Akwa Ibom State house a number of resources convertible for industrial purposes. But since these villages are inaccessible, nobody would come. In fact, the few who, eyeing the large deposit of such materials, may soon boycott the villages when cost of transporting such resources available at cheap prices in the village outweigh the profits realised at the end of the transaction. That is the evil of not having good rural access roads and bridges. It makes investors turn away from any society, however cheap the raw materials are. These and other problems associated with poor rural roads in the state informed government determination in committing funds to the construction of roads and bailey bridges, rehabilitation of rural feeder roads, farm roads and tarring of slippery hills to link all local government headquarters as shown in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1: Construction of 10 Bailey Bridges (1999 – 2011)

S/N	Project title	Local Government
1	Ntek Idim Bailey bridge	Ukanafun
2	Obot Iffiat Ididep/Opoto Ididep	Ibiono Ibom
3	Akpa Utong Bailey bridge	Ibiono Ibom
4	Ikot Ukpong Eren	Oruk Anam
5	Atan Ikot Okoro Bailey bridge	Essien Udim
6	Osung Ikot Nkan Bailey bridge	Mkpat Enin/Onna
7	Ikot Akan Udo bailey bridge	Eastern Obolo
8	Ikot Udo Obodom	Ikot Ekpene
9	Ikot Akpaso/Ikot Nko	Onna
10	Minya bailey bridge	Ikot Abasi

Source: Statistical Year Book of Akwa Ibom State (2012)

Table 2: Construction and Rehabilitation of Roads

S/N	Local Government	Project Location	No. of Kilometer	Cost
1	Uyo	Ukana Offot street, Ikot Ebido/Nkemba, Obio Imo/Umo Essien Street	5.3km	188.08m
	“	Urua Ekpa Road, Udo Eduok Street, Itam/William street, Aka Itiam	7.10km	229.10m
	“	Udo Obot street, Ewet/Atakpo street, Paul Bassey/Afia street, Ikot Abasi street/Lane, Udosen Uko street and Ikot Abasi Extension	3.0km	175.88m
	“	Abak road housing estate roads	4.74km	324.69m
2	Ikot Ekpene	Old itu road, Old firing/church road, Etim Close	6.70km	210.62m
	“	Dibue road, Abiakpo road and Essien street	6.70km	137.26m
3	Oron	Stadium road, Andiyo street, Jeo Essang street, Anwana Abia/Lious Ating street, Mary Hanny/College roads, Mainland avenue	7.7km	221.29m
4	Abak	Hospital road, Davis Ekpo road	12.25km	957.09m
	“	Market road/Umo lane, Nto Eshiet street, Port Harcourt street, Mkpokporo street/Lane, Akpan Eno street, Offot street, Covenant close, School road, Nyot street, Ise Ekpoudom street	11.06km	728.48m
	“	Obot Ntot road, Stadium road, MCA-Ebom Avenue – Nursery school – Ayan street	12.25km	737.85m
5	Ikot Abasi	Ikot Obong/Market road, Udobang road, Enobong Ufot road	5.54km	797.87m
	“	Consulate/Barracks road, Hospital, Ikpe Etim Road, Utu Ewa road, Chief Uta Ewa road, Quaetm Ltd road, old Utu Ewa road	7.3km	1.08b
6	Eket	Mkpok road, Idua-Uqua road, all weather road, Iseyeridua road, Eket Mission road, Ekpene Ukpa avenue	9.2km	1.14b
	“	Mkpo Mbuk road, Ukpong street, SDP road, Ikot Obiot road, Archibong Street, Etebi street, Ibo street	5.3km	711.97m

Source: The Akwa Ibom Project, (2012).

Table 3: Intercity Roads

S/N	Local Government	Project Location	No. of Kilometer	Cost
1	Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ubium, Nsit Ibom and Nsit Atai LGAs	Nung udoe-Ikot Okwot – Ikot Ubo, Odot Ekpene Ukim roads with spurs.	60.0km	1.49b
2	Ikot Ekpene, Ikono and Ini LGAs	Ikot Ekpene – Itu Mbon uso road	15.8km	869.26m
3	Oron LG	Ekeya – Okopedi – Urua Ita road	30km	745.51m
4	Obot Akara LG	Ikot Ukana – Abiakpo Usaka Annang	22.4km	1.64b
5	Etinan/Nsit Ubium LGAs	Etinan – Itreto road	14km	589.54m
6	Ibeno/Esit Eket LGAs	Ibeno – Edor – Ekpene Obio road	4.05k	1.49b
7	Obot Akara LG	Nto Ndang – Ikot Ukana Nto Edino – Ikot Ineme road	22.54km	1.69b
8	Ibesikpo/Uruan LGAs	Nung Udoe-Ibiaku Ishiet Adadia Beach market – Ituk Mbang	25.3k	1.49b
9	Etinan LG	Reinforced concrete bridge at Ekpene Ukpa	800km	143.05m

Source: Akwa Ibom Project, (2012).

Table 4: Rehabilitation of Rural Feeder Roads, Farm Roads and Tarring of Slippery Hills

S/N	Project Title	Some Benefiting Rural Communities
1	Grading of 20km of rural feeder roads in each LGA	Ndiya Ikpe Ikot Nkom, Ikot Okwot, Ikot Uso, Odot Ekpene, Akpa Utong, Urua Nsima, Ikot Edibo
2	Tarring of 4km of rural feeder road in each senatorial district	Ndiya, Ekeya, Ikot Akpan, Ntek, Idim Obio, Obio Akpa, Nto Ndang, Nto Ediene, Ikot Inem, Ikot Unek, Usak.
3	Tarring of 2 slippery hills in each LGA	Ekpene Obio, Ikot Ekan, Ikot Anam, Ikot Edung, Ekimbuk, Adadia, Urua Inyang etc.

Source: Statistical Year Book of Akwa Ibom State, (2012).

Data shown in the Tables showcase that, the government of Akwa Ibom State acknowledged that roads not only in quantitative terms, but also in qualitative terms have been at the heart of any society's social and economic development. Interestingly, the government efforts in transforming Akwa Ibom State through rural roads and bridges have impacted positively on the socio-economic development in the state variously; the availability of good road network that transcend rural areas has made it easy to navigate many parts of the state in a matter of

hours. This finding supports what Daniel (2012) earlier observation that the State has good road connectivity and many in good condition. It has also made it possible for rural farmers to transport their farm produce with ease to the urban centres with less cost; it has equally reduced the cost of portage and time loss in trekking long distances thereby facilitating more efficient distribution of goods and services in the state; other benefits are enhanced commercial agriculture, industrialisation and employment opportunities. Increment in the state income thereby contributing to the country's National Gross Domestic Products (NGDPs). Motorists are no longer subjected to the whims of transporters who subjected travellers to unreasonable fare hikes giving bad roads and high cost of vehicle maintenance as common excuses; it has stemmed the tide of rural – urban migration thereby improving farming by young people. Moreso, it has encouraged tourism development in the state such as the citing of Ibom Le' Meridien Hotel and Golf Resort in Idu Uruan village with World Class facilities dignified with a Five Star nomenclature. Sincerely, nothing would have probably attracted national and International Golfers, international businessmen, top government and corporate retreat, if the Uyo – Nwaniba road leading to Idu, Uruan Local Government Area was not constructed. Also, the proposed plan to build sea port at Ibaka in Mbo Local Government and refinery at Iko village in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area is as a result of good road network. All these benefits show that the state has actually benefited from her efforts in constructing rural roads and bridges (see Fig.2).

Notwithstanding the above impact, government efforts in transforming Akwa Ibom State through rural roads and bridges were not without some hindrances. In a study conducted by Ibok (2010) shows that inadequate funding occasioned by low budgetary allocation hindered effective provision in terms of a wider coverage. The greatest concern in opening and tarring of rural roads is that, it is seasonal, that is why such projects must be undertaken during the dry season. An attempt to embark on such project during the rainy season as a result of late release of fund had resulted in shabby work and project abandonment. The field experience shows that some slippery hills which were constructed were washed away by rain few months after construction. Also, some graded roads became water locked and impassable forcing the rural people using such road to look for alternative routes and bush paths. Despite these hindrances, we can say that government made appreciable effort in the provision of 10 bailey bridges, 20 slippery hills and 80 rural feeder roads between 1999 – 2011 covering four hundred and ten (410) out of two thousand five hundred (2,500) rural villages or areas in the state. This represents only 16% coverage. This therefore shows that the state of rural roads in the state still remains predominantly underdeveloped.

CONCLUSION

The positive impact of good networks of road on other economic sectors pass through various channels, motorable roads reduce cost and improve the movement of people, goods and services from different locations, and then, reduces the cost of production which in turn increases production output, transport cost is lowered which enhances better transport services, which in turn reduces prices of products and thus, boost inter and intra urban exchange of services making it possible for commercial agriculture, industrialization, and employment opportunities. These and other benefits have been realised as a result of government efforts toward rural roads and bridges.

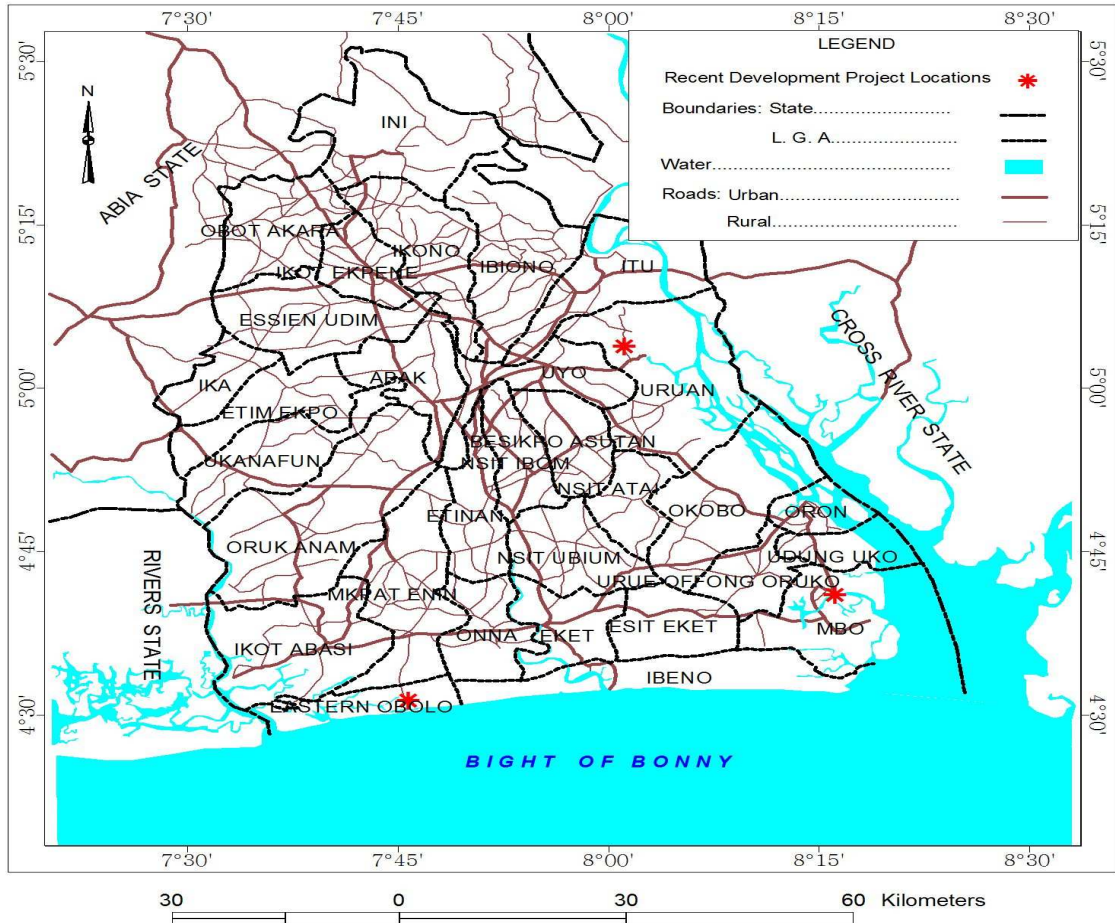


Fig. 2: Roads and Development Project Locations on the Map of Akwa Ibom State

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite government achievements in the construction of rural roads and bridges, there were some hindrances that impede its further progress. In this regard the paper therefore provides the following recommendations

1. The State government should sustain the present tempo by providing same to other rural communities who are yet to benefit from such provision.
2. The State Government should allocate more funds in their annual budget for rural infrastructure considering its importance. Also, such funds should be release on time considering the seasonal nature of road construction and maintenance.
3. Government should put in place monitoring and evaluation unit to ensure standard, performance and accountability in its project implementation.

4. Most importantly, government should ensure sustainability of its roads project in the rural areas. This can be accomplished by establishing the village or community development and maintenance board to oversee road maintenance of any kind.
5. Above all, there should be political will on the part of the successive governments to see rural roads and bridges as a propelling force for rural transformation.

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