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Transport as an Impediment to an Economically Endowed Region: The Case of Ekondo – Titi Sub Division of Cameroon

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Ekondo - Titi which has been described as the economic nerve centre of Ndian Division exhibits a plethora of growth potentials which make it an economically endowed town. Viable as this area may seem, it has been difficult to convert such viability to economic development. This is largely due to the fact that the area is poorly developed in terms of road and maritime transport. This paper examines the problems of road and water transport in Ekondo - Titi Sub-Division of Cameroon with a close look at the characteristics of the water and road transport modes. This paper also identifies the operational deficiencies that prevent transport from fulfilling its role in the development of the Sub-Division. Using a combination of field observations, interviews and group discussion with the different economic operators, it was observed that the prices of basic commodities such as building materials have increased significantly due to the high cost of transportation to the area. This has therefore slowed down the economic take - off of the Sub-Division for most parts of the year. The study presents proposals for appropriate remedial action both within the context of transport between this region and other areas of the South West Region and Cameroon in general.

Keywords: Sustainable development, communication network, post harvest problems, economic development, Ekondo-Titi.

INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that no matter how well intentioned the policy of the government is, it cannot be effectively implemented when there is no free flow of goods and services, economic operators and producers within all sectors from points of production to consumption centres. Routes play a vital role in lifting the economy of most countries particularly developing countries. Road transport is more significant in the case of landlocked countries and in areas where the other modes of transport are poorly or not adequately developed. Efficient transport links can also become vital for state security and identity. The quality of transport systems play an important role in determining the location of firms and the distribution of goods, both finished and unfinished. Thus, transport improvements generate welfare gains through better exploitation of comparative advantage between regions.

Transport development acts as a permissive factor to economic development and growth because "no region is completely self-contained, wanting no goods from its neighbours and wishing to sell nothing that it produces. In many cases, there is no alternative but to transport goods and raw materials from one region to another" (Knapp, 1989). Therefore, societies at any scale, from the small village in the developing countries to the large conurbations in the developed countries need a minimum transport requirement for optimal functioning. Transport is therefore the life wire of the economy and all human activities ranging from trade, agriculture, industry, service and leisure depend on transport.

Transport flow exists because of the misdistribution of world's resources. This is true in the works of Adams *et al*. (2006); Adesopo and Asaju (2004); Knapp (1989); Charles *et al*. (2009); and De Souza *et a*l. (2009). They realized that transport improvement acts as a catalyst to economic development because it increases the importance of relative space. To them, every flow provides a link between points of supply and that of demand or points of surplus and those of deficiency. They focused on transport as a social facility and an economic enabler at various levels within the development spectrum. Knowing very well that no country is self-contained, the writers in their

different works were able to show that transport development stimulates political, economic and socio-cultural development.

The role of transportation in the development of an area cannot be over emphasized as it ensures the flow and exchange of goods and services which are vital for economic development. Ekondo–Titi Sub-Division has been described as the "breast basket" or 'economic giant" of Ndian Division as it harbours a lot of natural resources that, if exploited, will transform the economy of the area. This area harbours Pamol Plantations Plc (the third largest oil producing company in the country), the Rumpi Hills and the Mokoko Forest Reserves. These areas have the potentials for the sustainable development of the touristic sector. Added to this is the fact that Ekondo – Titi Sub-Division is a transit town to the Korup National Park in Mundemba.

Paradoxically, this area is highly enclaved and seems to be cut off from other parts of the region due to lack of roads. Ekondo Titi Sub-Division is basically rural and the main activity is agriculture. This activity suffers from a number of post-harvest problems particularly transportation since most of the roads in this region are earth roads which are seasonal and some are particularly not usable at some periods of the year. The poor road network manifests itself through the high degree of perishability of agricultural produce, the increase in prices of basic commodities and building materials and consequent economic slowdown particularly during the wet season. Given the place of tourism in the world's economy, it is important to investigate how these potentials can be exploited to alleviate poverty with the provision of a good transport network. One other issue worth noting is the presence of a very important port in the area (Ekondo – Titi). This port is not exploited to its full capacity.

Based on the above issues, this paper examines role of poor transport as an inhibiting factor to the utilization of the resource potentials of Ekondo - Titi for development. It then attempts to analyse the efficiency of road and water transport services, the economic advantages of a dynamic transport sector and suggests ways of improving the poor state of transportation for future economic development and effective regional development.

THE STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Ekondo-Titi Sub-Division (Figure 1) is found within Ndian Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. It is located between latitudes 4°5' North and 5° North of the Equator and between longitudes 8°E and 9° E of the Greenwich Meridian. The annual average rainfall is about 2743.5mm and an average annual temperature of about 27.3°C.

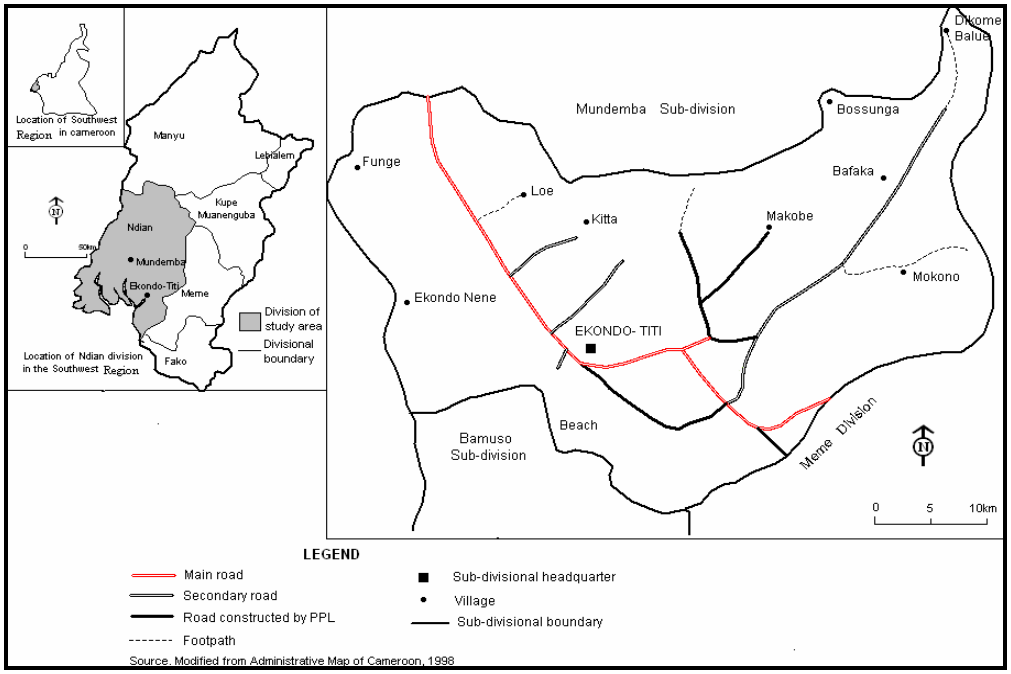

Figure 1: The Location of Ekondo-Titi Sub-Division

The sub-division covers a total land surface area of 1839.25sqkm² with a population of about 56,503 inhabitants (BUCREP, 2005). The main economic activity of the people is agriculture. Oil palm is grown by Pamol and small - holder farmers who market their nuts to Pamol or mill them locally. Food crops grown include yams, egusi, maize, cocoyams plantain, banana, cassava, beans and groundnuts, while artisanal fishing is being done especially by Nigerians immigrants. Secondary activities include oil milling (by Pamol and small scale producers). There are also some cottage industries such as garages, carpentry and weaving workshops. The tertiary sector includes civil servants, hawkers, shop operators, hotel caterers and transporters, as well as the border trade between Cameroon and Nigeria. However, it is important to note here that due to the lack of an effective transportation network, these activities are not yet fully developed.

Data for this study was collected mainly through field observations, the use of semi-structured questionnaires, interviews and group discussions with Pamol personnel, owners of small holder farms and other economic operators. Visits to the area were made during the two seasons; wet and dry seasons to find out the nature of the roads and the number of hours spent on each stretch of the road, the transport cost, the efficiency of the roads, vehicles and boats used. Field interviews and questionnaires were used to evaluate the fluctuating transport fare which range from 10.000frs in the wet season to 3.000frs in the dry season, between Kumba and Ekondo Titi and between Ekondo - Titi and other parts of the Sub-Division. Interviews were conducted with some members of the Customs and Emigration, Maritime Transport Departments in the area, Public Works Department, Delegation of Transport for Ndian and the authorities of the Ekondo Titi Rural Council. Secondary data was generated from municipal reports, Pamol Annual Reports, Customs reports, reports of the Sub-Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development for Ekondo-Titi, archives, published and unpublished books, dissertations and thesis.

RESULTS

Ekondo – Titi Sub-Division, for most parts of the year is enclaved. The difficulty in transportation has almost reduced the division into an isolated region with a very heavy toll on human activities such as agriculture, trade, urbanization, industrial development, tourism and other human activities. Since this area is basically agricultural, most of the farm produce get bad before they are transported to urban areas where they are sold. This affects the farmers negatively as the money spent on transporting the goods to the markets in most cases is not recovered when they sell their products (since most get bad along the way).

Road development in Ekondo-Titi is very poor and slow. Only a 50km stretch of earth road links Ekondo-Titi and the rest of Ndian Division to other parts of Cameroon. This road is also seasonal and is virtually impassable for most periods of the year (Figure 2). Consequently, only motor bikes and four wheel vehicles are used for transportation with head portage being an important mode for transporting raw material from farms to the markets. Motorbike transportation conveys very limited number of persons and does not have the capacity to transport bulky goods into or out of Ekondo Titi. This accounts for the limited quantities of basic commodities and building materials that reach the sub-division during the highly impassable wet season.

Fig. 2: The Bad State of the Kumba-Ekondo-Titi- Mundemba Highway

According to Pamol News (January 2007: pp 10), roads in Ekondo – Titi and Ndian Division in general are at their worst state. The corporation for example incurs extra-cost in the transportation of crops both from the field to the

factories and from factory to market. In 2006 business almost came to a halt due to bad roads and Pamol had to spend more than 40 million francs CFA to rehabilitate the 50km stretch of road between Ekondo Titi and Kumba, all in a bid to market her products. Before 1976, Mundemba could only be accessed through the Rio (by beaches). Transportation via the Rio suffered a decline due to accidents. The road between Ekondo Titi and Mundemba became operational in 1976 and officially became operational with bridges in 1985. The roads are bad for most of the year and this leads to very hand cost, as reflected in the transport fares. The high charges are not a reflection of the number of kilometers made but due to damages caused on the engines and the increased haul time (since most vehicles get stuck in mud for days). The impacts of this poor transport network are reflected in the long hours spent on journeys during the wet season and the high transport fares to and from areas linked to Ekondo Titi (Table 1).

Table 1: Transport Fare Situation for Roads linking Ekondo –Titi

Axle	Mode	Length	Motocar		Motobike	
			Dry season	Rainy season	Dry season	Rainy season
Ekondo-Titi - Kumba	Road	50km	3500	8000	5000	7000
Ekondo-Titi - Mundemba	Road	59km	4000	8500	5000	8000
Ekondo-Titi – Dikome Balue	Road	65km	5000	9000	6000	10000
Ekondo-Titi - Nigeria	Water		5000			
Ekondo-Titi - Mbongo	Water		2500			

Source: Ndian Road Transporters Drivers Union, (2010)

It is also important to note that “any luggage bigger than a traveling bag is paid for on the Ekondo-Titi road”. The fuel mostly used here is from neighbouring Nigeria, which is, in some cases, not available since transportation of Cameroonian fuel is hindered by the poor transport network. This also influences the prices of basic commodities and building materials (Table 2 and Table 3). Today the population heavily depends on motorbike for their circulation since they use both the roads and the footpaths and are thus faster. Despite the bad nature of the roads during the rainy season, more people travel during this time as compared to the dry season when they are engaged in farm work. The limitation of this transport network is that it cannot facilitate the transportation of bulky goods and can barely manage to carry human beings. This therefore is not a solution to the problem of transportation.

Table 2: Average Prices for Basic Commodities in Ekondo -Titi Sub- Division

Item	**Unit**	**Price (Kumba)**	**Price Ekondo-Titi (FCFA)**	**% increase**
Rice	Kg	300	450	33.3
Bread	Kg	550	700	21.4
Canned Tomato	Can	125	150	16.7
Milk (Peak)	Can	1900	2500	31.6
Sugar cubes	Kg	800	1000	20
Salt	1 cup	50	75	25
Candles	1	100	125	20
Savon (400g)	1 Tablet	300	400	25
Kerosene	1 litre	400	700	42.9
Mackerel	l kg	700	1000	30
Coking Gas	1 bottle (13kg)	6000	9000	33.3
Exercise Books	80 leaves	250	400	37.5
Pen (Beifa)	1	50	100	50
Beer (Export)	65cl Bottle	500	700	28.6

Source: Kimengsi, 2011

Table 3: Average Prices for Building Materials in Ekondo Titi Sub-Division

Item	Unit	Price in Kumba	Price Ekondo-Titi	% increase
Cement	1 bag	4800	7000	31.4
Plywood	1 piece	3500	5000	30
Iron Rod	6mm	1100	2500	56
Zinc	1 sheet	4000	5500	27.3
Nails (12 inche)	1 packet (5kg)	3500	5100	31.4

Source: Kimengsi, 2011

What is most disturbing about this situation is the fact that the majority of the population of this sub-division is poor, yet, they are forced to grapple with skyrocketing prices of basic commodities. Esoko Magazine (2008) summarised the development challenges of Ndian Division as follows;

> "… *there is no single kilometre of tarred road in Ndian Division, Ekondo-Titi, the economic capital of Ndian has no telephone, the available earth roads, due to the soil texture, easily give way under heavy and continuous downpour during the rainy season; CRTV Radio and TV signals do not get through in Ndian Division without satellite dishes…"*

Yet, this is a sub-division that is replete with natural resources which can generate and sustain growth and development.

Water transport was at its peak before 1977. Movement was very rampant as this time witnessed the buoyant trade between Cameroon and Nigeria. Travellers (migrants) included students and business men. There was commuted movement (people came to do business and go back). Movement began slowing down and this has resulted in departures and arrivals being scheduled. Before, there was unscheduled movement and boats would take off as soon as they were full. Ekondo-Titi had served as an exchange point between Nigerians and Cameroonians, and also as a gateway to Mundemba and the other parts of the Ndian Division. Export and import activities were done here. The types of goods imported include cosmetic products, motor parts, electronics, empty bags, generators, motorbikes, cloth materials, sewing machines, petrol, engine oil, gas oil, kerosene and food stuffs (oranges, beans, yams). On the other hand, goods exported through the port at Ekondo- Titi include wood, oil palm, rice, plantains, eru, garri, beans, rubber and soap.

Today however, the movement of passengers and the exchange of goods and services have greatly dropped to a point that the beaches in this region today seem to have no significance. In the past, these beaches enabled a big market and the movement of people was rapid but today it is not the case as movement has been greatly reduced. This is partly due to Cameroon – Nigeria border skirmishes with marked out most of the zone in the Bakassi Peninsula as 'none intervention zone'. This led to the decline of water transport in this area. The beaches in this region which were and are still functional on a very minimal basis include the Ekondo – Tit beach, Lobe Town beach, the Masore beach and the Ekondo Nene (German Beach since it was developed by the Germans and still has wreckage of German ships). These beaches provide the shortest possible trajectory to Nigeria in 2-3 hrs as opposed to Limbe which is 6 hrs to Calabar - Nigeria by the speed boat. This therefore means that maritime transport is still poorly developed and worse still, the problem of insecurity is rife. Table 2 shows the annual maritime passenger statistics for Ekondo Titi (1990-1995).

Table 2: Annual Marine Passenger's Statistics at Ekondo-Titi Beach (1990-1995)

Year	No of Passengers
1990	33,544
1991	21,194
1992	09,193
1993	06,000
1994	02,565
1995	04,416

Source: Marine Merchant Bureau Ekondo-Titi (2007)

According to the Central Custom Control Bureau in Ekondo-Titi, trade became less than 1/6th its pre-Bakassi days. It must be noted here that the drastic slow down in Marine transport in Ekondo-Titi is not only due to the Bakassi skirmishes but also due to the development of new route with better facilities (Limbe and Douala). The Ekondo-Titi beach can be improved upon by the building of a port and widening of the creek tracks.

However, the development of these beaches should not be a priority as this area is characterized by creeks, very shallow water and poor anchorage for large vessels and at times muddy. Commercial tonnage vessels cannot therefore access these creeks. The roots of mangroves also provide a hindrance to the development of these beaches as they project and block the passage for boats and canoes. This paper therefore recommends that since the cost of developing these beaches is very high, more attention should be given to the development of the road network in this region with provisions for some moderate port activities.

Despite the signing of the Green Tree Accord, the psycho-trauma remains a seal in the minds of the people and the recovery is very slow. Recently, the number of control posts along this already very bad road network has been reduced to revamp trade which is less than 1/6 what it was 13 years ago. However, with the Green Tree Accord and the relative peace in the Bakassi zone, there is hope that government efforts will be focused towards road and water transports so as to disenclave the region and replace the good interaction that once existed between Cameroon and Nigeria. These hopes of lasting peace for sustainable development seemed to have been threatened as recently, in February 2011, given the troubling news with respect to the kidnapping of a Sub Divisional officer, a Mayor and some of his assistants in the Bakassi area. The news report also noted the killing of some gendarme officers.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to transport and economic development, there is little doubt that a well developed transport investment will have a positive effect on the economy and development. Deficiencies in the transport will, thus, impact negatively on the economy. In Ekondo–Titi, producer's value transport network improvements for their potential to reduce not only transport costs, but logistics costs as well. Transport development has a lot of impact on the productive sector through the product and the labour markets. With regards to the product market, transport improvement in Ekondo-Titi will impact on Pamol, the Korup Park, and the oil rich areas of the Bakassi Peninsula and other services not only through transport cost reduction; but also through the scope for cost reductions throughout the logistics chain. Changes to the logistics chain will mean that the reliability of transport network is important as well as the speeds that they offer. Because of significant spillover effects, transport improvement will have potential impacts on the economy of this whole region and Cameroon as a whole.

However, the extent of these spillover benefits will be determined by the structure of the local and regional economy. Where competition is imperfect and economies of scale exist, spillover will be high. While transport improvements have the potential to yield significant economic benefits, the regional distribution of these benefits is dependent on the level of transport costs. Unless the transport costs are very high, peripheral regions in this region will stand to benefit to a greater extent than core regions from transport improvement. This will mean that regions like Ekondo – Titi Sub-Division that have been lagging in development should become attractive locations for industrial development since this not only help to curb unemployment but also reduce the rates of rural-urban migration. Transport will therefore have an important role to play in helping deliver such development. Because access to the labour market is now a much more important factor in the locational decision making of industries and other services, intra-regional links within the peripheral regions of this Sub-Division should be a focus for investment. This will go a long way to provide jobs, alleviate poverty and promote regional development.

The indirect effects on business costs taken together with the direct effects on transport costs suggest that transport investment can have a major impact on economic activity. Transport development acts as a permissive factor to economic development and growth because; "no region is completely self-contained, wanting no goods from its neighbors and wishing to sell nothing that it produces. In many cases, there is no alternative but to transport goods and raw-materials from one region to another" (Knapp, 1989). Therefore, society at any scale from the small village in the developing countries to the large conurbations in the developed countries needs a minimum transport requirement for optimal functioning. Transport is therefore, the life wire of the economy and all human activities ranging from trade, agriculture, industry, service and leisure depend on it. Faced with these development challenges, the following recommendations should be implemented.

The agricultural produce should be preserved to reduce the problem of perishability while basic commodities and building materials should be stocked in large quantities to take care of the demand during the impassable wet season. However, this is a short term measure for the Sub Division. As a mid term measure, it will be necessary to recommend the regular annual maintenance of the roads to limit the problem of inaccessibility within and out of the Sub-Division. The development of a good transport and communication network is sine qua non for the development

of any region and this therefore applies to Ekondo-Titi. Disenclaving the area and opening up more farms to market roads will lead to an increase in the income earned by farmers and the possibility of obtaining basic commodities at a relatively cheaper cost. Also, a good transport network will create an investment climate, enhance the flow of services into the Sub Division and reduce out migration (rural depopulation).With the signing of the Green Tree Accord to end the Cameroon-Nigeria border skirmishes, the government has embarked on a program to disenclave this region with some major axle way under construction. These are good signs and should be maintained but more still needs to be done if we want this region out of its economic stagnation.

CONCLUSION

The poor transport network that characterizes Ekondo-Titi coupled with the absence of feeder routes and its highly inaccessible nature has made the transportation of agricultural produce to the nearby towns and markets an uphill task. This has been aggravated by the problem of perishability. The high degree of perishability and the low prices for which the products are sold means that very little incomes are realized. At the same time, the poor masses have to grapple with the problems of high prices in the purchase of basic commodities whose transportation into these areas is constrained by the poor road network. The current road policy for the major radials in Cameroon would seem to be very compatible generally with regional development objectives since it will, above all, provide links to regions. However, the decision not to build the link between Ekondo-Titi Sub-Division and Kumba and to develop the port at Ekondo – Titi may deserve further consideration within the context of the National Road Policy since this region harbours one of the richest natural resource areas in Cameroon – the Bakassi Peninsula. Since access to the labour market is now a much more important factor in the location of a firm, intra-regional links within Ekondo-Tit and other regions of Cameroon should be a focus for investment. In the light of the need for a reliable transport network, infrastructure design standards may also need to reassess from this viewpoint.

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