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## **THE DILEMMA OF COLONIAL TRANSPORTATION ON THE LOWER NIGER AND BENUE RIVERS 1879-1960**

*The aim of this study is to investigate the dilemma of transportation on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers in Nigeria in the Hey days of European commercial water traffic in the period 1879 to 1960. This study finds out that the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers experienced a heavy traffic during the high water season of June to November but in the dry or low water season in December to May, vessels could not come up river from the open sea at Burutu. This paper concludes that the seasonal nature of transportation on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers in the colonial period was a set-back to serious and effective transportation. This study is significant because in the Hey Day of commercial water traffic on the Lower Niger River, over ten steamers or Vessels or boats plied up to the confluence of the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers at Lokoja daily from Burutu. The study adopts historical methodology using primary sources such as archival documents and oral interviews and secondary sources which involve the extensive use of published books and dissertation.*

**Keywords:** Boat, Steamers, Navigate, Lower Niger and Benue, River Ports.

### **Introduction**

In 1830, John and Richard Lander (two British explorers) established that the River Niger flowed into the Atlantic Ocean via the Niger Delta in Nigeria. Thereafter, the River Niger started to become a very important commercial waterway for the Europeans. Trade in Nigerian merchandise such as palm oil, palm kernel, cotton, groundnut, beniseed, shea nut and other commodities was the purpose for British empire building in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> British power in Nigeria rested solely on her trade with the colony for it was this trade that brought British men to Nigeria and in general it was commerce that brought Europeans to Africa. In 1876, a British die-hard merchant, Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie visited the Lower Niger. He formed a new trading company on the Niger, the Royal Niger Company (RNC), and persuaded the British firms operating on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers to amalgamate. Goldie's success prompted the Berlin conference to grant a protectorate over the Niger territory to the British Government in 1885.<sup>2</sup>

In 1886, to eliminate competition from other European companies, the British government granted power to the Royal Niger Company (NRC)

to exercise a kind of military protection over the middle belt and Northern Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of effective colonization, the Northern protectorate of Nigeria was subjected to military subordination led by Col. Friedrich Lugard who was appointed by the British government as the first Governor of Northern protectorate of Nigeria from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1901. Similar military campaigns was carried out in southern provinces of Nigeria and by 1914, the southern and northern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated with Col. Lugard as the first Governor General of one country called Nigeria.<sup>4</sup>

This paper focuses on the dilemma of transportation on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers in Nigeria in the Hey days of European commercial water traffic in the period 1879 to 1960. During the high water season, river Ports on the Lower Niger River experienced a heavy traffic in the colonial days of boom in cash crop exports from Nigeria to Europe and America. But in the dry season when the water of the Lower Niger was at low level vessels could not come up river from the open sea at Burutu up to the confluence of the Rivers Niger and Benue at Lokoja. Thus, this seasonal transportation method on the Lower Niger River in the colonial period was a set-back to serious and effective transportation business.

There were barges of various sizes. The commonest operating unit was one power craft with two barges towed alongside. Since none of the big steamers or ocean going vessels could come inland in the season of low water level, the process of transportation required a tug or vessels of suitable draught pulling some barges up and down the Lower Niger and Benue rivers. The number of barges pulled by each tug or vessel depended upon the installed capacity of its engine.

There was the dilemma of the supply of labour required to work in vessels and at the wharfs or inland ports on the Lower Niger River. Before the 1960s, supply of labour was essential to the smooth operation of the major inland river Ports. Before 1900, Africans were employed as labourers. They were then given on the job training in the various fields of specialization. Haven attained proficiency they were left in charge as pilots, captains, cleaners, stewards, clerks and porters. Most of them were recruited through compulsory labour in the early days of colonial trade.

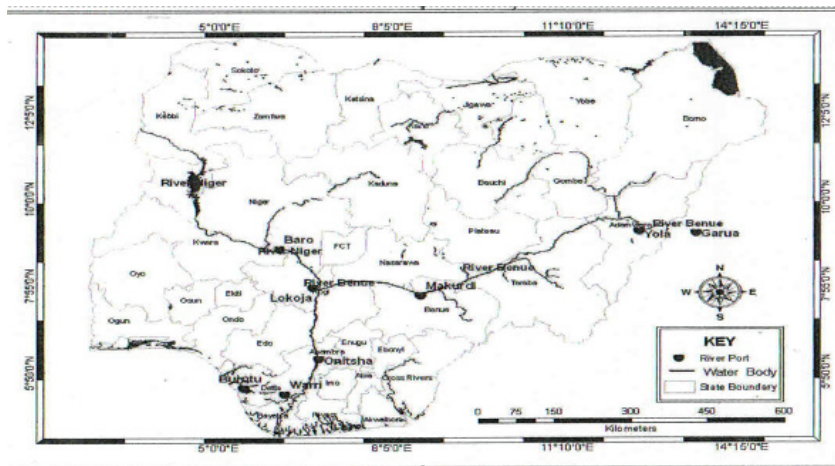
There was also the dilemma of produced purchase, packaging and export. A farmer produced cash crops on his farm, the company agent buyer or middleman bought the produce, made sure it met the standard requirements. He then took the produce to the ware house of the company he is representing for shipment abroad.

## **Companies Involved in Transportation on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers**

A.D. Ali,<sup>5</sup> in *Trade and Transport in the Lower Niger* noted that, as soon as the Lander Brothers had demonstrated the existence of navigable water way

(the River Niger) into the interior of Nigeria, British commercial enterprises set to work to ‘open up’ the country to trade. Mr. Macgregor Laird, a Liverpool Merchant supported by such influential bodies as the church missionary society, the British Association and the Royal Geographical society, quickly came forward and took advantage of the new commerce, in 1857, he was provided with a subsidy of £6-£8,000 per annum for the next five years by the British Government under Palmerston.<sup>6</sup> This was to enable him establish trade on the Niger above the confluence Macgregor Laird found Lokoja on the confluence a suitable station for trade and so he encouraged the British government to post a consul there. This goal of establishing a consulate at Lokoja was later accomplished by Dr. William Balfour Bakie following the death of McGregor Laird in 1861.

**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing Major River Ports**



Source: NEDECO Report Volume 2, 1958, 727

A.D. Ali,<sup>8</sup> in his Ph. D Thesis at the University of Lagos (2010) wrote that, trading stations were established on the banks of the major inland ports at Lokoja, Baro, Agenebode, Idah, Onitsha, Warri, Asaba, and Sapele on the Lower Niger and Makurdi, Yola, Ibi, on the Benue by several European firms. The first four among these firms were; the West African company of Manchester, which had close links with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) through the Crowder family; Alexander Miller and Brothers of Glasgow; Holland Jacques of London; and James Pinnock of Liverpool. In 1875, Holland Jacques of London ran into financial difficulties and its affairs were taken over by a former army engineer Sir George Dashwood Taubman Goldie who in 1876 reconstituted Holland Jacques as the Central African Trading Company. Sir George Taubman Goldie visited the Niger in 1877, and realizing the advantages

that would accrue from the amalgamation of British firms then trading on the river, and the consequent abandonment of trade rivalry, persuaded the firms in question to combine. The United African Company (U.A.C) was thus formed in 1879, and in 1881 its name was changed to the National African Company (N.A.C.) The United African Company (U.A.C) started with a nominal capital of 250,000 Pounds. The company hoped to eventually raise the capital needed to open regular trading relations with Hausaland.

Howard Pedraza,<sup>9</sup> in *Borioboola-Gha: The Story of Lokoja*, wrote that, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of commercial companies operating on the Lower Niger River increased and came to include John Bolt, and for a time the now forgotten names of J. Fairley and Co.; Pagenstecker and Co; H. Siegler and Co; Christian S. Cole, Tin Areas and Walkdens, all of which were later dissolved or have been incorporated into the most successful of the companies, the United Africa Company. In the year 1905, the Anglo African Bank started operation on the confluence at Lokoja but, its business was later acquired by the Bank of Nigeria which in its turn was absorbed by the Bank of British West Africa (BBWA).

By 1912, when the Kano groundnut export trade was booming, several European trading firms had established trading posts on the inland ports on the Lower Niger. These included the German Company of G.L Gaiser, the United African Company Limited, Paterson Zochonis, Societe Commerciale de l'Ivest African, G. Gottsschalk and Co. London Africa and overseas Ltd., J.F. Sick and Co., Co-operative Wholesale Society, Union Trading Company, Chellarams and Sons, J.T. Chanrai and Co.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, river ports had been constructed at Lokoja, Onitsha, Warri, and Sapele on the Lower Niger, and Makurdi, Yola, and Ibi on the Benue. Rocky obstacles and snags were blown up, and the rivers buoyed. This aided the Niger and Benue rivers safe for navigation. Some of the major European trading firms constructed their own wharves at Lokoja beach where plots, to the president of the Province. Most of the trading firms which had depots or warehouses on the Lower Niger were situated near the beach. Hence the trading company sites were concentrated in one particular area all along the beach on the river ports.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Dilemma of Colonial Transport on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers**

The River Niger occupies a central position in the network communication of the inland waterways of Nigeria. With this geographical position, the inland river ports on the Lower Niger River started to become busy in the colonial period with activities as vessels or ships and canoes plying north or south of the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers often stopped over at river stations of Lokoja, Baro, Agenebode, Idah, Onitsha, Warri, Sapele, Asaba, on the Niger and Makurdi, Yola, and Ibi on the Benue but the final journey terminates on the

open sea at Burutu. The dilemma of transportation on the Lower Niger River in the Hey days of European commercial water traffic was that these river Ports experienced a heavy traffic during the colonial days of boom in cash crop exports but in the dry season when the water of the Lower Niger was at low level these vessels could not come up river from the open sea at Burutu.

Thus, this seasonal transportation method on the Lower Niger River in the colonial period was a set-back to serious and effective transportation business in particular as it concerns trade in commodity export crops in Nigeria. Since none of the big steamers or ocean going vessels could come inland in the season of low water level, the process of transportation required a tug or vessels of suitable draught pulling some barges up and down the Lower Niger and Benue rivers. The number of barges pulled by each tug or vessel depended upon the installed capacity of its engine. Some tugs could pull as many as ten barges. However, the number of barges pulled by each vessel varies.<sup>12</sup>

Frederick Pedler.<sup>13</sup> in *The Lion and the Unicorn in Africa*, observed that, there were barges of various sizes which operated on the Lower Niger and Benue River in the years of boom in commodity crops trade. The commonest operating unit was one power craft with two barges towed alongside Barges were not towed in line often because when sailing up river it would be difficult to manoeuvre a line of barges round certain bends and when sailing down river, if the power unit were to run aground, barges towed in the line would bear down on the grounded vessel and dangerous collision may occur.

To make control of the vessels easy, full stern wheelers were used. Full stern wheel involved an overhanging weight at the stern of ship to reduce the rate of thrust when the engines are put astern. Initially side paddles were attached to the side of the vessels but this method was found to be not very effective.<sup>14</sup>

It is estimated that a branch steamer was capable of carrying goods weighing 1000 tons under good circumstances that is when there is a suitable draught. Therefore, if a branch steamer or vessel was pulling or pushing four barges this would mean it was carrying loads weighing  $1000 \times 4 = 4000$  tons. The size of the barges ranged from twelve feet to twenty four feet long. Some vessels when heavily loaded had a draught of about two feet in the river.<sup>15</sup>

The estimated time which it took for the ship from Burutu to Baro is shown on table 1, below:

**Table1: Estimated Time of Movement of ships on the Lower Niger 1900-1960**

Loading Burutu	6 days
En voyage	7 days

Discharging Baro (terminal)	8 days
To Burutu (sea port)	4 days

Source: Interview: Alhaji Abubakar Idris, 65 years, senior marine  
Supritendent (rtd), Lokoja, 2/10/90.

Braimo Ozoga,<sup>16</sup> explained in an interview that, the speed at which a lighter or vessel moved depended upon the weight of the cargoes it was pulling. On the whole, the speed of any vessel, boat or canoe depended on the direction of movement. The speed was usually higher while descending the river but slower while ascending. A large steamer might spend only two day descending the Lower Niger from Lokoja to Burutu, a distance of about 528 kilometres, while it could take up to five days going up the river to cover the same distance against the current. The journey from Burutu to Garua on the River Benue in Cameroun Republic, over a thousand kilometres away took on the average seventeen days, while returning with the current the distance could be completed in eleven days.

All vessels coming inland up the Niger and. Benue Rivers started from Burutu which is a deep river port open to the sea. The position of Burutu port was selected by the managers of the Niger company which had a large number of inland vessels which it depend on largely to do a major part of its trading activities on the Niger.<sup>17</sup>

There was the dilemma of a stopover at the river ports of Lokoja, Agenebode, Idah, Onitsha, Warri, Asaba, Sapele, Makurdi, Yola, and Ibi all of which were sub-stations to Burutu, either for loading or off-loading cargoes and trans-shipment of goods. Most vessels from Burutu, however, usually stop at Lokoja on the confluence for re-fuelling and changing pilots and to make the necessary hand over.<sup>18</sup>

There was also the dilemma of transshipment from Baro which is a terminal port or the highest point of navigation on the Niger where all vessels finally stopped and returned to Lokoja. Lokoja to Baro by steamer took about twenty four hours. The return journey took less time as it was travelling down river. Over ten steamers or Vessels were always arriving at Lokoja daily from Burutu some of these vessels went up river as far as Garua in the Cameroun Republic during high water.<sup>19</sup>

The major European trading firms owning steamers which plied the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers during the cash crop boom were the U.A.C. as the successor of the Niger Company and John Holt.<sup>20</sup> Although some other trading firms owned steamers, they were usually ocean going vessels. Among the biggest and most popular of John Holt steamers were the Mungo Park, William Wilberforce, Sir George Goldie, Sir George Clerk, M.T. Bauchi, Campay, Gongola, Sokoto, Yola, Lord Trenchard, Rasin, Taraba, Askabar, Richard Lander, Naraguta, Buza, Lantern Robert, Anketa, Mayor, Skubro,

others are Fantim, Nupe, Wudi, Katsina, Rubi, Apoolby, Splitby, Broughton Lordington and others.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the seasonal variations of the channel of the Lower Niger River Patrol men were usually sent at the beginning of every rainy season to survey the routes for navigation. Pilots were divided on a substation basis, firstly, because of the inconsistent nature of the river channels, secondly because of the distance of the journey and thirdly to make them acquainted with the routes which they plied. No one pilot ever piloted a vessel throughout the whole length of either the Niger or Benue rivers. The survey along the Niger-Benue Rivers was divided into three operations: Lokoja-Burutu, Lokoja - Baro, and Lokoja - Garua. Each of these journeys was covered by a pilot.<sup>22</sup> In other words a pilot specialized in piloting a steamer only on one of these routes. According to T.O. Adeoti:

A serious dilemma that faced water transportation on the Lower Niger River in the Hey days of European commercial water traffic was that steamers were not so useful in the dry Season when water level of the Niger fell considerable. The various trading firms then had to resort to hiring boats from indigenous owners to bring produce down the river to be stored at the riverside depots at Lokoja on the confluence from where it was trans-shipped by steamers down to Burutu on the open sea.<sup>23</sup>

Another dilemma was the inconvenience of hiring boats used for trans-shipment in the season of low water. For instance in 1902, hiring out a canoe or using it for ferrying could bring in an income of at least £2 (two British pounce) a month, This was considerable sum when It is realized that a labourer would generally earn about a shilling per day or about £1.10/ (one pounce ten shillings) a month at that time. There was a differential in charges on whether you were travelling in the wet or dry season. Even when the Northern Nigerian administration operated water transport, it charged different prices according to the season and direction of travelling. Transport charge for Cargo from Burutu to Lokoja in 1902, is shown on table 2, below.

**Table 2: Cargo Charges From Burutu to Lokoja in 1902**

Burutu to Lokoja (up)	wet season 30s per ton dry season 40s per ton
Lokoja to Burutu (down)	wet season 30s per ton Dry season 15s per tons

As can be seen on table 2 above, the charge during the wet season was lower when travelling from Burutu on the open sea to Lokoja at the confluence

in the wet season but higher in the dry season. On the other hand the cost of travelling down river from Lokoja to Burutu, was higher in the wet season for the same weight of goods. The fifty percent increase is explained by the difficulty and slowness of going down river, against the tide in the wet season.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Rivers Niger and Benue were not navigable by steamers all the year round, vessels went up to Baro along the Niger, some to Yola and Garua along the Benue to ship produce down river. This produce were stored in whare houses at an intermediate station awaiting future evacuation down river for export. This shipment of goods from up-river to intermediate station was usually done as a matter of urgency during the months of July to October when the water was at high flood, This was because by November shipment of goods down river to Lokoja could be virtually impossible by steamers and produce had to be placed on canoes or small boats went up river. Any steamer that went up river in November stood the risk of running aground, which implied it had to wait there until the next season of high water.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of these seasonal variations in the water level, most of the trading firms used to store their goods or produce in warehouses at intermediate river stations for future trans-shipment or evacuation in August and September. The fleet had to be concentrated as far as possible on the Garua route during this season. Immediately afterwards (by September ending), the fleets had to be Concentrated on the Baro route in order to make the best possible use of the Niger up to February. On the other hand, the Niger River from Lokoja to the sea was navigable throughout the year. Infact it was necessary to starve the lower Niger during the months when the upper Niger and Benue were navigable. And then concentrate the fleets on the lower Niger from November to July.

Frederic Pedler,<sup>26</sup> noted in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. that the navigability of the River Benue at each season is determined by its depth at the point where it joins the River Niger. Although the lower Niger is navigable throughout the year, but operations between Onitsha (313km from Burutu) and Lokoja (532km) where restricted to the smaller vessels between April and May. A dilemma also between Lokoja and Baro on the River Niger is that the river is open only from July to March, and from Baro to Jebba (52km) is accessible from August to February. On the River Benue, operations were restricted between Lokoja and Makurdi to the months of June to November. Between Makurdi and Yola navigation was restricted to the period July to early October; while the full voyage to Garua in Cameroun (1577km from Burutu) could only be carried out in the months of August and September.<sup>27</sup>

In order to reach the Niger from Burutu, a vessel had to navigate the Forcados River which joins the Niger about 110 miles from Burutu. The Forcados River is affected by tides for about 144km and is navigable for stern wheelers with six foot draught all the year round (3'—6" only on Warn flat at low water) and for small ocean going vessels of 250 feet in length and of 100



tons capable during the months of August, September and October. Vessels drawing over 15 foot cannot go beyond Burutu, but the branch steamers were constructed in such a way as to enable them carry heavy loads on a shallow draught. Branch steamers could carry 100 tons in 10 feet of water. The Forcados River varied in width from 200 to 400 yards up to Sagbama (361km from Lokoja at the confluence). From here the river then widened, varying in width, from 500 to 1000 yards.<sup>28</sup>

The government of Northern Nigeria maintained the only government service on the river steamers with an aggregate tonnage of 665 tons and lighters with carrying capacity of 250 tons being employed. The Niger company had a considerable flotilla of river steamers some 15 in numbers varying in tonnage from the Scarbrough of 468 tons (the largest boat on the Niger) to the Egga of 10 tons and aggregating some 2630 tons.<sup>29</sup>

Messrs John Holt & Co. and Messrs Pagensteker had another 500 tons capacity steamer. In all the aggregate tonnage of the river flotilla has about 4000 tons. In addition, at high water ocean steamers were frequently brought up the Niger as far as Lokoja and sometimes Baro. These steamers were often chartered. The larger steamers which were owned by the Niger Company worked during the high and medium flood from July to January and were then laid up for the season. The Niger Company devoted itself almost exclusively to developing inland river transport on the Lower Niger River. The company rarely extended its activities beyond 85 kilometres from the navigable river.<sup>30</sup>

### **Dilemma of Organization of Labour on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers**

There was the dilemma involved in the supply of labour required to work in vessels and at the wharfs or ports on the Lower Niger River. Before the 1960s, supply of labour was essential to the smooth operation of the major inland river Ports. Before 1900, Africans were originally employed as labourers. They were then given on the job training in the various fields of specialization, then having attained proficiency they were left in charge as; pilots, captains, cleaners, stewards, clerks and porters.<sup>31</sup>

Most men were recruited through compulsory labour in the early days from Lokoja and its environs. However when the Royal Niger Company administration was replaced, the colonial administration invariably objected to the use of forced labour by private firms operating at Lokoja as can be seen in the following commentary:

... His Excellency the Governor comments as follows under date 23:3:1913:— I do not like this compulsory labour from Bassa. The minesfield have to recruit their own labour and I see no reason why the trading firms in Lokoja should not do the same.<sup>32</sup>

## Chief Secretary to the Governor

However in spite of this warning the colonial administrators themselves continued to recruit forced labour by instructing the District Chiefs to compel their people to turn out for work on the Lokoja Docks as contained in this letter, written by the Resident to the Chief Secretary:

“... A representative of the Dekina District Chiefs staff will be detailed to warn the District Chiefs when steamers are expected. I am proceeding to Dekina to arrange for labour....<sup>33</sup>

As most of the river Ports were busy Ports the question of the supply of labour was a very serious affair as indicated by the Message contained in this letter of 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1912;

**LABOUR:** The S.S. Pluto was at the Lokoja Wharf discharging coal when I arrived on September 26th and some difficulty was experienced in recruiting sufficient labour to discharge her cargo. I suggest that they will be required to supply labour to help discharge these ocean going and branch steamers. A representative of Native staff from Bassa and Kabba should be detailed to the cantonment magistrate to sent out and warn the district heads in the vicinity of Lokoja when steamers are expected, The rate of discharging coal from the pluto was distinctly slow and would not bear comparison...<sup>34</sup>

## Chief Secretary to the Government

As can be seen from above, district heads were expected to organise their people to turn out for work at the Wharf. These forced labourers were mostly used as stevedores either to load or offload cargoes. The nature of the job was very tedious. This was why people never turned up voluntarily to work. More so, the remuneration for labourers was not encouraging. According to Braimo Ozogz:

Between 1900 and 1930 for example, a labourer was generally paid one shilling per day or about £1.40 (one pound ten shillings) a month. During the period 1930 — 1950 the wage was two pound ten shilling per month, and during the period 1950 — 1960 it was £5.1d (five pound one shilling) a month, and by 1970 the wage had risen to £8.1 a month.<sup>35</sup>

Each company recruited its own workers throughout the period of boom in European Commerce. Workers were often at liberty to withdraw their

service from one company to another. There was no professional group of dock workers, neither was there an organised trades union. This was a disadvantage to the workers as they could not negotiate for better remunerations. This explains why wages were so low and remained the same over long periods, during the season of high water when the Niger and Benue rivers could be plied by ocean going steamers about ten ocean going ships usually arrived at the confluence at Lokoja each day. During this period work was always going on at the wharf even at night. Lights were provided to enable the workers keep working round the clock.<sup>36</sup>

However, Nigerians who happened to be employed by the various trading firms either as middle men or licensed buying agents were generally rewarded or paid by way of allowances, overhead costs and transport differentials. The amount cannot be stipulated here because whatever each licensed buying agent received depended on the quantity and volume of goods purchased or supplied to the trading firms. Sales clerks in charge of ware houses for the sale of imported goods were on fixed monthly salaries while licensed buying agents were paid on commission.<sup>37</sup>

### **Dilemma of Produce Buying and Export on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers**

In order to facilitate the purchase, shipment and export of produce, the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB) was set up in 1934. The Board had its headquarters in London and a branch in Nigeria which served as the supply branch of the Nigerian secretariat. The branch purchased through approved buying agents all groundnuts offered for sale in Northern Nigeria. For the sake of purchase of groundnuts, Northern Nigeria was divided into buying districts. The buying districts in the river side area of Northern Nigeria were; Lokoja, Baro, Makurdi, and Yola. Groundnuts were purchased at a fixed price which remained constant from year to year. This was what was referred to as *Minimum naked ex-scale buying station prices*. The purchasing districts were cut out as follows:

Lokoja - All stations in the Kabba Province and Lokoja and Rumaisha in the Benue province. Lokoja district also comprised of the following towns: Isanlu, Ankpa, Ibillo, Kabba, Ogume, Okene, Kwali, Kwalwa, Auchi, Yewuni, Loko, Amagede, Girinya, Mozuni, Lokoja, Ajeokuta, Itobe, Agenebode, and Idah.

Baro - All buying stations in the Niger and Ilorin Province and Yelwa and Warra in the Sokoto Province. It also comprised of the following towns Baro, Katcha, Bakoga, Badeggi,

Ebba, Estuaggaie, Minna, Bida, Lemu, Kuchi, Badegi, Lapai Gawun, Abuja, Wuya, Kutigi, Dakpon, Tswegie, Jima, Agaie, Ndaaba, Kutu, Gwada, Sarikinpawa Zungeru, Ggarijuko, Kontagora, Kagara, Ukata, Saita, Ibeto, Paiko, Yelwa, Rejau, Zuru, Koko, Kendi, Jebba, Charati, Bodesadu, Loabu, Shonga Rabba, Kudu, Likpatata Baradogi, Wose.

Yola - All buying stations in the Adamawa province and Duku and Gwoza in the Bornu Province and Bajoga, DadinKowa (Hinna), Gombe and Kaltungo in the Bauchi province. It also comprise of the following town; ghellen, Lakuma, Banjiram, Numan, Jada, Mayo, Belwa, Madagale, Nichika, Mubi, little Gombe, Yola, Wuro Boko Wafango, Gamadio, Djen, Lav, Ankoerri Gidan Usumanu, Nun Beach, Gossol.

Makurdi - All buying stations in Gudi in the Plateau province and all stations in Benue province except Loko and Umaisha. It included the following towns; Donga, Ibi, Sufa, Abinsi, Makurdi, Gharegba, Kastina-Ala, Tor Donga, Gidan Uga, Savav, Ihugh, Gboko, Keffi, Godi, Lafia, Otuorkpo

Source: Interview, Alhaji Abubakar Idris, 65, Senior Marine Superintendent (rtd) lokoja, 2/10/1990) and Interview; Alhaji Suleiman S. Nmagaga, 72, Contractor, 28 and 5/10/1990.

Generally produce was purchased by utilizing the services of agents from time to time from the moment of purchase up to the moment of placing on board the ocean carrying vessels. Operation date of buying season was fixed as soon as the rain ceased to fall that is as from the beginning of the dry season. This is usually in the month of October or the first week of November. Residents of each province or districts were given the direction to vary the date to suit local conditions in particular districts. The agents for the West African produce control board which had the monopoly of the whole business of buying, shipping and exporting produce were multinational companies.<sup>38</sup>

The licensed agents recognized by the London headquarters were; (1) Campaigne Francaise de Afrique occidentale with headquarters in Liverpool (2) John Holt and Co. Ltd with headquarters in Liverpool and (3) United Africa company Ltd with headquarter in London. The main function of the buying agents was to purchase at buying stations at not less than the minimum prices and finance purchase until time of shipment after certification. The supply Branch would forward buying agents claims to the board that would make settlement with the United Kingdom Office. Produce was shipped in bulk so

as to cut down costs. The various shipping companies were responsible for the provision of storage. Produce were usually stored by crediting sheds. The shipping companies were paid a subsidy of 2/6d (two pounds six shilling) a ton by the West African produce Board.<sup>39</sup>

The various purchasing and shipping companies usually rendered a weekly return of stocks and purchases made to the Chief Inspector of produce in Lagos. The same weekly returns was also forwarded to the United Kingdom through the United Kingdom representatives in Nigeria, It was based on this weekly purchase return that the West African Produce Commodity Board in London paid the companies or agents after the bills of lading has been received in London.

In order to facilitate the purchase of export produce the various European trading firms appointed the service of Nigerians as middlemen. Some of these Nigerian middlemen, had previously engaged in the pre-colonial long distance trade, others were men with business acumen, while in some others were merely picked because they were interpreters.<sup>40</sup>

The chain of purchase of export crops was as follows; a farmer produced cash crops on his farm, the company agent buyer or middleman who must be from the locality, bought the produce, made sure it met the standard requirements, weighed it and then stored it. After doing all the buying from place to place, he then took the produce to the ware house of the company he is representing. Figure 1, below shows chain of purchase of export.

**Figure 1: Showing Chain of Purchase of Export Crops in the Lower Niger in 1936**



Source: NAK LOKOPROF 1936-54 Of Produce Buyers.

From the diagram above, we can see that the produce passed through several stages before it reached its final destination. There is no doubt that this long chain of middlemen had consequences for the price of the produce.

## Conclusion

Discussion in this paper was focused on the dilemma of transportation on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers in the Hey days of European commercial water traffic on the Lower Niger River in Nigeria in the period 1879 to 1960. River Ports on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers experienced a heavy traffic during the colonial days of boom in cash crop exports but in the dry season when the water of the Lower Niger was at low level these vessels could not come up river from the open sea at Burutu. Since none of the big steamers or ocean going vessels could come inland in the season of low water level, the process of transportation required a tug or vessels of suitable draught pulling some barges up and down the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers. The paper also discussed the dilemma involved in the supply of labour required to work in vessels and at the wharfs or inland river ports on the Lower Niger and Benue Rivers. Before the 1960s, supply of labour was essential to the smooth operation of the major inland river Ports. Before 1900, Africans were originally employed as labourers. Each company recruited its own workers throughout the period of boom, in European commerce. In order to facilitate the purchase of export produce the various European trading firms appointed the service of Nigerians as middlemen, clerks, and agents.

## End Notes

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