

Impact And Challenges of Indigenous Water Transportation in Buruku Area

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impact of indigenous water transport on River Katsina-Ala in Buruku area. The study explored the social, economic, and environmental implications of this traditional mode of transport. The paper employs historical methodology for the purpose of gathering information about the topic. The findings highlighted the significance of indigenous water transport as a means of connecting communities, supporting local economies, and preserving cultural heritage. The study also addressed potential challenges and opportunities for sustainable development, such as ensuring environmental conservation and balancing modernization with the preservation of indigenous practices. The research contributes to a better understanding of the indigenous water transport system and its impact on Buruku area, providing insights for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to promote the preservation and sustainable management of this valuable mode of transport.

Keywords: *water, water transportation, indigenous water transportation, impact, challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the inescapable basic needs of modern societies is transport which many scholars have identified as the arteries and lifelines through which national economic systems functions.¹ Transport has also been described as “the movement of passengers or goods from where they are to where their relative value is greater”.² Therefore, in the case of people, this may be for a variety of reasons of an economic or personal nature and in the case of goods exchange or business, it is considered as an auxiliary to trade and industry in carrying raw materials to the place of production and distributing finished products for consumption. Thus removing distance barrier. Inland waterways are any navigable or potentially navigable body of water, such as a river, channel, canal, or other routes for travel by water away from the coast or shore line. It usually refers to the bodies of water in the interior parts of a country or region. Inland Water Transport therefore refers to movement of goods or persons via inland water (canals, rivers, lakes etc.) between inland ports or quays and wharfs.³ Inland waterways constitute of natural or artificial navigable inland body of water, or system of interconnected bodies of water, used for transportation, may include a lake, river, canal, or any combination of these. The existence of waterways has been an important factor in the development of regions; waterways have served first as paths of exploration and new settlement and later as avenues of commerce and trade. Although slower than rail, road, and air transport, water transport is less expensive and accommodates such bulk cargoes as coal, ores, grain, and lumber. Navigation on waterways may be improved

by the construction of canals, dams, locks, levees, and dikes.

In any human endeavour or activity be it social, cultural, economic or political, the need for movement from place to place and conveying things, transmitting messages and disseminating news, information and ideas is very paramount. Hardly any development can take place in a society without transport services as there is always the need to collect, assemble, transfer and distribute persons and things in small or large quantities and over short and longer distances. The journeys, to work, business, shopping, recreation, entertainment, to social, cultural and religious functions as well as those undertaken for administrative purpose are all carried out in a variety of transport media. The crucial importance of transport as a necessary condition of man's socio-economic development is widely recognized as without its availability and efficiency, all other development programmes cannot reach maximum effectiveness. The efficient functioning of a national economy therefore, depends largely on the adequacy and efficiency of its transport system.

Prior to the advent of colonialism, Tiv societies generally used local canoes to transport people across the river. Communities bordering rivers had considerable access to activities at the riverside. Buruku River crossing started before the arrival of British hegemony in the study area. In pre-colonial Nigeria, commercial life of the people revolved around trade and transportation through several water channels. Major river side towns served as a rendezvous or market base for traders from different parts of the world, trading in both long and short distance trade.⁵ Articles of trade varied including plantain, onions, beans, beads, Okro, tomatoes, pepper, potatoes, garden eggs, and corn. At this period, indigenous water transportation was done with the use of canoes. These canoes also served as a means of fishing. According to Mall. Baban Usman Gada, the act of paddling canoe on the river

required years of training and practice to master, depending on the quantity of goods and passengers, local canoes could be paddled by single person using long bamboo tree.⁶ So, until the emergence of Europeans, canoe served as means of social, economic and political contact among the people of the area, and also between them and their immediate and distant neighbours. The emergence of the Europeans thus witnessed the introductions of improved means of transportation on the river. Colonial transportation served as medium of exporting cash crops produced by Africans, and was not meant to improve the lives of the people but as a means of exploitation of indigenous raw commodities. These colonial transport structures that survived after independence have prevailed up to the period of study before it transformed into large commercial activity.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The key concepts that require clarification in this paper are “Water”, “Transportation”, “Water Transportation” and “Indigenous”.

Water: Water is a fundamental and essential substance that plays a vital role in sustaining life and shaping the Earth's ecosystems. It is a transparent, odorless, and tasteless liquid that covers approximately 71% of the planet's surface, occupying oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, and glaciers.⁷ Water exists in various forms, including liquid, solid (ice), and gas (water vapor), and it undergoes continuous cycles of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. Water serves as a universal solvent, facilitating chemical reactions, transporting nutrients, and supporting diverse forms of life.⁸ It acts as a crucial resource for agriculture, industry, and domestic use, and its availability and quality have significant implications for human well-being and environmental sustainability.

Transportation: Transportation means the movement of people or goods from one location to another. The term is derived from two Latin words, *trans* meaning “across” and *portare* meaning “to carry”.⁹ Hence, transport literally means “to carry across” which presupposes ‘movement across space.’ Transport as a human endeavour or activity is as old as human existence. Its history dates back to the dawn of recorded history or beyond. Right from the start of human history, man has remained a gyrotory or itinerant animal moving from one place to another in search of food, shelter and for exchange of goods and services.¹⁰ Although the modes used have changed through ages, its importance to the development of cultures and advancement of civilizations cannot be overemphasized.

Transport, or mobility, is central to all activities of man and its history is the history of human civilization. It laid the foundation for the discovery of agriculture and the sophisticated tradition of iron metallurgy. For instance, early agricultural activities began when the early man through his nomadic tendencies observed the germination of discarded seeds in his environment and also started making simple implements for hunting games. It has been posited that no society can develop beyond its transport system. Hence, a society without an efficient and developed transport system remains primitive. It is on record that all imperial empires and great kingdoms in history had all achieved their greatness by first contriving an efficient and developed transport system. It is therefore no exaggeration that transport is the tonic of human existence.¹¹

The meaning and definition of transport are many and varied. Transport, according to Wayne, is “an activity that provides for the movement of goods or individuals from one place to another”.¹² However, the concept of transport goes beyond the movement of people and goods from one point to another. It also takes into consideration the means of conveyance or travel. From the foregoing,

therefore, transport can be defined as the movement of persons, animals, goods, ideas, information etc. from one point to another and the means by which such movement is accomplished.

Water transportation: Water transportation refers to the movement of people, goods, or resources over bodies of water such as rivers, lakes, canals, and oceans. It involves the use of various watercrafts, such as boats, ships, ferries, barges, and submarines, to navigate and transport passengers or cargo across waterways.¹³ Water transportation is a crucial mode of travel and trade, providing an efficient and cost-effective means of transportation for both domestic and international purposes. It plays a significant role in global commerce, tourism, and the movement of goods and people, contributing to economic development and connectivity between different regions and countries.

Generally, civilizations located near water are often preferred; owing partly to the fact that water enables more efficient and reliable travel compared to going over land. Waterways are critically important to the transportation of people and goods and services throughout the world due to its ability to convey bulk goods and services.¹⁴ The complex network of connections between coastal inland ports, trails, and air and truck routes forms a footing on the basis which material and economic wealth of a nation depend.¹⁵ Waterways in developing countries are critical avenues for local and regional commerce take place whereby fruits and vegetables vendors flock to floating markets on rivers and canals.¹⁶

The promptness and little charge of conveying goods by water influenced the locations of inhabitants near navigable waters (Rivers, Lakes, Canals, and oceans).¹⁷ Goods produced within inland farms were conveyed through inland waterways to coastal ports and

other coastal communities. However modern ferries, cruise ships and many types of recreational boats carry passengers for purposes ranging from daily business commuting to fishing and sight-seeing. Indigenous water transportation refers to the traditional methods and practices employed by indigenous communities to navigate and utilize water bodies for transportation purposes.

Indigenous water transportation has been extensively studied by several scholars and researchers globally, these studies range from how several communities have utilized cultural practices to harness movement across water bodies. They have highlighted the ingenuity and resourcefulness of indigenous communities in developing and using various types of watercraft for transportation. For example, canoes and dugout boats are commonly cited as important modes of transportation used by indigenous peoples worldwide. They have explored the construction techniques, materials used, and design principles employed in crafting these watercraft, showcasing the knowledge and skills passed down through generations.

Additionally, scholars have examined the navigational techniques utilized by indigenous communities. They have documented traditional methods of reading water currents, understanding tides, and identifying landmarks or natural indicators to navigate water bodies safely. Indigenous communities have developed a profound understanding of their local waterways, allowing them to traverse rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water effectively.

Moreover, scholars have emphasized the cultural significance of indigenous water transportation. Watercraft and navigation practices are often deeply intertwined with the social, economic, and cultural aspects of indigenous cultures. Traditional water transportation plays a vital role in trade, communication, and cultural practices, influencing folklore, and community identity.

Indigenous: With reference to people, “Indigenous” describes any group of people native to a specific region. In other words, it refers to people who lived there before colonists or settlers arrived, defined new borders, and began to occupy the land.¹⁸ Many Indigenous communities worldwide have faced and continue to face devastation of their culture and language, along with the loss of land and resources. The word ‘indigenous’ refers to the notion of a place-based human ethnic culture that has not migrated from its homeland, and is not a settler or colonial population.¹⁹

With reference to technology, Technologies employed by the native inhabitants of a country constitute an important part of its cultural heritage and should therefore be protected against exploitation by industrialized countries.²⁰ Indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings.²¹ For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life. This knowledge is integral to a cultural complex that also encompasses language, systems of classification, resource use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality.²² These unique ways of knowing are important facets of the world’s cultural diversity, and provide a foundation for locally-appropriate sustainable development.

History of Indigenous Water Transportation at Buruku Area

The history of indigenous water transportation on the River Katsina-Ala in the Buruku area can be traced back to ancient times when local communities relied on traditional methods to navigate and utilize the river for transportation purposes. The river has served as a vital lifeline for the people of Buruku, facilitating trade,

connecting communities, and providing a means of sustenance through fishing activities.²³

Indigenous communities along River Katsina-Ala, such as the Tiv, and Etulo developed specialized knowledge and skills in utilizing the river for transportation.²⁴ They constructed canoes and dugout boats from sturdy tree trunks, employing craftsmanship passed down through generations. This watercraft was designed to navigate the river's currents and transport people, goods, and resources between settlements.

Water transportation played a significant role in the economic activities of the Buruku area. Local inhabitants utilized the river to transport agricultural produce, including yams, cassava, palm oil, and other crops, to neighboring communities and markets. The river acted as a trade route, facilitating the exchange of goods and supporting commercial activities.²⁵ Furthermore, according to oral informants, indigenous fishing communities thrived along the River Katsina-ala, employing traditional fishing techniques to sustain their livelihoods.²⁶ Fishing provided not only a source of food but also opportunities for trade and commerce, as surplus catches were exchanged for other commodities.

The river also held cultural and social significance for the indigenous communities. It was a gathering point for ceremonies, cultural celebrations, and communal activities. Traditional practices, folklore, and oral history were closely tied to the river, reflecting the deep connection between the people and their natural environment.²⁷

The River Katsina-Ala, being a major watercourse in the region, has provided a natural transportation route for centuries. The indigenous communities living along the riverbanks recognized the advantages of using water transport to navigate the river and transport goods and people. They developed canoes and boats that were well-suited to the river's conditions, allowing them to travel upstream and downstream with ease.²⁸

This traditional watercraft was initially constructed using locally available materials such as wood and tree trunks.²⁹ They were designed to be sturdy and capable of carrying both passengers and cargo. Over time, as the demand for transportation grew, communities along the River Katsina-Ala refined their boat-building techniques and introduced improvements to enhance their efficiency and capacity.

Over time, with the advent of modern transportation and infrastructure, the prominence of indigenous water transportation on the River Katsina-ala has diminished. However, its legacy and cultural significance remain important elements of the history and heritage of the Buruku area, serving as a reminder of the resilience and adaptability of the indigenous communities who utilized the river for their transportation needs.

Impact of Water Transport

In this section, the impact of water transportation on Buruku Area is evaluated under the following sub-sections:

Social Impact

Water transportation on the River Katsina-Ala in Benue State has had significant socio-impacts on the communities residing along its banks. The utilization of water transport has brought about various social benefits, contributing to the overall development and well-being of the region.

Water transport has opened up economic opportunities for the communities along the River Katsina-Ala. It has facilitated trade and commerce by providing a cost-effective means to transport goods and agricultural produce.³⁰ Farmers and traders can now easily transport their products to markets located downstream or in neighboring communities, expanding their customer base and increasing their income.³¹

Water transport on the River Katsina-Ala has improved market access for communities in the region. It has enhanced connectivity between different villages, towns, and markets along the riverbanks.³² This promotes regional integration by enabling the exchange of goods, fostering economic cooperation, and encouraging the growth of local economies.³³

The development of water transport infrastructure and services on the River Katsina-Ala has created employment opportunities for the local population. Boat operators, dockworkers, maintenance crews, and other supporting staff are directly involved in the water transport operations.³⁴ This provides a source of income for individuals and households, reducing unemployment and poverty levels in the region.

Water transport has strengthened social connectivity among communities along the River Katsina-Ala.³⁵ It has brought people closer by providing a means for individuals to travel, visit family and friends, and participates in social events. Improved connectivity enhances social interactions, cultural exchanges, and strengthens community ties.³⁶

Water transport has improved access to essential services for communities along the riverbanks. People can now easily access healthcare facilities, schools, and other essential amenities located in nearby towns or downstream areas.³⁷ This has positively impacted the quality of life, particularly for those living in remote or underserved communities.

The scenic beauty of the River Katsina-Ala and the opportunities for leisure activities it offers have contributed to the development of tourism and recreation in the region.³⁸ Tourists and visitors can enjoy boat cruises, fishing trips, and other water-based activities, providing an economic boost to the local tourism industry and creating employment opportunities in related sectors.³⁹

Water transportation on the River Katsina-Ala has played a role in preserving and promoting the cultural

heritage of the communities.⁴⁰ Traditional watercraft, such as canoes and boats, are still used, maintaining the traditional skills of boat building and navigation. This sustains cultural practices, local knowledge, and craftsmanship, contributing to the preservation of cultural identity.

Economic Impact

Water transportation on River Katsina-Ala in the Buruku area of Benue State has had significant economic impacts, fostering trade, enhancing market access, and stimulating economic growth in the region. The utilization of water transport has opened up economic opportunities and created a positive ripple effect on various sectors. Here are some relevant examples of the economic impact of water transportation on the River Katsina-Ala in the Buruku area:

- a. *Agricultural Trade:* Water transport has facilitated the transportation of agricultural produce, such as yam, cassava, and palm produce, from farming communities in the Buruku area to markets and processing centers located downstream or in neighboring towns.⁴¹ Farmers can now transport their products in larger quantities and at lower costs, increasing their market reach and improving their profitability.
- b. *Expansion of Market Reach:* Water transport has expanded the market reach for businesses in the Buruku area. By utilizing the River Katsina-Ala, traders and entrepreneurs can access markets in other communities along the riverbanks or downstream towns.⁴² This has created opportunities for businesses to sell their products to a wider customer base, increasing sales and revenue.
- c. *Boost to Local Economy:* The development of water transportation infrastructure and services has injected economic activity into the Buruku area.⁴³ It

has created employment opportunities for boat operators, dockworkers, maintenance crews, and other supporting staff. Additionally, increased trade and commerce along the riverbanks have stimulated the local economy, generating income and promoting economic growth.

- d. *Cost-Effective Transportation:* Water transport on the River Katsina-Ala offers a cost-effective means of transporting goods and bulk cargoes.⁴⁴ Compared to road transport, water transport can be more economical, particularly for long-distance and heavy cargo transportation. This cost advantage enables businesses to reduce transportation costs, which can contribute to competitive pricing and increased profitability.
- e. *Diversification of Economic Activities:* The presence of water transport infrastructure has encouraged the diversification of economic activities in the Buruku area.⁴⁵ Entrepreneurs and investors have seized opportunities to establish businesses and services that support the water transportation sector, such as boat building and repair, fuel stations, storage facilities, and hospitality services for tourists and travellers.
- f. *Tourism Development:* The scenic beauty of the River Katsina-Ala and the opportunities for water-based activities has attracted tourists to the Buruku area.⁴⁶ Boat cruises, fishing trips, and other recreational activities have developed, contributing to the growth of the local tourism industry. This influx of tourists brings economic benefits, including increased spending on accommodations, food, and local products.
- g. *Infrastructure Development:* The establishment of water transport infrastructure, including jetties and terminals, along the River Katsina-Ala has stimulated infrastructure development in the Buruku area.⁴⁷ Improved access to water transport has led to the

construction and enhancement of related infrastructure, such as roads, parking lots, and market facilities. This infrastructure development supports economic activities and enhances the overall business environment.

Cultural Impact

The River Katsina-Ala, flowing through the Buruku area of Benue State, has had a significant impact on the culture of the Tiv people in general and Buruku specifically. The river has shaped various cultural practices and traditions, influencing their way of life. Here are some aspects of Tiv culture that have been impacted by the River Katsina-Ala:

- i. *Agriculture and Livelihood:* The Tiv people rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods, and the fertile lands along the River Katsina-Ala have provided them with a rich source of water for irrigation.⁴⁸ The river's presence has enabled the cultivation of crops such as yams, corn, millet, and vegetables, which are essential to the Tiv's agricultural practices and food security. The river's water supply contributes to sustaining their agricultural traditions and economic activities.
- ii. *Fishing Practices:* Fishing is an important activity among the Tiv people, and the River Katsina-Ala provides abundant fish resources. The Tiv engage in fishing as a means of subsistence and trade.⁴⁹ The river's presence has influenced their fishing techniques, such as using nets, traps, and hooks, and has become an integral part of their cultural practices. Fishing also plays a role in social gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies, where fish is often a central part of the cuisine.
- iii. *Transportation and Trade:* The River Katsina-Ala has served as a transportation route for the Tiv people, facilitating the movement of goods, people, and

cultural exchange. Traditionally, canoes were used for river transportation, connecting different Tiv settlements along the riverbanks.⁵⁰ The river has allowed for trade activities, enabling the exchange of agricultural products, crafts, and other goods between communities. It has also fostered cultural interactions, as people from different areas come into contact during their journeys along the river.

- iv. *Art and Symbolism:* The River Katsina-Ala has inspired artistic expressions and symbolism in Tiv culture. Traditional Tiv artwork often includes depictions of rivers, canoes, and fishing scenes, reflecting the cultural significance of water and river activities.⁵¹ These artistic representations serve as a visual expression of the Tiv people's relationship with the river and their cultural identity.
- v. *Traditional Fishing Practices:* Fishing is an integral part of the local culture in the communities along the River Katsina-Ala. Water transportation has shaped traditional fishing practices and techniques. Local fishermen use specific fishing methods, tools, and rituals that have been passed down through generations.⁵² These practices not only sustain the livelihoods of fishing communities but also preserve cultural knowledge and customs associated with fishing.
- vi. *Cultural Festivals:* Water transportation has influenced cultural festivals celebrated by the communities along the River Katsina-Ala. Festivals like the New Yam Festival often incorporate water-related elements and activities.⁵³ For example, communities may organize boat processions or perform traditional dances and rituals near the riverbanks to honor the river's importance in their culture and livelihoods.
- vii. *Oral Traditions and Folklore:* The River Katsina-Ala has been a subject of oral traditions and folklore in the local communities. Stories, legends, and myths are

often woven around the river, its spirits, and its significance in the lives of the people.⁵⁴ These oral traditions serve as a means of passing down cultural heritage and instilling a sense of identity and belonging among community members.

- viii. *Art and Craftsmanship*: Water transportation has influenced artistic expressions and craftsmanship in the region. Local artists and craftsmen create works inspired by the river and its transportation activities. Paintings, sculptures, carvings, and other forms of artwork depict scenes of boat journeys, fishing, and river life.⁵⁵ These artistic creations reflect the cultural significance of water transportation and contribute to the preservation and promotion of local culture.
- ix. *Social Bonding and Community Cohesion*: Water transportation on the River Katsina-Ala has fostered social bonding and community cohesion. People travelling together on boats or engaging in activities related to water transport build relationships and connections.⁵⁶ Water transport hubs, such as jetties or landing points, serve as meeting places where people gather, interact, and exchange ideas, strengthening social ties and fostering a sense of community.
- x. *Culinary Traditions*: The availability of water transport has influenced culinary traditions in the region. Freshwater fish and other aquatic resources from the River Katsina-Ala play a significant role in the local cuisine. Traditional dishes and cooking methods incorporate these ingredients, reflecting the close relationship between the river and the culinary practices of the communities.⁵⁷

Challenges of Indigenous Water Transport system at Bururku Crossing

The indigenous water transport system at Bururku Crossing, which involves the use of canoes and boats for

transportation on the River Katsina-Ala, faces several challenges. Let's evaluate some of these challenges:

- a) *Safety Concerns:* Safety is a major challenge for indigenous water transport at Buruku Crossing.⁵⁸ Canoes and boats used for transportation may lack safety features and proper maintenance, increasing the risk of accidents and mishaps. This is especially concerning during adverse weather conditions or when the river is in flood. The absence of safety regulations and enforcement further exacerbates these risks.
- b) *Lack of Infrastructure:* The lack of proper infrastructure poses challenges for indigenous water transportation.⁵⁹ The absence of well-maintained jetties, landing points, and access roads makes it difficult for passengers and goods to embark and disembark safely. Insufficient lighting and signage along the river can also hinder navigation, especially during nighttime travel.
- c) *Limited Capacity:* Indigenous water transport systems often have limited capacity to accommodate a large number of passengers and cargo.⁶⁰ The size and design of traditional canoes and boats restrict the number of people and goods that can be transported at a given time. This can lead to overcrowding, discomfort, and delays, particularly during peak travel periods or when there is a surge in demand.
- d) *Lack of Regulation:* The absence of proper regulations and oversight poses challenges for indigenous water transport.⁶¹ Without regulatory frameworks and standards in place, issues such as fare pricing, safety measures, and quality control may arise. This can lead to inconsistencies, exploitation of passengers, and a lack of accountability in the sector.
- e) *Infrastructure Development:* The need for infrastructure development to support indigenous water transport at Buruku Crossing is a significant challenge. Improving and expanding jetties, landing

points, and related facilities require financial investment and coordination among relevant stakeholders.⁶² Additionally, the maintenance and repair of boats and canoes require resources and skilled labor, which may not always be readily available.

- f) *Technological Advancements*: The reliance on traditional canoes and boats hinders the adoption of modern technologies and advancements in water transport. The lack of motorized vessels and navigational aids limits efficiency and operational capabilities.⁶³ The introduction of safer and more efficient vessels, along with GPS navigation systems, could greatly enhance the indigenous water transport system.

Conclusion

River Katsina-ala is an important waterway in Benue State, Nigeria, that has played a significant role in water transportation. The river has provided a means of transportation for both goods and people for centuries. The impact of water transportation cannot be over emphasized, however, this paper after careful evaluation, has concluded that. The river has facilitated the movement of goods and people across the state. Indigenous water transport systems, such as canoes and ferries, have been used to transport goods such as food crops, building materials, and other goods. These goods are transported to different parts of the state, where they are sold or used in local industries. Also, water transportation on the river has also been a source of income for local residents. Many people engage in fishing and ferrying activities to earn a living. They use small boats to ferry people and goods across the river, earning income from the fees charged. The river has played a significant role in the cultural activities of the people of Benue State. Many cultural festivals and events are held along the river, such as the

Tiv Fishing Festival, which celebrates the river's importance to the Tiv people. These events have become tourist attractions, bringing visitors and generating revenue for the local economy. The river has both positive and negative impact on the environment. Water transportation activities have contributed to pollution of the river, which has affected aquatic life and the health of people who depend on the river for their livelihoods. The impact of water transportation on River Katsina-ala has been limited by the lack of infrastructure and government support. The lack of modern transport systems such as motorized boats and bridges has made water transportation on the river difficult and dangerous, leading to accidents and loss of life. River Katsina-ala has had a significant impact on water transportation in Benue State. It has facilitated the movement of goods and people, provided a source of income for local residents, played a role in cultural activities, and affected the environment. However, more needs to be done to improve infrastructure and government support to maximize the benefits of water transportation on the river.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this paper, the following recommendations are made as possible steps to address some of the existing challenges identified above in order to boost the sector's potential for economic growth and connectivity.

- i. Firstly, there is a need for continued investment in infrastructure. This includes the construction of new ports, expansion of existing facilities, and improvement of inland waterways. Adequate funding should be allocated to ensure the completion of ongoing projects and the implementation of long-term plans, prioritizing areas with high potential for economic activity and regional integration.

- ii. Secondly, the government should focus on enhancing operational efficiency and effectiveness in water transport. This can be achieved through the adoption of advanced technologies for vessel tracking, cargo management, and port operations. Implementing digital solutions, such as online booking platforms and electronic documentation systems, can streamline processes, reduce administrative bottlenecks, and improve the overall user experience.
- iii. Thirdly, collaboration and partnerships are essential for sustainable water transport development. The government should foster strong collaborations with international organizations, development partners, and private sector stakeholders to leverage expertise, knowledge sharing, and investments. Engaging in regional initiatives and agreements can also facilitate cross-border trade and cooperation, enhancing connectivity within West Africa and beyond.
- iv. Lastly, a comprehensive regulatory framework and effective governance structures are crucial for the future of water transport. The government should establish clear policies, regulations, and standards to ensure safety, security, and environmental sustainability in the sector. Strengthening the capacity of regulatory bodies, promoting transparency, and addressing corruption will help create a favorable investment climate and boost confidence in the industry.

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34. Oral interview with Oryina Sai. Age 43. Occupation, Business, Buruku on 13/03/2023.
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