

Human Resources Challenges in Sustainable Transport Management in Nigeria

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Abstract : *The sustainability and the performance of any transport system depend so much on the quality of human resources that run the system. However, transport management in Nigeria faces many human resources challenges which tend to scuttle the efforts channelled towards transport sustainability. This paper focuses on these challenges and the dimension they have assumed in the society. It also discusses the relationship between transport sustainability and human resources, as well as the efforts geared towards transport sustainability in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *sustainability, environment, corruption, training and professionals.*

I. Introduction

The problems of a sustainable transport system in Nigeria are many, but the most prominent are those seen as human resources challenges. The reason is that the founders, builders and sustainers of transport systems are human resources. Virtually all failures in transport could be traceable to human resources failures. Hence, solving human resources problems is a sure way of bringing permanent solutions and making the system sustainable.

This paper critically viewed human resources challenges in sustainable transport management in Nigeria and also presented the ways forward. In achieving this objective, the relationship between transport sustainability and human resources was highlighted and the efforts made towards sustainability in transport were discussed before examining the challenges.

II. Sustainable Transport And Human Resources

Transport cannot be sustainable without the human resources component. At this point, focus is directed to the contributions of human resources that made Nigerian transport system sustainable.

Transport Planning and Research

The goal of transport planning is to secure the best use of natural and acquired advantages. It ensures that suitable lands are allocated to necessary purposes and at the same time avoid rigidity which will impose precondition on future use. Good transport planning provides for economy of construction and operation, efficiency in operation, flexibility in coping with future changes and expansion of facilities. It also enhances compatibility with the environment, community development and other modes of transport. Transport planning is based on procedures and criteria for evaluating needs, ranking priorities and alternatives and justifying the selected alternative (Ukaegbu, 2007).

Transport research provides a platform for creation of new ideas and testing of existing methods in order to improve on them. Transport modelling and simulations are necessary to ensure that new procedures are tested before they are embarked upon. This goes a long way to save cost of real constructions and projects that would not have worked. Transport planning and research need highly trained professionals that can design transport network facilities while taking cognisance of the environment, the polity and the economy. Any deficiency in the supply of these professional will stifle the process of development in the transport sector. In other words, sustainability in transport is only possible when the human resources component (transport planners, engineers, economists) is available and ready to steer the wheel of development through meaningful research. Nigeria is actually in need of these professionals.

Policy Formulation and Implementation

Transportation performs optimally in an organized state. Every transport system irrespective of the degree of perfection in its design will definitely fail unless it is operated in a civilized state under some sets of defined rules and codes. The laws of the state have to stand first as the foundation for the transport laws to

operate. The same basics are required for the formulation of the policies that govern the respective modes like land, sea, air and pipeline.

In Nigeria, trained personnel are needed in the formulation of policies required to operate transport services at local, state and federal levels. The Directors of Works and Transport, the Commissioner for Transport, and the Minister for Transport have to be fully informed to be able to make the right input into the transport policies. The same issue applies to the members of transport committee in the local government, the state House of Representative and those at the upper and lower houses at federal level. This pool of human resources when rightly chosen goes a long way to foster transport development and sustainability.

Training

Training provides for continuity in all fields of human endeavour. Since all human projects and man himself have life spans, training provides the means of transferring skills and knowledge so that they do not end with the possessors that pass on. Sustainability requires the skills to be acquired, improved upon and adapted to the environment. All these are embedded in a well packaged training. Hence everyone in all areas of transport needs training for ones improvement, and should also give training to those under ones supervision as a way of fostering sustainability in transport.

Maintenance

Maintenance is a key element of sustainability due to inherent defects in human projects and constructions. Even when a transport facility is faultless, it tends to wear out with time, and the only option left for it is maintenance. This is only achievable with a group of human resources that imbibed the culture of prompt and continuous maintenance. Without it, the use of many projects that gulped up millions and billions of naira for their construction would be discontinued much before the time they were guaranteed to serve. With adequate maintenance on the other hand, some facilities have been seen to still be in use many years after their estimated life span.

III. Efforts Geared Towards Transport Sustainability

Transport Institutions

Human resources are the most important asset of transport. Adequate pool of manpower is required to conduct research, construct, maintain and operate the transport infrastructure and services. The success of any transport policy also depends on the human resources available to develop and implement the policy (Abiye, 2004). Below are some government established institutions for professional training and skill acquisition.

- The Nigerian Institute of Transport Zaria, charged with training middle level management staff
- The Nigerian Maritime Academy Oron and School of Oceanography Lagos charged with the training of seafarers.
- The Nigerian College of Aviation Technology Zaria, which trains pilots and air crew.
- State and federal universities offering transport courses e.g. Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Federal University of Technology Minna, Niger State, Nigeria etc.

Transport Policy and Implementation

A draft national transport policy which is a body of knowledge, a statement of government's intentions and a guide for better transport system for Nigerians was produced in 2004. The desire of our local shipping operators to protect themselves against the excessive competition and dominance of their foreign counterparts necessitated the enactment of Cabotage law, which became operational on 1st July 2004 (Ihenacho, 2004). Other Acts are Merchant Shipping Act and Environment Protection Act. Worth mentioning are the structures put on ground to implement and sustain these policies like Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) and Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC).

Transport Safety

Transport safety tries to guide against losses affecting humans, commodities or even transport facilities. Nigeria has set up safety standards as it touches civil aviation, water, rail, road and transportation of dangerous goods. She has also ensured compliance with international bodies like International Maritime organization (IMO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and has also ratified international codes like International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code and Safety Related Standards and Recommendations (SRSR). All these safety measures and standards offer sustainability to the system (Ndikom, 2005).

Energy and Environment

Energy consumption in transportation accounts for more than 50% of energy used in the nation. This is quite on the high side judging by all standards. Sustaining this energy level has been a threat due to fluctuations in fuel supply and prices. However, Nigeria has been trying to address the situation through the effort of NNPC. There are no thorough or strict measures to guard against environmental pollution, but the government hope to initiate the necessary cooperation between the Federal Ministry of Transport and Environment and Energy Commission to promote measures that will reduce the negative effects of transport on the environment (Abiye, 2004).

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Corruption

“What worries me more than anything among our problems,” said Nigerian President Shehu Shagari in 1982, “is that is that of moral decadence in our country. There is the problem of bribery, corruption, lack of dedication to duty, dishonesty and other all such vices.” (Klitgaard, 1988). The Shagari regime had tried. It had proclaimed an “ethical revolution” to combat corruption. The government had included a code of for public servants in 1979 constitution and it had established a Code of Bureau to enforce the “prescribed behaviours.” The leadership had even appointed a cabinet Minister of National Guidance to provide moral leadership against corruption. Yet according to popular accounts, Nigeria has grown even more corrupted, leaving its citizens more alienated from the government and its economy more vulnerable to official venality (Klitgaard, 1988)

The chance of conducting business within the limit prescribed by law and morals is very low in Nigeria. Good examples are the seaports and airports where bribery has proved to be the major means of expediting cargo clearance and delivery. The private sector is no exception. Investigation has revealed that most workers have clear cut ways of swindling their establishments. Without such means, they may not stay on the job.

Similarly, many transport investments that would have contributed meaningfully to the level of infrastructure we have on ground today have been embezzled. What does one expect when great deal of money exchanged hands before the contracts were won? People that are determined to oppose the societal evil normally get disappointment on discovering that the supervisors of same project and the corrupt contractors are in the same league or that they have a common purse. Hence, every petition in that respect is swept under carpet.

Dearth of Transport Professionals

Nigeria is truly in acute need of trained transport personnel and professionals. For instance, one of the issues in Ship and Port weekly magazine revealed that they are less than 200 master mariners in the whole country, including foreigners, and that they are even becoming aged. A recent data on world seafarers by flag shows that Nigeria has only 975 officers. Ghana on the other hand has 1879 officers. When this figure is juxtaposed against national potentials, size of country and length of coastline, it is obvious that we need to do something fast if we must arrest the disturbing trend. The air and rail subsectors have similar problems (Dosumu, 2009).

Political Influence

Transportation can be greatly affected by the decision of the national and regional government. For instance, government policy for transport on investment, conservation, industry and land use goes a long way to affect transport. Hence the decision making body has to be well informed. One of the ways of achieving this is by involving the experts in the decision making process (Ukaegbu, 2007).

Non-professionals in Transport

Regrettably, most of the people at the helm of affairs in Nigerian transport systems are non-professionals, and most of the chairmen of transport committees do not posses transport qualifications. Worst still, these appointed set of people fail to take transport specialists as advisers. What is happening in the transport sector is not very different from that obtainable in the Nigerian polity where some appointments are made regardless of qualifications and professionalism. This is responsible for the total deviation we are having in our transport settings.

The human resources challenge imposed here is enormous. We clamour that we are in dire need of transport professionals but good number of the few we have are neither employed nor appointed to key positions. Well, the professionals have to wait to be invited or appointed before coming to set the system in order. They do not have the power to cast out those occupying those offices or influence the appointment. All they have to do is “wait”, hoping that one day a leader that has regard for professionals will emerge. One is only afraid, for one does not know how long they might wait. This is why human resources challenges in this direction are great.

Technological Gap

Technological endowment and capability does not have a direct relationship with the number of people operating the system, but with the required skills needed to build and maintain the system. The truth is that heavy constructions are awarded to foreigners. Good examples are airports, seaport, rail and major road constructions. One can go further to say that Nigeria may not be able to supervise properly these contracts awarded to foreigners. This stems from the fact that what one does not have the skill to do; one may not have the knowledge to supervise. We end up taking what the foreigner can hand down to us as a completed project. After the construction, the maintenance of the facilities stands as a critical component in the system. The issue here lies in the fact that both the human skills and the spare parts supplies still come from abroad. Any distortion in supply leads to a total halt or abandonment of the facility. The rail sub system in this respect seems to be affected at a larger scale than any other mode.

Environmental Impacts of Transport

Transport is a great necessity. This is why transport development and activities are still increasing irrespective of the environmental impacts. The only option left for us is to curtail its negative effects. Doing this starts from identifying the environmental threats, the type of emissions involved, the processes that lead to the emission and the level of the emission. All these need the employment of environmental specialists, which are not easy to come by in Nigeria. The essence of every effort in this direction is to be able to set up a standard for all transport modes regarding harmful environmental emissions and also enforce the set standards. Enforcement demands actual testing and categorizing of the vehicles concerned. For instance, meeting Euro-3-emission standard demands the use of emission detection equipment and a comprehensive tracking system. These equipments and specialists are not available in Nigeria (Omoke, 2007).

Insecurity

Nigerian coast zones have been rated as the most unsafe around the world. Piracy has been identified as the major cause of cargo losses. The frequency of cargo and life losses has heightened since the advent of militancy in the Niger Delta. Similar scenario is also seen on the roads. The breakdown in security has gotten to the level that the vehicles no longer ply in the nights. Armed robbery gangs have grown remarkably in number, ranging between 20-40 persons per gang. This makes it possible for them to withstand any security team. Such gangs have operated severally in our international airport at Ikeja and banks, without any hitch or hurt. Some even say they have fetish protections against bullets. Human resources challenges here bothers on providing a formidable security network to combat and overcome the above threats.

IV. Suggestions/Recommendations

Resolving human resources challenges in Nigerian transport system seems a hard nut to crack. However, the fact that every problem has a solution, even though the solution may be hidden makes one think of the possible ways forward.

Comprehensive Training

A well packaged training is a sure way of establishing sustainability in transport. Technical knowledge is gotten from transport schools and industries, while a good deal of operational experience is gained on the job. Hence a comprehensive training should be introduced. It must involve establishing transport studies in secondary and tertiary institutions, and provision of industrial training and jobs to absorb the trained persons.

Building Maintenance Culture

Facility maintenance is in many cases more important than its construction, because a facility that is not maintained may not be in use while it is taking up a great deal of land and fund that would have been used for other purposes. There is need to sensitize Nigerians on the need for maintenance. This could be achieved by organizing seminars and symposia among the decision makers on the impending need for maintenance.

Restructuring of Nigerian Transport Policy

Policy adjustment and enforcement are mostly needed if we must harness the transport potential of the nation. Policy restructuring must address corrupt tendencies in transport landscape, transport contract failures, insecurity, environmental impacts of transport, maintenance and training.

Security against Piracy/Armed Robbery

The answers to these problems could be provided by beefing up the security network. The navy should be on patrol along the water ways with more sophisticated weapons than those handled by the pirates. The air force should be integrated into the security network. Military helicopters should be supplied to all the states.

With such gadgets and adequate communication systems, the vehicles or boats of the robbers would be tracked and bombarded with the lens system of the military helicopters. In fact, the robbers cannot escape with the introduction of this security outfit. The security men need a great deal of motivation. They should know what they stand to gain even if they lose their lives; such gains may be the compensations payable to their families they leave behind. There should be adequate and prompt payment of entitlements. Necessary promotions attached to certain great or brave achievements should be clearly stipulated.

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