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The Socio-Economic Impact of the Railway

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EPILOGUE

As from the end of the 1970s, which was the terminal date for the issues covered in this study, the railway was in decline. It emerged from the Civil War in a critical condition and carried on in that manner until its eventual collapse in the 1990s. Despite several attempts to resuscitate the system,¹ its fortunes, freight, passenger traffic, and rolling stock further declined, its position increasingly challenged by road transport. Passenger and freight services did not stop abruptly, however, and they continued at a reduced level until the stations were eventually closed down. These closures were to affect passengers, freight services, local trade, and livelihoods.

The increased importance of the Kano–Zaria road diverted traffic from the rail line to the road. The road did not pass through the studied areas but instead followed a new route previously isolated from the rail line. Unlike the railway, road transport is much more flexible and has entered the remotest areas.² New centres have emerged and expanded along the road, while centres on the rail lines have declined in importance.³ In a similar manner, agricultural production and exports across the communities also declined. The increased wealth from oil exports was marked by neglect of agriculture and the disappearance of cash crops from the export list, leading to the collapse of food production in the 1980s. A condition of near famine developed in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, and the government had to import food to keep the nation alive. Many rural dwellers, in search of better economic opportunities, moved out of rural areas to the cities, thereby compounding the crisis in agriculture.

At present, the communities are mere ghosts of their former selves. At the time of the field work for this study in 2010 and 2011, the stations were locked up and most of their

¹ For instance, between 1978 and 1999, no less than three different reforms of the Nigerian Railway Cooperation have attempted to resuscitate the system. From 1978 to 1982, Indians were contracted to rehabilitate and turn around the system. This was followed by its management under a sole administratorship under Samuel Ogbemudia in 1989–1992. From 1995 to 1999, the Chinese were contracted to resuscitate the system. For details see J. A. Odeleye, “Politics of Rail Transport Development in Developing Countries: Case of Nigeria”, *Journal of Civil Engineering and Architecture*, 6/12, (2012): 1695-1702; J. A. Odeleye, “Public-Private Participation to Rescue Railway Development in Nigeria”, *Japan Railway and Transport Review*, 23 March 2000, 42-49; A. Adesanya, “Bringing the Nigerian Railway Back on Track: Challenges and Options”, being a Paper Presented at Monthly NISER Seminar Series, Held at the NISER Conference Room on 13 November 2010,

² O. O. Oladipo, “The Nigerian Motor Transporters since the 1920s”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2/12, (2012): 230-237.

³ Dottridge, “Aspects”, 25-6.

workers had been sent on forced retirement, as was the case of workers on the rail system generally. The only visible evidence that suggested the communities had once been bustling centres were the rail tracks, now covered with grass, the rundown stations, the dilapidated stores of the commercial firms, and the migrant quarters which stand independent of the indigenous communities. There is little indication of a government presence in these communities, except in the case of Madobi, which became the headquarters of a local council in the 1990s. It also housed a government radio agency and a private fertilizer company at the beginning of this century. Besides the government educational institutions in the other communities, they have all been neglected by government.

When the Kaduna State Government inaugurated the state's Railway Mass Transit Service in 2008 as part of its urban transport scheme, Likoro, Gimi, and Auchan were served by the railway once again. The scheme was a joint initiative between the state government and the Nigerian Railway Corporation. Despite the many challenges which beset the system, it proved invaluable in re-stimulating activities in the communities, at least as far as transportation of people and goods was concerned. The project was terminated in 2013, following the recommencement of operations by the new Nigerian Railway, funded and built by the Chinese. The project is ongoing and is expected to be completed in 2021. At present, the train stops only at Madobi and Kwankwaso, but there is a renewed optimism that, when finally completed, the railway will kick-start the communities back to life.