

THE INCIDENCE OF HUMAN INDUCED COMMUNITY ROAD DILAPIDATION: A CASE STUDY OF EKPOMA, EDO- NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The manner by which community roads are been excavated without concerted efforts to seal them up properly, has indeed become a worrisome phenomenon. The irony is the fact that requisite government agencies and community leaders/youths are apparently indifferent to this phenomenon; especially in this era whereby communities across Nigeria are groaning over the general lack of basic amenities, dilapidated infrastructures, poor social welfare, endemic corruption, leadership crisis, political instability, insecurity and hopelessness. It is based on the obvious human and economic consequences of this trend that we set out to investigate such incidence in Ekpoma –a semi urban town in Edo State, Nigeria, known for her characteristic good road network. An on-the-spot assessment of the roads was conducted and our findings revealed that many roads in Ekpoma town have been excavated and left at the mercy of natural forces without tangible effort to seal them up properly. It is our recommendation therefore, that relevant government agencies/community leaders should be alive to their responsibilities, while perpetrators are encouraged to do the needful when the need for road excavation arises. Like the saying goes, a bird at hand is worth millions in the air and a stitch in time saves nine.

Key Words: Human development, Optic fibre cables, Street lights, Road dilapidation

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1999, Nigerians barely communicated effectively with relatives, friends, business partners and associate. Although communication services existed, availability, effectiveness, and efficiency were descriptive words alien to that pre-1999 era (Arzika, 2000). But reprieve came when the federal government under former Nigerian president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, gave licenses to private mobile phone network providers and this triggered a wave of changes that had so far enhanced communication among Nigerians and the rest of the world (Balogun, 2000; Ndukwe, 2004; Ajala, 2005).

Undoubtedly, the advent of Global System of Mobile communication (GSM) services in Nigeria, has contributed tremendously to most of the developmental changes and transformations recorded in Nigeria; especially in her economy and education sectors (Wojuade, 2006; Adomi, 2006). This great developmental tool has also become an instrument in the hands of retrogressive forces like criminals and terrorists, as such anti-societal forces can now communicate effectively to perpetrate their evil deeds and leave behind a trail of destructions. For instance, mobile phones have become detonating tools for improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the hands of

the members of Boko-Haram –a terrorists group threatening the peace and security of Nigeria (OSS, 2005; Nnochiri, 2011).

Another disheartening trend denting the undeniable positive roles of GSM in Nigeria, is the manner by which mobile network service providers are undertaking the laying of optic fibre cables across lands and roads all over Nigeria without apparent efforts to seal them up properly; particularly the excavated tarred roads, thereby laying foundations for road dilapidation. This developmentally-related but apparently destructive activity has also been observed in the excavation of road-sides (to lay light cables) by contractors awarded street lights contracts.

Indeed, as several communities in Nigeria groan over the general lack of basic amenities, dilapidated infrastructures, poor social welfare, endemic corruption, leadership crisis, political instability, insecurity and hopelessness, it is retrogressive therefore, to destroy the few existing infrastructures in the name of these so-called developmental projects. Okunna (2002) had earlier asserted that development should bring positive changes and should be for the majority of the people. Moreover, the fact that relevant government agencies appear

indifferent to this phenomenon literarily makes it indeed, an unfortunate bitter pill to swallow.

Of course, there are appropriate regulations and surely, regulatory bodies, put in place to check such activities where necessary, except if such government agencies saddled with the responsibility are not alive to their duties or have comprised to look the other way. What of the community leaders? What of the youths? Are they no longer interested in the goings-on in their communities considering their trade-mark enforcement of compulsory levy payment by prospective developers? What of residents? Are they not observing the trend and the destructive potentials of such phenomenon? It is even more devastating to observe that some of these road destructive activities are occurring within the jurisdictions of Local Government Authorities who can barely maintain roads damaged by natural forces or even think of constructing new ones due to lack of funds (Aderamo and Magaji, 2010).

Considering therefore, the obvious human and economic consequences of the trend in question, we set out to investigate the incidence of such phenomenon in Ekpoma – a semi urban town in Edo State, Nigeria, known for her characteristic good road network.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Study Area and Population: This study was carried out in Ekpoma, the administrative headquarters of Esan West Local Government area of Edo State. It lies between latitude 60 40°N 60 45°N and longitude 60 05°E 60 10°E (Obabori et al, 2006). The inhabitants of Ekpoma speak the language known as 'Esan' and are predominantly farmers whose main produce are rice and cassava.

Before 1976, Ekpoma was characteristically rural with isolated settlements, few houses, health, educational, commercial and transportation facilities (Olomo, 1991). However, since the designation of Ekpoma as local governments headquarters and as host of the State owned Ambrose Alli University, the town has grown into an urban centre with a very good road network credited to the late Professor Ambrose Alli, the former governor of Old Bendel State, and a significant growth in population (Aziegbe, 2006).

While the population was 13,036 by 1975, it rose to 45,489 in 1991 (NPC, 1992) and approximately 125,842 (63785 males and 62,057 females) in 2006 (NPC 2006). With only 8.62Km² of the total 62Km²

of land used in 1979 (Ufuah, 1993), physical growth and expansion have increased to 29.28 Km² by 2003 (Aziegbe, 2006).

Road Sampling Criteria: All tarred roads in Ekpoma town with defects occasioned by human activities particularly those left behind after excavations to lay optic fibre cables or street lighting cables, were included in this investigation. However, roads with defects occasioned by natural forces – erosion or excessive usage, were excluded.

Field Investigations: With the aid of an automobile, an on-the-spot assessment of all the roads in Ekpoma was undertaken. Those with evidence of abandoned excavation spots were captured using a digital camera and labeled appropriately. The Roads investigated included Ujoelen road, Uwelen Dova road, Uwelen-Ebo Road, Eromo Street, Ukhun Road, Oguamelen Street, Aburimen Street, and Ilen-Otuma Street.

Prominent land marks were: 1) Market Square Round-About for Uwelen-Dova Street junction; 2) First Bank Plc, Ekpoma Branch, for Isidahome Street Junction; 3) UDA Micro Finance Bank for Oguamelen Street junction; 4) General Hospital Ekpoma for Ukhun Road junction; 5) Royal Market Ekpoma for both Uwelen-Dova and Aburimen Street junctions; 6) FinBank Plc, Ekpoma Branch for Afua Road junction; and 7) Eko Bank Plc, Ekpoma Branch for Uwelen-Ebo Road junction.

RESULTS

From the observations of this study, it is obvious that many roads in Ekpoma have been excavated and left at the mercy of natural forces, and without tangible effort to seal them up properly (figures 1-10). Our field investigations revealed also that the culprits included contractors laying cables for street lights and mobile network providers laying optic fibre cables. In each instance, the intent was clear - *development*, but excavating roads and abandoning them at the mercy of natural forces like *water erosion*, was clearly retrogressive and an anti-developmental activity, because it sets the stage for road dilapidation.

Severely affected were the Ujoelen Extension Junction (1) directly opposite G2 Road, Ekpoma; Afua Street Junction near Fin Bank Plc, Ekpoma; Oguamelen Street Junction near UDA Microfinance Bank, Ekpoma; Eromo Junction (Left and Right sides), Ekpoma; Aburime Street Junction near Royal Market, Ekpoma; Uwelen-Dova Junction opposite Royal Market Square, Ekpoma; Ukhun Road

Junction opposite General Hospital, Ekpoma; and Uwelen-Ebo Junction opposite Eko Bank Plc, Ekpoma. The severity-tag on these roads is tenable judging by the fact that some of the excavated but abandoned spots have shown signs of further degradations due to water erosion (see figures 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10).

DISCUSSION

It is rather unfortunate to observe that most of the roads in Ekpoma are dilapidating. Prior to this era, one can confidently say that a first-time visitor to Ekpoma must be astonished about her massive road network constructed in the early 1980's, under the administration late Professor Ambrose Alli who incidentally hails from Ekpoma and credited for the establishment of the State owned Ambrose Alli University. In fact, except for Poultry Road (off Ujemen Road), G2 Road (off Ihumudumu Road), and Momoh Street (off Ujoelen Road), which are relatively new, road construction in Ekpoma town by Local, State, or Federal Government is indeed, a tall order. Yet, no tangible effort is being made to preserve the existing road infrastructure. Adesanya (1997) had earlier lamented that the bad condition of rural roads is compounded by the poor response to repairs and delays in rehabilitation by relevant government agencies, while Oni et al. (2006) opined that such neglect multiplies the cost of repairs of these roads at the end of every rainy season.

On the other hand, one cannot but wonder, why a community –so blessed with good roads, would allow her roads to be so degraded intentionally, and this is happening in an era when it has become very difficult to put such infrastructure in place. The irony is the fact that Ekpoma is a town where individuals striving to build their own houses are compelled to pay various levies to government, community youths/elders and the traditional ruler (*Onojie's palace levy*). Logically, is it not possible that those embarking on such road excavations have been compelled to pay some sort of road reconstruction levy before the actual excavation activities began?

Of course, in this era of leadership crisis and corrupt tendencies, the perpetrators of this problem in question, may have handed over the sealing-up of such excavated spots to the appropriate agencies of government or to a member/group in the communities affected. This assertion is simply being fare to the perpetrators who probably might have provided the requisite financial backing.



Figure 1: Picture taken at the Ujoelen Extension Junction (1) directly opposite G2 Road, Ekpoma with the Benin-Auchi Express way running across. Note the blue arrows indicating parts of the road excavated without sealing them up properly.



Figure 2: Picture taken at the Ujoelen Extension Junction (2) directly opposite Ujoelen Road, Ekpoma. Note the BLUE arrows indicating part of the road excavated without sealing it up properly.



Figure 3: Picture taken at the Afua Street Junction near Fin Bank Plc, Ekpoma. Observe the blue arrow indicating part of the road excavated without sealing it up properly, and the encircled part where further degradation has begun.

If that is not the case, then it is indeed unbecoming of corporate bodies coming into communities and leaving it worse than they met it. In fact, Nigeria as a nation is still grappling with the devastating consequences of oil exploration in Ogoni Land (MOSOP Canada. 1998). As such, it makes no sense to incubate another version of such community devastating activity; all in the name of the so-called development.

By the way, why on earth would an individual excavate a solidly tarred road, abandon it and then subject it to the forces of nature –water erosion. Available evidence has shown that while erosion is a natural process, some human activities have accelerated the rate at which erosion is occurring worldwide. In addition, water has been identified as one of the two primary causes of land degradation and accounts (with wind), about 84% of the global extent of degraded lands, making excessive erosion one of the most significant environmental problems worldwide (Toy et al., 2002; Blanco and Lai, 2008).



Figure 4: Picture taken at the Oguamelen Street Junction near UDA Microfinance Bank, Ekpoma. Observe the blue arrows indicating part of the road excavated without sealing it up properly, and the encircled part where further degradation has begun



Figure 6: Picture taken at the Isidahome Street Junction near First Bank Plc, Ekpoma (see RED arrow pointing towards the bank). Observe also the arrows indicating part of the road excavated without sealing it up properly.



Figure 5: Picture taken at the Eromo Junction (Left and Right sides), Ekpoma. The RED arrow points towards Royal Market road while the arrows in shades of BLUE, indicates the parts of the roads excavated without sealing them up properly. Observe also the encircled part of the right side where further degradation has begun.



Figure 7: Picture taken at the Aburime Street Junction near Royal Market, Ekpoma. Note the arrows indicating part of the roads excavated without sealing it up properly. Observe also the encircled part of the right side where further degradation has begun.



Figure 8: Picture taken at the Uwelen-Dova Junction opposite Royal Market Square, Ekpoma. Note the arrows indicating the parts of the roads excavated without sealing it up properly. Observe also the encircled portion where severe degradation has begun.



Figure 9: Picture taken at the Ukhun Road Junction opposite General Hospital, Ekpoma. Note the arrows indicating parts of the road excavated without sealing it up properly.

Nevertheless, excavating roads where necessary may not be out of place, but the contention remains that lack effort to seal them it up properly with durable road construction materials. It is our recommendation therefore, that all government agencies saddled with the maintenance of roads should be alive to their responsibilities. Similarly, the perpetrators abandoning excavated community roads should always do the needful when the need for road excavation arises. Most importantly, inhabitants of communities like Ekpoma should be vigilant and ensure that perpetrators of such acts do the needful as no one is sure when dilapidated-roads would be re-constructed by government. Like the saying goes, a

bird at hand is worth millions in the air; and a stitch in time saves nine.



Figure 10: Picture taken on a rainy day from the interior of a car at the Uwelen-Ebo Junction opposite Eko Bank Plc, Ekpoma. Note the arrows indicating part of the road excavated without sealing it up properly.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

This community development study was conceptualized by Nwaopara, A.O., while Nwaopara, A.O. and Blackies, H.O.T. conducted the field study. Manuscript was written and revised as required by Nwaopara, A.O. and Blackies, H.O.T.