

It is a known fact that in most developing countries of the world, weak and poor functioning health systems, inadequate access to health services, inadequate health education etc is a re-occurring decimal, a malaise in the lives of the rural populace. Over 10 million people(Adults and Children) die annually due to these preventable factors. Transportation plays a pivotal role in alleviating the sufferings of these rural dwellers caused by these preventable factors.

This write-up therefore seeks to articulate; the role of transport services in improving poor communities access to health services, major constraints facing efficient rural transport services and consequently, the strategies necessary to ensure improved transport services.

Transport in its simplest sense is the movement of people and goods from one place to another. The need for transport is fundamentally the desire of man to bridge the gap between the areas of resource surplus and areas of resource deficit because resources are not distributed evenly in space. While transport service is the provision of infrastructure and mobility to actualize the movement of people and goods from one place to another.

Research as shown that about ninety percent of transport needs in developing countries(case study: Nigeria) are done exclusively by road transportation. This implies that majority of transportation services in rural communities of the developing is done through road except in some very few communities where water transport is used.

Transport service plays an integral role in improving rural communities access to health services through the following ways :

- Access to health care facilities: The federal Government of Nigeria has built primary health care centres and still in the process of building more health care centres to cater for the health needs of the rural populace. The availability of transport services to the community health centres is paramount to accessing the health needs of the rural community dwellers. This is rightly so because the rural populace might require to travel some distance to locate this centres.
- Access to health care personnel: Transport services enables health care personnel like; doctors, nurses, midwives, health care workers to have access to the rural dwellers in remote villages so as to offer their professional services . It could be non-governmental organizations(NGOs) offering to assist this rural poor on the treatment of a particular ailment where professionals needed for such treatment are not readily available on a daily basis. From another perspective, the rural dwellers may also need to go out to get specialized medical assistance that is not readily available in the community and hence would require transport service as a means to achieving the goal.
- Improved health condition of the rural community dwellers: Access to transport services, helps to improve the health condition of poor communities. Their improved health condition has a direct bearing on the fact that there is access to transport services that would convey the rural populace to these care centres at every instance of need for medical assistance as opposed to

waiting endlessly in a situation where there is no availability of transport service, while the lives of the rural poor hangs in the balance.

- Reduces mortality rate: The rate of child mortality and adult mortality is drastically reduced when there is access to transport services. Transport service provides an avenue where a sick child or adult can be quickly taken to health centres for immediate treatment. When a patient requires urgent treatment, transport service can be the determining factor between life and death for that patient.
- Economic Empowerment: When transport services are available in rural communities, it promotes productivity and self-reliance rather than depending continually on what can or should be done for them. This will reduce the burden of the government or NGOs as the case may be on certain areas of their health needs. By this, I mean the rural farmers are able to transport their agricultural produce to areas of demand and payment is made for their produce and they in turn are then able to pay for some of their medical expenses.
- Improved social life: Access to civilization (social interaction with urban dwellers or other rural community dwellers) made possible by the availability of transport services improves the social life of the rural communities. Their social life in turn improves the psychological wellbeing of the rural dwellers. This makes enable them to see life on a positive perspective thereby improving their mental and physical state of health.
- Increased awareness level: Access to transport service creates an atmosphere for interaction. Interaction creates an avenue for education. An educated person is said to be an enlightened person. In the course of interaction, the rural dweller becomes enlightened on issues regarding health consciousness. Health conscious issues like boiling their drinking water taken from streams, enlightenment about the HIV/AIDS pandemic and how to avoid it either by total abstinence until married or use of condoms if they are not able to abstain from sex. They are also enlightened on family planning methods etc.
- Reduce unit cost of drugs to the rural community: When transport service is readily available to a rural community, it becomes easy to transport needed volumes of drugs to the rural community. The more you are able to transport volumes of drugs at an instance or at once the lesser the unit cost of the drug as against trying to transport drugs to a rural community with poor or inadequate transport services.
- Preserves the potency and shelf life of special drugs: Drugs that require special considerations for transport to rural communities for administration to patients can be transported without fear that the potency of the drugs will be diminished or that the shelf life (time it takes for the drugs to expire) will be exceeded because of the availability of transport service.
- Facilitates information flow: Information and data flow are vital instruments necessary to improving the health needs of the rural poor. Information regarding the medical needs (drugs, health report) of the community will need to get to the urban centres. This is made possible via transport service because there are some communities that do not have access to telecommunication services and therefore information cannot be transmitted to urban centres except through the use of transport service.

The major constraints facing developing countries in ensuring efficient rural transport services to meet basic access needs are:

- **Lack of maintenance culture:** Maintenance culture in transport service can be said to be an attitudinal characteristics imbibed over the years to continually maintain infrastructures and mobility. Developing countries however suffer from negative maintenance culture syndrome. Government is saddled with the responsibility of providing transport infrastructure to rural communities. It is therefore expected that parameters be put in place to ensure adequate maintenance of this infrastructure at least for the entire life cycle of the project . Unfortunately this is not the case. The infrastructure are left to be used and used until deterioration sets into play. And after so many years of use without maintenance resulting in complete decadence, the government again manages to provide capital for reconstruction of these transport infrastructures. This amount to waste and mismanagement of resources because it is far cheaper to maintain this infrastructures progressively than allowing it to deteriorate before reconstruction.
- **Lack of proper planning and management :**It is often said that when you fail to plan properly you are planning to fail. Administrative lapses, mismanagement and improper planning on the part of those saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that transport infrastructure are put in place as and at when due is a major constraint.
- **Contracting Jobs to big construction/procurement companies rather than small efficient construction/procurement companies:** Construction of transport infrastructures are usually contracted to big construction companies with huge annual turnover, huge account balance and huge stock of construction equipment. In this situation, the cost of running this big companies and their overhead cost are all imputed into the cost of handling the contract. This translates into higher cost of handling the project as against what smaller but efficient companies will do with that same amount of money. This invariably leads to spending more for a particular capital project. Even foreign assisted projects are guilty of this problem.
- **Poor fund disbursement plans:** The process of funds allocation to projects, channels of fund flow, administrative protocols are major constraint facing rural transport service in developing countries.
- **Unavailability of funds:** Unavailability of funds for capital projects to cater for the transport needs of the rural communities.
- **Corruption:** Corruption in simple term can be said to be the deterioration of morals. It can be said to be the lowering of standards of what is right. Corruption is a big problem in developing countries. Corruption is a cankerworm that eaten deep into the fabrics of developing countries. It is so bad that corruption has become a way of life for people at the helms of affairs. It is like they no longer differentiate between what is corrupt acquisition of wealth and what is not. An example is when funds meant for the development of transport services are personally manipulated to ensure personal gains from such funds.

Some of the causes of corruption are; poor pay incentives, weak government institutions, acceptance and culture of corruption, scrambling for the nations resources, lack of openness and transparency in public and private sector, poor anti-corruption crusade and so on.

Suggested strategies to ensure transport services are improved are:

- Deliberate Government commitment to provision of rural infrastructure and mobility: The government of the various developing countries most show deliberate commitment to the provision of rural infrastructure and mobility so as to impact directly on the living standards of this rural dwellers. This is done by deliberately setting aside a chunk sum of money from the nations annual budget to fund rural transport service project. This can be done through the ministry of transport while the ministry of health via its agencies should progressively provide health care centres and its attendant facilities along the communities to which the government has provided rural transport services. It is more like a synergy between the health and transport sectors to provide immediate gains to the rural dwellers.
- Deliberate enactment of policies by different levels of government to develop rural community : Transportation is the oil of any economy. Therefore government should take pragmatic steps like enactment of policies that will favour rural community development .Development especially in terms of provision of transport service and health care centres. This will also prevent rural-urban migration and accelerate the economic activities within that community.
- Deliberate commitment by the government to resurrect the declining rail sector: Prior to the 1970 oil-boom in Nigeria, railways which is globally regarded as the anchor mode of seamless transportation system was vibrant and optimally utilized for all regional socio-economic and political integration. More agricultural produce were transported to seaports by rail, while finished goods(drugs, foods, equipment etc) were taken to the hinterland via rail. However, it is unfortunate that since the neglect of rail transport in Nigeria, rail has declined drastically in its contribution to the social, health and economic development of Nigeria. The cartel that exist in road transport that prevents the resurrection of rail transport should be dislodged by the government. A dual approach of road and rail transport development program by the government will improve the transport service to this rural communities. Because this communities reside along the axis of development. Besides the government should ensure that development of this transport services pass through this rural communities.
- Government should promote linkage of road and railways: One of the peculiar characteristics of Nigerian transport service is that it is unilateral in nature. In other words, rail transport hardly services road transport and vice versa. When transport networks are linked it provides access to development in rural communities and the lead time it takes for a rural dweller to have access to medical assistance in reduced.
- Public-Private partnership in transport service provision and health service provision should be encouraged: The government of various developing countries should encourage public-private partnerships .An example is when the government as a public sector provides transport infrastructure and mobility to a particular community while a multinational company like shell petroleum development company(private sector) working within that community supports the

- Finally, urgent and pragmatic steps in rural transportation needs to be taken as enumerated above if the MDG's of Child Health, Maternal Health and Combating HIV/AIDS pandemic is to be achieved.