

## The Growth and Expansion of the Nigerian Railway Sector: Colonial – Post Colonial period

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### Abstract

*Railway development is one of the major contributors to economic development and national growth. The development of the railway sector remains an integral aspect of various commercial activities and cultural interactions. Hence, this paper examines the growth and expansion of the Nigerian Railway Corporation. The paper adopted the historical, descriptive and analytical method to analyses data. Primary source was adopted through the use of interview of Nigerian Railway Corporation(NRC) officials whilst the use of secondary source was utilized through various journals, books, and conference literature. The paper examined the transitions in the railway sector. The article traced the colonial epoch as the bedrock for railway system conception in Nigeria. The paper also observed various interventions made by the government during the post colonial period which included the Rail Indian Technical and Economic Service (RITES) intervention, the Ogbomudia intervention and the Chinese modernization in 1995. The paper identified the Chinese 1995 as a success and the subsequent 25years strategic plan which fostered a total restructuring of the sector. Therefore the paper concluded by stressing the need for railway upgrade as one of the major contributors to economic development and cultural activities. It stressed the need for the government to unbundle the railway sector in order to reduce the monopoly of the Nigerian government in the railway sector.*

**Keywords:** Railway, Development, Interventions, Economic, Challenges

## Introduction

The Nigerian railway system has been through many transitional epochs in history. Railway development is extremely capital intensive and requires consistent commitment of various administrations to facilitate its growth and expansion. The conception of the railway idea in Africa and Nigeria in particular was orchestrated by the colonial masters. Many scholars traced the need for the railway development by the colonial masters as the quest for commercial activities and engagements (Rodney, 1976). According to Walter Rodney, this was not an act of deliberate development in Africa but an incidental development whose primary aim was to favour the colonial masters but also coincidentally brought about some form of development to Africa (Rodney, 1976). Indeed, the railway sector is known for connecting the hinterlands to the urban areas for easy mobility of both humans, goods and services. Railway fosters cultural interactions and various commercial activities that improve the economy of any nation. The commencement of railway system during the colonial days gave room for the exploration of the use of the railway as a means of transportation in Nigeria. All over the world, railway transportation remains an important segment in overall logistics business. This is so because railway transport has obvious advantage over other means of transportation in the movement of goods and passengers overland. In many of these countries, rail transport has retained its pride of place as a veritable source of economic development (Agbaeze and Onwuka, 2014). However, in Nigeria railway have not enjoyed so much attention and growth expected needless not to say that the railway has not experience certain and highly notable transformation. Despite the long years of colonial engagement in the railway sector, the sector has not enjoyed consistent interest of support from all administrations. The attention from the administrations has always been insufficient and non-continuous. Though, shortly after independence the sector witnessed such a high level of active services in overland freight movement which contributed to the nation's economy (Agbaeze and Onwuka, 2014). Indeed, the diversification of the Nigerian economy from agrarian society to the discovery of oil gave gradual room to the decline of railway as a popular means of transportation. The continuous activity in the sector has been sustained by the Nigerian Railway Corporation through the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Transportation (FMOT). The Corporation which is still in existence till date has ensured that the railway sector in Nigeria does not totally collapse. It is the decline in the railway sector that led to the Abacha administration's engagement of China

in the sector to revamp it. The administration noted the need for partnership in the railway sector to keep it alive and running (Yinkore, 2005). Therefore the paper seeks to examine the growth and expansion of the railway sector under the watch of the Nigerian Railway corporation, the paper also seeks to trace the intervention and the role of China in the sector. The critical evaluation of the Nigerian railway system can be divided into three epochs, the colonial phase of the railway service, post-colonial and the Chinese intervention.

## **History of the Development of the Nigeria Railway System**

### **The Colonial phase of the Railway Development**

The Nigerian Railway Corporation traces its history to the year 1895 when the first railroad in Nigeria was constructed by the British colonial government (Yinkore, 2005). Like most railways of the world, the development of railway system in Nigeria was initiated by private interest borne out of the twin desire to have more efficient transportation system to further exact their hold on the nation administratively and to fast track the easy evacuation of minerals and agricultural raw materials from hinterlands to the sea ports to export to Europe and America alike (Ujam, 1997). The origins of railway developments in West Africa started from the 1855 (Senegal), when many interest groups in West Africa and Britain began to lobby the imperial government to grant them investment and loan guarantee, and approval to construct railway lines in the British West African colonies (Ujam, 1997). Thus, between 1855 and 1892 various private firms were indicating their interest to construct rail network which was received by the colonial government. William Shelford conducted a survey in 1855 and 1892 which clearly indicated the trade values and possible gains of railway networking in Nigeria (Ujam, 1997).

The greatest single enterprise of the British in Nigeria was the railway project which was launched at the instance of Joseph Chamberlin, the dynamic secretary of state, who during his tenure of office between 1895 and 1903 actively pursued the cause of the economic development of British overseas possessions (Falola, 1991). In the case of Nigeria, the British government granted a guarantee of interest thus enabling the Nigerian government to secure much needed capital loan from the London money market in 1895, survey was completed and worked started in December of the same year (Jaekel, 1997). In 1895 approval was given for the construction of 32km of a 1067mm gauge rail line from Iddo (Lagos) to Otta (Ogun state). This marked the

commencement of railway network in Nigeria. The first phase which commenced in 1898 from Iddo later extended to Ibadan was concluded in 1901 with 193km. There was appreciable developmental effort and expansion made as the railway tracks kept increasing during the colonial period for instance, the Nigerian railway network runs diagonally from the Southwest (Lagos) to Northeast (Nguru) and from the South-east (Port Harcourt) through Kafanchan to the North-East (Maiduguri). The network consists of 4332 track kilometres characterized by sharp curves and steep gradients in many sections. Apart from the Kafanchan-Maiduguri line that was constructed between 1954 and 1964 most of the network tracks were constructed between 1898 and 1927(Jaekel, 1997). The expansion of the railway continued as it featured the Ibadan- Jebba (295km) from 1901-1909; Kano-Baro (567km) from 1907-1911, Jebba-Minaa (255km\_ from 1909-1915, Port-Harcourt- Enugu (243km) from 1914-1916, Enugu- Makurdi (220km) from 1916-1924, Kaduna- Kafanchan (179km) from 1924-1927, Kafanchan- Jos (101km) from 1925-1927. It is worthy of note to state that the lines that were operating independently prior to amalgamation, but it ceased to operate in isolation after the amalgamation which eased the colonial government operation(Yinkore, 2005). Hence, the construction and development of the Nigeria Railway (NR) system, led to the bringing together of many and different ethnic groups that now constitute Nigeria. Thus, the story of the Nigeria railway is also that of Nigeria; without one the other would not have been possible (Ujam, 1997). The Nigerian Railways came into being on October 3, 1912 by the merger of the Lagos government railways and the Baro-Kano railway. It however became an autonomous public corporation created by an Act of parliament, the Nigerian Railway Corporation Act (1955), as amended 1990, with the general objectives of “ carriage of passengers and goods in the manner that will offer full value and quality of service, ensure safety of operations and maximum efficiency, to the customers and meet social responsibility in a manner that will meet the requirements of rail users, trade, commerce and the general public” which determines the distribution chain(Jaekel, 1997).Due to the expansion experienced in the railway sector during the colonial period and the economic role it played, the need to institutionalize the Nigerian railway came up. Therefore, the need to convert Nigeria railway into a corporation was further underscored by two developments in the late 1940s. In 1949, another commission of enquiry was set up to look into Nigeria railway’s operational problems, headed by H.F. Pallant, the Assistant divisional superintendent of the British railways in York, this

commission painted a picture of Nigerian rail transport maladministration in its 64-page “meaty” report. Furthermore, it recommended that fundamental changes be made to Nigeria railway’s organizational structure and procedures (Jaekel, 1997).

Starting from 1949 well into the postcolonial period, the Nigeria Railway was the largest employer of labour in the colony. Though originally designed to carry up to 1.5 million tons of goods annually, but by 1949 it was carrying in excess of its installed capacity (Ayoola, 2008). On April 9, 1953, Ralf Emerson, an experienced British engineer, was appointed the General Manager/Chairman board of directors designate of the proposed Nigerian Railway Corporation. On October 1, 1955, the ownership of the Nigerian Railway was formally transferred from the Nigerian government to the new Nigerian Railway Corporation (Ayoola, 2008). Under the railway ordinance, NRC was given monopoly power and responsibility to carry out railway activities in Nigeria and manage to provide reasonable facilities for the carriage of passengers and goods. The restructure of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) was completed in 1955. Thus, services provided by the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) at inception includes:

- i) Freight Services; these include: covered wagons suitable for loading dry goods such as cement and general merchandise; Open wagons suitable for loading dry goods such as cars, billets; special wagons, tank wagons- for liquid goods; baggage vans suitable for parcels, household items and other courier services; provision for animals/general goods and farm products
- ii) Increasing of the respective shares of freight traffic between rail and road modes, leading to the Nigerian economy becoming globally more competitive.
- iii) balancing the respective shares of freight traffic between rail and road modes would result in a significant reduction of traffic on road, particularly the long haul and bulk traffic and therefore a significant reduction in the budget allocation of funds for road maintenance and rehabilitation in Nigeria.
- iv) NRC becoming financially self-sustaining and being in a position to reward its capital providers.
- v) government being able to increase its fiscal revenue through operations of rail track distribution logistic system as more organizations are getting involved in our services.
- vi) Nigerians to enjoy relative political stability with improving environment for investment. The private sector investor in the railways benefit from macroeconomic

stability and favorable investments. Other ways the rail distribution system support the downstream sector and impact the economy are as follows: reliability, sustainability, Improved socio economic growth and development, poverty alleviation, economic stability, Public Private Partnership(PPP) involvement, improved Gross Domestic Product (GDP), opportunity for job creation, better harmonization, higher revenues/income, better and appreciable service delivery, advancement in technology and innovation, more participation, improved distribution logistics for the future, implementation of effective strategic plan, creation of a better system wide or network transport mode. Etc(Yinkore, 2005).

Hence, from the late nineteenth century to 1955, the Nigeria railway was owned and managed by the Nigerian colonial government and its day-to-day affairs were managed by the Nigerian railway department before it became the Nigerian Railway Corporation. It is worthy of note to state that the development and construction of the railway system in Nigeria can be classified into three major phases: the first and second phases were developed and constructed between 1898-1927, and 1957-1964 ( this was the colonial period) The second phase lasted for 7 years covering the period of 1957-1964 with the construction of Lagos- Kafanchan rail line and the construction of Kafanchan- Maiduguri rail line; Kafanchan – Bauchi (238km)in 1961, Bauchi-Gombe (166km) from 1961-1963 and Gombe to Maiduguri (302km) 1963-1964. The development brought about total route kilometers of the Nigerian railway corporation to 3,505km and track kilometers to 4332(NRC,2021). While the third phase in real terms is the 25year Nigerian railway strategic vision and modernization plan(this falls within the post colonial period which also doubles as the period of the Chinese intervention)(NRC,2021). An interesting trend to note is that there was consistent rail construction and development from 1898-1927, followed by a 31year break. Consistent activity picked up in 1958- two years before the nation's independence and it has continued relatively till date (NRC,2021).

### **Post Colonial development of the Nigerian Railway system**

#### **Upgrade of the Nigerian Railway System**

As earlier stated the sole operation of the Nigerian railway system was done by the colonial masters during the period. After the colonial period (after independence), it became the sole responsibility of the Nigerian government to manage the railway service. The railway

sector would either improve the railway service delivery or nose dive the sector. Railway did not enjoyed as much attention as it deed during the colonial period, this can be associated with the discovery of oil and a major shift from agrarian society to the oil boom. Thus, the railway suffered major neglect during the much later years of independence. The takeover of the management of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) -the statutory body managing the Nigerian railway industry since 1955 - in 1979 by the Indians, was very crucial in the history of this transport sub-sector. This historical development has attracted comments from critics, and commentator(Ogochukwu et al, 2022).

Although the operation and management of the Nigerian railway industry from 1901 to 1960, (when Nigeria gained her independence) cannot be described as a commercial success, nonetheless the Nigerian railway department, which was transformed into a statutory corporation in October 1955, recorded modest operating surpluses for several years. The highest of these before 1960 was in the 1958/1959 financial year, when revenue reached £15.75 million, and a working surplus of £2,030,606 was achieved (Ogochukwu et al, 2022). This good performance was followed a year later 1960/61 - by poor financial results - with a net operating deficit of £988,000. However, in 1963/1964 the Corporation achieved its best financial performance to date: revenue of about £16.30 million and a working surplus of about £2 million. Thereafter the NRC's fortune began to decline rapidly from which it has not recovered fully(Ogochukwu et al, 2022).Nigeria's railway sector in comparisim to other countries reveals the inefficiency that has plagued the sector. Although like Nigeria Cote d' Ivoire inherited a 3 feet 6 inches-gauge from the French, she subsequently invested capital in her rail infrastructure and by the early 1980s was able to achieve 93 miles per hour speed for long haul freight trains(Salawu, 2021). Considering the standard of the railway network in some advanced country it is important that Nigeria does not pay the kind of attention needed to rail development. For instance, Japanese railway expanded progressively from 0 to about 27000km between 1872 and 1998 as against Nigeria that is still battling with 3515km (Ayoola, 2008). On the global scale Nigeria's imminent need for a sophisticated infrastructural advancement in the railway sector remains paramount. The urgent need to expand, renovate and carry out a total overhaul of the Nigerian railway network has led to the steady upgrade and rehabilitation over the years. There have been major concerted efforts made by the Nigerian government after independence to enhance the upgrade and

revitalization of the railway delivery in Nigeria. Part of these efforts includes some national and international development initiatives to revitalize the railway system which has taken place through different epoch. These includes:

### **A Contractual Agreement between Nigeria and Rail India Technical and Economic Service, 1978-82 RITES**

The RITES mission was to rehabilitate the rail network using advice from rail India engineers, to recover and maintain obsolete and disabled rolling stock, to increase revenue and reduce operating cost, improve the quality of train service and introduce market – oriented approach to traffic generation, give foreign experts authority over highest decision – making body of NRC and to design a better traffic schedule. Whether or not all of these were achieved is debatable by many scholars and analyst (Ayoola, 2008). The intervention was short lived, though it recorded some success in the aspect of replacement but in revenue generation according to Yinkore they were unable to meet set target(Yinkore, 2005). Under the leadership of Mr. K. C. Bansal the RITES made available 160-170 Locos, they also modernize the sheds, the RITES also made available new storage facilities and proper documentation. They also worked on the rationalization of location of different classes of locos. With the RITES arrangement, almost all types of locos were attended to in all the sheds and for easy maintenance and schedule (Yinkore,2005). RITES recorded achievement in the following areas: Running Division,diesel locomotives, signal and communication,level crossing protection, training of trainable and un-trainable staff ; staffs were trained in the following areas, track infrastructure and points and cross workshop

It is indicative that during the commencement of the RITES contract there was a steady increase in revenue in relation to expenditure and operating deficit. In spite of the difficulties the Bansal's RITES encountered with the Shagari's government that inherit the contract, the RITES performance between 1979-82 showed the potent capability and capacity of the Nigerian Railway Corporation if adequately financed. Finance remained a major challenge of the RITES upgrade(Oyewole,2021). Oyewole affirmed that many government intervention is short lived because it remains challenging for the Nigerian government to run NRC especially when indigenous staffs are not carried along whenever an external expertise is consulted(Oyewole, 2021).

## **The second major intervention made by the government during the post-colonial phase was the ‘the 1989-92 ‘Ogbemudia Revolution’**

### Ogbemudia revolution/ Romanian project

No sooner had the Indian experts left than railway traffic plummet. Gross operation set in, the railway infrastructure decayed rapidly and the finances were deplorable. Dr Samuel Ogbemudia was brought in as the leader to bring normalcy to the system(Ujam, 1997). With his visionary capacity the NRC during his tenure experienced the following:

- Divided NRC into 9 departments each headed by director
- Checked union militancy by briefing staff regularly on all management decisions
- Motivated staffs by paying salaries and entitlements
- Reactivate workshops and bee-hives of activities(Yinkore, 2005).
- This period also featured the intervention of the Romanian. The Romanian project stemmed from the Nigeria- Romania Counter-trade bi-lateral project Agreement of 1986 derived from a failed debt settlement agreement in respect of crude oil lifted by the Romanian government which was converted for the supply of rolling stock covering 400bxunits, 50 guard van units, and 150 machines and ancillary equipment for the retooling of some workshop (Ujam, 1997). The NRC whilst initiating this project considered it an answer to the dwindling status of the railway system. The machinery as regards the project was supplied by the Romanian company in 1988, unfortunately only 33 was installed. Again the Federal government’s inability to properly fund this project led to its eventual halt. Although attempts were made to regulate and stabilize the rehabilitation(Agunloye and Oduwaye, 2011).

The third effort was the involvement of the Chinese;the rehabilitation project with China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, 1995-99, Gen. Abacha involved the Chinese which eventually led to China’s continuous involvement in the Nigeria railway sector even till date(Yinkore, 2005).China and Nigeria over the years have signed several bilateral agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) related to infrastructure development, including railways. These agreements laid the groundwork for Chinese investment and involvement in Nigeria's railway projects. China’s earliest MOU with Nigeria dated back to 1995, when the administration of the late Gen. Sani Abacha heeded Maigoro’s advice when it awarded a \$528m railway contract in 1995 to the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation for the rehabilitation of rail infrastructure, supply of 50 locomotives and other rolling stocks, as well

as the training of critical NRC personnel. The involvement of China in the Nigeria railway sort to address three major needs; first, the infrastructural needs; secondly, the Financing and Loans by China's financial institutions, such as the China Exim Bank, which have been instrumental in providing loans and financing for Nigeria's railway projects and thirdly, Chinese companies and expertise, such as China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), they bring technical expertise and experience in building modern railway systems.

It needs to be stated that the rehabilitation has been slow but gradually taking shape over a long period of time. Despite the RITES and Ogbemudia revolution attempt to revive the comatose state of the railway service, it did not yield the expected result. After the 1995 involvement of the Chinese, the subsequent government began to draw out national plans that will enhance the advancement of the railway system. Even though these master plans are said to be ineffective because they are supposed to be derived from national transport policy but even the policies are obsolete. These policies do not tackle the current challenges that exist in the railway sector(Yinkore, 2005). The civilian administration of Obasanjo was applauded when it conceived the idea of a 25-year strategic vision for the railway in 2002. This was meant to be a systematic development of the railway system. It was specifically designed to provide a global framework and benchmark for rail expansion and modernisation for over 8,000 kilometres linking all state capitals and major centres and industrial areas in the country. And the government reportedly paid a princely sum to a panel that delivered the package. The conversion of the nation's narrow gauge rail tracks to a standard gauge and the construction of new 4,984 kilometres of rail lines to link the West and East of the country is also an attempt made to rehabilitate the railway sector(Salawu, 2021). Often, these plans are beautifully crafted but without sustaining policies. The Director of the Public relations of the Nigeria Railway Corporation stated that Nigeria needs more private partnership in its mission to boast the productivity and efficiency of the Nigerian railway system(Salawu, 2021). With the framework mapped out for improvement from 1995, the continuous inefficiency in the railway is traced to Nigeria government's old concepts of government as sole railway operator and owner supplying all rail infrastructure and services. This approach is in strong contradiction to the fact that all government, especially those in developing countries have rarely excelled in business ventures,

due to an overburdening bureaucratic approach to most issues(Yinkore, 2005). Thus, effort has been directed towards reviving the comatose railway transportation system in Nigeria through public- private sector initiative and collaborative efforts with foreign investors.

### **The 25 Years Strategic Plan of the Government**

The strategic railway plan, which includes the rehabilitation of all the existing narrow gauge rail line, construction of new standard gauge line and their operations and maintenance in the country, require a potential huge resource much of which are envisioned to be resourced through private sector investment and foreign investment to give the Nigerian people modern railway system comparable globally. The Federal government in its determination to revive and modernize the railway system in line with the 25-year strategic vision adopted a systematic dual approach phase 1: system transition 2002-2007: intended to make the railway system function effectively and become attractive to potential concessionaires while Phase II system modernization was within 2007-2015. Both phases are being implemented concurrently and the phase III entails system stabilization 2016-2027(Salawu, 2021). The administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo created a national plan that the railway sector can work with which was supposed to drive its operative for 25 years. The plan was divided into phases to monitor the progress achieved as the execution is carried out. New lines were constructed while old lines were rehabilitated, funds were made available to foster the actualization of these projects(Yinkore, 2005). The federal government of Nigeria in 2006 approved a US\$40 billion 25- year strategic plan for the modernization of transport sector; about 8000km standard gauge rail line was constructed. The first phase covered a total of 1,315 km which got completed in 2011(Mohammed, 2021). Also, the old Lagos-Kano rail line was inaugurated in December 21, 2012 after its rehabilitation, it received a vote of N1.4bn in the 2013 budget for maintenance purposes. The breakdown shows the Lagos-Jebba end and Jebba-Kano end got N700m each (ADB, 2015).The rehabilitation of the narrow-gauge Port Harcourt-Maiduguri line was allocated N67bn; it approved N225bn for the construction of a rail line from Aba to Ajaokuta, linking Enugu, Asaba and Agbor. The government also pledged an initial sum of N48bn for the construction of the 360km rail line from Ajaokuta to Abuja through Jakura and Baro(Yinkore, 2005).

The focus of the rehabilitation was supposed to cover the following:

- Rehabilitation of eastern rail corridor: track, signaling & Telecommunication bridges, culverts level crossings.
- Rehabilitation of Western rail corridor: track, signaling & Telecommunication bridges, culverts level crossings.
- Construction & commissioning of Abuja – Kaduna Standard gauge rail line
- Construction of Lagos-Ibadan segment of Lagos -Kano standard Gauge Rail line
- Procurement of 35no GE locomotives, rail road Crane, 40 coaches, 3 sets of DMU
- Operations intra-city mass transit in Lagos 16x daily, Kaduna MTT, Kano- Challaway. MTT, Jos-Kuru mtt, Maiduguri MTT, inter-city Train services: Lagos-Kano 2x weekly, Port-Harcourt –Kano 2x weekly, Lagos-Off-Oshogbo-Lagos weekly, Abuja-Kaduna passenger service 2x daily, freight train services on the western and eastern corridor daily.
- Preparation of the Nigerian railway corporation for concession and privatization ongoing: interim concession in readiness for a full concession of the NRC narrow gauge effective October 2017 (Mohammed, 2021).

The goal of the 25 year plan was to keep the system going while government ongoing plans to rehabilitate and concession the corporation is properly put in place. The Nigerian Railway Corporation is in charge of the year to year or short-term corporate responsibility of monitoring the progress of the plan. The sole objectives of NRC corporate plan therefore are to optimize the sustainable, cost effective, utilization of resources to produce a margin acceptable to the main shareholder the federal government of Nigeria (Owoseni, 2021). Nigerian railway corporation's corporate plan is essentially aimed at translating the objectives and short term goals of the NRC into policies and action plans with targets to work towards while taking note of the regulatory policy and frame work, the institutional framework and the market environment with special reference to targeted freight and passengers services, asset maintenance policies, operating policies as well as human capacity building policies. NRC's corporate plan identify its strength and weaknesses. The corporate plan is thus supported by a set of management plans such as: the business plan, operating plan, equipment maintenance plan, track maintenance plan, signaling and telecommunication plan, manpower and the financial plan (Owoseni, 2021).

Part of the move made to ensure an effective upgrade and to sustain the 25 year plan is to remove the government created challenges by eliminating monopoly rights and other exclusionary laws or regulations, privatize government assets, consolidate regulatory and policy responsibility under as few agencies as possible, and then invite the private sector to help build infrastructure

and operate transportation services, in deals typically structured as public- Private – Partnership (Mohammed, 2021). According to Mohammed, he asserted that part of what the privatization and opening the railway corporation up for foreign investors will do is to encourage competition which will give room for efficiency, and would increase the demands for railway services in Nigeria (Mohammed, 2021). The Corporation is still ‘enjoying’ some level of monopoly of providing rail services in the country but the federal government made a move by setting up a committee headed by Senator Gbemisola Saraki the state minister of transport to unbundle railway into competitive stage. This committee was saddled with the responsibility of providing counsel to the federal government on the legislation passed to secure the sustainability of the rehabilitation (Salawu, 2021). It needs to be stressed that (as observed by the committee) if the needed development and sustainability will be recorded in the railway sector the private- public partnership approach must be used to unbundle the sector. Till date the main focus of the 25-year plan has been on improving capacity for both passenger services and cargo, the latter of which could provide a sizable catalyst for economic growth and open up activity in agriculture and mining by connecting remote areas to central markets. The Twenty-five years plan have an overhaul of the railway system which started with rehabilitation efforts and about 90 percent of the system is slated for upgrade (Salawu, 2021). However, it needs to be emphasized that railway project are capital intensive and spills over a long term. The sustainability of the 25-year plans enhanced with the proposed Nigeria railway authority bill which the 8<sup>th</sup> national assembly passed at the expiration of its term. The government set up a committee to look into unbundling Railway Corporation into about 4 special business unit which include an Infraco, Opco, Regulatory/safety, marketing. With the unbundling, it will be easier to attract or mobilize private sector investment and foreign investors in managing the railway system. As an example the fare collection, using E-ticketing solution from Abuja to Kaduna train service was concession. The standard gauge services from Lagos to Ibadan and Warri to Itapke and the Lagos to Kano Narrow gauge train service about to be concessioned (Ayoola, 2008).

Indeed, rehabilitation requires a broad step and a huge detailed planning from the planning to the community negotiation, to the track construction and the signaling. Unlike the road construction where construction kick starts and is ready for use almost immediately after construction. Railway requires wagons which will be fixed on the tracks after the tracks are laid.

Salawu asserted that in 2019 eighteen wagons were brought to Nigeria and the delivery of these wagons needed inspection before they can be put into used. Beyond the tracking, there are many other service delivery expected of railway which can be exhaustive without commitment to plans and policies. Railway upgrade is a good idea but requires such a long-term commitment by the government and investors (Salawu, 2021). The success of the 25-year plan is anchored on commitment of the government and the need for a national policy that can enhance the master plan. Train upgrade remains an ongoing process because as technology evolve, there will always be transformation in railway system.

### **Conclusion**

The findings in this paper shows clearly that the Nigerian Railway Corporation have witnesses steady growth over the years, there has been plans put in place to upgrade and modernize the railway sector. The involvement of the Chinese investments has contributed to the modernization plan of the Nigerian Railway Corporation. One of the major findings of this paper demonstrated the need for consistent policy in the railway sector considering the fact that railway project is long termed and capital and labor intensive unlike the road. Beyond the construction of tracks it is needful to engage in capacity building for the personnel of the Corporation to ensure the development of the sector. The contribution of China to the railway upgrade since 1995 during the Abacha's administration has shown clearly the need for partnership in the rail, the finding shows that the government is incapacitated for the kinds of funds and services required in the railway sector. The 25 years strategic plan enhanced the steady transformation recorded in the Nigerian Railway despite many years of lack of efficiency. The major setback witnessed by the sector and the corporation can be traced to the monopoly created by the Nigerians government to oversee the operation of the railway sector solely which have hindered the development and modernization of the sector. Despite the attempt that have been made over the years to bring about transformation into the railway system in Nigeria, there is still so much that needs to be done to ensure economy development through efficient railway system.

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