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The Locational and Functional Characteristics of Bagana and Itobe; Two River-Bank Agricultural-Product Markets in Kogi State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The authors are Professor A. Akinbode, a professor of Geography who has been teaching Agricultural Geography, Regional Development Planning, Rural Development Planning, Philosophy of Geography and Research Methods in Geography in the Universities in the past three decades. His research interest has gone deep in the area of agricultural marketing in general and river-bank agricultural-product markets in particular and Mr Micheal O. Alabi, a professional town planner who teaches history and theory of urban planning. Both are staff of the Department of Geography and Planning Kogi state University, Anyigba. In the current study, their research focus is on Bagana and Itobe-two river-bank agricultural-product markets in Omala and Ofu Local Government Areas of Kogi State respectively. Specific emphasis is placed on the Locational and functional characteristics of these two moderate but very important market centers owing to the dominant role they have been playing and will continue to play in the spatial distribution of agricultural products both within Kogi state and between the state and some other northern states in Nigeria.

Key words: functional characteristics of towns, agricultural product distribution

Introduction

The existence of agricultural product markets pre-dated the advent of the colonial era in West Africa. In the early days of the evolution of these markets, sellers and buyers of Agricultural products were brought together in an exchange of products for products. Thus yam sellers who needed plantains would look for plantain sellers who also needed yam tubers. Yam sellers would exchange some tubers of Yam for given quantities of plantains. This is trade by barter. The greatest problem of this type of trade is the determination of the inter-product exchange rates. However, trade by barter persisted till the cowry a kind of money was introduced into West Africa from the Far East. The use of the cowry did not facilitate market transactions because cowries were cumbersome. In some cases the cowries were heavier than the products they where used to buy.(Aladejemokun,OA;Omonoma,B.T, 2008)

Eventually, the introduction of the British currency into British West Africa facilitated trade tremendously. This is because the British money is portable money was not only but portable also divisible. Thus the British currency promoted trade a great deal. In general, markets were areas or centers where various products were assembled from the producing areas for onward transshipment to other areas where the demand for the products existed.

Indeed agricultural-product markets in West Africa can be categorized into various types as road-side markets, route-junction markets, village markets, river-bank markets, nodal-town markets and urban markets.(C.I.A,2003)

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Both Bagana and Itobe, the two market centers which constitute the focus of the current study are described, in detail, in terms of their locational and functional characteristics within Kogi State. Both are river-bank multi-product markets.

The main objective of the study is an assessment of the socio-economic significance of each of the two markets in terms of their prominence in the process of the collection of diverse products from one section of their hinterland and redistributing them to another section. Both port markets thus serve as entrepot port between the two regions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Agricultural (rural) markets predated colonialism in West Africa. Essential agricultural-product markets promote effective spatial interactions between two sets of rural residents-farmers and their families (who are producers) and rural traders who are mostly women although some men and children also engage in rural trading. Producers and the traders transact trading business in the rural markets. No doubt the volumes of market transactions in the river-bank agricultural-product markets, the type of Bagana and Itobe that the current study is concerned with are much larger than the volumes of transaction the other markets of their size are expected to handle. But owing to the additional river transport system which serves the markets in this category, these markets are able to provide services to a much larger region (hinterland) than their counterparts that do not have a river system to serve them.

Certain facilities which are acquired in some of these markets such as store rooms, warehouses for storing goods of substantial quantity and quality for a considerable length of time before disposing off them. Facilities like these, build up people’s confidence in the use of the market infrastructure. A variety of small business concerns grow up in each market each of which offers employment to a few people thereby reducing rural unemployment problem. Such businesses include, catering, carpentry, bricklaying, petrol stations and laundry among others. Also the existence of several (in some cases many) churches and mosques caters for the religious or spiritual interests of many people in these market centers who can worship near their homes. The need to travel to the next village to worship does not arise. (Rosegrant, M.W.;Pairsver, M.S.; Meiger and Witcower, J., 2001). Itobe is a small market town where all these facilities are provided. The over all effect is that the infrastructure already acquired also assists in further building up the infrastructure which in turn continues to attract increases in both the resident population as well as the labour force in the community. While labour helps to enhance production, increases in the resident population enlarge the market size for the goods and services being provided. The resultant effect is a visible expansion in both the settlement size and the population size of the community over time. Itobe fits into this framework more than Bagana which has had its history of prosperity and decline as we shall see later in this study. This research began as far back as 1990-91, an exploratory survey of three river-bank agricultural-product markets. The three markets selected were Abinse on River Benue, in Benue state. Itobe on River Niger in Kogi State and Ilushi on River Niger in Edo State. This period afforded a second opportunity to continue the research and Itobe, Bagana in Omala local Government Area is added to enable us undertake a comparative study of both Itobe and Bagana.

Although the report of the survey of the three river-bank agricultural product markets was published in the proceedings of the 1992 Ambross Ali University Faculty of Environmental Studies Seminar, there have been no separate publications of reports on Itobe whereas the write-up on Abinse and Ilushi have been published in Ekistics and Iro ro journals respectively. As it is, the survey time is more intensive as it is designed to investigate further the locational and functional characteristics of Itobe and Bagana. The data are derived from both primary and secondary sources.

3. Locational Characteristics of Bagana and Itobe

Both Bagana and Itobe are small settlements which are located at the banks of two rivers on the extreme western part of their respective Local Government Areas-Omala and Ofu. While Itobe is located on the western bank of River-Niger at the eastern edge of the bridge over River Niger along the dualised express road that runs from Okene through Ajaokuta, Anyigba and Ankpa to join the express road that runs from Makurdi through Otukpo, Otukpa and Nsukka to Enugu (fig 1). The junction is near Otukpa. The dualization of this stops at Ajaokuta at present.

Both Bagana and Itobe which are sources of viable internal revenue generation for their respective Local Government Areas are quite some distance from their Local Government headquarters-Abejukolo and Ugwalagwo respectively. Itobe was founded by some Igala hunters who were returning home after the inter-ethnic wars between the Igalas and the Bassa people sometimes during the 18th century. Itobe was thus initially like an outpost for travelers moving north and south between Idah and Lokoja and also west and east between Ebiraland and Igalaland.
Thus, Itobe has witnessed definite stages in its growth and development. For many years after its inception it is not difficult to imagine that Itobe remained a small settlement-a camp. Even after the road from Okene to Anyigba was constructed, Itobe did not expand rapidly because the number of people plying the road from the west to the east and vice versa was small since there was no bridge over the river Niger then. But in the early 1980’s when the bridge over river Niger-the Ajaokuta-Itobe Bridge-was constructed traffic from the west to the east over the bridge and vice versa expanded phenomenally. Itobe has its share of prominence as a stopping point (or a bulking point) for goods coming from the west and the east respectively. The establishment of the Iron and Steel Industry at Ajaokuta is another potent factor that has contributed to the rapid growth and development of Itobe in recent times. Many workers at Ajaokuta have their own buildings and live at Itobe from where they go to work every day.

The preliminary survey was conducted at Itobe in 1991, by then Itobe was a small settlement of about 5,000 people. Today, Itobe has spread over an area which is about five times its size in 1991 and the population is also about five times the 1991 figure.

Indeed, today, Itobe is a moderate town which enjoys a number of modern basic amenities/facilities. These include roads and water transport. It benefits no matter how marginally from the nearby railway which serves Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industry. Other facilities include health clinic, postal agency, petrol stations, markets, churches, mosques, primary schools and secondary schools. Itobe is located on the west bank of River Niger in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State. Indeed, Itobe is at the eastern end of the Ajaokuta-bridge over River Niger. This bridge which stretches over two kilometers is the longest bridge in Nigeria today. (ADB,2005;)

![Fig. 1: Location Map of Kogi State (showing Bagana and Itobe)](source: Adapted from Alabi, M.O, 2009.)
Specifically, Bagana is located approximately on latitude 7° 80” North of the equator while Itobe is on latitude 7° 25” North of the equator. Bagana lies on longitude 7° 20” East of the Greenwich meridian while Itobe is on longitude 6° 42” East of the Greenwich meridian (fig.1). While Bagana covers a total of land area of about 275 ha. Itobe covers some 228 ha.

Table 1 below shows most of the other important socio-economic characteristics of both Bagana and Itobe settlements. Both are river ports. Bagana is on the west bank of River Benue in Omala Local Government Area while Itobe is on the west bank of River-Niger in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State. Both small towns are the Head quarters of the districts named after them.

Materials and methods

Questionnaires are prepared and administered to respondents who have been chosen on the basis of their occupations, status or role in the community. In both Bagana and Itobe the Onu (the Head Chief) was the leading correspondent contacted for interview. In each case the Onu provided abundant basic information which is useful for the study to assume its present format. Information relating to the date of origin, the founder, stages of growth and development of the settlements, the ethnic composition of the population, the modern amenities and facilities in each settlement as provided by the Onu of Bagana and Onu of Itobe respectively. Questionnaires were administered to hotel managers, artisans, cattle dealers and market women among others. Existing literature on the evolution of agricultural markets, settlement growth and development were consulted and reviewed. Those that are really relevant to our study are cited at specific points in the text.

The study area comprises the two moderate settlements-Bagana head quarters of Bagana district in Omala Local Government Area and Itobe which is also the head-quarters of Itobe District in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State. The strategy for the data captured is better described as purposive method of sampling whereby we approach those people in institutions that can provide us with the exact information we need to undertake our study successfully. In this survey we must acknowledge the traditional rulers, the Onu of Bagana and the Onu of Itobe who voluntarily provided us with abundant information about their respective communities. We indeed acknowledge the generous cooperation of the two head-chiefs in the current study. No doubt, we will try other survey methods in our subsequent investigations of the study. The current study is more or less an exploratory survey of both market communities. It is gratifying that with the cooperation of the people interviewed, we were able to collect adequate data that permit meaningful analysis of the problems that we set out to investigate initially.

Results and discussion

Functional Characteristics (Phases of Growth and Development) of Bagana and Itobe

Both Bagana and Itobe had passed through definite phases of historic-growth and development. These are highlighted below: In the early colonial days, Bagana could only be reached through footpaths. This was during the period before the construction of the roads and hence before the use of vehicles. Movement during this time was only by walking or at the best by bicycle.

After the 1840’s the Europeans had penetrated the interior of West Africa. First the amuck roads were available in certain parts of West Africa linking major administrative centres. Later earth roads replaced the amuck roads. Trades in Bagana during these two early periods were at low ebb. Only food products, vegetables and delicacy products like tomatoes, okro, melon and pepper were sold for transportation to other parts of the country.

The third phase of development of Bagana witnessed phenomenal expansion in trade in the town. This expansion was made possible through the use of mechanized transportation which facilitated large scale movement of both manufactured goods which were mainly imported into the country and local agricultural products. This period lasted as far as the second or even the third decade of the twentieth century. Since the beginning of the third phase, the United Africa Company (UAC) had started playing a prominent role in the socio-economic life of Bagana which it dominated. But following Nigeria’s political independence from Britain on October 1, 1960, UAC influence in Bagana began to wane. It went to the extent that Bagana almost became a mere shadow of its past glory as a result of visible decline in its trade activities which followed the loss of the monopoly of long distance haulage of bulky products between southern and northern regions of Nigeria.

However, the current phase of development can be described as the phase of democratic political dispensation that has seen the road that leads to Bagana from Abejukolo, the Omala Local Government Area headquarters being developed as a first class good road laid with asphalt and motorable all year round. Farmers as well as traders including cattle dealers convey their products and merchandise into Bagana almost
effortlessly every market day. Indeed, Bagana is witnessing a new lease of life which is conducive to economic prosperity. Today, Bagana has three lucrative markets, these are the main multi-product market which holds every fifth day on the main inland of the town, and Secondly there is the market at the river-bank where on arrival of each speedboat women and children rush to struggle to buy the products that the boats bring to the markets. Such products include condiments, food products, fish, meat, palm oil, plantains, bananas, pine apples, beans, locust beans, vegetables and yam among others are conveyed downstream into Bagana from both Benue and Nassarawa states. Factors that have influenced the population growth in Bagana over the years include (1) migration from Igala land especially from Omala, Ankpa, Olamaboro and Dekina Local Government Areas of Kogi state.

Note the ethnic composition of the population of Bagana town. The British traders are the first people to settle in Bagana about the middle of 19th century. The Ibos and the Yorubas were among the early settlers in Bagana. The river Niger has made fishing a lucrative occupation of the people at Bagana in the past years. Also crop production has offered attraction to the farmers who came to this district to produce food mainly for the market.

The continued improvement in the transportation of the Omala Local Government Area, Igala land and the entire Kogi state has provided a steady expansion in the market for the food production of the farmers in this area. The existence of the UAC between the end of the 19th century and the notable year 1960 when Nigeria became independent meant that food product could be carried to the distant northern markets by competing companies and not UAC alone. Ajaokuta which is immediately south of Bagana has its impact on the food market of the latter. The Local Government Area headquarters at Abejukoko also exerts its positive impact on the expansion of the Bagana food market. The food and other products that are assembled at Bagana both from within Kogi state and from outside the state especially from the distant northern areas of the former Northern Region form the food pool of Bagana market.(Ogen, O.J, 2004)

As indicated before Itobe was founded about 1841 by (i) Ochonia Apehu and his brother among (ii) a group of Igala hunters who were returning home after the inter-ethnic wars between the Igala land and the Bassa people. The word Itobe was originally Ete Ube (the beginning of trade) we can now identify four stages in the growth of the town- (i) when Itobe was served by only bush paths (ii) when it was served by earth roads. Itobe has had phases of expansion marked by (iii) when served by the road-Okene Ajaokuta Road without the bridge Itobe town was (iv) when it was served by Okene-Ajaokuta road with the bridge over river Niger which is the longest bridge in Nigeria today: Products coming from the

East-Igala land to Itobe: tomatoes, cassava, beans barbahurea, palm oil, rice and plantain.

Southward from Lokoja: Beans, fish, locust beans, and cattle among others.

Northward from Idah: Fish, electrical and electronics appliances and yams.

Southward Idah: Maize, beans, bush meat, cattle and vegetables.

West from Kabbal and Okene: Cattle, cassava, lantain among others.

Itobe is a nucleated settlement with a population of 6,000 in 1991. it rose to about 11,085 (2006) and 20,605 (2009). Oil, cassava, yams are among the major products conveyed from Igala into Bagana over a long period of time, while fish, rice, maize and cattle are conveyed from Bagana northward to Benue and Nassarawa states and beyond.

It has the reputation for generating large revenues on a regular basis for Ofu Local Government, as a result the number of workers that live and undertake commercial activities in Itobe market which has become a huge internal revenue generating centre for Ofu Local Government Area over the years.

Bagana, in turn was founded by the white who set the UAC trade depot there in about 1845.

Road and River transportation system were used and where beneficial to the people for movement of goods and services for a long time. There are three markets in the town (i) the riverbank market (ii) the upland main multi-product market and (iii) the cattle special market which serves a large number of customers from both far and near within and outside Kogi state.

Socio-physical characteristics of Bagana and Itobe

Bagana is like an entrepot port receiving large quantities of goods-manufactured and agricultural products from Kogi State especially Igala land and redistributing these goods to other states from the formal northern region especially Benue and Nassarawa states. Similarly, Itobe played the same role as an entrepot port between Igala land and the rest of Kogi state i.e. the central and western senatorial Districts of the state and even beyond to Lokoja, the state capital, south-western states and sometimes, to the northern states of Kwara and Niger.
The products that are involved in such movements include palm oil, yams, plantains, bananas, beans, locust beans, products from the western and central senatorial Districts that are assembled in Itobe are also sent to Igala land where they find their ultimate markets. Note, that also the reverse is true for Bagana. The UAC stores were in Bagana for many years as UAC was a monopoly during the colonial period when it dominated the trade for many years. But since October 1, 1960 when Nigeria gained her political independence from Britain the monopoly has ceased since other companies have come in to compete in the haulage of bulky products between the southern and northern states of Nigeria.

### Table 1: Socio-Physical Amenities in Bagana and Itobe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/NO</th>
<th>Amenities/Facilities</th>
<th>Bagana</th>
<th>Itobe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roads</td>
<td>710 km of intra town road</td>
<td>08 km of intra town road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rail road</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>The rail road serves the Iron and Steel Industry at Ajakuta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Water ways</td>
<td>From river Benue, Markurdi to confluence at Lokoja</td>
<td>River Niger: from Lokoja to Idah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fuel stations</td>
<td>There is only one fuel station at Bagana as at June, 2009</td>
<td>There are seven fuel stations in Itobe in May 2009: SOT. Petrol the oldest petrol station, Oando petrol station, Asta, Oluboye ventures Nig Ltd; Texaco, Makeva ventures Ltd. Musaco petrol station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Markets</td>
<td>There are three markets (i) the large 4-day periodic multi-product market (ii) cattle market on the north eastern part of the town and (iii) the riverbank market that stretches along the bank in a north to-south direction speed boats convey diverse products, yam, rice, beans and bush meat among others.</td>
<td>One large market which covers a large expanse of land. Its fast transforming from a 4-day periodic market to a daily market owing to the large volume of daily market transactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Only one postal agency in each of Bagana and Itobe</td>
<td>One postal agency-post office is in Abejukolo, Local Government Area Headquarters.</td>
<td>One postal agency-post office is in Ugwolagwo Ofu-L.G.A Headquarters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>Only one clinic for the district. It is maintained by the state Government.</td>
<td>3 Hospitals: 1 courtage hospital, 1 general hospital and 1 primary health care centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>No hotels but there are local eateries in Bagana.</td>
<td>3 hotels-treasure Beach hotel, Kogi concord hotel and Calabar restaurant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Police station</td>
<td>One police station</td>
<td>One police station located near the palace of the Oulu of Itobe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>There are two primary schools and one secondary school, no tertiary institution yet.</td>
<td>There are four primary schools and three secondary schools in Itobe. There is no tertiary institution yet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Oulu of Bagana put the ratio of Christians to Muslims to traditional religious worshippers in Bagana at 50:45:5 the corresponding ratios in Itobe are 80:15:5 respectively.
Bagana was founded around 1845 by European traders who came to establish U.A.C stores along southern part of the small town by the bank of River Benue. The first settlers where the British people. There is only one fuel station in the town as at May/June 2009. It is like an entrepot port between Igala and the rest of the former Northern Region. It was a small river port town receiving large consignments of both manufactured goods from the port of PortHarcourt and Warri and storing them up at the U.A.C depot in Bagana. These consignments were sent to different parts of the defunct Northern Region at different times as the market demand dictated. From agricultural products like rice, beans, hides and skin and groundnuts among others are brought down from the northern areas for storage at the depot only to be distributed to the various parts of Igala and beyond subsequently as the need arose.

Indeed, the U.A.C trade flourished during the colonial period and thus made the local economy of Bagana boom. But the monopoly enjoyed by the U.A.C ceased shortly after October 1, 1960 when Nigeria gained her political independence from Britain. Other companies came into the transport business to haul goods over long distances between southern and northern Nigeria both ways. Thus the U.A.C lost its monopoly of trade into long distance haulage of goods and services between southern and northern Nigeria via Bagana in Kogi state. Bagana seems to suffer a relative decline in its economic prosperity as a result of the U.A.C loss of its trade monopoly. This was not to be a permanent feature for the town, because since the return of full democratic governance to the country in 1999, Bagana has also received its share of the gain of democratic governance. Today, Bagana is the Head-quarters of Bagana district in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi state. It has a fuel station. There are three active markets in Bagana the multi-product large market operates on the upland mainland every four days. Also, the special cattle market located on north-eastern part of the small town operates almost daily but with the peak transactions on the day of the main multi-product market. There is the river market along the western part of river Benue in southern part of Bagana. Multi-factory products such as rice, beans, locust beans, bush meat, fish, crayfish, yam, plantain, banana and groundnut among others are conveyed into Bagana in speed boat, from both Benue and Nasararwa states into Bagana on the market days. Many passengers accompany these products into Bagana each market day. Thus normally the people in Bagana on the market day are a large multiple of normal resident population of the town. Thus if the market staff are serious they should collect huge sums of revenue on each market day based on the range and the volume of the products as well as the volume of transactions that take place each market day.

Bagana has a government financed health clinics whose staffs are resident in the town. There are also a number of veterinarian doctors who looked after the live stocks especially cattle to ensure they are free from live stock devastating diseases. There are two primary schools and one secondary school which provide education for the children of Government workers among others. There is no tertiary institution in the town yet.

There are several Christian churches in Bagana today. Among these are Anglican church, Ecwa church, Deeper Life Bible church and Assemblies of God church. Christians are not only many but active in both Bagana and Itobe. This is symptomatic of both the booming trade and expanding population of adolescent who are being attracted into business of both places.

Also, there is a large number of Muslims in both Bagana and Itobe. There are about twenty mosques in Itobe while those of Bagana are much fewer; certainly both the population of Christians and Muslims in each community is growing appreciatively. It is also notable that people of different religions have been living together peacefully in both communities without any quarrels or fights. This is commendable, it should be encouraged.

In Bagana, the ratio of Christians to Muslims to traditional religion worshipers stand at 50:45:5 respectively. The workforce of Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Industry and Ugwolagwo L.G.A. headquarters
secretariat for Ofu Local Government Area Headquarters secretariats staff constitute a strong pull from which people move to Itobe to build various structures such as residential houses, restaurants and stores at Itobe. River Niger constitutes the main source of supply of water for the major domestic uses of the people of Itobe for drinking, washing, bathing, cooking, and even for irrigation purposes among others. The occupation of the residents of Itobe includes trading, farming both crop-production, livestock-production, poultry, fishing and commercial activities. Other light activities in which women and children engage mainly include catering services, barbing saloon, keeping of beer parlours, selling of building materials, laundering, tailoring, restaurants, hotel and transport services. Some people are civil servants in the Local Government Secretariats such as Ugwolagwo, Abejukolo, Dekina, Ankpa and Idah as well as in the state service in Lokoja.

Many workers in the Iron and Steel Industry live in their own buildings in Itobe from where they go to work at Ajaokuta and return home after work each day. Similarly many staff of Ofu L.G.A. Headquarters secretariats at Ugwolagwo live in their houses from where they go to work daily. In both cases some of these workers have some of their staff as their tenants in their houses with whom they go to work and return home daily.

As pointed out earlier in this study, Itobe is a source of large revenue for Ofu Local Government Area. The local government secretariats staffs come to the town regularly to collect rates and taxes yearly. Vast and rich agricultural land of Itobe and its expansive hinterland provides a great attraction for local Igala people from the neighboring districts to come into the area to take advantage of the ample opportunities to cultivate various agricultural products, like Yam, cassava, corn, plantains, vegetables and beans among other products. The expanding market potentials of Itobe retain such farmers in the region year after years.

6. Conclusion

This study is a brief report of our survey on the Locational and functional characteristics of Bagana and Itobe-two river-bank agricultural-products markets in Kogi State. The stages in the growth and development of both Bagana and Itobe show how events in other places and various sectors of both the local and state economies can manifest into veritable development in the given places within the larger economy. Not this alone, but also the specific locations of certain places can confer on such places certain advantages which may translate into real development over time.

Indeed, Bagana and Itobe benefit from their riverine locations which make them accessible to certain places as a result of the additional water transport system that serves them. No doubt, improvement in the water transport system over the years has further enhanced the importance of both Bagana and Itobe in providing services to their hinterlands as entrepot ports.

References