

ROAD DEVELOPMENT IN COLONIAL ANNANG, CALABAR PROVINCE, NIGERIA, 1900-1960

Emmanuel Toby

Abstract

The major task of this paper is to examine roads construction and maintenance in colonial Annang and how road transportation was used to exploit the resources of Annang during the colonial period. The exploitation of Annang would not have been possible, but for improvement in roads construction and maintenance by the colonial authorities. The study interrogated how these roads were used to promote British economic exploitation of Annang during the colonial period. It adopted the historical method, relying extensively on primary information obtained from oral interviews and archival sources. The study reveals that improvement in transportation facilities in Annang was a means to an end contrary to the colonial belief that there were meant to develop the Annang society. The end itself was the economic exploitation of Annang. The colonial administration leveraged its machinery to establish crucial infrastructure in Annang, which served to advance and safeguard British economic interest in the region.

Introduction

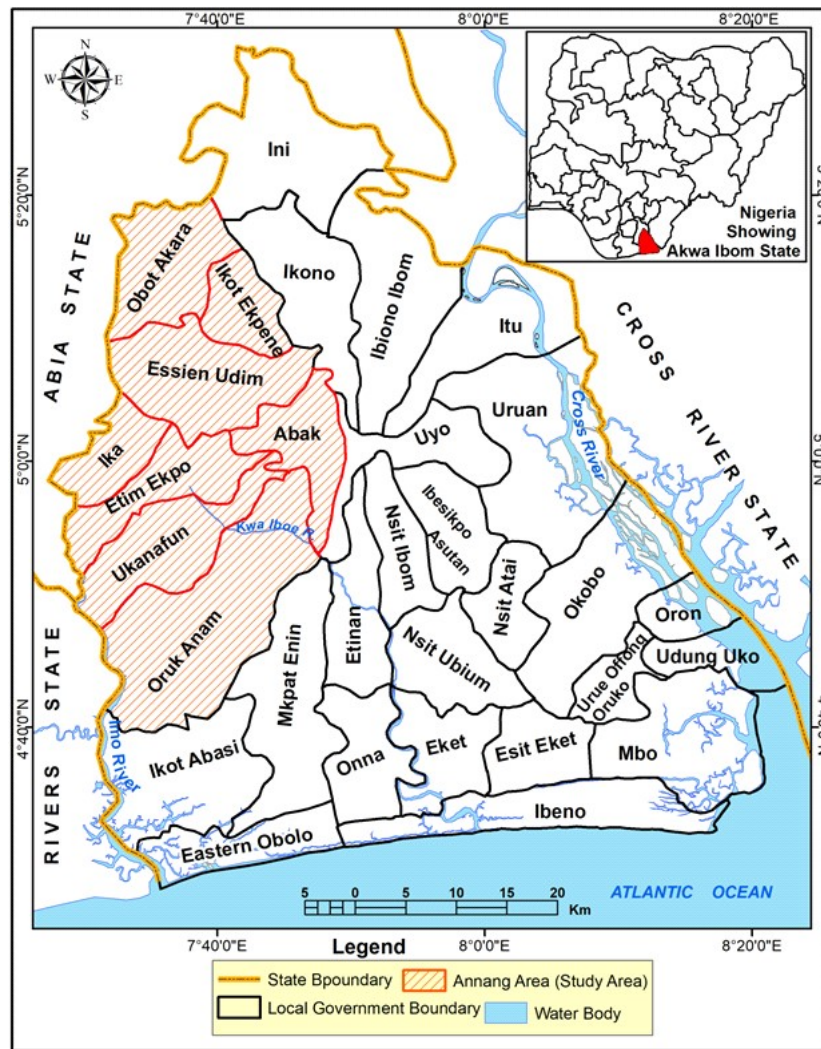
Annang people occupy the North-Western part of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria which lies within the Cross River Basin, between latitudes 4^o.25' and 7^o North and longitudes 7^o.15' and 9^o.30' East.¹Pre-colonial Annang was made up of thirty-five clans (*Aduk*).² Each of these had its own independent political institutions headed by a clan head (*Okuku*). Therefore, there were thirty five clan heads in Annang. During the colonial

Emmanuel Toby, PhD, Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Nigeria. +2349059866366 - Email: emmanuel.toby@uniben.edu

period, the Annang were majorly found in Ikot Ekpene and Abak Division in Calabar Province, with some other sub-set occupying 150 square miles in the north of Opobo Division in Rivers Province. These communities had a cultural bond and they all looked up to Afaha Obong where the Annang supreme deity was situated as their place of origin and traditional headquarters.³To the North, Annang is bounded by Ini and Ikono Local Government Areas and to the South by Ikot Abasi Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To the West, Annang is bounded by Ngwa and Azumini communities of Abia state and Ndoki community of Rivers State, and to the East, by Uyo and Mkpatenin Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State.

Geographically, Annang lies almost entirely in the rain forest belt of Southern Nigeria. The area has a level landscape, covered by relatively low vegetation and myriad of palms. There is a mean annual rainfall of 2,030 -2,540mm. Annang has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The wet season spans from March to October when the monsoon winds blow from the South-West, while the dry season spans from November to February when the harmattan (*ekarika*) blows from the North-East. The landscape is generally flat and low-lying, with no point rising above 300ft and no part less than 100ft feet above sea level. It has a level landscape covered by relatively low vegetation and numerous palm trees.

At present, Annang with a population of more than one million people is the second largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State. The Annang are found in eight of the present thirty-one Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State, namely; Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun; yet they are culturally homogenous.



Source: Compiled using Open Street Map Database (2024)

Pre-Colonial Annang Roads System

The oldest and most widespread form of transportation in Annang was human portage. The people travelled on foot to the various places with their goods in what could be referred to as relay trade through roads. The pre-colonial roads system

served the pre-colonial Annang economy well as it was considered suitable for the economy and was relatively efficient. In all, it satisfied the needs of the people.

British Conquest of Imposition of Colonial Rule in Annang

The imposition of British authority and ultimately British rule on the Annang started at the beginning of the twentieth century (1900-1912), when British government sent numerous military expeditions termed "patrols" to subjugate the Annang. The most significant of these patrols was the so-called Ibibio expedition which set out from Ekid in 1901 under R. B. Books, a British political officer⁴. The patrol overran a large part of southern Annang and in the process established military/administrative station at Abak.⁵ Another patrol that overran the northern parts of Annang was the Aro expedition which was led by Lt. Col. Montamaro that passed close to Ikot Ekpene village while pursuing the Aro westward and in the process established administrative station at Ikot Ekpene.⁶ The outcome of these expeditions was that, the Annang could not withstand modern British machine gun and as such were subdued despite their stiff resistance⁷. It was basically British intention to allowed free flow of trade and exploitation of agricultural and forest resources of the area. Thus, immediately after the conquest, and to ensured that anarchy did not arise in the absence of the hitherto indigenous rule, the British officers in Annang began to establish institutions and implement measures aimed at achieving the objectives of the conquest. The measures put in place by the British government to administer their Annang subjects were "Indirect Rule". The whole of Annang was divided into Native Courts. These Native Courts were vested with executive, legislative and judicial powers.

Under the Native Court system, Annang kings were appointed Warrant Chiefs and granted powers as members of the Native Courts.⁸ Other measures introduced by the British to enforce compliance to colonial rule in the area and to further colonial interest included the establishment of Native Authority

Police to exercise such functions as enforcement of law and order in the society, which were hitherto performed by the *ekpo* and *ekpe* secret societies, and introduction of taxation.

Construction and Maintenance of Roads in Colonial Annang

With the conquest of Annang by the colonial authorities and subsequently opening up of the area, there was need to effectively removed all the obstacles that could hindered exploitation of the agricultural and forest resources that were available in all parts of Annang on one hand and the need to also eliminate all the impediments that could thwart free flow of trade on the other hand. In solving the limitation of traditional foot-paths, colonial authorities embarked on expansion of roads and the construction of new one to accommodate expanding trades. This was to allow palm produce to be transported easily to the various trading stations and depots at Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Opobo, Itu and Calabar for export to Europe. The table below shows the distance between principal towns in Calabar province

Table 1: Distance between Principal Towns in Calabar Province

Town	Miles
Aba to Ikot Ekpene	24 Miles
Ikot Ekpene-Uyo	20 Miles
Uyo-Oron	30 Miles
Ikot Ekepene-Itu	25 Miles
Uyo-Nwanibe	9 Miles
Ikot Ekpene-Abak	16 Miles
Abak-Opobo	41 Miles
Aba-Opobo	63 Miles
Eket-Oron	28 Miles
Opobo-Eket	54 Miles
Abak-Eket	48 Miles
Calabar-Ikang	24 Miles
Calabar-Mamfe	130 Miles

Source: N. A. E. (A. D.) ABAKDIST 1/2/53, Roads and Bridges in Calabar Province, 1948, p.32

The above information on principal towns and mileages in Calabar Province will be useful in our examination of construction and maintenance of roads in Annang area of the Calabar Province.

The objective of constructing roads in the colonies was aptly expressed by a colonial official in 1907 that “without good roads it is impossible for the interior natives to bring down their produce to the European firms,”⁹ they believed that trade would be hindered by foot-paths which was the channels of transportation in pre-colonial Annang. In this regards, they embarked on the opening-up of resources producing communities of Annang by expanding the hitherto existing communication channel such as foot-paths and trade routes that linked various communities together and in some cases embarked on construction of new ones. Apart from trade, these communication channels also facilitated the movement of troops or patrols into communities that were recalcitrant to colonial authorities.¹⁰ In additional to the above, the roads also eased the movement of colonial officials into the various Districts, Native Court and Divisional headquarters that were created for administrative and judicial purposes. Most of the roads constructed in the early period of colonial rule in Annang by the colonial authorities followed the old existing foot-paths that linked palm produce towns and villages. As such, foot-paths which the people of Annang had used for a long period were gradually replaced by wider and motor-roads constructed by the colonial authorities for essay evacuation of palm produce from the area to European firms. Some of these roads are Itu-Ikot Ekpene road, Ikot Ekpene-Uyo road and Ikot Ekpene-Erruam road.¹¹ By 1909, Abak-Ikot Ekpene and Uwet-Calabar roads were added.¹² And by 1924, Opobo and Abak, Aba and Itu through Ikot Ekpene, Abak-Etim Ekpo which were connected Aba through Azumini was expanded.¹³ The most ambitious roads constructed in the area during the early period of colonial rule were Ikot Ekpene-Aba-Port Harcourt road, Umuhia-Ikot Ekpene-Uyo roads and Aba-Opobo roads.¹⁴ The expansion and construction of these roads became necessary

because before colonial rule was imposed on the people, roads system were mostly aimed at satisfying subsistent economic needs of the people and not exploitation purposes. Thus, the roads system in the pre-colonial Annang was able to meet the economic needs of the people. However, during the colonial period, this was not so, as the inadequacy of pre-colonial road infrastructure was exposed by the new volume of trade

Roads constructed in Annang during the colonial period were of three grades, namely A, B and C. based on their economic relevance and dimension. For instance, roads leading to main palm produce towns or villages were designated trunk "A" roads, those linking towns and villages with Native Court Areas were classified as trunk "B" roads, while those linking "Rest Houses" for colonial officials in towns were designated trunk "C" roads. An example of trunk "A" road in Abak Division was the Abak-Opobo road, while the trunk "A" road in Ikot Ekpene Division was the Ikot Ekpene-Uyo road.¹⁵ These roads were important to the colonial authorities as they were used for evacuation of palm oil and palm kernel by the produces buyers, independent middlemen and indigenou accredited agents from the buying stations in Annang for upwards evacuation to Itu, Opobo and Calabar ports for export to European countries. The roads also provided logistic for transportation of colonial personals such as administrative officers, judicial officers and patrol teams to their various locations. These roads were constructed and maintained exclusively by the Public Works Department (P.W.D) with finances provided by the Divisional Councils for Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions.¹⁶ The trunk "B" road in Abak Division was the Ikot Okoro-Ibesit roads, while the trunk "B" road in Ikot Ekpene Division included Ikot Ekpene-Adiasim roads.¹⁷ These roads were constructed and maintained by Abak District Council while those from Ikot Ekpene Division were constructed by Ikot Ekpene District.¹⁸ Trunk "C" roads were constructed and maintained by the Native Court which was the last level of administration in Annang. There was no strict demarcation in terms of responsibilities of who financed most of the above

roads in Annang, as the sharing responsibilities were often ignored to the extent that Public Works or Native Authority roads in Annang were at the discretion of colonial officials. Non-compliance to the strict responsibilities by the various level of colonial administration in Annang as regards the construction and maintenance of roads was partly because of the unwillingness of colonial government to invest their capital and resources in the development of Annang which was in line with their economic policy that colonies were to be self-supporting.¹⁹ Colonial authorities were not to invest in the economic development of the colonies but to use the resources of the colonies to provide infrastructure that was aimed at serving the economic interest of the British imperialist.²⁰ With this kind of policy in place in Annang, it was the duties of the Native Authorities to most time intervene by constructing and maintaining roads in their jurisdiction. As such, most of the roads were mostly earth roads that were constructed and maintained by the Native Courts in Annang before the end of Second World War in 1945. Frustrated about the state of roads and bridges in the area, the Resident's Office Calabar, work a lengthy letter to the Chief Secretary, Eastern Region, Enugu, stating that:

The public frustration by the inability of the government to meet the many pressing and entirely justified demands for improved communication is now such that one feels positively ashamed when attempting to explain the difficulties. I ask, therefore, that both His Honour and the Minister of Public Work be told the distressing story which follows so that they use their good offices to see that something is done and done without delay.²¹

On the Aba-Opobo Road, he stated in the letter thus:

His Honour is already aware of the truly appalling condition of the 20 mile section of this road nearest Opobo. For many years this section of the road, which provides the only land access to Opobo, a most important produce evacuation centre has been the subject of correspondences and it has many times been

pointed out that the only solution is to tar it. Last rainy season this section was virtually closed to traffic and the maintenance provided by the Public Works Department appeared, if anything, to make mater worse.²²

On the Ibagwa Road, he has this to say:

There has been continuous agitation by the people for the replacement of the Ibagwa Bridge with a permanent Bridge for vehicular traffic since 1929. The remarks in paragraph 5 of this letter in connection with the Etina Bridge apply with almost equal force to the Ibagwa river crossing. In 1949, His Honour visited Abak where, after a difficult meeting with the people, he undertook to see what could be done. As a result my letter No. C. P. 513/1/62 of 8th June, 1949 was written and I pointed out that provision for a bridge had been included in the first budget proposal for works extraordinary for 1948-49 but that it had subsequently been deleted. I recommended that this project should be giving a high degree of priority but the result wads your letter No. 5462/178 of 10th September, 1949 which stated "the Deputy Director of Public Work has advised that he has already more projects in hand in all Provinces than can properly finance and supervise and that he cannot possibly agree to add to their number at the present time". Since 1949, though the need for this bridge has become greater, there has been no development.²³

With lack of finance and interest by the colonial government in constructing roads in Annang, the warrant chiefs who were members of Native Courts were encouraged by the colonial officials to provide compulsory forced labour under the provisions of the Roads and River Proclamation Ordinance enacted in 1903.²⁴ Section 15(2) of Ordinance No 22 of 1933 provides that "In accordance with Native Law and Custom men and women should clean the markets, village meeting places and village paths ways, unless they are unable to do so owing to old age or sickness. If they failed to do so they are required to pay a fine of two manillas.²⁵ The policy empowered the Chiefs, on the orders of the District Commissioner, to asked

able-bodied men and women to clear roads, rivers and creeks on such days as the government required but not exceeding six days in each quarter of a year.²⁶ In practice, the government failed to keep a strict check on the duration of the forced labour provided. The worst part of this Ordinance was that juveniles and women were not exempted from the Forced Labour policy. According to the memo sign by (Sgd) G. Madonad, for Acting Chief Secretary to the Government to the Secretary, Eastern Province that:

with reference to your telegram No. 19019 of the 22nd of January, addressed to the Inspector of Labour, I am directed to inform you that there is no objection to the employment of juvenile above apparent age of 12 on the light work mentioned in your telegram, provided that there is no danger of the opportunity of employment interfering with attendance at school.²⁷

The table below shows the number of person that were registered to work on roads and building under the ordinance in Annang in 1949.

Table 2: Registration under Force Labour

Registration Centre	Classification of Works	Number of Personnel	Date	Contract to be Made with or Representatives
Ikot Ekpene	(1) road tarring, (2) building and maintenance, (3) road maintenance	{250}	20/12/49 to 23/12/49	Mr. Uyah Y. S. D. E
	(a) route 250A of Aba-Ikot Ekpene road	24	28/12/49 to 29/12/49	
	(b) route 396 of the Ikot Ekpene-Itu road	28		
	(c) building maint. Itu	10		
	(d) township roads Itu	20		
	Total	332		
ABAK	(1) R. W. S. Yard	20	4/1/1950 to 6/1/50	Mr Mac Clinto
	(2) Well sinking crews	80		
	(3) Road maintenance			
	(a) Route 397 of the Ikot Ekpene-Abak-Ikparakwa road	15		
	(b) Route 405 of the Abak-Uyo road	6		
	Total	121		

Opobo	(1) building maintenance	10	7/1/1950	
	(2) water Supply			
	(3) Road Maintenance Route 340A and 340B of the Azumini- Iparakwa-Opobo road	15		
	Total	25		

Source: N. A. E. (C. P.) CALPROF 3/1/1447, Labour Conditions, 1942, p.228

Although in practice, however, the government sought to prevent the employment of women for long-distance so as to enable them to return to their respective villages without molestation.²⁸ During the pre-colonial period, Annang women were protected from doing heavy manual labour such as bush clearing, palm tree harvesting or community roads maintenance and construction as these were regarded as jobs for men. They were mainly engaged in weeding, planting minor crops and performing household duties. However, under the colonial dispensation, women became victims of the Roads and River Proclamation that was backed up by administrative coercion. As earlier stated, the new regulation specifically directed local authority holders such as warrant chiefs, acting on the District or Provincial Commissioner's instructions, to recruit labour for road construction and clearing inland waterways. Under the forced labour system, the government recruited men and women indiscriminately in Annang. At times, the system led to serious abuses which resulted in protest by the people with the policy especially as there was no provision for wages or salaries payment. In justifying the involvement of women in the forced labour policy Acting Colonial Secretary, Mr F. S. James stated thus "the women also have the task of keeping the existing roads in proper condition. They pay no taxes and even for this work; they are invariably rewarded by payments made to the chief in their town in question if the work is properly done".²⁹ He also defended forced labour for work on roads and waterways on administrative, financial and economic grounds. He argued that, apart from the money that was given to the

chiefs, those that were involved in the forced labour often received ‘dashes’ of 6d which were equivalent to the daily wages then earned by workers in Southern Nigeria.³⁰ It should be stated that even as a substitute for direct taxation, forced labour so used adversely affected agricultural production and the price of foodstuffs. Although, the colonial officials contended that only few people were employed as forced labour at any given time out of the population of the area as such it did not adversely affect the agriculture production of the people. They continued that chiefs acting as agents of the government relied on forced labour to improve the foot paths while roads were built by paid labour.³¹ The labour ordinance directed that a person shall be punished by Native Court for failure to perform such services that has been required by the government. When they occurred, the punishment is usually a fine of 2/6 or seven days imprisonment in default.³² The table below shows the number of persons that were prosecuted in Adiasim and Odoro Ikot Native Courts

Table 3: Prosecution under Force Labour Ordinance in Adiasim and Odoro Ikot Native Courts

Native Court	Particulars of Offence	No. of Person Prosecuted	No of Person Convicted	Remarks
Adiasim	Failing to attend village work and clearing of Native road contrary to the village head's order	14	Nil	One of the person prosecuted had paid of 5/- when found guilty and convicted
Odoro Ikot Native Court	Failing to sweep the village road	12	12	All 12 accused discharged on payment of 2/6/- fine each

Source: N. A. E. ((I.K.) IKOTDIST13/1/480, Forced Labour, 1943, p.3.

The Annang people considered forced labour for work on roads or waterways as a form of slavery which was subject to abuse by the government and called for its replacement by a more enlightened machinery of government.³³ While one may concede that despite all the hardships and deprivations encountered by

the Annang people, particularly the women as a result of Force Labour, some minor achievements were recorded under the Roads and Rivers Proclamation programme. It provided government with the essential framework upon which it successfully launched an ambitious roads and bridges construction programme in the period after the First World War. The problem of the use of force labour was aptly expressed in *The Nigerian Pioneer* of February 1917 as follows:

There is widespread discontent among that people at the ideas of taking people away from their farms for work on roads. Hundreds of farmers are being called away, most of who have to travel for two days in reach the place where they are called upon to do work, and had to stay away for months. While not taking into account the enormous hardship, which these farmers had to endure, the prospect of a serious shortage in the food supply of the country is to be feared.³⁴

As a result of the negative impact of force labour as stated in the above quotation, some villages in Annang experienced food shortages in 1920s, as able bodied men and women were taken to work on roads construction as force.³⁵ Although, within a few years of force labour in Annang irrespective of the negative impact it had on the people, it had helped to removed various forms of obstacles on the roads thereby paving way for the opening up of the interior of Annang for trade which was the intention of the colonial officials in the area.³⁶ For example, during these periods, the Azumini road was opened up to linked Ekparakwa and Ikot Ekpene-Umunhia was also opened up to free flow of trade which linked Ikot Ekpene Division with Ibagwa in Abak Division.³⁷ It should be noted that, despite the volume of capital required in the opening-up process, Britain's financial support was minimal as the colonial government remained doggedly committed to its retrogressive doctrine of colonies self-sufficiency in matters of financed and expenditure. The implication of this attitude was that, in most cases the Native Courts had to foot the bill because the colonial government councils were unwilling to bring in resources from

Britain to develop the road infrastructures in Annang. Consequently, most of the colonial roads in Annang were always in bad shape due to inadequate financial input from Native Courts. As in other parts of Nigeria, the problem of lack of skilled labour that were knowledgeable in road construction, and lack of earth working equipment such as bulldozers, diesel road roller and tar sprayer compounded the challenges of Native Courts in their quest for road construction in Annang.³⁸

The outbreak of the First World War and the economic depression that followed arrested the pace of roads construction and maintenance in Annang. This was because the attention of the colonial government was turned to winning the War rather than development of the colonies. As such there was drastic cut in roads projects in both Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions of Annang.³⁹ The end of the War, however, witnessed the introduction and implementation of various economic measures such as expansion of communication networks designed to bring about increase in British exports of Annang agricultural and forest products as a means of off-setting the War time shortages encountered in Europe. To this end, government tried to improve on basic infrastructure, particularly roads that were already placed and construction of new ones.

From the second half of 1940s, colonial authorities in Annang embarked on a deliberate and systematic road development programme thereby accentuating the pace of infrastructural development and economic growth in the area. For example as early as 1940, almost all parts of Ikot Ekpene District and Abak District were effectively linked with roads.

These roads were destined to carry tremendous volumes of trade and traffic from the hinterland of Annang to the United Africa Company (UAC) or Nigeria Product Ltd buying stations at Ikot Ekpene, Ibagwa or Etim Ekpo. Although the roads brought some advantages to the people, the major aim for constructing them was to ease exploitation of the vast resources in the area and also to expand the volume of external trade in Annang. These roads broke down the barrier of long distance

trade which hitherto had kept many rural communities isolated. It also eased human movement which was hitherto carried out through foot-paths during pre-colonial period. These benefits came with a cost, as the local people of Annang, paid a huge cost for them through forced labour. In spite of the cost, these new roads were important signposts of colonial development in Annang as both the federal and state governments in post-colonial Nigeria have continued to maintain some of them.

Conclusion

From the above analysis one can conclude that roads development in Annang during the colonial period was mostly developed along the line that was essential for conveying cash crops particularly palm produce from the interior to the buying stations or to the depots at the coast. As such any benefits derives from it by the Annang people were accidental and not deliberate which was in line with Michael Crowder argument which concluded that any "benefits of colonialism to the African was accidental" (Crowder, 1976) .Although some positive fall-out of these accidental benefits such that skilled and semi-skilled bicycle repairers emerged in all parts of Annang thereby deriving their livelihood from such a trade.

This paper has focussed on the changes and developments that took place in road transportation sector during the colonial period which helped to transform the economy of Annang. The aim of colonial authorities in improving the road networks was basically to encourage European officials and traders to penetration into the interior of Annang villages for British economic interest, rather than to improve on the socio-economic conditions of the Annang people. The roads, no doubt, reduced transport cost, facilitated the access of European traders and officials to the market in the hinterland and enabled them to exploit the area more effectively by ensuring prompt evacuation of cash crops and forest resources for export. As such, these roads were developed basically to serve colonial economic interest, as colonial officials knew that the extension of British authorities into the various parts of Annang and to effectively

exploit its agricultural and forest resources depended largely on the availability of accessible roads. The roads were, therefore, aimed at the opening up the interior for the expansion of British trade and not necessarily to satisfy the transport requirements of the people. In constructing the roads, colonial authorities did not in any respect consider the interest of the people, as most of them only ran from centres of export production to the seaports to facilitate exports of cash crops to European countries. The areas that were not productive in exports crops were neglected in terms of roads construction and maintenance by the colonial authorities, even if they were important area in food crops production.

Endnotes

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