

Investigation

Ongoing projects in South East: Truth vs lies

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There were screaming headlines on the front pages of national newspapers on August 28, 2018.

The story was about the 69 ongoing projects funded by the Federal Government in the South East part of Nigeria.

It made headlines because the governors of the South East had met few days earlier to protest marginalisation of their zone. The governors had alleged that most federally-funded infrastructure projects in their zone were stalled.

Consequent upon this, Nigeria's Information Minister Lai Mohammed refuted this claim, releasing a list of 69 projects that were going on in various parts of the zone.

"His Excellencies were either misquoted or they were quoted out of context. Either way, this allegation flies in the face of available evidence," Mohammed said in Ilorin, Kwara State capital, at a lecture, in reference to the governors' claim.

"Though the contracts for many of the roads were awarded before the advent of this administration, they were either poorly funded or not funded at all, hence work on the roads has lingered," he added.

Mohammed said the 69 roads and bridges, spread across the five states in the South-East Nigeria, were at different stages of completion, thanks to the funding sourced by the present Muhammadu Buhari administration from budgetary allocations, the Sukuk Bond and the Presidential Infrastructure Development Fund.

Understanding the problem

The South East is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. It is made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. It is the only zone among the six geopolitical regions with five states. The other five—South South, South West, North Central and North East have six states, with North West having one more.

Pundits say the region has the worst infrastructure record, with major federal roads in state of disrepair.

The zone is made up of mainly Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria, who are one of the tripods on which the country stands—with the other two being Yoruba in the South West, and Hausa/Fulani in the North-West/North East.

From the days of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010) and Goodluck Jonathan (2010-May 28, 2015), promises of infrastructure revamp were made to the people of the region, but these often turned into political gimmicks targeted at winning votes. The

promises would often come weeks before general elections and evaporate weeks after.

The Investigation

My interest was, therefore, aroused the moment I saw the list of projects in the zone released by Nigeria's Information Minister.

I decided to fact-check these claims. I noticed that out of the 69 projects, 20 were classified as 'construction' while the rest were designated 'rehabilitation'.

I moved down to the South East to investigate the ones categorised as 'construction'.

A bridge or a ridge?

I left Lagos for Ihiala. My first port of call was Oseakwa Bridge. This project had been listed as 'construction of Oseakwa Bridge in Anambra State, C/No. 6043' by the Minister. My findings showed that Oseakwa Bridge was awarded on October 6, 2009, to Horizon Construction Co. Ltd at N896.863 million.

When I got to this location, I observed that no work was going on. My findings showed that the project was completed two years after by the immediate past government of Goodluck Jonathan.

But there is something striking about this project. What the Federal Government calls 'Oseakwa Bridge' is not technically a bridge. It is just a road in a typical Nigerian village—sandy, hilly and bumpy.

The Cambridge Dictionary (online) defines a bridge as a 'structure that is built over a river, road, or railway to allow people and vehicles to cross from one side to the other'. This so-called bridge does not fit into this definition.

Also, the road leading to it is not tarred and the road extending from it is decrepit and is not passed by vehicles. Ordinarily, federal government roads always interconnect states in Nigeria, but this so-called bridge does not lead to anywhere.

Villagers told me that work was done and completed on the so-called bridge, but the road looks like nothing was ever done.

Completed projects listed as 'ongoing'

Findings showed that the list released by Mohammed contained some projects completed by the immediate past administration. Muhammadu Buhari came to power on May 29, 2015, but the list released included projects completed before this date.

First is the Olokoru-Isiala-Oboro-Nnono Junction awarded on December 21, 2010, to Abia Bok Company at N515.315 million. This road starts from Federal University of Agriculture Umudike, down to Isiala Ngwa. I found that it was completed in 2013. Contrary to claim made by the Minister, the road was



Oseakwa Bridge

not poorly funded. However, some sections of this road—around Isiala—are decaying, which speaks to the quality of work done, an engineer, Duru Anayamere, told me.

Second is the Ahiakwu-Amangwo-Umuahia-Ngwa Road, awarded on December 23, 2010, and contracted to La Ann Engineering Nig Ltd for N589.554 million.

I found that this road was

completed in 2014 and is in good shape.

Eight out of 20 'not ongoing'

I classified eight out of these 20 roads as 'not ongoing' because they are uncompleted and no work was going on around them as of September 15.

On travelling to Isseke Town-Amafuo-Ulli with Spur (Ihiala-Orlu-Umuduru Sec-



Completed Mbaise+Ngwa road at Imo River

completed before May 2015. No work was going on as of September 13 when I used this road. It was neither abandoned nor poorly funded as residents testified that it was completed around 2013.

Another one completed by the immediate past administration but listed as 'ongoing' by Lai Mohammed is the Olokoru-Alaukwu-Itaja-Okwu-Obuohia-Ikwuano, awarded on March 10, 2010, to Rhas Nigeria Limited at N990.673 million. I found that this road was completed before the advent of the current government. No work was going on as of September 14 and it was not poorly funded as claimed by the Minister.

While going to Aba, the industrial nerve centre of the region, from Owerri, Imo State capital, I alighted at Imo River. This river borders Imo and Abia states. The road leading to this river was listed as ongoing. But I found that it was

tion) in Anambra State, I decided to engage a commercial motorcyclist on the state of this road.

"You can see that the contractor started in Isseke and stopped at Health Centre, Ihiala. They stopped work here before the 2015 election and nothing has happened since then," the motorcyclist, who gave his name as Ikenna Iluno, told me.

I stopped at Ihiala Micro-finance Bank to buy a bottle of water. I looked around and observed that vehicles were often trapped in the muddy waters in Ihiala, a road the Federal Government listed as ongoing.

Natives of Ihiala were shocked when I told them that construction of the road was supposed to be ongoing.

"It is a lie," retorted a 72-year-old man, who told me that he now pays N200 to commercial motorcyclist to get home, instead of N100.

So, it is correct that this road was not completed and could have been poorly funded.

I moved down to 'Ikemba Drive Spur on Oba-Okigwe Road Through Permanent Site of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital in Anambra State'. This road has some sections that need repair. I did not see any work going on when I used it.

Next is Umulungbe-Umuoka-Amokwu-Ikediokpe Egede-Ojjeji Awhum Road. The Federal Government said it awarded a contract on this road to IDC Construction in June this year.

I went through this road but no work was going on yet.

"We have not seen any contractor on this road. We only hear it on the radio," a sceptical Daniel Okoro, a commercial driver plying this road, said.

"Maybe they are waiting for the rains to subside," Uche Ene, another commercial vehicle driver, interrupted.

My investigation took me to 'Oji-Achi-Mmaku-Awgu Road With Spur To Obeagu-Ugbo in Enugu State'. This road was not completed and no work was going on when I used it. The same fate applies to Ogrute-Umuida-Unadu-Akpanya-Odoru Road in Enugu/Kogi.

I witnessed an anomaly on 'Aguobu-Owa-Mgbagbu Owa-Ebenebe (Anambra State Border) with Spur to Awaha-Oyoha-Oyofe-Iwollo Road in Enugu'. This road starts from a town known as Amansea in Anambra State. But this town was not factored into this project. The only section of this road constructed was between Alaoji and Okpuno in Ebenebe. This is just one out of seven towns which the contract was supposed to cover.

Of particular interest is the Amansea road. It is dilapidated and decrepit. I noticed that some sections of the road were rehabilitated. However, I was not convinced that it was handled by the same contractor that worked on Ebenebe axis. The reason is simple: Ebenebe road is solid while the section of Amansea road already serves as a dunghill. No work was going on here when I used this road.

Similarly, 'Umuna-Ndiagu-Agba Umuna-Ebenebe-Amasi Awka Express Road with Spur from Umuna-Ndiagu (Agba-Ebenebe) Section I in Enugu State' is bad. Beyond Agba Ebenebe, roads are decrepit. Commercial motorcyclists, therefore, have a field day here, charging N1,000 to N1,500 to move residents and villagers through this road.

Moreover, I noticed that Ikot Ekpene Border-Aba-Owerri was not ongoing. I was told that the contractor abandoned the road two months ago because he was

not mobilised. The contractor parked his vehicles at a private residence in-between the United Evangelical Church and Onyedika Industries Limited, Alaoji Ntigha.

Light at the end of tunnel

However, seven out of 20 roads are ongoing, from my findings.

One is Nkporo-Abiriba-Ohafia, which was awarded in May 2012 but was abandoned by the immediate past administration of Goodluck Jonathan. Though I classified this N2.739 billion project as 'ongoing', work on this road is in fits and starts now, forcing villagers to ask if the government has indeed mobilised Dutum Construction Nigeria Limited or if the contractor is just slow.

The second one is the Abri-ba-Arochukwu-Ohafia Road in Abia State, awarded by the immediate past government on December 13, 2012, at N2.265 billion. Sections of this road, handled by Beks Kimse Nigeria Limited, are still bad. I was told that the senator representing the zone, Mao Ohuabunwa, facilitated some level of rehabilitation of this road in March this year, making it a bit motorable. But as of the second week of September when our correspondent visited this road, the road looked decrepit.

Roads in this area have been abandoned for ages and politicians play politics with them, I was told.

"Once the government announces the construction of roads around here, politicians begin to take the praise by claiming that they influenced the contracts," one native of Ozu Abam Ohafia told me.

"Is it not their job to influence such contracts?" he asks, rhetorically.

Next is the Ohafia-Oso Road, which is between Abia and Ebonyi states' border. Work on this road, though ongoing, is in fits and starts.

The N979.889 million Omor-Umulokpa Road, which borders Anambra and Enugu states, is going on, just as Nnenwe-Uduma-Uburu Road.

Similarly, construction of Nenwe-Nomeh-Mburubu-Nara Road with spur to Obeagu Oduma Road in Enugu State is going on and is handled by Arab Contractors OAO Nigeria Limited.

Also, Ugwueme-Nenwenta-Nkwe-Ezere-Awgunta-Obeagu-Mgbidi Nmaku Road Project Enugu State is ongoing, according to my findings. True to Lai Mohammed's words, it was observed that some of the projects are being funded with Sukuk Fund.

Conclusion

Out of the 20 projects listed as ongoing by Mohammed, only seven are actually ongoing. I got pictures and videos to prove them. Mathematically, this is equal to 35 per cent.

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Project Name	Date Awarded	Contractor	Status	Verdict	Amount voted for the contract
Nkporo-Abiriba-Ohafia	May 2012	Dutum Construction Nig Ltd	Ongoing	Abandoned by Goodluck Jonathan. Project work in fits and starts now.	N2.739 billion
Olokoro-Isiala-Oboro-Nnono Junction	December 21, 2010	Abia Bok Company	Completed Before 2015	Was completed by Goodluck Jonathan	N515.315 million
Ahiakwu-Amangwo-Umuahia-Ngwa-Ngwa Road	December 23, 2010	La Ann Engineering Nig Ltd	Completed Before 2015	Was completed by Goodluck Jonathan	N589.554 million
Olokoro-Alaukwu-Itaja-Okwu-Obuohia-Ikwuano	March 10, 2010	Rhas Nigeria Limited	Completed before 2015	Was completed by Goodluck Jonathan. Parts of the road now in disrepair.	N990.673 million
Construction of Ariba-Arochukwu-Ohafia Road in Abia State	December 13, 2012	Beks Kimse Nigeria Limited	Ongoing	Project abandoned by Goodluck Jonathan. Work now in fits and starts. Road is not motorable.	N2.265 billion
Construction of Ohafia-Oso Road in Abia/Ebonyi States	December 13, 2012	Uniglobe Construction Engineering Limited	Ongoing	Project done in fits and starts.	N2.293 billion
Construction of Ihiala-Orlu Road in Isseke Town-Amafuo-Ulli with Spur (Ihiala-Orlu-Umuduru Section) in Anambra State	October 30, 2013	Tomline Nig. Ltd.	Not ongoing	Project ended mid-way before Health Centre Ihiala. No work going on now from this point to Ihiala junction	N711.888 million
Construction of Ikemba Drive Spur on Oba-Okigwe Road Through Permanent Site of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital in Anambra State	October 30, 2013	Jireh Hibitation International Services Nig Ltd.	Not ongoing	Much of the work completed by last administration	N625.690 million
Construction of Oseakwa Bridge in Anambra State, C/ No. 6043	October 6, 2009	Horizon Construction Co. Ltd	Bridge not seen anywhere	Road extending from the so-called bridge dilapidated and unmotorable	N896.863 million
Construction of Omor-Umulokpa Road in Anambra and Enugu States	December 22, 2014	Arrays Global Services Limited	Ongoing	Slow, in fits and starts but ongoing	N979.889 million
Construction of Nnenwe-Uduma-Uburu Road. Section I (26.27km), and Section II: Spur to Ishiagu-Mile 2 Road(14km), Enugu/Ebonyi States	November 14, 2012	Setraco Nigeria Limited	Ongoing	Ongoing	N11.603 billion
Umulungbe-Umuoka-Amokwu Ikedimkpe Egede-Ojieyi Awhum Road	June 13, 2018	IDC Construction Limited	Work yet to commence	Work yet to commence. Not ongoing.	N6.245 billion
Construction of Oji-Achi-Mmaku-Awgu Road With Spur To Obeagu-Ugbo in Enugu State,	December 11, 2014	Golden Construction Company Limited	Abandoned and not ongoing	Achi to Awgu Road not motorable	N994,661 million
Construction of Ugwueme-Nenwenta-Nkwe-Ezere-Awgunta-Obeagu-Mgbidi Nmaku Road Project Enugu State.	March 15, 2017	IDC Construction Limited	Ongoing	Ongoing	14.693 billion
Construction of Ogrute-Umuida-Unadu-Akpanya-Odor Road in Enugu/Kogi	December 13, 2012	P.W. Nigeria Limited	Not ongoing	Started by Goodluck Jonathan but stopped midway. Not ongoing now.	N12.951 billion
Construction of Aguobu-Owa-Mgbagbu Owa-Ebenebe (Anambra State Border) with Spur to Awaha-Oyoha-Oyofolwollo Road in Enugu State	December 13, 2012	Coduc Nigeria Limited	Not completed and not ongoing	Only good road is Ebenebe road	N3.035 billion
Umuna-Ndiagu-Agba Umuna-Ebenebe-Amasi Awka Express Road with Spur from Umuna – Ndiagu (Agba-Ebenebe) Section I in Enugu State,	December 17, 2012	Master Holdings Nigeria Limited	Limited rehab done and completed by Goodluck Jonathan	Road still bad. Not ongoing. You will have to pay N1,000 for a bike to take you through this road.	N995.369 million
Construction of Nenwe-Nomeh-Mburubu-Nara Road with spur to Obeagu Oduma Road in Enugu State	March 22, 2017	Arab Contractors OAO Nigeria Limited	Ongoing	Ongoing	N6.437 billion
Construction of Mbaise-Ngwa Road with Bridge at Imo River, Phase I in Imo/Abia States	December 13, 2012	Mangrovetechnigeria Limited	Completed by Goodluck Jonathan	It is in good shape and not ongoing.	N2.943 billion
Construction of Ikot Ekpene Border-Aba-Owerri Dualisation Road, Section I, Phase I (11.26Km from Owerri End) in Akwa Ibom/Abia/Imo States	December 13, 2012	Arab Contractors OAO Nigeria Limited	Not ongoing	Work stopped about two months ago. Some sections of Aba axis bad.	N3.780 billion