

Angst Over Nigerian Roads As Yuletide Approaches

By **Lukmon Akintola** - October 5, 2019



LAGOS – If the duo of Taye and Kehinde Animashaun had envisaged their death would follow a visit to their mother, they would not have embarked on the journey.

31 year-old, the duo were returning to their hometown in Ijoko, Ogun State from Sango area of the same state when they crashed into a stationary truck by the roadside on July 15, 2018. For the duo, and the bike man riding, it was instant death.

It is the same fate that befell the family of Tavershima Jebe when he lost his wife and three children in an accident that took place in Akwanga, Nasarawa State on September 15, 2019.

Indeed, death via road accident is now a recurring decimal in Nigeria. Statistics from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) stated that an average of 11 persons die from accidents either through cars, bikes, trucks or other moving mechanisms.

The Facts

Statistical analysis has also shown that every four hours, at least two lives are lost on Nigerian roads, while annually about 20,000 of the 11.654 million vehicles in the country are involved in accidents.

The deaths have led to the loss of a score of promising lives that ordinarily could have turned leaders of tomorrow, maybe even today.

The situation has indeed become worrisome, as it has led to a drastic loss in productive human capital, as a consistent amount of deaths are recorded annually.

According to the Federal Road Safety Corp Commission (FRSC), there were 12, 077 road accidents of which 5, 400 persons died in 2015.

In 2017, the FRSC recorded 4,410 deaths from 7,937 road crashes with 23,392 people injured. The figure was lower than the 4,527 deaths recorded in 2016.

In the first quarter of 2018, the FRSC recorded 1, 945 crashes nationwide, a 13 percent reduction in accident cases compared to the same period in 2017 which is put at 2,240 accidents.

The period in review also witnessed a corresponding decline in the number of people killed, as 1,079 were killed in 2018 as against 1, 297 in 2017.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), road traffic injuries caused an estimated 1.35 million deaths worldwide in 2016. What it means is that one person is killed every 25 seconds.

It is also a fact that low-income countries now have the highest annual road traffic fatality rates, at 24. 1 per 100, 000, while the rate in high-income countries is lowest, at 9.2 per 1000, 000.

While there is a global concerted effort to reduce the figures, total eradication is what is desired.

Road management officials have collectively identified speed violations as the main cause of road crashes. Other variable factors such as impatient and reckless driving, distraction, and attempted robbery also have their place in the equation.

Though deaths via road accidents occur daily, the toll rises during the concluding parts of the year especially as festivities such as Christmas and New Year draw near.

Its recurring nature has thus raised eyebrows with blames being ascribed, and calls for related organisations to rise to their responsibilities being heightened.

In December 2013, the FRSC revealed how 24 people were killed in 28 road crashes recorded during the yuletide period.

In the preceding year, at least 88 people died in various accidents across Nigeria during the festive period between December 22 and December 31, an official cumulative reports by the FRSC showed.

A 2017 report by the FRSC also revealed that over 4,410 deaths occurred in the year. The rate of death from accidents during the festive period is indeed high with some blaming it on bad roads among other factors.

Who Is To Blame?

Prince Abimbola Sunday Abimbola, Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Epe Branch blamed both drivers and the government, calling for training for drivers when they contravene traffic laws.

“Money they say is the root of all evil. In the festive period, people have access to money, they have saved for the period and they are happy going home. On their way home during the journey, they have stopovers and a bottle or two of beer is consumed. In some cases, more than three bottles are consumed. At the end of the day, you find out that almost all of the people driving during the festive period are either almost drunk or are indeed drunk, it is the common thing these days. People take Tramadol, sniff gum. Today, Indian hemp is smoked everywhere, most of the things they tell you are for pile contains alcohol and local drugs.

“Alcohol is sold in sachet and they are readily available. Besides that, another cause of accidents is bad roads, the government is not making new roads, and the old ones are in a bad shape, they are hardly maintained except when there is an uproar from the consequences of a major accident. Today, the roads that are constructed have a life span of fewer than four years except those done by renowned construction companies. These are the causes of accidents on our roads.

“In the Ibeju Lekki axis of Lagos State where I reside, most of the time when these accidents happen, they are caused by truck drivers. I am sure you heard of the Dangote truck that recently killed three innocent people in BRT buses in Ikorodu. The truck drivers drive with so much recklessness because in a way they believe that they are driving for the superman of Africa, and nothing can happen to them. Several tricycle riders have been killed and some maimed by the truck drivers along the Lekki-Epe Expressway. These are issues we should look into, there has to be a total change of attitude to driving.”

Prince Abimbola also called on the government to construct new, standard roads and repair old ones to taste.

He said: “roads are often repaired in January, February, basically early in the year. By July, August, September, and October, the rains would have arrived destroying some portions of the roads and accidents will naturally be on the rise. A driver driving on the fast lane may want to divert to the service lane because of a pothole and that alone can cause a road accident if he is not careful.

“Normally, it would be expected that by November and even early December when the rain has subsided, palliative works would be done on these roads in preparation for festive travelers, but this is never done. We have to find a solution to this problem instead of accepting it as the norm.”

Alhaji Hakeem Bello, a transporter in the Ajah axis of Lagos ascribes blame for the continuous accident on Nigerian roads during festive periods on traffic enforcement officers. According to him, most of the supposed traffic officials are only interested in generating revenue for their agencies rather than the safety of lives.

"Are the Vehicle Inspection Officers (VIO) not susceptible to corruption? The Road Safety hardly does anything good. All they do is harass people. You are putting penal issues ahead of restoration. If somebody drives wrongly, you ask him to go and pay a fine, you are not talking about training or enlightening him so that he doesn't commit the same offence again. He has to know why he should not commit that offence, it is not all about fear, in Lagos State, fear is the tool for enforcement. The government both federal and states are looking for revenue and when a driver drives wrongly, they fine him, they make him pay penalty but they don't train him. That way, he gets to commit the offence again, and probably kills somebody the next time he gets stopped because he would attempt to escape by all means available to him. If the government wants to generate revenue, it should not be at the expense of its people. The government pays lip service to complains, and always say that they are working to better the situation, but nothing gets done. Look at the men of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), were they not better during the past administration? They victimised Lagosians and when we cried out, the then governor came to the rescue, the men of LASTMA still did their job. They are back to their old style now, and we have been complaining, but nothing has been done about their highhandedness. They said the new law was not punitive, but it has turned out to be so. You can get arrested for staying too long at a bus stop, where is that done?"

On his part, a teacher in one of the government schools in Lagos State who preferred anonymity called for a total re-orientation of the Nigerian driver.

According to him, the situation is so bad that the average Nigerian driver does not know the basics of driving on the road. "They don't know that they should give preference to a learner or that a driver with a 'Baby On Board' sticker on his car needs to be given preference.

"The driving culture is worse with commercial buses. The drivers hardly listen to you. The more you complain, the faster they go. Some of them drive as if they are possessed. I am not sure that they even go to driving school at all. The only thing that can change the situation is a total re-orientation.

"Frustration is in the land and most people driving were not originally drivers. Some of them after losing their jobs became Uber drivers or Cab 45 drivers because they need money to feed their children, pay school fees, but the fact is that they are not trained drivers.

"People like this will be exposed if they have to drive a long distance because what they do typically is to take their bosses to the office and back home."

"Most of the time when you travel home to the East at the end of the year, you can be sure that you have only made the trip when you return because your life is in the hands of the driver who you know nothing about. Your fate is in the hands of his company, and that is why people prefer to travel with transport

companies who have proven themselves over time,” Nkechi Ozurigbo, a member of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), serving in Lagos State stated.