

Harvest of deaths on the highways

The United Nations has urged member-states to halve injuries and fatalities from road crashes by 2020. Nigeria, which has the second highest rate of deaths through road crashes, some days ago, launched a committee to realise this. The launch of the initiative coincided with the 'ember months' when the rate of road crashes is believed to increase. Many doubt the sincerity of government in joining the global initiative, especially with the lacklustre approach to road rehabilitation and construction, writes **OLUKOREDE YISHAU**



An accident on the Okene-Auchi road, which claimed 16 lives on Monday

Nine injured in Oyo road crash

Bode Durojaiye, Oyo

NO fewer than nine persons yesterday evening sustained injuries in a multiple accident along Oyo/Ibadan road. The accident involved two trailers and two cars. The immediate cause of the accident could not be immediately ascertained as at press time.

Officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) helped in rescuing the victims. They were taken to the State Hospital, Oyo town.

They were attended to at the accident and emergency unit.

The acting Chief Medical Director of the hospital, Dr. Alayo Ayo, told The Nation on telephone that two persons sustained injuries on the forehead, three serious burns, and the remaining four sustained body injuries. He said no one died in the accident.

A FAMILY of five, some days back, perished on the Tamburawa bridge along the Kano-Zaria road. Father, mother, two children and a brother went down with their dreams.

The family's head and driver of the ill-fated Mercedes Benz car was Abubakar Adamu, a 49-year-old resident of Badarawa Kaduna. He was travelling to Kano from Kaduna, with his wife, Maryam, 28; his brother, Ibrahim Adamu, 47; and his two children, four-year-old Halima and one-year-old Muhammad Abubakar. They are all dead.

No fewer than 34 people have died in accidents on the bridge, located at kilometre 21 Kano-Zaria federal highway in the last six months.

On October 30, an expectant woman and 10 others died in a road crash in Imo State.

A witness said a trailer rolled uncontrollably and fell on top of the 18-seater bus coming from Okigwe. The woman died when the vehicles were being broken with axes to rescue trapped passengers.

Two days earlier, on October 28, four people were killed and another one injured in an accident along the Tegna-Kontagora road in Niger State.

It was the turn of Anambra State on October 23, when an articulated vehicle crushed two people to death on the Onitsha-Awka old road, near Onitsha. The accident occurred at about 12:30 p.m., close to Afor-Nkpor market on the outskirts of Onitsha.

In the last three months alone,

The road network

160,000

The country's approximate no of roads

4,000

The estimated number of roads per state

15

The country's percentage of paved roads

close to 200 lives are believed to have been lost to road crashes. Five days ago, an accident claimed 30 lives in Edo State. The victims included children, travelling for the celebration. It occurred on the Benin-Okene-Abuja Express Road.

Eyewitnesses said the accident, which occurred around Okpela, involved two commercial buses.

The victims were reportedly trapped for several hours. It was a Herculean task removing them from the wrecked vehicles.

On the same day, no fewer than 16 people died in a road crash on the Okene-Auchi Road in Kogi State. Two Toyota Hiace buses, travelling in opposite directions with 30 passengers on board, had a head-on collision about 13km from Okene in Kogi State.

Sunday Maku, Kogi State Sector Commander of the FRSC said the victims included nine men, six women and a baby. He said 10 other passengers, including eight men and two women, sustained injuries. He attributed the cause of the accident to dangerous overtaking.

Corpses of the deceased were deposited at the Okene General Hospital mortuary, while the in-

jured passengers were treated in the same hospital.

Wednesday, November 2 did not end in Benin without tragedy striking again. No fewer than eight people died in a multiple accident along the Murtala-Muhammed Way in Benin City. The accident involved a commuter bus marked XK 563 USL, a Volkswagen Jetta car with registration number DG 744 BEN, a motorcycle and a tipper, which fell at the opposite side of the road. The lorry rammed into other vehicles.

Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) boss Osita Chidoka, quoting a recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report, said Nigeria was rated 191st out of 192 countries with the world's unsafest roads. According to Chidoka, if something radical was not done to rectify the bad state, road crashes, which had claimed 1.3m lives and made over 50 million people disabled, could increase by 65 per cent between 2015 and 2020.

Dr. Sydney Ibeanusi has the mandate of the Federal Government to coordinate activities aimed at reducing the high number of deaths recorded on Nigerian roads. Some days ago,

Ibeanusi puts the figure at 162 deaths per 100,000. This is considered the world's second highest.

He said: "Our emphasis is to see how we can reduce this." He added that there was hope relevant agencies would contribute to ensure proper funding for the programme as well as advocate policies adequate to the target.

The UN Decade of Action on Road Safety and Injury Prevention, launched in May, aims to achieve significant reduction in road accident injuries and deaths by 2020 using contribution from several sectors.

Inaugurating the Ibeanusi-led-committee, Minister of Health Prof. Onyebuchi Chukwu said by the set date, "we should have drastically reduced loss of lives, loss of limbs and injury on our roads." He said road crashes killed more people in Nigeria than diseases.

The committee has members from agencies such as the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), police, fire service, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), ministries of works and health.

The committee has the mandate to manage safety on roads; provide safe vehicles and mobility; safe roads; ensure safe use of roads; and ensure post-crash care.

It remains to be seen if the country makes a headway with its move to halve the deaths and fatalities recorded on the roads.

A situation where only about 15 per cent of the country's over 160,000 kilometre of secondary and tertiary roads in Nigeria is paved, is nothing to cheer about.