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• Ugochukwu before the accident

Construction firm has ruined my life, says patient

Posted by: SEUN AKIOYE in Southwest ⌚ 11 hours ago

Things were looking up for Okechukwu Ugochukwu until two years ago when he went to Ikorodu to conclude a business transaction. An accident involving a commuter bus and a Chinese construction company CEECE's vehicle left him paralysed for life. Assistant Editor, SEUN AKIOYE recounts his story.

There were many items on the schedule of Ugochukwu Okechukwu on February 20, 2013 as he boarded the Hiace commuter bus from Ikorodu en-route Ketu for an important business transaction. There was the burial of his mother in a few days and his thriving event and food business to attend to. The N123, 000 in his possession assured him that as the major bread winner of the family, preparations for the burial would go unhindered.

About 10 minutes into his journey, fate played a cruel joke on him, one that would change his life forever. It was an incident that confined him to a hospital bed for the next two years and destroying his hopes and dreams.

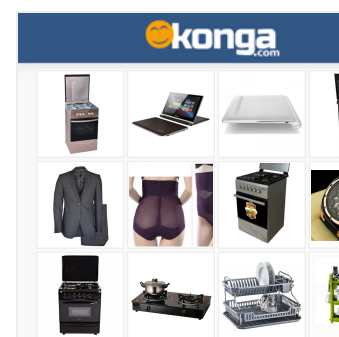
"You know the Chinese company CEECE was doing the Ikorodu Road. As we got to Majidun by the edge of the bridge, the crane fell on the bus. I was sitting between the driver and another passenger. One of the passengers died on the spot. I noticed that I couldn't move my hands or body. Blood was oozing out from my body as a deep cut was on my forehead. Then people came and pulled us out. We were first taken to Ikorodu General Hospital but we were rejected and referred to Igbobi Hospital," Ugochukwu said.

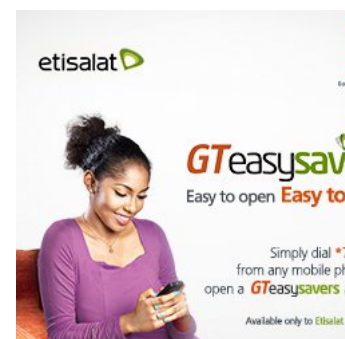
The crane driven by Makasuwa Haruna, a staff of CEECE was working on the expressway when the sheaf of the crane suddenly came off dropping on the commuter bus and causing horrific death to a passenger and life-changing injuries to others. The driver, Abdulkareem Gbadegbeshin and Ugochukwu lay prostrate in the mangled remains of the bus. The driver, like Ugochukwu, was paralysed from the waist down.

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In the male spinal cord injury ward at the National Orthopedic Hospital, Igbobi Lagos, Ugochukwu occupied the fourth bed adjacent to the exit door. Save for his head and torso, other parts of his body were immobile. Unable to pass out waste on his own, a large tube had been inserted into his side which helped him to pass both solid and liquid unwanted wastes.

His legs are bent permanently and he has to constantly lie on his side. It was a position he has maintained for over two years. His disability has extended to his hand and his fingers are closed up. For over one year, he has been unable to open them.

"I have been in pains for over two years and the fact that I am still alive is by the Grace of God. These people are just wicked, I think the plan was for me to die but I am alive. Imagine they just dumped me here at Iqoboli and I am suffering," Uqochukwu told *The Nation* on his hospital bed.



- Ugochukwu on hospital bed

Before the accident, Ugochukwu has been a successful entrepreneur, a specialist in event management, supplying ushers and security and other logistics. He also ran a chicken and chips buffet restaurant at the National Stadium, Surulere Lagos. Every weekend was a celebration as he made an average of N150, 000 on all his investments.

Under him were two brothers who came to Lagos through his industry and a wife who, at the time of the accident, was heavily pregnant with their second child. She was later delivered of her baby boy while her husband dangled between life and death.

His journey to Igbobi has been long and brutal. On the second day, he was taken to Bamby Specialist Hospital in

Ibadan where he underwent an urgent spinal cord surgery and a wiring implant was inserted into his body.

His stay at Bamby Hospital did not last long as he was subsequently returned to Lagos and “dumped” at Amodu Adesola Memorial Hospital in Ikorodu.

"They dumped me at the hospital as if I was nobody," he said.

His stay at Amodu Adesola Hospital lasted over one year during which his condition gradually got worse. Ugochukwu alleged that the doctor in charge of the hospital was merely interested in his fees which were still paid for by CCECC. He said the doctor, Muhammed Adesola, was not qualified to treat him and merely piled him up with pain relievers and blood tonics.

It was at this point that fate brought him in contact with Alaba Odunlami, Principal Partner at Alaba Odunlami & Co who decided to take up his case with the Chinese company.

Legal battle

Ogunlami tackled the case with frenzied enthusiasm. "His condition was so bad by the time we got into the case that it was evident he would have died if nothing concrete was done immediately," Ogunlami told The Nation.

The lawyers wrote the first letter to CCECC on August 30, 2013 asking for a better specialised treatment for the victim. The letter was allegedly rebuffed, forcing the lawyers to write a reminder on September 10, 2013.

"The lawyers to the Chinese company were asking for what we want as compensation but this is not a matter of compensation until we are sure of the state of health of this guy; the level of his disability and what can be done to remedy it. The victim's health and saving of his life was paramount. That was what we wanted them to do at that time because the victim himself believed that his situation may still be remedied at the time," Odunlami said.

Ogunlami said he bore the costs of the examination at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) Ikeja but the result was bad news: He is quadriplegic and wheel chair bound, he has had 100 percent disability and would never be able to walk, stand or make use of his limbs again.

Ugochukwu was brought to Igbobi Hospital on September 19, 2014 by the Insurance brokers to the Chinese company I & S, and he stayed until May this year, but the case of neglect was never completely out of the picture as Odonlami claimed that the victim was abandoned by the CCECC and its agents as they refused to give him adequate help, including a request for a caregiver.

Disdain for Nigerians



Ugochukwu is convinced that his case is especially bad because the Chinese company responsible for his predicament places little or no regards for his life as a Nigerian.

"These people did not behave as humans at all. They just dumped me and we wrote so many letters to which they replied none. When I call them too, they do not pick the calls, the insurance company won't pick my call and when they do, they do not treat me kindly," he said.

"During the doctors' strike at Iqobobi, there was nobody to care for



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•The vehicle in which Ugochukwu was travelling

me; there was no food or money. My brother that was helping me lost his job. They have refused to see reason and it is like they are tired of me and would just wish am no longer here," he added.

But more dramatic scenarios are still to play out on the case. On May 5, a medical report from Igbobi Orthopedic Hospital confirmed the earlier result from Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) that the victim is 100 per cent disabled. A day earlier his lawyer alleged those representatives of CCECC and their insurance brokers had stormed the hospital in order to forcibly discharge Ugochukwu.

"They came here without informing my family. I asked them where they were taking me to and that I don't have a house as I had been staying in the hospital for two years. They just refused to listen," he said.

Luckily, the insurance brokers were prevented from taking him away. "You need to see the ramshackle ambulance they brought to take him away. We asked them which address they were taking him to and they said the one he gave. But they never verified if he was still living there, maybe the plan was just to dump him in the house to his fate," the lawyer said.

The Chinese defence

Attempts to speak to the management of CCECC were futile as The Nation was told at the company's head office in Oyingbo that there were no interpreters to help in translation.

But a broker to the company, Ibrahim Abdullahi, in a telephone conversation with The Nation absolved the company of blames.

Abdullahi said: "There are two of them, we gave the first one N18 million but this one we offered him N25million, and the lawyer refused, saying they want N100 million.

"So the matter is in court. I know that after the second sitting the lawyer will come around for dialogue. The house the guy is staying in, I am the one that paid for the rent. We want to settle this amicably but our lawyer too is ready to go with him anywhere he wants to go. We will go to the court, just do your work," he said.

The Medical Director of Amodu Memorial Hospital that treated the victim, Dr. Muhammed Adesola, is also defending himself. Apparently angry that such claims of incompetence were made against his hospital, he seemed determined on exposing all the pent-up 'dirty secrets'.

"Don't mind him. Somebody who had an accident, spinal cord injury that is paralysed, such a person is prone to bed ulcer. So, when you have bed ulcer, the only thing you can do is to treat it," he said.

Continuing, he said: "If we had not treated him, he would have died along the line. We know what we went through to be able to keep him alive; he also gave testimony to his people that we did our best. So, if he developed bed ulcer, did we cause the bed ulcer?"

Adesola said he continued to treat him even when the Chinese company owed him for several months; he also accused Ugochukwu of being an arrogant and selfish person who refused to take his drugs.

For now, Ugochukwu lives at the mercy of others. His once-flourishing business has collapsed and his self-esteem gone.



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