



# THE NATION BUSINESS

## MARITIME

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# Resolving seaports' many challenges

In this report,

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**DAUDA** looks at the challenges created by vehicles coming to and leaving the seaports and proffer some solutions

THE number of those that have died or have been injured on the roads leading to Apapa Port Complex (LPC) and the Tin-Can Island Port in Lagos are uncounted. Trucks laden with containers from the ports have turned the Western Avenue and Apapa/Oshodi expressways to a killing field.

The number of innocent, hardworking and promising citizens that have been killed or injured on the access roads is on the rise. Two remain outstanding. One was an accident at Ojuelegba, Surulere, involving a container-laden trailer, which fell off the bridge and crushed two vehicles, killing three persons; and that of a journalist who was killed at Coconut Bus Stop after the Tin-Can Island Port on Apapa/Oshodi Expressway.

### Reflection on trucks

A senior bank official in Apapa, who craved anonymity, said: "Articulated vehicles, either small or long, carrying containers on ports' access roads in Lagos, are vessels of death. The vehicles and their drivers have pushed many families into everlasting agony, pains and sorrow."

The immediate family of one of our colleagues will not forget in a hurry what the drivers of articulated vehicles have done to them through their carelessness and drunk driving in this area. They have become terror on the road, unruly, indifferent and uncontrollable by the government and security agents.

"Who feels it knows it, seems to be apt in describing the hardship, sorrow and tears, articulated vehicle drivers bring to bear on port users and Lagosians daily."

Those who have one business or the other to do around the two Lagos ports are not likely to have kind words for owners and drivers of the vehicles. What with the man-hour losses incurred every day.

The bank official said further that "the families of those who have lost their lives in accidents caused by the vehicles are still smarting from such to date".

Yet, the seaports suffer from lack of care. When *The Nation* visited the second gate of the Tin-Can Island port during the week, the smell of urine oozing from the illegal market opposite the gate assaulted the nostrils. And this indicates that toilet facilities are not available, inadequate or in bad shapes.

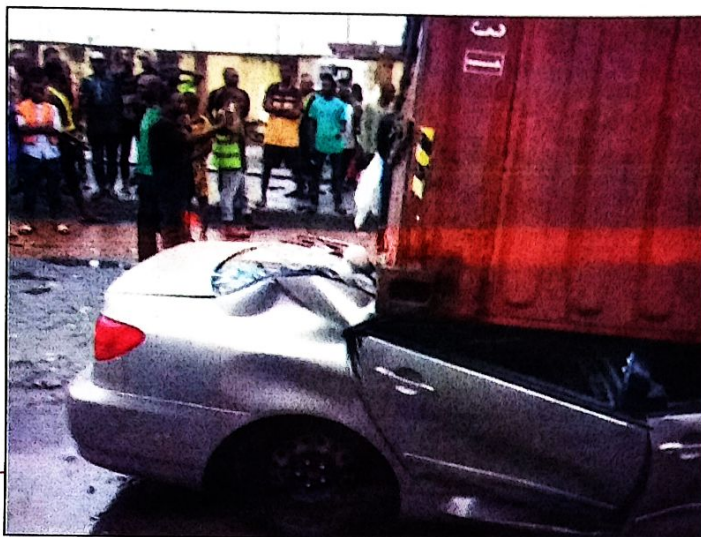
Worse still, vehicles going and coming out of the ports are parked indiscriminately, with security officials seeing in the chaos opportunity to make quick bucks. Evidence of overstretched facilities abound. Cases of container diversion, broaching and pilfering are common.

Although some parts of the expansive land in front of the port have been demarcated for truck parks, the other part cut the picture of a shanty. Yet, the Federal Government makes billions of Naira from the hundreds of containers laden with goods arriving from various parts of the world.

### Motorcyclists operating indiscriminately in Apapa

Despite the ban on motorcycle operators, better known as *okada* riders, by the Lagos State Government, *The Nation* observed that many of them ply Cele Bus Stop-First and Second Rainbow Bus Stop-Mile 2 where they have taken over a section of the major road. Thus, there is a struggle between commuters and trailers laden with containers for right of way.

At Tin-Can Island Port, Apapa, the story is similar. Trucks are still snaking through the roads, trying to either enter or come out of the port to the discomfort of road users and residents of the area. The Nigerian Ports Authority's (NPA) Truck Call up system to solve the problem seems not to be working.



• An accident at Tin-Can Port



• Illegal market in front of the second gate, Tin-Can Island Port



• One of the illegal check points at Sunrise Bus Stop, put in place by security agents.

### Need for a sustainable clean port environment

Despite the Federal Government's laudable efforts to fix the Oshodi-Apapa ports road, investigation has shown that it has not solved the gridlock on that part of Lagos.

"Although the Federal Government, through private partnership, has embarked on massive reconstruction of the Apapa/Oshodi Expressway with billions of naira spent on the road, the drivers of these trucks you are seeing inside the trucks, live and sleep on the streets for weeks. But when the bad eggs among them finally exit from port gate, what is effectively their prisons, they drive like escaped prisoners sometimes killing fellow road users. The story of the crises along the road is made worse by the presence of oil storage tanks in our area, necessitating oil tankers coming into the port to lift oil to various depots across the nation," said a resident of Apapa, Segun Okubanjo.

He said port users deserve a clean and healthy environment and assured of his company's commitment to support the port authority in achieving this goal. He charged port users to end the indiscriminate dumping of refuse on

the port access road.

Okubanjo described the illegal market in front of Tin-Can Port as an eyesore, and said all hands must be on deck to restore the lost glory of the port city.

But the truth is that it is not only the Tin-Can Island that faces these challenges. The ones in Koko, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Onne, Warri, Onitsha and Sapele are battling their own devils. True, the ports in Lagos are like jewels in the savannah of the country's ports.

Efforts have been made over the years by the management of NPA to make the ports the best in the West African sub-region. But like the mythical Abiku child, the problem remains intractable. Options that have worked in other ports outside the country have produced less or no results here.

Space has become a major constraint, especially in the Lagos ports. The quay wall at Tin-Can port and some of the terminals at Onne Port have collapsed and begging for attention. Also, there is no room for the Nigeria-bound containers because the empty ones have taken over the little space at the terminals.

Yet, opportunities for expansion of the port to Ogogoro village behind the Tin-Can port

have not been fully done by the successive administrations.

Most of the roads leading to the ports are in poor shape. For instance, before the Muhammadu Buhari administration, the roads to and out of the ports were death traps because of lack of maintenance and indiscriminate parking by port-bound trailers, resulting in a gridlock that is still defying solutions.

Taking advantage of the laxity between government officials and security agents, residents sold robbers and other criminals attack commuters daily on the road.

The Federal Government, which owns almost all the functional ports in the country, experts say, seems not to care as it entered into concession pact with the private sector to run the ports. And many years later, observers have been proved right as the government and the concessionaires were yet to come up with a lasting solution to the protracted and age-long problems affecting the ports.

Former President, Association of Nigerian Licensed Customs Agents (ANCLA), Prince Olayiwola Shittu said the failure of the Federal Government to meet its terms of the agreement with the terminal operators through the NPA has led to the NPA extending contract periods for some major concessionaires within the Tin-Can Island Port Complex, when the contract expired. Stakeholders said they were awaiting the NPA to come out with the new concession agreement and see if it would be skewed in favour of the terminal operators like the expired one or not.

### Facilities of the two Lagos seaports over-stretched

The problem of the ports also include overstretching of facilities, which, according to the NPA, are over-stretched by over 128 per cent of their installed capacity. Past Managing Director NPA, including their successor, Muhammed Bello Koko, admit that the installed capacity of the ports is between 40 and 45 million metric tonnes of cargo yearly.

Similarly, the Maritime Workers' Union of Nigeria (MWUN) said the Lagos ports are overstretched.

As a solution, the President-General Dr. Adeyemi Adewale, called on the Federal Government's agencies to dredge the Calabar, Escravos, Warri and Port Harcourt ports.

Shittu said the actual volume at these ports has since exceeded 100 million metric tonnes, which represents 127.3 per cent growth.

The ANCLA chief said further that the most challenging part of this development is that 70 per cent of this 100 million metric tonnes are handled by the Western Ports comprising Apapa and Tin-Can Island Ports, in Lagos.

### Lagos as the hub

While there is congestion at Lagos ports there is low activity in other ports outside the state because of alleged bad government policy. For instance, despite the dredging of the Calabar port at a total cost of \$56 million in 2006, the channel remains shallow, maintaining a depth of only 6.4 metres, which does not make it attractive for bigger vessels and shippers.

When *The Nation* visited the Calabar and the Onne ports, most of their terminals were empty.

### Illegal activities of security agents

The security agents who manage traffic in and around the ports extort importers, truck drivers and clearing agents.

Investigation confirmed the development. Truck drivers pass through three illegal checkpoints where they pay unreceipted fees to security agents at Mile 2, Sunrise Bus Stop and Coconut Bridge.

They pay between N5,000 and N10,000 before they pass through the port. Recently, Bello Koko, in company of reporters, arrested a security agent operating illegally in the area.

### Last line

Experts say the Lekki Deep Sea Port may suffer similar fate if railways which are the normal features of modern ports for delivery of exports and evacuation of imports are not linked to it. The road from Ajia to Eleko, Lekki, Osoroko, Ipe, Itoikin and Ijebu-Ode may become dangerous.