

Help, one-way drivers are killing us, Lagos residents cry



CHUKWUMA OKPARAOCHA - LAGOS

THE story is told of a middle-aged woman identified simply as Charity who met her untimely death on the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway.

Charity who worked for a media company had just alighted from a commercial bus at Berger Yard area of the ever busy expressway a couple of years back. The 'mistake' the woman who, like most Lagos residents, was hustling to make ends meet, made was to take it for granted that on that route one-way movement of vehicles was indeed one way.

But the 'mistake' proved to be costly, when she was hit by a commercial motorcycle (okada) moving against the traffic in the opposite direction. She died on the spot.

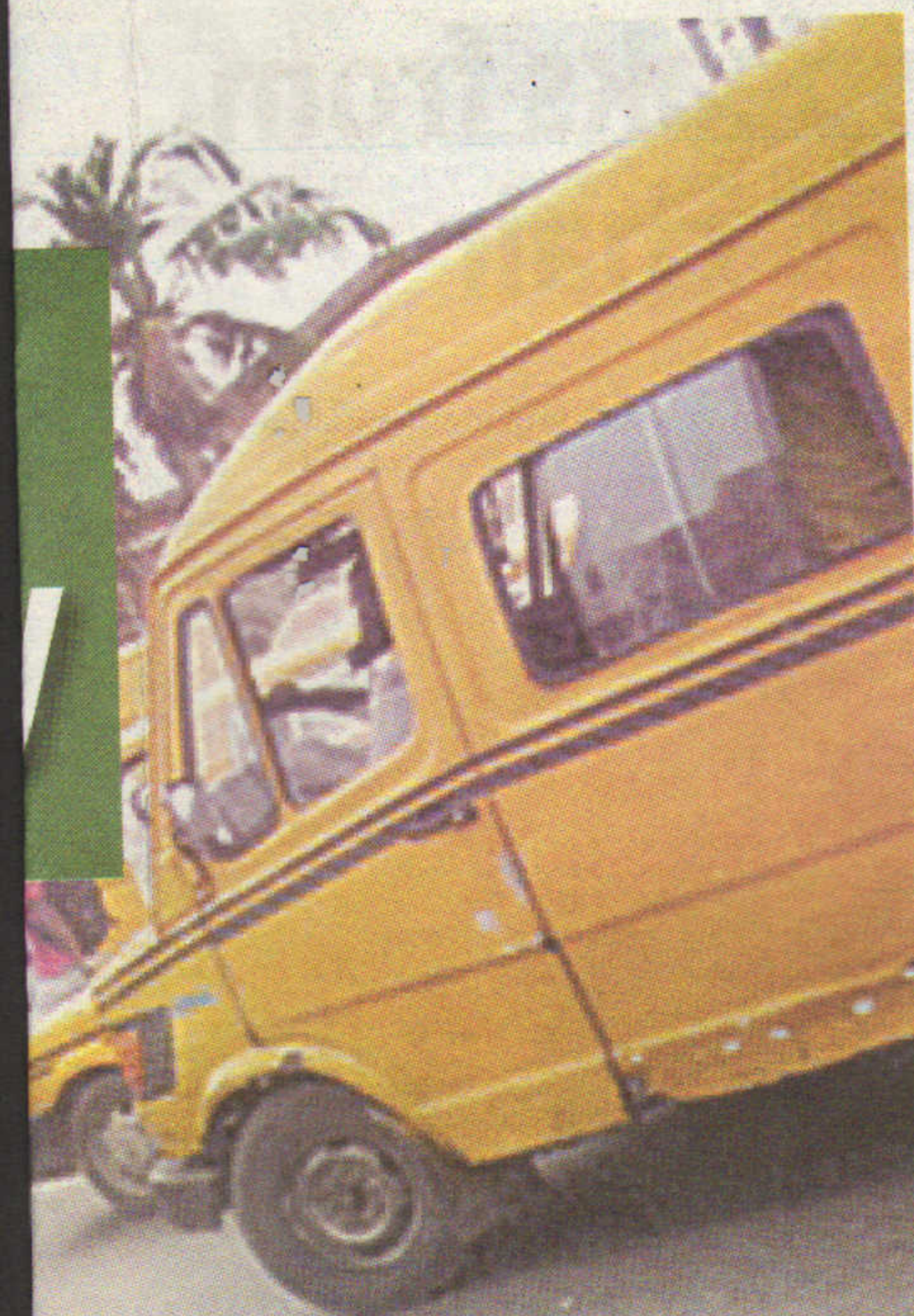
Charity's sad story which was narrated to *Saturday Tribune* by one of her colleagues in the office, has been described as one that perfectly captures the kind of danger an average road user is exposed to on the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway everyday. There have been numerous hit-and-run cases on the road with some resulting in deaths, while quite a number of people have in the process been maimed for

life.

An average resident of Lagos is believed to always be in a hurry; he always seems to be rushing somewhere, a situation that has made the state to be branded a land of hustling.

Perhaps this is what has encouraged many motorists plying the Oshodi-Apapa Expressway, which has somehow become notorious for infuriating traffic holdups and logjams, to have devised an audacious, yet risky means of beating gridlocks and logjams, also popularly called 'go slows' in local parlance. This audacious method is for drivers to drive

Feature



Julius Berger, a project that has been on for several months.

One look at the logjam which, depending on certain factors, often extends from Ijesha area of the road to Mile 2 and sometimes beyond, would discourage an average individual who perhaps is running against time to look for a time-saving way out.

Many motorists, especially commercial ones, are therefore taking full advantage of this development to pick up passengers who would not want to be trapped in the gridlocks, especially given the fact that once trapped there is no way of backing out, and this, needless to say, could lead to the loss of useful man-hours.

However, travelling to Oshodi on the reverse route, i.e. driving on one way is full of risks and danger, because many of the drivers, more often than not, come face to face with oncoming vehicles, including articulated vehicles and other big buses, while at the same time making efforts to let off passengers or pick up new ones.

While driving one-way, drivers, alongside their conductors, are also often on the lookout for officers of law enforcement agencies who are usually on their prowl since they (the drivers) are clearly breaking the basic rule of traffic in the state. This condition often reduces the concentration level of such drivers on the task of meandering their way from oncoming vehicles that are staring at them in the face.

It is also not uncommon to see both drivers and conduct-

ors (and at times, passengers) gesticulating to oncoming vehicles to move aside, while they snake their way in and out of danger.

The dangers embedded in this wrong way of driving is not limited to the drivers and other occupants of such vehicles alone, but also pedestrians, as well as people waiting at various bus stops who are often caught off guard, especially since such vehicles are not supposed to drive in such manner in the first place.

Apart from the commercial buses, and very few private cars whose drivers drive in such a manner on daily basis, the most prominent danger seems to emanate from ubiquitous commercial motorcycles, popularly known as *okadas*, who seem to have, over time, turned one way driving into a normal daily occurrence irrespective of traffic situation on the other side.

One of the most dangerous routes for pedestrians or passengers who are just coming out from their vehicles is the Otto Whorf/Berger/ Sunrise axis of the expressway. There have been many reported cases of accidents caused by *okadas* on the road, a situation usually aggravated by the reckless and mindless manner with which *okada* riders traverse the route in all directions.

Narrating his ordeal in a recent chat with **Saturday Tribune**, Mr John Ekem, a resident of Sunrise area of the expressway, disclosed that many drivers and motorcyclists who engage in such act have become daring over the years, especially given the chequered way the government has been tackling the issue.

"I have been fortunate enough to have escaped being hit by *okadas* on a number of occasions only by a whisker, but I can assure you there are people who have not been that lucky. Great care has to be taken when alighting from a bus, because fast moving bikes are always everywhere, including close to people coming down from vehicles at various bus stops. The situation is really bad," Mr Ekem lamented.

"Most times, especially in the evenings, the whole place becomes so rowdy and disorganised that one has to be extremely careful and watchful before crossing over to the other side. This is because you will find a situation where both motorcycles and vehicles will be coming from different directions at breath-taking speeds, including those who are driving against traffic," he said.

Similarly, another resident, Mrs Beatrice Asuquo, a resident of Apapa-Ajegunle area of the state, called on the state government not to relent in its quest to end the menace. "If one is not familiar with this route or with the reckless way people drive here, such an individual stands a high chance of being hit by one of such vehicles or bikes," she said.

When **Saturday Tribune** spoke with one of such drivers simply identified as Dennis, he claimed that they were not unaware of the dangers involved in driving against traffic, and as such, they were usually more vigilant when doing so. But he also insisted that he could not afford burning all his fuel and using up his valuable time in traffic holdups which, he claimed, were often endless.

"If we don't drive one-way, then we may not be able to go for more than a few trips before we close for the day, and this would surely affect the profit made. Movement in traffic holdups also leads to a situation whereby one consumes a large amount of fuel, which is of course very expensive to buy. Therefore, except those constructing the road finish it on time and the road becomes very usable, one-way driving may still persist for now, otherwise, someone like me might change my route altogether," Dennis disclosed.

The Lagos State government is known to have taken diverse measures to arrest the situation in recent times, including clamping down on petroleum tankers and other articulated vehicles parked on the road so as put an end to the era of gridlocks on the road.

The Lagos State governor, Mr Akinwunmi Ambode, during the week visited some of the troubled spots in Apapa, including Creek and Liverpool roads which are both notorious for inappropriate parking of trucks and reckless one-way driving. He pledged to find a lasting solution to the problem.

The traffic situation on the Apapa-Oshodi-Mile 2 expressway, widely regarded as one of the busiest and economically vital expressways in the country, has, in recent times, been aggravated by the ongoing road work

against traffic, which is also known as 'one-way driving.'

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