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Five months after LASTMA official killed her husband, mother of five loses source of income

By Ayodele Ale

Published: Saturday, 15 Nov 2008

Customers who thronged Mrs Abosede Jogunomi's wooden restaurant at Yusuf Junction, Agbado, Lagos penultimate Monday found themselves saddled with the task of consoling her.



Abosede

Like other traders in the area whose shops were located under high tension cables, she had just received the news of a planned demolition of her shop by the state's task force on the environment.

She had seven days to pack her belongings and quit the shop she had used for years

"This is too much for me. It would have been better if my husband was alive. His death in the hands of some LASTMA (Lagos State Transport Management Agency) officials is responsible for my plight. Since my parents are

dead, he was the only one left to care for me. Now that he is gone, my life is miserable," she cried.

Abosede told Saturday Punch that her husband, Lateef, who worked in the Sheriff Department of Lagos State High Court, Ikeja Judicial Division, was planning to get her a better shop when he met his untimely death in the hands of some overzealous LASTMA men. "He promised to help me with the contribution he was making in his office. I never thought it would not come to pass," she said, wondering how she was going to cope with the upbringing of her five children in the absence of her husband.

According to witnesses, Lateef met his untimely death in the hands of two LASTMA officials on June 6, 2008. The deceased, who was as a casual worker with the Sheriff Department of the court had gone to the Ikorodu part of Lagos to effect a court order. "He was one of the casual workers we used when we had to enforce court orders. So he was merely doing his duty," said the Chief Registrar of the court, Mrs Latifat Folami.

According to the victim's colleague, Aliyu Ajiwokeu, on getting to the location of LASTMA's head office at Oshodi, two LASTMA men emerged from the gates, stopped the commercial bus they had boarded and forced the passengers out, saying they (LASTMA officials) wanted to use the bus for patrol. While some of the passengers obeyed the order, others queried the rationale behind it. "Some of us told the LASTMA men that we had already paid the driver," Aliyu said.

But the LASTMA men insisted on hijacking the bus. In the ensuing argument, one of the LASTMA men seized an umbrella belonging to one of the passengers and broke it.

Ajiwokeu said Lateef watched with amazement while the confusion lasted. "He only folded his arms and watched. Then suddenly, one of the two LASTMA men grabbed him, shook him violently and shoved him, causing him to hit his head on the pavement. Efforts made by those present to help Lateef to his feet failed.

Sensing anger on the part of the passengers, the two LASTMA men ran into the agency's premises. When all the efforts made to revive Lateef failed, the sympathisers ferried him to the General Hospital at Gbagada with the help of some LASTMA men.

"Some people from my husband's office came and told me that my husband had a

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headache in the office and had been taken to the hospital. That sounded strange because he was hale and hearty when he left home in the morning," Abosede said.

She headed to Gbagada with one of his children. "When I got there, he could not open his eyes. That was when I heard what actually happened," she said, adding that even though the victim was brought there with the assistance of some LASTMA men, she had to shoulder the responsibility of buying the required drugs.

Unfortunately, in the night of the following day, she noticed that her husband was gasping for breath. "I called the nurses and told them that his breathing pattern had changed, but one of them looked at him and told me to keep praying." Moments later, she was told that her husband had given up the ghost.

Abosede told Saturday Punch that she was appalled by the insensitivity displayed by LASTMA over her husband's death. "I appreciate what the Sheriff Department did for my family. They contributed N25,000 to the burial expenses. But nothing came from LASTMA. They did not even send anybody to sympathise with us. Even if it is a dog, one should show some care. It is four months and no word has been heard from them.

What we heard initially was that the two LASTMA officials who killed by husband had been arrested, but we later learnt that they had escaped," she said.

The bereaved mother of five said, "Since then, I have been the one taking care of my five children." She believes that except the government comes to her aid in sponsoring the education of her five children, the future is bleak. While the first and second born, Babatunde and Fatimo, have completed secondary school and are seeking admission into tertiary institutions, the third born is still in secondary school while the remaining two, Azeez and Modinat, are in primary school.

"This (referring to the wooden shop where she sells food) is what I have been using to take care of them," she said.

The inability of the woman to get justice over the killing of her husband impelled her to petition the Chief Judge of Lagos State. In the petition dated October 23, 2008, she stated, "I am writing this letter with great pain because I have not heard anything from your office since the death of my husband who left five children for me, a petty trader." She therefore implored the Chief Judge to use his good office to assist her in the upbringing of the children and bring the killers of her husband to book. His case must not be swept under the carpet," she wrote.

The Chief Registrar of the court told Saturday Punch that the case had been brought to the knowledge of the state judiciary and that efforts were being made to assist the widow, especially her children. "She has already sent a letter and it is receiving attention. The family will not be left alone," she vowed.

But the attitude of the authorities of LASTMA to the Lateef's killing has been a source of concern to observers.

The General Manager of LASTMA, Mr Young Arabamen, who spoke with our correspondent penultimate Wednesday, did not deny that the two men responsible for Lateef's were officials of LASTMA, but he said it was a criminal offence, which fell within the powers of the police. "LASTMA does not prosecute criminals," he said, adding that LASTMA, as an organisation, did not send its officials out to hijack vehicles. "We equip our officials when they are going on assignments," he said.

He said as soon as the case was reported at the office, his organisation informed the police who started investigation into the matter. But he said the culprits were on the run and so were yet to be arrested.

Arabamen expressed the determination of his agency to bring Lateef's killers to book, saying they would not be shielded. "We are not shielding them. Whoever flouts the law of the land pays for it," he said.

But the victim's wife said she was not satisfied with the slow pace of justice. "I am not satisfied at all. I am not happy. They see us as poor people and are therefore exploiting our poverty to afflict us. The killers of my husband should not go unpunished. Look at me, at my age, they have turned me into a widow and made my children fatherless," she cried.









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