

End of the year Major disasters that

By Tessy Igomu

AS the year 2016 takes a bow, the memories it would leave behind in the minds of many Nigerians are not all that pleasant. In the course of the year, there were emergency situations spread over the 12 months, many of which were quite traumatic.

There were cases of fire incidents that razed businesses, investments and homes in seconds, just as floods, mudslides and boat mishaps traumatised many in the passing year.

Director, Lagos State Fire Service, Razaq Fadipe, and the authorities of the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) agreed that most of the disasters were caused by human error.

According to Fadipe, 80 per cent of the emergencies responded to between January 2015 and January 2016 alone were caused by human errors, adding that some causes of the fire incidents include gas cooker explosion, petroleum products stored in homes, candlelight and use of substandard electrical appliances.

Fire incidents

On Monday, January 4, 2016, about 90 shops were gutted in an inferno that broke out at Yola Market in the capital of Adamawa State.

Haruna Hammanfuro, Executive Secretary of the Adamawa State Emergency Management Agency, who confirmed the incident, said no life was lost and regretted that property worth billions of naira was destroyed in no time. The incident was described as the worst inferno in the history of the market.

Soon after, on January 17, about 80 students were displaced from their accommodation at the Don Bosco Secondary School and Youth Centre, Obolo Obosi, near Onitsha, Anambra State, following a fire incident.

According to the rector of the school, Charles Uzoeto, the fire broke out while the students and teachers were in school. He said he couldn't quantify the extent of damage, as virtually everything the students had in the hostel was lost.

On January 27, 2016, two buildings were completely gutted in different parts of Benin City, Edo State. The landlord of one of the buildings at 13, Ekaladeran Street, off Aerodrome Close, Mr. Ernest Aganmwonyi, said the fire was caused by power surge.

On March 26, a midnight fire gutted the popular Sabon Gari Market in Kano, destroying property worth millions of naira. The fire was described as the worst market fire disaster in Nigeria, as about 3,800 shops and goods estimated at N2 trillion went up in smoke.

A few hours later, another fire incident was recorded in a neighbouring furniture market in Gwarzo, Kano State, and another one in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State capital. In the space of three months, 10 major markets across the country were burnt down along with goods and property worth trillions of naira.

While traders in Kano and Kebbi states were yet to recover from the calamity visited on them, traders at the Ladipo auto parts market in Lagos, on April 21, played host to the destructive visitor. The early morning fire destroyed about 50 shops and goods worth billions of naira.

Nkire Ezeigbo, spokesman for the Ladipo Auto Dealers Association, and Felix



The Kara inferno

Okoro, Chairman of the Osoro section of the market, said the fire started at about 3.30am from the Osoro/Akinwumi area of the market. They were, however, thankful that no casualty was recorded aside from the material loss incurred.

For residents of Sokoto State, September 12, 2016, would be remembered as the day a heroic 42-year-old mother, Blessing Arigi-Osakwe, lost her life while attempting to save her two children from a fire.

While the two children were brought out dead from the burning building along Trade Fair, Old Airport area of Sokoto, their mother died the next Sunday. The fire was allegedly caused by an electrical fault.

According to an eyewitness, the deceased woman, alongside her husband and two older children had initially escaped from the fire unhurt. However, she died while attempting to save the younger children.

Similarly, an octogenarian was burnt to death in his one-room apartment in Surulere, Lagos, on September 14. The 80-year-old man, Godwin Oyia, was killed by in a fire caused by a boiling ring. The fire spread rapidly across the top floor of the building, burning the deceased beyond recognition.

Over 60 shops were destroyed by fire at Saraki Market, Ita-Ama, Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, on October 6 2016. Valuables worth several millions of naira were destroyed by in the early morning inferno, which raged till the afternoon.

Similarly, on October 12, 2015, more than 12 shops, 14 rooms and property worth millions of naira were destroyed in Kwami, Gombe State. According to Malam Abdulrahman Mohammad, one of the victims, the incident started from a house at about 8am before spreading to shops in the vicinity. The man who blamed the fire outbreak on power surge, said household items and other belongings were burnt to ashes as most residents, mainly policemen, were unable to save anything from their rooms.

On October 13, tragedy struck in the

sleepy community of Gaun in Ogun State when two children were burnt to death in a fire that gutted their parents' bungalow. The fire started in the evening while the family was preparing dinner.

It was alleged that the firstborn of the family, Iyanu, tipped a jerry can of fuel over, spilling the contents. The fuel came in contact with a lantern and caused a big explosion. Members of the family, including Iyanu, were rescued by residents who acted promptly. The twins, aged three, were not so lucky.

On October 16, fire razed a shopping complex at the popular Yaba Market in Lagos, opposite the Presbyterian Church. Ninety-four of the 201 shops in the complex were destroyed alongside goods worth billions of naira.

In the early hours of Wednesday, November 23, 2016, the Bakassi female hostel at the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, was gutted. The incident, which started at about 5am while many of the students were asleep, lasted for about six hours. About 13 of the students were injured.

Eyewitnesses said the fire started from the top floor of the three-storey double-wing building housing the HND 2 Computer Science final year students, before spreading to other parts of the building. The situation led to panic and a stampede. Many students were injured while trying to escape.

Meanwhile, between January and October 2016, at least 11 fire incidents were recorded at the international terminal of the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos. Although the incidents disrupted activities and damaged facilities at the terminal, no life was lost. But the incidents were seen as embarrassing to the country.

Tanker fires

April 24, 2016, was a tragic day for residents of Kaduna, as three people were killed following an inferno at an Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) accredited filling station.

According to an eyewitness, one of the compartments of the tanker started leaking while fuel was being discharged.

This ignited a fire that raged for over three hours. Witnesses said that the fire consumed eight cars and two buses waiting on the queue to buy petrol.

Similarly, on May 5, 2016, three people were killed after a tanker caught fire while offloading petrol at a filling station near the Grand Central Hotel, Kano. Eyewitnesses said the fire, which started by 2pm, also destroyed a building adjacent to the filling station.

Daily Sun gathered that more than five cars and property worth millions of naira were destroyed by the inferno. The fire allegedly broke out when the driver and one other person were trying to offload fuel into the dumps.

On July 26, 2016, motorists and traders scammed to safety following a fire outbreak caused by a fuel tanker that fell at the Ijesha axis of the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway in Lagos. Two lives were lost in the inferno, according to the Director, Lagos State Fire Service, Razaq Fadipe.

Fadipe said the tanker toppled over and caused petrol to spill on the eight-lane expressway, which led to a fire outbreak. He said the content also spilled into the drainage, which made it difficult for fire service officials to put out the fire on time.

On September 27, six residents were confirmed dead while one was in critical condition after a tanker collided with another vehicle on the Calabar-Itu highway in Cross River State. The collision caused the tanker to overturn, spilling its content and incinerating other motorists caught in the gridlock.

Six people also died when fuel-laden tankers caused multiple accidents in the same axis days after. One of the tankers was said to have hit the one in front, causing it to veer off the road and rammed against the wall of a guesthouse in the town.

On October 29, a tanker fire burnt one person to death and razed five trucks in the Kirikiri area of Lagos. The incident took place at about 4.20pm on a Saturday. The tanker, conveying PMS, toppled over while trying to navigate some failed portions of the Kirikiri road.

shook 2016

As it fell, the tanker caught fire. Another truck conveying gas and three other container trucks were also razed.

On Wednesday, November 16, Nigerians got the devastating news of a multiple crash that claimed the lives of at least three people on the Kara Bridge, on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

LASEMA said the incident occurred at about 3.08am when a tanker carrying 33,000 litres of diesel rammed into a truck carrying brewery products at high speed and caught fire.

Two other trucks and a Toyota Corolla saloon car were razed while the three casualties caught in the inferno were burnt beyond recognition.

The fire caused a gridlock that stretched to virtually all parts of Lagos, with many motorists and commuters stranded, as no vehicle could go out of Lagos through the bridge for many hours.

On December 3, 2016, there was another tragedy with 14 deaths from a tanker fire in Tegina town, Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State.

It was gathered that the tanker was conveying petrol from Lagos to Kaduna when the driver lost control and rammed into some residential buildings in the town. Eight houses were completely burnt in the fire that ensued. The fire claimed the lives of those trapped in the buildings and others selling by the roadside.

Boat mishaps

Most of the boat mishaps recorded in the country were in Lagos, prompting the state government to set up a meeting at the Lagos State House of Assembly to proffer solutions to the menace.

However, the major boat mishap took place at Ijede area of Ikorodu, Lagos, after a passenger boat capsized, killing seven people, while eight others were declared missing. The boat was reportedly conveying 17 passengers from Ijede en route Badore before it allegedly collided with adredging point at Ijede.

On November 13, seven people drowned in a boat accident on River Bako in Katcha Local Government Area of Niger State. According to Malam Ahmed Inga, Director-General, Niger State Emergency Management Agency, the boat was conveying 10 women farmers from Balsa community to a rice farm across the river. He noted that the dead included a woman and her three children.

On December 9, 2016, three members of a family, a husband, wife and their child, were drowned following a collision between a wooden canoe and a fibre boat

on the Badagry waterways in Lagos. The two boats were said to have taken off from Pathfinder enroute Gberefu shore and Iyafin in Badagry, respectively, before the collision.

Flood and mudslide

Though a mudslide is alien in these climes, Lagos has recorded two already. The first one was in 2015, in Isheri Magodo, Ojodu Berger area, which claimed four siblings.

On Tuesday, September 6, 2016, a mudslide collapsed on shanties in the Agidingbi area of Lagos, killing 16-year-old Faisa Muhammed, who got married 10 days earlier.

Flooding did not cause a major panic in the country this year. Though the authorities had predicted massive flooding in Lagos, Kaduna, Yola and five other cities, the situation was not as tragic, even if the volume of water surpassed the level of the devastating floods in 2012.

According to Alhassan Nuhu, Director, Disaster Risk Reduction Department, National Emergency Management Agency, while economic losses in 2012 amounted to N2.5 trillion, in 2016 it was much less.

He also said that the number of displaced persons was less than a million in 2016 compared to 2.3 million in 2012, adding that fewer than 100 people died in 2016 as against 360 in 2012. He stated that the total number of people affected in 2016 was less than one million compared to the seven million affected in 2012.

Building collapse

In 2016, Nigeria recorded some major incidents of building collapse. On March 9, at least 34 people were killed after a five-story building under construction collapsed in Lekki, Lagos. The collapse occurred after a downpour. Thirteen other people were pulled out alive from the ill-fated building in a rescue operation that ended late the next day.

Two weeks later, another storey building located at 9, Alli close, Mile 12, also collapsed, killing a 47-year-old woman.

But more tragic was the Saturday, December 10, 2016, collapse of the building of the Reigners Bible Church in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The tragedy, which took place during a service, was attributed to structural failure. Conflicting accounts put the death toll at between 50 and 200. The incident happened during the Bishopric installation service for the General Overseer of the church, Apostle Akan Weeks. Hundreds of people, including the state governor, Udom Emmanuel, were inside when the roof caved in on the congregation.



Community leaders preparing for the festival

Nibo community agog for Ezike Festival

NIBO, a community in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, is in a colourful mood as the people await this year's edition of the popular annual festival, Ezike Day.

The cultural festival that ensures mass return of indigenes of Nibo to the community would be celebrated on Monday, December 26, 2016.

On that day, the community, divided into four quarters, Ezeawulu, Umuunum, Ifite and Ezeoye, and 31 villages, would roll out the drums in celebration of Ezike Day, a festival that showcases the rich cultural heritage of Nibo, foster unity and build bridges among the people. The best of traditional and cultural dances and masquerades are expected to add colour to the event.

The community's royal father, His Majesty, Eze (Dr.) Ugonwanne M.C. Ngene (JP), Ezike IV, will also use the occasion to host and celebrate prominent indigenes of Nibo who have distinguished themselves in various fields of human endeavour and contributed to the development of Nibo.

The monarch said he would recognise deserving indigenes of Nibo, who have contributed to the development and unity of the community, by conferring chieftaincy titles on them as a way of appreciation. He said the gesture would also motivate other people to also give back to the community.

Said the monarch: "Ezike is the progenitor of the entire Nibo people. So, the festival is not a personal event. It is for the whole Nibo. I'm only representing that progenitor. So on that day we will come together to pray for one another and plan ahead for the coming year."

On why he wanted to recognise certain people specially that day, the royal father stated that, "There is nothing as important as encouragement. When someone willingly gives back to the community, you have to show the person that you appreciate him so as to encourage others to also think home by contributing their quota to the well-being of the community."

For instance, a prominent son of Nibo, Chief Emeka Okonkwo, has undertaken to sponsor the coming Ezike Day. Giving reasons for this gesture, Okonkwo, who is the current chairman of the Abuja branch of Nibo Union, said: "I'm passionate about anything that concerns Nibo community because my late father, Ichie Nathaniel Oregbunem Okonkwo, an educationist of repute, inculcated

in us the love of our community.

Again, both my mother and father are indigenes of Nibo and a testimony to the fact that Ezike's leadership has brought about peace and unity in Nibo, which has engendered development in our community."

Ezike Day, according to Chief (Dr.) Innocent Akubue, the President General, Nibo Union Worldwide, is, "The high point of our celebrations in Nibo community. Some communities call theirs Ofala, but we call ours Ezike Day. It is supposed to be an annual event but what we have done is that in every even year, we have what is called a major Ezike Day, and on such occasions chieftaincy titles are bestowed on deserving people from Nibo and friends of Nibo.

"It should be noted that chieftaincy titles in our community are not for sale. They are given to only deserving people who have remarkably contributed to the development of the community."

Akubue explained further that the festival has nothing to do with paganism. "The current traditional ruler of the community, HRM Ngene, who has been on the throne for the past 31 years, is a practicing Christian. And 90 per cent of Nibo indigenes are Christians. Ezike Day is a celebration of our culture and not pagan worship, as I have always told people. In fact, the tourism content of the event is underscored by the interest it generates among people from within and outside Anambra, as the best of our cultural heritage is put on display."

Speaking on the festival, Ichie George Nwolis (Kaliozor), the public relations officer of the Cultural Committee, Nibo Union, said, "Ezike Day is a day set aside originally to celebrate and remember our ancestral father and leader, Ezike. We also use the event to showcase our cultural heritage, as we display the best of our cultural dances and colourful masquerades.

"Ezike is also used to celebrate what we call Ofala for the current traditional leader, Ezike. Our traditional rulers are called Ezike. The current one is called Ezike IV. He always uses the opportunity of the Nibo Day to speak directly to all Nibo people, praising them where they have done well and also pointing out areas that need improvement.

"The festival is also a platform for the sons and daughters of Nibo, those at home and in the diaspora, to socialise, mingle and get to know one another better to encourage unity and networking for the overall interest of Nibo community."



The collapsed auditorium of Reigners Bible Church International, Uyo