

HOME / COVER / NATIONAL / **Yauri, Koko roads where travellers face death everyday**

Yauri, Koko roads where travellers face death everyday

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...Over 40 passengers died within seven months

From Olanrewaju Lawal, Birnin Kebbi

Thousands of travelers on the Yauri and Koko-Basel roads in Kebbi State, which connect the state to Niger State and other nearby communities are not finding it easy to embark on journeys. Trips that should last two hours now typically take more than four hours, just to travel between two local

government areas within the state.

When travelers in the State say goodbye to their relations at the commercial motorparks, they can never tell when they are likely to reach their destinations. Apart from deplorable roads from Koko-Basel to Yauri local government, which is a federal government road, travelers still face the danger posed by domestic animals and motorcyclists who could cross the highway at will when drivers are on top speed.

Not too long ago, the life of Abdullahi Issa, a commercial driver from Ilorin, Kwara State, was cut short along the Koko-Basel Maiyama road. The late driver and his passengers including four youth corps members had an accident when a motorcyclist who did not have a headlight suddenly crossed the road about 7:30 pm.

In an attempt not to kill the old man on the motorcycle, the driver swerved sharply and the vehicle skidded-off the road and somersaulted several times. The driver died on the spot. The deceased left behind three wives and many children. Members of his immediate and extended family are still shocked by his sudden death. Expectedly, there was much wailing when his corpse was taken back to Ilorin for burial.

Similarly, on March 20, 2017, the people of Giron village on the Koko-Yauri axis in Shanga Local Government Area of Kebbi State witnessed human beings burnt to death as a result of an accident that involved a light truck known as Mitsubishi Canter. The truck was loaded with fertilizer, farm produce, live animals and over 50 passengers sat on the wood provided on the goods and animals it carried. The mini truck with registration number, ZUR 466 XA hit a motorcyclist, which had two other passengers. The commercial motorcyclist was trying to overtake the truck at Giron when the accident happened. The motorcyclist died on the spot while the truck skidded off the road, fell on its side and caught fire and 22 of the traders were burnt to death. They were given mass burial beside the road, and the state governor, Abubakar Atiku Bagudu attended the heartbreaking event.

Penultimate Sunday, four indigenes of Kalgo town in Kalgo Local Government Area of Kebbi State were also killed in a ghastly road accident at Giria village along the Kalgo-Bunza road in the same local government. The head-on collision occurred as a result of reckless driving. The deceased were identified as Alkali Nafiu Danguru, Mallam Aliu Bangu, Bonto Kalgo and one unidentified passenger. They were travelling to a village in Bunza, in a small car before another big vehicle rammed them head-on. Only their dead bodies returned to their families. The vehicle was a total write-off.

When he spoke with *Sunday Sun*, the Public Relations Officer of Kebbi State Sector of the Federal Road Safety Commission, Mr. Ibrahim Turaki Kangiwa, confirmed that the corpses of the 22 traders were picked from different points in Dalah Ruwa village in Shanga Local Government Area of the state.

He said the driver apart from loading the vehicle with goods and human beings, also carried on board jerry cans of petrol for generators.

According to him, 22 of the traders died at the scene of the accident and 11 were hospitalized. He added that three of those admitted into the hospital later died. That brought the number of dead victims to 25, as at the time of filing the report.

Kangiwa advised people of the state to desist from boarding trucks laden with goods. He said: "FRSC had sensitized them about the danger involved in the practice. We have told them on several occasions to stop sitting on top of the trucks conveying goods, but they would not listen."

The former sole administrator of Shanga Local Government Area, Alhaji Garba Salihu Takware who also spoke on the incident said the vehicle had onboard traders that were returning from Tungan Giwa and Dalan Ruwa when the accident occurred.

Sunday Sun learnt that 11 of the survivors were taken to the Yauri General Hospital, where three of them died and three others among the 11 were referred to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) in Birnin Kebbi for medical treatment.

At the FMC, *Sunday Sun* found that only one of the victims identified as Dani Nazuru Gulma with hospital registration number 275409 had a record in the male surgical ward/male

Ophthalmological ward, and diagnosed with “open Tibia-fibular injury.” However, efforts made to trace him in the ward was abortive. It was gathered that the victim and others referred to the hospital had run away against medical advice.

Kebbi State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Kabiru Ibrahim who also spoke with *Sunday Sun* disclosed that road accidents had claimed several lives. The rising incidence of fatal accidents prompted the Kebbi Police Command to invite drivers' unions and commercial motorcyclists for a stakeholders meeting, to caution them on over-speeding, reckless driving and use of expired tyres. He disclosed that in year 2016, 25 accidents were recorded with 53 deaths while 46 victims had various degree of injuries.

He added: “Within three months of this year, we have recorded 16 major accidents, in which 25 people died and 55 others had serious injuries. That was why we felt that this was getting too much and we had to organize a meeting to sensitize the unions on how to prevent such accidents,”Ibrahim said.

The police commissioner explained that most of the accident occurred along Birnin Kebbi-Sokoto road, Birnin Kebbi-Jega road and Birnin Kebbi-Bunza-Yauri-Koko road.

Koko Yauri road which is a major federal road linking Kebbi and Niger states. Many commercial vehicles also ply the route to Kwara and Lagos states from Birnin Kebbi and Jega towns. The deplorable state of the road has been the cause of the traffic gridlock that lasts for hours, thereby prolonging the duration of journeys to Niger State that should ordinarily take about two hours. It was gathered that contract for reconstruction of the road had been awarded, but the contractor was very slow in the execution of the project.

Chairman of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Yauri Local Government Area branch, Alhaji Saliu Adamu said occurrence of fatal accidents was not a new thing to them in the area.

His words: “It is due to carelessness on both the part of the drivers and passengers. This is not the first time such accident would happen here. They always overload the vehicles with passengers and goods. They even carry jerry cans of petrol. This kind of accident occurs here from time to time. It is not a new thing to us here. The condition of the road is deplorable. Both the federal and state governments are trying. Government must also ensure these drivers are well trained before being allowed to drive on the roads. There should be mobile courts to try erring drivers who disobey traffic rules.”

The Minister of State for Power, Works and Housing, Hon. Mustapha Baba Shehuri, who addressed journalists in Birnin Kebbi on the state of Nigerian roads explained the intention of the government to handover the roads to private sector organisations to manage and maintain.

His words: “The Federal Government has being doing its best. If you would recall, the former administration budgeted N15 billion for construction and reconstruction of all roads in the country. Meanwhile, we have over 200 federal government roads that need reconstruction and over 500 new roads that need to be constructed. But in the 2016-2017 budget, N200 billion was budgeted for road construction and reconstruction despite the fact that we are in economic recession. This time around, over N300 billion was budgeted for roads. Federal government is now looking for a way to invite investors to take over these roads when completed and charge little levies like N100 from road users. I think, ordinary Nigerians would not mind paying as long as these roads are motorable.”

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