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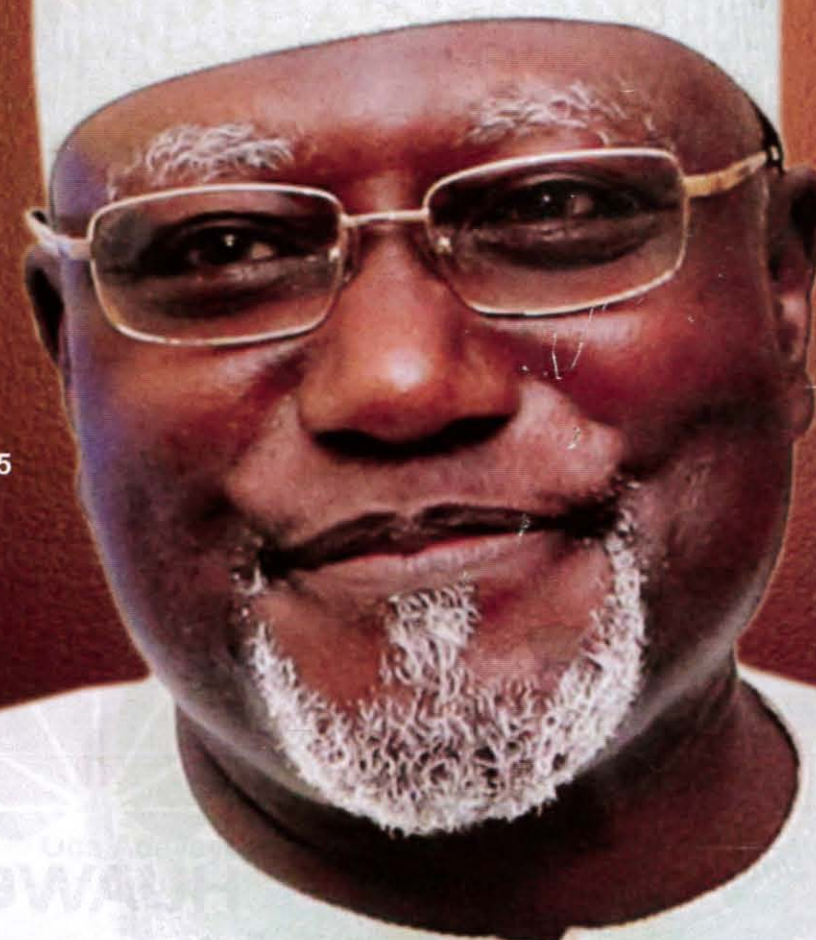
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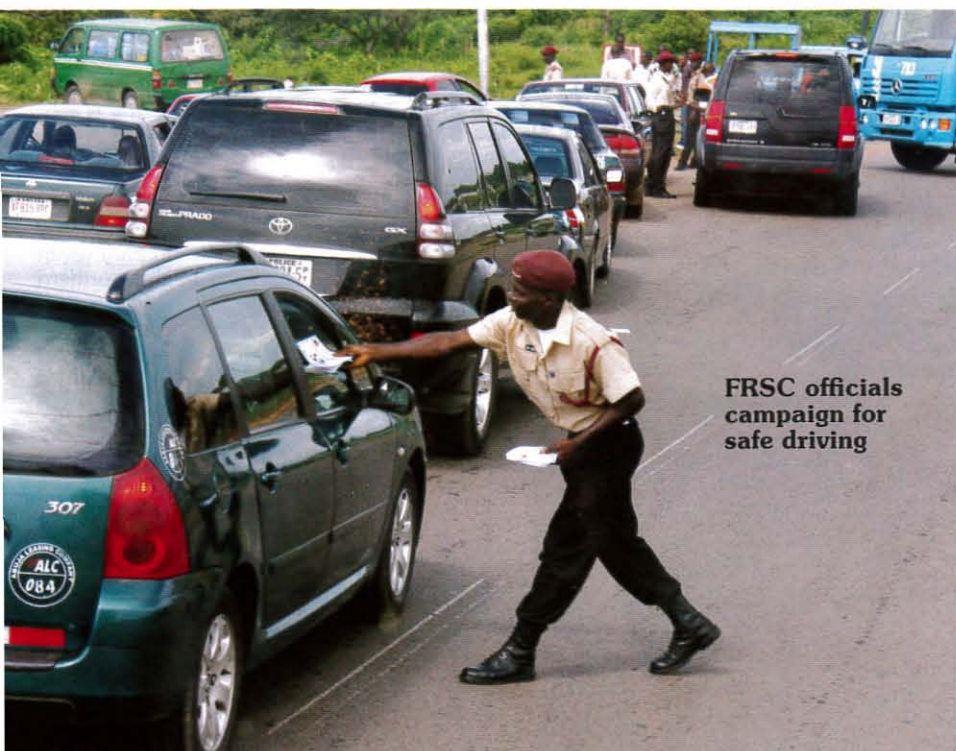
SAVING DSS FROM DAURA



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FRSC officials campaign for safe driving

Yuletide: Keeping The Roads Safe

As the Yuletide approaches, more Nigerians are expected to travel to places outside their base to enjoy the festive season, the FRSC campaigns for an accident-free season



Passengers travelling for Christmas

By JULIANA UCHE-OKOBI

Many Nigerians dread the 'ember months', especially December. The reason is that many view these months as times when human and vehicular traffic become heavier on roads resulting in increased road accidents.

If the roads were in good condition, there probably would not be any room for fear of accidents. But as some Nigerians argue, most Nigerian roads are death traps, which has resulted in fatal accidents.

But it is worth mentioning that while the ember months are loathed by some Nigerians following the fear of accidents, road mishaps are not restricted to the last quarter of the year but are recorded in other times of the year. And though road accidents are also not peculiar to Nigeria, the country is worst hit when juxtaposed with other countries of Africa and also ranks high when compared with other countries across the globe.

For instance, the 2014 report of the World Health Organisation, WHO, showed that Nigeria ranked second-highest in the rate of road accidents among the 193 countries surveyed. In Africa, the report said Nigeria is the most dangerous country with 33.7 percent deaths per 100,000 persons yearly. Stating that one in every four accidents that result in deaths in Africa occurred in Nigeria, the WHO report, entitled, "Road Safety in the WHO African Region," further stressed that road accident was the third leading cause of death in Nigeria.

Other countries of Africa closely trailing Nigeria according to the report are South Africa, which occupied the second position with 31.9 per cent per 100,000 population, followed by Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The WHO report no doubt, was a confirmation of the deadly state of Nigerian roads and also confirmed fatality record in many areas of the country. Information from the database of Nigeria Watch, a research project that monitors violence and human security in Nigeria, shows that between June 2006 and May 2014, Nigeria lost about 15,090 lives 30,075 road accidents. According to Nigeria Watch, the highest fatality occurred in 2013 with 2,061 deaths recorded, which it said was a 2.8 per cent leap from the 1,652 deaths recorded in 2012. Nigeria Watch database revealed that Lagos State was worst hit with 1,579 deaths recorded in 620 accidents.

As reports have shown, Nigeria has a total road length of about 194,000 kilometres comprising 34,120 kilometres of federal roads, 30,500 kilometres of state roads and 129,580 kilometres of local roads. With a population of over 167 million, and a road population ratio of 860 persons per square kilometers, it is not in doubt that there is so much pressure on the roads, many of which have not been maintained for years. This pressure, the

Federal Road Safety Commission, FRSC once said in 2012, accounted for the high number of road accidents recorded in the country.

A lot of factors have been fingered as being responsible for the carnage witnessed on Nigerian roads almost on a daily basis. Hyginus Omeje, sector commander, FRSC, Lagos, divided these factors into human and other related factors. According to him, human factors such as recklessness on the part of drivers, inadequate vehicle maintenance, drinking while driving, constitute about 80 per cent of accidents on Nigerian roads while some other environmental factors such as bad road and bad weather constitute the remaining 20 per cent.

Omeje pointed out that the major issue is the human element and less of the state of the roads. "If the road is bad, then it behooves on the driver to apply more caution, drive more carefully, and avoid over-speeding. If there is a mechanical challenge such as bad brake or second-hand tyre, the driver who understands the vehicle should also be able to apply caution knowing that his vehicle is not in good condition. So, everything boils down to the driver and that is the human factor," the sector commander said.

In his study of the trends and patterns of fatal road accidents in Nigeria between 2006 and 2014, Vitus Ukoji, an information retrieval specialist at Nigeria Watch and a research fellow at the French Institute for Research in Africa, IFRA, noted that while politics may not be directly linked to the state of Nigerian roads, it has indirect link, as decisions regarding roads, including contracts and maintenance are taken by those in power.

Ukoji maintained that party activities, governance, contract evaluation as well as inadequate budgetary allocations, frustrate genuine attempts by ministries and parastatals, including the FRSC to make the roads safe, as they are left with inadequate human and material resources. Again, he noted that because contracts are often politicised, there are a lot of irregularities and unnecessary inflation of contract sums, all of which make it difficult for the roads to be properly maintained.

But besides the issue of contracts, and budget, Ukoji also blamed what he described as the "indiscriminate" use of siren by politicians and recklessness on the part of their drivers as another cause of deaths on Nigerian roads. The researcher is



Omeje: Sees human factor as major cause of accidents

right. In 2013, Festus Iyayi, a professor of Business Administration and former president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU was killed in a ghastly motor accident. The professor was on his way to Kano with three other members of ASUU, University of Benin chapter, when the vehicle they were travelling in was hit by a police escort vehicle in the convoy of Idris Wada, Kogi State governor, around Lokoja, state capital.

That was not the first time Wada's convoy was involved in an accident. In 2012, the involvement of his convoy in another accident along Lokoja-Ajaokuta road resulted in the death of his aide-de-camp, Idris Mohammed. In the same year, the convoy of governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo State was also involved in an accident that led to the death of three journalists. In the same 2012 in Nasarawa



Ukoji: Blames 'indiscriminate' use of siren as another cause of deaths on Nigerian roads

State, governor Al-Makura lost three political aides when his convoy got involved in a multiple auto crash along Gadabuke-Keffi road in the state.

That was not all. Before the Edo governor's incident, Ibrahim Shema, former governor of Katsina State, had in 2011, lost his ADC and four others as his convoy was involved in an accident. That accident happened just two days after a similar incident happened in Niger State. Two persons travelling in the convoy of former Governor Babangida Aliyu for a political rally lost their lives following an auto crash.

But it is not only those in governors' convoys that are reckless. Some commercial drivers are equally reckless, as they struggle to meet their daily delivery and make some profit for the upkeep of their families. Reports have shown that while some drivers have visual challenges, which make it difficult for them to see the road clearly, others have poor knowledge of road signs and regulations. Yet, some others drive while drunk just as others engage in excessive speed irrespective of the bad state of the roads.

Besides bus drivers, reckless driving is also one of the bad habits of trailer and tanker drivers, whose activities have also left deaths in their trail. As the FRSC reported in 2011, Nigeria has an average of 5,000 tankers conveying about 150 million litres of fuel to different parts of the country and about 2,500 trailers in dry cargo plying Nigerian roads on a daily basis. Between 2007 and 2010, Nigeria reportedly recorded about 4,017 tanker/trailer crashes, amounting to an average of 1,148 crashes per year. These crashes, reports said, led to about 4,076 fatalities.

If vehicles were properly maintained, perhaps, accidents would be minimal. But as the FRSC has often stated, many drivers hardly maintain their vehicles. "Before you start work in the morning as a commercial driver, even as a private car owner, you should ensure that everything in your car, ranging from the brake, tyre and other components of the vehicle are in good condition before you set out. Brake failure and sometimes unexpected removal of tyre on the highway have resulted in fatal accidents," George Okeshola, a commercial driver, said.

While this is important, he however pointed out that some of the drivers are guilty of this, as they hardly pay attention to their vehicles until they break down and get them stranded on the road. According to Okeshola, most drivers do not maintain their vehicles because of their daily struggle

to make more money. This is particularly so as some of them are not the owners of the vehicles but drive and render account to the owner on a daily or weekly basis. "So, in their effort to make the required delivery and also make some money for themselves, they ignore the vehicle; they only remember to attend to them when they can no longer work and by that time, the cost of maintenance is very high," the commercial driver told the magazine.

Ego Nwabuike, a commuter, recalled her experience in a commercial bus in one of her trips to Ibadan last May. Twenty minutes after the bus left Berger Park in Lagos, she watched as the driver consistently inched towards the median uncontrollably. "Initially I did not understand what was happening. As he kept moving to the left side, I thought he wanted to overtake another vehicle in front but as he kept nearing the median without stopping, I knew that something was wrong. Eventually he hit the median and I screamed thinking that the bus would tumble over to the other side of the road," she recalled. But Nwabuike and her co-travellers were lucky. The bus did not tumble though it caused a deep crack on the median. But as passengers asked what happened, the driver explained that the steering was faulty, which was why he could not control the vehicle.

Apart from over-speeding, brake failure, an offshoot of lack of maintenance, has often been cited as the cause of some of the accidents involving fuel tankers. Brake failure, coupled with speed, were said to have been the twin cause of the notorious tanker accidents at Iyana-Ipaja in Lagos, and Upper-Iweka, Onitsha, Anambra State in last May and June respectively.

Peter Kathy, chairman of the Nigerian Red Cross Society, who said 69 people were burnt to death while 30 others were injured, said, "The tanker driver lost his break while descending the hill from Boromeo and Army Barracks end of the Onitsha-Enugu Expressway towards Upper Iweka." His anger was particularly on the attitude of the driver who was also consumed by the inferno caused by the explosion. "If the driver of the tanker were alive, he would have been arraigned in court because it is multiple murder. He was reckless. He knew he was fully loaded with petrol and yet he decided to direct his vehicle into a motor park," Kathy said.

The Iyana-Ipaja incident, which happened just few days after the Onitsha disaster, was also linked to brake failure and fatigue on the part of the driver. Though no life was lost, about 14 persons reportedly sustained injuries while goods worth millions of naira were destroyed as several shops got burnt in the fire that

followed the explosion of the tanker.

Obviously, the recklessness of Nigerian drivers appears to be more evident in Lagos State. Though Omeje said the spate of road crashes has reduced in the state this year, he however maintained that they are still far from achieving their target for this year. In the last quarter of 2012 for instance, Lagos recorded about 1,357 crashes and 148 deaths. In the last quarter of 2013, the figure dropped to 1,091 crashes and 176 fatalities but surged again to 1,654 and 186 deaths in 2014. Though the year has not ended, he however expressed optimism that the figure dropped by about 705 crashes in the 'ember months' and 78 deaths so far.



Iyayi: Killed in a ghastly motor accident around Lokoja

But those were the figures for the 'ember months'.

On the whole, Omeje stated that in 2012, Lagos recorded 4,817 crashes and 546 deaths. In 2013, there were 3,505 crashes and 450 deaths while in 2014, there were 4,387 crashes and 536 fatalities. In 2015, the figures dropped to 3,042 crashes and 340 deaths.

With such alarming rate of casualties, not just in Nigeria but at the global level, and with a view to stemming the trend, the United Nations in 2011 adopted the period 2011-2020 as the UN Decade of Action for road safety within which time efforts would be focused on stabilising and reducing global road traffic deaths by 2020. FRSC has put up different programmes to nip the causes of accidents in the bud.

Ban Ki-Moon, UN secretary-general, was optimistic that if the action was strictly implemented, lives would be saved. There was also the Accra Declaration to reduce accident by 50 per cent by the year 2015. But as Omeje said, the year has not ended and it would be out of order for anybody to say whether the goal has been met or not.

But to ensure that that the country achieves the UN decade of action by 2020, the FRSC has put some policies in place and has embarked on some programmes aimed at making the dream feasible. Omeje said the commission has been going to worship centres and motor parks sensitising and enlightening people on the right road usage. These campaigns involve educating Nigerians on road signs and their meanings, as some drivers are still ignorant of the signs. As at last week, he said the FRSC was having motorized road shows in partnership with Guinness, telling people the danger of drinking while driving. The sector commander who described as aberration, the presence of LASTMA officials at every corner of the state to control traffic, said it ought not be so if drivers were law abiding and would respect traffic rules.

However, it is a bit disturbing that despite all such efforts to sanitise the system by the FRSC, Nigerian roads are still unsafe and drivers still engage in those attitudes known to cause tragedies on the roads. Some of them still drive while drunk while some contravene traffic rules indiscriminately. But as the FRSC which works closely with the drivers maintain, a lot of improvement has been recorded.

For instance, Omeje said the agency had acquired a digital breathalyzer, which they have deployed to use since last week to measure the amount of alcohol in the breath of drivers who were randomly picked. Contrary to the belief that some drivers drink while driving, he said the test has not recorded up to five positive cases, as at last Thursday, a revelation he said was evident that drivers are learning from the trainings given by the corps. But that does not mean that there are no defaulters. This year alone, he said the FRSC has prosecuted about 400 drivers at mobile courts for various offences.

In addition to the breathalyzer, the FRSC has also introduced the use of speed limit device to checkmate excess speed by drivers. Whereas the agency is enforcing subtle implementation of the device at the moment, the effective date for full enforcement of the device is April 1, 2016. But in the interim, Omeje said the FRSC has been meeting and sensitising stakeholders in the transport industry

Road Traffic Accidents

Rank	Country	Rate	Rank	Country	Rate	Rank	Country	Rate
1	Iran	43.54	59	Honduras	21.43	117	Greece	12.27
2	Iraq	41.41	60	Cameroon	21.27	118	Turkey	12.23
3	Venezuela	41.06	61	Gabon	21.23	119	Brunei	11.90
4	Guyana	39.80	62	Bolivia	21.16	120	Uzbekistan	11.84
5	Libya	38.61	63	Nicaragua	21.10	121	Bahamas	11.79
6	Dominican Rep.	38.51	64	India	20.74	122	Arab Emirates	11.70
7	Uganda	37.14	65	Solomon Isl.	20.37	123	Philippines	11.56
8	Burkina Faso	36.56	66	Guinea	20.33	124	Chile	11.11
9	Nigeria	35.39	67	Pakistan	20.22	125	South Korea	11.08
10	Angola	34.96	68	Ethiopia	20.16	126	Zimbabwe	10.65
11	Guinea-Bissau	34.37	69	Cape Verde	20.06	127	Poland	10.42
12	Oman	33.84	70	Morocco	19.98	128	North Korea	10.09
13	Mauritania	33.75	71	Kazakhstan	19.86	129	Cyprus	10.07
14	Thailand	33.57	72	Indonesia	19.68	130	Ukraine	10.04
15	Comoros	32.52	73	Belize	19.19	131	United States	9.99
16	Mali	32.49	74	Algeria	19.11	132	Croatia	9.47
17	Yemen	31.63	75	Tunisia	18.61	133	Guatemala	9.45
18	Sudan	31.13	76	Tajikistan	18.59	134	Bulgaria	9.44
19	Ecuador	30.68	77	China	18.49	135	Romania	9.39
20	Niger	30.59	78	Uruguay	18.41	136	Portugal	8.57
21	Tanzania	29.12	79	Swaziland	18.31	137	Lithuania	8.34
22	Eritrea	27.94	80	Suriname	18.25	138	Latvia	8.19
23	Afghanistan	27.82	81	Togo	18.03	139	New Zealand	8.19
24	Paraguay	27.76	82	Congo	17.53	140	Serbia	7.88
25	Sierra Leone	27.40	83	Turkmenistan	17.41	141	Slovakia	7.58
26	Benin	27.30	84	Lebanon	17.20	142	Belgium	7.37
27	Chad	27.04	85	Colombia	17.05	143	Macedonia	6.59
28	Timor-Leste	26.62	86	Trinidad/Tob.	16.95	144	Barbados	6.58
29	Zambia	26.51	87	Peru	16.86	145	Czech Republic	6.54
30	Lesotho	25.94	88	Armenia	16.81	146	Cuba	6.41
31	Liberia	25.48	89	New Guinea	16.62	147	Hungary	6.17
32	Senegal	25.47	90	Mongolia	16.51	148	Fiji	6.13
33	Saudi Arabia	25.33	91	Cambodia	16.46	149	Italy	6.03
34	Malaysia	25.25	92	Russia	16.42	150	Slovenia	5.87
35	Kenya	25.11	93	Central Africa	16.25	151	Canada	5.86
36	Jordan	25.00	94	Egypt	15.34	152	Australia	5.67
37	South Africa	24.64	95	Bahrain	14.92	153	France	5.65
38	Ghana	24.60	96	Haiti	14.69	154	Luxembourg	5.26
39	Gambia	24.55	97	Myanmar	14.56	155	Estonia	5.21
40	Cote d'Ivoire	24.51	98	Montenegro	14.55	156	Austria	5.17
41	El Salvador	24.33	99	Bhutan	14.53	157	Singapore	4.75
42	Brazil	24.13	100	Kuwait	14.43	158	Finland	4.31
43	Rwanda	24.06	101	Panama	13.77	159	Denmark	3.96
44	Madagascar	23.43	102	Moldova	13.57	160	Germany	3.94
45	Viet Nam	23.10	103	Georgia	13.38	161	Ireland	3.91
46	Syria	23.08	104	Qatar	13.33	162	Israel	3.89
47	Namibia	22.82	105	Argentina	13.11	163	Malta	3.66
48	DR Congo	22.53	106	Sri Lanka	13.05	164	Spain	3.65
49	Kyrgyzstan	22.48	107	Azerbaijan	12.89	165	Switzerland	3.61
50	Nepal	22.32	108	Mauritius	12.89	166	Iceland	3.54
51	Mozambique	22.23	109	Bangladesh	12.87	167	Netherlands	3.51
52	Malawi	22.12	110	Costa Rica	12.84	168	Japan	3.28
53	Botswana	22.04	111	Mexico	12.80	169	United Kingdom	2.97
54	Djibouti	21.90	112	Jamaica	12.68	170	Norway	2.86
55	Laos	21.84	113	Belarus	12.50	171	Sweden	2.36
56	Burundi	21.83	114	Bosnia/Herzeg.	12.49	172	Maldives	1.05
57	South Sudan	21.80	115	Albania	12.44			
58	Somalia	21.65	116	Equ. Guinea	12.27			

Source: WHO, May 2014

World Rankings Calculations Are Age Adjusted Death Rates Per 100,000 Population.

such as NUPENG, National Union of Road Transport Workers, and the Association of Maritime Truck Owners on the need to install the device, stressing that implementation is for commercial fleet operators.

With the havoc wreaked by tanker accidents, the FRSC sector commander also said that they are meeting with their unions across the six geo-political zones to ensure that tanker accidents are reduced. On their part, he said the Corps also trained some of its officers on what is called "safe to load policy" whereby the officers are stationed at the tank farms where the tankers lift fuel. The essence is for the officers to check the roadworthiness of the vehicle, whether the driver has license and if so whether the license is original or fake. "If in the course of the investigation it is discovered that a driver is not properly licensed or that the vehicle is not in good condition and the driver is given ticket to go and put right whatever that is wrong but he ignores the instruction and comes back to lift fuel, the directive is that he should not be allowed to load. The truth is that some of these trucks are older than the FRSC," Omeje lamented. He believes that this new directive would help to curb tanker-related accidents in Nigeria.

But to effectively carry out its operations, Omeje said the Corps needs assistance, as there are notable constraints. For instance, he said they need cranes, patrol vehicles and ambulances, which would be stationed on different highways across the state. He lamented that a situation whereby they rely on private cranes in their operations makes it difficult for them to effectively function. "The state government should have crane for emergencies; the FRSC should have crane, heavy duty trucks for emergencies but these things are not there," Omeje lamented.

As some analysts have noted, the failure of drivers to go through driving school is another contributor to the problems on Nigerian roads. Basic things such as road signs, the fact that drinking and driving take parallel dimensions and never meet, are learnt at driving schools, which many drivers, especially in Lagos run away from. But as Omeje said, the era where an individual would sit in the comfort of his room and send someone to get a driver's license for him is over. "If you are a fresh applicant you must go back to driving school and proceed from there to the VIO for test. If they are satisfied, the VIO will now refer you to the FRSC for capture," the sector commander explained adding, "people must know and obey traffic rules."

If drivers obey traffic rules and do the right thing whether or not there is somebody to direct them, Omeje is certain that the roads would be more accident free.