

REDUCING ROAD ACCIDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Road accident is one of the leading causes of death in Nigeria. Our roads have become death trap where citizens are slaughtered on a daily basis. Daily death resulting from avoidable road accident seriously threatens every family, killing and maiming innocent lives. Road accidents always cause invaluable human tragedy, heartache and affliction, not to mention the huge economic losses, property damage and cost for medical treatment. The focus of this paper therefore is to examine the trends and rate of accidents in Nigeria. Also attempts are made to x-ray the causes and factors that have sustained this menace. Finally, necessary solutions are proffered with a view to reducing road accident in Nigeria.

Introduction

Kari Benz is generally acknowledged to be the inventor of modern automobile, which he built in Germany in 1885. The invention was greeted with great enthusiasm and happiness. It was a major breakthrough, which ushered in an era of economic development and progress. Motor serves as a useful means of transportation, which replaced other stressful means of transportation, which hitherto existed. It leads to economic boom as goods and services are now easily transported from one place to another.

Then there was nothing like accident. The world's first road traffic death involving a motor vehicle is alleged to have occurred on 31st August, 1869. An Irish scientist Mary Ward cited in wikipedia (accessed 20/5/2010) died when she fell out of her cousin's steam car and was ran over.

Today road accident is now a social problem especially in developing countries. The raising tide of vehicle accident in Nigeria is now a major source of worry to all Nigerians. Countless number of lives has been lost as a result of road accidents. People die everyday on our

roads even as we write somebody just died. Our roads have turned to graveyard. To travel on roads in Nigeria is now a nightmare for all and sundry. Citizens don't know what to do anymore and government seem not to be helping matters. Embarking on any trip by road is like a suicide mission and in order to assuage the fears associated with traveling, people have resorted to 'prayer and fasting'. The prevalence of road accident in Nigeria has made people to believe that there must be a spiritual dimension to its occurrence.

The issue of road accident is one that cannot be overlooked because of its economic implication and cost which cannot be quantified. We cannot count how many businessmen and women including academic, politicians, leaders and the clergy have died through this process.

Road Accident Defined

Many different terms are commonly used to describe vehicle collisions. The World Health Organization cited in Wikipedia (accessed 21/5/2010) used the term road traffic injury while US Census Bureau also cited in wikipedia (accessed 21/5/2010) uses the term motor vehicle accidents and transport Canada uses the term motor vehicle traffic collision. Other terms that are commonly used include auto accident, car accident, car crash, car smash, car wreck, motor vehicle collision, Personal Injury Collision (PIC), road accident, road traffic accident, road traffic collision as well as other unofficial terms including smash up and fender bender. However in Nigeria, the

term used to describe vehicle collision is Road Accident.

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary 7th Edition, accident is an unpleasant event, especially in a vehicle that happens unexpectedly and causes injury or damage. Also according to Wikipedia, a traffic collision or road accident is when a road vehicle collides with another vehicle, pedestrian, animal, road debris, or other geographical or architectural obstacle. Traffic collision can result in injury, property damage or death.

It is worthy to note at this point that some organizations in the U.S cited in Wikipedia (accessed 21/5/2010) have began to avoid the term accident based on their knowledge of factors involved in collision. According to them, the word suggests an unpreventable, unpredictable event and disregards the opportunity for the driver(s) involved to avoid the crash.

Rate of Accident

Road accident in Nigeria is a major cause of disability and death. No official record can truly represent the exact number of deaths and casualties resulting from accident. A great number of accidents in this country are not reported or documented probably due to the location and time of its occurrence. However, one cannot as a result of these inadequacies ignore the relevance of official records.

According to Major Rasaki Salawu (RTD) as reported in Daily Sun Newspaper of July 2008, gave analysis of road fatality and causality on Nigerian roads since the past 28years as follows: In the first decade - 18, 748 persons were killed and 209, 080

injured while between 1990 to date the toll have increased to 78, 783 deaths and 208, 600 injured or maimed, bringing the total lives lost to 154, 557 and those injured to 552, 513 an average of 66 casualties per day. He added that a Nigerian has between one and three chances of being injured in road accident in his lifetime.

Furthermore, the Corp Marshal, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) Osita Chidoka stated at the European bank for reconstruction and development (EBRD) conference held in London (July 4th 2008) that there are an estimated 161 deaths per 10, 000 vehicles in Nigeria.

Recently, reporting on road accident in the Nigeria dailies, daily trust on three issues: it was reported on January 30th 2009 two people were killed in a car accident at Abaji (Abuja). On April 6th 2009 seventeen women of the Catholic Church died along Makurdi-Enugu road. On April 8th 2009 an officer of federal road safety commission reported that fuel tankers have killed about 5,157 people in different accidents in the last three years.

In the same way vanguard newspaper of March 30th 2009 reported that seven people were killed in multiple accident in Kano. Also Thisday newspaper of April 7th 2009 reported that eleven people died in Ovia river in Edo state as a result of car accident.

Finally, the people of Edo state will never forget 14th December 2008 when Chris Nwachukwu and Mr. Greg Haruna chief press secretary and personal assistant to Edo state government respectively lost their lives in an accident along Benin-Auchi road. Also on June 17th

2009 Chief Barrister Samson Ehabafe, a one time PDP state chairman and his son were burnt beyond recognition after a collision along Benin-Auchi road. This goes to show that road accident does not respect status or station.

Causes of Road Accident

A study by K. Rumar in 1985, it was found that 57% of crashes were due solely to driver factors 27% to combined vehicle and driver factor, 3% solely to road factors, 3% to combined road driver and vehicle factors, 2% solely to vehicle factors and 1% to combined roadway and vehicle factors. It is clear from this analysis that human factor is the greatest in the cause of accident.

Human Factor: Infact human factors contribute wholly or partly to about 93% crashes. Besides, a number of the accidents on our roads are caused by recklessness of drivers. Many drivers on our roads cannot interpret road signs. Moreso most drivers do not adhere to speed limit. The vehicles are commonly used well in excess of the design load capacity. This makes it difficult for drivers of such vehicles to control them in safe and reasonable manner. Drunk driving is another human factor that can lead to accident. Most drivers especially our commercial drives drink alcohol before driving. Even Okada riders are the worst culprits. Alcohol could make drivers feel high behind the wheels. It could cause drivers to have less concentration while driving. Above all alcohol could cause drivers to take risk not minding the lives of passengers. There are

drivers who have one impairment or another as a result of old age especially vision impairment. These types of people are responsible for most of the carnages on our high ways.

Road Condition

Nigerian roads have become a huge slaughter slab, where human lives worth nothing. Virtually all the federal roads are in deplorable state occasioned by failed portion and potholes. The road from Lagos to Benin, Onitsha to Owerri and Port-Harcourt to Enugu etc are all in a sorry state. The government cannot claim ignorance of this fact as every minister of transport or works have one time or the other paid an assessment visit to some of these roads to no avail.

Vehicle Condition

Most vehicle in Nigeria are not serviced regularly nor are they serviced by authorized manufacturers service agents nor by people who have access to manufacturers manuals. A lot of improvisation therefore goes into vehicle maintenance thereby creating room for fake parts dealers. Fake parts can fail at any time and these failures do cause a lot of accidents on Nigerian roads. Moreso, the absence of skilled work force can also affect the standard of car maintenance.

Solution to Road Accident

The paper believes that if the following strategies are adopted and implemented by government and all relevant stakeholders the problem of road accident will be drastically reduced:

1. Developing a strategic master plan:

In order to achieve this, all stakeholders must be involved which includes the following: Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), The Nigeria Police, Federal and all State Ministries of Works and Transport, Health, Education, Road Engineers, Policy Makers, Insurance Companies, Automobile Companies, Psychologist, Consultants and Researchers on Road Safety Issues.

2. Road Maintenance and Construction:

In this regard, government and the private sector should cooperate in order to realize the dream of having roads without potholes or bad spots. Government should consider privatizing road construction and maintenance since successive governments have failed in remedying the deplorable state of our roads.

3. Road Safety Education:

Towards this end, Ministry of Education should consider evolving children traffic education. We have had cases where children steal the car keys of their parents to commit road havoc. We should catch them young. We should make them understand issues concerning safety on our roads and the role of children and youths.

4. Issuance of Drivers License:

Government should ensure that the agency responsible for this exercise is restructured and empowered to carry

out testing of driving skills before the issuance of drivers license it is also advocated here that prospective drivers should undergo psychiatric test to determine their mental balance.

5. **Road Users Education:** This type of education should be designed to help those drivers that are not literate and did not attend any driving school. It involves awareness creation and also training this set of drivers on how to interpret road signs as well as equipping them with defensive driving techniques.

6. **Enforcement of Driving Laws:**

The Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) and other law enforcement agencies should enforce all laws on drunk driving. Where none exists the commission should work with other relevant authorities and stakeholders to introduce a bill to National Assembly to make careless and drunk driving an offence punishable with stiff penalties.

7. **The use of Breathalyzer:**

Breathalyzer test should be introduced. Breathalyzer is a device used to measure the amount of alcohol in the breath of a driver.

8. **Developing other means of Transport:**

Government should expedite action in ensuring that other means of transportation are introduced so as to reduce vehicular traffic which will ultimately result in

the reduction of carnage on our roads.

Conclusion

It is the writers informed opinion that accidents don't just happen, they are caused. It is an established fact that human factor constitute 93% of accident. Based on this, there should be no need to shift blame; rather we should take responsibility by accepting attitudinal change as a panacea.

This will involve a change in the way we use our roads especially the highways. Discipline should be our watchword, adhering to road safety rules and ensuring that our vehicles are fit for the road.

The need to improve the deplorable state of our roads needs to be reemphasized. It has come to a point where government should declare a state of emergency in this sector. Federal Road Safety commission (FRSC) should be repositioned. Their focus should include road maintenance. In other words, they should be empowered by government to monitor all road maintenance and construction with a view to ensuring that they are executed in record time and to specification. In addition, they should ensure that all cars and lorries not properly packed on the highway are towed away and owners made to pay heavily.

Finally, we all should adopt defensive driving techniques, which emphasize carefulness, and anticipating conditions that can lead to accident. If we can adopt these measures so enumerated, we would have succeeded in curbing if not eradicating road accident in Nigeria.

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