

Unlicensed Road Menders and Road Maintenance in Ekiti, Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Roads. Ekiti. Communities. Motorists

ABSTRACT Survival strategies are becoming the unique features of developing countries, especially when they face serious economic hardships. This need for survival has prompted the emergence of another 'road construction experts' without any formal training in road construction and maintenance on the major highways in Nigeria. This study therefore examined this trade (referred to as road menders) and the perception of the people on their activities on the Nigeria high ways using Ekiti state as case study. A representative sample of three hundred and eighty respondents made up of both the road menders, as well as community members were involved in the research. Findings revealed that the activities of the self-employed road contractors constitute a threat to the public and an embarrassment to the nation. A number of suggestions were made to avoid this situation.

INTRODUCTION

Bad roads are becoming one of the identifying characteristics of Nigerian structures. From the east to West and North to South, there has been tales of woes regarding the state of Nigerian roads. Reports and findings reveal that billions of naira is spent yearly on road construction and maintenance (Akinrolabu 2001). By the end of the first three years of the third republic for example, it was recorded that over three hundred and twenty billion naira had been awarded for road construction and maintenance (Ogundipe 2003). Some roads have become death traps resulting to physical deformities and even deaths of the motorists.

In regard to this, several moves are being made by the individuals, community groups and associations in form of community efforts aimed at repairing and filling the pot holes and, if need be, completely rehabilitate the roads. But lately, in the last few years to be precise, another group of individuals without any form of license from the government or support from the communities concerned have emerged on the highways filling the damaged roads with sand (as a form of road repair) and later barricading the roads to collect money from motorists as compensation for the services rendered. In this study such individuals are termed 'road menders'.

Without doubt, a distant assessment of this development might appear commendable, especially if they have filled up the potholes on

roads one has plied before, and such trips have been through pains and discomfort, which is one of the consequences of traveling on Nigerian roads. A closer look, however, will make one doubt whether these set of people have relevant roles they play in the maintenance of roads, considering the short and long run effects of their actions on these roads (Fed. Road Safety Commission 1989; Fagbuyi 2001).

These unregistered road menders begin their activities by rising very early in the morning, filling certain portion of holes on the roads with sand and later spend the rest of the day collecting money from motorists and passers by. One may be curious to know whether these set of people have any other jobs they do apart from this road mending. Aside this, the disadvantages of the activities of these people on the road appear more grievous than the services they render (Fagbuyi 2001; FRSC 1989). These road menders in their bid to collect money barricade the highways, thereby making them stand the risk of being hit by oncoming vehicles. This is because; vehicles coming may find it difficult to halt at such short notices. This may lead to accidents leading to loss of lives of the people. Based on this, the question one may ask is why road mending? Does mending have positive impact on the society? The efforts of this people might not be commensurable to the risks they pose for themselves, the innocent motorists and the society at large.

The physical appearance of these road

menders while on the road without doubt is frightening as they dress in rags and tattered clothes to show how serious their business is; Their forceful appearance in collecting money is a thing to be scared of; Drivers plying such roads for the first time may be frightened and lose control sighting them at a distance, and this could be another source of road accident. Aside this, strength displayed by the people, standing all day in the scorching sun or heavy rainfall collecting money for their services are questionable. Some of them appear to be under the influence of psychoactive substances. This might be so considering the findings of Olatunji (2000) in a study where he discovered that road menders are among the largest consumers of alcohol (Olatunji 2000). Another potential danger is that these menders could become criminals especially armed robbers on our roads if they no longer receive compensation from the public as expected. Not that alone, neighborhoods and communities where these self-employed groups conduct their business may stand the risk of being robbed, or possibly assaulted as these menders could pounce on them at will since they are close-by.

Working illegally on highways as road menders can also serve as a means of disguise for criminal activities on the highways. This could be a hard nut to crack for innocent motorists, nearby communities and even security officials as knowing their true identity could become difficult. From these foregoing discussions it will be important to understand the socio-economic characteristics of this road, menders and the perception of the neighbouring communities on their activities. This becomes important in this study in order to identify the motives behind road mending and the right approach to this issue.

It will be pertinent at this juncture to acknowledge the efforts of these people in mending and rehabilitating the damaged roads due to neglect by the body concerned. However, there is need to exercise caution on this achievements as empirical evidence to support their achievements are not available. Rather, the roads are at the risk of further damage. This is because some of these roads are only filled temporarily and within a short time such fillings are removed as vehicles ply such roads. More so, these menders, from observation, only fill portion of the road where it will be possible to collect money thereby leaving the other damaged areas undone. Based on this, one is apt to ask

whether their contributions have any positive impact on road construction and maintenance in 20th century technology.

This becomes crucial considering the safety of lives and properties of the motorists, neighbouring communities and even the road menders themselves. Reports have indicated that about 150,000 people die daily on road mishaps globally (Olagunju 2002). In the same vein, in spite of the billions of naira spent on road maintenance and construction (Fasuan 2000), Nigeria is said to have the most dangerous road network in Africa (Kadiri 1998). Based on these issues, it will be imperative in this work to assess the issue of unregistered road mending and its relevance to road maintenance. The need to explore other causes of road accidents and deaths on highways is essential especially when the attention of the people has always been on bad roads and careless driving as the causes of accidents (Idakwoji 1992; FRSC 1997; Olagunju 2002).

It is pertinent therefore to understand the socio-economic characteristics of the road menders, causes of road mending, the effects of their activities on the society and the reactions of the neighbouring communities to them. Based on the problem highlighted above, the following questions arise for this study; what are the causes of road mending? Does this road mending have impact on road construction and the society at large? How do the neighbouring communities perceive the actions of road menders? These questions will help throw light on this development in road maintenance in the country

Objectives of the Study

Following from the discussions above, the general objective of this study was to examine road mending as a form of road maintenance on Nigerian roads. The specific objectives were to

- (1) Examine the socio- economic and demographic characteristics of the menders
- (2) Understand the reactions of the neighbouring communities to road mending
- (3) Assess their impacts on road maintenance and the society in general
- (4) Recommend a better maintenance culture for both the government and the public.

Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses formulated for this study:

Ho: Bad government policies on road

construction and maintenance lead to road mending work by the unlicensed road menders.

H1: No relationship exists between bad government policies and road mending work by the unregistered road menders.

Ho: The act of road mending results to armed robbery by the unlicensed road menders.

Ho: The act of road mending may not lead to armed robbery.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Ekiti State, South Western Nigeria. The state does not enjoy good access and feeder roads. They have been bedeviled with this problem for quite a long time. This without doubt has encouraged this type of business in the state. In conducting the study, a total number of one hundred well-designed structured questionnaires containing open –ended and closed-ended questions were distributed to the road menders. The reasons are due to the fact that the respondents were located at different access and focus point within the state. Equally, a total number of three hundred respondents that were neighbours or residents around the areas where these road menders were working were asked series of questions that will enable the researcher have a deeper understanding of the problem. This was done through the distribution of questionnaire to them. This study was further complemented with in depth interview to facilitate a deeper knowledge of the problem for this study. Out of the three hundred questionnaires distributed among the selected respondents in the communities where these menders are operating, a total number of two hundred and eighty questionnaires were retrieved. In all, a total of three hundred and eighty respondents comprising road menders and the communities were selected for the interview.

The questions in the interview and questionnaire bothered on the socio-economic background of the respondents (both the menders and the communities) and menders' perception of their work. Also, the communities were asked questions on their perception of this new form of trade in their communities, their perceived cause of involvement in such trade and its impact on the communities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings on sex revealed that all the

respondents involved in road mending are male (100%). This is not strange since this type of trade is not meant for women. First, the approach involved in doing the business involves some elements of thuggery and violence, which might not accommodate women. Also, the stress involved in sand filling the potholes may be too strenuous for the opposite sex. However, for the respondents in the communities where road mending takes place, there was equal percentage distribution. We had about equal number (49%) of male and female (51%) for the study. This enabled the researcher to have balanced information from them on this issue.

On age of the road menders, over 70% of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 40yrs. Precisely, over 50% of the age distributions were between the ages of 31 and 40 years. This is an indication that well able-bodied men were involved in this trade. About 4% remaining in the distribution were over 41 years of age. These set of people were like godfathers, but some of them were also on the site (road) to work and collect money from passers-by. Also, about 6% of the respondents were under the age of 21 years. These young ones are supposed to be in school or learning a particular trade, but the reverse is the case. They appear to be enjoying this fast means of making money. The findings revealed that 6% were below 21 years; 25% of the respondents were between the age of 21years; and 35% of the respondents were between ages 31 and 40 years respectively. The findings further revealed that 15% of the respondents were between ages 41 and 50 years and 4% of the respondents were aged 51 years and above.

Findings on the educational level of the road menders revealed that over 57% of the respondents had no formal education. Majority of them reported that they went to primary school but never completed it. This set of people could neither read nor write. Few ones among them that could write their names and read in 'Yoruba' (native language) constituted about 28%. About 15% percent of the remaining respondents could speak Pidgin English. These respondents (15%) went to secondary schools, some dropped out while the remaining claimed they passed secondary school certificate. On whether they have learnt some trade or business, over 60% of the respondents claimed they were drivers (commercial) and petty traders. They claimed that they have not been able to secure vehicles to drive. The traders

Table 1: Socio-Economic and demographic characteristics of respondents (in percentage)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	100	100
Female	-	-
Total	100	100
<i>Age</i>		
Below 21	6	6
21 – 30	40	40
31 – 40	50	50
41 and above	4	4
total	100	100
<i>Education Level</i>		
No formal Education	-	57
Primary school (uncompleted	57	28
Primary school	28	-
Secondary school (uncompleted	-	15
Secondary school	15	8
Tertiary Institution	-	-
Total	100	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	45	45
Married	15	15
Divorced	18	18
Widowed	2	2
Separated	20	20
Total	100	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Christianity	65	65
Islam	35	35
Traditional Religion	10	10
Total	100	100
<i>Approximate Income (Monthly)</i>		
Between 5,000	95	95
5,000 – 10,000	5	5
10,000 – 21,000	-	-
21,000 and above	-	-
Total	100	100
<i>No. of Years Spent on the Job</i>		
Between 1 year	20	20
1 – 2 years	35	35
2 – 4 years	45	45
5 and above	-	-
Total	100	100
<i>Ethnic Group</i>		
Yoruba	100	100
Igbo	-	-
Hasua	-	-
<i>Positions in the Family</i>		
First	35	35
Second	40	40
Third	15	15
Fourth	10	10
Total	100	100

also claimed they have no money to continue their trade due to the economic hardship in the country. The remaining 40% do not have a definite job, but they have some attachment to motor packs either as touts or bus conductors. The economic hardship in the country appears to have pushed

some of them into the trade. The findings further revealed that the respondents had no stable jobs apart from road mending.

Findings on the marital status of the respondents showed that 45% of the respondents were single while about 15% of them are married. The remaining percentage of the respondents

Table 2: Perception of road menders and road maintenance culture in Nigeria (in percentage)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Causes of Road Destruction</i>		
Heavy truck on the road	15	16
Old age of the road	21	21
Bad govt. policies on road construction	25	25
Lack of maintenance culture both government and road users	13	13
Inadequate education to the road users	15	15
Student unrest, burning of tyres on the road	11	11
Total	100	100
<i>Reasons for Road Mending</i>		
Due to govt. negligence	50	50
Voluntary mending work	10	10
Lack of employment	40	40
Total	100	100
<i>How They Feel When Working</i>		
Good	20	20
Bad	30	30
Indifference	50	50
Total	100	100
<i>Variables</i>		
<i>Whether the Job is Financially Rewarding</i>		
Yes	25	25
No	75	75
Total	100	100
<i>Drivers Reaction to Them</i>		
Good	45	45
Bad	15	15
Indifference	40	40
Total	100	100
<i>Times They Go to Work</i>		
Weekly	45	45
Daily	20	20
Monthly	20	20
Bi-monthly	15	15
Total	100	100
<i>They Leave for Site</i>		
9.00am	12	12
8.00am	18	18
7.30am	30	30
6.30am	40	40
Total	100	100
<i>Site Location</i>		
Aramoko-Igede (X)	20	20
Odo-Ado-Fajuyi (Y)	18	18
Ikere-Akure road (Z)	22	22
Iworoko to Otun (0)	40	40
Total	100	100

Table 3: Feelings about the job

<i>Location</i>	<i>V. good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fairly good</i>	<i>Bad</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
X	4	6	11	7	-	21	28
Y	1	3	1	4	3	12	12
X	7	5	6	7	2	27	17
0	3	4	8	12	6	33	33
Total	15	18	26	33	11	93	

Note: Figures may not add up to 100 because of rounding

(40%) were divorced, widowed or separated. Since majority of the respondents did not have family responsibilities at present this might be responsible for their involvement in that type of trade.

On the approximate income of the respondents per month, findings revealed that over 90% of the respondents received an average monthly income below N5, 000. (Less than 50 dollars) According to them after sharing the proceeds in a day, some of them may go home with less than N500 (less than 3 dollars) at the end of the day. Then one begins to wonder how this people survive, especially those ones with family responsibilities. As a matter of fact, these people didn't take any financial responsibility on their dependants. On how they survived, some of them buttressed that they also survived on the good will of their fellow colleagues (drivers) who may give them money for meals. Findings also revealed that their fellow bus drivers usually gave them money while they plied their routes. This gesture is usually seen as the drivers' token of appreciation and support. On the number of years they have spent on the job, about 80% of the respondents have spent between 1 and 4 years. This also reveals that this form of trade is still new in this part of the state. Aside this, this finding raises the question of how these respondents survive, in the last four years. One then begins to ask whether it is true that they solely depend on the trade and goodwill from friends as means of survival for the past four years? One expects that they should have left this type of trade for another considering the meager income they receive and the stress associated with the trade.

The respondents were asked on why they mend roads. Exactly 50% of the respondents claimed that they were helping the government perform their expected duties. According to them the government is negligent in its duties to the state. Another 10% of the respondents claim that they were doing it voluntarily. But when they

were asked why they collected money at the end of the day, they said they must be remunerated for such voluntary efforts. The remaining 40% claimed that lack of employment pushed them into this type of trade.

Data on how the respondents perceived the trade revealed that 20% of the respondents claimed that they felt good doing the job. They claimed that they were happy; at least. Another 30% of the population claimed that they felt bad doing the job, but since there was no alternative, they had to do the job. Another 50% of the respondents were indifferent. What mattered to them was the need to survive. On whether the job is financially rewarding, about 80% respondent argued that it is not. They said that they were in the business based on the need to survive. Then one begins to wonder why they

Table 4: Whether each location is rewarding

<i>Location</i>	<i>Yes (%)</i>	<i>No (%)</i>	<i>Total (FRE)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
X	7	13	20	20
Y	51	10	15	15
X	71	18	25	25
0	12	28	40	40

Table 5: Reactions from neighbouring communities communities/people

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Perception of Road Mending</i>		
Good	68	13
Bad	92	46
Indifferent	22	11
Total	200	100
<i>What Government should do</i>		
Employment	80	40
Rehabilitation	48	24
Educate and absorb them	72	36
Total	200	100
<i>What They could Become Possible Effect of the Trade</i>		
Armed robbers	92	46
Breeds lazy people	50	25
Fraudsters	42	21
Individual	16	8
Total		

Table 6: Correlation analysis of governmental policies as they affect road maintenance culture in Nigeria.

Ho: Bad government policies on road construction and maintenance lead to road mending work by the unlicensed road menders

Hi: No relationship exist between bad government policies and road mending work by the unregistered road menders

Question	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(FO-Fe) ²
A	20	16	4	2	0.13
B	20	18.5	1.5	1.22	0.07
C	15	24.25	(9.25)	3.04	0.13
D	15	41.25	3.75	1.94	0.05
Total	100	100	0	8.2	0.38

Table 7: Correlation analysis of peoples perception of road menders and the incidence of violence on the Nigerian road

Ho: The act of road mending results to armed robbery by the unlicensed road menders

Hi: The act of road mending may not lead to armed robbery

Question	Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(FO-Fe) ²
A	15	21.25	(6.25)	2.5	0.12
B	20	16.25	3.75	1.93	0.12
C	25	25.5	(0.05)	0.7	0.03
D	40	37	2	1.7	0.05
Total	100	100	0	6.13	0.32

Level of significant = 0.05 χ^2 tab val. 5.991
 χ^2 calculation 0.35

have remained in the trade for this long. Of course, the economic hardship may be attributed as the main reason for this. On the reaction of the motorists to them, findings shows that about 45% of them claimed that the motorists responded to them in a positive way, they did this by giving them money as a show of approval to what they were doing. The distribution further revealed that 15% of the motorists disapproved their gesture especially private vehicle owners. The remaining 40% according to the respondents were indifferent. Findings further showed that close to 60% of the respondents did not appreciate the efforts of road menders. All these may indicate that the reaction of the motorists to these menders may not be encouraging, considering the attitude of the motorists to them. One of the respondents in road mending commented:

I don't care whatever anybody says... after all I am not stealing. I think people should even appreciate us for using our initiatives in filling the potholes. Some motorists especially private ones look at us as if we are not human beings... it is only the commercial vehicles drivers that appreciate our efforts. People must know that we

also have to survive... it is not our wish to wake up early in the morning and come into this type of business...

The findings also revealed that the road menders (70%) left for work mostly between 6.30 and 7.30 in the morning and they did mending on weekly and monthly bases (65%). Also, they usually patronized these site locations: Iworoko-Otun (40%); Aramoko-Igede 20%; Odo-Ado/Fajuyi – Ikere road 40%. This gave them opportunity to interact with vehicles plying Ekiti State from other states as they normally passed through the state during these hours. This may also be as a result of the need to collect money from these motorists. Findings on the perception of the activities of the road menders by the communities showed that 43% of the respondents were supportive of the activities of the menders. They claimed that they were doing something commendable, as it would enable motorist ply these highways without any hitch. Also, 46% of the respondents did not see any benefits in their activities. According to them they have constituted themselves as threats and nuisance around their neighborhoods. The respondents believed that these menders could do something worthwhile than mending the roads. On what they perceived as the cause of this type of trade; exactly 50% of the respondents attributed it to negligence on the part of the government in performing their duties. According to them, if the government is up and doing this type of trade wouldn't have come up at all. The remaining respondents (50%) attributed this to illiteracy, unemployment and poverty. A respondent has this to say:

If these poor people have means of survival, you won't see them begging on the high ways after all they must survive"

The respondents believed that poverty resulting from unemployment was the major cause of this problem. The economic hardship was biting them so hard that a few among them who have learnt one trade or the other have no means of surviving in their chosen careers. Respondents in the areas where menders work commented thus:

I cannot blame this people as such. The government of any nation is expected to take care of its citizen... Some of these people are pushed to the wall and they must survive. It's disheartening to see them waiting away under the scorching sun. If these poor people have mean of surviving, you can't see them begging on the high ways

The respondents were asked on what they think could be done to reduce this kind of business on our high ways; about 70% of the respondents saw it as the responsibility of the government. They believed, the government should educate them (road mender) on how they can be useful to themselves, then provide employment or start a trade for them. About 24% of the respondents claimed that these road menders need rehabilitation, in order to be able to fit well back into the society.

On the possible effects of this trade on the society, the respondents were of the opinion that the road menders could become armed robbers (46%) robbing motorists and even people in the communities when they get frustrated. Another 46% of the respondents also said that they could end up becoming lazy thereby looking for others cheaper means of making money like fraud, thefts and so on. This was further buttressed by a respondent during the in depth interview. His remarks:

I don't think these people are willing to work. Land is still free for all to cultivate in here in Nigeria. They all want quick money... The risks this people portray to us and the motorists are enormous. I am even afraid that these people will not just come one day to my home and forcefully demand for money....

The first hypothesis formulated and tested for the study shows that there was a relationship between bad government policies in relation to road construction and maintenance and the rise in unregistered road menders. This shows that if the government has been up and doing in ensuring that there is good policy in ensuring that good roads are constructed and maintained, there wouldn't have been opportunity for road mending.

The second hypothesis shows that there is a relationship between road mending and possible violence on our high ways and surrounding communities. This shows that it is possible for these unregistered road menders to turn into violent acts like armed robbery, theft, rape etc both on our highways and the surrounding communities. They may resort to these acts if they discovered that the attitude of the people is hostile to them. More so, these road menders are usually under the influence of alcohols and drugs while conducting the trade. This constitutes a possible risk on the lives and properties of the motorists and the surrounding communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unregistered road mender no doubt is one of the end products of government negligence both at the national and the local levels at ensuring well maintained highways. This has of course prompted these unregistered menders into our high ways with the sole aim of extorting money from the motorists. The risks inherent in this anti social act may not be obvious for now. However, this type of business portrays a huge risk for the perpetrators, the motorists and the surrounding communities as well. The menders stand the risk of being hit by on-coming vehicles while in the process of doing their "business". Equally, the road menders also constitute problem themselves. They stand the risk of becoming violent thereby leading to high way robbery, extortion, etc, especially since these people are always on the influence of drugs and alcohols while doing their jobs.

Aside this, these highways stand the risk of further destruction as this act of road mending by unprofessional hands could further worsen the conditions of the roads. Equally, these people can begin to damage roads in future in order to be able to collect money from motorists. Furthermore, the positive impacts of road menders are not obvious on these high ways. This is because, they only fill one or two portions of potholes on the road while other areas are neglected. They now use the location of the potholes they have filled to collect money. Their efforts do not usually lasts for a long time, after a day or two, the sand filled areas become potholes as soon as vehicles ply the sand filled spots. Aside this, it is painful to see young and able-body men, considered as the future of this nation waste away on the high ways under the pretence of joblessness due to economic hardship in Nigeria. Going by the above discussions, the following recommendations become necessary in order to forestall the socio-economic problems that may emanate from this trade:

It is suggested that the government should pay a closer attention to the issue of road maintenance in this part of the country and especially where roads maintenance need proper attention. We need to acknowledge the efforts of the federal government in the establishment of an agency responsible for maintaining federal roads. Some states are also taking cue from this. Other states should also emulate this gesture.

These agencies should not do a window-dressing job; rather, they should identify the problems and look for means of solving such problems

The government should also make moves in providing jobs opportunities for these people. Private bodies should also assist in providing jobs. Facilities in form of loans, empowerment schemes should be made available for this set of people.

Aside this, it is also suggested that there should be proper rehabilitation for this people. They should be made to see the need to look for better ways of making a livelihood apart from this unacceptable means. Private bodies and Non-Governmental organizations should assist in doing this.

Finally, it is suggested that laws should be promulgated to stop this type of activities. Highway patrol team should be empowered to arrest anybody found in this type of trade on Nigeria highways.

The belief is that the activities of these unlicensed menders will be reduced on our highways if they are properly integrated back into the society through the provision of decent and well remunerated jobs. By this, these people will

be able to contribute their positive quota to the development of this noble country.

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