2019
NATIONAL JOURNAL
NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF
LOGISTICS & TRANSPORT
VOL 1, No 1, PP 31-44
XLVIII

ISSN:2714-2248

NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF LOGISTICS & TRANSPORT

Journal Nigerien de Logistique et du transport

Volume 1, 2019

NJLT

A Publication of
Transport Research & Intelligence,
Nigerian Institute of Transport Technology (NITT), Zaria,
Kaduna State, Nigeria

ISSN: 2714-2248

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NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF LOGISTICS & TRANSPORT

Volume 1, 2019
www.nitt.gov.ng
ISSN: 2714-2248
Published by Transport Research and Intelligence Department, Nigerian Institute of Transport Technology Zaria, Nigeria

NJLT

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF TOUT (*AGBERO*) TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ROAD PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN IBADAN

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges facing the public transportation development of Nigeria has been the significant birth of transport tout called 'agbero'. Therefore, this study was conducted to address the issue of tout towards sustainable public road transport in Ibadan. The study adopted both purposive and simple random technique using a well-structured questionnaire to elicit information on the issue of agbero. Three (3) commercial motor parks and seven (7) bus-stops were purposively sampled. The respondents in this work were Nissan Micra taxi drivers and intra-city public bus drivers, and commuters of both intra-city and inter-city public transport selected from motor parks and bus-stops, respectively. The respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique. Two hundred (200) questionnaire were distributed to various respondents and 192 retrieved. The findings of this study revealed that inadequate access to economic means remains the main reason for engaging in the work of an agbero. Furthermore, the result showed that agberos were part of road administration in Ibadan; they averagely earn more than a university graduate Violent extortion is their main activity among others while the government's measure in curbing the menace of agbero in Ibadan is gradually yielding results. This study, therefore, recommends that the governments should create employment opportunity for youths to channel their energies to a productive enterprise. Education should be mandatory while attention should be given to graduates. The law should serve as a safeguard against an unlawful act of road extortion and other menace caused by agbero. Lastly, the operation of transport unions should be reviewed by the local and state governments through effective dialogue with stakeholders and rendering of proper accounts by the executives and parks' managers.

Keyword: *Challenges, Transport, Agbero, Road, Public.*

Introduction

Africa's informal transport sector could be characterised as an ungoverned and chaotic industry as it requires no procedure for its recruitment. The challenges in the socio-economic development of Nigeria affected all segments in which the transportation system is one of them (Ogunbodede, 2008). Under the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s, the prices of food items dramatically rise, transportation costs became surged, and education became the right of the rich. The increased withdrawal of the state from providing social amenities to communities made it very difficult for youth to attend, or even remain in school while inadequate gainful employment for graduates worsened the situation (Akyuz and Gore, 2001; Pfeiffer and Chapman, 2010; Compton *et al.*, 2010; Obayelu, 2011; Matemilola, and Elegbede, 2017).

The primary aim of SAP was to divert the economy and reduce Nigeria's dependence on oil generated revenue. The introduction of SAP, therefore, caused an increase in inflation, income inequality and high prices of consumer goods. As a result, this led to the shortening of the labour market. With a rise in the cost of living, high social standing and no jobs to sustain livability, crime swelled. One of the main results of the SAP was the impact it had on the identity of area boys, the precursors of *agberos* in Lagos. The identities of Area Boys undergo constant changes in situations of significant socio-economic flux (Mustapha, 2002).

The increase in people migrating from the rural to urban areas, seeking better economic fortunes in Nigeria's cities affected the meagre resources. This is the period where agriculture is no more the priority of Nigeria. During this period, the original values of *area boys* were lost and reborn as *agberos*, as they are now known (Agbiboa, 2018). In some studies, the tendency had been to conflate Area boys and *Agberos* with existing social categories such as the frequent confusion of *agberos* with area boys in Lagos. Such confusion reinforced homogenising and de-historicised tropes that haunt many studies on youth politics and urban informality in Africa (Bentley *et al.*, 2009; Hawas and D'haen, 2014).

Agbero in local parlance are agile men who rush to assist commuters in carrying loads while in their sense trying to force passengers to board vehicles. As a result of assisting passengers in carrying their loads at the motor parks and bus-stops, the name *Agbero* which lithographed from '*a gba ero*', a Yoruba word for "passengers' conveyors" emerged.

Today, a*gberos* are now common all over the cities. The favourite hangouts for *agberos* are bus stops, major highways, and motor parks (Ayodeleet al., 2012). In broad daylight, *agbero* levy tolls on commercial bus drivers; demanding bribes from the market women; patrol potential car parking spaces, demand illegal fe s from shoppers and threaten ordinary passers-by for donations. Bologi (2009) argued that the word "*Agbero*" generally paints the picture of miscreants, street urchins or thugs who forcefully extort money from commercial motorcycle riders and commercial public transport operators at garages, bus stops and major highways.

The transformation of *agberos* from passenger callers to violent extortionists in

the light of their tacit incorporation into the National Union of Transport Workers (NURTW) as tax collectors and foot soldiers for the union's dirty work has not well researched. This unionisation of *agberos* had the twin effect of politicising and expanding its role and designation in urban transport (Agbiboa, 2017). The NURTW has, therefore, become a popular option for the jobless especially those who choose not to go to school and have limited opportunities and thus used the body umbrella to cover themselves up in perpetuating the evil plot. The present-day NURTW has now become a legal alternative of sorts for area boys turned *agbero*.

In contrast to area boys, Omitogun (1994) cited by Immerwahr(2007).observed that *agbero* are institutionally embedded within the routine management of public transport by the NURTW. Unlike area boys who are seen frequently as deprived streets urchins surviving on the social margins of the megacity. While area boys occasionally solicit tolls from operators under duress, this ordinarily happens when, in a bid to avoid the extreme traffic gridlock (which is termed 'go-slow' in Lagos), mini-bus (*danfo)* drivers use alternative street routes. When this happens, Area Boys i.e boys from that area will block the streets with sticks that have open nails, and demand '*owo ita*' (street money) from the drivers. '*Owo ita*' is not to be confused with '*owo garaji*' (garage money) collected by *agbero, (*Interview with an agbero at Ikotun Egbe on December 22 2014 (Agbiboa, 2018).

All over the cities in Nigeria, including Ibadan, *agbero* are all the same thing. They reap where they have not sown (Interview in November 2014). However, many *agbero* insisted that they are not 'thieves' (as many people view them) but 'notables' doing all it takes to survive (like any other hardworking Lagosians) in the motor-parks and getting a just reward for their labour. '*Ise wa lan se*' (We are only doing our work) with demanding slang of '*owo mi da*' *(*where is my money)from commercial drivers. Failure to pay this tax spells '*wahala*' (trouble) for any operator as reflected in the interview conducted with a *danfo* conductor in 2014 by Agbiboa (2016).

Urban scholars have studied area boys and organised street violence such as Jeremy Jones' account of hustle in Zimbabwe (Jeremy, 2010); Sasha Newell has studied the moral economy of theft in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (Sasha, 2006) while Janet Roitman has worked on road bandits and the ethics of illegality in the Chad Basin (Roitman, 2006). Furthermore, there were studies on tactics and strategies used by informal transport operators to navigate everyday risk and uncertainty (Oosterom *et al.*, 2016; Agbiboa, 2016), Tim (2014) worked on becoming a "Big Man" in neo-liberal South Africa and on migrant masculinities in the minibus-taxi industry, a case study of Dar es Salaam.

Furthermore, Matteo (2011) studied the struggles for survival amid abysmal labour conditions; and he went further to show how informal transport operators cope under harsh conditions of flexible labour markets, and economic liberalisation (Matteo, 2014). Adrian, (2013) researched on the thematic issues of the politics of informal transporting and Ikuomola (2012) worked on poverty, road culture and deviance among Area boys

in Lagos Central neighbourhood while Austin (2015) conducted a study on arresting political thuggery and other social vices among the miscreants for sustainable development in Lagos State, Nigeria as well as Peace (2006) who examined the micropolitics of relations between transport owners, operators, and passengers.

In Nigeria, most scholars had focused on politics and the menace of *agberos* with public transport in Lagos only. The related study on *agbero* has received scant attention about the issue *agberos* and sustainable road public transport in Ibadan. Therefore, this study tends to address the issue of *agberos* towards sustainable public road transport in Ibadan.

Review of Related Literature

For realists such as Lea and Young (1984), many youths have been forced into the limits of the society (and into a life of crime and deprivation) as a result of their socio-economic background and self-effort into the labour market been denied due to shortage of resources and corruption (Adeyanju, 2000; Fore, 2012; Ampudia Sjogreen, 2016). In response to their marginalisation from the economic, social, and political institutions of mainstream society, a large percentage of youth have transiently and other times as a career-long affair created a criminal sub-cultures as a means of 'getting back' at the society. An interview conducted by Momoh (2000) with hundreds of area boys showed that many admitted to their criminal activities even as they maintained that they had not always sought criminality. They argued that their hands were forced by the increasing lack of access to economic means.

Oluwatobi (2016) argued that *agbero* remains a main stay in the list of problems facing the traffic system in Lagos. He noted that they had become famous members of the road administrative team and responsible for manipulating social issues such as scarcity of public vehicles, traffic congestion or other bottlenecks. Ikuomola (2012) argued that there is a dearth of empirical research rooted within local neighbourhood settings that tries to discover many of the differences and complexities inherent within the modern-day Lagos street youth experience(s). The general social analysis around particular people be it poor, ethnic minorities have been dominated by macro theorising that has high-lighted the systematic essence of discrimination as evidenced through structural inequality and social exclusion.

Phillips and Bowling (2003) also pointed out that crime researchers interested in street youths have viewed the lop-sided numbers of the poor individuals caught up within the criminal justice system as being either suggestive of their higher rates of offending or because of institutionalised neglect. Owumi, (1994) and Isamah and Okunola, (1997), examined the potential political fall-out from the theoretical and empirical researches around poverty, road culture, touts, and crime. Tinubu (2000), on the other hand, decried the activities of social miscreants. He admitted that they pose a serious problem and threat to the nation's foreign investment inflow drive. Utebor and Nwogu (2010) as cited by Omomia (2015) gave an account of the uproar that occurred on Wednesday, 5th May 2010, when two

rival groups of social miscreants clashed over the control of a motor park at the junction of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Idi-Araba, Lagos. They employed all sorts of dangerous weapons, like axes, cutlasses, and firearms. *Agbero* seizes every opportunity to unleash mayhem.

Makinde (2010) reported of a bloody clash between members of the National Road Transport Workers Union (NURTW) in Ado–Ekiti. They aimed to change the leadership of the union led by Omolaye Aderiye. This however left a member of the NURTW dead as the two factions engaged each other.Majority of *agbero* also doubled as political thugs while the list of violence and harm did by *agbero* is unquantifiable. Ibemere, (2011), described the experience of the residents of Amukoko, a Lagos suburb, on the 1st of January, 2011. Residents of the community were locked themselves in, while the miscreants took over most of the streets, smoking and unleashing havoc on unsuspecting people. The miscreants laid ambush at strategic places to attack motorists, loot and vandalise vehicles. He argued that dangerous weapon such as bottles, machetes, knives and others were used freely among themselves, forcing passers-by to flee for their lives. At the end of the crisis, over eight vehicles were destroyed at Market Street in Amukoko, Lagos.

Agberos are, in fact, the included youths who play a central role as conduits for the everyday extortion rackets of the NURTW. They are touts who live better than Nigerian university graduates. In Nigeria informal setting, *agbero* believe that only area boys are hungry people and have no mouth (connections). The area boys beg and steal money in addition to their '*owo ita*' (street money) which is not often.

Drivers regularly bemoaned the fact that they ended up paying triple of the charges that are imposed on them since different sets of *agbero* claim to be representing the NURTW and threaten to unleash violence (at the slightest provocation) if their demand for money is not met without a story. The confusion between 'real' and 'fake' *agbero* is hardly surprising when we consider that even within the NURTW, there are various rival factions (each with their own loyal sets of *agbero* and unit chairmen) jostling for ascendancy and control of public transit spaces (Isaac, 2007). One of the fundamental aspirations of E*ruku* (motor parks war-front) is to become O*ga agbero* (Lords of touts) one day and control a motor-park. The O*ga agbero* typically have several E*rukus* who work under them as apprentices and foot soldiers. *Eruku* is the name given to junior cadre of A*gbero* who can sacrifice their lives to protect the interest of their paymaster, known as *Alaga* (Chairman).

With the establishment of the NURTW in 1978, the *agbero* transformed into a menace and bec ,ne increasingly linked to violent party politics (Agbiboa, 2018) and slowly became more of a nuisance to the transport industry (Newswatch, 18 November 2013). In particular, there was a widespread perception (among operators and commuters) that the NURTW is a fundamental supplier of thugs recruited among its battle-ready *agbero* to advance the electoral campaigns (i.e. through voter intimidation and violent extortion)

(Fourchard, 2010). In a study of the politics of order and chaos in the urban public transport of Kampala and Kigali, Goodfellow found that *bayaye*s (matatu touts) constituted a critical 'voting bloc' and a 'potential source of violence (Goodfellow, 2012).

During the Second Republic, however, the control and management of motor-parks and bus stops, especially in Lagos, became the epicentre of political antagonism when transport unions usurped their management. There was the case when the management of motor parks became the place of two concurrent powers: the Federal government, under the President Shehu Shagari, and his party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) on the one hand, and the Government of Lagos State under the Governor Lateef Jakande and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) on the other hand. For instance, in 1978 Adebayo Ogundare, known as Bayo Success, the Chairman of NURTW was given the assignment of winning all the motor parks in Lagos over to UPN. He did so in mobilising his large clientele of drivers during the 1979 electoral campaign and in resorting to violence and killing of his potential opponents in most of the motor parks in Lagos (Fourchard, 2010). There is a widespread perception among operators and commuters that *agbero* have become 'undisputed kings of the roads (Interview with a commuter at Oshodi on 12 September 2014 by Agbiboa, (2016).

Materials and Method

The study area is Ibadan, capital of Oyo State, Nigeria. In a regional setting, it is 142km from Lagos and 659km from Abuja the Federal Capital Territory. Ibadan city covered a total land area of about 463.33-kilometre square and a total population of 1,343,147 (National Population Commission, 2007) making her the third-largest city in the country after Lagos and Kano. Ibadan is a significant political, social, educational, commercial, transportation, health and administrative centre. Majority of the residents depend on public transport to fulfil their transport needs. However, the choice is limited to road transport due to non-operation of rail transport service even though its routes traverse the city. Private and public transit operators characterise the public transport system in Ibadan. Private transit operators use individually owned minibus and taxi to provide more than 90% of the city's transport needs. On the other hand, the public transit operator (Ajumose bus) owned by the State government only provides services on a few selected routes and to a limited number of passengers in the city. The study, therefore, focused on the private transit operators that dominate the transit business in Ibadan (Wojuade and Badiora, 2017).

The researchers survey was carried out between August and December 2019, and structured questionnaire were used in obtaining the data. Three (3) commercial motor parks and seven (7) bus-stops were sampled. The sampled motor parks were namely Lagelu, Ojoo and Egbeda while the sampled bus-stops were namely Ojoo, Orogun, UI, Bodija, Sango, Iyana UI and under Bridge, Akobo. All these were sampled purposively because of their link to the issue of *agbero*. However, the

respondents were Nissan Micra taxi and intra-city public bus drivers, and commuters of both intra-city and inter-city public transport selected from motor parks and bus-stops, respectively.

Data were collected from only the primary source and respondents selected through simple random sampling technique. The main instrument used in collecting the necessary data was the questionnaire, and the data were analysed based on a 96%response rate. The two hundred (200) respondents were selected which includes five Micra taxi drivers, five commercial bus drivers from each bus-stop, ten commuters from each bus-stop and 20 commuters from each motor park. Data collected were analysed using table, pie chart and histogram.

Findings and Discussions

This study revealed that 8.3% of the respondents agreed that unemployment situation in Nigeria was responsible for the decision of *agbero to touting*; 7.3% agreed that it was as a result of structural inequality; 9.4% as a result of social exclusion; 13.5% as a result of institutionalised neglect; 11.9% as a result of family issue and 32.3% as a result of inadequate access to economic means. This study however aligned with the work of Ayodele *et al.* (2012) where respondents strongly agreed that economic hardship is an essential factor for the invasion of motor parks and bus stops by *agbero* in Lagos State.

A further result showed that 69.8% of the respondents agreed that *agbero* are part of road administration in Ibadan while only 30.2% disagreed. It implied that *agbero* has a place in the administration of the road transport system in Ibadan, which is unhealthy. On the issue of real and fake *agbero* in Ibadan, 54.2% of the respondents agreed that there is a difference between real and fake *agbero* while 45.8% disagreed. This result implies that Nissan Micra taxi and public bus drivers tend to pay tolls to more than one *agbero* on a trip. Failure to pay will tantamount to violence. This study supported the interview conducted on the transport official, Alimosho Local Government on 15 December 2014 by Agbiboa (2016) where it was argued that some hoodlums had taken that opportunity to terrorise these motorists because nobody will ask them who they are.

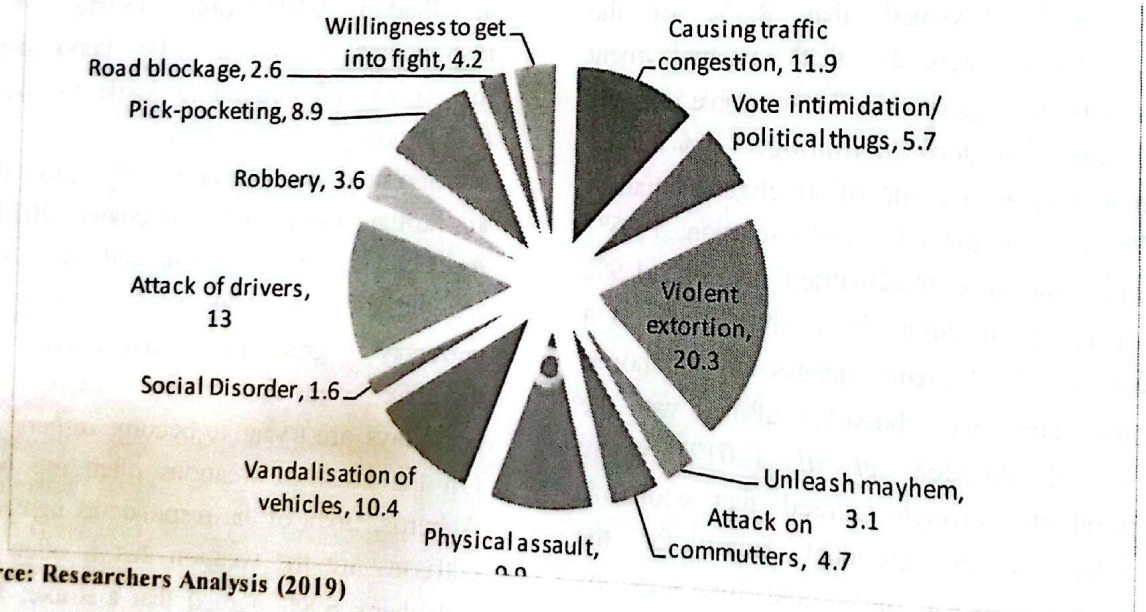
The result from Table 1 below also revealed that 66.1% of the respondents agreed that *agbero* earn more than University graduate in Ibadan while only 33.9% of the respondents disagreed. The implication is that youth will compel to jostle for *agbero* than going to school. This study corroborated the interview with *danfo* driver in Ikotun Egbe, 12 November 2014 by Agbiboa (2016), which argued that *agbero* are the dropouts who live better than many university graduates. Moreover, this, therefore, justified why more youth nowadays are trying to become *agbero*.

On the issue of weapons often use by the Agberos, 26% of the respondents agreed that cutlasses are the weapon that is often found with them; 6.8% agreed that it is axe; 17.2% had it that it is firearm; 21.9% had it that it is broken bottles; 13.5% had it that it is knives while 14.6% had it that it is stick.

Table 1: Analysis of Variables, Frequencies and Percentages.

No	Variables		Freq	%
1	Reasons behind touting in Ibadan	Unemployment	16	8.3
		Structural Inequality	14	7.3
		Social exclusion	18	9.4
		Institutionalised neglect	26	13.5
		Family issue	23	11.9
		Inadequate access to economic means	62	32.3
		Inadequate access to school	33	17.2
			192	**100**
2	Is *Agbero* part of Road administration in Ibadan?	Yes	134	69.8
		No	58	30.2
			192	**100**
3	Is there a difference between the real and fake *agbero?*	Yes	104	54.2
		No	88	45.8
			192	**100**
4	*Agbero* earn more income than graduate in Ibadan	Yes	127	66.1
		No	65	33.9
			192	**100**
6	What types of weapons are always in the hands of the *agbero?*	Cutlasses	50	26
		Axes	13	6.8
		Firearms	33	17.2
		Broken bottles	42	21.9
		Knives	26	13.5
		Stick	28	14.6
			192	**100**

Source: Researchers Analysis (2019)

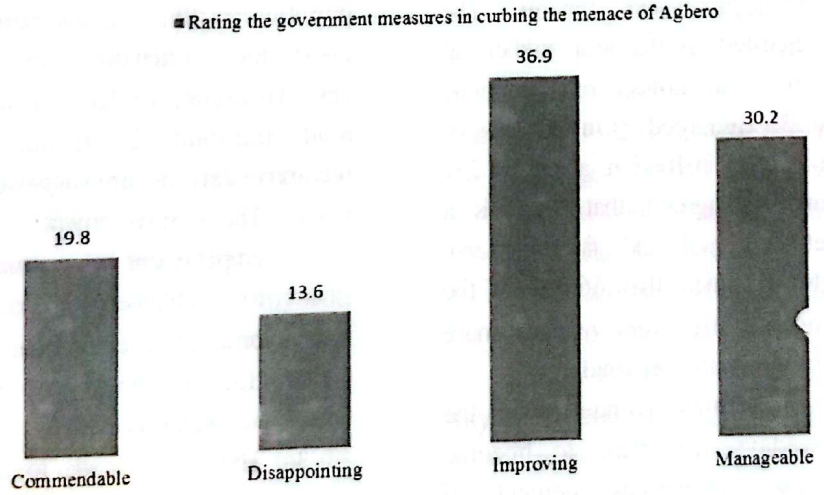


Source: Researchers Analysis (2019)

Figure 1: Activities of Agberos in Ibadan.

Figure 1 above shows the activities of *agbero* in Ibadan. The figure revealed that 11.9% of the respondents insisted that *Agbero* usually caused traffic congestion on the roads. The implication is that their activities will cause a delay. Congestion occurs in a situation when *Agbero* allow especially '*Baba alaye*' (the rich men), to pass through unlawful ways with sounding haling slang of '*Tuale*'. 5.7 % of the respondents revealed that A*gbero* is the principal instrument of voter intimidation and political thugs.

This result is in total interview agreement with the result of the interview of Human Rights Watch (2007) which revealed that NURTW, Oyo state chapter has long been used as a tool of political violence by Late Alhaji Adedibu (acclaimed political warlord in Ibadan). Furthermore, 20.3% of the respondents agreed that Agberos are involved in violent extortion from the drivers. With this percentage, the implication is that the extortion will lead to hike and unstable transport fare and commuters tend to suffer for it. The general assumption of the A*gbero* is that money will not be made until only when the commercial vehicles' tyres roll on the road in Ibadan. Other misconducts of A*gbero* are the unleashing of mayhem which has 3.1%; attack on commuters 4.7%; physical assault on people has 9.9%; vandalisation of vehicles had 10.4%; social disorder had 1.6%; attack on drivers had 13%; robbery had 3.6%; pick-pocketing had 8.9%; roadblock had 2.6%, and willingness to get into fight had 4.2%.



Source: Researchers' Analysis (2019)

Figure 2: Rating the government measures in curbing the menace of *Agbero*.

Figure 2 shows the government measures in curbing the menace of *Agbero*. On government's measure in curbing the menace of *agberos* in Ibadan, 19.8% of the respondents commend government efforts. 13.6% considered it disappointing; and 36.9% considered it was improving, while the remaining 30.2% considered it manageable. With this percentage, the government has more work to do.

Conclusion

It has been established that about 32.3% of the respondents agreed that inadequate access to economic means was responsible for *agbero*, followed by institutionalised neglect and family issues. About 69.8% of the respondents agreed that *agbero* are part of road administration in Ibadan. The agberos are regarded as the foot soldiers at the motor parks that collect road revenue while only 30.2% disagreed. On the issue of real and fake *agbero* in Ibadan, about 54.2% of the respondents agreed that there is a difference between real and fake *agbero*. The result also revealed that 66.1% of the respondents agreed that *agbero* earn more than University graduates in Ibadan.

Furthermore, one could wonder why the youth of nowadays are trying to become *agbero*. Moreso, twenty-six percent of *agbero* use cutlasses as the weapon for violence, follow by broken bottles and firearms. Among the activities of *agbero* in Ibadan, violence extortion remains the significant prominent activity of *agbero* while government measure at reducing the menace of *agbero* is considered improving (36.9%) but not satisfied.

Recommendations

This study addresses the issue of *agbero* towards sustainable public road transport in Ibadan, and the study found that *agbero* constitute threats to security, social menace and severe hardship to drivers and commuters at the motor parks, bus-stops and junctions in Ibadan. By 2050, two-third of all humanity will be urban (Nnaemeka-Okeke, 2016). Sustainable development cannot be achieved without significantly transforming the way our public transport is being operated and how our urban spaces are being managed (Litman and Burwell, 2006; Camona *et al.*, 2012; Wheeler and Beatley, 2014). The conduct of *agbero* has a grossly negative impact on the economic, social and political wellbeing of the populace in Ibadan, invariably affecting the quest for sustainable development in the city. Therefore, to have a sustainable public road transport in Ibadan, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. The government should create employment opportunity for youths to channel their energies to productive enterprise.
2. *Agbero* should not be part of road administration.
3. There is need to re-examine our family life and child upbringing practices to discover the point at which our values were misunderstood and misapplied to produce the effects that the *Agberos* now display (Ayodele *et al.*, 2012).

4. The government and Non-governmental Organisations should, as a matter of urgency considered the rehabilitation of both the fake and real *agbero* irrespective of their ages and numbers.
5. *Agbero* with daring harms or weapons should be apprehended and face the wrath of law without fair or favour or any political affiliation.
6. Education should be the primary priority "World Class" cities: Urban renewal, informal transport workers, and legal disputes in Lagos. *Urban Forum,* of all governments and attention should be given to the employment and remuneration of the graduates.
7. The law should serve as a safeguard against an unlawful act of road extortion, congestion, voter intimidation and political thugs, unleash of mayhem attack on commuters, physical assault, vandalisation of vehicles, social disorder, attack on drivers, robbery, pick-pocketing, roadblock, and willingness to get into a fight.
8. The local and state governments should review the operation of transport unions through active dialogue with stakeholders and rendering of proper accounts by the executives and parks' managers.

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