New Solution to an Old Problem

Contributed by Kazeem Akintunde
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Lagos State government, mindful of the chaos on its roads, forces traders out of Oshodi bus stop to pave way for free flow of traffic

Driving through Oshodi on January 5 became a pleasure to Siji Adedamola, with the branch of a first generation bank on Matori Road, Oshodi. At the close of work that day, he drove through the Oshodi-Agege express road on his way home. Within 30 minutes, he was already at home in Abule-Egba, a Lagos suburb, to the surprise of his wife and kids. He told Newswatch that he couldn’t believe he was home in 30 minutes. “Under normal circumstances, I don’t make use of the route. From my office to Bolade Bus Stop, a distance of about 1,000 metres, I could spend more than two hours in the usual Oshodi gridlock and on most days, I avoid the route,” Adedamola said. He thanked the state government for demolishing illegal structures at Oshodi, an action which he said has drastically reduced the length of time people now spend on the road. Before the exercise, Adedamola usually took a detour at Ikeja to link Ikorodu road in an effort to beat the gridlock in Oshodi. It took him an average of two hours to get to the office and another two hours back home. “I was the happiest person when illegal structures at Oshodi market were demolished by the Lagos State government which ensured free flow of traffic,” he said. While Adedamola and many other road users are happy that traffic is once again moving in Oshodi, many of the traders who were affected by the demolition are still counting their losses. Samuel Ogundare is one of them. He watched helplessly as what used to be his shop was pulled down. “I have a wife and children at home, where do they want me to earn a living? Shops are expensive, government should stop contracting the building of shops to private developers whose main objective is to make profit at the expense of the people,” he counselled. Yomi Tajudeen, another trader whose shop was not affected by the demolition pleaded with the government to have a rethink and stop demolishing markets in the state. “I was called at home and I just had to rush here,” he said. He appealed to the government not to demolish stalls at MaCarthy/Banjoko area of Oshodi as they are not on the main road. “We have been complying with government’s directive not to constitute a nuisance. Besides, if this kind of thing is to happen, what I expect from the government is to provide an alternative place for traders where they can be accommodated at affordable cost. The problem we are having is that whenever government provides such alternative, it is usually expensive for the average traders,” he said. Omolabake Banjo, Iyaloja of Abibat Mogagi Mini Market, on McCarthy Lane, also pleaded with the state government to handle the demolition with care. “We are not on the main road. We are all women; we do not have anybody to help us and we have children in higher institutions. It is from the money we make here that we feed our families. Government should help us because we are more than 300. It was Oshodi/Isolo Local Government that approved the place for us, we have receipts of payment; we pay N100 per month,” she said. Worst hit by the demolition exercise were food vendors at the motor park under the Oshodi bridge. The makeshift structures that once served as their shops, their stoves, buckets, cups and other cooking utensils were smashed by the bulldozers. For the thousands of traders at Oshodi, Sunday, January 4, will remain indelible in their memories for a long time. On that day, a combined team of Kick Against Indiscipline, KAI, the state environmental degradation watchdog, and Lagos State Environmental and Special Offences Enforcement Unit, (Task Force) decided not only to dislodge them but also ensure that they do not in anyway stage a comeback to one of the most busiest points in the state. With over 100 truck loads of KAI Brigade men backed up by mobile policemen, three tractors and five Black Maria vehicles, the determination of the state government to permanently displace the traders was achieved. As early as 4 a.m, the demolition of illegal structures began under the watchful eyes of Danjuma Meigeri, a retired Captain and KAI Marshall General who is also a special adviser on environmental matters to Babatunde Raji Fashola, the state governor. From Bolade junction down to the overhead bridge extending to Mushin and Apapa/Oshodi expressway interchange, illegal structures were demolished and burnt. Being a Sunday and very early in the morning, most of the traders were caught unaware. Many of them who rushed to the scene on learning of the demolition exercise were helpless as KAI officials were on the look out for them. Those caught were promptly arrested. The spectacle sent shivers down the spines of the traders, some of whom gathered and watched helplessly and bemoaning their ordeal. Meigeri said the traders have constituted great nuisance. They were warned several times to vacate the area but refused to comply. He said government had no option but to move in. “I can assure you that in the next decade, street traders will not come back here. We are ready for them. We will make the place inhabitable for hoodlums and their cronies,” he vowed. Meigeri also noted that the traders had been told to report to their local government chairmen who would give them alternative places to trade. He reminded traders that street trading has been banned by the state government and warned that anyone caught would be prosecuted, he stressed. He also said that a KAI Battalion would be established in Oshodi permanently to ensure orderliness and safety. He stated that Suru-Orile, Alaba-Rago and other spots along Lagos/Badagry expressway are the task force’s next ports of call. “Government has lofty projects to execute and these projects cannot be established in an unfriendly environment,” he noted. For the Lagos State government, the issue is simple and clear: traders in the state will no longer be allowed to take over the highways, obstruct the free flow of traffic, provide a haven for criminals and miscreants and constitute an environmental nuisance to the state. Muiz Banire, commissioner for Environment, said the ministry, through KAI, had the mandate of the state government to ensure full compliance with the directives. He said the structures were illegally built and had to be demolished adding that government has provided alternative stalls at Ilasa and Awolowo Market in Odi-Olowo Local Council Development Area.