

# The Emergence of *Okada* Business and its Impact in Lafia Metropolis of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*The emergence of Okada business in Lafia Metropolis has a wider significance effect both positive and negative which resulted to the revenue generation and high rate of accident in Lafia Metropolis. The aim of this research is to look at how Okada business contributed immensely for the alleviation of poverty in Lafia Metropolis, and to suggest on how this business will be improved due to its significance role in the economy development of Lafia Metropolis and by extension Nasarawa state at large. In the course of this research, the study sort to trace the motivating factors behind the emergence of Okada business in Lafia Metropolitan. However, we were able to realize that the emergence of Okada was as a result of high rate of unemployment, poverty, untimely payment of salary, increase in numbers of graduate without absorption and bad state of the road within the Lafia Metropolis prompt many to venture into the business to enable them to earn a living. We have come to the conclusion that, large numbers of youth in Lafia prefer themselves in the business of Okada than to learn any other hand-work which by observation, the local industries will be dislocated. The methodology used in carrying out this research is both oral sources and the secondary sources and they gave me the clear picture of the Okada business in Lafia Metropolis.*

**Keywords:** Emergence, *Okada*, Business, Lafia Metropolis, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, we are going to discuss deeply about the *Okada* business and its impacts in Lafia Metropolis because of its significant contributions to all aspects of life particularly the life of a common man. The paper is going to be discussed under the following headings such as Transportation problem and the Emergence of *Okada* in Nigeria, *Okada* trade union and coordination, Positive impact of *Okada* such as Movement of people, Revenue to the Local Government Area and the State, also the negative impact is going to be discussed such as environmental pollution road accident etc.

## **The Transportation Problems and the Emergence of *Okada* in Capital City Nigeria**

The use of *Okada* by private individuals had existed for a long time. Although many used it for private purposes, few people made use of it to transport farm produce and to hawk their goods like Bread, Medicines, and Newspapers etc. The commercial use of *Okada* began in Calabar, the Capital city of Cross Rivers State of Nigeria in the early 1970s. Its use for Commercial Services grew after the nationwide retrenchment of civil servants in 1975 and 1976. Apart from Calabar documentary evidence also shows that *Okada* were first introduced for public transport in the Northern Nigeria town of Yola in 1970. By 1980s, the use of *Okada* for public transportation had gradually spread to other parts of Nigeria includes

metropolitan of Lafia.

One of the problems was the rapid rate of urbanization in the face of inadequate means of transportation. In Lagos for example, as the city expanded in the direction of oko-oba, Abule Egba, Ikotun, Egbe, Ipaja and other areas, it was often difficult to get the conventional means of transportation to move people into and out of these areas. Commuters often struggled at peak periods for commercial vehicles to convey them in or out of these areas. The inadequacy of the transport system was handled with the emergence of *Okada* for commercial purposes on the streets of Lagos.

Another transportation problem that led to the emergence of *Okada* in Nigeria is the way in which SAP affected the economy, which led to high inflation. The inflation affected the cost of imported goods including automobile. This made it difficult for transporters to replace their engine vehicles with new ones.

In order to solve the transportation problem, the Government at the time introduced a mass transit programme at both the state and federal levels but it failed to solve the intra-city transport problem. The Government vehicles were grossly inadequate for the population that needed their services. In the Lagos area, for example, the decrease in the supply of commercial vehicles for public transportation dates to the late 1970s. In relation to population growth, the level of motorization per capita rose from 248 in 1980 to 454 in 1995.

The implication of this is that as the population grew rapidly and activities got more diversified, especially in Lagos, the vehicle fleet decreased thus necessitating the need for other means of commuter transportation. The other means of transportation that emerged to fill the gap was the *Okada* (motor cycles) transportation system.

Another important factor that contributed to the emergence and the growth of *Okada* business in Nigeria was the relative lucrative nature of the business. Generally, the *Okada* operators derive reasonable profit from their operations. Most of the operator interviewed claimed that they make an average of about N5,000.00 to 8,000.00 on a daily basis after satisfying all expenses. The lucrative nature of the business had made *Okada* (motorcycle) transportation business to grow into a big industry in the country.

The advantage which motorcycles have over the transportation modes can also be said to have accounted for its use for commercial transportation and the widespread nature of the *Okada* business. One of these advantages is that it reaches where commercial vehicles may not reach due to bad road. There is no road that is too narrow and there is no area too remote for *Okada* (motorcycle) to reach. Besides unlike motorcar, they are able to take passengers to their door steps. Also, they are faster and time saver than other means of transportation. They are capable of maneuvering their way through traffic congestion and they do not stop like commercial vehicles at bus stops to pick passengers. This makes it a very fast means of transport. Beyond all these, it is cheaper to maintain an *Okada* than a taxi or bus drivers. The spare parts are cheaper and readily available than those of motor cars or buses. Above all, motorcycles consume less fuel than motor vehicle.

From the above mention advantage of *Okada* transportations, it is obvious passengers prefer to use motorcycles rather than other means of transportation.

### **Okada Trade Union and Coordination**

Due to few negative Impacts of *Okada* as transport as well, and the aspiration to influence government policies on transportation. The greatest, perhaps is the high rate of some persons using *Okada* (motorcycle) for criminal acts.

It is estimated that large number of criminals in Lafia Metropolis are using the advantage of *Okada* as a means of transportation to commit crime. The scenario is the same in other towns and cities across the country. Such criminal activities include snatching of personal belonging or properties like bags, phones; abduction and killing, including raping etc. People of questionable character are among the bike operators. When an unsuspecting passenger stops a rider, a criminally minded rider could take the passenger to spots when he/she could be rapped or rubbed. Such criminal activities are usually perpetuated in the early hours in the morning or late at night. This is the reason why in some towns and

cities, authorities have banned the operation of commercial *Okada* before 6:00am and after 8:00pm.

With this development, *Okada* members set up a union in helping to curtail such menace in view of above, the *Okada* union decided to introduced jacket for their members and also for every member to register yearly with the sum of N5,000.00 and buying of ticket for the sum of N200.00 daily to enable them to identify her members to avoid being accused. They often go out to sensitize and advice the general public or passengers to always go for an *Okada* rider who are wearing the *Okada* jacket. In view of the above, state of the affairs, the union due meet with members 7 to 8 times yearly and orient her members on hours to carry out *Okada* business without unlawful acts and also how to avoid illicit drugs to minimize accident. However, the congresses further to strengthen the relationship between the members and the union and to equally identify her members and to inform them on any information from the Government concerning *Okada* business in the state. Also, the unions further do advice the *Okada* riders to be their brother keepers by standing for each other whenever they are involved in accident or argument with passengers so as to resolve the problems peacefully.

### **The Impacts of *Okada* Business in Lafia Metropolis**

*Okada* business has impacted significantly on the Nigerian economy and society in many ways. One of the important positive impacts is the provision of employment for millions of unemployed people. *Okada* business has empowered many Nigerians economically indeed, many unemployed youths and retired people have found gainful engagement in the commercial motorcycle business. Some of those who are employed in government service still engage in *Okada* business either as owners or riders in order to augment their regular income with whatever they are able to make from *Okada* business.

Some states government in the country have also used motorcycles as poverty alleviation scheme by procuring and distributing motorcycles to the unemployed in their states as part of the poverty alleviation program. A good example is that of Oyo State where the governor of the State, chief Alao Akala in 2007 – 2011 bought and distributed motorcycles to various beneficiaries during one of his visits to the Local Governments in the state in 2009. Also in 2005, the Borno State government procured and distributed 5000 motorcycles to it indigenes to boost public transportation and alleviate poverty.

Lack of adequate statistics will not enable us to state the actual numbers of people engaged in the *Okada* business in Nigeria. It is however, estimated that they are in hundreds of thousands. Apart from those directly engaged in riding the bikes, many people are in to the sale of different brands of motorcycles and the sale of bike sparer parts. In addition to this, we have a good number of people engaged in the business of motorcycle repairs and maintenance. When considered together, it will be discovered that the economic impact of *Okada* business on the society cannot be over-emphasized. Indeed, the view has been expressed that if governments ban the operations of commercial motorcycles, it will lead to an increase in crime rate in the society. This is because; many young people who would have been involved in criminal activities in the society are currently employed in *Okada* business.

*Okada* business has also contributed to government revenue generation. Government derives a lot of revenue from money paid for plate numbers and license by motorcycles operators. Although we do not have actual figures of the revenue from this source, we can say that given the share number of motorcycles operating for commercial purposes in Lafia Metropolis, the revenue to the government must run into millions of naira. This is in addition to the sales of motorcycles and motorcycles spare parts estimate to be about millions of naira per annum.

Furthermore, the operation of this group of transporters has eased the transport difficulties encountered by the people. Thus, we can say that the *Okada* business has filled a big gap in the public transport system in Nigeria with the operation of commercial *Okada*. People can now go to areas previously impregnable by conventional means of transportation. For example, there were some rural suburbs and streets in Lagos that conventional commercial buses and taxis could not reach, such as Ayobo in Ipaja area of Alimoso Local Government, Ajara area in Badagry and Aboru area in IyanaIpaja, to mention just a few. The *Okada* has now provided a means of transportation for commuters in these areas. In Ogun state, the interior of Mowe and Ibafo town has been open up by the use of *Okada*.

In spite of all the aforementioned significance of *Okada* business there are negative impacts on the side of *Okada* business, Critics of the *Okada* business maintained that the expansion in the business has increased the number of road accidents in the country. This has led to the loss of lives and in many cases permanent disabilities to victims. For example, in 1989, about 144 cases of *Okada* accident were reported in Lagos state. In 1999, 699 cases of *Okada* accidents were reported, representing 21.06 percent of the total accidents in Lagos state for that year. This, no doubt, is also the picture in other states across the country. Over the years, accidents involving *Okada* riders have kept on increasing in direct proportion to the increase in the number of *Okada* operating for commercial purposes. Recklessness and refusal to comply with traffic rules have been largely responsible for this accident.

It is also said that more than half of those killed in accidents involving all vehicles are more motorcycle riders and passengers. In Lagos state alone, the FRSC reported that 10,471 motorcycle accidents were recorded in the last ten years, high rate of accidents is attributable to lack of training and traffic education among motorcycle operators, impatience on the part of the bike riders, flagrant disregard for traffic rules and regulations, among other factors.

*Okada* riders are also reported to constitute nuisance on the higher way since many of the riders do not obey traffic rules. Aside from this, their members are also reported to be extremely violent, resorting to jungle justice to get easy passage of their erring members whenever the situation warrants.

Another negative effect of the use of motorcycles for commercial transportation is its use of criminal acts. It is estimated that more than seventy percent of crime committed in Lafia are traceable to armed bandits operating with *Okada*. The scenario is the same with other towns and cities across the country. Such criminal activities include snatching of personal effects like bags, phones, abduction and killing including raping. People of questionable character are among the bike operators. When an unsuspecting passenger stops a rider, a criminally minded rider could take the passenger to spot where she could be raped or robbed. Such criminally activities are usually perpetuated in the early hours of the morning or late at night. This is the reason why in some places, authorities have banned the operations of commercial motorcycles before 6:00am and after 8:00am.

Another effect of the increase in the use of motorcycles for commercial purposes is the negative environmental impact on society. The emission from bikes is adding to the pollution of the environment. Scientists still need to conduct research to measure the actual effects of this pollution. But the view has been expressed that increase in the cases of cancer and terminal diseases in the country are not unrelated to the high pollution of the Nigerian environment. The life expectancy in Nigeria is put at 46/47 years compare to over 70 years in Britain and America and even over 80 years in Canada. These western societies are doing a lot to control environmental pollutions. In Nigeria, the pollution of the environment is one of the reasons for this low life expectancy. The country has been losing able-bodied men and women and this is not good for economy because it means the country is depleting its source of labour. Suffice it to say that the pattern globally, nowadays, is to reduce environmental pollution by all means. Daily increase in the number of commercial motorcycles in Nigeria does not help in achieving this objective.

Furthermore, evidence from fieldwork shows that it is now generally difficult for artisans to find people whose are willing to learn their trade. From bricklayers and plumbers to mechanics and carpenters, the story is the same young people are no longer ready to endure the patience of learning under any master. They prefer to work as *Okada* riders where they can make between N7, 000 and N9,000 a day. If the trend continues, a time may come that some of these traders plumbing, carpentry, painting, etc. may die due to the difficulty of getting successor for the present crop of people in the trade. This is a negative impact indeed on the Nigerian economy and society.

Finally, the point must be made that *Okada* business is affecting the indigenous manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy in a subtle negative way. *Okada* business is a service industry. Not a manufacturing or production sector of the economy. The point must be made that industrialization has a vital role to play in governing an economy. When a country is industrialized, it is able to sell its manufactured products both in the local and international markets to get foreign exchange. This

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### **Summary**

Transportation is very important for the growth of any economy. The experiences of advanced states capital like Lafia, is lack of buses or taxi for town service and other means of transportation are very cost effective. However, the Lafia town service is as good as dead for developing state capital like Lafia; *Okada* transportation remains the best and most affordable means of transportation of passengers, goods and services. *Okada* transport accounts for more than 30% of the transport sub sector's 70% contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the council. It should therefore, occasion no surprise that people of Lafia whose road transport industry was saddled with many bottle necks resorted to any means to provide them the needed transportation services.

*Okada* businesses in the state capital provide an answer to unemployment and poverty in Lafia bridging the gap that the Local Government could not cover in transportation sector not only that *Okada* also commercial activities and the development of the council through revenue generation. Prior to increase in *Okada* business in Lafia Metropolis, Lafia witnessed negative impact on the side of the *Okada* by causes havoc within the Lafia town. It is also said that more than half of those killed in accidents involving all vehicles, are motorcycle riders and passengers. For instance high rate of accidents is attributed to lack of training and traffic education among motorcycle operators, impatience on the part of the bike rides, flagrant disregard for traffic rules and regulations, among other factors. However, the accident rate of *Okada* in Lafia mostly as the result of *Okada* riders who try to maneuver their ways in a high way for easy passage and some of the *Okada* riders are into high drugs.

### **Conclusion**

*Okada* transport service emerged in Lafia Metropolis as a result of poverty, unemployment but the business serves as a source of income to government and the *Okada* operators. *Okada* transport service is the most common and easy mode of transportation that convey people, goods and services at a cheap rate. One of the greatest disadvantages of the business is that both the *Okada* riders and the passengers are involving into a terrible accident that resulted to the loss of lives and property. The government needs to apply all the necessary strategy to see that the management of *Okada* business is run effectively through the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC).

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