

TANKERS AND PIPELINES: NAVIGATING THE PATHWAY TO CREATING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FOR FUEL

- Stephen Lazi Akhere PhD -

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Over the years, Nigeria has continued to have a fragile fuel transporting system within its own states and cities. As a country blessed with deposits of the black gold, our main means of transporting petroleum products are through pipelines and tankers from depots, where they have been delivered from foreign refineries which are moved to fuel stations nationwide.

While this has been a stable way haulages. over the years for transporting fuel, the question to ask is whether these methods are actually safe and sustainable.

Transporting with tankers has be known to have more disadvantages than benefits, posing a high risk to people, and the environment and making the roads death traps for humans. The average Nigerian perceives fuel tankers as a menace as it contributes to traffic congestion on the already busy roads.

Topmost on the problem pyramid is the often erratic behaviour of tanker drivers who compete with other motorists for the roads ignoring the weight of their haulages.

Unfortunately, this bad driving technique coupled with bad road condition often results in tanker explosions that claim Transporting by tankers has been known many lives and properties. In milder cases,

there are tanker spills where fuel tankers end up spilling transported fuel along the way creating an opportunity for unscrupulous people to scoop the petroleum products. Dangerous as it sounds, it has become a regular news item and this questions the safety and sustainability of this method of transporting fuel.

In fact, petroleum tanker drivers have also repeatedly threatened strikes calling for the rehabilitation of cross country road networks as well as increase in freight rates. Not many will be as heroic or lucky as Ejiro Otarigho, a tanker driver who drove a burning tanker away from where it could wreak greater havoc and in so doing, prevented the loss of lives and properties.

Pipeline vandalism, a deliberate act of damaging petroleum pipelines with the intention of stealing petroleum products illegally a so continues to be an unending menace for the government and oil marketers. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has reported that the country loses about 200,000 barrels per day due to the nefarious activities of vandals.

This is in addition to the environmental hazards vandalized pipelines pose to the communities around them as a result of oil spillages which include the destruction of arable land that would have otherwise been used for agriculture and other widespread ecosystem damage.

The activities of these pipeline vandals have hampered operations in the oil and gas sector and have deprived the country of huge resources which otherwise would have accrued to government.

All efforts by government to eradicate this menace have virtually been thwarted through the unpatriotic acts of some citizens and their collaborators. This has therefore put untold pressure on the roads as the channel that is clearly easy to monitor and regulate.

Navigating a safe and sustainable transport system is however not an impossible task. All it requires is for all stakeholders to adequately key into their roles and responsibilities. This clearly include the security agencies who are charged with securing every aspect of the oil chain in Nigeria.

This will enable petroleum products to be transported by railways and thereby reduce the many incessant road accidents, petroleum products road spillages, and avoidable deaths of citizens.

Security agencies must be seen to be alive to their duties and rescue the nation and its oil resources from the grasp of unpatriotic and unscrupulous individuals bent on strangulating it economically.

In addition, technology has proved time and time again to be a reliable ally in fighting crimes and other untoward activities. The government and all agencies involved ought not compromise in terms of acquiring the latest technological gadgets and equipment that can help in tackling illegal activities along the oil value chain.

Furthermore, the government should supply routes away from the same roads pedestrians and motorists ply solely restricted to tanker drivers. These routes should be monitored and well maintained to ensure smooth delivery operations across the country.

The ongoing rail line construction in certain states of the country should be expanded to connect all major cities and towns in the country. This will enable petroleum products to be transported by trains and thereby reduce the many incessant road accidents, petroleum products road spillages, and avoidable deaths of citizens.

We may still have a long way to go but with consistent steps and contributions from stakeholders in the oil sector, a safe and sustainable pathway for the Nigerian oil transport can be created and maintained.

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