

THE ROLE OF SOKOTO STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (SEMA) IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FIRE DISASTER IN SOKOTO CENTRAL MARKET, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Fire disasters have become a recurring threat to commercial activities in Nigeria, particularly in major urban markets where congestion, poor electrical installations, and inadequate fire safety measures increase vulnerability. This study examined the role of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in the fight against fire disasters in Sokoto Central Market, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the nature and causes of fire disasters, the magnitude and socio-economic consequences of fire incidents, the roles of SEMA in disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, as well as the level of collaboration between SEMA and other stakeholders in the fight against the scourge of fire disasters in Sokoto Central Market. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. Primary data were collected through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and field observations involving 26 purposively selected participants. Respondents included SEMA officials, officials of the Sokoto State Government, personnel of the State Fire Service and Sokoto Central Market management, as well as academics and victims of fire disasters. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, academic literature, policy documents, and disaster management publications. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that electrical faults, illegal electricity and solar installations, market congestion, indiscriminate waste disposal, blocked access routes, and negligence by traders are the major causes of recurrent fire outbreaks in Sokoto Central Market. The study further established that SEMA plays a significant coordinating role through rapid emergency response, inter-agency collaboration, disaster assessment, relief distribution, public sensitization, and post-disaster rehabilitation in the management of fire disaster in Sokoto Central Market. However, the agency's effectiveness is constrained by inadequate funding, obsolete firefighting equipment, poor documentation of disaster losses, weak enforcement of fire safety regulations, political interference, communication gaps, and encroachment on emergency access routes. The study concludes that although SEMA has made appreciable contributions to fire disaster management in Sokoto Central Market, strengthening institutional capacity, improving stakeholder coordination, enforcing fire safety regulations, and investing in modern emergency response infrastructure are essential for reducing fire risks and enhancing market resilience.

Keywords: Fire disaster, management, Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Emergency response, Sokoto Central Market,

Background of the Study

Fire disasters constitute one of the most devastating hazards affecting urban commercial centers worldwide, particularly in developing countries where market infrastructure, emergency preparedness, and disaster management systems are often inadequate (Abrassat et. al, 2021). Markets serve as critical economic hubs, providing employment opportunities, generating government revenue, and ensuring the continuous supply of goods and services. Consequently, fire outbreaks in major markets result not only in the destruction of property and livelihoods but also in significant socio-economic disruptions that negatively affect local and national economies (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2023).

Globally, fire disasters account for substantial economic losses each year. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED, 2023), disasters—including urban fires—continue to threaten sustainable development by destroying infrastructure, reducing household income, and increasing poverty. Rapid urbanization, overcrowded commercial environments, poor electrical installations, inadequate firefighting equipment, and weak enforcement of building regulations have been identified as major contributors to frequent market fire incidents in developing countries (World Bank, 2022, Adekunle et. al, 2018, Agbola and Falola, 2021).

In Nigeria, market fire disasters have become increasingly common, particularly in densely populated commercial cities. Markets such as Balogun Market in Lagos, Onitsha Main Market in Anambra State, Ariaria Market in Aba, and Singer Market in Kano have experienced repeated fire outbreaks that resulted in billions of naira in losses (Federal Fire Service [FFS], 2023). Common causes include electrical faults, improper handling of combustible materials, illegal electrical connections, open flames, gas explosions, and inadequate compliance with fire safety regulations (National Emergency Management Agency [NEMA], 2022).

Recognizing the growing threat of disasters, the Nigerian government established the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) through Act No. 12 of 1999 (now Cap N34 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) to coordinate disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery nationwide. At the sub-national level, State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) were established to complement the efforts of NEMA by implementing disaster management policies within their respective states. In Sokoto State, the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) serves as the principal institution responsible for disaster risk reduction, emergency response coordination, public awareness campaigns, and relief distribution. The agency collaborates with the Federal Fire Service, State Fire Service, security agencies, local governments, market associations, traditional institutions, and humanitarian organizations in managing emergencies, including fire disasters.

Sokoto Central Market represents one of the largest commercial centers in Northwestern Nigeria, attracting thousands of traders and customers daily from Sokoto State and neighboring Niger Republic. The market plays a vital role in regional trade and contributes significantly to the state's internally generated revenue. However, its dense physical layout, aging infrastructure, congested pathways, indiscriminate storage of flammable materials, poor electrical wiring, and limited firefighting facilities make it highly vulnerable to fire outbreaks. Several fire incidents have been reported within the market over the years, resulting in extensive destruction of shops, merchandise, business capital, and means of livelihood (Daily Trust, 2024; Vanguard, 2023, Dankani et, al, 2022 and Aliyu and Dankani, 2018).

Effective disaster management extends beyond emergency response to include risk assessment, public education, disaster preparedness, early warning systems, inter-agency coordination, and

post-disaster recovery. Contemporary disaster management emphasizes proactive strategies aimed at reducing vulnerabilities before disasters occur (UNDRR, 2023). In this regard, emergency management agencies are expected to strengthen institutional capacity, enforce safety regulations, conduct public sensitization programmes, and coordinate rapid emergency responses to minimize disaster impacts.

Despite these expectations, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of disaster management institutions in many Nigerian states. Challenges such as inadequate funding, insufficient firefighting equipment, poor coordination among emergency responders, limited public awareness, inadequate personnel training, weak enforcement of safety standards, and delayed emergency response continue to undermine disaster management efforts (NEMA, 2022; FFS, 2023). These institutional constraints become particularly critical in high-risk environments such as major markets where fire outbreaks can spread rapidly due to overcrowding and the presence of combustible materials.

Within Sokoto Central Market, the recurring occurrence of fire incidents raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency in disaster prevention, preparedness, emergency response, and recovery. Understanding the agency's role, achievements, operational challenges, and collaborative mechanisms is therefore essential for improving disaster resilience within the market and enhancing the protection of lives, property, and economic activities. This study seeks to examine the role of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency in combating fire disasters in Sokoto Central Market with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for strengthening fire disaster management in the state.

Statement of Research Problem

Fire disasters have become one of the recurring hazards affecting commercial centres across Nigeria, resulting in the destruction of lives, goods, business investments, and public infrastructure. Major markets in cities such as Lagos, Kano, Onitsha, and Aba have experienced devastating fire outbreaks that have led to losses running into billions of naira and disrupted the livelihoods of thousands of traders (Federal Fire Service [FFS], 2023). Sokoto Central Market, one of the largest commercial hubs in Northwestern Nigeria, is similarly vulnerable to fire outbreaks due to overcrowding, poor electrical installations, inadequate firefighting facilities, indiscriminate storage of combustible materials, and weak compliance with fire safety regulations. The persistence of these incidents raises concerns about the effectiveness of existing disaster management mechanisms and the capacity of relevant institutions to prevent and respond to market fire emergencies.

Although disaster management has attracted considerable scholarly attention in Nigeria, existing empirical studies have focused predominantly on flood disasters, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian emergencies, with relatively little attention paid to fire disasters in urban markets. For instance, Adelekan (2011) examined the vulnerability of poor urban communities in Lagos to flooding and emphasized the need for improved disaster preparedness and adaptation measures, while Nkwunonwo, Whitworth, and Baily (2020) reviewed flood risk management in Nigeria and identified institutional weaknesses, inadequate funding, and poor inter-agency coordination as major impediments to effective disaster management. Similarly, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA, 2022), through the *National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2025)*, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2017) highlighted the importance of strengthening institutional capacity, stakeholder collaboration, and disaster preparedness in enhancing national resilience.

However, these studies and policy documents are largely broad in scope and do not provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of State Emergency Management Agencies in addressing market fire disasters.

Studies that specifically address fire disasters have also concentrated primarily on fire safety awareness, preparedness, and risk factors among market users rather than evaluating the institutional performance of emergency management agencies. For example, Adebimpe and Azeez (2015) found that many market traders possessed inadequate knowledge of fire prevention measures, had limited access to firefighting equipment, and lacked the capacity to respond effectively during fire emergencies. Likewise, annual reports of the Federal Fire Service (2023) consistently identify electrical faults, poor maintenance of electrical installations, overcrowding, and non-compliance with fire safety regulations as the leading causes of market fire outbreaks in Nigeria. While these studies contribute to understanding the causes and consequences of market fires, they do not examine the role of emergency management institutions in disaster prevention, emergency response coordination, stakeholder collaboration, or post-disaster recovery.

More importantly, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical studies focusing on the role of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in managing fire disasters within Sokoto State. Available information on fire incidents in Sokoto is largely confined to government reports, operational updates from NEMA and the Federal Fire Service, and media reports, with little scholarly evidence assessing the agency's effectiveness in fire prevention, preparedness, emergency response, public sensitization, coordination with other stakeholders, and recovery interventions in Sokoto Central Market. Consequently, policymakers and disaster management practitioners lack empirical evidence to evaluate the agency's operational performance and identify areas requiring improvement.

This gap in the literature limits the formulation of evidence-based strategies for strengthening institutional capacity, improving inter-agency coordination, and enhancing fire disaster resilience in one of the state's most important commercial centres. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the role of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in the fight against fire disasters in Sokoto Central Market, with a view to assessing its effectiveness, identifying operational challenges, and proposing practical measures for improving fire disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery

Methodology

This section contains the various components of the research methodology comprising of the research approach, research design, nature and sources of data, instrument of data collection, sample and sampling techniques, population of the study, and techniques of data analysis.

Research Approach

This research is purely qualitative that obtained its data in form of views, perceptions and experiences from purposively selected respondents In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which were carefully interrogated and analysed.

Research Design

This study is a single case study, which investigated the performance of Sokoto SEMA in disaster management in Sokoto state. However, the study focused on the nature, magnitude and consequences of fire disasters in the Sokoto Central Market and role of SEMA in the management of such disasters.\

Nature and Sources of Data

This study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through observation, In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with key stakeholders; including victims of disaster, community-based organizations and traditional rulers who are the representatives of their respective communities. Others are representatives of Sokoto state government, academics/experts and Sokoto SEMA officials. On the other hand, secondary data was sourced from government and non-governmental official reports, academic journals, books, and databases related to disaster management. These sources would provide historical data on disaster occurrences, responses, and impacts within the Sokoto state and beyond.

Population of the Study

The targeted population interviewed in this work are respondents affected by the fire disaster in the Sokoto central market and SEMA officials. The respondents under this category were selected based on their expected capabilities and relevance to provides first-hand information on the issue under investigation. They are also part and parcel (either victim of disaster or service providers) in the issue related to disaster management in such affected communities and beyond.

Sample and Sampling Techniques (purposive sampling)

This research adopted purposive sampling. Categorically, the sample size for both IDIs and FGDs on this work constituted 26 respondents. This number consisted of two (2) academics from Geography department for their wealth of knowledge on the issue of disaster, two (2) representatives of state government from the Ministry for environment and Ministry for land, housing and survey. Accordingly, three (3) staff of Sokoto SEMA office, due to their vast knowledge about the primary functions of SEMA and their experiences in the course of discharging the administrative duties in the state. Others are Director Administration Sokoto Central Market; Chief Fire officer of SCM fire service station and Fire Prevention Officer at Sokoto state Fire Service Headquarters, Sokoto. These categories of respondents were chosen because of their first-hand knowledge of the nature of disaster and state response to disaster in their communities.

While the categories for FGDs were victims of Fire Disasters at the Sokoto Central Market (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of the population

Population Area	Target Population	Respondents
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto	Academics/Experts	2
Sokoto State Government Officials	Commissioner's Representatives	2
SEMA Officials	Special Adviser, Director Relief and Rehabilitation and Director Admin.	3
Sokoto Central Market (SCM) official	Director Administration	1
SCM Fire Service Station	Chief Fire Station Officer and Fire Prevention	1
Sokoto state Fire Service HQTs	Officer	1
FGD	Victims of Fire Disasters, and representative of Community-Based Organizations	16

Method of Data Analysis

This study is purely qualitative. Therefore, thematic technique of data analysis was used in analysing the data. This further means that collected data through the forms of interviews and possibly observations was duly analysed using descriptive method. The analysing of such data was transcribed using themes and sub-themes, by identifying and labelling the data based on the objectives of the study. The analysis followed several stages. First, the interview and FGD responses were transcribed verbatim from field notes and audio recordings into written form. Second, the data was coded by assigning labels to recurring words, phrases, and ideas relevant to the study's objectives. These codes were then grouped into broader themes and sub-themes, which aligned with the research questions. Finally, the themes were analyzed, interpreted, and compared with the study's assumptions and existing literature on disaster management. To maintain validity and reliability, the study employed triangulation of sources by comparing responses from state officials, SEMA representatives, traditional/community leaders, and victims of disaster. This ensured that findings were not based on a single perspective but reflected the experiences of multiple actors involved in disaster management.

Results and Discussions

Nature of Fire Disaster in Sokoto State

Fire outbreak is one of the most dangerous disasters that can destroy lives and properties worth of trillions, particularly if there was no instant response from the professional personnel and relevant agencies such as federal and state Fire Service, NEMA/SEMA, Air Force, Police and individuals. The most affected areas are usually residential and commercial places where people, goods and sources of power/fire exist. The Sokoto Central Market like any modern business environment where different people gathered to make their earnings, a place of different size of stores and shops filled with the valuable items; has been vulnerable to fire outbreaks. Thus, empirical evidence shows that SCM have witnessed series of fire disaster that have consumed properties worth of billions and raw cash, with hardly any life lost.

It is pertinent to know that fire disaster unlike other forms of disaster, usually occurs throughout the year but with high frequencies in some seasons. Fire outbreak is difficult if not impossible to detect at the point in the time of its occurrence especially in the residential places. Likewise, the outbreaks of fire in Sokoto Central Market (SCM) have become sudden even at various times; being it wet or dry seasons (FGD, SCM, 2024). It was argued by an official of Fire Service that based on experiences and some available literature; fire used to breakout mostly during the time when harmattan wind blows between November to January. He further confirmed that the first incident in SCM was around 2002 in which the whole market was burnt down (IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024). However, as ascertained by some respondents through FGDs, the inferno is what has been divinely ordained by God. There are also other remote factors that could not be unconnected with deliberate acts of some marketers and human errors. For instance, careless and improper installation of solar power in the shops without consultation of experts to guide them on how to install it or what kind of equipment needed for solar installation is one of the problems. Others are illegal connections of electricity from national grid (popularly known as NEPA) to a single or multiple shops and stores in the market without the consent of management body in SCM (FGD, SCM, 2024). Another respondent attribute this to nonchalant attitudes of some marketers,

especially due to their negligence to switch the electronic appliances before closing their shops as demanded by the management; this is very common among the shop owners who are in haste to park and close their business. A respondent added that:

The factors are many, but illegal formation of Temporary Shade (TS) along the road that usually blocked the passage has contributed to the escalation of high recorded loses, especially during the fire incident since the point of fire would be inaccessible to the fire fighters. Shops owners and customers usually abandoned refuge within the business area, which may also ignite fire unknown to the people around (FGD, SCM, 2024).

In an interview conducted with the Chairman Sokoto Marketers Association he confirmed the above statement where he argued on the incessant fire outbreaks in SCM was attributed to many factors such as the way some shop owners' closes their places without switching the electrical appliances especially those with freezer and other appliances. These appliances which are suppose to be switch off for the safety of all are usually abandoned and spark up when light goes on and off more especially in the night (Chairman, Marketers Association SCM, 2024). Another person stressed that the other contributing factors are the manner in which the local security guards using local firewood which after use would be left without putting off the fire. She further pointed that food vendors also after selling their food or at closing time they will leave for their various homes without carefully and adequately putting the used brim storms off (FGD, SCM, 2024). It was argued that leftover cigarette if carelessly thrown inside dustbin parked for refuge within the market premises cause fire incidents that affects some parts nearly in middle of the market. Moreover, those mobile tea sellers known as "*Mai Nagaske*" moving around with life brainstormers can also cause fire within and around the market premises. This argument was confirmed by the Staff Officer (SO) SCM during interview when he stated that:

Mostly fire disaster used to happen during harmattan period, been that market is a congested place where both marketers and customers are in habit of dumping or throwing away unused thing very close to the shops without properly parking it. These acts of indiscriminate dumping of refuge have contributed. In spite the fact that those moving around with life brainstormers selling tea are used to be cautioned about the danger of doing so, they are not properly care for to keep eyes on what they carried. Some people did not know that smoking in the market is strongly prohibited they may smoke and threw away the left over anyhow without properly quenching it. These and many have contributed to the escalation of fire outbreak in SCM (IDI, Staff Officer SCM, 2024).

Nevertheless, it was confirmed that one of the most recent devastating fire disaster which occurred in 2022 was caused by electrical spark off; when the transformer stationed very close to eastern gate popularly called *Kofar Gabas* busted. A respondent from FGDs confirmed that "the inferno was started from line D (Kofar Gabas) where electricity transformer (the main causer) was stationed, then it extended to east, moved to north and finally to central parts of SMC (FGD, SCM, 2024).

Moreover, another source has it that the 2022 fire incident happened in the early morning precisely around 01:09am while the market was not opened and very few movements of persons and vehicles are noticed (FGD, SCM, 2024). Another respondent added that office of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) located within the SCM premises have alerted the state fire service office which in collaboration with other sister agencies from far and near fought the

fire and later put it off. This was achieved within 56 minutes, due to the great efforts of SMC fire service with the gigantic support of all other security agencies like Nigerian Police (NP), Civil Defense and Airport personnel and the good people around the area (FGD, SCM, 2024).

Furthermore, it was confirmed from officials that within the period of 2020 to date, there are about nine (9) recorded cases fire out breaks in SCM. Thus, the stated incidents have been listed started with the most recent ones, the dates and time for each fire incident, it causes and possible response from fire fighters is indicated in the below table:

Magnitude of Fire Disaster in Sokoto Central Market (SCM)

Table 3: Showing the Fire Incidents in Sokoto Central Market

S/N	TIME	CAUSES	ACTION TAKEN
1	10:00 am	NEPA	Fought the fire
2	07:45 pm	Dustbin	Fought the fire
3	10:00 am	Solar	Disconnect the solar and Fought the fire
4	04:30 am	Unspecified	Team work and Fought the fire
5	04:45 am	NEPA	Disconnect the light and fought the fire
6	01:09 am	NEPA	Team work and Fought the fire
7	06:20 am	Unspecified	Fought the fire
8	08:30 pm	NEPA	Fought the fire
9	02:30 pm	Generator	Fought the fire

Source: Sokoto Fire Service Headquarters, Sokoto, July 2025

The above table indicated the frequency of fire disaster in SCM which was about 9 times within five (5) years only, with two or more in a year. For examples, in the year 2020 it happened twice and three times in the year 2024. These and many fire incidents as shown in the table were caused by different factors at different time that consumed raw cash and properties worth of billions of naira yet to disclose by the body concerned particularly the Sokoto state government.

Magnitude of fire outbreak in SCM was terribly sad and unquantifiable in terms of losses of all kind of goods and properties stored. Once such incident happen it is difficult if not impossible to be told the exact lost, both in cash and goods. That is why state government used to constitute a committee with responsibility to investigate the number of people affected and the value of their properties lost to the inferno.

In SCM, fire disaster used to culminate anything within the scene of the event, irrespective of when and how those items were kept. Fire Station Officer (FSO) interviewed (2024) stated that although no loss of life was recorded upon all the incidents but money and properties worth billions of naira have been lost to the fire. The report produced for the 2022 incident was already submitted to management of SCM for its onward submission to Sokoto state government. Moreover, Staff Officer (SO) SCM revealed that in the 2022 inferno, nearly everything was burnt down especially materials such as robber and leather shoes, slippers, ornaments (*kayan koli*). Others were all forms of aroma (*kayan yaji*) especially garlic among others were the most affected items (IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024). When shading more light on this, one of the FGDs respondents decried that almost half of the market was affected, but the notable lines are that of line A, B, C, and D that has recorded highest severity from the terrible incident of 2022 (FGD, SCM, 2024). Another respondent added that cash and properties worth millions naira was engulfed by the said fire incident. He cited example with one Alhaji Ummaru Na Alh. Shehu Gyalgyal (a well-known for

robber trading of line D Kofar Gabas) has lost over 150,000 million naira to that inferno. There are over 300 people selling different properties valued from 1m up to 100 million that have been completely consumed by fire. As a result, he further stated that thousands of family members who depended on these businesses are now roaming about with nothing to do. While some are with less than one million naira as capital to keep soul and body together. He further claimed that:

Most of the traders with little capital have return to road side with their business outside the main market. The worst is that the past administration of Aminu Tambuwal did not make any tangible efforts to restore our hopes upon all the promises to adequately compensate the actual victims. The government gave most of us worthless compensation. Let me tell you and say it anywhere that you have heard it from me, the highest beneficiary is Alh. Ummaru (with 25 store and shops filled with valuable items), ended up collecting only 2.7 million while other victims received far below that amount (FGD, SCM, 2024).

Chairman SCM Marketers Association reaffirmed that the magnitude of fire disaster is beyond anyone's imagination, due to the fact that many shops, stores and properties burnt to ashes; one can see by self how people are struggling to survive because all their traders, capitals and properties were consumed by inferno. So, the little they sourced from another means is what they displayed outside the main market premises to get what they can survive together with other family members. He finally put it as nobody knew the exact figure of the people affected or know the precise amount of the properties consumed except government that has already constituted a committee of experts and selected victims of such disaster. However, he confirmed that the fire outbreak in the Sokoto Central Market is every year event, though with different issues such as causes and magnitude among others (IDI, Chairman Marketers SCM, 2024).

The incidence of fire disaster particularly of the Sokoto Central Market is a recurring one. Many factors are attributed as the causes of the series of the fire outbreaks. Because of most of incidences occur after the closure of business, hardly is any life lost. However, goods and cash worth billions of naira have been lost to many of these incidences. Despite many committees and government reports of the incidences of fire outbreaks at SCM, not much have been done to compensate victims or prevent further occurrences.

SEMA'S Roles in the Management of Fire Disaster in Sokoto Central Market (SCM)

Fire disaster is one of the devastating emergencies that can suddenly happen with large number of human casualties and destruction of properties (IDI, Academic Expert, 2025). Sokoto SEMA as an agency solely responsible to respond such disaster is expected to play vital role in prevention, control, mitigation and rehabilitation. The representative of Sokoto SEMA said that rapid response used to be made by the SEMA and state government whenever the information about the fire outbreak reaches their office. He clarified that:

To (officially) report any fire outbreak in SCM it should first come from the office of the (CSO) Chief Security Officer of SCM, through Director Administration (DA), through the office of the Director General (who is the overseer of the affairs of the SCM), through Head of Service and Secretary to the State Government, and finally to His Excellency's office (IDI, Staff Sokoto SEMA, 2024).

However, it was further stated that once there is report of fire incident, state apparatus would be mobilized to the scene for quick response through effective mobilization of all stakeholders in the

state including that of Airport and fire service stations who were together to put off the fire. This was argued by SCM official:

SEMA or state government alone could not handle the issue of fire disaster particularly in SCM. Thus, neighboring states, National and International, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NEMA, FERMA, Airport, Red Cross, etc), private individuals and companies have given their financial and non-financial contributions; all security personnel in the state especially Police and Civil Defense also used to assist to safeguarded the people's properties from theft (IDI, Staff SCM, 2024).

In his response Chairman Sokoto Marketers Association confirmed that there was no time from the first fire incident in 2002 during Bafarawa's administration up to the current administration of Dr. Ahmad Aliyu (2023-date) without getting necessary support and assistance no matter how small it is from Sokoto state government. Government at all levels through their agencies are trying their possible best to financially assist the victims of fire disaster just to support them not to replace what has been loss to such kind of fire. State government used to distribute fund donated by neighboring states, federal government, companies, organizations and good Samaritans among individuals and/or groups of individuals to the actual victims of fire incident in SCM (IDI, Chairman Marketers Association, 2024).

In an interview, Fire Station Officer confirmed that there is another committee set up which comprises all the management of SCM including the SA, Police and Civil Defense under market Fire Service Chief on how to decongest the market, especially during this harmattan period in which fire outbreak become rampant. According to him fire that can be put off within 15 minutes if delayed for about 5 minutes can take you 5 hours to quench it off. Though he pointed some challenges associated with their work such as lack of enough ways to rescue and fight the fire instantly when such incident happens, due to illegal display of goods by traders. This is really disturbing to hear that even within the period of the current administration there was up to 5 fire outbreaks in this market, although with less casualties. According to him, in terms of firefighting equipment, Sokoto state government among other agencies are doing their best especially state office of the fire service for prompt action (IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024). However, Station officer have further pleaded that:

There is need for the Sokoto state government to buy them new vehicles with modern equipment, due to the fact that the vehicles they are using now are somehow old and outdated. He shaded light that the modern vehicles has a factory fitted lifter that can reach the higher tower building, it also has a high sophisticated fire extinguisher unlike the current powder one; operate manually and to be refill or throw away after use (IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024).

For the strategies put in place by State government in curtailing excessive fire incident, Staff of the SCM argued that Sokoto state government is reconstructing the affected areas, though work is now halted and a committee has been set up to review the construction. This would enable the state government to reapprove the continuation of the work under the supervision of Sokoto Investment. He further stated that:

There is also proper arrangement which led to the establishment of a committee of encroachment which includes Police, Civil Defense, staffs of SCM and Representatives of Marketers, and to be headed by Fire Service Chief. This is in order to avoid unnecessary blockage of roads by traders, to

ensure good passages of people and vehicles especially water tankers in case of any emergency (IDI, Staff SCM, 2024).

In an interview with the chairman central committee (FSO SCMs) narrated that their committee is strong one saddled with the certain responsibility to clear off the routes in the whole SCM. He is also the chairman solar committee which have since invited the professionals and engineers in that aspect to tell the committee why solar frequently causes fire in the market. The professionals responded that it is due to an illegal connection; use of less quality wires and poor batteries and lack of solar switch control that can regulate it and switch off when there is tension elsewhere. They also stated that solar battery would explode if over charged. However, they further advised on how to go about the proper and legal way of installation of solar and all it required accessories before and after use. Eventually, he confirmed that:

The committee has collected a draft or list of all the quality items and accessories required for anyone ready to install the solar. Therefore, we went round the market and order for the disconnection of all the earlier installed solar with poor accessories. This similar action was also taken to those using electricity, as we discovered that most of the shop's owners had an illegal connection done by unprofessional hands ((IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024).

As part of the necessary measures the committee has involved all the security agencies stationed in the SCM, engineer Solar and Electricity, representatives of all categories of traders had agreed on one critical issue; henceforth there is no need of solar or electricity in the entire market since it is used to be open by 9am and close at 6pm daily. Even for those selling cold drinks, are advised to get their drinks cold before coming to the market. To achieve all these, he insisted that:

Sokoto state government have tasked the committee to carry its functions without fair or favor and to assure all members of the committee should always be vigilant and report any issue that may cause the fire incident, since government is ready to do the needful as when due. (IDI, Fire Officer SCM, 2024).

One of the FGDs respondents testified that the reconstruction of the affected shops was so far going on smoothly, but with coming of the present government of Ahmad Aliyu in 2023 everything has been halted; due to some irregularities and suspected fraud in the contract and other issues related to it (FGD, SCM, 2024). Another respondent have it that the Sokoto Central Market (SCM) was sold to unidentified bank and other Cement Company in the state, which is under investigation. He also argued in respect of compensation given to them, that neither SEMA nor any organizations has given anything to the victims of fire disaster apart from that little amount shared by the Sokoto state government (FGD, SCM, 2024).

Collaboration with other Agencies in the Fight against Fire Disaster in Sokoto Central Market

Sokoto SEMA used to seek for reinforcement from NEMA, Nigerian Airport Authority and Federal Fire Service on the course of firefighting when there is fire incident and other non-financial contributions to the victims of fire disaster as in the case of fire disaster in SCM and beyond (IDI, Staff Sokoto SEMA, 2024). In the same vein, a Fire Station Officer also explained that:

The nature of collaboration is with SEMA and other security agencies especially Police Force, Civil Defense Corps, and Immigration towards protection of lives and properties of all people in the SCM during and after the incident. SCM established a powerful committee in collaboration with these

sister agencies in which their first meeting was held on 11/12/2024 with Special Adviser SCM in order to come up with action plan on how to decongest the market premises for easy passage of all and their vehicles in response to fire outbreak (IDI, Fire Officer, 2024).

The above claim was testified by the management of SCM, that the authority would first communicate any fire outbreaks to the state government through SEMA that quickly mobilize other nearby stakeholders especially Sultan Abubakar III International Airport fire service, and all the neighboring fire service stations together with the one stationed at central market to put off the fire. Similarly, he elaborated that management of SCM usually seek the assistance of military and Para-military personnel in order to safeguard the people's properties from thieves and other criminals; especially during and after the sad event (IDI, Staff SCM, 2024). This statement was further supported in a claim made by fire station officer in SCM as he added that there is good understanding between our office and other security formations in the state when there is fire outbreak. These security agencies used to assist our personnel while fighting the fire to safeguard and protect the properties of both the affected victims and expected one. This is how we go about, not only in the critical place like SCM where properties worth billions of naira are kept but also in most of the residential areas in the Sokoto metropolis and beyond (IDI, Fire Officer, 2024).

To fortress the above, another respondent of FGDs further lamented that criminals are always waiting for such calamity to happen, this would grant them plain opportunity to steal people's properties in the process of helping the victims. For instance, it was around mid of 2024 fire incident happened at the main gate 'Babbar Kofa' but criminals were found in all the other gates stealing goods. He therefore, stressed that under this situation if not because of the security personnel stationed within and outside the market, supported by state government and other agencies most of the goods not burnt could have been stolen (FGD, SCM, 2024).

In view of all these instances, it was posited that definitely Sokoto SEMA need other stakeholders including individuals, formal agencies or organizations to join hand together in disaster management not only in Rabah, Shagari and SCM but also in the entire state. It was revealed that these organizations usually donate funds and necessary items to the victims of disaster and emergencies, depending on the forms and magnitude of disaster. However, the funds and items to be shared would first be handed over to the state government by respective agency or organization for onward distribution to affected persons. He further clarified that:

Such intervention is not directly given to the Sokoto SEMA, rather these agencies will collaborate with SEMA in assessment of disaster happened and eventually attach some staff together with security agencies in the state for fair distribution to the enlisted victims of disaster. More so, these organizations also directly help in training SEMA staff within or outside the Sokoto state without any financial commitment from the Sokoto SEMA office. Similarly, they used to help the agency in developing strategies plans towards disaster management in the state like Early Warning System in the case of flood disaster (IDI, Staff Sokoto SEMA, 2024).

Challenges of Sokoto SEMA in Management of Disasters in Sokoto State

The findings of this study revealed that fundamental issues like the official records of fire incidents in SCM and the properties consumed are not properly generated and kept for access to relevant authorities (FGD, SCM, 2024). However, an official of the SCM affirmed that it is true that some

vital information regarding to the fire disaster can not be ascertained since nobody knows the exact figure of the people affected or the precise amount of the properties consumed, hence this is not about the owners of business or traders to make estimate of what they lost; it is the responsibility of the state to verify all claims made. Therefore, the committees established by the state government are expected to investigate and report on the extent of damages and destruction and the truthfulness of claims made by people. The committees are usually supported by the relevant agencies such as NEMA and NGOs such as Red Cross, who are critical stakeholders (IDI, Staff SCM, 2024).

In spite of the aforementioned the most notable challenges confronting the SEMA and other state agencies in disaster management in the three selected local governments under study are especially limited fund to runs the agency; political interference, encroachment and overlapping by other state agencies; communications gaps between and among agencies and victims of disaster among others.

An anonymous in SCM also argued that the Sokoto state governments' failure to purchase new vehicles with modern equipment to the state Fire Service especially SCM fire station office; due contributes to the challenges. He stressed that modern vehicle had a factory fitted lifter that can reach the higher tower building compacted with high sophisticated fire extinguisher among others (Anonymous, 2024). It was argued that the only vehicle in use now cannot be enough and expected to work efficiently in the SCM and beyond in case of any eventuality. More so, those with business especially within the SCM are urged to endeavor to purchase fire extinguishers of less than 30 thousand naira to save or help them before the arrival of the rescuers especially the fire service (FGD, SCM, 2024). Most of the respondents argued that it is the Sokoto state government that should be held responsible to any problems associated with SEMA and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the state. For instance, an anonymous official among the management of SCM stated that the state government to some extent excluded them in some relevant activities in the market. He stated that their entire (important) document was lost to the recurrent fire incident. Sokoto state Governor has directed Ministries of Environment and ministry of Land, Housing and Survey on behalf of the management of SCM to ensure all what are needed are provided for the smooth daily operation/activities (Anonymous, 2024).

On their part, traders interviewed through FGDs expressed their dissatisfaction with Sokoto SEMA and some governmental and non-governmental out fits, on the delay by the state government to constitute a monitoring committee outside the management of SCM that will ensure that shops owners must use the quality of solar panels, wire, sockets and batteries before installation. In the same vein, all the illegal connection should be removed permanently; while any person found wanting should be punished accordingly (FGD, SCM, 2024). On the other hand, another respondent havesimilarly accused the management of SCM of collecting money from people to create Temporary Shade (TS) that escalate the impact of fire disaster at their business environment. He however advised the management that:

The proposed committee of SCM should be fair and just, they should avoid collecting money from the traders that will block the entry and exit in the whole premises of SCM. These TS causes delay during firefighting and escalate the severe consequences of fire disaster in SCM. He admonished to the business men and women to avoid greediness, but to be contented with shops they have and stop seeking for additional TS at the front of their shops/stores or that of others just because you want display or trade their goods (FGD, SCM, 2024).

Discussion

Based on the results presented above, the findings of the present study revealed that electrical faults, illegal electricity connections, poor solar installations, negligence by traders, indiscriminate refuse disposal, and market congestion constitute the major causes of recurrent fire outbreaks in Sokoto Central Market. Respondents further explained that most fire incidents occur after business hours when electrical appliances are left switched on and when faulty electrical systems generate sparks that ignite combustible materials. This finding corroborates Adeleye et. al, (2021), whose analysis of commercial building fires by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) identified electrical distribution systems, cooking equipment, careless disposal of combustible materials, and human negligence as the leading causes of fire outbreaks in commercial premises. Similarly, the present study demonstrates that poor electrical safety practices and negligence remain major contributors to market fires in Sokoto Central Market.

The study also established that market congestion, illegal temporary structures, blocked access routes, and indiscriminate display of goods significantly hinder firefighting operations during emergencies. Fire officers reported that access roads are frequently obstructed, delaying the arrival of firefighting vehicles and allowing fires to spread to adjoining shops before suppression begins. This finding agrees with Agbonkhese et. al, (2017), who reported that inadequate access roads, overcrowded commercial environments, and poor compliance with fire safety regulations substantially increase fire losses in urban commercial buildings. Both studies highlight the importance of maintaining unobstructed access routes and enforcing building regulations to facilitate effective firefighting.

The findings further revealed that collaboration among Sokoto SEMA, the State Fire Service, Airport Fire Service, Federal Fire Service, Police, Civil Defence Corps, market management, and community members has considerably improved emergency response during fire outbreaks. Respondents acknowledged that the combined efforts of these institutions have prevented several incidents from escalating into more devastating disasters. This finding supports Kudor. (2020), who found that coordinated emergency response involving multiple agencies significantly improves fire suppression, evacuation efficiency, and protection of lives and property during urban fire emergencies.

The study further showed that although firefighters respond promptly to fire incidents, inadequate firefighting equipment, obsolete fire engines, and limited operational resources continue to constrain effective fire suppression. Respondents specifically recommended the acquisition of modern firefighting vehicles equipped with hydraulic ladders and advanced extinguishing systems. This finding corroborates Rahman et al. (2021) Dankani, Aliyu and Dankani (2023) on Assessment of Household Fire Safety Devices and Preparedness in Sokoto Metropolis and Aliyu and Dankani (2018) on Evaluation of Fire Disaster Safety Measure in Sokoto Metropolis, who observed that inadequate firefighting equipment, insufficient logistics, and poor institutional capacity remain major constraints affecting fire service performance in developing countries including Nigeria

The findings also indicated that despite repeated awareness campaigns and enforcement efforts, many traders continue to engage in unsafe practices such as illegal electrical connections, improper solar installations, smoking within the market, and indiscriminate disposal of combustible waste. This finding is consistent with Kihila (2017), who argued that public awareness alone is insufficient to reduce fire risks unless accompanied by strict enforcement of fire safety regulations and sustained behavioural change programmes.

The study further revealed that although the Sokoto State Government provides financial assistance to victims of market fire disasters, the compensation received is generally inadequate compared with the magnitude of losses incurred. Traders expressed dissatisfaction with post-disaster compensation, noting that many businesses worth millions of naira received only minimal financial support. This finding agrees with Yusuf (2012), who found that inadequate post-fire compensation delays business recovery and weakens the economic resilience of victims following commercial fire disasters.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of the Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) in the fight against fire disasters in Sokoto Central Market, Nigeria. The findings reveal that fire disasters have become a recurrent phenomenon in the market, with electrical faults, illegal electricity and solar installations, market congestion, indiscriminate waste disposal, blockage of access routes, and negligence by traders identified as the major causes. Although the incidents have resulted in enormous economic losses amounting to billions of naira, the study found that the prompt response of the State Fire Service, SEMA, and collaborating agencies has significantly minimized the loss of human lives.

The study further established that SEMA plays an important coordinating role in disaster management through rapid mobilization of response teams, collaboration with the State and Federal Fire Services, NEMA, security agencies, humanitarian organizations, and market authorities, as well as providing relief and facilitating post-disaster assessments. The establishment of committees to regulate market activities, enforce decongestion, monitor electrical and solar installations, and improve emergency preparedness demonstrates the agency's commitment to disaster risk reduction.

Despite these achievements, the effectiveness of SEMA is constrained by several institutional and operational challenges, including inadequate funding, obsolete firefighting equipment, poor documentation of disaster losses, political interference, weak enforcement of fire safety regulations, communication gaps among stakeholders, and persistent encroachment on access roads within the market. These challenges reduce the agency's capacity to prevent and respond effectively to fire emergencies. The study therefore concludes that while Sokoto State Emergency Management Agency has made significant contributions to fire disaster management in Sokoto Central Market, strengthening institutional capacity, improving stakeholder collaboration, enforcing fire safety regulations, and investing in modern firefighting infrastructure are essential for enhancing disaster preparedness, response, and resilience within the market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Government should strengthen the institutional capacity of SEMA and the State Fire Service** by providing adequate funding, recruiting additional skilled personnel, and procuring modern firefighting vehicles, equipment, communication gadgets, and emergency response facilities capable of responding effectively to large-scale market fires.
2. **The Sokoto State Government and market management should strictly enforce fire safety regulations** by eliminating illegal electrical and solar installations, removing temporary structures that obstruct access roads, prohibiting unsafe commercial

practices, and ensuring routine inspection of electrical systems and firefighting equipment within the market.

3. **SEMA should intensify public awareness and disaster preparedness programmes** through regular sensitization campaigns, fire safety education, evacuation drills, and training of traders, market associations, and security personnel on fire prevention and emergency response procedures.
4. **An integrated disaster management coordination framework should be institutionalized** to strengthen collaboration among SEMA, NEMA, the Federal and State Fire Services, security agencies, market authorities, humanitarian organizations, and community stakeholders for improved information sharing, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery.
5. **A comprehensive disaster information management system should be established** to facilitate accurate documentation of fire incidents, assessment of damages, identification of victims, and transparent distribution of relief and compensation. Such a database will also support evidence-based planning, policy formulation, and future disaster risk reduction initiatives.

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