

Inside Niger Delta on Sunday

Rage Trails Sapele Surge Killings



• The late Mr Jude Otite

- 'A spark and my dad died instantly, another killed rescuing others'
- Two families shattered, BEDC mum

By Paul Olayemi

A quiet night, then a deadly spark. That Friday night started like every other night on Agbogoroma Road — dark, quiet, and tired. There was no light, as usual. People were closing their shops, some already asleep. Then suddenly, the light came on.



• Burnt shop. (Insert) One of the naked wires that caused death

It wasn't the normal light people in the area get once in a while. Residents would later learn it was a high-tension supply — the type usually meant for factories and big businesses, not ordinary homes. Within seconds, a loud bang tore through the air — like a small explosion — and sparks lit up the street.

Before anyone could understand what was happening, two people were gone.

One of them was Mr. Jude Otite, a 68-year-old man known by many as Bobmen. The other was Desmond, a 32-year-old popularly called Desmond Tutu.

Jude's daughter, Ochuko Otite, can't forget that night.

"We were all in darkness when suddenly we heard people shouting outside," she told Sunday Vanguard, her voice breaking. "They said my mother had fallen... then my father came out to help. Before we knew it, he fell too. We just stood

there and watched him die."

Fire, panic and helpless cries

The surge had started a fire on the roof of a nearby shop. People rushed with buckets of water, trying to help. A man took a stick to push off the live wire. Desmond ran to assist — and died instantly.

Witnesses said it was like watching death move from one person to another.

BEDC's cold silence

By morning, officials of the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC)

arrived — not to console the grieving families, but to reconnect the same line. "The chairman of the local government, Hon. Bright Abeke, stopped them," Ochuko said. "He told them to care about the people first. Till now, BEDC hasn't said a word of apology."

A people paying for darkness

Residents say the tragedy was long in coming. They've complained for years about high-voltage surges, bad transformers, and reckless disconnections.

Kenneth, a welder, said: "Sometimes we stay two weeks without light. Then they bring small current just to make us pay bills. After that, darkness returns."

Ironically, this happens in a town that hosts two power generation plants — the Ogorode Power Station and the National Integrated Power Project. Both feed electricity to the national grid, while residents who live beside them barely see light.

"It's like living beside a river and washing your hands with spittle," one community leader lamented.

Light for the rich, darkness



• Mrs. Otite

for the poor

Despite the two power plants, residents say they get less than two hours of electricity daily. Businesses rely on diesel. Families get outrageous estimated bills. Meanwhile, a privileged few enjoy steady power through a special 33KVA line allegedly reserved for those who can afford it.

"We pay for darkness," Kenneth said simply.

Reporter chased away

When this reporter visited BEDC's office to get their response, officials declined to comment. Security men ordered me out, warning, "No camera here, go away."

A community tired of being ignored

This isn't the first time residents have protested. They've blocked express roads, marched to the power plant, and vowed to shut it down.

"We have been shouting for years," said an elderly man. "Nobody listens until people die."

Grief that won't fade

Inside the Otite home, sorrow still lingers. Mrs. Otite, who survived the shock, remains weak and traumatized.

"Every time I see light flicker, I remember that night," her daughter said. "We used to be afraid of darkness. Now we are afraid of light."

"It could have been anyone" Desmond's family, for their part, mourns quietly. He died helping others. "A good-hearted man who paid for BEDC's failure," a friend said.

Everyone in the area knows — it could have been anyone.

When the light that should save kills

Experts say what caused the deaths was high-voltage electricity meant for industrial use, not homes. Safety transformers were either faulty or bypassed.

That single mistake — feeding residential lines with factory current — turned a night of joy into a night of horror.

A lesson unlearned

Months have passed, yet nothing has changed. The wires still dangle. The transformers still hum angrily. BEDC still sends bills. Electricity, meant to bring comfort, continues to take lives.

A plea for justice

The Otite family wants accountability. "If we stay quiet," Ochuko said, "others will die too." In the town that generates power for millions, families now whisper a warning when the bulbs flicker: "Remember that Friday."

What can people emulate from you to live