

Pregnant woman, children among 11 mourners feared dead in Benue boat tragedy



File image of a boat mishap

By Peter Duru, Makurdi

Tragedy struck in Benue State on Saturday night as at least 11 mourners, including a pregnant woman and six children, were feared dead after a boat conveying them home from a burial ceremony capsized on the River Benue in Makurdi Local Government Area, LGA.

The victims were reportedly returning to Daududawadawa community, an island settlement located behind the Nigerian Army School of Military Engineering (NASME) Barracks in the North Bank area of Makurdi, when the boat overturned midway through the journey.

Sources said the incident occurred between 7 and 8pm amid a torrential downpour and strong winds that swept across parts of the Benue state capital.

It was gathered that the passengers had earlier attended the burial of a woman from their community in Wadata, a suburb of Makurdi town and were in their way home.

Confirming the incident, the Commander of Operation Shara (Sweep), a local vigilante group in the North Bank axis of Makurdi, Mr. Nura Umar, explained that the deceased woman had been taken to a private hospital in North Bank earlier on Saturday but died shortly afterward.

According to him, relatives and sympathisers from the Daududawadawa community gathered in Wadata to participate in her burial before embarking on the ill-fated return trip.

“What happened was that we took a sick woman from the community behind NASME to a private hospital in North Bank yesterday morning, where she later died. Her relatives came and joined us for the burial at Wadata,” Umar said.

He continued: “After the burial, they boarded a boat to cross back to Daududawadawa community. At about 7pm, heavy rain and strong winds started and the boat capsized halfway into the journey.

“There were over 40 passengers aboard the boat, but 11 are feared dead. We have recovered four bodies so far and buried them, while divers are still searching for the remaining victims.”

Umar disclosed that among those feared dead were a pregnant woman and six children from the small riverine community.

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He also recounted a heartbreaking incident involving one of the survivors who escaped the mishap but lost her baby.

“One of the women survived, but the baby she had strapped to her back was swept away when the boat capsized,” he said.

The accident has reportedly thrown Daududawadawa community into mourning, with residents anxiously awaiting news of those still missing as search and rescue efforts continue.

Attempts to obtain comments from the Chairman of Makurdi Local Government Council, Mr. Joseph Keffi, were unsuccessful as calls and text message sent to him were not responded to at the time of filing this report.

When contacted, the Public Relations Officer of the Benue State Police Command, DSP Udeme Edet, said she had yet to receive details of the incident.

As of press time, local divers and community volunteers were continuing the search for the missing passengers, while families of the victims gathered along the riverbank, hoping for updates on their loved ones.