

Ladies die in Abuja pond

● *They were in high spirit for Christmas - Relatives*

By Nathaniel Jonah & Mustapha Suleiman

When 23 years old Ladi Friday left her Takum hometown in Jos, Plateau State, to join her husband in Abuja, she had no premonition that she was embarking on a journey of no-return. Barely three months after she relocated to Abuja to be with her hearthrobe, she met her untimely demise on the December 23, 2009 while

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preparing for a trip back to her hometown. Investigations by *Sunday Trust* revealed that on that fateful day, Ladi, in company of her friend died at the pond.

VILLAGERS' ACCOUNT

Ladi and Talatu Ndong had proceeded to the nearby pond to do their laundry. According to an eye witness, John Yetinve, who also resides in Dakwo, “When I came back from work, I saw some people gathered at the pond, and when I asked them concerning what happened, they told me that two ladies went to the pond to wash clothes in preparation for their journey to the village. One of the ladies went to fetch water from the pond and, in the process, got drowned. The second lady, too, got trapped in the pond while attempting to rescue her friend from the water. They were discovered by some little children swimming inside the pond. These children later went to the village to raise an alarm and they were eventually evacuated from the pond. The pond has been here for over one year now and residents have been going there to fetch water which they use for washing and bathing.”

Another resident of the village, who gave her name as Mercy Abdul, added that the disaster would have been averted if there were other villagers at the pond side. Lamenting that Talatu Ndong could have run to the village for help rather than attempting to rescue her drowning partner, the woman added that the two died before help could come their way.

According to a lady who claimed that Ladi was in with her on the day she met her untimely death, the two ladies were left behind at the pond when other villagers that also went to wash had gone. “The girl was here in the morning to make her hair and later went to the river with



THE deadly pond

her brother's wife to wash their clothes,” she said.

The pool, according to the villagers, was formed after the excavation of red clay was carried out by SCC Construction Company that tarred the road linking the Dakwo community with other roads in the FCT.

The two ladies according to an eyewitness went to the pool to wash their clothes when they got drowned and died. It was narrated that the two girls left home at about 1.30pm to wash their clothes and did not return, which prompted their family to launch a search party for them.

When *Sunday Trust* visited Dakwo village where the tragedy occurred, the community was wearing a mournful look. The dead bodies were on display for several hours before they were taken for burial in Plateau State, the hometown of the deceased.

EXPLANATION BY VILLAGE HEAD

When contacted, the chief of Dakwo village, who gave his name as Bangyi Tezhibeyi

Auta, confirmed the unfortunate incident. He also attributed the existence of the pool to the excavation of red clay by SCC Construction Company that worked on the road linking the community with the rest of the FCT.

“When they came for the excavation, they told me they got the order from the FCDA and I have no order to stop them. But when we discovered that the area was being dug excessively, we complained bitterly about it and were able to stop them,” he said.

When asked on measures he had taken to ensure that the place is sealed to prevent reoccurrence he said, “I have been warning residents for some time now, but they keep going there to wash and bath. Even after the recent incident, some people were seen there today. I hope the relevant agencies will come and redress the issue.”

A resident of the village who identified himself as Badmus Oleka told *Sunday Trust* that the environmental officers had been seen in the area in the past

for an environmental impact assessment.

Oleka also added that the incident had not been reported to the police.

NGO TAKES UP CASE

However, in a chat with this medium, Priscilla Achapa, the national coordinator of Women Environmental Programme, WEP, an international non-government organization with the objectives of addressing the environmental imbalances and also championing women's social and economic rights, explained that her attention was drawn to the incident by a security guard at the Sunny Vale Estate. In her words, “I was driving through the gates when one of the guards here drew my attention to the unfortunate incident and when I got to the pond, I saw two women in their early 20s lying lifelessly on the ground. I became concerned because, this is part of what we are working against. Most of these construction companies here in the FCT, when they dig and excavate sand from the rural

communities, they leave a very big gully, which in turn, become death traps for the residents. After the incident, we were told that another construction company took their truck to the site of the incident and attempted excavating sand from the pit. Thereafter, we took a firm action and prevented them from carrying out the excavation. It is quite unfortunate that it is only in Nigeria that this kind of issue can take place. In other countries, construction companies don't excavate sand close to residential settlements, and even if they will, a duly signed letter of approval would be issued to that effect.”

Attempts to reach the construction firms proved abortive as they were said to be unavailable for comments. *Sunday Trust* however, learnt that one of the construction companies, Mustadrak Contracts, a real estate and building construction firm, was forced by the residents to sign an undertaking to stop the excavation of red earth from the village. The undertaking, which was signed by one Wale Durojaiye on behalf of the company, was made available to the village traditional leader.

It would be recalled that a similar pool located in Chika village along the Lugbe-Airport road, also in the FCT had claimed lives.

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