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Nigeria: Flood Disaster 55 Feared Dead As Boat Capsizes Near Lokoja

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BY HOPE ABAH, 30 SEPTEMBER 2012

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Makurdi — It is feared that, at least, 55 persons fleeing the flood disaster in Benue State died yesterday in a boat mishap on their way to Lokoja, Kogi State, where they had hoped to find succour.

According to a member of the Benue State House of Assembly, Honourable Audu Sule, who called our reporter last night to break the news of the tragedy, he learnt about the disaster when some survivors put a distress call through to him.

Audu said the victims included women and children from rural areas in Agatu-speaking communities in Benue State. He said their homes and farmlands had been washed away in the floods that have swept through North-Central States.

The lawmaker explained further that the villagers had left their devastated villages in wooden boats to seek refuge with their kinsmen near Lokoja in Kogi State.

He added that the victims of the boat accident may have come from the following villages: Oweto, Adeka, Agbobe, Adagbo, Eminyi, Ologba and Bagana in Benue State.

It was difficult to obtain official confirmation of the accident last night. The Police in Lokoja told our reporter last night that the Marine Police had been rendered incapacitated because floods had washed away their operational base, hence they could not confirm the report of the accident.

In Benue State, the Deputy Police Public Relations Officer, Mr Ejike Alaribe, who spoke to our correspondent, said he was not aware of the boat mishap, adding that if it occurred near Lokoja, then it is the Kogi Police Command that should be asked to confirm the accident.

However, the Benue State Commissioner for Water Resources and Environment, Mr John Ngbede, who hails from Agatu, said he should be given time to make necessary contacts to confirm the story, while the State's Emergency Management Agency's Secretary, Mr. Adikpo Agbatase, told Sunday Trust that the agency had made appeals to Agatu people to relocate from their villages to SEMA camps, but they rejected the offer.

Meanwhile, the LGEA Primary School camp for people displaced by flood in Lokoja has been submerged in water, the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported yesterday.

The head of the camp, Mr Joe Uhumwangho, told NAN in Lokoja that the state government had been notified, adding that the people would be relocated to another primary school in the area.

He said that 187 displaced persons, comprising 75 female and 56 male adults, 27 male and 29 female children, were currently being kept in the camp.

Uhumwangho said the camp was one of the three established in Lokoja in the wake of the flooding of the state capital.

He said relief materials such as clothes, blanket and food items had been supplied to the camp by emergency relief agencies and the state government.

He, however, said there was a need for a medical team and an ambulance in the camp, saying that majority of the people appeared to be in need of medical attention.

Uhumwangho said a pregnant woman at the camp gave birth to a baby girl on Friday through caesarian operation at the Kogi State Specialist Hospital, Lokoja.

He said the woman and her baby were in good condition.

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