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It was sometime around 3am that Mairo Lawal, mother-of-three, woke to the sound of what she thought was a heavy wind. Few hours into her sleep in her cold, dark room of Madaki Street in Bukuru, Jos South, she woke to restored power which made the torch light in the pocket of her sweater useless. But it was not the bright light in her one-bedroom apartment that woke her. “It was the wind, it was so loud,” she recalled.

With a peek through her door, Mairo’s confusion became fear. A raging fire exacerbated by the city’s cold harmattan had eaten into her neighbour’s home. “I managed to wake my children, and took them out.”

Mairo’s neighbour, Maryam, and her husband Adam, had also woken to the raging fire. But unlike Mairo, the fire was coming from their makeshift kitchen which incidentally happened to be by the main entrance of their apartment.

Made of wood and corrugated tin sheets, the main door to the apartment was beside the kitchen which inhibited Maryam, her husband and three kids from making it out. Neighbours suspect the fire must have emanated from a stove which Maryam or another member of the family

forgot to turn off when power went out. With power restored in the middle of the night, the plate had likely overheated and caused the fire.

At the time Mairo bundled her children out the door, she was sure her neighbours were still alive. “I shouted her name, ‘Maryam’ and she answered me, she called me back twice. At some point she tried to come towards the door but the fire was overwhelming. The next time I screamed her name, there was only silence,” she narrated in tears.

In the midst of that confusion, other neighbours heard the screams and rushed out. Yusuf Abubakar, another neighbour and relative to the Adams, said he got to the scene a few minutes after 3am and was told all five occupants were still inside.

In the rocky area of Madaki street, neighbours went house-to-house in search of water having exhausted their stash. Black, smelly water from the gutters was fetched and poured, yet the fire raged on and extended to Mairo’s home. “It was not until an elderly man told us to use detergent that the fire began to subside,” said Abubakar.

By 4am, the fire had died down and neighbours were finally able to make it into the Adams apartment. But it was too late. The family of five had died.

Now left as the only surviving member of the family, is their eight-year-old daughter, Amina, who has been living with her grandparents a few meters from where her parents and sibling died.

Abubakar narrated that the remains of the three children were recovered first. “We found them on the bed, then we removed the father, and the mother was last. We found the parents by the door of the inner room probably trying to open the door or trying to barricade it.”

The names of the three children were given as Abdul (6), Ibrahim (4), and Fatima (8 months).

Mairo, in tears, recalled that she was with Maryam on Friday afternoon before she went out for to hawk food. “We had the usual banter, she even walked me out as I left for my business but I returned late and went straight to my room. Oftentimes when I return, I invite her to my room for tea but that night I went in, and went to bed.”

Thought Mairo also lost her business money and home due to the fire, she says all that is of no value compared to the loss of a friend and the rest of the family.