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# How headmaster made case for school hours before death

By Hope Abah, Makurdi | Publish Date: May 26 2018 3:00AM

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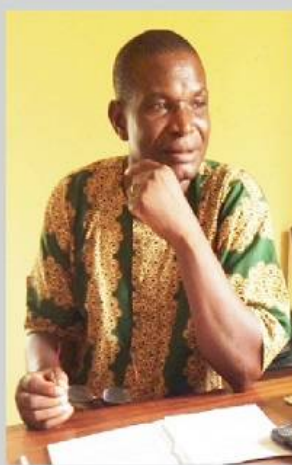
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■ School is out: The collapsed structure

PHOTOS: Hope Abah



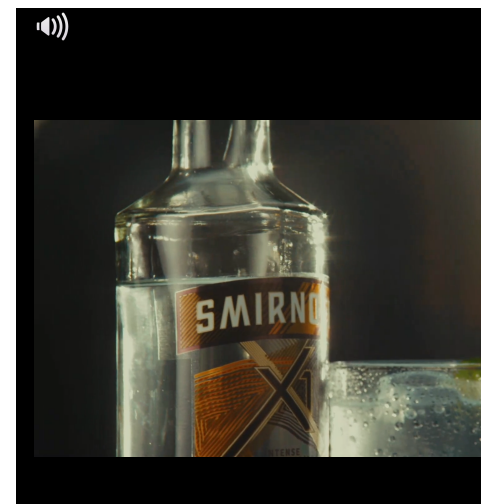
■ Late Stephens during the interview before his death, hours later

Without the slightest premonition of his death hours later, 44-year-old Tervaku Stephens, headmaster of St. Mary's Primary School, North bank suburb of Makurdi had granted Daily Trust an interview in his office where he spoke passionately about the environmental hazards bedeviling his school.

The Masters Degree holder had, during the encounter, expressed hope of possible solution by authorities concerned to the menace of

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indiscriminate waste, insecurity and erosion threatening his school.

The school had become a dumpsite for the large population of the North Bank slum and erosion had eaten deep into the school buildings such that one of them had already caved in.

A community leader who was worried about the collapsed building had drawn the attention of Daily Trust to the plight of the school, which was established by the Roman Catholic Mission before the government took over its running many years later.

Speaking to our correspondent on Tuesday May 15 (barely 24 hours to his death), the head teacher expressed sadness over the economic downturn and farmers/herders crisis, which he said had affected pupils' enrolment in his school.

Daily Trust gathered that the deceased had on Wednesday, a day after his interview with our correspondent in Makurdi gone to inspect some farmland for rice cultivation under the umbrella of a cooperative society.

Stephens and five others were reportedly killed near Ikpayongo community in Gwer East Local Government Area of Benue State. They were ambushed at the farm by gunmen believed to be herders, who attacked them and killed six out of the ten persons who went to inspect the farmland.

In the interview before his death, Stephens said the collapsed school building was reported to appropriate quarters but there has been no response yet. He said the building caved in in 2016 shortly after the structure was renovated.

“The structure is a block of 3 classrooms housing the whole of Primary four. I had to look for a way to accommodate them, using the computer centre built and equipped by Barrister Emmanuel Jime when he was member House of Representatives as a way of giving back to his alma mater.”

The late Stephens worried about the huge refuse dump that has become an eyesore around the school compound occasioned by the putrid smell which not only poses difficulty for learning in classrooms but a challenge to the health of pupils.



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“The refuse is a sad situation. When it rains, I can’t stay in the office. A school should not be littered with papers but in this situation, we can’t do otherwise. We made effort to sanitise the place by burning the refuse. We also met with the market committee to help stop dumping of refuse there. We even started seizing wheel barrow after instituting a committee but since there were no guards, that too didn’t work,” he narrated.

The deceased lamented that the school was often burgled, such that all the equipment in the science and computer laboratories donated by Jime had been carted away because there is no perimeter fence.

According to him, the challenges predate his headship of the school and despite many letters to the education ministry, no action has been taken.

“We only pray that the governor would pass through here one day to see our plight. The State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) has security but we hardly see them, they only show up in the morning during handover. As for the fencing, we have gone a long way with SUBEB,” he added.

Meanwhile, the deceased’s wife, Mrs. Patience Stephens, a primary school teacher with UBE Primary School, Federal Low Cost, is still unable to come to terms with the reality of her husband’s demise.

According to her, they were married for 15 years and had two children from the union which she said remained blissful until the agents of darkness cut short the life of her generous husband.

She recounted that her husband had gone to mass (early morning church service) as usual after which he watered the blocks moulded for him the previous day before they both left home together for work.

“By 4pm, his daughter called him to buy banana and fuel for generator. He bought the banana because we saw it in the car the next day.

“When I got back around 6pm and he was not still home, I tried his number but it was not reachable...It was the following day that we

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found out that four of them were missing, three corpses were immediately discovered,” Patience narrated amidst sobs.

She said though the deceased hailed from Andema Mballagh council ward of Makurdi LGA, he would be buried at his North Bank residence because of the security challenge in his village at the moment.

She said, “Nobody is in the village for now. It has been deserted since January.”

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