

FEATURE

How Faulty Transformer Killed 7 In Benue



The charred killer transformer by Police barracks, Lessel street, Wadata

By Hope Abah Emmanuel

Sat, 12 Mar 2022 03:38:22 GMT



10-year-old daughter. Responding to our



DAILYTRUST

HOME

NEWS

BUSINESS

POLITICS

PODCAST

VIDEOS

AGRICULTURE

SPORTS

OPINION

EDU

recently, he said, “talking about this again brings bad memories. I am still dealing with the pain of losing my daughter to an avoidable incident, which I am trying to forget and move on.”

Ajeh, a staff of the Benue Entrepreneurial and Skills Acquisition Centre, Makurdi, insisted that the incident that led to the death of seven people was avoidable if the Jos Electricity Distribution Company (JEDCO) responded to the community’s distress call when it became evident that the transformer in their neighbourhood was faulty.

- **Trader killed, many kidnapped as terrorists invade Niger market**
- **Despite NAFDAC’s alarm: Imported poisonous ponmo biz thrives in markets**

“The JEDCO didn’t show up for three consecutive days we had that problem. Sometimes the light would be very faint, and at other times it would be very full. It was always fluctuating,” he said, adding that the incident happened on February 24, about 8:30am, shortly after he left for work.

He said members of his household told him that there was a sudden spark from the transformer serving the area, popularly known as Wadata Rice Mill, a Makurdi suburb, and moments



Those who lost their lives to the incident were Ochanya Emmanuel Ajeh, 16; two siblings -Joy Ijeoma Ikemba, 30 and Victor Emenike Ikemba, 23; Mama Shuaibu; Aisha, a nurse; a water vendor and a woman whose name was not known.



■ Aisha, a nurse, also a victim



■ Joy Ikemba, 30-year-old victim



■ Ochanya, 16-year-old victim

Our correspondent gathered that the police stationed its men at the JEDCO office on that day to prevent angry Wadata youths from causing more trouble.

It was also learnt that apart from those who lost their lives, many people sustained various life-threatening degrees of injury and were taken to hospitals, while scores of household electronic gadgets were destroyed.



Ajeh, who hails from Iga-Okpaya in Apa Local Government Area of the state, also said his deceased daughter finished from secondary school last year, after which she was enrolled for tailoring recently at the Makurdi Modern Market pending when she would write the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) to further her education.

He recounted, “The incident happened on Thursday. I had barely settled down for work that day when I got a distress call from my wife, who was shouting, ‘I will not lose you.’ There were shouts and pandemonium at the background of the phone. I asked what happened but nobody responded, so I knew there was a problem in the house.

“I quickly boarded a bike while I placed a call to a neighbour, who told me that something had happened to my daughter and that I should meet them at the St Theresa Hospital at High Level, where she was taken to.

“On my arrival at the hospital, I saw the body of my daughter being wheeled to the mortuary. At that point, I broke down. I had no option than to take the corpse home. People suggested we should deposit her in the mortuary but I said we should first go home so that I could relate the incident to my people.



also electrocuted.”

He continued, “The boys who took my daughter’s body home went ahead of me and laid her on the chair.

“I live in a predominantly Muslim environment and the boys there were very helpful. They narrated how the incident happened. According to them, she was trying to turn off the switch on the wall but was electrocuted in the process.

“Before I left the house, she had dressed up for work that day. I learnt that one of her younger siblings drew her attention to the fridge, saying it was shocking. She wanted to prepare pap for them before leaving the house because they were on midterm break. That was between 8am and 8:30am. The one who drew her attention was asked to bring the pap from the fridge but was shocked in the process, so Ochanya (deceased) went to put her hand beside the fridge where the stabiliser was, to enable her switch it off from the socket.

“When she put her hand on the socket, it dragged her. The fridge had been in that very position before Ochanya was born.



“The same scenario was happening simultaneously in other homes in the vicinity. A woman in my compound who wanted to plug her phone was also pulled down while the charger in her hand glued to the socket. She was, however, lucky to survive. She is still receiving treatment as we speak.

“One woman in my compound, Mama Shuaibu, was buried immediately because she was a Muslim. That was before I conveyed my daughter’s corpse to the village that same day.”

He lamented that since then, the authorities of the JEDCO had not condoled with families of victims.

“No JEDCO staff came. That’s even our pain till date. It was the day Akume (minister of special duties and intergovernmental affairs) came with a transformer that the JEDCO district manager came and assessed what happened. He pleaded on behalf of the company, saying that those in higher positions would come to see things for themselves. But up till now they haven’t come, neither have they invited any family of the victims for a meeting.

“But the transformer is yet to be installed. The JEDCO staff who came earlier had intimated that their men were scared of coming to the area, so they would allow things to normalise



Corroborating Ajeh's story, Halima Mohammed, the late Aisha's elder sister, lamented that their parents are still alive and regretted the manner in which her sister, a mother of three, died in the presence of her helpless son.

"We will take them (JEDCO) to court so that this kind of incident doesn't repeat itself. We just want our minds to settle down first before taking action. Although our parents, as Muslims, feel the incident was an act of God, so they have left everything to the Almighty, we will go to court.

"It is very painful that we lost Aisha, our lastborn, whose husband had gone to work when the incident occurred. Two siblings in our neighborhood also died, while their mother, who they wanted to rescue, is still battling for her life in the hospital. To the best of my knowledge, the deaths were up to eight," she said.

Rabiu Adamu, the chairman of Aloko Transformer Committee said, "We thought it was a mere accident, so all of us relaxed. I reported the incident to the JEDCO network manager, who condoled with us. The truth is that the company doesn't have staff, vehicles or ladder; absolutely nothing. If anything happened to the transformer, we are the ones to pay for it and transport them to come and fix it.



the women admitted in hospital as a result of the incident had her legs amputated. Another victim's hands were also amputated. Three people are still in the hospital. It was a very unfortunate incident and a black day for our community."

Adamu said scores of electronics had been damaged in over 300 houses linked to the faulty transformer. He added that JEDCO staff intended coming, but because of high tension among the people, his committee advised them not to come until frayed nerves are calmed.

"We have had meetings with them and the police, so they will soon come to install the new transformer, then they can start talking about compensation for victims' families. We appreciate the minister of special duties for donating a brand new transformer to the community.

"The JEDCO said the old transformer was overloaded and that was why it caused us problem, so they would reduce the load before installing the new one.

"We are expecting a delegation of the JEDCO to come and conduct an assessment. It is their response that will determine whether we will take legal action or not," he said.