

## IN-DEPTH

From Abubakar Sadiq Mohd,  
ZariaHow electricity surge in Zaria  
community claimed 11 lives

**A**isha Shafiu heard an uncommon sound around 2am on Wednesday which roused her from sleep. "I thought it was a banditry attack," she told this reporter, three days later while groaning in pain from the burn wounds she sustained as a result of a power surge that engulfed her home and parts of Gwargwaje community in Zaria, Kaduna State.

"I then saw smoke coming from the electric wiring in my room, and I rushed to switch off my appliances, but the high current threw me down and I had burns on my hands and breasts," she recalled. The 20-year-old nursing mother said she became unconscious and was only brought to the following morning after she was taken to a nearby clinic and first aid administered on her.

Her husband, Shafiu Aliyu Makarfi, recalled that he had taken his wife to a clinic in the night and they discharged her the following morning and asked them to return home after she became stable. "She has a nursing baby, maybe that was why they did not admit her. However, she is responding to treatment as she can now talk and move some parts of her body, unlike the previous night," Shafiu stated.

Now lying with burn wounds and whining in pain, in a rented home she shares with her husband and infant, Aisha Shafiu said they are unable to afford proper medical treatment. "I have severe pains but I am helpless. I cannot go to the hospital because we don't have money to settle medical bills," she said.

Despite her condition, Aisha is one of the lucky ones who escaped electrocution after a high-tension line snapped and dropped on a low-tension line that resulted in an overload voltage supply, according to the Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company, which distributes electricity to Kaduna and parts of the North West region.

Our correspondent reports that at about 11pm on Tuesday, electricity supply was restored to Gwargwaje community in Zaria. However, about two hours later, an inferno had engulfed several houses which resulted in the deaths of no fewer than 11 people and damage to property worth millions of naira.

Daily Trust, however, reports that the casualty figure may have risen, according to the ward head of Unguwan Malam Shuaibu, one of the affected areas in Gwargwaje. "Initially, we had 11 people who lost their lives, but as of now (Saturday), there are reports reaching me that more deaths have been

recorded. Though we don't have a specific figure, it is estimated to reach 15 to 20," he said.

The ward head, however, expressed hope that justice will be done to the affected victims as many government officials continue to visit the area, including officials of Kaduna Electric Distribution Company (KAEDCO) to condole with the affected families.

Aliyu, whose wife was also burnt, expressed sadness and described the incident as a calamity that has not been recorded in the area before.

For Malam Abubakar Garba Jafar, it was a bleak morning as he lost his older brother and nephew on the same day due to the incident. He told this reporter that his immediate elder brother, Ibrahim Ja'afar, noticed smoke in the house and tried to put off a switch but he was electrocuted. He explained that his brother's son, Murtala Ibrahim, was also electrocuted when he tried to rescue his father.

"They both died due to the electric shock," he said, adding that many of those who lost their lives had either tried to switch off an appliance or went close to an electric cable in their homes.

Like Malam Ja'afar, Mrs Christy Lombo's life was turned upside down when her daughter woke her up to see smoke had engulfed their apartment at Gwargwaje Police Barracks in Zaria.

"I realised some of the fuses in the house were smoking," she recalled, adding that her husband, a police officer had woken up before her and made his way to the main change over. "He was instantly tossed away by the high current. We took him to the hospital where he gave up. I also suffered severe burns on my face and hands," she said.

Others like Mohammed Salisu Mai Inji lost property after the high voltage led to a fire that claimed his two grinding machines and grains stored in his shop for processing.

"Apart from the machines, I have lost properties worth over N300,000 including customers' grains," he said.

The incident has generated anger, with many residents accusing the Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company of negligence.

Mustapha Falalu, one of the good Samaritans that assisted in putting out the fire at one of the residences lamented what he described as "high negligence



■ A burnt house as a result of a recent power surge that claimed more than 11 lives in Zaria



■ Ward Head, Bature Aliyu



■ Christy Lombo sustained burns from the incident but also lost her husband, a police officer

**Speaking to Daily Trust on the incident, Malam Isa Sa'idu, a political scientists and journalist, said it is unfortunate that leaders remained mute in the face of a tragedy until a segment of the society decided to express its frustration. "Had the emirate, local and state governments taken measures to show love and concern, the alleged planned demonstration wouldn't have been contemplated in the first place," he said.**

of the personnel of the electric company. I wonder how such tragedy would be allowed to escalate despite telephone calls to the KAEDCO office in Zaria, yet the power supply was not put off for almost 30 minutes," he said, stressing that many residents had become hopeless, fearing a calamity as the whole area was engulfed with smoke and flames.

The Chief Imam of Gwargwaje Juma'at mosque, Malam Sharafadeen Salahuddeen, told our correspondent that the community had already engaged the services of a legal firm to institute a suit against the electricity distribution company for compensation to the victims. "We are still compiling the list

of those who lost their lives and the level of damage of every household," he said.

He, however, confirmed that some officials of the electricity company had visited the affected places and families for condolence but said they had only promised to take inventory of the damage and would communicate later.

Daily Trust gathered that youths in the area had planned a protest against what they term "high level of negligence by Kaduna Electric," but the Emir of Zazzau, Malam Ahmed Nuhu Bamalli, intervened through a radio broadcast urging them not to take the law into their hands.

The emir had also provided

some relief materials, mainly food items to the affected families which were distributed by leaders of the community.

Speaking to Daily Trust on the incident, Malam Isa Sa'idu, a political scientists and journalist, said it is unfortunate that leaders remained mute in the face of a tragedy until a segment of the society decided to express its frustration. "Had the emirate, local and state governments taken measures to show love and concern, the alleged planned demonstration wouldn't have been contemplated in the first place," he said.

He indicted the electricity distribution company for constant restoration of electricity supply at night saying "this singular act has, time without number, resulted in similar incidents in the past in Zaria and beyond."

Our correspondent reached out to the management of Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company on whether it would compensate the victims of the power incident but the company's Head of Corporate Communication, Abdulazeez Abdullahi, said he could not comment on the issue until the company completes taking inventory of the loss incurred by victims. He, however, assured that the company will make its position known in due course.