

How recurring boat mishaps claim about 100 lives in Sokoto in 3 years

From Abubakar Auwal, Sokoto

Residents of Dindeji village in Shagari Local Government area of Sokoto State were on Tuesday thrown into mourning following the early morning boat mishap, which claimed the lives of 17 of their daughters.

According to the eyewitness account, over 40 girls were on the boat when it capsized and sank in the dam popularly known as Shagari Dam.

The girls were said to be on their way to the nearby bush to fetch firewood for cooking and to sell.

A resident of the area, Muhammad Ibrahim said 15 corpses have been recovered while local divers were still searching for more corpses.

Another account said some of the girls were rescued alive.

The chairman of the local council, Aliyu Abubakar, who confirmed the incident said the bodies were buried according to the Islamic rite.

The latest is one of the four incidents recorded in the area within the last two years.

Daily Trust reports that in 2021, a boat ferrying wedding guests, who were mostly women and children, capsized as a result of which 13 of them died.

Similarly, in 2022 more than 30 girls, including a to-be- bride from Gidan Magana perished in the water.

The girls were also going to the nearby bush to fetch firewood.

The Village head of Gidan Magana, Malam Muhammadu Auwal who lost five of his children in the 2022 mishap, said that 23 females and six males were among the dead.

He however, stated that six of the passengers were rescued alive.

He noted that the victims were crossing the river to fetch firewood because of its scarcity in their community.

"You know the kind of situation we are in. There is a serious shortage of firewood which we use to make our meals.

"The children used to go to the nearby bush across the river to fetch firewood for their parents while some of them sell it to get money.

He stated that the incident happened shortly after the boat took off.

"The sailor lost control shortly after take-off because of heavy water waves and it capsized," he said.



■ The victims of Garin Magana boat mishap being prepared for burial

Photos: Abubakar Imam



■ Victims of the boat mishap at Garin Magana during the funeral prayers

He noted that the tragedy occurred when many of the elderly people in the village were resting at home after the dawn prayer.

"I was sleeping when some youths came to my house and informed me about the incident.

"I mobilized the people of my community, including our local divers but before we reached there many of the children had died.

"I lost five of my children and two younger sisters of my wives. I also lost my niece whose wedding was fixed for a week after Sallah.

"This is the greatest tragedy that ever happened in our community. We pray Allah to grant their souls eternal rest and give us the fortitude to bear their lost," he said

Aliyu Muhammad, who lost a 12-year old daughter, Rufaida, in the same accident said his child was healthy before she left for the bush.

"I was going to the farm when my wife told me that my

daughter was going to fetch firewood for us.

"When I was coming back, I heard people shouting and screaming for help that a boat had capsized in our river.

"When I reached home, my younger children told me that Rufaida was among those onboard the canoe, so I rushed to the river side only for me to meet her lifeless body lying by the river bank," he said in an emotion-laden voice.

Our reporter also gathered that some members of the Tijjaniyya Islamic sect, died in the water while attending the last Eid-el-Maulud festival in the village across the dam.

The dam is a curse- Resident A resident of Ginga where the wedding guests died while crossing Shagari Dam, Aliyu Umar said the general view of the people in the area is that the dam is a curse to them because of how they were losing their relatives in recurring boat mishaps.

"From 2022 to date we counted 70 persons who lost

their lives while crossing the dam.

According to him, there were several communities living close to the dam, which include Dindeji, Gwanai, Gidan Magana, Doruwa, Bela, Dalijan and Guloro and about 50 persons cross the dam from each of these communities every day for various reasons.

"Some have their farmlands across the river, some, especially young girls and boys, cross the river to fetch firewood while some visit their relatives who live across the dam among other reasons," he said.

Umar added that in 2021, Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, while on a condolence visit to their community over a boat mishap, promised to help us with motorized boats and life jackets but only three motorized boats were brought to us recently.

Some of the residents of the affected areas who spoke to our reporter believed that the only solution to the problem was for the government to

build a bridge across the dam or provide adequate motorized boats and life jackets to their communities.

They said many of the boats being used to cross the river were old and often overloaded. They added that the operators do not provide life jackets to the passengers.

Tambuwal condoles relatives of the deceased, donates N3.5m

Meanwhile, Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal has consoled the families of those who lost their lives in Dindeji village and donated the sum of N3.5 million to them.

The governor, who was accompanied by the Sultan of Sokoto and his Special Adviser in charge of the State Emergency Management Agency, Alhaji Bala Musa Yabo promised to provide them with motorized boats and life jackets

The governor also warned canoe operators in the riverine communities to desist from overloading, which has been the major cause of boat mishap in the state.

We're doing everything to prevent boat mishap - SEMA

The Special Adviser to Governor Tambuwal in charge of the State Emergency Management Agency, SEMA, Bala Musa Yabo said the agency has been doing everything possible to prevent boat mishap in the state.

"We have been taking measures, part of which was the provision of motorized boats and life jackets.

"Recently we distributed motorized boats to some of the riverine communities but Dindeji was not among them because this was the first boat mishap recorded in the area.

Another measure he said was a sensitization programmes, which are meant to educate members of the riverine communities on some of the preventive measures to be taken while crossing the dam

The Director General of the agency, Nasiru Alhaji Aliyu explained that the agency has provided relief materials to victims of boat mishaps.

"Even today, we sent our people to the village to assess the situation for further action," he said.

Daily Trust recalled that the Hydroelectric Power Producing Areas Development Commission (HYPPADEC) has assisted Garin Magana community, which lost 30 teenagers in a boat accident last year, with life jackets.