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More than three weeks after a mining pit collapsed in Galkogo, Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, over 30 miners have remained trapped, victims' families and residents said.

Daily Trust recalls that labourers were working inside the 400-metre-deep pit owned by African Minerals and Logistics Limited when it caved in on June 3 after a heavy rain the previous day.

While government agencies, including the police, claimed that 20 people were trapped and six had been rescued, families and locals insisted that 50 individuals were trapped.

They said the six people were not rescued as claimed by government officials but managed to escape before the pit fully caved in.

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Daily Trust had reported that initial efforts to rescue the trapped victims, including the site manager, Alhaji Ishaku Ibrahim, stalled because of lack of appropriate equipment.

However, findings by our correspondent yesterday showed that the recovery effort has resumed but is being done manually.

Families of the victims expressed frustration over the slow progress and lack of government's involvement in the rescue efforts.

Suleiman Isah, whose younger brother is among the trapped victims, criticised government's response to the situation, saying, "We are confused. I was crying when your call came in because my younger brother is among the victims. There is no day that I don't go to that site. The recovery team has not been able to bring his body out.

"They said his left leg had already been cut off because of stones that fell on his head. Under his corpse, three other bodies have been sighted. But until they can remove my brother, they won't be able to bring out the ones under him.



■ Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake



■ Niger State Governor, Umaru Bago

“I couldn’t go there today (Wednesday) because of the traumatic experience I had at the site yesterday, seeing how they were trying to drag out my brother from the pit. The three bodies that were so far recovered have been deposited at the mortuary of the IBB Specialist Hospital, Minna,” he narrated.

He alleged that only the affected company was involved in the recovery efforts, without any help from either the state or federal government.

“What they do is to remove stones and pass them on to one another until they take them out. It is the same way they are bringing out the dead bodies because excavators cannot stretch inside the ground to take out stones that fell on the victims. With this, when will they finish bringing out the victims?”

Meanwhile, the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dr Dele Alake, on June 7, 2024, announced a N50 million federal government’s donation to support the victims’ families.

The minister, who said he was representing President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, announced the donation in the Government House in Minna during a meeting with Governor Mohammed Umaru Bago and representatives of the affected communities.

However, Isah said that no money had been received yet.

He said, “We have not seen any money. We heard that on the social media and news platforms, but nothing has come to anybody.”

Mallama Safiya Ibrahim, the wife of one of the trapped victims, said in a telephone interview with our correspondent that she had not lost hope that her husband would be rescued alive.

“I will be happy if my husband is brought out of the pit alive. I have been praying, and I am hopeful. Let the authorities bring them out so that we know our fate.

“But I believe the government is not doing enough to save the victims. We learnt that some people came from Abuja, and with support from our people, they are working to bring them out. We pray they succeed,” she said.

Umami Musa, whose brother is among those trapped in the pit, said if the authorities had deployed appropriate instruments, the victims wouldn’t have stayed this long in the pit.

“This issue is very terrible. The company and the government did not do the right thing from the beginning. They said they were trying, but honestly speaking, they are just doing the little they are doing so that people will not see their fault. How can you excavate or try to rescue people in that kind of pit with bare hands or use labourers? That is impossible! Imagine how long it is going to take them. They are just trying to fool us,” she said.

Sources told *Daily Trust* that four mutilated bodies were recovered on Monday and Tuesday through manual operations.

The president of Lakpma Youth Forum, an association of youths in security-challenged axis of Shiroro Local Government Area, Babangida Zaharadeen Kudodo, corroborated this account to our correspondent.

“The government is truly silent on the incident. As I speak with you, they have started recovering dead bodies from the pit. Four bodies were recovered but they were mutilated – two bodies were brought out on Monday and another two on Tuesday.

“There is no hope that any of the victims would be brought out alive. Chemicals have to be seriously applied to enable the recovery operations because of the unpleasant odour oozing out of the pit; if not, no one can even stand close to the pit,” he said.

Kudodo said recovery operations were being done manually by labourers, adding, “Anybody who tells you that bodies were being recovered with the use of machines is not telling you the truth. Labourers are digging and removing the bodies. The fifth body was seen but the head had already disjointed from the body, so they could not put it out of the sand because it would dismantle.”

He said the association and stakeholders were working out modalities to take legal action against the company for negligence and exploitation.

“As I earlier told you, we are pushing to ensure that the families of victims are fully compensated. Also, there is no corporate social responsibility project executed by the company, which has operated in the community for over a decade.

“When the company started mining, it came with escalators, but they never used the machines to dig holes; they preferred cheap labour. If it were machines that dug such pit, it wouldn’t have been difficult to rescue the victims in the event of this incident,” he added.

Why rescue operation is slow – Official

The Niger State Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management confirmed ongoing recovery efforts but noted the difficulty due to the depth of the pit.

The ministry’s director of media and strategy, Habibu Abubakar Wushishi said, “The victims are still underground, but recovery effort is ongoing. The machines and professional rescuers are still there working.

“The truth of the matter is that the pit is very deep, so they have to do it gradually, otherwise they may end up stepping on the bodies. That is the problem we are facing.

“Because of the concern and commitment of the government, the recovery effort is still ongoing; we want to bring the victims out alive or dead.”

Emmanuel Odoh, the chief executive officer of African Minerals and Logistics Limited, declined to provide detailed information on the rescue effort, directing inquiries to the site for firsthand observation.

“Go to the scene and verify by yourself,” he told our correspondent on phone. Asked about compensation for the families of the victims, Odoh said, “Don’t ask me questions. Go to the scene.”

He also replied to a text message earlier sent to his phone, stating, “Please come to the scene of the accident and see things for yourself.”

Meanwhile, the Niger State chapter of the Federation of Nigeria Mining Host Communities, on Saturday threatened to sue the African Minerals and Logistics Limited, the company managing the site.

In a communiqué jointly signed by the state coordinator and secretary of the association, Habibu Wushishi and Mohammed Mohammed at the end of its emergency meeting in Minna, it was stated that relevant authorities would be engaged to investigate whether or not the mining company operating the site had obtained a licence or lease permit from the appropriate authorities.