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NEWS

Many Feared Dead As Passenger Boat Capsizes In Niger



Search and rescue operations of victims of Niger boat mishap in Niger State, recently Photos: Abubakar Akote

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By **Abubakar Akote, Minna**

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Many passengers, mostly traders, have died when their boat capsized in the River Niger along the Lapai axis of Niger State.

Although details of the incident remain sketchy, Daily Trust gathered that the mishap occurred on Wednesday night at Sokun Village in Lapai LGA.

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The victims were said to be travelling from Bugge village in Kogi State to Sokun Village in Niger State, carrying over 200 bags of paddy rice, when the boat overturned due to cloudy weather and a violent windstorm.

A resident, Baba Alhassan, said the exact number of passengers on board was still unknown, and that all the rice bags were lost in the river, and that all the rice bags were lost in the river.

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Among the deceased were two brothers from Alaba Village in Lapai LGA – Ismail Alaba, a POS operator in Lapai town, and his younger sibling.

The Director General of the Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), Abdullahi Baba Arah, confirmed the incident but noted that the agency was still working to determine both the number of victims and the exact cause of the mishap.

Boat mishaps claim 78 lives in 8 months

At least 78 people—mostly farmers, traders and children—have died in boat mishaps across Niger State between September 2024 and April 2025.

The deadliest incident occurred on October 1, 2024, when 44 Maulud celebrants drowned at Gbajibo in Mokwa LGA of the state.

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The boat, which had about 300 people on board capsized, a short distance from the victims' destination.

organised by the local Hausa community leader. The boat capsized around 8pm.

While authorities attributed the mishap to overloading, locals said the incident was mysterious, adding that the boat did not come in contact with a tree or tree logs. They wondered how a boat, which according to them was not full, broke into two at the centre.

In another tragic event in September 2024, four women died in a boat accident in Gbajibo while travelling to their farms to harvest groundnuts.

On November 28, 2024, 28 traders lost their lives in Katcha LGA when their boat capsized. The boat was reportedly en route from Ebe in Kogi State to Katcha Market around 2am, carrying over 50 traders and their goods, according to NSEMA.

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Safety violations cited as primary cause

Both residents and water transport regulatory agencies have consistently blamed the recurring accidents on overloading, night travel and the use of defective boats.

The high fatality rate is often attributed to the widespread lack of life jackets.

The National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA), in collaboration with residents, has pointed to frequent violations of water transport safety regulations as a major cause of the mishaps.

Despite the deployment of waterway marshals to enforce compliance, accidents persist.

NIWA Area Manager, Mr Akapo Adeboye, stated that the agency has imposed various penalties to discourage unsafe practices.

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carrying excessive mining sandbags.

Additional fines include N20,000 for overloading or dumping refuse into waterways, and N10,000 for failing to wear life jacket, operating without a license, or lacking fire extinguisher.

According to Adeboye, NIWA has conducted community sensitisation campaigns and donated life jackets to several riverine communities. He warned that untrained boat operators caught ferrying passengers would be prosecuted.

“We’ve found that many boat operators lack sufficient experience. To address this, NIWA is offering training programmes to improve their skills and ensure the safety of passengers and cargo,” he said.

Adeboye also stressed that passengers must register their names in a cargo manifest before boarding, as this helps maintain accurate records in the event of emergencies.



He added that waterway marshals, marine police units, and speedboat patrols are regularly deployed to monitor compliance.

More action needed — Residents

Despite these interventions, residents insist that government efforts remain insufficient. They blame boat operators for continuing to overload vessels, travel at night, and fail to provide life jackets to passengers.

Abdullahi Usman, a trader at Katcha Market, said life jackets are not readily available for purchase, and government support is minimal.

“Most boat operators don’t even have life jackets because they’re hard to come by. Government assistance has been poor. For many of us, water transport is the only way to get our goods to markets since the roads are in terrible condition,” he said.



Fatima Mohammed, another trader, explained that passengers often travel at night to reach the market early due to the long distances involved.

“Our biggest challenge is transportation. We rely on boats and canoes to get our goods to market. Sometimes, these boats are dangerously overloaded—boats meant for 100 people may carry far more. But the passengers are also to blame, especially those in a rush to arrive early,” she said.

Residents called on both state and federal governments to provide adequate life jackets, and modern boats, and to strictly enforce safety laws with appropriate penalties for violators.

Tears still in our eyes — Grieving families

Months after the boat accidents, the grief still weighs heavily on affected families. Many homes remain broken by the repeated losses suffered due to boat and canoe accidents.



In Gbajibo, residents often speak of Yankede, a once-thriving settlement now almost deserted due to boat mishaps.

Located just a few meters from Gbajibo’s landing points, Yankede lost more than half of its 45-person population in accidents between 2023 and 2024.

The Makun of Gbajibo, Prince Abdullahi Ibrahim, recalled that in September 2023, about 30 villagers died in one mishap while heading to harvest groundnuts.

Need for stricter safety enforcement — NSEMA

The Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA) has emphasised the urgent need for the strict enforcement of safety regulations on the state’s waterways.

While noting that it is not directly responsible for enforcement, its director general, Abdullahi Baba Arah, called on relevant ministries and regulatory bodies to step up their efforts in ensuring compliance and safeguarding lives.