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High Voltage Wire Snaps, Kills Mother, Child

High Voltage Wire Snaps, Kills Mother, Child

Sunday, 12 October 2014 00:00

Written by Itunu Ajayi, Abuja

Category: CityFile

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Angry Residents Blame Negligence By PHCN

'They Must Bring No Bills Here Till Further Notice'

WITH a shaky voice, laden with emotion, Success told what he saw and heard. The narrative of the Primary Two pupil of Great Future Leaders Academy, Kuje, only elicited further

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wails from sympathisers in the room. Success turned six on Saturday, October 5. Same day, before his eyes, two of the three most important people were killed.

Success' mother, Mrs. Comfort Okolike, had woken up the fateful day. She had her two boys ready to go to her shop. She could, however, not leave home on time because of an early morning shower. Six years to the day, she had had her first child, Success. Like all parents, she and her husband, Mr. Ikechukwu Okolike, had prayed that their son would witness many years on earth.

Comfort was in her eighth month of pregnancy. She and her husband had decided that any birthday party for Success would wait until the arrival of her third child, which she had quietly prayed would be a girl. But like the saying: 'joy has a slender body that breaks too soon', the family not only failed to see the arrival of the new baby; it also lost its second son, alongside the mother, all on the same day!

Mr. Ikechukwu Okolike, who is yet to come to terms with the loss, told

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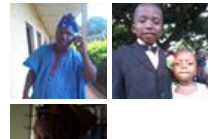
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The Guardian what happened in his home that morning: "My wife told me, 'Daddy, we are on our way to the market. See you later.' I said, 'Okay,' and she left with my two sons. I got ready to take my bath, so that I could also prepare to go to my shop. As I stepped into the bathroom, I heard people shouting my name. I had not even put water on my body. I quickly rushed out of the bathroom, wore my cloth and ran out of the house towards the main road where the noise was coming from. I arrived there only to find my wife and son on the floor: dead! She was supposed to put to bed next month."

Eyewitnesses said that while Mrs. Okolike and her sons were waiting for a commercial motorcyclist to convey them to the market, a high voltage cable above them snapped and dropped on her other son, Bright, who was some meters ahead of the rest. The boy was electrocuted. Acting on impulse, his mother reached for him in attempt at rescue. In the twinkling of an eye, both mother and son lay stone dead. Bright would have been four years old by December.

Nerves were frayed. The

residents of the Basali area of Kuje were angry. They marched in their numbers to the office of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) nearby. No staff was around to attend to them. They might have razed down the office but for the intervention of men of the Nigerian Army, the police and the Civil Defence Corps who forestalled a breakdown of order and moved the victims to the morgue at General Hospital, Gwagwalada.

According to residents of the area, what angered them most was that the particular 33Kv wire had been sparking since about 7am, yet nothing was done about it, till the disaster happened.

Clement Ezeorah, who described himself as senior brother to the bereaved, said: "The wire had been bringing out a strange lightening, since the time when Muslims were going for their prayers. Nobody did anything about it. Is that to say that at the PHCN office they did not get any signal that something was wrong? No, there is no way the thing would not give an alert. And even when this thing happened,

and we went to the office, nobody was there. They refused to open the door to us.”

Another resident said he suspected that the wire was not of the diameter required for conveying such high voltage. According to him, he noticed that the wires were joined together, suggesting that could make them snap. He said such wires are supposed to be 100mm, rather than 50mm.

“Apart from that, if you look up, you will notice that these wires were joined together. This is not supposed to be so for high voltage wires. It is very dangerous to join them because they could snap, like this one did. It is unfortunate. They should not even think of bringing any bill to this area till further notice.”

It was a different scenario altogether at the Kuje General Hospital where Mr. Sunday Jonas Udoh, father of the deceased, was admitted. He lost a daughter and a grandson in one day. So much was his trauma; the 63-year-old had to be sedated. The medical personnel on duty said decision was reached to

have him sedated and calm him down because his blood pressure was high. He was reported to have been at the scene of the incident, even making a call to his employer before he broke down. The Guardian had to wait for him to come to himself. After what seemed an endless wait, he eventually woke up. The medical staff, however, insisted no one would be allowed to speak to him in order not to aggravate his condition. With a plea that the chat would not last more than two minutes, The Guardian was allowed into the emergency ward. His pain was palpable.

“Someone called me, saying that my daughter and her son had been involved in an accident, so I rushed there. I thought it involved a commercial motorcycle. But when I arrived, it was... I can't even describe what I saw. I am confused now. Will I carry the corpse of a daughter and a grandson home for burial? What will I tell my people? What will I say happened?”

Commodore Asuquo Orok Itam (rtd) is Mr. Udoh's employer. He said the wire, which had been sparking, would have sent

feedbacks to the PHCN office, especially with residents saying the spark continued for more than three hours before the wire eventually snapped.

“I had just returned from my exercises when Udoh, who is my horticulturist, called, saying that his two children were dead. It was a horrible sight. That wire would have given sufficient alert at the power station. And if someone had been on duty, power would have been switched off, and the source of the problem traced. This is a case of negligence on the part of PHCN. And the unfortunate thing is that the negligence has caused the untimely death of innocent people, and an unborn child.”


The family agreed that while the unfortunate incident cannot be reversed, PHCN must take responsibility.

As at 2.30pm, same day, officials of the PHCN were atop electricity poles in the area, restoring the failed wire amid a heavy presence of armed security personnel.


For now, one can only wish that little Success would live up to his name. What would, however,

remain indelible in his memory is the horrid sight of how a live wire snuffed life out of his mother and only brother.

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