



Dugout boats in River Benue

Tragic End Of Peasant Farmers In River Benue

Five out of eight peasant farmers met their tragic end, while one is still missing in River Benue as windstorm capsized the dugout boat in which they were rowing home after the day's labour.

Residents of Terwase Agbadu were recently thrown in a state of mourning when a canoe conveying eight farmers across River Benue, Makurdi who were returning from their farms capsized, leaving five persons dead and one missing.

The canoe, apart from the 38-year paddler, Terkula Ukele, father of four was conveying five women and two men who went to farm on an island of the river.

Giving account of what happened, the paddler, Mr Ukele who is one of the survivors revealed that he was ferrying the farmers who are all his neighbours at about 1pm when it was about to rain, and were about to reach the shore before a strong rainstorm hit the canoe causing it to capsize.

"All of us were coming back from our farms, including myself and it was about to rain. I carried seven other persons who were all my neighbours at Agbadu here. We were eight in number, I did not carry them as passengers, we use to go to farm on that island because as you can see there is no land where we are staying, and we are farmers, farming is our only source of livelihood here.

As usual we went to the farm. I was the person who conveyed them and on our way back it was threatening to rain and suddenly there was rainstorm and even though we were close to the shore, the heavy wind just took the canoe where it was, back to the middle of the river causing it to capsize.

"I was the only person that was able to swim out of the river, one young girl who was about 16-years and was wearing a life jacket could not be rescued because she did not know how to swim and it was raining heavily and there was no one to rescue her, that was how she drank water and died, while another woman held her hands on the edges of the sinking canoe and was rescued alive after several hours of floating on the water with the canoe under new bridge by some fishermen.

"So far, five corpses have been recovered out of the six persons that drowned with the help of some of our elders here and the Marine Police except that of one Teryila Ayaku that has not yet been found up to this moment, but the search is still on."

Terkula, disclosed that he was a mason before he finally went into farming. "I have been

a paddler. This is the seventh year. I have never experienced this kind of tragedy. I was really shocked, since that incident happened on the 16th of last month which was Friday, I have stopped paddling canoe, at least for now, even though I can not go back to mason, I will still continue to farm, but let other people paddle me also.

"I am thankful to God for helping me to survive the mishap, even though I am sad that most of my neighbours lost their lives"

While his mother, Veronica Ukele, who was full of praises to God for saving the life of her son regret the loss of their fellow farmers whom she said have been farming together for a long time.

According to Ukele, "We have lived here over the years and because there is no land here that is why we have been farming different kinds of crops on that island till when there is too much of rain, we will harvest our crops and wait till November before all of us will resume back to our farms, even that faithful day of the tragedy we went to weed our maize, and plug okra, ugu (fluted pumpkin) and pepper and on our way back we meet this tragedy,

only God knows"

Narrating her ordeal, another survivor, a 50-year-old mother of six, Anthonia Kwaghange told our correspondent that she went to her farm across the river on the island to pluck ugu and pepper and on her way back it was threatening to rain so as usual she entered a canoe, and at the verge of reaching the shore of the river, there was a heavy rainstorm which hit the canoe causing it to capsize.

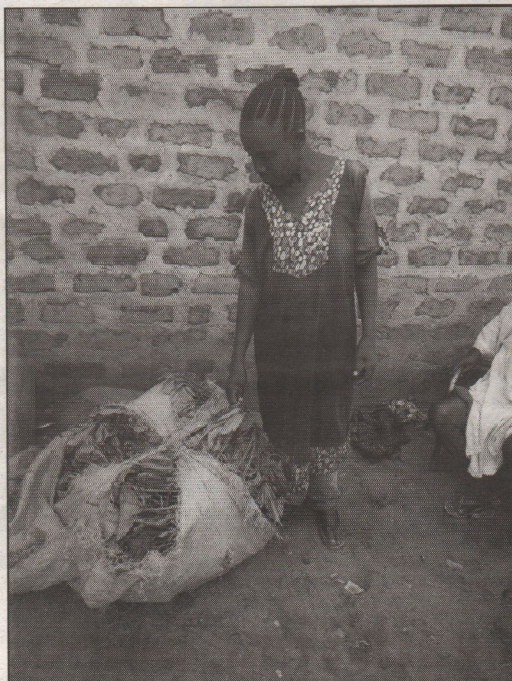
"I cannot exactly explain what happened but when the canoe capsized, it was around 1pm, I held my hands on the edges of the canoe and my whole body was in the water but my head was up on the canoe and I was floating alongside the canoe from that 1pm to 4pm, that was when I was spotted by the fishermen who came to my rescue.

"It was not a small journey, but I kept calling Jesus, Jesus, it was raining cats and dogs, the first engine boat passed close by with people inside but none of them heard my shouting, that was how I kept floating till across the new bridge which was about six kilometers away from the point where the boat capsized, what else can say, I give God the

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One of the survivors. Antonia Kwaghhange



Missing Teryila Ayaku

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glory.”
Alfred Kwaghhange, Antonia’s husband, who is a contract staff with the Nigeria Brewery, Enugu branch said he received the news in Otukpo as he was on his way back to the office.

“I came home and on my way back we were in Otukpo, when I received the news, I immediately alighted and boarded another vehicle back to Makurdi, on reaching home, I saw my wife in the house standing with people outside, I asked her whether she was really in the canoe and she said yes, I even sought to take her to the hospital but she told me she was okay. If I tell you I am shocked, is an understatement, because even as a man, what my wife did, holding unto to the edges of a canoe that capsized and threw people into the middle of the river for over five kilometers, only God can explain the reason behind this miracle.

“For now I am even pleading with my wife to stop this farming on the island, this is dangerous, ever time risking her life in the waters, let her find another business and stop this farming, hence we don’t have land here.”

Also speaking, the wife of one of the victim who has not yet been found Mrs Ngufan Teryila Ayaku, a 16-year-old mother of a five-months-old baby boy told our correspondent that she was not around when the incidence happened.

“Me and my husband went to visit his elder brother at Tyo-Mu along Gboko Road which is about eight kilometers away from here, to farm cassava and



Widow of yet-to-be recovered Ngufan Teryila; his wife and their five-months old baby and Teryila’s elder brother

maize, after which he told me he would come and weed maize which his father planted on river Benue’s island. He came back on Thursday alone because her sister-in-law asked me to wait a little before going, because as you can see I just gave birth, my baby is five months now.

“That faithful Friday, my father-in-law just called his son to bring me back in Makurdi, they did not tell me what happened till we reached Makurdi, and on reaching here, they now broke the news to me, I wept and wept, but to no avail. I am confused, where can

I go from here, they can’t even find his corpse for me to believe that he is really dead, everybody that was drowned in that canoe is found except my husband, I wish he could come back alive, if he died and leave me with this baby I wonder how I will cope.”

Teryila Ayaku, the missing 23-year-old farmer, hails from Vandeikya local government area.

The two survivals appealed to the Benue State governor, Samuel Ortom to provide life jackets for safe crossing of farmers to the other side of the river.

Our correspondent reports that all the victims are residents of Terwase Agbada Community, and their means of survival is farming which is mostly done on the island of the river, because there is no land where they live to even build houses. The recovered remains of the victims have been buried.

The police public relations officer, Moses Yamu who confirmed the boat mishap disclosed that the recovered five corpses were through the efforts of the Marine Police, adding that he was not aware that one person is still missing.

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