

Killer gin: Death toll rises to 71 in Rivers

NAFDAC traces cause of death to methanol

DAPO FALADE
- PORT HARCOURT

THE number of Rivers residents killed by local gin scourge in the last three weeks has risen to 71.

From the 66 deaths recorded Wednesday last week, the state Ministry of Health reported that the number had increased, with the latest casualties coming largely from Gokana and Ahoada West local government areas of the state.

Permanent Secretary, Rivers State Ministry of Health, Dr Somiari Harry, made this known while giving an update on the killer alcoholic drink in Port Harcourt, on Tuesday.

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and the state Ministry of Health had, last Wednesday, put the death toll at 38 and 66, respectively.

Harry, however, confirmed the new figure of 71, even as he narrated a particular incident in Ahoada West, where a young man had boasted that the local gin, which was said to contain methanol, would have no harmful effect on him.

According to the permanent secretary, the young man, whose name was not disclosed, defied all pleas and consumed the drink and went home, only to be found dead the following morning.

Meanwhile, NAFDAC has confirmed that methanol, rather than ethanol, is responsible for the deaths arising from the consumption of *ogogoro* in Rivers State.

Chairman of the ad hoc committee set up by the Rivers State House of Assembly on the cause of deaths arising from intake of the local gin, Honourable Okechukwu Chinda, disclosed this while presenting the committee's report on the floor of the assembly, on Tuesday.

According to him, the committee, in the course of its investigation, discovered that some greedy dealers resorted to the usage of methanol to produce the local gin, due to shortage in supply of ethanol.

Chinda further said the state, so far, had 80 cases, with 70 reported deaths in five communities and local government areas, including Ahoada West, Woji in Obio/Akpor, Abuloma in Port Harcourt Local Government Area, Gokana and

Bonny local government areas, respectively.

"The actors (staff) of the state Ministry of Health acted promptly by taking those affected to the Bori General Hospital, Woji Health Centre and Bonny

General Hospital and a private hospital in Abuloma.

"Unfortunately, all the victims in Ahoada West Local Government Area died before they could get help.

"The officers of the state Ministry of Health took

samples of the killer gin from the affected locations and sent to NAFDAC.

"The laboratory result of the investigation revealed excess presence of methanol in varying quantities in the sampled local gin.

"Due to shortage of supply of ethanol used for the production of local gins, unscrupulous elements resorted to the use of methanol to bridge the supply gap," he said.



Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje of Kano State (left), exchanging pleasantries with former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Dr Aliyu Modibbo Umar, in an aircraft in Kano, on their way to Abuja, on Tuesday.

'G7, imperialist agenda against Nigeria'

DAPO FALADE
- PORT HARCOURT

PRESIDENT Muhammadu Buhari has been admonished to be careful in his romance with the United States-led G7 countries, as it is an imperialist ploy against Nigeria.

A senior citizen and former staff of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Mr Kehinde Aladesoun, gave the warning and also accused the Amnesty International of playing double standard against Nigeria.

Speaking with newsmen in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, he cautioned Buhari on his current romance with G7 nations, as well as called for other countries to help in the fight against insurgency in the country.

Aladesoun wondered why the president was invited to the G7 meeting when Nigeria was not a member.

Reminiscent of the cold war years, he said US was busy recruiting allies against Russia and also working against the interest of countries romancing with Russia.

He said it was ironical that US which refused to supply Nigeria with weapons to fight Boko Haram insurgents and actually dissuaded Israel and other nations from doing so, had suddenly indicated interest to help fight the insurgents.

He said US left Nigerians to their fate until Russia and some other countries came to their aide, while France was able to convince Nigeria's neighbours within the French colonial

sphere to join hands with the country in the fight against the Boko Haram.

He said it was clear that America and her allies were not comfortable with the warm relationship between Nigeria and Russia lately, especially during the administration of former president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan.

The senior citizen recalled that "it was Russia that helped us to fight the Civil War and again, it is Russia that assisted in

tackling the Boko Haram.

"Buhari should stop ganging Nigeria with G7. The G7 is wooing us, looking for scapegoats against Russia. It is a point of danger; we cannot align with them against Russia. The earlier we stopped Buhari, the better."

Aladesoun also berated the Amnesty International for what he called its bare-faced double standard in its assessment of the ongoing onslaught against the Boko Haram insurgency.

I'll cut my salary by 50% —Adamawa gov

KABEER GWANGWAZO - YOLA

ADAMAWA State governor, Muhammadu Umaru Jibrilla Bindow, on Tuesday, pledged to cut his salary by 50 per cent, adding that he would also appeal to members of the state House of Assembly to do same as sacrifice for the state to move forward.

Bindow made the pledge during the flag-off of some township roads across the state capital, adding that he would also work with minimal number of commissioners to minimise ex-

penditure.

"I will work with less than 10 commissioners in my cabinet to minimise cost of governance," he said.

The governor added that he would extend the road construction to the rural areas, so that the people in rural communities would also feel the impact of governance.

He reiterated that his government met nearly an empty treasury from Ngilari-led administration, that he was left with a debt burden to the tune of N44 billion, stating it as the rea-

son for the late payment of May salary in the state.

He noted that the past administration left only N900 million from the federal allocation, but was not able to pay May salaries amounting to N2.1 billion, adding that he had to source for loan to pay the workers their salaries.

Bindow said all the road projects would be completed before the end of the year, calling on the people to reciprocate the gesture by giving his government the necessary cooperation and support.

N10bn fake drugs: Court adjourns trial till Oct 30

AYOMIDE OWONIBI
ODEKANYIN - LAGOS

LAGOS Federal High Court, on Tuesday, adjourned the trial of two accused persons charged for alleged importation of N10 billion fake drugs into the country till October 30.

The accused persons, Kennedy Okereke, alias Agama and Uchendu Oledibe, were brought before Justice Mohammad Yunusa by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) on a 12-count charge bordering on importation, labelling and circulation of counterfeit and expired drugs to the public.

The two accused persons, according to NAFDAC, were alleged to have committed the offence on March 2, 2015.

At the resumed trial of the matter on Tuesday, NAFDAC's prosecutor, Mr Umar Shimaki, informed the court the agency's unreadiness to proceed with the trial due to unavailability of the laboratory reports of the alleged fake drugs.

Ganduje advocates Kano/Burkina Faso joint commission

KOLA OYELERE - KANO

KANO State governor, Dr Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, has advocated a Kano-Burkina Faso Joint Commission, to facilitate trade and remove bottlenecks militating against smooth socio-economic relations between the two countries.

The governor made the call while receiving the Burkina Faso Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr Piabie Firmin Gregoire Ndo, in his office.

According to him, the commission would enhance cross border movement of agricultural products and livestock, as well as facilitate other mutually beneficial economic activities.

Ganduje said the state government would be willing to facilitate the meeting which would bring together officials from government, members of the business community, immigration officials, police and the officials of the Central Bank from both sides, to discuss the way forward regarding socio-economic relations.