

We're still in shock, says father of boy electrocuted by Chinese firm's faulty machine

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FIVE days after 14-year-old Joseph Ekwenobe (Jnr) was electrocuted by a faulty machine at the factory of a Lagos-based Chinese footwear company, Cheng-Fa Nigeria Limited, his father Joseph Ekwenobe (Snr), has said the incident is still like a dream from which he hopes to wake up from.

The father said nobody could have thought death was beckoning on his son, adding that his electrocution was shocking and sad news to the whole family.

PUNCH Metro had reported that the teenager was allegedly electrocuted while pouring materials into a faulty machine belonging to the firm. •

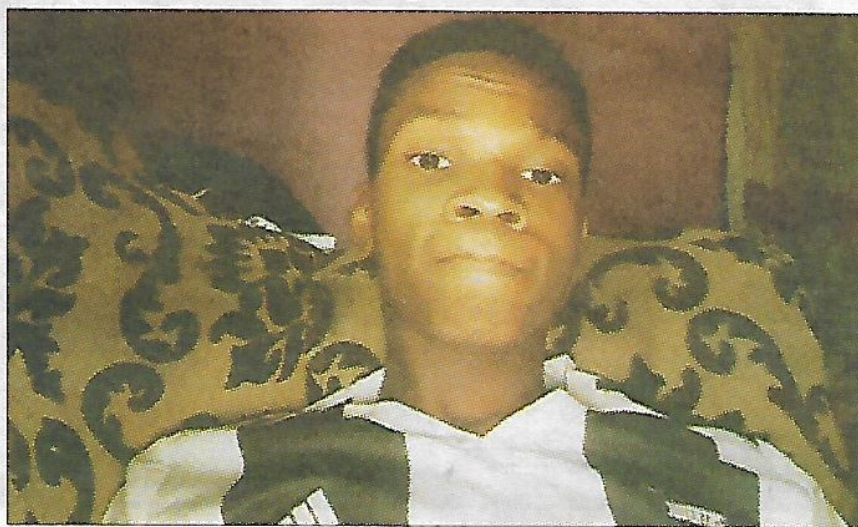
His colleagues had on Friday protested his death in front of the company at the Obasa area of Ikeja, Lagos.

The workers said they had complained about the faulty machine to the management in the past, but nothing was done about it, adding that Joseph's death was unnecessary.

They accused the management of being indifferent to the plight of the workers, adding that the machine developed a fault three days earlier and had electrocuted some workers in the past before killing Joseph.

The workers, who lamented the poor working condition in the firm, also complained about their take-home pay, which they noted was nothing compared to the number of hours they put in.

When the 61-year-old father spoke to *PUNCH Metro* on



• Joseph

the telephone on Tuesday, he said Joseph's mother had been taken out of the house, while he was receiving treatment in an undisclosed place.

He said he was on drugs to relieve the pain that the loss of his child had brought upon him, adding that he would do anything to have the boy back.

He said Joseph went to the company because the family could not afford to pay for his West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination and he decided to work for a while in order to raise enough money.

He stated, "As I am speaking to you now, his mother cannot speak to anybody; she is traumatised. If not that I am a man, I would not be able to talk to you.

"It takes a while for someone who suffers from this kind of misfortune to coordinate himself. It is a big blow. As I am speaking to you, I am on drugs; this news shocked me.

"This government has thrown many people out of jobs and business is not moving well. Joseph and his siblings attended a private school, but when the

school fee was increased, one of them had to step down for the others to finish first.

"He was not lazy but was ready to help; he went to the company to work and he had not spent up to a month there when the incident happened.

"He was a star and someone I could count on anytime. When my telephone had a problem, he took it and repaired it; he was polite to people and he had promised to buy me a ticket to America when he eventually made it."

The father, who added that what pained him the most was that Joseph died with his dream unaccomplished, noted that when the legal representative of the company got in touch with him, he was too distraught to talk.

Meanwhile, a human rights activist and Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Femi Falana, has offered to help the family get justice.

He told our correspondent that it was against local and international labour laws for a 14-year-old to be engaged by a company to work in its factory.