

Tragedy: 76 die as boat capsizes in Anambra

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By Ikenna Obianeri

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A capsized boat

There was tragedy in Anambra State when about 76 persons lost their lives when a boat carrying 85 passengers from Onukwu to Nkwo Ogbakuba capsized on Friday morning.

Three other persons were also said to have gone missing in Enugu State as a result of flooding in some parts of the state.

The Zonal Coordinator of the National Emergency Management Agency, South-East, Mr Thickman Tanimu, told NAN in a telephone interview on Saturday in Awka that 85 persons had boarded a boat in an attempt to escape to escape the rising water level but that the boat capsized on the way, leading to the death of 76 persons.

He lamented that it would be difficult to access the area due to the high level of water.

Tanimu explained that people refused to relocate in spite of the sensitisation and warnings because they thought the current flooding situation was the usual flood water that would eventually recede.

He added, “The report we are receiving is that as at yesterday (Friday), the flood level rose above the 2012 flood level by 11 per cent. What I suspected happened yesterday at Ogbaru, Anambra State, going by the report we received from the State Emergency Management Agency is that the water kept rising and the people were trapped.

“They decided to escape the rising water and 85 of them jam-packed inside the boat which capsized due to the rising flood. It is very unfortunate because the flood has covered many houses up to roof level. Out of the 85 persons, nine were found and the remaining 76 are nowhere to be found.

“Also at Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area in Enugu, two men and a pregnant woman died in the flood. It is sad to note that as of yesterday (Friday), we recorded 79 deaths due to the rising flood; 76 in Anambra and three in Enugu.”

Tanimu said the agency was in talks with the military in Onitsha and Abuja to activate the Disaster Response Unit to airlift trapped residents in the affected communities.

“This will involve the Air force and the Navy so that we can get an aerial view of the affected areas to see people who are trapped and airlift them,” he added. “With the rising flood, airlifting is the only solution right now. Any boat that goes in there is likely to capsize because the flood has covered houses to roof level.

“The 82 Division of the military is preparing and once they get the go-ahead from Abuja, we will begin to airlift those who want to leave because our people are very conservative and they might refuse to leave,”

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Meanwhile, the chairman, Ogbaru Flood Committee in Anambra State, Mr Ogochukwu Nwasike, has cried out for help as over 20 persons were still in a boat accident that occurred at Umunankwo in Ogbaru Council Area of the state.

Nwasike said since the incident, no government agency had visited the scene to help recover the bodies of the over 20 missing passengers.

“Therefore, I am calling on relevant authorities to come to Umunankwo village to help them recover the bodies of the missing persons. Some of them may be alive but delay may put their lives in danger.”

He said the flood had submerged the road leading to the village, making it impossible for some rescuers to visit the scene.

Also, the Transition Committee Chairman of Ogbaru Local Government Area, Mr Pascal Aniegbunam, said about 30 passengers lost their lives in the accident.

Aniegbunam told NAN in a telephone interview on Saturday that so far, 30 persons were rescued, 20 corpses recovered, while a search team was still looking for more bodies.

He noted that houses, farms and other businesses in Ogbaru had been submerged by flood, leaving many people in tears and hopelessness.

He listed the affected communities to include Ogbu Ikpele, Akili Ogidi, Obeagwe, Ossomala, Ogbuaniocha, Umunankwo, Ogbakuba, Ochuche, Umuzu, Akili Ozizor, Atani, Ohita, Odekpe, Amiyi, Iyiowa, Ogbeukwu, Okoti and parts of Okpoko community.

The Anambra State Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Tochukwu Ikenga, said he was not aware of the accident.

Ikenga said rather, the command had been receiving reports of flooding in Ogbaru and had activated its marine department to help provide necessary support in the area as may be needed.

The National Emergency Management Agency urged residents in flood-prone areas to relocate to safe places, saying that as of Friday, the flood level rose above the 2012 flood level by 11 per cent.