

panorama



Boat accident: Water scarcity pushes Zamfara children, women to death

Tragedy recently struck in the Albarkawa area of Zamfara State when eight people died in a boat accident. Residents of the community explain to MAIHARAJ ALTINE how the young women and children died while searching for potable water

GUSAU, the Zamfara State capital has recorded several boat accidents as a result of the struggle by the inhabitants to get water from the river very close to the town as both the state and the federal governments have over the years failed to provide the over 500,000 residents with potable water.

The people of the town particularly women and children have to go to the river in canoes to fetch water for domestic purposes, despite the inherent dangers involved. This is because it is the only source of getting water whenever there is water scarcity in the town.

Although many boat accidents have occurred in the town in the past, the one that happened on May 7 when seven children and a prospective bride lost their lives was the most pathetic.

It was very pathetic in the sense that, the victims were mainly women and children among them was a girl called Zainab Yusuf who was about to get married. Her younger brother Aliyu Yusuf was also among those who lost their lives in the incident.

Both Zainab and Aliyu came from one poor family whose parents depended solely on them for drinking water as they could not afford to buy water from vendors who sell a Jerry can of water at N150.

Aged 18, Zainab Yusuf lost her life in a tragic boat accident a few weeks before her wedding which was slated to take place before the end of this month.

Speaking to The PUNCH, the father of the late Zainab, Lawal Yusuf expressed disgust over the incident which he described as the worst thing that ever happened to him.

He said, "I will never forget this throughout my life because I was not at home when the incident happened.

"I was away from home when my neighbour called me on the phone and told me that both my daughter, Zainab and my son Aliyu had died in boat accident.

"I nearly fainted but managed to come home where I met the two corpses lying on the floor."

Although Yusuf described the incident as an act of God, he, however, blamed both the state and the federal governments for their failure to provide Gusau with potable water.

According to him, the inability of the appropriate authorities to provide water to the inhabitants of the town is the major reason why the people have to go to the river to get water.

"You see, we have to send our wards to the river to fetch water for our domestic purposes because that is the only alternative as the government failed to supply us with drinking water," he lamented.

He maintained that several lives were lost in the river explaining that, "People will continue to die there, as long as the government fails to address the issue of water scarcity in the town."

He called on the state government to do something urgently to arrest the current water scarcity in the state capital.

Also speaking, the mother of the two deceased children, Fatima Adamu, said, she sent them to the river on the fateful day to fetch water for the family as according to her, there was no water in the house.

"There was no water in the house on that day, so I asked Zainab and Aliyu to go to the river and get water so that we can cook food and do other domestic activities because it's the only source of water in this area."

"As I waited for them to come back, I heard people shouting, saying that, there was a boat accident and many children were in the river."

"I rushed to the scene to see what was really happening because my children were there."



• Yusuf

"As soon as I reached the river, I met some people trying to rescue those who were under the water."

"As I waited impatiently by the river bank, I just saw my daughter's dead body being carried out of the river by the rescuers.

"Some minutes later, the corpse of my son, Aliyu was also discovered and brought out of the water. This made me scream heavily and fell on the ground."

Fatima explained that all arrangements for the wedding of her late daughter were completed, adding, "We planned to send her to her husband's house before the end of this month (May.)"

One of the rescuers, Muddasir Sani, said he brought out about seven corpses including that of Zainab.

Sani maintained that the accident happened as a result of

overloading, explaining that, "The canoe was supposed to convey only 12 persons but there were over 20 people with their Jerry cans."

He stated that as the canoe was moving, it capsized and sunk into the river and everybody in it went under the water because none of them was able to swim.

"I personally evacuated seven corpses including that of the girl who was about to get married."

The community leader of the Albarkawa area where the incident occurred, Yahaya Yusuf, said he witnessed the rescue of some children as well as the evacuation of some corpses.

Yusuf added maintained that six children were saved by the rescuers and eight dead bodies were evacuated, adding that more children were still missing.

He said, "I was around when six children were rescued and eight dead bodies were also recovered."

Yusuf stated that the people of the area were in dire need of potable water, adding that, whenever there was water scarcity in the town, the people of the area had to go to the river to fetch water as it was the only alternative.

He lamented that between March to May this year, there were three boat accidents which claimed many lives.

He called on the state government to do something urgently to address the issue of water scarcity.

"I am using this medium to appeal to the state government to please come to our aid and provide our people with good drinking water so as to alleviate the suffering of our people."

"We wrote so many complaints to the state government many years ago but nothing was done."

"Our children don't go to school whenever there is water scarcity. Many of them have to go to the river to get water for their parents, despite the danger involved in the process."

Our correspondent gathered that the residents had to be conveyed in boats to fetch water from a part of the river that they considered potable.

But the state Commissioner for Water Resources, Ibrahim Isa Mayana in an interview with The PUNCH, said the problem of water scarcity would soon be over.

Mayana who earlier argued that the boat accident had nothing to do with the water scarcity said normal water supply had been restored to Gusau.

He stated, "Normal water supply was restored in the town two days ago. The eight persons who lost their lives in the river did not go there to fetch water. They were going for another thing went their boat capsized."

"I am telling you, that, those who have died in the river as a result of the boat accident did not go there to fetch water. They were going somewhere when the incident happened."

However, the state police command confirmed the death of eight persons in the boat mishap.

The command called on the people of the state to always monitor the movement of their wards and check their whereabouts, especially during rainfall.

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