

# Heartbreaking tales of beach fun s



•Elegushi beach

The beach, often painted as nature's place of laughter and serenity, where the sun kisses the skin and waves whisper promises of peace, is meant to be an escape from the relentless heat and city chaos. Here, families build memories on sun-drenched sands, lovers find comfort in the music of the tides, and adventurers surrender to the call of the sea. Yet, for many Nigerians, this picture of bliss is often shattered, with what starts as a carefree outing ending in tragedy, writes **GODFREY GEORGE**

**A**daora was only 22. Bright and lovely; smart and full of promise. But in 2019, her vibrant life was tragically cut short.

Her lifeless body was discovered along the seashore—unclad, bloodied and broken. The scene was haunting. Her skull had been violently cracked open, and investigations revealed that water had filled her lungs.

But the day had not begun that way. It was unbearably sunny. The kind of heat that makes the ocean shimmer like a vast expanse of liquid diamonds. The scent of salt hung heavy in the air, mingling with the festive cheer of the holiday season. Christmas was near, and the beach pulsed with life. Children squealed with delight as they built sandcastles, while couples strolled hand in hand, their laughter rising above the rhythmic crash of waves. Families laid out colourful mats, sharing meals and memories under the open sky.

Yet, for Nadia, a gospel artist whose music had once soothed the hearts of thousands, that same beach would become a symbol of unrelenting pain. A wound so deep that even her most heartfelt hymns could not mend it.

Nadia had always been close to her younger sister, Adaora. "She was my best friend, my cheerleader, and my first audience," Nadia whispered, her voice trembling under the weight of memories. Adaora, so full of life, had a way of making every room feel brighter, every silence felt warmer. Her laughter was the kind that could turn an ordinary family gathering into a carnival of joy.

That fateful Sunday, Adaora had joined friends for a beach hangout. The last one she'd ever attend.

"She had begged me to come along," Nadia continued, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "But I had an engagement at home. I promised her we'd go together the following weekend. I promised..."

A promise that would remain unfulfilled, echoing in the void left by Adaora's absence.

The call came in the evening, piercing through the air like a dagger. Nadia had just stepped off the stage, the echoes of her worship session still lingering, when her phone buzzed. It was Adaora's friend on the other end—breathless, barely coherent.

"Adaora... she's... gone."

Nadia's heart stilled. For a moment, she thought it was some cruel, twisted joke. "Gone where?" she asked, forcing a nervous laugh. But the silence on the other end shattered her heart into pieces.

The caller explained, haltingly—Adaora had drowned. That was the official story. But when the body was retrieved, the truth felt far more sinister.

Nadia's world turned upside down when she saw her sister's lifeless form. Adaora's head bore a gaping wound,

deep and haunting. There was water in her lungs and the injury told a different tale entirely.

"How do you drown and break your head at the same time?" Nadia whispered, her voice a tremor of pain and fury. "We live in a wicked world."

The tragedy shattered the family in ways words could barely capture. Adaora had been the baby of the house, the radiant spark of their home.

Their parents, once pillars of strength, crumbled under the weight of grief. Her father, a retired school principal who had spent his life teaching resilience and discipline, now seemed like a shadow of the man he once was—silent, hollow, broken.

"I should have protected her," he would mumble repeatedly, staring at Adaora's picture on the living room wall. Adaora's mum, a devout Christian, buried herself in prayer, her Bible permanently open on the dining table. But even her faith seemed shaken. "Why would God let this happen?" she asked one evening.

The days that followed were a blur of grief and unanswered questions. The family said the police conducted an investigation, but it yielded no results.

"We were told she drowned," Nadia said. "But we knew better. There was no justice, no closure—just silence."

Amid her sorrow, Nadia turned to her music, hoping to find solace. But every time she picked up her pen to write, the words felt hollow. "How do you sing of hope when your own heart is filled with despair?" she asked.

Nadia also found herself haunted by guilt. "If only I were there," she often said. "Maybe I could have saved her." These thoughts consumed her, pulling her into a spiral of self-blame.

It was during one of these dark moments that her mother said something that stayed with her. Gripping her daughter's hand tightly, she whispered, "Nadia, vengeance belongs to God. We may never know what truly happened to Adaora, but we must trust Him to fight for us."

## Brothers drown on Christmas Day

The Adegboyega family of FESTAC Town will forever remember the Christmas of 2023 as a day of heartbreak and loss.

Their festive joy was cruelly interrupted when two of their beloved sons, aged 23 and 26, drowned at Ibeshe Beach in Lagos.

The young men had joined friends for a Christmas celebration at the private beach on the morning of Monday, December 25.

It was supposed to be a day of laughter, and camaraderie amid the serenity of ocean waves. Instead, it turned into a nightmare no parent should ever have to endure.

Eyewitnesses recounted how the merriment was suddenly replaced by chaos and despair. Some youths swimming nearby noticed the brothers struggling against the relentless pull of the ocean's undercurrent before disappearing beneath the waves.

Panicked cries for help echoed across the beach as local divers frantically searched for the missing siblings. Hours of effort yielded no results, leaving a haunting void where hope once lingered.

The Lagos State Police Command confirmed the tragic incident. Its spokesman, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, revealed that the brothers were swimming with friends when they vanished around 6 a.m.

"It is a devastating incident," he stated.

"The parents have been informed, and investigations are ongoing." Friends of the brothers stood in disbelief, grappling with the brutal reality that their Christmas celebration had ended in tragedy.

"They were full of life," said a close family friend who declined to be named. "They loved the beach, the freedom it gave them, and now it has taken them away from us."

The parents, whose lives have been irrevocably altered, remain inconsolable.

Described by neighbours as a loving and close-knit family, the Adegboyegas are now struggling to cope with the incomprehensible loss of not one, but two sons.

"They were their pride and joy," another family friend said, her voice heavy with emotion.

For the Adegboyega family, Christmas will never be the same. What began as a day of celebration ended with an unbearable void that words cannot fill.

As the family mourns, their story serves as a sobering call for better oversight and safety measures at Nigeria's beaches—because no family should have to endure what they are going through.

## Death of activist Fawaz at Ibeshe Beach

A few months later, Ibeshe Beach would again be the site of heartbreak.

On April 10, 2024, Nigerian activist and social justice advocate, Fawaz Alabi, 34, drowned while swimming at the same location.

Witnesses recounted seeing him struggle against a strong undercurrent before vanishing beneath the water.

Despite onlookers' frantic efforts to rescue him, his lifeless body was only recovered two days later.

Alabi's sudden death sent shockwaves through the activist community and beyond.

Known for his tireless work on pollution, governance, and the empowerment of the Awori people of Lagos, he had made a name for himself as a progressive yet deeply rooted Yoruba nationalist.

His staunch support for President Bola Tinubu and leadership within the Yoruba Nation movement earned him respect and admiration.

The tributes poured in as friends and colleagues grappled with the news. One mourner, Aare Kurunmi Kakanfo, wrote, "Rest in peace, Fawaz Alabi. You were a progressive, a conservative, an Omoluabi, an Awori, a proper Yoruba man, a BATIST, an authentic Lagosian, and a nationalist to the core. We all miss you, may we meet on the resurrection day."

Others echoed similar sentiments, highlighting Alabi's passion for the upliftment of his people and his dedication to justice.

"It pains me to share that we have lost one of our beloved followers here on X," wrote a user known as Lord of Warri. "May the soul of @lengdrx rest in eternal peace."

The Lagos State Government expressed concern over the rising number of drowning incidents at the time, particularly at locations like Ibeshe Beach.

These incidents, according to officials, point to a systemic problem that requires immediate attention.

The Director General of the Lagos State Safety Commission, Lanre Mojola, described the situation as alarming.

"These incidents have occurred across many locations, including hotel swimming pools, beaches, and the lagoon," he said.

Speaking through his X handle, he highlighted the urgency of implementing and enforcing the Lagos State Swimming Pool Regulations of 2021.



•Fawaz Alabi



•Two friends of the deceased



# Seekers brought home in body bags

"The regulations were established to create a sustainable safety culture and outline critical safety policies, standards, and practices," Mojola explained.

"Key provisions include the presence of trained lifeguards, proper signage, incident reporting protocols, and restrictions on alcohol usage and fire around pool areas."

He noted that operators of public swimming facilities must comply with these safety protocols, stressing that the measures are intended to safeguard individuals engaging in water-related activities, whether they are residents or visitors.

However, the effectiveness of these regulations hinges on strict enforcement, a challenge that has plagued similar initiatives in the past.

A civil engineer and safety expert based in Benin City, Edo State, Mr Miracle Morgan, noted that the 2021 regulations if properly enforced, could mark a turning point.

"The mandate for trained lifeguards, for instance, addresses a critical gap in ensuring immediate response during emergencies. Proper signage, including warnings about dangerous undercurrents and designated swimming zones, can inform visitors and reduce risky behaviour."

"However, these measures require collaboration between private operators and regulatory bodies. Without consistent oversight and penalties for non-compliance, the regulations risk becoming another well-intentioned but ineffective policy," he said.

Fawaz's death, in particular, underscores the need for collective responsibility. As an activist who championed accountability in governance, his passing calls into question the accountability of the very systems he sought to improve.

His life and work demand that society confront these systemic failures and push for meaningful change.

The incidents at Ibeshe Beach are not isolated. They are part of a broader pattern of neglect and complacency that plagues many public recreational spaces in Nigeria.

To address this, stakeholders must commit to a comprehensive strategy that combines regulation, enforcement, and education.

Morgan added that public awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in promoting water safety.

"Simple steps, such as teaching children how to swim and educating the public about the risks of undercurrents, can save lives. Additionally, investments in infrastructure, such as lifeguard towers and rescue equipment, must be prioritised."

"Private operators, too, have a role to play. By adhering to safety regulations and prioritising the well-being of their patrons, they can help restore public trust in their facilities."

"State governments, for their part, must demonstrate commitment through consistent enforcement and support for operators striving to meet safety standards."

## From WASSCE hall to mortuary

In August 2022, a celebratory outing for teenagers from Kuramo Senior College, Lekki, turned into a heart-wrenching tragedy at Elegushi Beach in Lagos State.

The students, aged 14 and 15, had just completed their West African Senior School Examination and decided to mark the occasion with a trip to the beach. However, their youthful exuberance ended in an unrepeatable loss as four of them drowned in the ocean.

The students had initially accessed the beach without proper registration, a point highlighted by the spokesperson for the Elegushi Beach Management, Chief Ayuba Elegushi.

In a statement, he explained that the pupils ventured into a section of the beach that was not open to the public and was, crucially, unmanned by lifeguards.

"We initially sent them away from the area of the beach they wanted to swim in," Chief Elegushi recounted. "They went to another place that was not for the public at all. It was the child of our kinsman, Abass, who took them from school to the beach, and those kids followed him. They did not pay any gate fee to access the beach. Abass used the leverage that he was one of us to take them through another place."

Tragedy struck when the waters began to pull some of the children under. Desperate cries for help pierced the air as waves overwhelmed the teenagers. Lifeguards at the beach acted swiftly, plunging into the water to rescue six of the students.

"Out of the six that were rescued, some escaped by the time we got there. We were able to arrest two of them and took them to the Jakande Police Station," Elegushi continued.

"As of now, there are still four missing as our seamen have not been able to bring them out of the water. We have informed their parents, and they have come to the police station. Abass is one of the missing kids. There is another boy we have not identified and two other girls."

The two boys who were rescued and later taken to the police confirmed in their statements that they had initially been chased away from the section of the beach they first attempted to access.

According to them, Abass reassured the group, promising to take them to a safer, secluded spot. Tragically, this decision proved fatal.



"He took them to another end of the beach where no one could see them," Chief Elegushi lamented. The Lagos State Police Command confirmed the incident.

The state's PPRO, Hundeyin, said the search for the missing teenagers was ongoing.

"The teenagers were from Kuramo Senior College, Lekki. Four of them are missing. They are two males and two females. Efforts are on to recover their bodies. We have yet to meet with the parents of the victims," he stated.

The grim reality of the situation began to sink in as parents and guardians gathered at the Jakande Police Station. They clung to the faint hope that their children would be found alive, but the odds seemed increasingly bleak as hours turned into days.

Saheed Adesanya, the then-spokesperson for the Lagos State Waterways Authority, acknowledged the incident but offered no updates as investigations unfolded.

## Nigeria's coastlines

There are areas with coastlines in Nigeria, resulting in the establishment of beaches across various states in the country. Lagos has the highest number of beaches.

Some of the beaches in Nigeria include Ibejo Beach in Akwa Ibom, Calabar Beach, Suntu Beach in Badagry, Lagos, Oniru Beach in Lagos, and Patigi Beach in Kwara State, among many others.

Despite the fun associated with beaches, drowning is a recurring tragedy. Deaths are often recorded at both private and public beaches worldwide.

Since drowning occurs quickly and silently, often within a brief span of 20 to 60 seconds, it spares no one, irrespective of age, swimming skills, or physical fitness. Everyone is vulnerable, as such incidents usually happen unexpectedly.

The World Health Organisation reported that more than 234,000 deaths occur annually from drowning worldwide, averaging around 647 deaths per day.

This figure makes drowning a leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths globally, the WHO stated.

The world health body further revealed that Africa has the highest drowning rate, with 13.1 deaths per 100,000 population.

In the Niger Delta region, beaches offer a more tranquil experience. The serene environment provides an escape from urban hustle, allowing visitors to connect with nature.

Activities such as boat rides, fishing, and traditional dance performances are common, offering insights into the local way of life.

The beach culture in Nigeria significantly contributes to the local economy. Tourism generates employment opportunities for vendors, artisans, musicians, and tour guides.

Events hosted at these beaches attract both domestic and international tourists, fostering cultural exchange and economic growth. Additionally, beaches serve as venues for social gatherings,

from family picnics to community festivals, reinforcing social bonds and cultural identity.

## Safety challenges at Nigerian beaches

Despite their appeal, Nigerian beaches are plagued by safety challenges that have led to tragic incidents.

Drowning remains a leading cause of unintentional injury deaths globally, with over 234,000 annual fatalities.

In Nigeria, the WHO reports an age-adjusted drowning death rate of 2.17 per 100,000 people, accounting for 0.44 per cent of total deaths in the country.

Several factors contribute to these alarming statistics.

Experts have identified the lack of lifeguards and emergency services, poor infrastructure, limited public awareness, and inadequate regulation and enforcement as key causes of beach drowning tragedies.

A swimming coach and safety expert, Efe Moses, noted that many Nigerian beaches operate without professional lifeguards or adequate emergency response teams.

"In emergencies, the absence of trained personnel can delay rescue efforts, increasing the likelihood of fatalities," he said.

Moses added that essential safety infrastructure, such as warning signs, designated swimming zones, and first aid stations, is often lacking, leaving visitors uninformed about potential hazards like strong currents or deep waters.

A creative and brand strategist who organises a monthly Dance on the Beach programme for creatives, Adora Richards, noted a general lack of public education regarding water safety.

"Many beachgoers are unaware of the risks associated with swimming in the ocean, including rip currents and sudden changes in weather conditions," she said.

She also highlighted insufficient regulatory oversight of beach operations.

"This lapse allows for overcrowding, unmonitored activities, and the operation of facilities without necessary safety measures in place," Richards added.

She cited the June 2016 incident where two postgraduate students drowned at Elegushi Beach in Lagos.

Eyewitnesses, the brand strategist said, reported the absence of lifeguards and inadequate emergency response, which contributed to the fatalities.

Additionally, a family outing turned tragic when a teenager drowned at Tarkwa Bay.

The lack of warning signs and immediate medical assistance were cited as factors that could have prevented the death.

## Moving towards safer beaches

Recognising these challenges, various stakeholders have initiated efforts to enhance beach safety in Nigeria.

A water resources engineer, Oluwatofunmi Akinola, stated that although some state governments have begun implementing policies to improve safety on public beaches, more needs to be done.

These measures, according to him, include deploying lifeguards, installing warning signs, and enforcing regulations to ensure operators comply with safety standards.

He also noted that private beach operators need to invest more in safety infrastructure and staff training.

"By providing life jackets, first aid stations, and conducting regular safety drills, they aim to create a safer environment for visitors," Akinola added.

## Global best practices

Drowning remains one of the leading causes of unintentional injury deaths globally.

According to the WHO, over 236,000 people die each year from drowning worldwide. The African region records the highest drowning rates, with low- and middle-income countries contributing to over 90 per cent of these fatalities.

Countries with advanced beach safety programmes offer a blueprint for Nigeria to follow.

Examples include Australia, the United States, and South Africa, which have implemented comprehensive strategies to minimise drowning risks.

Australia's beaches are considered among the safest globally, largely due to organisations like Surf Life Saving Australia.

Their safety measures include professional lifeguard services, a flag system, and strong community involvement.

SLSA ensures that every beach is staffed with trained lifeguards equipped with rescue boats, jet skis, and communication devices. Beachgoers are directed to swim between red and yellow flags, indicating safe zones actively monitored by lifeguards.

South Africa's coastal areas, despite facing challenges similar to those in Nigeria, have made significant strides in beach safety.

These efforts include current education programmes, local community engagement, and regular beach safety patrols.

Experts have emphasised that for Nigeria to effectively address its beach safety challenges, a multifaceted approach is required. This would involve legislative action, capacity building, public-private partnerships, and data collection and research.



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