

Three drown, 19 rescued as Rivers boat capsizes

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| By Dennis Naku

| Map of Rivers State

Three people including a toddler have been confirmed dead when a passenger boat travelling from Port Harcourt to Bonny in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State capsized on Sunday evening.

PUNCH Metro gathered that the incident was caused by a storm at an area called ‘Yellow Platform’ near Bonny Island at about 5 pm.

The boat was said to have ferried 22 passengers from the Bonny/Nembe/Bille Waterfront Jetty in Port Harcourt but three of the occupants did not make it when the boat capsized due to the storm.

The spokesperson for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, confirmed the incident to our correspondent on the telephone on Monday afternoon, describing it as sad.

Iringe-Koko stated, “There were 22 people on board, unfortunately, we lost three people. Two of the bodies were first recovered and the body of the girl was later recovered.

“It is very sad, but 19 passengers were rescued. They were en route to Bonny Island from Port Harcourt when the boat capsized at the Yellow Platform in Bonny. Investigation is ongoing.”

Also speaking, the Chairman, Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria, Rivers Commercial District, Israel Pepple, corroborated the police confirmation that the incident was caused by a windstorm.

Pepple said, “Yes, it is true. There was a boat accident yesterday (Sunday). We lost some lives, two male adults and a girl. The boat left Port Harcourt and was going to Bonny,” adding that their bodies had been recovered.

Meanwhile, the Bonny Local Government authorities have commiserated with the bereaved families.

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The Chairman of Bonny LGA, Anengi Claude-Wilcox, in a statement issued on Monday, signed by the Secretary to the council, John Gabriel-Pepple, said she was deeply saddened by the incident.

The statement partly reads, “The Bonny Local Government Council is deeply saddened by the tragic boat crash that occurred on the Bonny-Port Harcourt sea route on Sunday, January 19, 2025, claiming the lives of two adults and a toddler.

“Preliminary findings revealed that the crash was caused by a sudden rise of the oceanic storm which troubled the boat, leading to the unfortunate crash that claimed three lives, with 19 survivors who were all immediately taken for medical attention at the expense of the Bonny Local Government.

“We extend our sincerest condolences to the families, friends, and loved ones of the victims. May God grant you all the strength and fortitude to bear this irreparable loss.”

He said the council shared in the grief and pain and prayed for the repose of the departed souls.

Claude-Wilcox however said the council was investigating a passenger boat that was at the scene during the incident but refused to assist the victims, even as she warned against travelling under turbulent conditions.

The statement added, “Sadly, information reaching the council revealed that there was a passenger boat that met the scene of the incident but refused to stop to rescue the victims while they were struggling to survive on the sea.

“Anybody with useful information about the particular boat driver should contact the council secretary. The Bonny Local Government Council advises travellers to be cautious of the weather and adhere strictly to the safety rules and measures of passenger ferries, to avert a recurrence.”

PUNCH Metro reports that concerned residents of Bonny Island have continued to call on the relevant authorities to provide better safety measures for commuters utilising the Bonny-Port Harcourt sea route, as well as compel the contractor working on the Bodo-Bonny Road to expedite work to ensure its early completion.