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## PONDS OF DEATH

— 28th April 2017

■ Plateau community where children drown in mining pits

From GYANG BERE, Jos

Residents of Gyel community, Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, are grieving over two kids, who died recently in circumstances described

as mysterious.

Their death, however, sparked off controversy in the community, especially between two affected families after the bodies were mistakenly interchanged for burial. The deceased, 12-year-old Solomon Gyang, and David Markus, aged seven, were in primary four and three respectively, at the LEA Primary School Gyel, before their painful demise.

Both got drowned one after the other when they left their homes for swimming in an abandoned mining pond after at the close of school. David and Solomon, who drowned in an interval of two days, were of two different families in the community.

Sources said the body of Solomon, who drowned in the evening of Tuesday, March 28, 2017, was recovered and taken away for burial in error by David's family who thought it was the corpse of their son, which they had been frantically searching for. It was recovered on Wednesday night, unknown to his biological parents who were also searching for him, after declaring him missing at the community's police post.

However, when she saw the corpse when it was brought to the family's home in the night, David's mother raised the alarm that the body was not that of her child; she said her son was smaller. But an explanation by a member of the community that the body had bloated after being in the water for two days, persuaded her to accept it as that of her missing child, thus mistakenly taking possession of Solomon's corpse for burial in place of David.

A day after, a woman who lives few metres away from the pond where the children drowned, raised a fresh alarm on the discovery of another floating corpse. A close observation of the body after it was recovered showed that it was that of David, whose parents had earlier accepted and buried Solomon in error as their son.

Thus, the body was exhumed and brought to his mother, Regina Gyang, who initially said it wasn't the body of her son because it had decomposed. After a thorough examination, she was able to confirm that it was indeed, her son, Solomon, and demanded for the clothes he was putting on before he drowned. Before a large crowd that gathered, a boy said to be about five years old, sauntered out and said the clothes were by the ill-fated mining pond. He eventually led Solomon's mother to the pond where she found her son's clothes, and the reality dawned on her, that her son was indeed, dead. Members of the community took the body of the real Solomon to the family's compound where another grave was dug, and he was interred.

The late Solomon had left home at about 5pm on that fateful Tuesday to ease himself in a nearby bush in company with some of his peers. Earlier, they had been scolded by his mother against watching Nigerian movies. When it was late into the night, his parents thought he was afraid of returning home for fear of being beaten by his mum. By 10pm, they began a house-to-house search for him but no one seemed to have a clue on his whereabouts, till his corpse was recovered from a pond.

A week before the incident, a seven-year-old girl, Verat Zakka, of the same family fell into an abandoned mining pit while walking on a footpath close to the pond where David and Solomon drowned. Verat narrowly escaped death, but had a fractured leg, she is currently walking on crutches.

Similarly, in 2014, a 14-year-old secondary school student, Gyang Davou, drowned while swimming in an abandoned mining pond behind Bukuru Township Stadium, an extension of Gyel community. Gyang is of the same family with Solomon Gyang, who drowned penultimate week. Sources hinted that about six persons in Gyel community have drowned in disused mining ponds in the past three years.

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**Uche Atuma**

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