

Killed by deadly transformer

- Survivors narrate how six people were electrocuted by power surge from malfunctioning transformer in Makurdi
- Bereaved community tackles Jos disco

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From **Rose Ejembi**, Makurdi

It was a harvest of tragedy when six people from various homes lost their lives through power surge said to be caused by an old transformer in the Rice Mill area of Wadata in Makurdi Local Government

Area of Benue State.



When *Saturday Sun* visited the area on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, the residents were in a mourning mood.

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They include John Emmanuel, a former staff of Rain Oil who lost his 16-year-old daughter, Vivian; Alhaji Mohammed Salau, who lost his daughter, a mother of three, and a nurse; and the Ikembas who lost two of their siblings while their mother is still battling for her life at the Federal Medical Centre after sustaining serious burns from the incident. Another woman who was said to have been burnt on both legs is still struggling for life at the hospital and may have her legs amputated.

How I lost my first child

–Victim

“I lost my first child, Vivian to the power surge,” Emmanuel said as he shook his head in a vain attempt to stop the tears that was beginning to well up in his eyes. He revealed further that his daughter, who just completed her secondary school education last year, was engaged as a salesgirl in one of the shops located at the Modern Market, while waiting to sit for university matriculation exams this year. Emmanuel and his wife sat pensively in front of their room and parlour apartment while sympathisers trooped in to condole with them.

He narrated what happened: “That morning, my daughter had dressed up to go to work when one of her siblings came to tell her that he tried to open the fridge and it shocked him. She then rushed to disconnect the fridge from the socket but got electrocuted.”

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He said neighbours initially battled to no avail to save her life by resuscitating her. The voltage was reportedly too high and was shocking everyone until he went and managed to cut off electricity from the entire house.

“By that time, my daughter was already dead. We rushed her to three different hospitals. But she was confirmed dead in all. Police later came and wanted to take her corpse to the mortuary. But I said in our culture, we don’t keep the corpse of young people for long. So, I took her body to my village in Iga-Okpaya that same day for burial.”

How we lost two family members –Spokesperson

On her part, Vivian Ikemba, who spoke on behalf of her family, said she lost two of her siblings – Joy Ijeoma, 30, and Victor Emenike, 23, while their mother remains critically ill on her hospital bed from the serious injuries she sustained on her hand and other parts of her body.

“Joy was our eldest child and the breadwinner of our family after our father died six years ago. My parents had six children and three grandchildren. Joy was a hairdresser while Victor was learning tailoring before this sad incident.”

Narrating how it happened, Vivian said she was in the room with other members of the family when they noticed some small light under the fridge. Their mother attempted to put off the fridge but got electrocuted in the process.

“On seeing that, my brother went closer to rescue our mother, but he also got electrocuted. It was at that point that I ran out for help, leaving my sister inside with them. I’m sure she was also trying to rescue my mother and

my brother when she got electrocuted too.”

Vivian, who added that the remains of her two siblings have since been deposited in the mortuary while their mother is being treated in the hospital, said: “We have yet to tell our mother that her children are dead because we don’t know how to break that news to her just yet.”

Surrounded by sympathizers, Alhaji Salau, 80, who disclosed that his daughter, Aisha, had since been buried according to Islamic rites, resigned to fate. He said: “God gave her to me in the first place, and if He has decided to take her from me, who am I to question Him?”

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Recollections, regrets and responses

Meanwhile, residents of a ten-room apartment at Number 10, Lessel Street, off Rice Mill, Wadata, including Amina Salisu and Hajia Hauwa Bako have continued to lament the loss of their electronic property to the power surge.

According to Mohammed Lawal Mohammed, an eyewitness, the incident happened at about 8am on the fateful day. Suddenly, there was a power surge from the transformer that serviced the area. Mohammed, husband of three wives, said he almost lost his first wife, Zakiyyat Yunusa Shagarda, 34, and his 13-year-old son, Ahmad Lawal Mohammad. He gave account of what happened:

“I had dressed up and put on my shoes to go to work when suddenly I heard one of my neighbours raise alarm. I rushed out to know what was happening. I saw people running helter-skelter on the street. Nobody was saying what was making them run. I thought maybe some gunmen had invaded the area.

“I turned to go back into my apartment but what I saw inside my living room shocked me. I saw my wife and my son lying down by the fridge, motionless! When I rushed to pick my son, I had an electric shock from the current passing through him.”

The man, a staff of a new generation bank, noted that everything in the room including the tiles, were generating electric shock. He said he was only able to move about because he had his shoes on.

But that did little to clear the confusion whirling in his head. “At that point, I was confused as to what to do next. I attempted to pick him up again and had the same shock. I thought of going to remove the junction box but suddenly remembered that a woman and her son had died in the area two weeks earlier while trying to disconnect the junction box during a power surge.

“It was then I remembered and rushed to switch off the changeover button before I could pick my son. When I picked him, he was lifeless. I dropped him on the couch and ran outside to raise alarm that my wife and family had died from electrocution.

“Neighbours rushed inside and started pouring milk into his mouth to no avail because his upper and lower teeth had clenched together. At that point, my wife whom I thought was dead just sat up and went back again. So, I knew that she was still alive. I then picked my son and with the help of a motorcyclist rushed him to a nearby hospital while seriously beating him all over his body to bring him back to life.”

Mohammed said while medical personnel were battling to save his son, he rushed back home to pick his wife, adding that it was only by the grace of God that both of them eventually came back to life after taking several drips and other medications.

Asked if officials of the Jos Electricity Distribution Company (JEDC) had visited the area since the incident, some of the residents answered in the affirmative. They said that some of the officials came for an on-the-spot assessment of what happened and promised to come back. Since then, no officials had visited again, the people said.

When contacted, Regional Manager of Jos Electricity Distribution Company responsible for the supply of the electric power to the area, Felix Adamu confirmed receiving the report from the community elders.

“Some people from the community have come here to report the case but we have not gone there to find out the root cause,” he said. “All what they told you is what you have but because the people are restive. There is serious tension in the community. So they advised that we should not go there.

“I know that there was an electrocution, but I cannot comment on the cause until I go there to inspect it. I have asked the community to take inventory of what happened, and the losses. We are still waiting for them.”

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