

Trader slumps, dies as fire guts market



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By



A

trader on Saturday collapsed and died after he gone to the Santana Market on the Sapele Road, Benin, Edo State and discovered that his shop had been razed down by fire.

The middle-aged man, identified simply as Biggy, didn't know that a midnight fire gutted the market until he got there. On seeing that his shop and his entire wares were now debris, he collapsed. He died while being rushed to the nearest hospital.

A witness said: "All the shops in the market were gutted by the fire. The fire destroyed goods worth millions of naira."

Mrs. Eucharia Ezeribe, whose shop was stockpiled with clothing materials and household items, said nothing was salvaged from her shop.

Another wholesale trader, referred to as Mama Ofure, a rice and beans seller, said: "I recently stocked my shop, but now everything is gone with the inferno. I couldn't salvage anything because my house is far to the market. It was only those that live close to the market who were able to salvage their goods."

One of the victims, who live close to the market, said immediately she noticed thick smoke from the market, she knew something had gone wrong. She immediately alerted the state fire service, but she and other traders waited in vain.

Traders and residents close to Santana Market disclosed that the inferno started about 9.30p.m. on Saturday when the market reputed for hosting the rich and middle class had closed for the day.

It was learnt that the fire started from one of the stores inside the market and spread to others.

The cause of the fire was not readily known, but residents said it might have been caused by power surge when the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC) restored power. BEDC restored power four days after outage.

Some owners of the shops, who are mainly women, were wailing over their losses.

Burnt raw food items – such as rice and beans – as well as sewing machines, fridges, grinding machines, provisions, among others, littered the shops.

The fire outbreak occurred just about two months after a similar incident occurred at the multi-billion naira Uwelu Auto Parts Market in Egor Local Government Area of the state,

A team of fire fighters from the Nigeria National Petroleum Company, (NNPC) later arrived, but could not do much to the already bad situation.

The Chairman of Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, Dr. Eric Osayande, was on ground to access the extent of damage.

Osayande, who addressed some of the victims, assured them that government would investigate the cause of the fire, which he said was the first since the history of the market, with a view to preventing a reoccurrence.

He promised that the local government would seek help from the state government because of the enormous damage which the council couldn't carry alone.