

EBONYI TRAGEDY: River too shallow for our 3 daughters to drown in, something was wrong – Parents

May 9, 2020 Uchenna Inya



The people of Amawuzu, Amaeze, Ishiagu in Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State are yet to recover from the shock arising from the sudden drowning of their daughters at the Iyi-Echara river. The girls had already been buried in accordance with their tradition regarding persons that get drowned within the area.

81-year-old Chief Rueben Okorie who interacted with Saturday Telegraph in the area put it thus: "It is our tradition that whenever a person gets drowned in a river, he or she must be buried beside that river or stream immediately. It is our custom and it has been there since the days of our forefathers."

A couple in the community, Mr. Okoro Aja and Catherine Okoro, had gone to farm with their entire five children, four girls and a boy when three of the girls who are all grown up decided to go to a nearby stream in the farm to freshen up having become tired while working in the farm. But Chisom, 18, Chinelo, 15, and Chika, 14 could not return to the farm to continue their work as they all drowned at the Iyi-Echara stream.

Their father waited long for them to return to the farm but to no avail. He then decided to go to the stream to check for the girls only to see them drowned at the small river. Okoro was shocked that a small stream like the Iyi-Echara could drown such grown up girls and raised the alarm. Those who were farming nearby rushed to the stream and saw the lifeless bodies of the girls in the stream.

Some of the villagers gathered in the stream and immediately buried Chisom, Chinelo and Chika beside the water without coffin in accordance with the laws of the land. Chisom was a teacher in a private school identified as Chosen Generation in Amaeze community and just got admission for her university education before the tragedy occurred. She was buying things and preparing to go to the university that offered her admission to commence her programme in the institution when the incident occurred.

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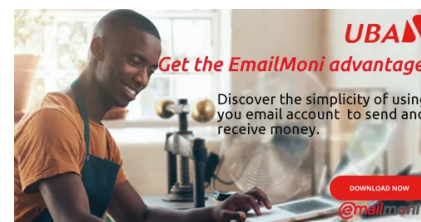
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On her part, Chinelo was preparing for her West African Examination Council (WAEC) and had written a mock of the examination. She was waiting for the examination proper when she got drowned in the stream. Chika was in SS1 class before the incident.

The three girls attended Community Secondary school in Amaeze, Ishiagu. Only two children, a girl and a boy, are the children the family currently has left. The girl is about five years old while the boy is 11 months old. Their mother, Catherine said the surviving girl would have followed Chisom, Chinelo and Chika to the stream if not the way she quarreled with her and attempted to beat her up and she had to stay back in the farm. She described the death of the three girls as a colossal loss to the family and called for full investigation into the tragedy. She said the way her daughters died was very suspicious and that a chemical was applied in the stream by some fishermen which may have caused the death of the three girls especially as the stream is not deep. She was so angry that government was yet to investigate the incident and expressed disappointment on it.

We can't hurriedly forget our daughters -parents

Catherine described Chisom, Chinelo and Chika as vibrant, respectful, peaceful, Godly, hardworking and obedient children who were the strength of the family in all ramifications. Catherine is from South West but married to a South Easterner, Okoro. The grieving woman averred that the girls lived, acted and operated like triplets throughout their lifetime, adding that it will be difficult for her to forget them.

"They have buried them, they have buried my daughters and that's all. Immediately this incident happened, government would have checked the water to know what happened because that stream is too shallow to drown my daughters but nothing was done till today. Even, it has rained and water has flushed everything inside the stream.

"What has happened has happened. If they have not buried them, I would have hope but they have put sand on my daughters, so there is nothing we can do, but I just thank God for those children because they worshipped God all through their lives and I am proud of them.

"We started our journey with these wonderful hardworking children from my own village to Abuja, from Abuja to Ishiagu and these children were very industrious always telling me "what a man can do, a woman can do it better" and working very hard to support this family.

If they start doing any work no matter how big the work may be, they will finish it under 30 minutes. If they make mounds in a farm, you will never believe that the heaps were made by girls, you can't believe unless you saw them when they were cultivating the heaps.

They were the ones that made the heaps in all our farms including the one we went to and they decided to go and refresh in the stream where they died. "They do things together. When they go church, they go together. When they go school, they go together, when they eat, they eat together, in fact, my daughters behaved like triplets. If one of them falls sick, all of them must fall sick.

Any time one of them fell sick, I made sure that I gave all of them treatment not just that one that was sick because all of them would definitely fall sick and it really helped me. "I so much love my daughters and they so loved my family. They were source of strength, inspiration, unity, oneness, truthfulness for me and my husband. When one of them commits an offence and I asked who did it, all of them will say "we."

They would not like one person to be punished, they would like all of them to be punished for the offence. All of them would always prefer to be flogged for the offence rather than one person and I usually flogged all of them. "In fact, Chisom, Chika and Chinelo were wonderful kids to my family and even Deeper Life where we worship.

They were choristers in our church and everybody loved them. Chisom would always assure us that all would be well in our family whenever we had some challenges. She even volunteered to teach in a private school so as to be getting money to assist us and herself. We allowed her to be teaching in one of the schools in our community and she wrote JAMB and just got admission.

The other one was in SS3 preparing for her WAEC and the other was in SS1. "These children were all happy and lively on that day of the incident. Chisom the eldest was so happy because it was on that day that she was called to collect her salary and decided to go to farm on time, work very fast so that she could finish on time to enable her to go and collect her salary. That day was Eke day, our market day and she was also planning to buy things and prepare for her school after collecting her salary.

"We were very shocked to see our daughters dead. Under 30 minutes, their tongues changed and their colour also did same when their corpses were brought out of the river. People had the gut to put chemical inside the stream which caused my daughters' death and those people who did it know themselves; it is very bad but no problem. God will judge everybody according to his deeds. I am only praying to God to give us the heart to bear this great loss.

I and my husband are trying to forget what happened but it is not easy for us. It is because of this that I always encourage my husband for us to go to farm where we see people so that we can forget what happened to us." she said. Her husband, Okoro Aja said if he had followed the resolution of his Yoruba inlaws on the sudden death of his daughters, he would have done something the people of his Amaeze community would not like but that he had left everything to God. He stated that the deaths of Chisom, Chinelo and Chika were not ordinary. He wondered how a little river like Iyi-Echara could drown his three daughters and alleged that some persons who were harvesting fish in the stream applied chemical substances on the water which he said caused the death of the girls. He called for full thorough investigation into the death of the girls.

Okoro said: "You know government was supposed to carry out investigation into the death of my three daughters but they have not done anything about it. It pained me much the way I carried the corpses of my three daughters. "At least the government, men of Civil Defence, Police, DSS that saw the corpses of my three children were supposed to fetch water from the stream and know actually what killed my children because I strongly believe the little stream can't drown anything let alone human being.

"They were supposed to fetch the water, conduct investigation and know what chemical was poured into the stream by fishermen who usually kill fish in the river. They supposed to find out what actually killed my three daughters because I am not happy at all the way they died. Till today, I have not recovered from the shock over my daughters' sudden demise in the stream, I am very sad. "They should go and look at the stream and find out what killed my three daughters at same time because you cannot tell me that a stream that doesn't rise to kneel level will just drown my children like that, no, it is not possible.

People went to the stream and killed fish there with some chemicals which I strongly believe caused the death of my children. Those who killed fish in the water knew themselves and they're supposed to come out and confess what they did. But since they refused, let what they did be upon their heads.

It is only when an investigation is conducted and the cause of their deaths unraveled, that I would be happy. "Well, we have to bear the loss. Is it the one that just got admission that I will not think about or the one that is writing her West African Examination Council (WAEC) that I will not think about? In fact, I can't easily forget my daughters. I see your coming as resurrecting what I am trying to forget though not easy for me, I can't forget my daughters in a hurry, I am missing them a lot.

"My wife is Yoruba and if I had followed what my in-laws resolved on the death of my daughters, I would have done what people would not like but I said I don't want trouble. I watched helplessly as the colour of my daughters changed under a few seconds when they were brought out of the water; there was nothing I could do but I have God and believe that he will fight for me."

I must find out cause of Chisom, Chinelo, Chika's deaths -Traditional ruler

When contacted, the traditional ruler of Ishiagu Autonomous community, HRH Moses Okafor Ngele told Saturday Telegraph that he must find the root cause of the deaths of the three girls. He pleaded with the family of the girls a "What happened in this small river in our community is shocking because that water is too small to drown somebody. As a traditional ruler, I have commenced investigation to know what is inside the river that killed them because I don't believe that this small stream can just drown three persons like that.

"I am appealing to the family of the girls and the entire Ishaigu community to give me little time to investigate what happened to these girls so that this type of thing will not happen again in our community because I believe it is not ordinary, their death is very mysterious.

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