

# AREWA VOICE

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## Niger State: How hundreds perished in boat mishaps, courtesy of bandits

- Governor directs immediate monitoring of boat operations
- Boat owners resist life jackets

By Wole Mosadomi, Minna

THE tragedy certainly was avoidable. But there is little or no indication the authorities are in the mood to act quickly in putting an end to the recurring tragedy of boat mishaps, even as it continues to claim innocent lives. Death by boat mishaps has become a routine occurrence in Niger State and there is no end in sight. Men, women and children have all been left at the mercy of the rampaging floods, leading to their untimely but avoidable deaths.

The result of such recurring tragedy is unceasing pain, agony, despair and gnashing of teeth by the relatives of the victims of the furious floods from waters that crisscross the length and breadth of Niger State. Although the state can be said to have put in place several laws regulating the operations of riverine transportation and businesses, the inability of the state to painstakingly enforce its own laws, has led to abuse of river transportation and the frequent death of river users in the state in a magnitude that is worrisome.

There are stipulated laws in the state guiding water transportation; among them, the registration of routes which boat operators intend to use, avoiding overloading, provision of passengers' manifest and use of protective jackets while on board.

However, with the absence of anyone enforcing these laws, they are mostly observed in the breach by anyone who can afford the acquisition of boats no matter the condition of such vessels and the capability of their owners or operators to ferry them to and from designated destinations.

The result: Frequent capsizing of boats with many passengers and deaths in the oceans and rivers that define the coastal state. Between 2020 to date, many lives have been

lost to boat mishap with accurate figures not known.

Records, however, show that on the May 26, 2021, 100 people died when a boat capsized in the state. The ill-fated boat reportedly set sail from Loko Mina in Niger State with most of the passengers being traders, women and children heading to Kebbi State. It capsized around 7:30 a.m. Only 80 of the 180 passengers, who were crammed into the small outdated boat, were rescued. The rest perished with their goods.

Just three weeks earlier, a similar

incident occurred in Tijana in Munya Local Government Area of the state where 28 out of the 100 passengers who were in a rickety boat, died when it capsized.

Also, on July 5, 2021, no fewer than 15 lives were lost, 17 rescued while many others were declared missing when another boat capsized in Tijana in Munya Local Government Area at about 6pm which was a Saturday.

They were returning from a weekly market in Zumba, Shiro Local Government Area of the state on the fateful day.

Investigations revealed that the boat was overloaded with over 60 passengers, mostly women and children, when the ill-fated boat was seized by a severe windstorm that rocked the waterways and threw it overboard.

As if these tragedies were not enough, residents of Tijana Community in Munya Local

Government Area were thrown into mourning when many villagers drowned while trying to escape the area following news that hundreds of bandits were on their way to raid the village and abduct men and women, and destroying their means of livelihood. The flight by boat was aborted midway in the ocean when the boat was broken into pieces by severe storm and 30 of the community members died, while 65 were rescued. Five corpses of the remaining five persons have still not been recovered till date.

Also on July 24, 2020, five persons, including two children, drowned in Gurmana River, Shiro Local Government Area of the state. The canoe which they hurriedly boarded to ferry them out of their community following news of bandits coming to invade their villages eventually capsized a few kilometers to their destination. The corpses of others could not be seen

just as the actual number and names of those who embarked on the journey could not be ascertained.

In 2022 alone, three different boat mishaps have been reported with a casualty figure of 67 lives. On March 30 this year, no fewer than 67 villagers were feared drowned when the boat in which they were travelling capsized while trying to escape from terrorists who stormed their communities in Munya LGA of the state.

Guns numbering up to 100 were said to have stormed Sayita village in the local government which prompted the villagers to desperately look for an escape route and they decided to flee through River Kaduna.

The villagers reportedly squeezed themselves into a small boat and headed towards Zumba Town in Shiro LGA but could not reach their destination as one of the boats

hit a rock at Bodo Village in Guni ward of the local government area and capsized and claimed the lives of 30 of the passengers.

Twice in July this year, two separate mishaps occurred which claimed over 50 lives. The first was on the 23rd when tragedy struck in Zumba Village in Shiro LGA when a fully loaded wooden canoe capsized in Zumba, Shiro River with 50 passengers on board. The canoe was said to have taken off from Iburo Community around 10am on Saturday and was heading for Zumba Town for the normal Saturday Market. The actual number of those in transit could not be ascertained but a source close to Zumba confirmed to Arewa Voice correspondent that the wooden boat was loaded with no fewer than 50 passengers and farm produce and that all steps taken by the local divers to rescue them proved abortive.

In the same month, another boat carrying 24 persons, including

## Benue records 2,248 new measles cases, new variant of polio

By Peter Duru, Makurdi

BENUE State has recorded no fewer than 2,248 new cases of measles in the last seven months even as a new variant of polio has also been discovered in the state.

The State's Health Educator, at the Primary Health Care Board,

PHCB, Mr. Emmanuel Beeka, who made this known in Makurdi, explained that the new measles cases were recorded in the state between January and August 2022.

Mr. Beeka said to tackle the challenge, the state had already keyed into the national vaccination intervention which kicked off yesterday... "for Polio which would be rounded off next Tuesday while the flag-off for Measles vaccination would be done on the October 19, 2022 with full implementation commencing from 20th and would run till 28th".

The health educator stated that the scope of the exercise had been expanded, stressing that children of nine months to 59 months would be vaccinated for measles while for oral polio, those from zero to 49 months would get vaccinated.

While appealing to members of the public to take advantage of the vaccination days to get their children vaccinated, Mr. Beeka disclosed thus: "In the last two to three months there was an outbreak of measles in about 18 local government areas, LGAs, of the state where measles was identified and it is for that reason that there is every need to massively vaccinate the targeted age groups to check the spread."



• Boat mishaps in Niger State. INSET: Alhaji Ibrahim Ahmed Inga, Director General, Niger State Emergency Management Agency, NSEMA

From bad to worse: Deplorable state of Kano roads despite huge allocation from govt