

# 20 persons die in Bayelsa boat mishap



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By Samuel Oyadongha

**Yenagoa—No fewer than 20 persons lost their lives when the engine of a wooden boat popularly known as 'Denghe' exploded in the middle of the river and sank in Ezetu I community river in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of the Bayelsa State.**

The sole survivor of the tragic incident, which occurred Wednesday evening, said to be in critical condition is currently on admission at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, NDUTH, Okolobiri in Yenagoa Local Government Area of the state.

It was learned that the ill-fated boat was journeying from Ekene on the Atlantic fringe of the council area to Yenagoa when the tragedy struck.

Meanwhile, Governor Douye Diri of the state, has expressed sadness over the accident.

Spokesman of the state police command, Musa Muhammed, who confirmed the incident, yesterday, said rescue operations were ongoing to recover the drowned passengers of the ill-fated boat.

He said: "The local boat travelling from Ekeni community in Southern Ijaw to Yenagoa had a mishap and sank, 20 persons were reported to have lost their lives. Efforts are ongoing to recover their corpses."

Multiple sources told Vanguard that the unfortunate incident occurred about 4:30p.m., Wednesday.

Occupants of the local boat were mainly market women when the vessel went up in flames after the engine allegedly exploded. It was learned that the market boat usually goes from community to community along the coastal areas to do makeshift market before returning to Yenagoa on a weekly basis.

Chairman of Maritime Workers Union, Bayelsa State chapter, Ipgansi Ogoniba, while confirming the accident, said the local boat went up in flame in the middle of the river while the boat was sailing to Ukubie community and burnt some of the passengers onboard.

He said the number of casualties could not be immediately ascertained as search and rescue operation was ongoing late Wednesday.

Chairperson of Association of Coastal and Waterways Communities of Nigeria in the state, Odede Tina, blamed the large number of casualty on the inability of the boat operators in the state to stick to safety protocols, especially wearing life jacket while onboard and pleaded with the state government to intensify effort in linking more coastal communities by road in order to curb incessant loss of lives in the river.

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Reacting to the tragic incident, the chairman of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of the state, Target Segibo, described the mishap as most unfortunate and a great loss to the family members of the victims and the council area.

#### Diri expresses sadness

Diri, in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Daniel Alabrah, expressed the condolences of the state government to families of victims of the mishap.

The governor said: "The news of another tragic boat accident in our state was shocking and sad. On behalf of the state government, I extend my deepest condolences to families of victims.

"Upon hearing the news of the tragedy, I immediately directed the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy and other relevant government organs to dispatch their teams to the river point to join the rescue efforts.

"This is yet one boat accident too many and the state government will take measures to avert such avoidable tragedy going forward. We will investigate the cause(s) of this mishap.

"I again implore boat operators in the state to ensure they observe proper safety procedures at all times in order to make our waterways safer."



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