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Buliisa mourns boat accident victims as families pick bodies

How it happened. Police explain that the boat carrying intoxicated passengers was overloaded.

BY FRANCIS MUGERWA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

BULIISA. Buliisa District was engulfed in grief yesterday as families picked bodies of the nine people who perished in a boat accident on Lake Albert on Christmas Day.

"We have handed the nine bodies over to their respective families for decent burial. In total, 36 people survived the boat accident," Buliisa District police commander John Rutagira told *Daily Monitor* in an interview on Tuesday.

Explaining the possible cause of the accident, Mr Rutagira said the fishing boat that could accommodate a maximum number of 18 people was loaded with 45 people. The 45 people that included footballers and fans from Kaweibanda village in Buliisa District were travelling by water to Runga Landing Site in Hoima District for a friendly football match to crown their Christmas Day festivities.

In the process, the passengers gravitated to each other, accidentally crowding more on one side. The boat eventually lost balance and flipped-pouring all the passengers in the foggy waters.

Claims of drunkenness

The steersman identified as Twambe and most passengers were allegedly drunk by the time of the accident, according to Mr Rutagira.

The dead were identified as David Okecha, 42, Consolate Akutu, 18, David Ocan, 25, Oyirowth, 23 and Oketi-wendi, 28, Piwe, 22, Ozele Kasamba, 29 and Oting, 26.

Ms Akutu who had tagged along to cheer up her home football team perished in the accident, leaving behind her five-month-old baby.

She left the baby in the care of her parents at home.

Her mother tearfully requested mourners to support her raise her grandchild, now orphaned at such a tender age.

Ms Akutu's brother, Pascal Okaba described the sister as hardworking and an active member of the family.

"She kept our home because most of us are fishermen and business people. She has left a big vacuum in a family that is struggling financially," Mr Okaba said.

"We have finalised with the burial but we have failed to get money for her last funeral rites," Mr Okaba told the *Daily Monitor* yesterday.

Mr Peter Otim, a close friend of the late Okecha said the deceased left behind a young family that needed a hand.

The Buliisa District Referees chairperson, Mr Godfrey Opira, said the friendly football match was abandoned after the accident.

The owner of the boat, Mr Vincent Byaruhanga, a businessman told this newspaper that he was on a business trip to Hoima by the time his boat capsized. The boat was eventually recovered but he is said to have lost his employees Piwe, Kasamba and Twambe.

He said his boat was recovered from the water and will resume operations.

He feigned ignorance about the cause of the accident.



Saved. A survivor is helped ashore by rescuers as other rescuers continue to search for other victims in the lake on Sunday. COURTESY PHOTO

Relatives say...

"She kept our home because most of us are fishermen and business people. She has left a big vacuum in the family,"

PASCAL OKABA, BROTHER OF CONSOLATE AKUTU

"He loved football so much. We shall miss him so much. He was social and loved the youth."

PETER OTIM, A FRIEND TO THE LATE OKECHA

"We mourn the loss of our dear ones. We shall take steps to sensitise people about the safety on water,"

SIMON KINENE, BULIISA DISTRICT CHAIRMAN,