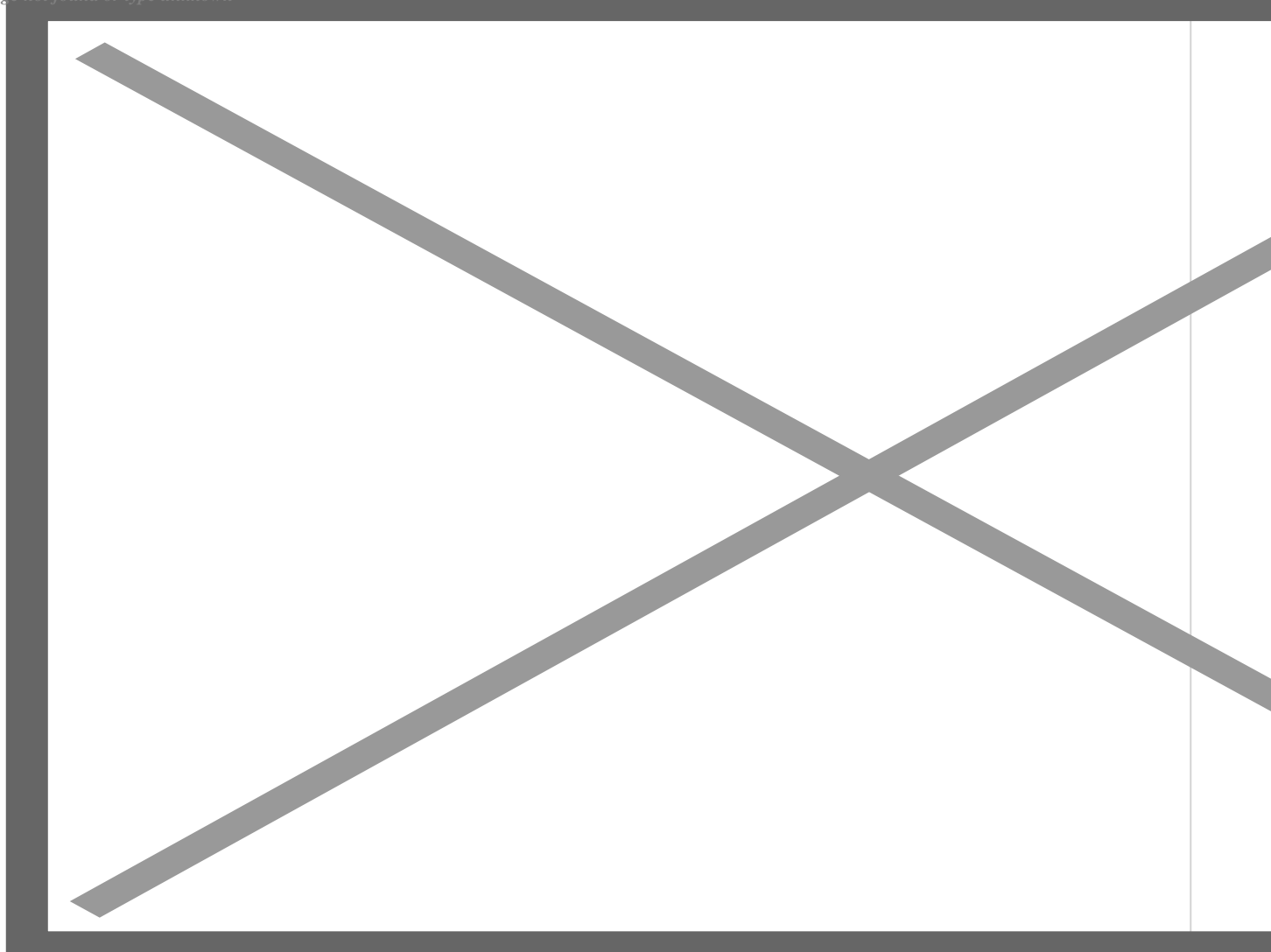


More than 100 people missing after Nigeria boat carrying 300 sinks

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Abuja, October 3 (RHC)-- More than 100 people are missing in Nigeria after a boat carrying mostly women and children capsized in Niger State in the country's north, authorities have said.

The locally made wooden boat, with a capacity of 100 passengers, had about 300 people on board when it overturned in the rural Mokwa district, an emergency official said on Wednesday.

The vessel sank in the Niger River on Tuesday night at about 8:30pm (19:30 GMT), said Abdullahi Baba-Arah, the director general of Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA).

The passengers were returning from an Islamic religious festival when the incident occurred. Rescue workers and volunteers from Mokwa local government area had rescued 150 people, Babah-Arah said early on Wednesday.

"The search and rescue operation is still ongoing to locate more survivors," the NSEMA head added in a statement.

"Nine corpses have been recovered in the Gbajibo boat accident. Two females and seven men," Baba-Arah said in an update, the publication reported.

Local outlet Vanguard News cited a news release from the Council Chairman of Mokwa local government, saying dozens of bodies were recovered. "Council Chairman Abdullahi Muregi acknowledged the recovery of approximately 60 bodies, while 10 survivors have been found," Vanguard reported.

The boat had been travelling from Mundi to Gbajibo for the Annual Maulud celebration when the accident happened, both the local government and NSEMA officials said.

Ismaila Umar, who leads an association of boat skippers in Mokwa, told the Reuters news agency that chances of finding survivors were slim. This would be the second such major disaster in Niger State in 18 months after more than 100 people were killed in another boat accident.

Experts say most of the boat disasters in Nigeria in recent years increasingly point to regulatory failures and are often attributed to overloading or poorly maintained boats.

"The boat was not supposed to carry more than 100 persons, but there were almost 300 people on it. And that was what resulted in the breakage of the boat," Salihu Garba, the director of relief and rehabilitation at the state emergency services, told The Associated Press news agency.

NSEMA's Baba-Arah said his agency was investigating what happened during Tuesday's incident and that the cause was yet to be determined, local media reported.

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