



ISSUE BRIEF

June, 2025

Title: Escalating Boat Mishaps in Nigeria: Urgent Need for Legislative Oversight and Action

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Summary:

In May 2025, a devastating boat accident in Gbajibo community, Kwara State, claimed at least 27 lives, marking the third major tragedy in the region in less than two years. Similar accidents in October 2024 and June 2023 resulted in over 160 deaths, revealing a persistent and deadly pattern. These incidents, largely reported to be caused by overloading, adverse weather, and regulatory lapses, continue despite presidential directives and the recent establishment of a Special Committee to prevent boat mishaps by the Honourable Minister of Marine and Blue Economy.

The recurrence of these tragedies reveals systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's inland waterway safety enforcement, inadequate oversight by the National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA), and a lack of public awareness on water transport safety protocols. These failures endanger the lives of millions who depend on water transportation across the country.

To address these challenges, legislative intervention is urgently required. The National Assembly may wish to:

- **Summon NIWA** to provide a full account of investigations and safety enforcement following recent incidents;
- **Conduct a public hearing** involving the Special FG Committee on Boat Mishaps to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and identify legal or operational gaps;
- **Assess funding and resource adequacy** for NIWA and related agencies responsible for inland waterway regulation;
- **Mandate nationwide safety education campaigns** through the National Orientation Agency to inform passengers and operators about life jacket use, overloading dangers, and night-time sailing bans.

These actions may help strengthen safety standards, restore public trust, and prevent future tragedies on Nigeria's waterways.



Background

A tragic boat accident in Gbajibo community, Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara State, was reported by Channels Television on the 17th of May, 2025¹. This accident was said to have claimed the lives of at least 27 people. The incident involved a boat carrying passengers returning from a market in Niger State, which capsized due to overloading and adverse weather conditions. This tragedy occurred just seven months after a similar accident in October 2024, where at least 60 people, mostly women and children, lost their lives in a boat mishap in the same region². Similarly, In June 2023, over 100 individuals died in a boat accident still in Kwara State³.

In response to the October 2024 incident, President Tinubu directed The National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) to investigate the spate of boat accidents and devise strategies to prevent future occurrences⁴. He emphasized the need for expanded surveillance and enforcement of safety regulations, including prosecuting operators violating bans on night sailing⁵.

Despite these directives, boat accidents continue to claim lives across Nigeria even after the Federal Government had inaugurated a Special Committee in February 2025 to Curb Boat Mishaps in Nigeria⁶. These incidents still indicate systemic issues in the management and regulation of inland waterways.

Issue

The recurring boat mishaps in Nigeria point to significant shortcomings in the enforcement of safety regulations, inadequate oversight of water transport operations, and insufficient public awareness of safety protocols. Ineffective monitoring and accountability mechanisms have possibly allowed unsafe practices to persist, endangering the lives of countless Nigerians who rely on waterways for transportation.

Rationale

Ensuring the safety of citizens is a fundamental responsibility of the government. The persistent occurrence of boat accidents not only results in tragic loss of life but also undermines public confidence in the nation's transportation systems. Legislative oversight is crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies, hold relevant agencies accountable, and enact laws that strengthen safety measures on Nigeria's waterways.

Recommendations for Legislative Action

¹ <https://www.channelstv.com/2025/05/17/boat-accident-claims-27-lives-in-kwara/>

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/least-60-dead-nigeria-boat-accident-officials-say-2024-10-03/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kwara_boat_disaster

⁴ <https://humanglemedia.com/over-400-killed-in-6-months-the-sorry-cases-of-boat-mishaps-in-nigeria/>

⁵ <https://newscentral.africa/tinubu-directs-inland-waterways-authority-to-address-rising-boat-accidents-nationwide/>

⁶ <https://niwa.gov.ng/tag/boat-mishap/>



To address this recurring issue, the Senate Committee on Marine Transport and the House Committee on Inland Waterways may wish to:

1. **Summon** NIWA officials to provide detailed reports on investigations conducted following presidential directives, actions taken to enhance safety, and challenges faced in implementing safety measures.
2. **Conduct** a public hearing inviting the inaugurated Special FG Committee on the Prevention of Boat Mishaps in Nigeria by the Honourable Minister of Marine and Blue Economy to gain insights on their findings in view of assessing areas that may require the review of existing laws governing inland waterway transportation to identify gaps and propose amendments that enforce stricter safety standards or penalties for non-compliance.
3. **Examine** the adequacy of funding and resources allocated to NIWA and related agencies to ensure they are equipped to perform effective monitoring, enforcement, and public education campaigns.
4. **Call on** the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to initiate nationwide campaigns to educate boat operators and passengers on safety protocols, the importance of life jackets, and the dangers of overloading and night sailing.

Conclusion

The recurring boat accidents in Nigeria are a clear indication of systemic failures in ensuring the safety of inland waterway transportation. Legislative action is urgently needed to investigate these failures, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and implement effective safety measures. By taking decisive steps, the National Assembly can play a pivotal role in preventing future tragedies and safeguarding the lives of Nigerians.

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