

4th building collapse:

Taming the Lagos monster

Stories by OKEY ONWUCHEKWA

THE frequency of building collapse in centre of excellence, Lagos State re-echoed last Tuesday, (July 18) as four-storey building situated at 56 Bola Street Ebute Metta caved-in, leaving in its trail blood, tears, sorrow, homelessness and shattered future.

No fewer than 40 persons were confirmed dead in the ugly incident, while over 50 persons cheated death on that black Tuesday night. This recent collapse brings to four the houses that had caved-in this year in Lagos State. The collapsed houses are in Amukoko (January), Broad Street Lagos (May) and Iganmu (May).

Once again, professionals in the housing sub-sector are lamenting the avoidable carnage. Their cry has become the proverbial voice of one crying in the wilderness without the authorities bothering to heed their timely admonitions.

First, a Lagos-based structural engineer, Mr Kunle Adebajo said that building collapse is not

a strange development as it occurs worldwide. He likened it to motor accident that is inevitably occurs anywhere in the world unannounced.

But the eminent structural engineer lamented that building collapsed in Nigeria are quite avoidable, attributing the menace to quacks and non-enforcement of relevant housing laws.

National President, Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Prince Emeka Eze concurred with his professional colleague, Adebajo that frequent collapse of houses in the country are caused by quacks and non-enforcement of relevant laws.

Leading a team of engineers from NSE to the collapsed four-storey building in Ebute Metta last Thursday, Eze blamed the incident on a quack, who was driven by avarice dumped a plan for two-story building for unapproved four-storey building.

He also blamed the collapse on low quality materials used for the house.

Eze lamented that his society was

handicapped in going all out to bring quacks to book, noting that government has such responsibility.

His counterpart at the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Mr Habu Gumel said, now is the time for the hammer to fall on quacks, who inflict sorrow on hapless citizens.

Non-professionals are equally united in condemning the menace of quacks and the frequent collapse of buildings in the country.

Governor Bola Tinubu of Lagos has vowed to prosecute the developer of the collapsed four-storey building. Concerned citizens are still hoping that it does not turn out to be a political statement not backed with affirmative action. Stakeholders are of the view that, if people are prosecuted and jailed if found guilty, it would stem the tide of violating relevant housing laws in the country.

Another issue remains moral rectitude that is a scare commodity of law enforcements

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in the country. Standards are compromised with reckless abandon in relevant housing ministries. It is a two-way cancerous phenomenon. You have clients (developers landlords) who believe that with money they can bribe their way in obtaining building plans approved but not implemented to the letter.

The other side of the coin is ministry officials, who with bribes close their eyes to illegality committed by builders. Again, when they go out into the field and notice building illegalities, they are quick at accepting "settlement" than insisting on the right things. In other word, it takes two to tango.

It is also becoming obvious that people intend to cut corners due to bottlenecks associated with securing approvals for housing projects at the relevant government agencies. Efforts at making such things less esoteric would help to restore sanity in the industry.

Adebajo is equally of the view that frequent building collapse can be averted,

if mortgage finance institutions like in UK start playing dominant role in erecting and leasing houses in Nigeria. He is of the considered view that standard would be promoted, as the housing institutions would engage professionals to execute their jobs as apposed to the situation where quacks are dominating the market.

Professionals are understandably calling for control of such a vital sector of the economy, but it has to consider their charges. Their professional charges do scare not a few. And this often leads many to the temptation of patronizing quacks to our collective pain later.

Hope is, however, not lost if government, professional association and the public can co-operate in stemming the monster called building collapse. It is equally hoped that continuous enlightenments and workshops will go a long way to restores sanity into the housing sub-sector of Nigerian economy. A stitch in time saves nine and let hope there will be no building collapse in Lagos after four houses collapsed in the state this year alone.