



Flood and erosion menace:

A challenge to good governance



Even the military government at the centre was thoughtful enough to make provisions, from the federal allocation, for natural disasters including erosion, occasioned by heavy flooding and ceaseless downpour, peculiar to the old eastern and western regions and the middle belt and the savanna region.

Yearly, the states are allocated several billions of naira to tackle erosion menace, flooding and other natural disasters.

Sadly, yearly also, the pains of what these disasters have inflicted on their victims keep assaulting our sensibilities, leaving the impression that ours is a place where governance is, like what late Chief Sunday Afolabi, former internal affairs minister under president Olusegun Obasanjo, termed "come and chop".

In this report, correspondent **ETÁGHENE EDIRIN** (etahene@yahoo.com) takes a look at the various flood and erosion disasters in parts of the country, the pains and agonies associated with them and what the affected states and federal governments are doing to contain the menace.

THE coming of the rains has brought with it the perennial problem of flood which has over the years been a major problem of most cities in the country.

Whole households and communities have been swept away, resulting in human and material losses which in many cases are unquantifiable. Many lives have been lost and properties worth billions have also been swept away by these violent flows of water, including goods, buildings, farmlands, livestock, roads and bridges.

There are no up-to-date national casualty figures, but reports on this

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year's floods suggest that scores of lives have been lost across the country.

Though many states experience problems associated with heavy downpour and flooding, areas most affected by this predicament are communities in Anambra, Ogun, Plateau and Lagos states.

Apart from Plateau which is in the middle belt area of the country, the annual catastrophic experience of flooding mostly occurs in states along the Atlantic Ocean, River Niger and its tributaries while some level of disasters are recorded in the lower Niger basin. For instance, about three-quarters of Bayelsa State and half of Delta State both in the Niger Delta are inundated by devastating floods every year.

In Amako village of Nanka, Orumba North Local Government Council of Anambra state, a 65-year old retired lorry driver Mr. Elijah Ezekeke and his wife lost their four male children all boys and aged between twelve and six. The family house has also been washed away by erosion.

According to eye witness accounts, the boys had gone to fetch water from the stream when they met their untimely death. The youngest of the boys was being swept away by the torrent, and his brothers, in a bid to save him, jumped in to rescue him, only to fall victims of the erosion. The flood was said to have swept them up to Amaokpala, a neighbouring town, where their remains were later picked up.

For Pa Ezeokeke, life now means nothing as few days after the tragedy, his wife of many years, Joanah, disappeared. It is feared that the devastated woman might have harmed herself or ran out of the village out of frustration.

The problem of erosion in the eastern parts of Nigeria is legendary. No less than 250 lives have been lost to the menace over the years by the Nanka community alone. The erosion problem in Nanka has ravaged the community without much effort by the government to tackle the problem. So the problem continues to wreak havoc on the people.

According to official estimates, there are over 1,000 active erosion sites in Anambra state. And efforts by the state government to tackle the menace have so far been unsuccessful.

The story of Pa Ezeokeke is one of the woes the people go through annually, as many communities in the state are under constant threat of erosion, especially during the rainy season.

Many indigenes in these communities say the problem is clearly beyond the State government. Residents called on President Ya'Adua to make out time to see the erosion site for himself or send an aide to the place to assess the problem and see what can be done to ameliorate it.

Another resident of the area, Elder Umeano, while lamenting the plight of the communities said, "it is not only this tragedy that we are worried about, we are also worried about the 330 KVA high tension line that is about to be washed away by erosion and if that happens, the entire community would be in trouble, because they would either be electrocuted or face other dangers."

Speaking further, he said "other areas the lines passes will also be endangered."

He alleged that a former lawmaker got assistance from the Federal Rural Electrification Programme to relocate the high tension but abandoned the project and made away with the money.

The traditional ruler of Nanka, Igwe Gilbert Nwabueze Ofomata while decrying the state of erosion in the community, stated that erosion has defied all their communal efforts. He said that over 50 houses and 15 lives have been lost to erosion, just as he added that over 18 other houses were under severe threat of erosion and may soon be washed away, if drastic measures are not taken.

While appealing to government to provide them with pipe borne water, the ruler disclosed that the community has spent over 100 million naira in communal efforts to tackle the problem, yet no solution has been found.

He said: "Nanka has the biggest erosion site in Nigeria and nobody is talking about it. And when another land slide will happen and wipe away the entire community, swallowing up every body, then people from the War College and Jaji would now come here for sight seeing which ought not to be."

The story is not different in Aba, the economic nerve-centre of Abia. Yet these floods are perennial and their effects the same. Year after year, the problem remains the same and they people suffer the same thing, and it seems endlessly as government little or no effort has done next to nothing to ameliorate their sufferings.

The causes are familiar and their impact is common knowledge, while the solutions are readily available. But, nothing seems to have been done to permanently tackle these recurrent disasters.

Heavy down pour which occurred in some parts of Plateau state recently, left about 20 people dead. Thousands were displaced and farmlands washed away wreaking much more havoc on communities in the area.

When the rains started, many in the affected areas thought it was just like any other down pour, but it turned out to be heavy and continuous, resulting in an unprecedented flood with the attendant devastation.

The havoc of the rains was glaringly obvious as its toll on the communities were monumental, if not incalculable. Reports from the four local government areas affected by the incident revealed that over 20 lives were lost; more than 9,000 people displaced; 772 houses and several

live stocks destroyed while hundreds of farmlands were submerged. Bridges linking communities also collapsed, cutting off some areas and rendering them inaccessible. The local government areas affected are Wase, Kanke, Langtang North and Kanam.

In Wase, the incident claimed 16 lives, destroyed 430 farmlands and 30 settlements with about 552 houses.

"Oh, we have been left homeless and jobless," stated one victim of the flood disaster that swept through parts of southern Plateau state.

The disaster also cut off both the road and bridge linking Wase with neighbouring Langtang north.

Reports indicate that the displaced persons have been moved to public buildings, especially primary schools in Wase, Kanam and Langtang.

Before this incident, Borno State got a dose of the destructive floods when the Maiduguri-Biu federal road was washed away. The incident which took place in Damboa, about 70 kilometres from Damaturu, the state capital, is reported to have disconnected five local government areas from the rest of the state. Travelers to Maiduguri, Biu and other towns now have to make a detour through Damaturu, a distance of about 130 kilometres.

In Adamawa, at least 23 persons were confirmed dead in Song local council area due to flooding.

Flash floods also devastated three other local government areas of the state, including Yola North and Yola South, following two days of torrential rainfall. More than 500 houses were reported submerged by the floods, leaving an estimated 2,000 persons homeless. The flooding in the two council areas of Yola was attributed in part to the collapse of embankments on the River Benue.

An estimated 500 houses were submerged in Yolde-Pate, Shagari low-cost housing estate, Angwan Sabo and neighbouring villages of Yola South Council. Farmlands cultivated with such crops as rice, corn and millet were affected.

Victims in related flood disasters in Ogun State, and some parts of Lagos state are still reeling in pain and anguish, over the calamity that befell them.

In Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, no fewer than 1000 residents were displaced during a heavy down pour on the state capital which lasted for over 14 hours.

It was the first of such rain in the past four years which was not accompanied by whirlwind or thunderstorm.

The rain which started at about mid-night forced workers from their respective offices while taxi drivers and other motorists were forced off the road by devastating flood which swept across the state capital.

Areas like Oke-Lantoro and Oke-Sokori, which are a few metres away from the residence of ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo, Idi Oparun, Totoro, Amolaso, Mokola, Eleja Olorunsogo Ijemo, among several others, were terribly submerged revealing the neglect of the areas by successive governments.

Many private and commercial drivers got stuck in the torrential rain that later became the talk of the town.

At Amolaso area of the state capital, no fewer than 150 houses and shops were sacked with six families stranded in the flood.

Officials of the state fire service were found wanting in their duties as they complained of lack of equipment to combat the flood.

For some hundreds of residents in another part of the ancient city of Abeokuta, they woke up one day at about 3 a.m. to find their homes submerged by surging floods.

A torrential rain that lasted for about 48 hours had washed through the city, leaving a trail of disaster in its wake. Many people were displaced from their homes. Worst affected were those who lived along the banks of the Ogun River.

Many were displaced while 500 residential, business and religious houses were submerged in floods. The flood also swept off domestic animals and vehicles. Some people were trapped in the upper floors of houses for about two days in some areas.

As the rains lasted, the floods surged into the city. The rains also affected the capacity of Oyan dam, raising fears of a possible catastrophe.

A statement by the Ogun River Basin Development Authority advised people living along the river banks to relocate to safer areas.

Two days after the rain, no fewer than 5,000 people were displaced by the flooding which was compounded by the release of water from the dam.

Because of its proximity to Ogun, the release of water from the dam worsened the already pathetic situation in some parts of Lagos State.

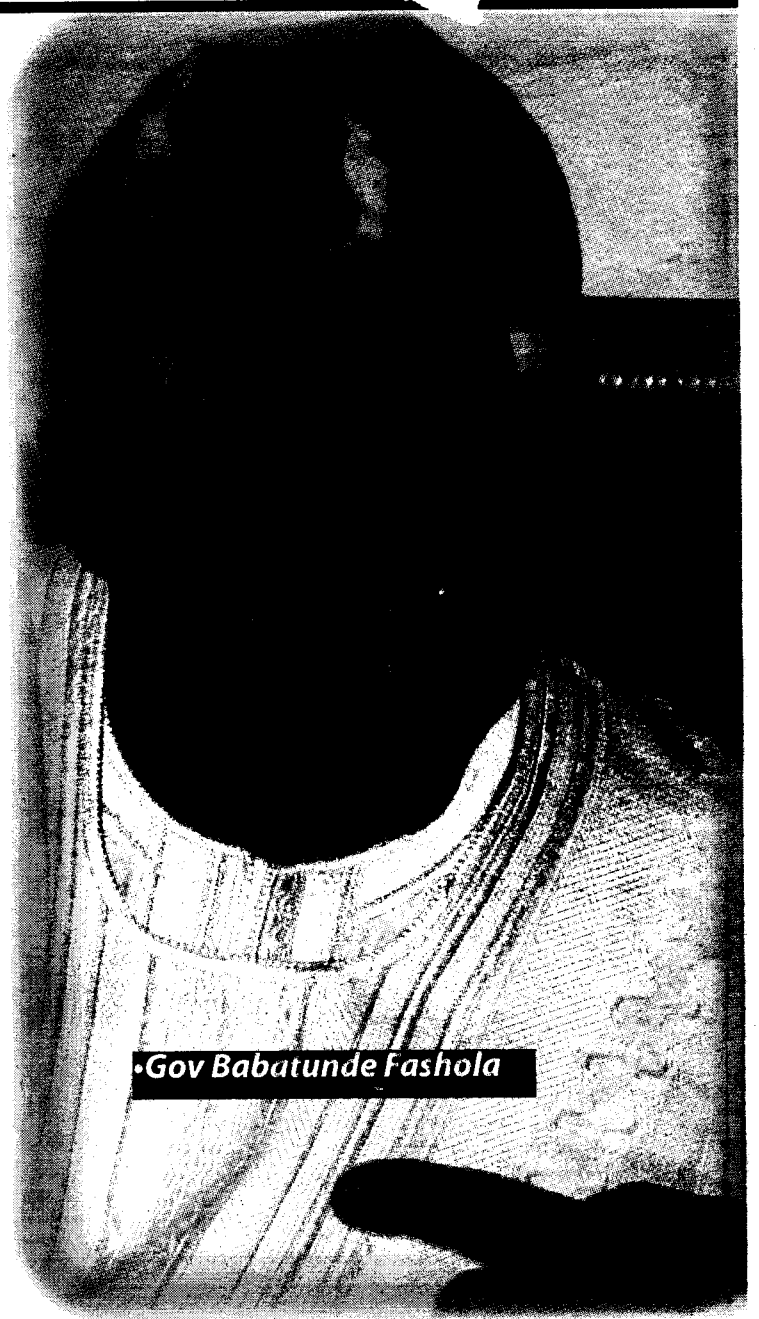
Residents of Ajegunle, a neighbourhood of Ikorodu town and other parts of the state, had tales of woe to tell of the floods caused by an overflowing Ogun River.

Mostly affected are those living in the banks of rivers particularly in Agiliti, Owode, Ajegunle, Mile-12 and Maidan along Ikorodu road and in Apapa areas of Lagos. About 300 residents are known to have been displaced in Isheri-Ikosi Local Council Development Area (LCDA).

General Manager, Lagos State Emergency Authority (LASEMA), Dr. Damilola Osanyintolu said on the whole, over 1,000 people were affected.

LASEMA has relocated some of the victims to Ikosi High School on the outskirts of the state. A lady identified as Mrs. Lateef was delivered of a baby boy two weeks ago at the camp. About 700 of them have relocated to other parts of the state, while a few, ostensibly feed up with life in Lagos have returned to their respective states of origin.

A resident of Ajegunle near Ikorodu who gave his name as Moshood Adefuye said the flooding had been the worst in 10 years. A principal of one of the schools in Ajegunle



said, though it had been an annual experience, this year's flood is exceptional.

Though the flood has receded in some areas, in others, people are still being ferried in and out of their houses by canoes.

Similarly, a member of Christ Followers Church of Nigeria, Itowolo, also affected by the flood, said it had never been this bad in the 12 years that the church has existed in the community.

In Nigeria, flooding, particularly by this time of the year, has become a regular occurrence. A principal of one of the High Schools affected by the flood in Lagos said it has become an annual occurrence but the volume and current of this year's flash flood has been higher and faster. "It has become an annual experience but the highest volume before this year's was to the knee level," he said.

Investigations revealed that floods in Nigeria are largely caused by poor planning and neglect by local and national physical planning authorities as well as flagrant disobedience to existing rules by individual developers. For instance, in Lagos and Ogun states where the recent flooding was blamed on opening of a Dam in Ogun State, the same experience is witnessed every year each time the authorities, threatened by alarming increase in water volume, released the water into populated communities.

According to authorities of the Ogun-Osun River Basin Development Authority (OORBDA), the opening of the Oyan Dam, which caused floods in parts of Ogun and Lagos states, was done to prevent the collapse of the dam.

It was discovered that OORBDA released water from the dam because of heavy rainfall experienced in July when it became flooded following a heavy downpour.

The Executive Director (Operations) of the body, Yomi Sofela, said the pressure from the water would have led to the collapse of the dam. He therefore advised owners of buildings "along the River Ogun to either remove them or build appropriate barriers to protect their structures."

A statement from the body further stated that the exercise was periodic. The authority added that this was usually done whenever the volume of water in the dam is high.

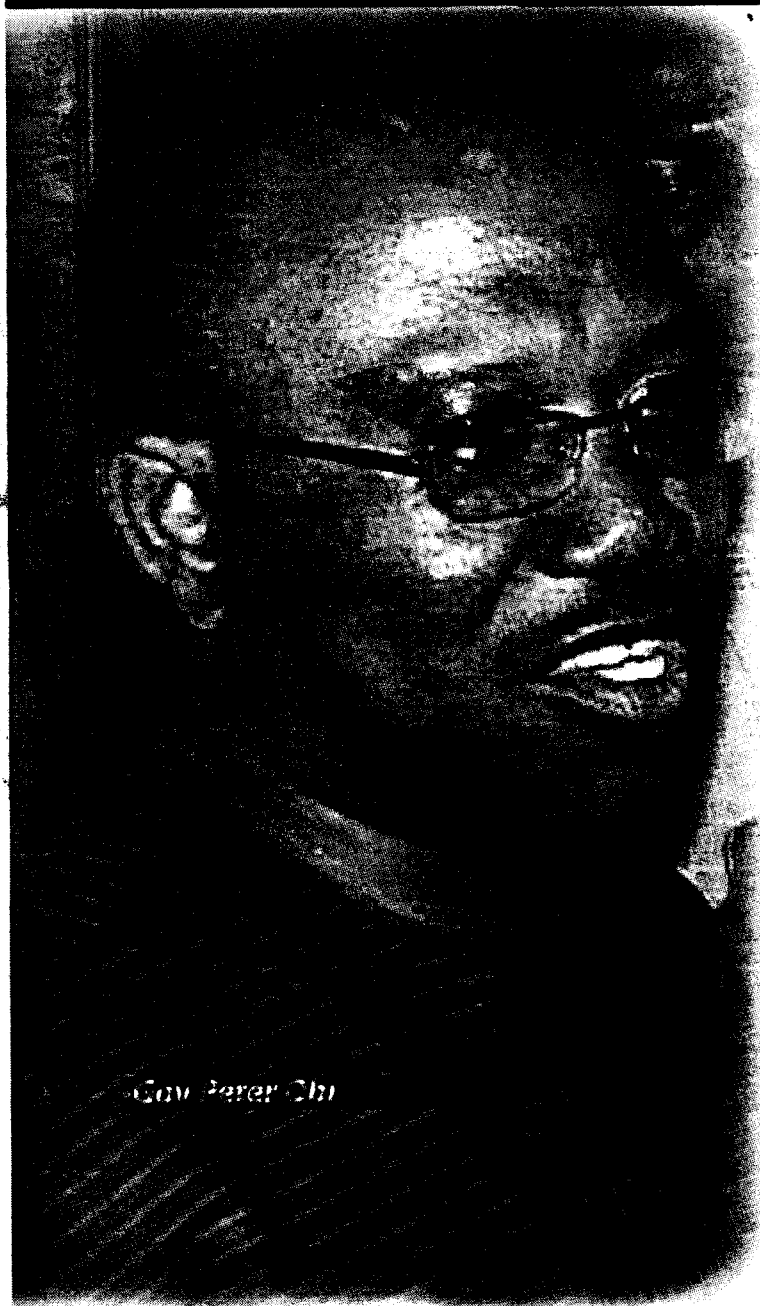
The OORBDA further said the release of the water was in the best interest of the people living on the plains of Ogun River.

It said, "It is in the best interest of the people that gradual and systematic release of water should take place rather than allow the dam to overflow and fail."

"The alternative to the systemic release of water will be the danger of massive destruction of lives and properties in Ogun and Lagos states."

OORBDA stated that it informed relevant authorities in the two states before releasing the water.

Yomi Sofela, the Executive Director, Operations, explained that it was the practice of the Authority to open



Gov Peter Obi

the dam whenever the volume of water in it gets too high. Sofela stressed that the authority informed the appropriate authorities in both states before the 'gates' of the dam were thrown open. "The recent release of water from the dam by the authority is a routine precautionary measure normally taken whenever the water level at the dam necessitates such release of water in order to ensure safety of the dam. It is in the best interest of the people that gradual and systematic release of water should take place rather than allow the dam to overflow and collapse. The alternative to the systemic release of water will be massive destruction of lives and properties in Ogun and Lagos states," Sofela explained.

But what could be the reason for such devastating floods in Nigerian cities and towns? The Ogun State Commissioner for Environment, Dr Adeleke Adedoyin, who released casualty figures, blamed the disaster on the people's poor attitude to environmental issues.

He said the floods were worsened by persons who built illegal structures on drainage channels, thus hindering the flow of water.

The flood situation in Aba is also attributed to the blockage of drains by residents who indiscriminately dump solid wastes in unauthorised places.

Residents of the city say the inability of rain water to find its course to the Aba River is responsible for the perennial floods.

"Any time there is rain, floods surge from the blocked end of the system and overflow the entire neighbourhood, including the Ariaria market," says a resident.

The Permanent Secretary, Abia State Ministry of Works and Transport, Mrs Ifeoma Agu, disagrees with the notion that the city lacks adequate drainage channels.

She puts the blame on residents who throw their household waste into drains. "The problem is compounded by indiscriminate construction of houses in the city without regard for town planning code," she says.

Agu notes that the buildings block the natural flow of water, and expresses the concern of the state government about the situation. The state government, she says, has requested the services of experts to design a drainage system for Aba as part of efforts to find a permanent solution to the problem.

The Ogun State Government is also worried by the situation caused by flooding. "We need to put in place an effective law to combat environmental problems in the state," Adedoyin says.

He explained that the recent flooding should also be "seen in the context of those who have built structures on our drainage channels."

"Despite several appeals to those individuals and organisations, they have persisted in this wrongdoing. We are now determined to ensure that the larger society does not suffer the illegality perpetrated by a few citizens," he

says.

Observers say that the government has the political will to control and mitigate the effects of flash floods. For instance, the Lagos State Government has embarked on the construction of massive drainage channels in Owode-Ajgunle to control perennial flooding in the area.

A few hundreds of residents of the area have been evacuated and homes demolished to make way for the project. However, the citizenry must be educated to appreciate the benefits of such measures.

On her part, Agu says the residents of Aba will be enlightened to assist the government in tackling the problem of flooding. The government, she explains, will undertake public enlightenment to encourage people to desist from unwholesome acts that pose grave environmental hazards.

But more importantly, the works ministry will continue to clear the drains regularly, she adds.

A recent survey on an urban renewal programme in the Aba South local government area, estimates that N269.9 million will be required to construct roads and drains.

Experts say that when completed, the federal government-sponsored programme will help check flooding in the city.

In the aftermath of the July 26 flooding, the government of Ogun state set up a task force comprising four ministries, education, health, environment and works.

While the education ministry provides materials to affected schools, the health ministry provides health care services to victims. Works and environment ministries see to the clearing of drainage channels for easy flow of water.

It behooves government at all levels to address factors that lead to flooding so as to ensure safety of life and property. Since the floods come annually, it requires that all hands must be on deck to contain them. While the citizenry need to see themselves as in efforts geared towards containing floods, the government also should take adequate measures to protect the citizenry.

Reacting to the menace of flood, Ogun State Governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel through his Chief Press Secretary (CPS) said: "It is regrettable that this level of flooding has taken place in Abeokuta.

"We are particularly sad that properties worth millions of naira were affected including the dislocation of socio-economic lives of our people. We have already initiated moves to bring succour to those affected as can be seen from the efforts of our officials."

In different areas along its path, especially around Denro, about two kilometres from Akute in Ifo local government area, the flood swept away poultry, piggery and fish farms worth hundreds of millions of naira.

There are indications that this year's unusually heavy rains, which have also ravaged several cities in Europe and Asia, may not be unconnected to the increasing incidence of global warming.

In some countries pre-emptive measures are currently being taken to handle possible flooding. For instance, prompted by the wave of flooding in other low-lying areas of the world, authorities of the city of Austin in Texas, United States of America have put up emergency measures waiting for a possible worst flood disaster in decades.

The City, a densely populated area has been described as "one of the most flood-prone regions in North America.

Again, major waterways particularly in Lagos State are often blocked by structures. In many cases the structures were approved by the state physical planning authorities. Building constructions are also not properly supervised to ensure that they conform to approvals.

The urbanization of most cities without a corresponding increase in the number and quality of infrastructures and facilities to handle increased population is another contributing factor to the recurrence of floods in many major cities in the country.

For example, new buildings and residential areas are daily springing up in several parts of Lagos without adequate arrangements or facilities for refuse disposals or clearance.

It is well known that in some parts of Lagos and other major cities in the country with such refuse disposal difficulties, the only time residents throw away their dirt, is when it rains. And this they do, by dumping them into drainages with the hope that it gets washed away to a suitable site.

Prompted by the recent floods, the Lagos State Government has embarked on a massive demolition of buildings and other structures identified to be obstructing drainage channels in the state. Some of them are said to be illegal structures.

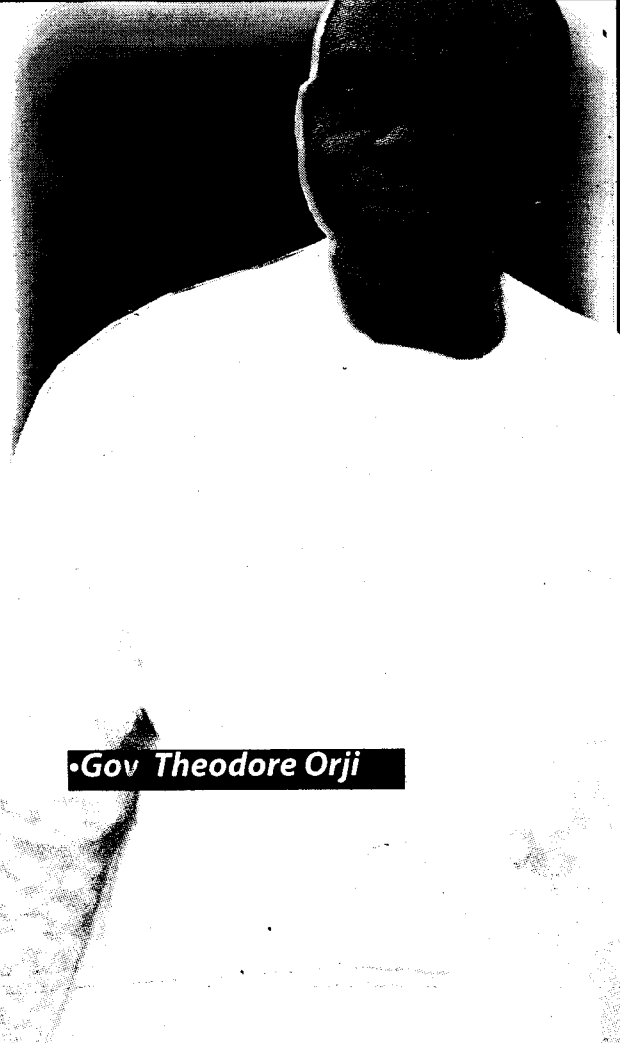
Besides, the state government announced that it would commence immediate dredging of waterways along the Lagos Ikorodu axis.

A war is also being waged on dumping of refuse in canals.

In a bid to get the residents involved in the task of keeping drainage channels in the city free, the Lagos state government led other stakeholders to sign a treaty with some residents.

The scheme which was jointly initiated by the state government and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), is being jointly facilitated by Clean-Up Nigeria (CUN) and National Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research (NIOMR). It would be recalled that in November last year, the state government issued a public notice that offending landlords should remove the parts of their structure causing the obstruction within 14 days.

A former commissioner in the state had stated that the drainage and flooding situations in the state are often being neglected and as such, the state government has resolved



Gov Theodore Orji

Prevailing Erosion: Corruption- abaited

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EROSION in the nation
A nation in destruction
By pervasion of corruption
Leading to erosion
Of man and material
By flood of negligence
Watered from providence

Flood of water denied of gutter
Guttering it's way into human quarter
Creeping and sweeping man and material
Children at play packaged as garbage
Because our state house is master's house
Fortified against our disaster cry
Even as they munch our mustered mustard

Flood of oil in the pipeline
Meant to fund our lifeline
Rather converted from plan line
Opening us to the flood line
Where we are flushed into flooded line
Just like feathers of butterfly
That's the fault of our planless state

Worse than erosion is flood of corruption
Ever eroding our flood-prone nation
Where the state is a different world
Walled away from the state citizenry
The flood, the flush, the cry of victims
Wailing for help from erosion victims
Song of fun for state officials

Ministry of work, whither thine work?
Town planning division, planning what?
When atop your bulging nose
We are swept away by erosion torrent!
Our farms and homes eroding off
While we watch in helpless awe
Just because you are workless ministry
Who engage in planless planning.

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Flood and erosion menace



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to deal ruthlessly with the erring persons by applying the full weight of the law.

According to the notice, "Failure to remove or comply with this notice (clause) will result in the government removing the offending structures at cost to their owners."

Eight months after the warning was issued out, nothing concrete has been done.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) says it has provided relief materials to victims of a recent flood disaster in five local government areas in Plateau.

NEMA's North Central Coordinator, Edward Maigida told newsmen in Jos that some of the victims were in the 19 communities in Langtang North local government area.

Others, he added, were in 18 communities in Wase, 17 in Kanam, 9 in Kanke and 3 in Pankshin local government areas.

Maigida said the victims were evacuated to highland areas, with the army in Shendam providing them with fresh water, while hospitals were activated to render medical assistance.

He said the effect of the flood was severe because the area had lacked rain, and that when it came, it was heavy and lasted for 12 hours.

Maigida said Shendam and Langtang South Local government areas were also likely to be flooded because of the intensity of the rain.

The coordinator said the agency was working with Plateau Emergency Management Agency toward resettling the affected communities on highland areas to avoid a recurrence.

He advised people residing on fertile plains because of farming activities, to relocate to highlands to avoid such flooding incidents.

Proffering solutions to the problem of flooding in Lagos, and drawing a parallel with Amsterdam, which though it is below sea level, does not witness flooding like Lagos, Dr. Adeleke-Adedoyin, the commissioner of Environment in Ogun state, said: "In Amsterdam, they built on the surface of water by using pillars, but what happens here is that, we are doing a lot of reclamation. We have to draw up sand from the sea to fill up the

swampy areas. The result is that because we have already tampered with nature, it is nearly impossible to find a lasting solution to such threat.

"In places like Amsterdam that I have just mentioned, all the drainage they have provided, they have considered the gradient of discharge of run off water during rain fall and melting snow. But in our case, we have destroyed nature courtesy of the sand filling of low level areas to create land for building. And this is done to the detriment of the environment."

Corroborating the view expressed by Dr. Adeleke-Adedoyin, the Director of Flood, Erosion and Control in OSEPA, Yomi Adesanya, an engineer, posited that "when you impede, you are creating a barrier and the water will back up behind the barrier to such a time that it can overflow the barrier."

Adesanya decried the lacklustre attitude of the government which, according to him, includes problems of land management, bad planning, and inconsistency in policies as well as discontinuity in governance.

On what his agency as the mouth organ is doing, particularly in Ogun State, to stall the menace, Adesanya declared:

"The economy doesn't grant the government enough funds to tackle it effectively. The very precarious one like the one in Ota and Ijebu Ode, where houses are threatened, we draw government's attention to it."

He pointed out that the cost of bringing the situation to its barest minimum to forestall adverse effects is colossal, even as he said that the state government needs the magnanimity of the Federal Government to be able to make an edge way.

This view was also expressed by the state government after closing down the camp that had been set up to accommodate victims of flood disasters in the state.

Shock and disbelief greeted the inmates of the Abeokuta flood victims' camp as the state government ordered their disbandment.

Dr. Adedoyin, who justified the closure of the camp, which was opened barely five hours after the natural disaster sacked the state capital last month, said all was now well with the victims.

According to him, the situation at the residences of the affected victims was now habitable "since the flood has subsided."

He revealed that the state government has pushed

their case to the Federal Government.

"What remains now is for the government, after the evaluation of the losses to give them something after we must have received assistance from the Federal Government."

Continuing, the commissioner told journalists that the disaster could not be handled by the state government alone. "The state government can't handle it alone."

The little we can do is to give them first assistance which we have done by camping, clothing and feeding them and providing health care.

"That's what we have done. Other requests have been sent to the Federal Government in whom we hope soonest will get back to us on their plight."

He also disclosed that the state government spent between N7 million to N8 million in providing shelter, feeding clothing and health care delivery to the victims of the flood disaster.

One is forced to ask if this amount is considered as too much for a government to spend in ensuring that citizens who have met with misfortune are made as comfortable as can be.

Asked whether the closure order was limited to the Abeokuta camp alone, Adedoyin said: "We have another one near Lagos, the 'Sparklight Estate'. All has been disbanded because water has subsided and they have to go back to their normal life and business. That's why we have to decamp most of the camps."

What lives are they expected to go back to when all they own have been swept away by the floods?

Considering the bureaucratic bottlenecks associated with official communication between government bodies and implementation of policies in Nigeria, it might be safe to conclude that these ones have been left to their fate by the Ogun state government.

While further justifying government's move, he added: "Here (Abeokuta) in particular, the people at the school need their facilities for summer classes, so we have to leave for them."

As well intentioned as such moves may seem, observers are of the view that government needs to do more for these people to ensure that their sufferings are reduced to the barest minimum, by making further provisions, both material and financial to assist them get back on their feet, instead of throwing them out into the cold, which is close to what has been done.