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Rush to provide relief after Ibadan flood kills 102

Written by Joel Olatunde Saturday, 03 September 2011 05:00

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Flooding that killed more than 100 people in the southwestern corner of Nigeria led to a scramble on Thursday to provide badly needed relief supplies, with homes and bridges collapsed. Families in the city of Ibadan whose homes were washed away moved in with neighbours or slept on mattresses at a school transformed into a displaced camp while aid officials rushed out medicine, food and other supplies.

Water was subsiding after the heavy rains that began on Friday and continued into Saturday, causing a dam to burst. The Red Cross has said at least 102 people were killed. Residents said the water rose quickly in the middle of the night between Friday and Saturday, causing them to run for shelter. "I was sleeping with my family when suddenly one of my children woke up and shouted, 'Daddy! Water!'" said Caleb Babatunde, a 45-year-old father of five who had taken shelter with his family at a school.

"Before we realised it, our rooms had been flooded. We then tried to run for our dear lives." He said when they returned the next day, they found that their house had collapsed. One-hundred-six families had been registered at the school for a total of around 500 people. Houses and other buildings alongside the Odo Ona River in the city of Ibadan, a sprawling metropolis and traditional political base for the Yoruba, one of Nigeria's three main ethnic groups, were destroyed in the rush of water.

The main newspaper in Ibadan carried photographs of dead bodies left behind by the floods last weekend and mass burials were held for victims. Festus Adedayo, a spokesman for the governor of Oyo state, where Ibadan is the capital, blamed houses and other structures built illegally along waterways as a main cause of the flooding since he said they restricted the movement of water. "It was a real tragedy," he said. "If figures coming in are really to be believed, then it was a disaster."

Red Cross official Umar Mairiga said the Eleyele dam had burst. "I lost my neighbour, a mother, and her child to the flood," said Ramon Olabitan, 35, speaking from where his home used to be located alongside the Odo Ona River. "They were swept away on Saturday night. The wall of the house fell and both of them and their property were washed away. Now even my house is completely destroyed. I have nothing."

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