



■ A typical Niger community

PHOTOS: Ahmed Tahir Ajobe

The story of deaths on Niger's many rivers

From Ahmed Tahir Ajobe, Minna

The rain has since ceased across Niger state and the hazy weather heralds the end of the season. And residents of the riverine communities displaced by the rampaging flood which always come with torrential rain, are returning to take stock as usual of their many losses.

But the water level has hardly reduced and still threatens lives. Just penultimate Saturday, it claimed 7 lives, all female from the sleepy Balsa community in Katcha local government area of the state. Among the dead were a pregnant house wife and two little children. Four of the victims were teenagers between four and 11 years old.

They were heading to a farm across the river to thrash rice when the unfortunate accident happened. The owner of the farm, Yabagi, Alias Gomneti would endure the pain for life having also lost a daughter, a granddaughter and a wife in the tragedy. The president of a human rights group, Global Movement Against Poverty (GMAP) Barrister Anthony Adaramola, who was in the state recently for a two-day workshop, described the incident as "shocking" and the figure "alarming".

But such news is not new to the state and its people, especially as the rain intensifies. The figure from a similar accident early last month, precisely October 2, was higher when a boat capsized on River Kontagora, killing 11 out of its 17 passengers. The victims were all married women from Sabon Gari in Magama local government area. One of them was 7 months pregnant. And like the incident above, they were all going to a farm across the river to harvest groundnuts.

It is a recurring decimal and emergency officials will rush in to take statistics and do its report for onward submission to the higher authorities. But its figure will certainly not be complete until after a post-flood assessment of all the riparian communities across the state.

The official statistic put the death toll this year at 23, 19 of which were female. But these are just the reported cases, many



■ Another house in Ketso

believe the figure would be more. "People no longer report cases of death because of lack of response on the part of government," a community leader told Daily Trust on Sunday in Munya, the headquarters of Munya local government last Saturday.

Our investigation shows that the figure

of reported cases from 2012 to date is 156. The breakdown shows that 21, including 15 female died in 2015, while 44 perished in 2013, even as 68 lost their lives in 2012.

Our findings indicate that out of the 68 victims in 2012, 49 died when their houses were submerged during a down pour at

night, while 19 perished as a result of boat mishaps. Daily Trust on Sunday learnt that flood related deaths became prominent in the state since 1998, when a total of 74 persons perished. Findings reveal that most of those affected are women and children and the aged. Apart from the natural disasters, some of the accidents are said to be caused by overloading by boat and canoe transporters.

Destructive rainstorms and the consequent flood have had adverse effect, especially in riparian communities where major rivers and their tributaries exist. The state is traversed by eight major rivers such as Niger, Kaduna, Gbako, Eko, Gurara, Ebba, Egga, Mariga, and their tributaries. The State houses three major dams, Shiroro, Kainji and Jebba with the construction of the fourth already under way in Zungeru. All these factors put together have made the state so prone to flood disasters of all kinds.

Apart from the annual precipitation which is the increase both in intensity and duration globally, perennial discharges of excess water from the dams due to siltation have further complicated the situation. The flood comes with devastating consequences, submerging houses; destroying infrastructure, crops and farmlands; depleting fisheries and contaminating water as grave yards, as well as other wastes are washed into the rivers. Local government areas mostly affected are Mokwa, Shiroro, Lapai, Borgu, Lavun, Katcha, Paikoro, Munya, Wushishi, Gurara, Bida, Magama, Bosso, Rafi, Edati, Gbako, Agaie, Agawara and Mashegu.

Over 400 communities across the aforementioned local government areas were affected this year, according to a rough estimate, while it displaced more than 200, 000 people, including women, children and the aged, the group regarded by emergency agencies as the most "vulnerable". It is also said to have washed away 300,000.00 hectares of farmland and over 600,000 hectares of cultivated land. A multi-million sugarcane plantation and rice farm belonging to Sunti Farm, a subsidiary of Nigeria Flour Mills Plc, situated in Sunti, Mokwa Local Government area, was the first of such investments to be submerged. Other major agro-allied concerns were to suffer the same fate.

The statistics of houses and households, infrastructure, such as roads, drainages system, bridges and other socio-economic impacts of the disasters were not available as at the time of filling this report. The state emergency agency officials seem helpless because of the magnitude of the problem. Its activities are restricted to providing relief materials and conducting post-disasters assessment as well as pre-flooding enlightenment.

Our reporter learnt that officials find it difficult to access flooded areas due to high water level and because of lack of basic working tools. There are no essential

Continued on page 19



■ Part of Ketso community, in Mokwa local government