

Outrage, agony as death toll hits 20, many still trapped

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The death toll from Monday's collapse of a 21-storey building in the Ikoyi area of Lagos rose to 20 on Tuesday even as more people are still trapped in the rubbles.

The increase was recorded in the wake of the collapse of another 2-storey building also in Lagos on Tuesday.

Experts have decried the slow rescue operation at the scene of Monday's tragedy and feared that over 36 hours after the disaster, chances of rescuing the people under the debris are getting slimmer.

More than 50 people were reportedly trapped in the collapsed building while less than five were rescued on the day of the incident.

Outrage continued to trail the incident even as the Lagos State Government has set up an independent panel of enquiry to ascertain the immediate and remote causes of the disaster.

The suspension of the General Manager of the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA), Mr Gbolahan Oki, did not assuage the anger of the public with sympathisers saying the bigger picture should unravel all those that compromised the trust vested in them, which paved the way for the developer to put the lives of many people on the line.

Our correspondents report that the emergency team comprising the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), the Fire Service, among others, had mobilised to the scene after the building caved in.

Experts said they ought to have achieved more in rescue operations if they had the requisite manpower and resources.

The building developer, Mr Femi Osibona was said to be trapped in the rubbles but no information yet on him as of yesterday even as a lady believed to be his assistant was one of those brought out dead.

The General Manager of Lagos State Physical Planning Permit Authority (LASPPPA), Kehinde Osinaike, said no fewer than 67 commercial and residential buildings, as well as other structures were sealed yesterday for contravening physical planning regulations during an enforcement exercise carried out by the authority.

'Weak enforcement responsible for calamities'

As the death toll rose, stakeholders and experts had faulted weak enforcement of building regulations which led to avoidable disasters.

When the incident happened on Monday, a letter that went viral indicated that the structural engineers in charge of the project, Prowess Engineering Limited, withdrew from the project when it got to the fourth floor, saying it could no longer guarantee the integrity of the project.

Later, the suspended GM of the Building Control Agency granted an interview to say that the developer, Fourscore Homes Limited got approval for 15 floors but went ahead to construct 21 floors.

However, his statement was later dismissed by the Deputy Governor, Dr Obafemi Hamzat, who said the approval was actually for 21 floors.

While speaking with journalists at the site of the incident, he said something must have gone wrong during the construction, which was what the government was trying to ascertain.

Findings by our correspondents indicated that the building control agency's GM, who was said to have been appointed about three months ago, was suspended for giving what was termed to be "misinformation" on the project.

"The government was angry that the GM jumped the gun and rushed to grant a press interview without getting to the roots of the matter thereby embarrassing the government," a source said.

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu had ordered the setting up of an independent panel to probe the incident.

Commissioner for Information, Gbenga Omotoso said members of the panel will be drawn from the Nigeria Institute of Architects (NIA), Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP), Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE) and other professional bodies.

According to him, the panel will independently investigate the remote and immediate causes of the incident and make recommendations on how to prevent future occurrences.

He however noted that the investigation is not part of the internal probe already being conducted by the government, stressing that those indicted would be punished.



■ Scene of the Ikoyi collapsed building in Lagos

Govt, developer indicted already

But the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) in Lagos had already faulted the developer of the 21-storey building that collapsed in Lagos. Speaking during an interview on Arise TV monitored by our correspondent, Chairman of the Institute, David Majekodunmi faulted the regulatory agencies for not being proactive in discharging their duties.

He said: "When you look at the way the structure collapsed, it looks like an implosion. There is a lot to be said about this incident. It is a case of cutting costs at the expense of peoples' lives."

"What are the regulatory bodies doing? We are fighting amongst ourselves over frivolities instead of focusing on making sure that buildings are of the appropriate quality. Enough is enough. We are putting the lives of Nigerians in danger. If you check the victims, they are mostly the poor people who come here to make paltry sums of three thousand naira daily."

"Even the professional bodies do not know what the National Building Code is. It has been drafted by professionals in the construction industry since 1986. It was not signed until 2006. In 2021, the code has not been passed by the National Assembly. This collapse is a result of the failure to pass this bill," Majekodunmi said.

Also speaking with one of our correspondents, the President of Lagos State Bricklayers' Association of Nigeria, Oyebamiji Dauda implored building contractors to always use indigenous artisans.

According to Dauda, indigenous artisans understand the soil

component of different locations in the country, which he said could help avert disasters such as building collapse.

Atona Oodua of Yorubaland, Chief Bode George described the building collapse as a symptom of a dysfunctional state.

"It is a symbol of a systemic state failure. It is a reflection of greed, the arrogance of power and sheer lawlessness. Everything about the building spells doom and yet the state appears comatose and indifferent," George said in a statement yesterday.

Victims' families must be compensated - Ubani

Human rights lawyer and former Vice-President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Monday Ubani, SAN, blamed the government for negligence even as he demanded compensation for the families of victims of the disaster.

In a chat with *Daily Trust*, Ubani said he might take up the matter, which he said was of public interest by suing the government and the builders.

"It is complicity on the part of the government that usually causes things like this. The information available shows that only 15 floors were approved. Where are the inspectors? Is it not evident that they may have compromised?" Ubani asked.

He said the best thing is for the developers to forfeit that property to the government.

He tasked the civil society to rise up to demand accountability from the government and hold it responsible, adding, "They cannot play the judge when they have committed all these errors."

How I escaped from collapsed building - workers

While the rescue operation continued, some of the workers who escaped by a whisker narrated their experiences.

One of them who escaped when the house collapsed said he went out to eat when he heard that the building had collapsed. The man who identified himself as Malik Ganiyu, a labourer at the site, said he couldn't believe what he saw.

"I could not go for lunch when others went for theirs around noon because the bricklayer I was serving said he was asked to go home as soon as he finished work on the portion that was given to him."

"We were on the 5th-floor setting blocks. I left my Oga to go and eat while he said he will rest a little. On my way out, I observed that the building was making a noise but I dismissed it as one of those sounds you hear around building sites."

"Some of those who were on the ground floor scampered to safety but the owner of the building, his bulletproof jeep and some people who came to inspect the property because they want to reside in the house were all trapped. The building is not small," he said.

Another disaster yet

Amidst Monday's disaster, a yet to be confirmed report indicated that another uncompleted two-storey building also caved in in Osapa London, Lekki area of Lagos State.

The building reportedly collapsed after Monday's downpour less than 24 hours after the Ikoyi building collapse.