

# Days after the Wase River push

• With 100 people, 3,000 cattle drowned, survivors of Plateau flood disaster seek help

SEVERAL days after, John is yet to come to terms with the enormity of what befell his family of 10.

He was born into the community and grew up there. At 35, he had never known or been told by his elders that the Wase River near Pishe in Pilgani District of Plateau State could rise beyond its banks and overwhelm the entire area with catastrophic dimensions.

That is why he and his wife, and their eight children did not take the rain that started to fall just before night fall a fortnight ago any serious.

"This is not the first rainy season I have seen in this community. Rainfall in this part of Plateau State had never been known to present problems until last week (two weeks ago)", John who shook his head constantly in disbelief, said.

He lost his three last children who could not swim in the dark, murky waters of the flood that over ran their home in the night.

Parts of Southern and Central Senatorial zones of Plateau State were submerged in several metres of flood, as Wase River could not drain all the rain that fell two weeks ago. The flood drowned over 100 people and 3,000 cattle.

Elders in the village said they could not recall when last that type of flood occurred in the area.

All those years, the town folks, like their ancestors before them drank, fished and washed in the river. The river was a blessing.

But all that came to an end early last month as the blessing turned into a curse when the river surged over its banks in the flood disaster.

The disaster had come on the heels of a torrential rainfall, which lasted for 24 hours, flooded the Wase River and swept away over 76 communities in the Langtang North, Langtang South and Wase Local Councils.

Thousands of livestock, several bridges, roads and lives were swept into the river.

One of the worst hit local councils is Langtang North, which lost 37 villages and recorded 24 deaths, including John's.

At the last count, over 3,000 heads of cattle and a large number of goats and sheep were drowned.

And just when the displaced persons were beginning to adjust to the situation around them, there came a reoccurrence of the flood, this time plundering and wasting further whatever remained of the farmlands and settlements that survived the previous disaster in Langtang.

Three communities, Pishe in Pilgani District, Mban in Zanko District and Yashi in Langtang District were completely submerged, raising the number of deaths in the locality to 56 and sharp increase in the number of displaced persons also.

When *The Guardian* visited the affected areas, there were scenes of woe, abject poverty, hunger, fear and sickness.

The Langtang North Council administration which said it had earlier spent over N4 million in assorted grains, clothing, drugs and temporary shelter for the survivors is now running helter-skelter in search of more assistance for the increasing population of the affected communities.

The Advisory Committee Chairman of Langtang North, Mrs. Esther Wazhi, said the council was heavily burdened with meeting the necessary needs of food and shelter for the people.

She however said the local authority was making efforts to make more temporary camps available to accommodate the increasing population of displaced persons.

The chairman observed that shelter was what the people needed most particularly now that the rainy season was not over yet, expressing the fear of more heavy down pour.

Wazhi lamented that the council has over-stretched its means and is completely helpless in the face of the overwhelming situation that has so affected the lives of her people negatively.

While expressing gratitude to the Plateau State Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) for the relief materials so far sent to her people, the Council Chairman said much still needs to be done to make life a bit meaningful to the affected communities.

With most of the bridges linking Langtang North with other outside communities either washed away or under the verge of collapse, Wazhi is appealing to the Federal Government, state, international donor agencies, corporate organisations and individuals to come to the rescue of her people so badly hit by the disaster.

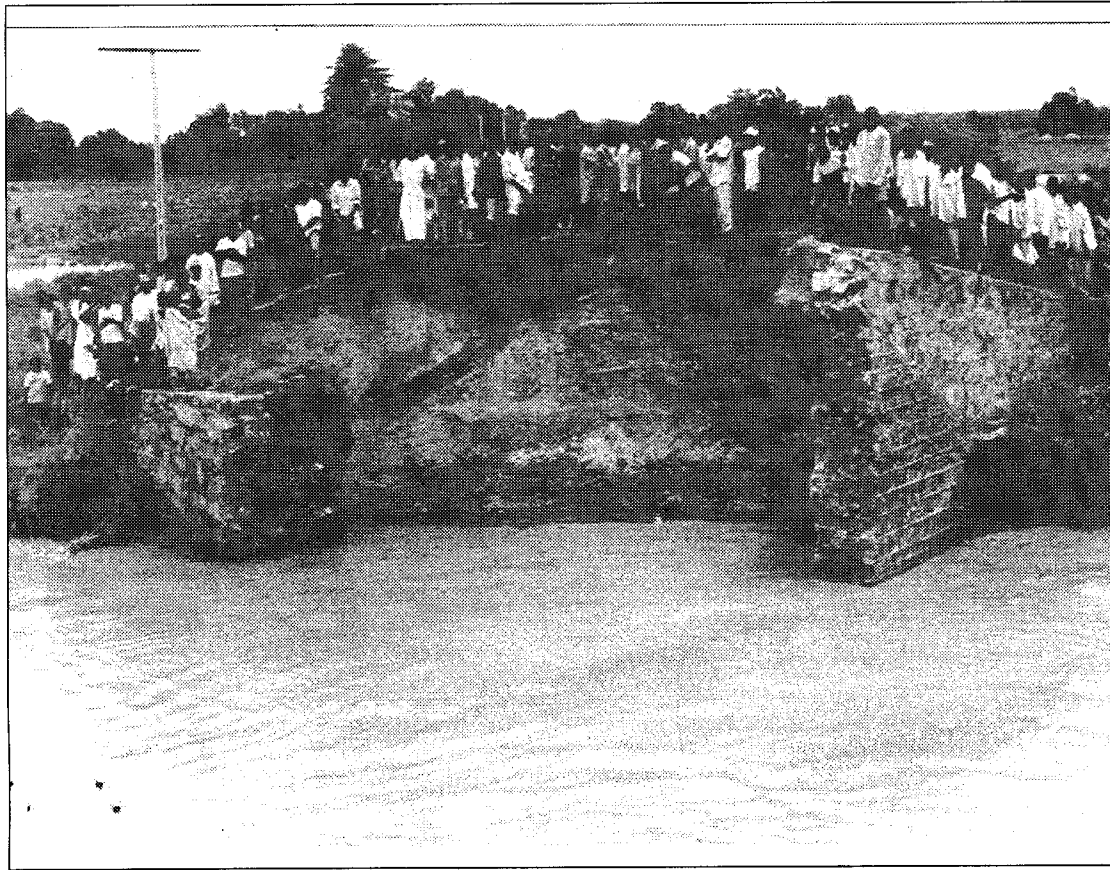
Some of the displaced persons that spoke to journalists in the camps said their future looks bleak. Mr. Gampye Fall-en who lost 400 heads of cattle and farmland in the disaster said he doesn't know how or from where to pick up life again with everything now lost.

Another man, Daniel Tanko, who lost tow relations, farm lands, a house and livestock wished he were dead than being alive in the present reality.

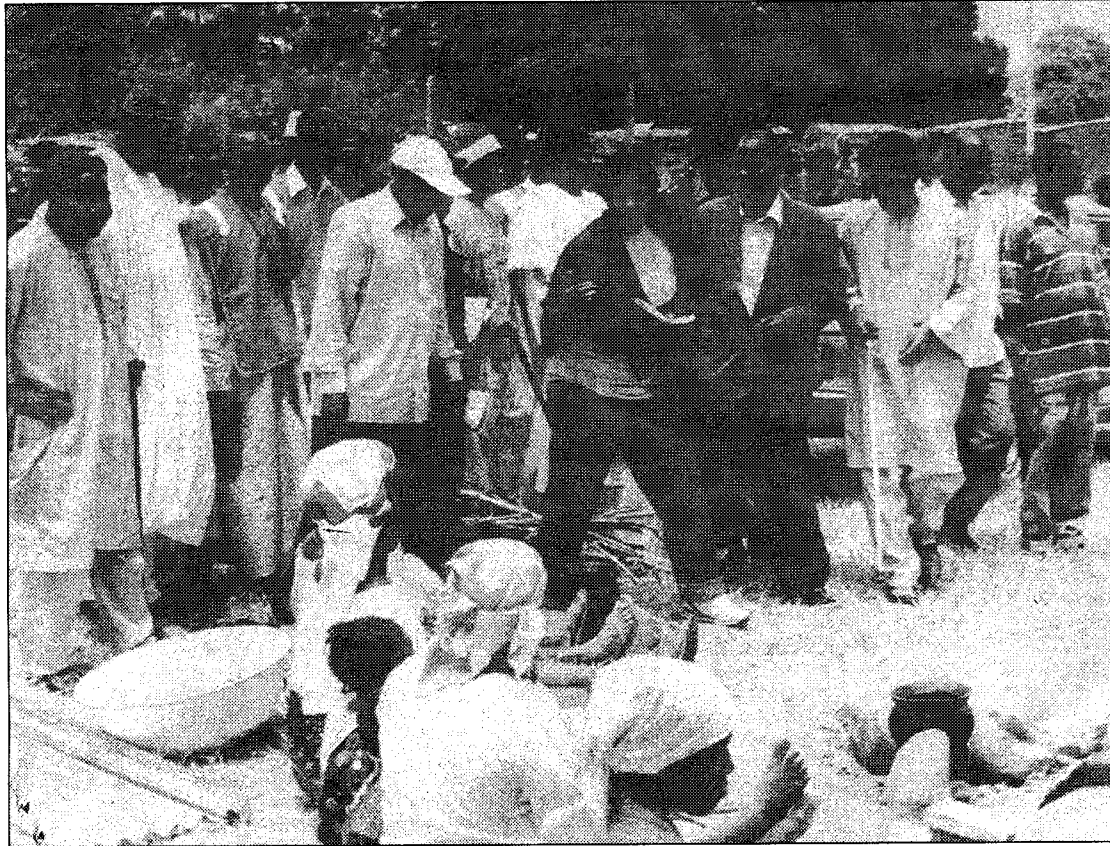
A mother of seven, Mrs. Tabitha Vongdip who also lost her husband and child to the flood said though the local council tried by providing them with temporary shelter and food; their conditions can best be likened to that of a chicken and her chicks under the harsh cold weather. She said that they needed more permanent and warm shelter.

Life to the displaced persons in the camps is generally so boring as they are left to the mercy of the conditions around them, with reported cases of diarrhoea, malnutrition, malaria and pneumonia striking down particularly women and children who are the majority in the camps.

The Director General of NEMA, Mohammed Audu Bida



• State local council officials at the bank of Wase River ...



• Officials addressing the survivors in one of the camps...

PHOTOS: ISA ABDUSALAMI.

From Isa Abdulsalami, Jos

while on an assessment visit to the affected areas in Langtang North Local Council, expressed surprise at the level of destruction done by the flood.

He fingered the diversion of the Wase River as a major cause of the recent flood, noting that the agency's studies reveal that the river was reclaiming its old paths as a result of the effects of global warming. He advised the authorities of Langtang North to advise their people to look for alternative areas to settle in instead of near the river.

He described the Chairman of Langtang North as a visionary and committed leader with great passion for the welfare of her people as evident in the way she handled the aftermath of the disaster. He advised other chairmen to take a cue from her.

To the Advisory Committee Chairman of Langtang South, Solomon Dalung, a lawyer, he needed over N59 million to put succour on the faces of the affected victims in his local council. The chairman, visibly worried, said the enormity of destruction in his area is beyond the capacity of the local council as it lacks the muscle to bear the burden.

Dalung revealed that over 700 farmers who were involved in the devastation have been in farming business in the areas for about three decades but are now depen-

dants.

The council recorded six dead people, and some 311 pregnant women and 1,338 children were rendered homeless who are now taking refuge in the schools, churches and neighbours' houses in Talbut, Langtang North, and Dadin Kow, at Zambong and Faya.

Dalung also disclosed that the people of the affected areas recorded about 15 unidentified corpses mostly children killed elsewhere but floated to the area. They had been given mass burial.

River Kafe and River Shimankar, which burst their banks during the rainfall, wreaked immense havoc on the communities.

As there was prolonged dry spell this year, the people moved to the banks of these rivers with prayers and fasting so that they would get enough rainfall. Apparently, their prayers were heard. Ironically, the outpouring of the blessing overwhelmed them.

The Chairman said he needed special intervention from the state and Federal governments, individuals, corporate organisations, non-governmental organisations and the international community to cope with the situation.

When the disaster occurred, the Chairman visited the affected areas and distributed some relief materials to them such as salt, rice, maize, beans, mattresses, blankets, pots and others.