

Saturday

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Tales Of Death, Destruction As Flood

From Uzoma Nzeagwu (Awka), Charles Ogunbaja (Owerri), Isa Abdulsalam Ahoi (Jos), Ann Godwin (Port Harcourt), Monday Osayande (Asaba), Ayoyinka Jegede (Uyo), Ibrahim Obansa (Lokoja), Gordi Udeajah (Umuahia), Julius Osehon (Yenagoa) and Ahmadu Baba Idris (Birnin Kebbi)

Again, flood disaster has caught Nigerians napping. From Anambra to Bayelsa, Rivers, Kogi, Delta, Imo, Kebbi and many other states, cries for help resonate from individuals and communities who have lost their loved ones, homes, properties, farmlands and other valuables to ravaging flood.

According to the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Sadiya Umar Farouq, who addressed a press conference last Sunday, over 603 lives had been lost as at that day, some 1.3 million people had been displaced, 2,407 persons injured and more than 200,000 homes destroyed.

The last time Nigeria recorded such losses and destruction from flood was in 2012. As of November 5 that year, flood had killed 363 people and displaced over 2.1 million others. An evaluation report by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) showed that 30 of Nigeria's 36 states were affected by the flood, with the damages and losses incurred estimated at N2.6 trillion.

So far this year, 27 of the 36 states have been affected and the governors concerned have found themselves in dire straits.

Speaking on a Channels Television programme last Tuesday, Governor Chukwuma Soludo of Anambra State said the Federal Government must call for a national conversation on the current flood disaster in the country.

Soludo disclosed that eight local councils in the state had been submerged, adding that bridges, roads and houses were washed off. He called on the Presidency and the National Assembly to be proactive in seeking immediate and long-term solutions to the problem of flooding.

"Beyond the immediate coping strategy and our own long-term agenda as a government in dealing with the environment, there is a national conversation that needs to happen. We can no longer deal with perennial flooding as an emergency. We knew it would happen. We know the next one will come. A year or two from now, another massive one will come and the country must begin to prepare and ask what if it happens again, what would be our response."

"And that conversation must become national in the run-up to next year's election. I think the National Assembly and the Presidency must give a more forceful response, especially in the next two to three weeks when the flooding recedes. The bridges and roads are washed away. There are communities, villages and local governments that are completely cut off. Roads leading to those places have been completely swept off by the flood," Soludo said.

The situation in Bayelsa State was no less pitiful. In a statewide radio and television broadcast, also last Tuesday, Governor Douye Diri cried out that the flood in the state was overwhelming and beyond what the government alone could handle.

Diri said: "From my personal assessment, the situation is dire. Nearly a million people in over 300 communities in the state have been internally displaced. Unfortunately, some deaths have been reported."

"The narrative is the same across Sagbama, Ekeremor, Southern Ijaw, Ogbia, Yenagoa, Nembe and Kolokuma Opokuma local councils. Businesses have been shut, properties lost and farm lands destroyed."

"Critical infrastructure like hospitals, roads, bridges and schools, including the state-owned Niger Delta University, Amassoma, the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, and the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, were severely affected."

"Without exaggeration, the sheer scale of the devastation is not such that the state can handle on its own. We urgently solicit the support of multinationals, international donor agencies, the Red Cross, diplomatic missions and people of goodwill to come to the aid of our state."

"Appeal to Mr. President to consider special grants to the state from the Stabilisation Funds, Ecological Funds and Natural Resources Fund."

Other state governments, communities and individuals contending with the challenge also narrated their ordeals to *The Guardian*. The following reports capture their stories.

Flood Has Taken Away All We Have Labourled For In Life,



Delta Victims Lament

Residents of Delta State have been reeling from the shock of the ravaging flood, which claimed 12 lives, displaced hundreds of people and destroyed farmlands.

The Guardian gathered that various flood-prone areas in the state shared from the deaths and destruction with Ndokwa East Local Council recording the highest number as at penultimate Wednesday with six casualties. Isoko North and South local councils also recorded four deaths each.

In Akarai and Otuoku communities, both in Ndokwa East Council, the bodies of a middle-aged woman and a boy who died from the flood were yet to be recovered as at last Saturday.

Other communities heavily impacted by the flood include Oko/Hausa market and the back of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Otuogwu, in Asaba. Food items such as onions, tomatoes, pepper as well as hundreds of goats, cows and chicken worth millions of naira were seen floating on the floodwater.

The flood also affected construction workers at the site of the Second Niger Bridge project at the Oko axis where two persons reportedly lost their lives in an attempt to horribly abandon the site to avoid being swept away.

Camp 75 Asaba, Ikpide-Irri riverine community, Uzere, Ivrogbo-Irri, Araya, Aviara, Emede, Umeh, all in Isoko South council were submerged. It was the same situation in Iyede-Ame, Lagos-Iyede, Onogbokor, Ashaka, Ibrede and Abbi in Ndokwa East Council.

At Abala Unor and Abala Obodo in the local council, the palace of the traditional ruler, Igwe Fredrick Chukwulobe Egbunokonye III, was submerged, forcing him to relocate to Asaba.

The Chairman of Ndokwa East Council, Juan Amachee Governor, in a statement signed by a councillor, Barth Ozah, lamented the situation, saying: "This year's flood has taken a new dimension far beyond what we experienced in 2012. Although we experience annual flooding in this local council and, therefore, have proactive programmes that ordinarily would work effectively in pre, during and post-flood time, this 2022 flood has surpassed what the local council can manage as it has beaten all our predictions, strategies and plans." A victim in Ivrogbo-Irri riverine community, Isoko South Council, Jane Ajirigbhe, while lamenting the disaster called on both federal and Delta State governments to rescue them. "This 2022 flood is getting more serious than the one of 2012," she said.

Another victim at Otuogwu quarters in Asaba, Mr. Chihamdi Nwokobia, said: "The water has taken away all we have laboured for in life while our businesses have been put on hold. We are stranded."

Nwokobia also called on government at all levels to come to their aid "because at the moment nothing is left with us." Speaking with *The Guardian*, the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Mr. Patrick Ukah, expressed the government's readiness to tackle flood challenges in the state. Ukah, who is the chairman of the 2022 Flood Management

Committee of the state, said government was doing everything possible to mitigate the suffering of the affected people. According to him, camps have been set up to accommodate displaced residents temporary until the water recedes.

Three Die In Uyo

Two persons were found dead along Atiku Abubakar Way in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State after a downpour that lasted for several hours penultimate Sunday night.

The two bodies were recovered from a gutter near GWT petrol station the following day.

An eyewitness, who identified herself as Uduak, said the road was always flooded during rainy season. According to him, motorists by pass the flood by diverting to adjoining streets such as Esuene and Ebetaya through which they connect to Abak road and the state secretariat.

"The male and female corpses were recovered this morning in a gutter and the police were immediately informed to evacuate them," the eyewitness said.

Also recently, flood swept away a 60-year-old petty trader on Nkemba Street, Uyo. The flood also destroyed a church building and the properties therein.

A resident of the area, Anietie Sam, who narrated the incident to newsmen, said the flood swept the woman away while she was returning from the market around 4:30pm.

He added that efforts to rescue her were abortive as the flood swept the woman into an underground drainage channel.

"Actually we made efforts to rescue the woman but it was difficult because she was swept away uncontrollably by the flood to an open hole linking the underground drainage facility," he said.

Victims Groan Over Loss Of Properties In Imo

In August, the Nigeria Metrological Agency (NIMET) predicted that Imo State would be one of the 32 states that would witness flooding this year.

So far, in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta local councils of the state, Ezioru, Egbuoma, Egbema and Oguta Lake areas have been affected, with their ancestral houses, property, farmlands and other belongings submerged.

Also, in Owerri metropolis, residents of Works Lay Out, Ikenegbu Lay Out and Chukwuma Nwoha by MCC Road had their properties destroyed by flood after a heavy rain recently. The development prompted the state government to direct all residents to clear drainage channels in front of their homes with immediate effect to allow floodwater flow through the Balloon Technology areas into the rivers.

However, the victims have cried out for help from the federal and state governments, oil companies operating in the area and philanthropists.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Operations Officer in the state, Nnaji Ifeanyi, lamented recently that victims of the flood disaster were homeless, saying they refused to relocate to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta local councils. He