

One year after tragic flood incident, residents fear another mishap

By Isaac Taiwo

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Following the prediction of the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMET) that flooding in some parts of the country, including Lagos State could be devastating this year, residents of Oyatoki and its environs have raised the alarm of the possibility of another tragic flooding in their area, similar to what was experienced last year.

Last year, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) through its Zonal Coordinator, South West, Mr. Ibrahim Farinloye, while providing a post-emergency phase assessment after the flooding incident around Oyatoki revealed that about seven people – three children of the same parents and four adults died.

He added: “About eight lives were also saved during the period, as a result of the flooding that was witnessed during the two-day continuous rainfall,” he said

Fearing a repeat of the sad episode, residents of the area are now complaining aloud that aside from the Oyatoki Canal being in a horrible state, the bridge across it that links Agege to Oyatoki has become narrower as a result of dilapidation, endangering motorists and residents.

They stated that once it rains, floodwater covers the bridge making it invisible to users. As a result, the residents said that vehicles and persons that miss-step usually fall into the canal, and easily get swept away.

The residents' worry has, however, become aggravated with the prediction by NiMET that extended rainfall should be expected between September and December 2023 in some parts of Southern Nigeria, including Lagos.

The Vice Chairman, Ilupeju Tuntun Community Development Association (CDA), Mrs. Morufat Olayanju, who spoke to The Guardian, said that the expansion of the canal, which started after last year's fatal incident, appeared to have been abandoned.

"Whenever there is a moderate downpour, the resultant flooding makes it difficult for vehicles and motorcycles to cross the bridge with ease. Many motorcycle riders had fallen into the canal while crossing the bridge. This was during a minor rain. One can only imagine what would happen when we experience torrential rainfall.

"Also, whenever it rains heavily, all the houses that are close to the canal are flooded, which means at every moment it threatens to rain, our people's hearts often in their mouths.

"So, we are calling on the authorities to come to our rescue before another calamity occurs. We would appreciate it if the government considers our lives very important, not minding the cost, of re-awarding the contract to widen the canal to a capable contractor.

"This is more so as those that started the job have since abandoned it, and we do not know why they left," she said. Another resident who simply identified herself as Shade, whose house is not far from the canal, also called on the state government to be merciful to the residents, especially those whose houses are close to the canal.

She said: "Whenever it rains heavily, our houses are filled with water and the alternative is to escape and seek shelter elsewhere. A lot of household items have been destroyed by the flood. We live in fear of our apartments getting flooded, especially during this season.

"We are, therefore, pleading with the government to show mercy and do the needful by ensuring that the contractor that started widening the canal finishes the job, which has been abandoned for reasons we do not know why.

"The bridge where the incident occurred last year has been left in a state of disrepair, and it is on the brink of collapse, and should there be any heavy rainfall again, any attempt to cross the bridge would be calamitous.

"We have a lot of schoolchildren in this area, and whenever it rains heavily, the parents are always troubled, and have to find a way of going to pick up their children, and cross the rickety bridge that has become a troubled spot.

"They would have to gather at the other side of the bridge with their children till the water level goes down. If the rain meets the children in their schools, they would have to remain there until their parents come for them. One can picture the mind of parents anytime it rains, or threatens to rain in this area.

“We call on the government to come to our rescue as we do not want a recurrence of the disaster that happened last year,” she said. Another resident living close to the canal who chose to remain anonymous said that he had been living in the axis for the past 10 years and that it has become a yearly ritual that someone must get carried away by the flood.

“The government should wake up, show genuine concern, and not just be mouthing what it plans to do to remedy the situation around the canal.

“Just about two weeks ago, three people on a motorbike were swept away when it rained. Whenever it rains like that victims are washed to the Aboru axis.

“Another problem that should be minimised is that of residents turning the canal into their dumpsite. If government officials, in mufti, could parade and monitor activities around the canal, a lot of people would be arrested for constituting environmental nuisance,” he said.

A welder, simply called Moses, who operates along Ota Road, near the canal, also implored the government to come to the residents’ aid, while corroborating the fact that because the canal has not been widened enough, residents that live close to it always have their houses flooded whenever it rains heavily.

A motorcycle rider, Alade Odumosu, expressed the belief that if the widening of the canal is completed, it would bring relief to residents, especially motorcycle riders.

The Guardian also visited the Aboru axis to see the point where victims from the Oyatoki part of the canal often get dumped. That section of the canal has been widened and the bridge across it repaired.

For Tajudeen Abbas, a resident, who lives close to the canal, the community has not been freed from the constant flooding despite the expansion works completed by the government because whenever there is heavy rainfall, the area still gets flooded.

“One can see that this area almost looks like a valley. The road linking Aboru to Iyana Ipaja is undulating with the spot around the canal being low, this forces a large pool of water to gather at the Iyana-Ipaja-Aboru link bridge, whenever it rains heavily. The irony of this is that some points where the floodwater passes are now being blocked.”

He also maintained that schoolchildren are often stranded on both sides of the road whenever the road gets flooded, and on several occasions, lives have been claimed.

“We plead with the government to put a permanent end to the flooding here,” he said. The canal around Ikotun is also problematic, and it appears that little attention has been paid to the axis.

According to Bolaji Akinmade, who stays near the canal: “The bridge is gradually collapsing, eating deep into the road. If the authorities concerned fail to do what should be done, the road would soon be divided into two.

“We are calling on the government to quickly help in fixing the challenges around the canal in Ikotun before the unexpected happens,” he said. A civil servant, who lives around the axis, while lamenting

the state of the canal, said that it would not be long before a vehicle plunged into the canal through the part of the road that has been eaten up.

Seyi Ogundimu, who spoke on behalf of the Director, of Public Affairs, Ministry of Environment, Mr. Kunle Adesina, confirmed that work has started on the expansion of the canal, at Oyatoki to curb any further mishap this year.

“Expansion work has started on the canal and what is disturbing the contractor is the rain. If the people working there were not found working at the site, it should be because of the rain and they would return to the site anytime the rain subsides.

“There is no more problem as far as Aboru canal is concerned, as proper construction of the canal has been effected. Concerning the canal at Ikotun, it was the first canal to be dredged this year, where it was discovered that market women were dumping refuse inside the canal, and a stakeholder’s meeting was held with them to enable them to change their habit.”

Efforts to get the Director of Public Affairs, Ministry of Works, Mr. Sina Odunuga, to comment on the state of the bridge over the canal proved abortive.

However, the Special Adviser, Environment at Orile-Agege Local Council Development Area (LCDA), Ajala Surajudeen said that the expansion of the canal at Oyatoki has started.

He added that: “There is drainage under construction leading to the canal. The canal coming from Abattoir and the correction, which includes the problems at Alaramimo and Alhaji Oladipupo areas, has started by expanding the canal. The government has risen to the task while the local council is not folding its arms.”