

# Hope dims for Kwara flood victims

Of the 17 persons that were swept away by flood in a rural community in Kwara State on Monday, five are dead and buried. Residents have given up the hope of finding the remaining 12, reports Biodun Oyeleye.

**R**ESIDENTS of the Kwara community where a flood resulting from heavy downpour on Monday led to the loss of five persons have given up hopes of finding the remaining 12 bodies said to have been swept away.

All the victims were females of school age, according to sources within the community, who gave their age as ranging between 10-20.

Investigations by our correspondent yesterday showed that while the five persons whose bodies were recovered during the incident, have been buried beside the river, there were no positive signs of rescue operations any longer.

Residents complained that they could not call for modern rescue efforts at the initial stage of the tragedy because of lack of communication facility. Few personal effects of the victims still littered the scene of the incident during our visit.

Contrary to earlier reports that the tragedy occurred at Osi, hometown of former Chief of Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Samuel Afolayan (rtd), the incident actually took place at Obbo-Ile few kilometres from Osi. The victims were all casual labourers with the Special Royal Farms, owned by the former naval boss.

The incident occurred on a small bridge linking the River Ihija to the ex-naval chief's farm.

Afolayan built it after similar floods washed away two smaller

bridges said to have been built by government.

It was observed during the visit that work on the farm has been temporarily suspended, apparently because of the unfortunate incident.

Rear Admiral Afolayan (rtd) was said to have been part of the initial rescue team after the incident occurred.

Farm sources claimed that the retired naval chief did not go home until about 11pm. He was, however, said to have travelled out of town yesterday.

A resident of the community, Mr. Femi Olowokere, who was on the spot when our correspondent visited and who claimed to have worked with the rescue team, confirmed that all the victims were ladies who could not swim to safety.

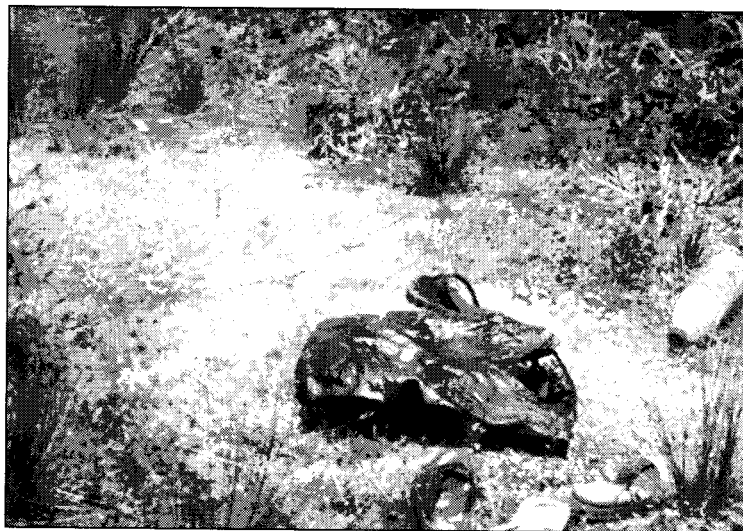
They were probably spurred by a male villager into making a venture to cross the bridge with the flood raging. All the male workers were said to have either swam to safety or got rescued. He said over 50 volunteers from the community were involved in the rescue operation.

Both Olowokere and the manager of the farm, Mr. Samuel Ajiboye, in separate interviews, attributed the disaster to alleged impatience of the victims, pointing out that since it was a flash flood, it would have abated after about two hours if they had chosen to be patient.

Ajiboye said the victims were casual workers adding that they



•The river which caused the flood



•Some personal effects of the victims

were returning home after collecting their claims.

The farm manager lamented that all efforts on his part to make the victims stay were not heeded even when he went as far as the bridge head to warn them against making the fatal crossing that eventually resulted in their death.

The manager insisted on correcting the media report that the incident occurred on the farm adding that it happened on a public highway far from the farm.

Olowokere said: "We have not seen anybody here today for rescue operation. What can we do again? Where can we search? People have gone far in the search yesterday (Wednesday)

and it was the ones we found that were buried here. If only they had been patient; because this thing happens once a year and goes down later.

"Majority of those who went to the farm around this place and crossed over the bridge came back home safely after two hours of the downpour."

On his part, Ajiboye told our correspondent: "When I noticed that the small dams on the farm were overflowing, I sent a message to the security guards at the gate to warn everybody not to go home until the flood subsides. The security man came back to tell me they were not cooperating, so I went to them

myself, to the banks of the river to warn them not to go.

"A few of them heeded my advice and returned to the farm while others that drowned, ignored my advice saying that they must go home that night. At least we were about 150 that spent that night on the farm; there is food and accommodation. I just think that devil wanted to exploit the situation."

Monarch of the community, Oba Rufus Segun Adebayo, Owalo of Obbo-Ile, described the incident as unfortunate and a great calamity to the community.

He lamented that the situation would have been averted if government had heeded several calls for the expansion of the bridge to give it more space for water to flow.

He said: "We have been calling on the government to expand the bridge. At times, it (flood) deprives the people on the other side of the bridge to come down for their economic activities. We appreciate the effort of Admiral Afolayan who sandfilled part of the bridge to make access possible to his farm and the villages beyond the place, but that is not the solution to the problem."

"Although the state government has been trying for us here, we want government to come to our aid by expanding the bridge, this is a disaster considering the number of people that perished in a day within a community. This is not a laughing matter."