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Shock, deaths stalk victims of Benue flood

Posted By: [INNOCENT DURU](#) On: September 9, 2017 In: [Saturday Magazine](#)

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After surviving a prolonged deadly attack unleashed on them by blood-thirsty herdsmen last year, the people of Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State, who are mostly farmers, last weekend suffered another devastating blow in the hands of nature following the destruction of their farms and houses by flood. INNOCENT DURU, who spoke with some of the victims, reports that some of them have begun to suffer shock and dying as a result of the incident.

IT was double tragedy for many families in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State last weekend after the calamitous flood incident that ravaged many farmlands and submerged many houses. The rampaging flood left thousands of the natives homeless and destroyed farm produce that were almost ready for harvesting.

But that was not all. The Nation gathered that some of the victims have begun to suffer shock and dying as a result of the incident, which came shortly after the people lost their beloved ones and valuables to the terror unleashed on them by herdsmen.

One of such families that suffered double tragedy over the weekend was the Ochohepos from Aila area of the local government. The breadwinner of the family, according to the daughter, suffered shock, collapsed and died after seeing all he laboured for destroyed by the flood.

The deceased's daughter, who gave her name as Mary, told The Nation that our father was devastated last year after his house was burnt down by the herdsmen and had his state of mind compounded last weekend by the flood incident which robbed him of his basic means of livelihood.

Her words: "My dad collapsed and died last week after the incident. He died of shock. We took him to the hospital and did all we could, but he didn't survive. He lost his house last year and lost all he laboured for this year. This made the shock too difficult for him to bear and that resulted in his death. The flood affected our farms badly.

"Our house was burnt down during the herdsmen-farmers crisis. After the herdsmen burnt our house, we camped in Ugboko in Apa Local Government. We later returned to Aila. I also totally became hopeless after the flood destroyed our farm. Now, we are homeless and foodless, let me put it that way."

Speaking in emotion laden voice, Mary hinted: "We are supposed to harvest the produce later in the year but there is a variety of rice we are supposed to harvest this month.

They are all gone. My late father had about eight hectares; my mother has about four hectares and I have three hectares. What to eat now is a huge problem. If we are able to get equipment to help us enlarge our farm produce, we would be happy.”

Pa Christian, a 75-year-old, also lost his life after the incident. One of his son’s, Oloche, said: “I lost my father on Tuesday. He was sick and when we took him to the hospital, he couldn’t make it. The flood affected many places here. I lost a lot. We lost a lot of things during the herdsmen attack and now flood came again and brought down our houses.

“We have buried my late father in our house that was affected by the flood. We couldn’t bury him in the Catholic cemetery because the place is flooded. This is why we managed to bury him in the house. We need a lot of assistance. We don’t have a place to live. We are staying with somebody. Going back to our house depends on God.”

A victim who hails from Abugbe, Emmanuel Adagedo, described the flood incident as terrible, regretting that he has lost everything he toiled for since the beginning of the year.

Reliving his experience, one of the victims, Alhaji Odho, who hails from Abugbe, said the flood incident was so severe that most of them have found it difficult to cope. “Our buildings were built with burnt bricks and therefore were not so badly affected by the flood but our farms were wiped off. I lost everything that I planted on the farm. My rice farm is about 10 hectares. Yam is about three hectares. We were planning to harvest the rice between December and January but with the situation of things now, I don’t think we can get anything from the farm anymore. Everything is lost. It is the survival of the fittest for most of us now as we depend only on God for help. I have been relying on people to take care of my family and as things stand now, there is no hope for the coming planting season.”

Odho feared that the affected communities would experience food scarcity because of the huge loss they suffered. “There would certainly be food shortage in this area next year. Even as I speak to you now, there is nothing on the ground. If I can get someone to give me a loan to start all over again, I would be very happy. We would so much appreciate if the government could be of help to us. There is no IDP camp here.”

Another victim, Emmanuel Adegedo said: “The rain has been falling regularly except for the past two days. The flood destroyed the FADAMA farms. There is no hope of getting farm produce this year, most especially in the swampy area where we planted rice. The farm is expansive and our primary occupation is farming.

“I was in my house when the flood was coming. The community shares boundary with River Benue. We are by the river bank. Because of our experience in 2012, we quickly ran away when we saw the flood coming. We started evacuating the little children much earlier.

“The flood didn’t pull down my house but it occupied the whole place; so we had to run away. I have moved my family to Gboko while I am in Oturpko. They are out of school no but immediately this challenge goes off, they would be returning to school.”

He hinted that many of his colleagues have been finding it difficult to feed after the incident. “We have been managing the little we have on us but many people are finding it difficult to feed their families because their homes were massively destroyed. Many people didn’t take proactive steps when the signs were coming. They sat down thinking it would not happen. I saw it coming and started preparing much earlier for it. With the rate the rain is falling, we don’t know when we would be returning to our homes.

“I have decided not to go to IDP camp because of the way people are treated there. If there is any outbreak, it would be a problem. I don’t feel comfortable. Ahead of the next

planting season, we would go to the communities that were not affected by the flood to get seedlings to plant but we are still looking up to the government for assistance.”

Rueing his loss, a victim, Gideon Ogbole, said he has been relying on his relations to provide for his family. “I was at home when the flood started late in the evening on Saturday. It didn’t get to my house but it destroyed all that I had planted on my six-hectare farm. I felt so bad when I saw the damage because I have nothing left.

“We are only managing to feed from some relatives who were not affected. I go to their farms to work for them and at the end, they give me the little they can afford to feed my family. That is how we have been managing to survive. There is no surplus money anywhere to take care of the family. I am supposed to harvest the produce in two or three months’ time. I lost everything.”

Ogbole despondently added: “I don’t have the means of starting all over again. I need help to do this. But if help doesn’t come, I have to look round to source for money to start all over again. This is the only alternative. I will be happy if the government can help me to start all over again. There is no IDP camp in our area. We were told that they were planning to open one but that one of the facilitators died and they had taken his corpse home.”

In a telephone chat with The Nation, the monarch of the embattled communities, HRH, Cletus Kukunu, tersely said: “The rain started last week and fell for about one week. The flood came overnight and swept many things away. It carried away animals, properties and damaged houses.”

Efforts to get him speak further proved unsuccessful as he said he was in a meeting. He promised to return the call but he didn’t. Even when our correspondent called him much later, he maintained that he was still in a meeting.

In another telephone chat with our correspondent, the Executive Director of Global Care for Kids Foundation, one of the non-governmental organisations providing relief materials for the victims, Linda Orokpo Ochagla, said: “We have been giving relief materials including cooked food to the children and women. I appeal to people that want to help. They contribute and I also do use my personal money too to buy things. Aside from us, there are many non-governmental organisations coming to help the victims. Bengonet, an NGO, is in charge of sharing the relief materials together with NEMA. Tuface was also around to give relief materials to the people.

“Some people normally complain that food doesn’t get to them. So, whenever we take things there, I always stand there and see them share the items before I leave. I do this to make sure that the items get to everybody.”

She added: “The flood destroyed a lot of things. As we speak, some people still have their cars inside the flood. They are waiting for the flood to subside before they can take the vehicles away. The problem here is that it has kept raining. Until the rain subsides, I don’t think there is anything they can do. But the government has started working on the water ways to prevent flood in the area.

“The children cannot go to school. We are soliciting for volunteers who can be teaching the children for this period until they are able to go back to their houses. So far, we have got some people that have agreed.”

To avert a re-occurrence of the incident, Ochagla said: “The government needs to make sure the water ways are functioning. They need to demolish some structures built on wrong places. There is a place where they built a market and that is a wrong place for such. They need to shift the market to the right place so that the water ways can be free.

“They need to clean the gutters because many of them are blocked with dirt. The level of hygiene in the IDP camp is okay but if they don’t leave the camp on time, there could be

issues but for now there is no outbreak yet.”



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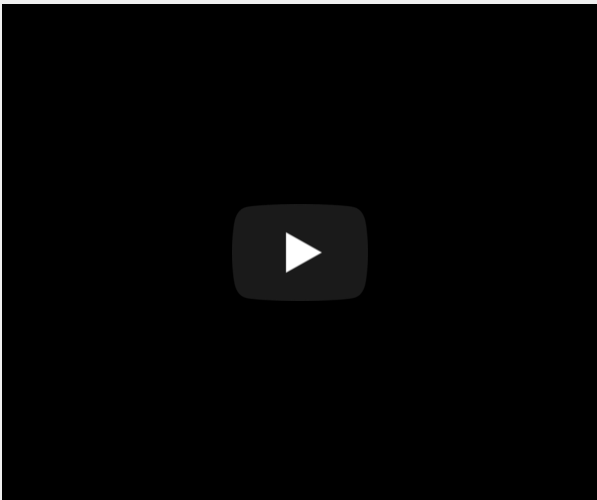
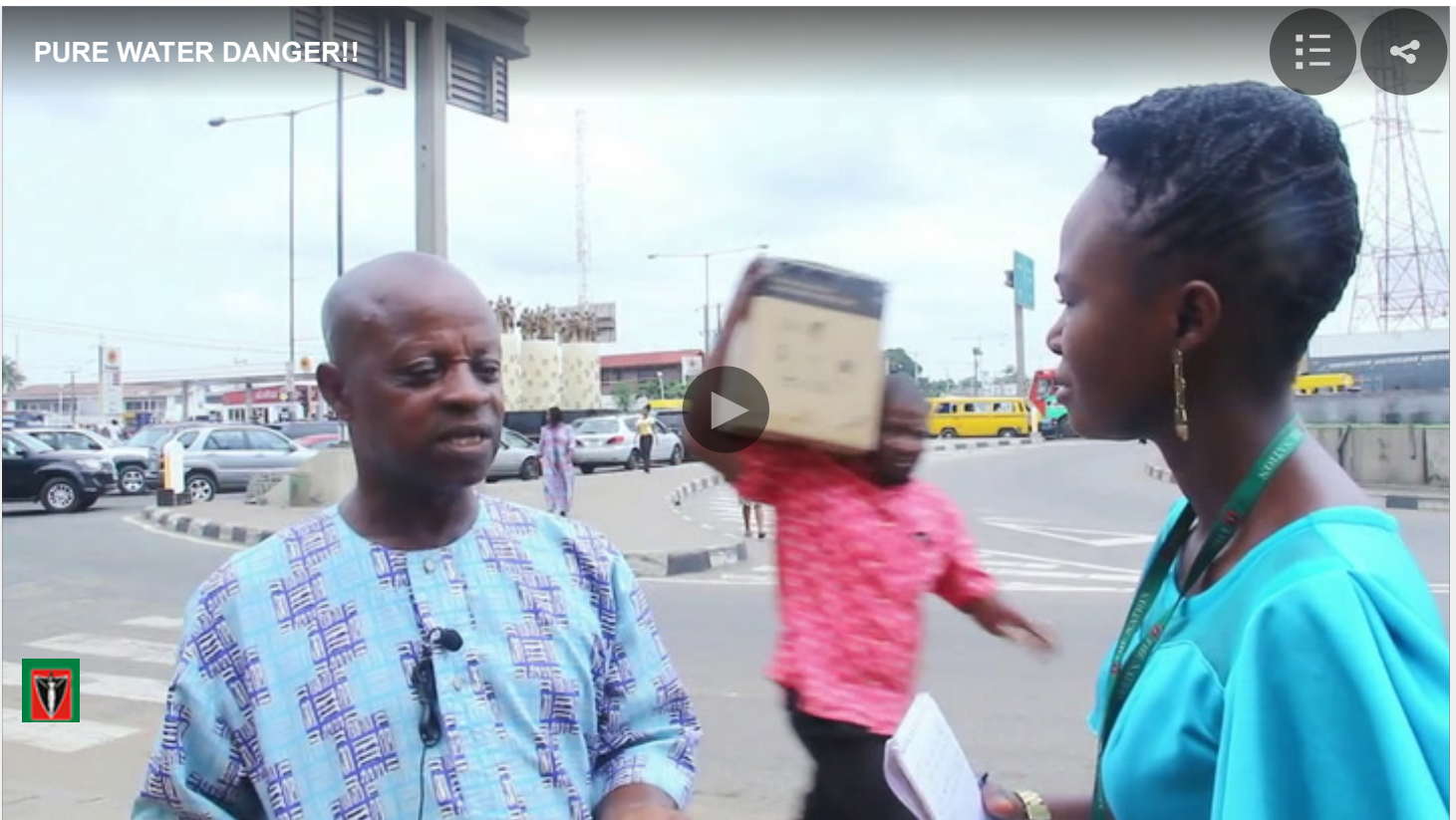
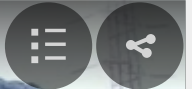
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