

Two die in Aba building collapse



by **Sunny Nwankwo** March 8, 2019 in **SouthEast, Southeast report**

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On Tuesday, February 26 a building situated at plot 98 Old Express off Sameck Junction by Faulks, Aba, Abia State, caved in, killing two while other occupants of the structure were rendered homeless.

Aba, a throbbing commercial city, attracts lots of people, making it easily one of the most densely populated cities in the country.

Like the beautiful bride, Aba on a daily basis witnesses an influx of families from the hinterlands and cities across the country relocating to settle in the city.

One of the problems Aba has at the moment apart from bad roads is inadequate housing. This is orchestrated by the continued swelling of the city's population.

The three-storey building that went down in the city, it was gathered, was built years ago, and has been waterlogged for several years. This affected its foundation. It caved in, killing two while two others have their stars to thank as they were rescued 24 hours after the building collapsed.

An eyewitness who gave his name simply as Chima said that the deceased, a father of three had escaped from the building, but couldn't make it after part of the fence of the building collapsed on him allowing other blocks to hit him in the process.

"The owner of the building died many years ago. The people living in the house are his two wives and other tenants.

"We learnt that one of the landlord's wives noticed that the house was cracking. She raised alarm, asking their tenants to leave the building that she feared that the building was going to collapse. The man that died, from what we learnt was held back by his wife, but he eventually found his way into the building after he said that there was money that he wanted to use for something urgent. He made it, but while he was running out of the building, part of the fence fell on him, but before help could come his way, other blocks had already collapsed on him and he died.

"The other person trapped inside is an okada man. I learnt that he was resting in the house before the unfortunate incident. We started this rescue operation when he called one of his relatives informing them that he was still trapped in the structure. So, what you see going on is an effort to see if he can be rescued alive.

"You need to see waterlog here whenever it rains and this has been happening over the years. We were happy when the Governor of Abia State, Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu started construction work on this Old Express. But our joy went down when we discovered that the work stopped just by Sameck. We are appealing to the governor to come to our rescue. We fear that many houses may go this way.

Some of the occupants including Mr. Patrick Uzoma, Jonathan Charles and Benjamin Uzoma who despite their loss participated in the rescue of trapped tenants told our reporter that their properties at

the time of filing this report is still trapped in the rubble, adding that they were still making efforts to see if they can salvage any of their belongings.

According to some of the tenants, apart from their properties in the rubble, huge amounts of cash which they had wanted to use for other various purposes before the building collapse is still yet to be sighted.

They said that the only thing that they could salvage from their flats were the clothes that they wore to their various shops and offices before the unfortunate incident. For them, the incident has left them to wonder if they still have hope in life again as what they have labored for in so many years collapsed into the ground in just a twinkling.

According to them NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency) and the lawmaker representing Aba North and South Federal Constituency at the National Assembly, Hon. Ossi Prestige had visited the site but they are yet to send relief materials their way.

The residents who thanked the Abia revered traditional ruler, His Imperial Majesty Eze Isaac Ikonne to ensure that an excavator was on site which facilitated the rescue operation told our reporter that they got to know that some persons were still trapped in the building when a co-tenant called to inform his relatives that he was in the rubble.

They disclosed that two other tenants were taken to yet to be known private clinics where they were being attended to. This is even as they appealed to the governor of the state, Abia lawmakers, NEMA and concerned individuals to come to their aids.

While the residents of Old Express were still counting their losses, another three-storey building at Park road by East was said to have collapsed after a torrential rainfall in Aba which many attributed to the use of inferior or substandard materials in its construction, though no life was lost in the incident.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) and the Architect Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) have called on the Abia State government to set up a panel of investigation to look into the causes of constant collapse of building which has become a trend in the state.

The Abia State Chapter of the two organizations (NIA and ARCON) made the call in Aba, the commercial hub of Abia State during their fact finding mission in the sites of recent building collapse within the commercial city.

The NIA said the frantic call became necessary following the recent collapses happening in the city that have taken lives without any serious action and punishment for those responsible for the mess.

The fact finding mission which took the members of NIA and ARCON team to the offices of the Town Planning Authorities of Aba South, Aba North and Osisioma Local Government Areas was aimed at ascertaining the authenticity of the architects involved in the collapsed building and how they got their approvals.

Speaking to newsmen after undertaking a tour of the incident scene, Architect Ikechi Ochiulo, Abia State Chairman of NIA urged the Abia State Government to look into the issue of constant collapsing of buildings and map out a strategy that will help punish those who cut corners during construction works.

Ochiulo decried the presence of quacks in the state and how they go about claiming to be architects, getting their drawings approved by Town Planning Authorities without any license and seal of approval as stipulated by the law governing the profession.

He said, "We have a situation that when collapses happen in this state, no panel, no investigation takes place. On the part of the Government, no panel of investigation is set up for culprits to be brought to book so that others will learn.

"That's why we plead with the Government that as these recent incidents have just occurred, they should not be swept under the carpet like the previous scenarios. Things must be done properly to help everyone.

"We have procedures for checkmating this evil. ARCON has made provisions that before Town Planners are to approve any drawing, they must see the seal of a registered and licensed architect. There's a security stamp we put on the drawing of every true professional architect.

"Here in Abia, we have also improved on that by even having what we call authentication form for which every practicing architect must attach his license so that those in Town Planning Authority will see all those things before approving any building drawing.

"But sadly the drawing of the collapsed building we saw at the Town Planning Office has none of all these things I just mentioned which tell you where the problems are coming from. These are part of the things we are seeing that makes us call for serious synergy between us and the Town Planning."

Speaking further, Ochiulo said: "The presence of these quacks is a great misnomer to our professional and the society and when there is a misnomer like this and we continue to perpetuate it, we stand a greater lose. Those quacks to set records straight are not architects and are never part of us.

“Our society stand a greater lose because of them for example, when you have a problem of building collapse, you spend three times of the money you should have spent to do things properly.

“The money you spent on the poor job, the money you spend to demolish and clear and cart away the rubbles and the money you will spend to build again in the right way. So, wisdom demands that you do the right thing from on set.”

The Abia State NIA boss went further warned estate investors and other persons who wants to build in the state to desist from patronizing quarks as it will do them more harm than good.

“We want to warn the people that are patronizing these fake people that they are doing that at their own risk. A sick person submits himself to a quark surgeon to carry out operation on him, what else does he wish himself if not untimely death? Ochiulo asked.

He assured that the necessary provisions of the law that will soon catch up with the fake people hovering around all in the name of architects in the state.

Adding his voice to the pathetic situation of building collapses in Aba, a renowned architect, Chief Dan Nwankwo said, “Obviously from what we can see, it’s important that we get the records straight, the problem in our state and country at large is that people don’t use professionals for building.

“They just go to quacks, anybody, but professionals. For instance, the drawings of the collapsed building at East Street by Park Road which we saw at the Town Planning Office were not prepared by a professional architect.

“So, we are urging the people of this state to form the habit of using professional architects and engineers in their projects. If they do that, there will be no collapse. Over and above that, they should also accept the advice of these professionals during construction so that the building will stand the test of time.

“They think it is expensive using professionals, but at the end of the day, it is not true because a professional saves you trouble and double expenses. Imagine the collapsed building; do you know how much he will spend in clearing it?