

Two drown in Bayelsa creek

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By Mike Odiegwu, Yenagoa

Activists and residents in Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital, have lambasted the state government after two bodies were recovered from the popular Epie Creek in the capital city.

The bodies were believed to be of two persons who drowned on Friday when their boats capsized while trying to cross the flooded creek to their community in Agudama area.

People residing across the creek usually find it difficult to access their communities during flood periods following a rise in water level and unavailability of bridges.

It was gathered that some folks who witnessed the Friday boat mishap rescued five of the victims while two others identified as Jeff Julius, 22, and Adeni Julius, 24, were declared missing.

The sight of their floating remains provoked the residents, who took to the streets to blame the state government for failing to build bridges about one or two meters in length.

An environmental activist Alagoa Morris recalled that about seven years ago when a similar incident happened, the state governor promised to construct small bridges to link communities across the creeks to the expressway.

But he said the governor had yet to fulfil his promises, lamenting that both Dickson and his predecessors failed to pay attention to the Epie creeks.

He said, “The Epie Creek ought to be a veritable resource if properly recognised and positive advantage is taken. It is a natural water course running through the entire length of Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital; meandering from Igbogene down to Yenagoa water front where it empties into the Ekole River.

“A very sad coincidence happened today, as exactly on this date, 20th October, 2012 (seven years ago) the Governor of Bayelsa State Henry Seriake Dickson stood in the midst of troubled Bayelsans following the drowning of five persons who were crossing the Epie Creek at Akenfa environment, Yenagoa.

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“He promptly promised the construction of bridges across the Epie Creek; even at that very spot of the incident. Unfortunately, that promise has not been fulfilled till date. On February 14, 2020, Dickson will leave Creek Haven as first governor of Bayelsa State to complete his second tenure: eight years.

“The protesters were expressing displeasure for government’s failure to construct bridges at strategic locations across the Epie Creek, knowing fully well that in communities like Agudama-epie, Akenfa, Akenpia, and others, the population has increased on the other side of the Epie Creek, and instead of crossing by canoe or monkey bridges that are risky; the state government ought to have bridged this need gap”.

Narrating the incident that led to the protest, a resident who identified himself as Endwell, said, “Yearly, people from this neighbourhood die because of flood. On Friday night, about 11pm, seven persons were crossing from Mbiama/Yenagoa Road to our area when their both capsized.

“We managed to rescue five persons but two people were swept away by the current. Since that day, we have been searching for their bodies until this morning when we discovered them.

“Because government failed to build a bridge for us, we built a wooden bridge that we managed until the flood came and swept it away. So the only way we can connect to the outside world is to cross the Epie Creek with a canoe. If not for that reason, those boys wouldn’t have died in the manner they died on Friday.”

One of the protesters, Ikogi said residents of the area were pained by the way and the two residents died at the creeks.

He said, “We are protesting the death of the boys because of government’s total neglect of our community. It is painful to see those boys die in the manner they did.”

Also, an uncle to the deceased, Mr. Julius Diepreye, mourned the death of his nephews, lamenting that the government continuously failed to live up to its responsibilities.

He said, “The people living across the Epie Creek have been suffering for more than 20 years. Since the creation of Bayelsa State in 1996, every year we lose people to flood. This is because government has failed to construct the road linking this area to Igbogene.

“For government to build a 100-meter bridge across the creek is a problem. So what we normally do every year is to use a canoe to cross over to the city each time there is flood. If the state government cannot do it, then the NDDC should do it for us. Let it not be that it is only when there is election they come and solicit our votes.”