

WEEKEND LIFE

THE NATION | SATURDAY | OCTOBER 15, 2022

Tales of death, sorrow, tears as floods wreak havoc nationwide

• How flood swept my wife, three children away - Survivor
• Disaster claims 14 lives in Niger, separates families in Rivers
• Girl suffers snake bite as reptiles, displaced victims struggle for space in camp

TALES of deaths, homelessness, and material losses have continued to reverberate from one part of the country to another as an end to the havoc wreaked by flood incidents that swept through the land in the last two weeks appears not yet in sight.

In many communities from north to south, hordes of hapless citizens are locked in grief over the havoc wreaked by floods in different parts of the country. In some pitiable instances, parents watch tearfully as rescue operators pull the lifeless bodies of their children out of water. In others, husbands helplessly watch their drowned wife floating and being taken out or the other way round.

Among the states mostly affected by the disaster is Anambra where floods have taken over four local government areas with many buildings submerged. The impact of the natural disaster was such that no fewer than 13 holding camps have been created by government in different parts of the state for the purpose of harbouring Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Nwanosike Onu, Awka, Emma Elekwa, Onitsha, Simon Utebor, Yenagoa; Mike Odlegwu, Port Harcourt; Linus Oota, Lafia; Uja Emmanuel, Makurdi; Justina Aishana, Minna; Chris Njoku, Owerri; Elo Edremoda, Warri and Okungbowa Aiwerele, Asaba.

According to the Executive Secretary of State Emergency Management Agency SEMA, Chief Paul Odenigbo, floods have already taken over six of the 21 local government areas in Anambra State. The affected LGAs include Anambra East, Anambra West, Ayamelum, Awka North, Ihiala and Ogbaru.

Many others remain trapped in their houses with many residents also losing loved one. Among them is Mathew Umeorji, an indigene of Awo Idemili, Imo State who lives in Ossomala, Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, who lost his wife, Gladys.

"It is a terrible experience for me. We were forewarned by the National Emergency

Management Agency (NEMA) but we refused to heed the advice and we are suffering for it," he said.

A worse victim was Mr Bernard Achonu who lost his wife and three children. The sobbing breadwinner told one of our correspondents: "I'm short for words. This is the worst situation I have ever been in life. Where do I start from with my wife and three children lost?"

The flood menace in Ogbaru has been the worst in the six affected local government areas, according to the SEMA boss, Odenigbo.

A visit to one of the holding camps in Otuocho, Anambra East Local Government Area showed that virtually all the IDP camps are overstretched. Apart from the challenge of accommodation, facilities like mattresses, buckets and cooking utensils are grossly inadequate.

Regrettably, while many IDPs are busy searching for safer grounds to relocate to, snakes, pythons and other reptiles pushed out by the floods are also searching for where to hide their heads, with the result that man and reptiles are now in battle for space.

That has been the case at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Ochuiche Umuodu in Ogbaru Local Government Area where reptiles have infiltrated

the camps of victims. The children are also exposed to cold and mosquito bites.

One of the camp's occupants, Mr. Chuka Osadebe, who was at the facility with members of his family, narrated how one of his daughters was bitten by a snake.

He said: "While several other residents were relocating to stay with their friends and relations, we didn't have anywhere to run to, because none of my relations and friends are within the locality. That was why we decided to come here."

"Although this place appears to be a bit better than where we came from, it has not been easy for me and my family."

"We were asleep the other day when a snake crawled into this place and bit my daughter. But, thank God, it is gradually healing even without any medication."

At Umuzu community in Ogbaru Local Government Area, many of the residents are trapped. A community leader, Christopher Okwusa, said there was no single IDP camp in the entire area. He said the closest one in Okija was grossly insufficient.

Okwuosa, the Chairman of Children of Farmers Club, said:

"It is indeed an ugly situation. I lost all. My farm was submerged with about 1,200 tubers of yam and my fish cage all gone. A lot of other people lost so many things to floods."

At Father Joseph Memorial High School, Otuocho, no fewer than 700 displaced persons were sighted. Those who spoke to one of our correspondents complained about congestion as well as absence of mattresses.

One of the occupants, Adaaora Uche, said: "We are making use of mats and wrappers as

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

•CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

improvised beddings. The food they are giving us is grossly inadequate."

At Iyowa Odekepe, a House of Representatives member, Hon. Chukwuka Onyema, provided a three-storey building for the housing of IDPs.

He also provided the victims with relief materials while many of them battled for space.

Despair, agony, horror in Bayelsa

In Bayelsa State, many indigenes and residents alike have been singing songs of despair, agony and horror, no thanks to the devastating floods that have hit many homes and communities in the oil-rich state.

With many areas located within flood plains and below sea levels, flooding has become almost an annual occurrence in the state since 2012.

While few persons have lost their lives during this current flooding, many have been sacked from their residences and places where they eke out a living. Yet, many others are begging the government to relocate them to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps.

Places like Biseni, Tombia-Ekpetiama, the Tombia-Amassoma Road, Akenfa, Akenpai, Igbogene, Swali in Yenagoa and towns such as Kaiaama, Odi, Otouke and Ogbia are facing the menace. Rivers and tributaries like River Nun and the Epie Creek have overflowed their banks.

Many other communities such as Sampou, Kaiaama, Gbaranna, Sabagrea, Okoloba, in Sagbama, Ekeremor and Kolokuma-Opokuma local government areas are equally impacted.

During the week, a woman identified simply as Mama Carol, from Amabulu in Ojobo community of Ekeremor but resident in Yenagoa, the state capital, lost her teenage son to the flood.

She had gone to the market last Saturday to buy food items and ingredients to prepare the family lunch only to be welcomed with the sad story that her son, Temedi Yerimene, drowned in a flood near their area.

Madam Carol said: "When I came back from the market, I was told my son had gone swimming with friends. I thought he was swimming in the rising water level at the compound."

"Later, one of his friends told me my son had been dragged by flood into the canal."

Temedi was killed by a surging flood that flushed him into a deep canal in Igbogene community of Yenagoa LGA.

Sadly, a Police Sergeant, Samson Akpolobode, also got his own dose of despair and horror from the disaster. Akpolobode, who reportedly took a bank facility to buy land and build a two-bedroomed apartment in Ogbogoro community in Yenagoa, lost his entire building to the flood.

Narrating his predicament, the police officer said a huge debt was still hanging on his neck while the bungalow that was his consolation had been swept away.

Akpolobode, who is now homeless, said his wife and five children had relocated to stay with relatives in his village in Angiama in Sagbama area of the state.

The police officer, whom many of his neighbours and colleagues described as a gentleman and pious Christian, implored the state and federal governments to come to the aid of his family.

Another victim, Mrs. Perez Ayebarua, said the flood waters that entered their houses late last month were still taking a toll on inhabitants with reptiles competing with them for space.

She explained that while those who have the resources have left their flooded homes for hotels or other homes elsewhere, those of them that are not financially buoyant were still stranded.

One of the victims at Akudama community in Biseni LGA, Chief Profit Joel, who was expelled by flood, said their suffering occasioned by the incident was better imagined than experienced.

He said: "It has been a yearly occurrence and we have been calling for the intervention of governments at all levels to provide a lasting solution but to no avail."

"A lasting solution should be provided to save us from this yearly agony. We are really suffering."

"We are also appealing to the government to provide us succour by way of sending us relief materials and also to evacuate us to a habitable location."

Also, an octogenarian at Gbaran-Ama in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA, said she had been sacked by flood and did not have anywhere to stay.

The aged woman, who did not want her name mentioned, said although she would join her ancestors when the time comes, she would not want to die by drowning.

She said: "I no longer have a place to lay my head. I now move about like a fugitive looking for where to sleep. One can endure hunger but can one stay inside water? How long can one stay inside the water?"

"I am very old. I know I will soon join my

ancestors but I don't want to get drowned. Let the people that are ruling us come and rescue me."

Flooded roads, others

A tour of the East West Road connecting the Southsouth region to Lagos, the Southeast and other parts of the country revealed that flooding was already affecting some sections of the road.

Worse hit is the Patani section, a town in Delta State that shares boundary with Bayelsa communities such as Adagbabiri which is already submerged.

The Mbiama Bridge, which connects many Engene communities in Rivers State to Bayelsa, is also being threatened by rampaging flood waters from the river underneath which is full to the brim.

Floods have affected some roads, particularly the Bulou-Orua axis on the Sagbama-Ekeremor Road, which has been cut off due to the pressure from rampaging flood.

Schools in Bayelsa State are on a six-week break to protect pupils and students from the disaster.

Government intervention

Although the surging flood is at its worst stage across Nigeria at the moment, the people of Bayelsa, one of the worst hit states, should, at least, heave a sigh for some relief as the government is not entirely leaving them to their fate.

Recently, the Douye Diri-led government inaugurated a task force on flooding. The Governor also approved an initial sum of N450 million for the relocation of persons displaced by floods across the state to higher grounds and for the provision of relief materials.

The exercise, according to him, would commence immediately and would carried out on a local government basis.

The state Task Force Committee on Flood Mitigation and Management said the only way to manage the situation was to construct water barriers across the shorelines of flood-prone coastal communities in the state.

The task force committee, therefore, went on an on-the-spot inspection tour of the communities affected by the 2022 floods in the state, visiting Yenagoa and Kolokuma/Opokuma LGAs. The areas visited were Yenagoa main town, Obele, Agudama-Epie, Akenfa-Epie and Igbogene-Epie communities in the state capital, which were largely submerged.

Other areas inspected by the task force in Yenagoa were the Zarama/Okodia/Biseni LGA where it was observed that all the communities in that axis were totally submerged as flood victims were staying on the tarred road, which is now the only high land in the area and their temporary place of abode.

Suffering was boldly written all over their faces. Hardship, agony and inconveniences that always come with excessive flooding were telling on the victims, who could not hold back their pains but cried to governments at all levels to come to their aid.

The ugly tale of the devastating flood was not different at Kaiaama, headquarters of KOLGA and other communities in the LGA such as Kaiaama, Gbaran-Ama, Okoloba and Sabagrea.

Their farmlands, crops and other sources of livelihood were washed away even as they were rendered homeless. Their primary and secondary citadels of learning have also been engulfed by the waters.

Led by its chairman and Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Iselama Gbaranbiri, the task force revealed that the state through the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure had already kick-started the water barriers construction project, using Odi and Sampou communities in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA and Okutukutu community in Yenagoa as pilot areas, adding that the experiment had paid off.

According to Gbaranbiri, Odi community, which used to be flood-prone, is 95 per cent protected from flooding, thanks to the water barrier constructed across its shoreline.

It was observed that what protected the River Nun water from overflowing the community was a concrete wall. The water on the riverside was glaringly higher than the land but was unable to penetrate because of the barrier. The situation has kept the community dry, save for some areas where water had to penetrate through canals from the bush.

At Sampou, Governor Diri's country home, a similar feat was observed as the water level at the riverbank was higher than the ground level but the water was prevented from by a barricade wall from flowing into the town.

The water was, however, submerging some areas from behind the community through canals from the bush.

Also speaking, the Commissioner for Works and Infrastructure, Moses Teibowei, noted that he and his team had noticed the lapses to be corrected in the pilot water barriers project, adding that such would be corrected before the next rainy season to

How flood three children



•Victims of flood at IDP camp in Oleh, Delta state

ensure total protection from flood in those communities.

Flood incidents separate families in Rivers

The flood incidents have also left many people devastated in Rivers State. One of the victims, Chika Jean-Adiemea, is in trauma. Her booming commercial farming business is gone.

"Where do I start from?" she wept as she narrated her ordeal in the Omoku area of Rivers State.

Chika has since fled her Aggah community in Ogbia-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area, leaving her separated from her children who she has sent to their uncle's place in Port Harcourt while she takes refuge in Omoku.

The entire Aggah community has been sacked by the ravaging floods. Buildings, roads and trees have all gone under water. Even the roofs of houses are not spared as the entire area looks like the sea.

Apart from Ogbia-Egbema-Ndoni, a significant part of Ahoada Local Government Area is also overflowing with water. The East-West Road between Ahoada and Bayelsa axis has turned into the East-West river, rendered impassable by high-current floods.

Like others in Aggah community, the flood is a major setback for Chika. Although she lost other valuables, her major concern is her cassava business, which is her major source of income.

Chika is known for planting cassava on a large expanse of land, harvesting it later and processing it into cassava flakes popularly called garri. Unfortunately, the flood washed away her 21-plot cassava farmland.

She said: "I am a businesswoman and a farmer. I deal in garri. I plant, process and sell. What the flood has done to me is unexplainable. One needs to experience it before one can understand."

"This is the worst we have had in recent times.

The flood damaged a lot of things. The 21 plots of land where I planted cassava that is due for harvest in November was submerged. My car and properties are buried in the water and the water got up to the roof level. Even N10 million cannot solve the setback this flood has done to me."

"I did not uproot any cassava because of the level of flood which we had thought would be like that of 2012. Before we realised what was happening, the water had already taken over the entire place."

"Business activities have been grounded because we cannot access the communities without boats. Hunger is what we face here. I thank God I sent my children to Port Harcourt to stay with my uncle. I am in my uncle's house in Omoku, taking refuge."

For Sandra Ubah, a nurse eking out a living from her pharmaceutical store, her means of livelihood is no more. The drugstore has been submerged by the flood. Sandra said she fled with her children to a nearby village in Imo State where they now sleep in an open space.

She said: "I have lost millions of naira to the flood. It damaged many things."

"I am a nurse. I run a pharmacy shop in the community but it was submerged all of a sudden."

"We woke up in the morning and discovered that water had soaked everything including more than eight plots of land where I farm."

"I could not enter the water to uproot the cassava because the water keeps rising per day, and there is nothing I can do to salvage what is left."

"I just woke up to see everything I had toiled for destroyed by water, and it is heartbreaking."

"I did not remove a pin from my pharmacy shop because it happened in the night and by dawn, everywhere was submerged. And you know drugs, when water touches them, there is no remedy."

"I have lost more than N5 million in that shop coupled with my farm, it is daunting for me and

“
Regrettably, while many IDPs are busy searching for safer grounds to relocate to, snakes, pythons and other reptiles pushed out by the floods are also searching for where to hide their heads, with the result that man and reptiles are now in battle for space.
”