



The rains are here again and it has left in its trail flood, devastation and anguish on several Nigerians as shown in the picture.

Checking menace of perennial flooding

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THE rains are here, and are devastating.

They wreak havoc, leaving trails of destruction and pain in their wake.

For most cities in the country where they occur, floods have become phenomenal.

Though there are no up-to-date national casualty figures, reports on this year's floods suggest that scores of lives have been lost across the country.

Property worth billions of Naira have also been reported destroyed. These include goods and services, buildings, farmlands, roads and bridges.

Reports say that 16 persons lost their lives in Wase, Plateau, as floods swept across 300 farmlands in three local government areas.

In Adamawa, at least 23 persons were confirmed dead in Song local council area due to flooding.

Flash floods also devastated three other local government areas of the state, including Yola North and Yola

South, following two days of torrential rainfall.

More than 500 houses were reported submerged by the floods, leaving an estimated 2,000 persons homeless.

The flooding in the two council areas of Yola was attributed in part to the collapse of embankments on the River Benue.

Victims of recent floods in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, and some parts of Lagos State are still in reeling pain and anguish.

The story is not different in Aba, the economic nerve-centre of Abia.

Yet these floods are perennial and their effects the same.

The causes are familiar and their impact is common knowledge, while the solutions are readily available.

But, nothing seems to have been done to permanently tackle these recurrent disasters.

For some hundreds of residents of the ancient city of Abeokuta, July 26 may not be easily forgotten.

That was the day they woke up at about 3 a.m. to find their homes submerged by surging floods.

A torrential rain that lasted for about 48 hours had washed through the city, leaving a trail of disaster in its wake.

Many people were displaced from their homes. Worst affected were those who lived along the banks of the Ogun River.

As the rains lasted, the floods surged into

the city. The rains also affected the capacity of Oyan dam, raising fears of a possible catastrophe.

A statement by the Ogun River Basin Development Authority advised people living along the river banks to relocate to safer areas.

The statement said this was "due to the need to release water from the overfilled Oyan dam".

The authority's Executive Director (Finance and Administration), Mr Bayo Oladele, said it was necessary to release water from the dam to maintain a tolerable capacity level for the safety of life, property and the dam itself.

"Due to the heavy rainfall in the last 48 hours, the reservoir level has increased beyond the maximum capacity.

"While we do not want to create any panic, it is important for those who are residents along the Ogun River to watch out where danger is perceived," Oladele stated.

The statement advised the people to evacuate to safer areas to avoid danger as the weather forecast indicated that

the downpour could last longer.

Two days after the rain, no fewer than 5,000 people were displaced by the flooding which was compounded by the release of water from the dam.

Because of its proximity to Ogun, the release of water from the dam worsened the already pathetic situation in some parts of Lagos State.

Residents of Ajegunle, a neighbourhood of Ikorodu town in the state, had tales of woe to tell of the floods caused by an overflowing Ogun River.

But what could be the reason for such devastating floods in Nigerian cities and towns?

The Ogun State Commissioner for Environment, Dr Adeleke Adedoyin, who released casualty figures, blamed the disaster on the people's poor attitude to environmental issues.

He said the floods were worsened by persons who built illegal structures on drainage channels, thus hindering the flow of water.

The flood situation in Aba is also attributed to the blockage of drains by residents who indiscriminately dump solid wastes in unauthorised places.

Residents of the city say the inability of rain water to find its course to the Aba River is responsible for the perennial floods.

"Any time there is rain, floods surge from the blocked end of the system and overflow the entire neighbourhood, including the Ariaria market," says a resident.

The Permanent Secretary, Abia State Ministry of Works and Transport, Mrs Ifeoma Agu, disagrees with the notion that the city lacks adequate drainage channels.

Since the floods come annually, it requires that all hands must be on deck to contain them. The government also should take adequate measures to protect the citizenry, and in turn they must see themselves as major stakeholders in the flood containment effort.

She puts the blame on residents who throw their household waste into drains.

"The problem is compounded by indiscriminate construction of houses in the city without regard for town planning code," she says.

Agu notes that the buildings block the natural flow of water, and expresses the concern of the state government about the situation.

The state government, she says, has requested the services of experts to design a drainage system for Aba as part of efforts to find a permanent solution to the problem.

The Ogun State Government is also worried by the situation caused by flooding.

"We need to put in place an effective law to combat environmental problems in the state," Adedoyin says.

The July 26 flooding "should also be seen in the context of those who have built struc-

tures on our drainage channels.

"Despite several appeals to those individuals and organisations, they have persisted in this wrongdoing.

"We are now determined to ensure that the larger society does not suffer the illegality perpetrated by a few citizens," he says.

Observers say that the government has the political will to control and mitigate the effects of flash floods.

For instance, the Lagos State Government has embarked on the construction of massive drainage channels in Owode-Ajegunle to control perennial flooding in the area.

A few hundreds of residents of the area have been evacuated and homes demolished to make way for the project.

However, the citizenry must be educated to appreciate the benefits of such measures.

Agu says that the residents of Aba will be enlightened to assist the government in tackling the problem of flooding.

The government, she explains, will undertake public enlightenment to encourage people to desist from unwholesome acts that pose grave environmental hazards.

But more importantly, the works ministry will continue to clear the drains regularly, she adds.

A recent study on an urban renewal programme in the Aba South Local Government Area estimates that 269.9 million Naira will be required to construct roads and drains.

Experts say that when completed, the Federal Government-sponsored programme will help to check flooding in the city.

In the aftermath of the July 26 flooding, the Ogun State Government set up a task force comprising four ministries — education, health, environment and works.

While the education ministry provides materials to affected schools, the health ministry provides health care services to victims.

Works and environment ministries see to the clearing of drainage channels for easy flow of water.

As an adage says, "a stitch in time saves nine", it behoves government at all levels to mitigate factors that lead to flooding so as to ensure safety of life and property.

Since the floods come annually, it requires that all hands must be on deck to contain them.

The government also should take adequate measures to protect the citizenry, and in turn they must see themselves as major stakeholders in the flood containment effort.