

# ‘They Could Have Survived If We Had A Health Centre’: Distraught Mother Laments After Three Kids Were Killed By Collapsed Wall In Warri

EBENEZER ADUROKIYA was at Iyara, a slummy suburb of Warri in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State where three children were killed after a heavy downpour crashed their toilet wall on them. His report:

By EBENEZER ADURO... On Jun 18, 2022

FEATURES



The collapsed wall that killed the kids

RESIDENTS of Atise-Olu in Iyara, a community in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, including one of the mothers of the three children that died as a result of a collapsed wall, have lamented that the kids would have survived if there was a functioning healthcare centre in the community.

The kids, a girl and two boys, between the ages of five and seven, died on Saturday, June 4, 2022, after a toilet wall caved in on them. According to reports, the children were playing in the rain beside the wall when it crashed on them as a result of the windy downpour.

Following the reaction of the chairman of the community, Mr Eju Akubor, expressing regret over lack of a health centre in the community of roughly over 4,000 people, Saturday Tribune decided to visit the community. Bereaved mother speaks Saturday Tribune was only able to speak with one of the bereaved mothers, Mrs Joy Frank, as the others refused any audience. Mrs Frank, who is the mother of the girl among the deceased, said that though her daughter died on the spot, the two other kids would probably have survived if first aid was available.

“I do petty trading to take care of my children and I have been living in this compound for the past 15 years. “I was doing laundry behind my house when I heard a crash sound. I rushed outside and saw that it was my toilet that had caved in. My daughter, Sarah, was found under the first block that the people who came to help us raised. Her head had been shattered, her eyes popping out of the sockets. She died some minutes after we recovered her. But we still hoped against hope and rushed her to Warri General Hospital where she was confirmed dead. That was how my seven-year-old daughter left this world,” the petty trader lamented.

Efforts to identify the other two deceased kids were unsuccessful and neither could Mrs Frank help out with much details. “One of the two children my daughter was playing with before the tragedy was called Bobo. That is all I remember. “When Sarah’s father, my husband, got home, he wanted to get the landlord arrested. He changed his mind with the realisation that the action would not bring back Sarah,” she noted.

Abandoned health centre

Saturday Tribune gathered that there is an abandoned health centre that has been overgrown with weeds in the community with residents lamenting that if the centre were completed and functional, two of the victims could have survived. It is a community of about 4,000 inhabitants, yet without a functional healthcare centre. As a result, residents with health issues either visit ‘across-the-counter’ patent stores or head to the Warri General Hospital, a journey of about 30 minutes, depending on the seriousness of the issues. Sarah’s distraught mother expressed the belief that a functional health centre would have offered the wounded some immediate relief.

“If there were a health center in the community, the other children would have survived, but I am not sure if my girl would have survived. Even if she had survived, I am not sure she would have been able to see again because her eyes had been popped out of the sockets,” she submitted. She refused to release her picture or that of her daughter, saying that would not bring her daughter back to life or mend her broken heart.

Overgrown weeds, reptiles take over health centre Our correspondent searched for the community head and was directed to the community secretariat where he met the secretary, Mr Yemi Nobu, who led him to Edukugho Iyara, where the uncompleted health centre is located. What was actually found at the place was a foundation-level structure that had been taken over by thick bushes.



*The health centre at foundation level, overgrown with weeds.*

The residents lamented the losses the community had suffered as a result of the 12-year-old abandoned healthcare project. The residents, who are mostly of the Itsekiri stock, said the death of the three kids was just one of many tragedies that had been recorded in the slum due to lack of a health centre. One of the residents, Mrs Merit Chukwuemeka, explained how the people of the area cope with illnesses, filth, snakes and other reptiles.

Mrs Chukwuemeka said: “Living in this environment is not easy because of the lack of health centre. If there is a situation that requires an emergency medical attention, it would be very difficult to save such a fellow. “Two years ago, my son was bitten by a snake in one of the bushes. If not for the people that were around that day, I would have lost the boy.

“There was one pregnant woman that went into labour in the middle of the night. Luckily for her, one

of her neighbours who had a car helped her. She gave birth inside the car, on their way to the hospital.”

Another resident of the area, Mr Kelvin Okoro, disclosed that some other pregnant women were not so lucky due to the lack of health centre in Iyara community. Okoro said: “We have had a lot of casual cases as a result of lack of healthcare centre in this community.

“We have lost pregnant women who went into labour in the middle of the night. We lost a woman to a snake bite last year because she was not taken to the hospital in time. “About two weeks ago, a boy was saved from death after he was bitten by a snake. So, it is not easy for people living in this environment.”

Plea for completion of health centre Mrs Chukwuemeka, speaking further, pleaded with the authorities of Warri South Local Government Area and the Delta State government to see to the completion of the health centre to save lives.

“We are pleading with the government to help us complete the healthcare project. Above everything else, we need a health facility here so that emergency cases can be resolved. “During elections, politicians do come to solicit for our votes. We have 12 voting units here. They make all sorts of promises but after elections, we get nothing.

“It took a long time before they came to construct this road that you are looking at. We are praying that they should complete the health centre,” she pleaded. Speaking further on their plight, Mr Okoro said: “This place is quite far to the General Hospital, so we do patronise private hospitals around us here.

“We have been waiting for the contractors that started the health centre project 12 years ago to come and complete it. “We don’t even know the contractor that the healthcare centre was awarded to so. We need the assistance of the government.

“We have written to DESOPADEC, various Warri South chairmen, yet nothing has been done.”

Meanwhile, Saturday Tribune sought an audience with the current chairman of Warri South Local Government Area, Dr Michael Tidi, to ascertain the identity of the handler of the project. Tidi, however, said since his five years in the saddle, he hadn’t received any information as regards the health centre. Tidi said: “I wish to start by expressing my deepest sympathy to the families of the victims over the unfortunate incident. “The

actual circumstances that led to the deaths are still unclear but it is important to note that Warri South Local Government Council has no abandoned health centre project at Iyara. “We have two functional health centres by Essi College, Warri and Pessu health centre at Odion Road, by Police Station. “These two health centres were strategically located to address the primary health care needs of residents of that axis in Warri.

“They operate 24 hours and the council’s medical personnel are always ready to attend to medical emergencies.” He said the only health centre his administration met uncompleted was located at a place called Omadino and had since been completed and equipped with up-to-date medical facilities and skilled workers.