

Woman who lost her only child to flood says: I wish it is a dream that I can wake up from



•The erosion route

Erosion has conquered the Baba Egbe area of Agbelekale in the Agbado Oke Odo Local Council Development Area of Lagos State and constantly threatens it with dangerous floods. The flood claimed its first victim late last month. Unfortunately, it was the only daughter of a woman, whose husband also seems to have deserted her, writes EMMANUEL ONYECHE

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD Ranti Ayeni left home for school on June 24. She didn't succeed in getting back, even though she tried to. The rain fell heavily on that day, and when school closed, Ranti, a pupil of Community Primary School, Meiran, defied it and set out for home.

About 10 metres to her home at 2, Imafidon Street, off Moshood Bello Street in the Baba Egbe area of Agbelekale in the Agbado Oke Odo Local Council Development Area of Lagos State, she needed to get past one of the erosion-created gullies that traverse her neighbourhood. Whenever it rains, life threatening floods meander through these gullies.

Ranti couldn't get past the gully. Her small feet slipped and she fell into the four feet deep gully and her tragic experience began. The treacherous flood swept her away at top speed, smashed her against several dangerous objects and deposited her nearly a kilometre away at the foot of a banana tree near Community Junior High School, Meiran.

By the time she was found in the evening of the next day, her clothes were in tatters and she was dead.

It was probably a conspiracy of fate to merge Ranti's last day at school with her last one on earth, and there was nothing the small girl could do about it. She was with another small friend when the incident occurred. Her friend successfully crossed the gully, but she couldn't.

The incident also occurred in the presence of two adult males – one of whom playful Ranti and her friend disobeyed when he told them not take the path of the gully – and another one who tried and failed twice to pull

Ranti out of the flood, as she was being swept away – failing at the second attempt just to save his own life.

The man, who tried to save Ranti, Mr. Sunday Oladitun, told *SUNDAY PUNCH*, "The girls were two. One man had warned them not to follow the path they were taking, but the playful girls did not mind him. One of them successfully jumped past the gully, but Ranti tried and slipped and fell into the water.

"Immediately I saw that the wave of the flood had carried her, I ran to block her. I tried but the wave was too fast for me. I ran forward again along the route of the flood beside a nearby church to block her at the gutter there.

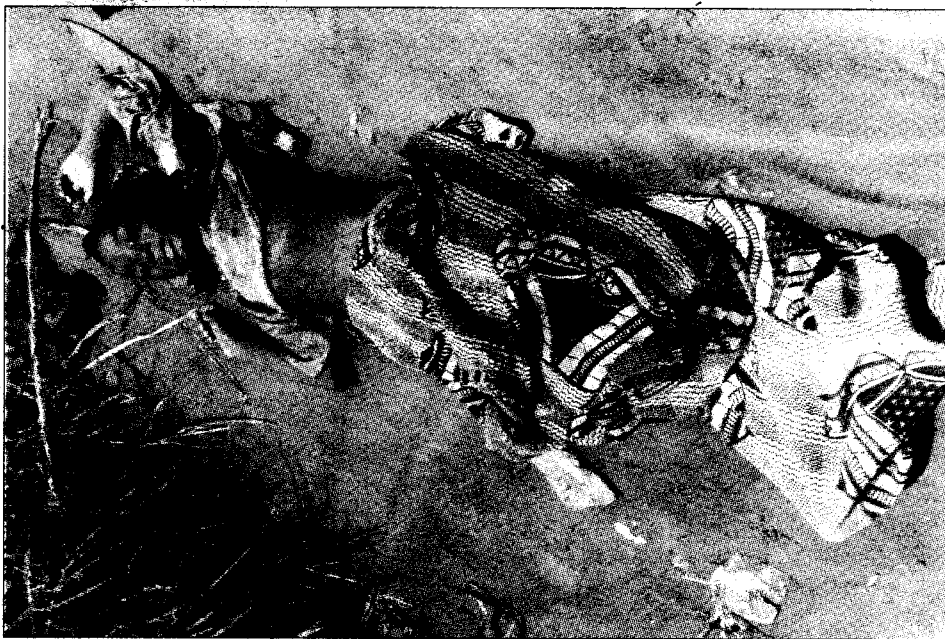
"As I tried, I also slipped and fell into the water and the wave also started to carry me, but I managed to get hold of the root of a cashew tree washed away by erosion, which was shooting out of the gutter in front of the church. That was what I held onto until people came and pulled me out of the water. After I came out, we organised a search party and ran along the length of the wave to see if we could rescue her, but it was too late."

Ranti's loss represents a double tragedy to her mother – 33-year-old Mrs. Tawa Ayeni. Ranti was her only child, who took seven years to come. She has stayed eight years after without another child. When *SUNDAY PUNCH* saw the devastated woman at her home last week, she wore a distant look like someone communing with forces mortal eyes could not see. She was pained inside and her words were few. "It is like a nightmare to me and I don't know how I can wake up from it. I don't think I will ever be in a good mood again," she managed to say.

Her mother – Ranti's grandmother – had



•Mrs. Ayeni



•Ranti's corpse

come quickly to join her, as well as her half sister, who simply identified herself as Mrs. Ogunjirin. Both were there to comfort her and prevent her from going berserk. Ogunjirin spoke and when confirmation of what she said was needed from Mrs. Ayeni, the troubled woman just nodded absently and kept staring into space. Her mother kept a close vigil beside her.

"We haven't even seen the father of the child to tell him what has happened and today is the eighth day after the incident. He just left home shortly before the incident and has not come back," Ogunjirin said.

Prodded further on whether the man had deserted home, Ogunjirin said, "We know that he is not dead and he is not lost. We just don't know why he has not come home or contacted us. We were still trying to figure out that problem and now this one also happened." She then refused to say another word about the man.

She revealed how Ayeni took so long before she could conceive and give birth to Ranti, and said that was why she named the child "Oluwarantimi," meaning "God has

remembered me," after the child was born.

"That is why the whole thing is so painful. For one week after the incident, the mother had to be secluded and only a few people were allowed to be with her all day to prevent her from doing something dangerous to herself," Ogunjirin said.

It is a tragic story that should teach parents one or two lessons about childcare. The Divisional Police Officer of Meiran Police Station, Mr. Otabor Festus, a Superintendent of Police, who confirmed the incident, advised parents to see to it that they personally go to take their children from school, especially after a heavy rain.

This, he said, is because many parts of Lagos are flooded after it rains and many of the children, especially those in primary school, are usually playful and do not know the danger floods constitute. "In fact, some of them play in the water," he said.

Mr. Joseph Ogunjirin – one of the elders in the Baba Egbe community – also advised that the school authorities could use their discretion to keep the children at school after such heavy floods pending the time their parents or an adult could come and pick them.