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12-year-old girl drowns in Lagos floods, typhoid cases rise

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A 12-year-old girl, Ugochi Ude, on Sunday fell in the floods that have been ravaging some parts of Lagos and Ogun states and got drowned.

Ude, a pupil of Aina Memorial Primary School, Agiliti in Agboyi-Ketu Local Government of Lagos, resided at 31, Oriofe Street in the area before she died.

Although none of her relatives was around when one of our correspondents visited her residence, the landlord's son, James Umoh, told PUNCH METRO on Monday that the deceased and her guardian returned to their home on Sunday after fleeing their apartment when the floods persisted.

Umoh, who said the family came back basically to move their belongings, noted that Ude, who went to fetch water, fell into the floods on her way home and got drowned around 8am.

He added that corpse was later discovered around 11am.

Umoh said, "Earlier in the morning, Ude was swimming in the floods. But when my father saw her, he shouted at her and told her to come out of the water. She listened to my father. Later she went to fetch water.

"But after a while, Ude's guardian came to ask me if I knew her whereabouts. Since she told us that she was going to fetch water, we searched many places. We could not find her. When we came back, we met her guardian crying.

"I went back to search for her. I waded through the floods but I could not locate her. At this point, her guardian became worried and urged neighbours to join in the search.

"She pleaded with me to cross over to the other side of the water that is a little bit deep. I went there and later touched something. It turned out to be someone's head. I screamed that I had found somebody. People joined and helped me to carry her up but then she was already dead."

A Medical Officer, Herald Specialist Clinic and Maternity, Maidun area of Lagos, Dr. Nasiru Ibrahim, confirmed Ude's death, adding that she was already dead before she was brought to the hospital.

He also said cases of typhoid had increased since the flooding and urged the governments to provide potable water, construct more roads and create more awareness on the danger inherent in people living in such areas.

One week after floods displaced hundreds of Lagos residents, Governor Babatunde Fashola on Monday visited Ajegunle on Ikorodu Road where he announced the immediate relocation of 681 victims of the disaster.

The governor, who led members of the State Executive Council on a sympathy visit to the area, was, however, held up for some minutes along the road following the traffic congestion caused by the floods that have taken a major part of the road.

The development prompted Fashola and members of his cabinet to alight from their vehicles and waded through the floods.

The governor, who blamed the Federal Government for the disaster that had rendered no fewer than 1,000 people homeless, said the situation would have been averted if the

•Lagos relocates 681 •We won't bequeath our forefathers' lands'



•Agiliti area of Lagos... on Monday. Photo: Ehi Emhonyon

state had been allowed access to the ecological fund.

Fashola said, "This is a disaster of no small proportion. It is a disaster for the whole country as far as I am concerned, because the people for whom we exist have been displaced by floods.

"I want to say that National Emergency Management Agency contributions have come a little late because we have been corresponding with the Federal Government for three years. Since 2007 when I first visited this area, we wrote to the Federal Government, appealing to them to let us have access to the ecological funds."

Admitting that the disaster was foretold, Fashola said the solution proffered by his administration to forestall the disaster was hampered by non release of fund by the Federal Government to the state government.

The governor said the 681 people would be relocated to a camp built by the state government, adding that in due course, land would be re-allocated to the affected victims for resettlement.

He appealed for the cooperation of residents and the affected victims who were going through untold hardship as a result of the situation, explaining that what happened was not peculiar to Lagos but a global occurrence.

He said since 2007, the government had been warning the people of the area of the danger of staying along floodplain areas, but regretted that the residents did not heed the warning.

The governor said the area was not approved for residential purposes, advising the affected victims to cooperate with the

government on its relocation plan.

He assured the victims that they would be relocated to a more comfortable and safe area at little or no cost.

In his address, the South-West Coordinator of NEMA, Alhaji Mohammed Bida, said all emergencies management agencies in the country had been mobilised to assist flood victims.

He added that NEMA would request for necessary intervention from the Presidency.

Responding on the ecological funds, a top source in NEMA, who would not want his identity revealed, said, "Ecological fund is a special fund in the federation account, but last year or so, Abia and other states went to court to say NEMA does not have the right to withdraw some money as special funds. However, the ecological fund is directly under the control of the Federal Government.

"So, the blames on NEMA about ecological funds does not arise. Our duty is to ensure that we intervene when there is crisis of this magnitude. The issue of ecological fund is highly contentious; the question you will ask yourself is why will some of the state governments be asking for the fund?

"It may have political undertone, but for NEMA we are not politically inclined. We have assured them that we will intervene and the intervention will reach the victim very soon."

On his part, the Assistant Zonal Coordinator, NEMA, Mr. Tunde Adebisi, said it was not true that the agency's response to the disaster was slow.

"On Thursday we were given the signal, on Friday, we were already in town, and on Saturday, we responded," he said.

He said the Federal Government would soon swing into actions to forestall a recurrence

of the disaster.

Meanwhile, a victim, who identified himself as Olamide Ajah, told PUNCH METRO that they did not want to bequeath their lands because they were family heritage.

He said their forefathers had lived in the area for over 200 years, adding that the flood was rare occurrence.

Also, the Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Mr. Adeyemi Ikuforiji, who visited the area on Sunday in company with some members of the House, urged the people to remain calm.

One of our correspondents observed that at Okiokio area of Ajegunle in Isheri-Ikosi Local Council Development Area of Lagos State many residents still relied on canoe as a means of transportation within the neighbourhood.

One of the canoe operators, who identified himself simply as Silas, said most canoeists had resorted to canoes because of the presence of reptiles in the floodwaters and the fear of contracting water-related diseases such as bloody urinary bladder, guinea worms, cholera, among others.

He further said this was to avoid the repeat of 2007 when many of them contracted severe water-borne diseases.

Another canoe operator, John Peters, said another effect of the floods in the area was astronomical rise in prices of foodstuffs and other necessities, as well as transport fares.

Meanwhile, NEMA has ordered the release of truckloads of relief materials to victims of flood disaster in Lagos and Ogun states as interim measures to address the plight of the inhabitants of the communities.