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Ogun communities battle pollution, residents report seven deaths

AUGUST 4, 2014 BY OLALEYE ALUKO 0 COMMENTS



One of the affected communities

Residents said no fewer than seven people died in Ilashe, Ilupeju and Odan Agbara communities of Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area, Ogun State, in the first week of July from suspected water pollution.

Some residents who spoke to *PUNCH Metro* alleged that their wells were polluted by a sewage treatment plant located near the communities, adding that the facility was endangering their lives.

During a visit to the area by our correspondent, the *Baale*, Ilupeju Agbara, Alhaji Adamson Hassan, who confirmed the deaths, said the people died from stooling and vomiting.

He said, "When the outbreak started in June, some guests were the first set of people to be affected. We rushed them to the hospitals, but not all of them survived. Those ones who did not report to hospitals early died. They were more than seven people. Apart from the deaths, we had 15 people from this community who were hospitalised after drinking from the polluted water.

"We believe that the cause is a sewage treatment plant located near our area, which is not properly managed. For example, in the past, we used to have about 10 drinkable river channels in this community, but when the plant deteriorated, all these waters became polluted with sewage. Now, as I speak to you, we do not have any good drinking water."

When our correspondent visited a private health centre in neighbouring Odan Agbara, he was showed the medical records of patients who were admitted on a Friday in July. The records revealed that 14 persons in the community came to be treated for a similar ailment, which the medical doctor, Thomas Ighodaro, identified as *Acute Gastroenteritis*.

Ighodaro said, "In the first week of June, we recorded four cases of the infection. There was a patient, a baby, who started stooling in the morning and died in the evening. She was brought to the hospital dead on arrival. It was when the mother of the baby came back the following day as a patient that we suspected it was an epidemic. In July, there were 14 reported cases of the infection.

"What we carried out on our patients was simply a clinical diagnosis. This is why we cannot say it is Cholera as the people are saying. There is still a laboratory diagnosis, which is normally carried out by the World Health Organisation, before one can confirm it is Cholera.

"Some victims may not have reported to the hospital, because we got information that some people died of the infection in early July. But I believe proper waste disposal system and potable drinkable water are the solutions."

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A patient in the area, identified simply as Mr. Saheed, who was just discharged from the hospital said he had spent five days before his recovery.

He said, "I was vomiting and stooling continually. I was afraid because I knew some people died from the same problem. I spent about five days at the centre before I was stabilised."

Our correspondent gathered that the Chairman, Community Development Association, Chief Olawunmi Salisu, and Secretary, Mr. Adewunmi Oluwafemi, had written a letter to the state governor through the LGA chairman, seeking government intervention.

However, the Manager, Agbara Estates Limited, which owns the sewage plant, Mr. Adeniya Thomas, debunked the claim by the communities that the plant was responsible for the epidemic.

He said, "To start with, the area, where these communities presently occupy, belongs to the Agbara Estates Limited. It is only in Nigeria that people encroach on your land and still complain that you are disturbing them.

"The alleged epidemic cannot come from a biologically treated sewage plant. Our companies has a primary treatment plant, where their wastes must have been treated to a minimal level.

"Also, when you have a biologically treated plant, you are making use of Oxygen and releasing Carbon Dioxide, and so, there must be a buffer zone around it, which these communities have encroached on.

"Most residents in the communities don't have toilets in their houses. They defecate in their rivers. So, that in itself is an epidemic. At the sewage plant, it is true that some of our aerators need repair, but it is not that they are not working."

The council Chairman, Mr. Rotimi Rahmon, said, the government was aware of the challenges the Agbara communities were facing, adding that measures had been put in place to address them.

He said, "On the issue of the sewage tank, I have not received any letter from the communities as may have been said, but all the same, I heard about their situation and we will take every measure to put it under control. I have asked the director of health to get involved."

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