

Two die as rainstorm wreaks havoc in Ondo, Enugu, Nasarawa

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• Affected Ondo school • A damaged classroom

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Two persons have lost their lives, while 15 others sustained varying degrees of injury as a heavy rainstorm destroyed a multi-million naira farm in Nasarawa State on Tuesday.

The deceased were said to be employees of the Nigeria Farmers Group and Cooperative Society, Ga'ate Farm Centre, in the Kokona Local Government Area of the state.

The deceased were identified as Naomi Audi and Rabiud Sodangi, and were attached to the rice processing unit of the farm.

The rainstorm also destroyed property worth millions of naira on the farm.

Addressing journalists in his office on Wednesday, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the farm, Mr Redson Tedhekhe, stated that the victims met their untimely death when the windstorm pulled down the building they were in, while they were trying to evacuate some of the farm produce.

Tedhekhe expressed sadness over the incident, adding that the 15 injured staff members were rushed to the Mumbasa Medical Centre, Keffi, where doctors stabilised them, and expressed the hope that they would recover soon.

He stated that in recognition of the dedication and commitment of the deceased, their salaries would be paid for one year, while the injured would be treated by the farm and their salaries would continue to run until they would return to their duty posts as part of the firm's insurance scheme.

Meanwhile, the Abaga of the Toni Chiefdom, Lawrence Sylvester Ayih Oho II; the Chairman, Kokona Local Government Council, Saidu Kurki; and the council's secretary, Mr Augustine Ogaba, were among prominent persons to have gone to the farm to condole with the management and staff over the incident, which they described as catastrophic and unfortunate.

Similarly, many buildings were destroyed by rainstorm in some towns in the Akoko North West and North East Local Government areas of Ondo State on Tuesday.

According to an eyewitness, some the affected buildings were churches, schools, mosques and business centres. Electric poles were also damaged by the rainstorm.

The eyewitness said the incident occurred during a downpour that lasted about 45 minutes and wreaked havoc on towns such as Ugbe Akoko, Ikare Akoko and Arigidi Akoko, among others.

The eyewitness said, "The rain came with a powerful storm and blew off the roofs of houses in Ugbe. Shops on Jubilee Road, Ikare Akoko, were also badly affected, while many electrical poles were damaged as well as churches, schools and mosques.

"This led to a total blackout in some parts of Akoko land. At Olokun Agbaluku in Arigidi Akoko, some shops were destroyed by the rainstorm; a church's roof was totally blown off, while the fence of a local government maternity centre collapsed."

Residents of the affected areas described the incident as double tragedy as the destruction came when the state government had placed a ban on commercial activities as part of preventive measures to contain the spread of coronavirus.

One of the victims, Mrs Kehinde John, a fashion designer, said her shop's roof was blown off and rain destroyed her machines and clothing materials inside the shop.

She called for assistance from the government, saying she had lost over N1m worth of property

Another victim, Mr Fatai Abolore, said the roof of his house was blown off and the rain destroyed some of the items in the house.

“I want to appeal to the state government and other agencies of government in charge of emergency to assist us; we can't bear the burden alone; the cost of repairing the houses will be too much too much to repair the houses. We don't want to be rendered homeless,” Abolore stated.

In Enugu State, a multi-million naira petroleum products' filling station under construction at Onu-Asata by the Presidential Road in the Enugu metropolis was on Wednesday destroyed by flood.

The station was being constructed by the Asata River Bridge, opposite the Pully General Hospital in the Enugu North Local Government of the state.

When one of our correspondents visited the site, spectators were seen discussing the development.

It was gathered that the property was owned by a former Chairman of the Enugu East Local Government Area, but none of the spectators could reveal his identity.

PUNCH Metro observed that a stop work notice had been pasted on the wall of the station by the Enugu State Capital Territory Development Authority, but work was still going on.

Four underground fuel tanks were excavated by the flood.

The station blocks the water channel.

Observers at the scene said it was dangerous if the remaining structures were not carefully removed and remedial work done before the next rainfall to avoid the flooding of the entire neighbourhood and submerging of residential houses or even the washing away of the bridge.

Some of the spectators alleged that when officials of the ECTDA came to paste the stop work on the building, work was temporarily suspended, only to resume about two weeks later, thereby fuelling suspicion that government officials might have been compromised.

Effort to reach the Chairman of the ECTDA, Mr Ken Onoh, proved abortive as he did not pick his calls.

Meanwhile, the mast of the *AIT/Raypower* in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, was brought down on Wednesday by a heavy rainstorm, which swept through the capital city and communities around it.

The natural disaster, which lasted over 40 minutes, also blew off the roofs of some houses and destroyed billboards, signboards and electric poles.

The incident happened just two days after a heavy rainstorm destroyed the mast of the Bayelsa State Broadcasting Corporation, operators of the *Radio Bayelsa* in Yenagoa.

The *Radio Bayelsa* mast also hosted the transmitters of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's *Creek FM* and the *Nigerian Television Authority*.

Wednesday's incident resulted in the disruption of the operations of the *AIT/Raypower* as it went off air.

No life was lost to the incident.

The Head of News, *AIT/Raypower*, Yenagoa, Mr Theophilus Agidee, described the incident as shocking.

He said, "It came as a big shock to us. We didn't expect it. But these things happen. It was a natural disaster; one cannot blame anybody.

“But we really thank God that no life was lost. Instead of falling towards the building, the mast fell backwards to a bushy area, where there was nobody; we thank God for that.”