

Mokwa floods: A predictable tragedy unfolds

3rd June 2025



People look through debris from damaged buildings in Mokwa on June 1, 2025, after the town was hit by torrential rains overnight Wednesday into Thursday, with the flooding displacing more than 3,000 people. Search teams fanned out several kilometres from the epicentre of deadly flash flooding in Nigeria Saturday, the Red Cross said, as the death toll from heavy rains in the north-central market town of Mokwa topped 150. The sharp rise in the toll came as bodies were recovered nearly 10 kilometres (six miles) away from the town, where more than 250 buildings were levelled and two bridges were swept away, Ibrahim Audu Hussein, a spokesman for the Niger State Emergency Management Agency, told AFP. (Photo by Tonye BAKARE / AFP)

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THE latest flood disaster in Mokwa, Niger State, stands as a tragic reminder of the devastating impact of environmental and infrastructural neglect, and poor disaster preparedness compounded by climate change.

The flash floods, triggered by intense rainfall beginning early on May 28, have exacted a heavy human toll and left the Mokwa community grappling with trauma, loss, and uncertainty.

With confirmed deaths put at over 200, some estimates are suggesting the death toll could be significantly higher, up to 700, due to many victims being swept into the Niger River. Over 3,000 people have been displaced, more than 265 houses destroyed, and 503 households impacted. Critical infrastructure, including three bridges, was washed away, cutting off traffic between the northern and southern parts of the country.

Indeed, entire families have been wiped out, with survivors recounting harrowing losses. Farida Auwalu lost seven children and awaits the recovery of their bodies for proper burial. Mohammed Tanko said he lost at least 15 from his household. Bodies, clothing, and household items are still floating on the river as the grim task of recovery is underway.

Beyond fatalities, the floods have displaced thousands, destroyed homes and livelihoods, and disrupted the local economy.

Mokwa, a vital market and transit hub connecting northern food producers with southern traders, has seen significant damage to infrastructure and commerce, and many face homelessness, food insecurity, and the risk of disease outbreaks.

The official response has been predictably replete with lamentations, prayers for the deceased, and promises of help to victims, even as weather reports indicate even more rainfall in the affected area in the coming days.

Yet, several interlinked factors contributed to the severity of the flooding in Mokwa despite severe weather warnings by NiMET.

Experts point to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events in Nigeria because of climate change. This has led to heavier rainfall concentrated in shorter periods, making traditional drainage and flood management systems inadequate.

Many areas in Nigeria, including Mokwa, suffer from inadequate drainage infrastructure. Existing drainage channels are often clogged with waste, preventing proper water runoff. Rapid and unregulated urban expansion has led to construction in flood-prone zones, reducing the land's natural ability to absorb water.

The clearing of vegetation for agriculture and development has diminished the land's capacity to retain rainfall, increasing surface runoff and flood risk.

Some residents speculate that a dam burst or discharge from one of the three major dams in Niger State may have worsened the flooding, though officials have not confirmed this.

Notably, the Niger flooding incident occurred five months after Governor Mohammed Bago announced that the state had secured a \$10 million World Bank facility to arrest gully erosion in some parts of Mokwa.

This tragedy is the latest in a series of recurring flooding incidents which have taken many lives and resulted in the displacement of thousands of survivors.

Between August and September 2024, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States were devastated by flooding disasters, which plunged thousands of residents into humanitarian crises.

The flooding in Borno, which was caused by excessive rainwater and followed the collapse of the Alau Dam, claimed at least 150 lives, according to the National Emergency Management Agency.

The Borno flood displaced over 400,000 residents, and over 70 per cent of Maiduguri was inundated.

In Adamawa, overflowing local rivers swamped Numan and surrounding areas after continuous heavy rainfall. At least 49 people were killed, and thousands of others were displaced.

The International Organisation for Migration indicated that 361,919 individuals in 66,360 households across 16 local government areas were affected by the floods.

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A report by the Food Security Cluster noted that the Yobe flooding, which started in April and lasted till August, killed 29 people, injured 274 persons, and resulted in many collapsed buildings.

At least 88,901 individuals in 21,180 households were affected by the floods. Of these, at least 20,000 displaced persons across 17 LGAs of the state, the IOM noted.

Similarly, the 2022 floods, which occurred between May and October, led to the death of 612 people and the displacement of 1.4 million others, according to official figures.

The flooding, which affected 33 states across the country, was caused by heavy rainfall, the effects of climate change, and the release of water from the Lagdo Dam in neighbouring Cameroon.

One of the worst flooding disasters was that of 2012, in which 30 states were affected by the floods, especially Benue and Kogi States, according to NEMA. The floods killed 363 persons, displaced over 2.1 million people, and affected an estimated total of seven million people. NEMA placed the damage and losses caused by the floods at N2.5 trillion.

Regrettably, flood disasters have assumed a global dimension. According to ReliefWeb, the UN humanitarian coordination agency, climate change is provoking devastating floods worldwide. Yet this does not mitigate the tragedy in Niger, one of Nigeria's leading food-producing states.

ReliefWeb reported major flood disasters in Peru and Ecuador in January, Botswana in February, Tanzania, Bolivia, Iraq, Argentina in March, and the DR Congo in April.

May was pregnant with flood disasters. Floods have overrun parts of Kenya, Algeria, and Haiti. On May 28, melting glaciers wiped Blatten, a Swiss village of 300 residents, off the world map. In mitigation, geologists warned in 2024 that the ice was melting due to heat, which forced the Swiss authorities to evacuate Blatten.

In late May 2024, floods battered Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria in Germany, causing two deaths. The floods occurred after rain worth one month fell in one day, the German Meteorological Services said. Multiple rivers broke their banks in the two states. A train carrying 180 passengers derailed due to landslides.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia were also hit by devastating floods in 2024.

Despite these warnings, political leaders have yet to take decisive action on climate change.

In the meantime, Nigeria must improve its preparedness for flood disasters.

Evacuations matter greatly. Nigeria should learn from others. In 2024, Nysa in Poland saw 40,000 evacuations. 15 thousand people were evacuated along the Czech-Polish border in 2024, and over 10,000 people were evacuated in the Czech Republic.

The federal and state governments and the National Assembly should review the Derivation and Ecological Fund. It currently stands at 1.0 per cent of the Federation Account. It should be increased considering the projected impact of climate change.

A North-Central state governor was jailed because he tampered with the Fund. So, beyond that, the Fund, in the custody of the CBN, should be properly managed, unlike what obtained under previous administrations.

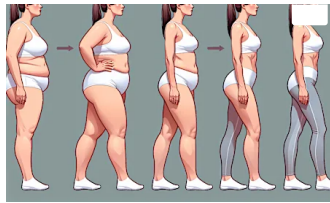
In September 2024, the Maiduguri flood disaster occurred after the Alau Dam collapsed. The dam was not maintained until it gave way. Therefore, the state and federal governments should take stock of the dams in Nigeria. After the audit, they should swiftly commence repairs.

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All tiers of government should sustain a campaign on the need to evacuate flood-prone communities. Many Nigerians are adamant about evacuation, sensing that the government will abandon them to their fate after they have been uprooted from their ancestral land.

Prevention is a better option. So, the disaster reminds states of the urgent need for well-planned cities, construction of drainage, waste management, and removal of physical structures blocking waterways.

Niger State should call for the support of international aid agencies and governments; the Federal Government should be in the forefront of coordinating the relief efforts by NEMA and other federal d agencies.