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Mudslide wipes out family of 8

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...I'm finished, says bricklayer, who lost inlaws, children, pregnant wife with twin babies

From JUDEX OKORO, Calabar

For Mr Amos Akaniyene, a native of Ikono in Akwa Ibom State, fate dealt a heavy blow on his family, Wednesday afternoon in Calabar, Cross River State. He will not forget the afternoon's mudslide that followed a downpour, in a hurry.

By the time the mudslide subsided, Akaniyene had lost his house and eight members of his family. The victims include his pregnant wife, Gloria, his mother-in-law, Mrs Ikwo Edet, his children, David, Emen (7), Ekaete (10), sister-in-law, Asuquo and the unborn twin babies his wife was carrying when the tragedy struck.

Recounting his ordeal, Akaniyene, 40, a bricklayer, said: "I am the victim. I returned from work on Wednesday afternoon and there was no problem. But when the rain started about 3pm, I tried to control the flood so that the water can pass through. But suddenly, I saw a kind of slide coming down from the top of the hill with a loud noise.

"It didn't even give us any chance. Within a minute, the slide collapsed on the house and consumed the entire family and eight persons died including my unborn twins. I have suffered in life. I suffered to buy the land, I suffered to build and I was still suffering to train my children when suddenly, this type of disaster came upon me again. I am finished in life without my entire family members.

"I wished my family had survived and the house collapsed. I would have thanked God very well. I only pray God to accept their souls and plead with the government to help me bury my family members as well as provide another house for me. For now, I am finished," he reiterated.

Shedding more light on how the catastrophe occurred, an eyewitness, who opted to remain anonymous, said Akaniyene family members were relaxing in the house located at the bottom of a burrow pit, off Uduak Obong Close, when suddenly, the mud started rolling down the hill side and

collapsed on the building and subsequently submerged the house. He said that at the time the incident happened, the head of the family, Amos who is said to be a brick-layer, was around trying to dig up the place to rescue some of the family members and relatives.

A neighbour, Mrs. Eno Akpan, in her account, also said, “we were just sitting outside discussing about the downpour when we suddenly saw trees rolling down from the top of the hill and within a twinkle of an eye, it collapsed on the building and buried the entire occupants. Well, at that time, there was nothing we could do because everybody started running away in confusion and we were hearing cries and shouting from those who were trapped. But by the time help came, the family was gone and only three were rescued.”

At the scene yesterday, people were trooping into the place to catch a glimpse of the building while a few good Samaritans were digging and bringing out some household property.

Also speaking, the Secretary-General of Edim Otop Welfare Association, Mr. Inyang Williams Effiong, 45, said “the welfare association has tried to assess the condition of our community and we have called the World Bank to come and help us.

“So, we were in the process before this incident. We have had meetings with residents and it was very positive. The World Bank has promised to assist us. But they said we should come up with a strategic plan on how to partner us. We have told them about the gully and the consequences on the community, their representatives were here three months ago and on July 31, 2013, we had a meeting with the entire community”, he said.

Effiong pleaded with the government to come to their rescue as well as encourage the World Bank to help. He said, “government should declare the place a disaster zone. But we don’t have any other inheritance. We bought that place despite the fact the erosion had been devastating here. We should be evacuated to another place and then work should be done there.”

Reacting to the tragedy, government official, who is a Director of Information, David Akate, said, “we have been talking to the community members over the years now to leave the place because it is not only a raving, but a flood-prone area, but they refused.”

Akate said the government has taken over the treatment of three survivors and they are responding, disclosing that the bodies of the victims have been deposited at the General Hospital mortuary. He advised the residents to vacate the place to avoid further disaster.

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