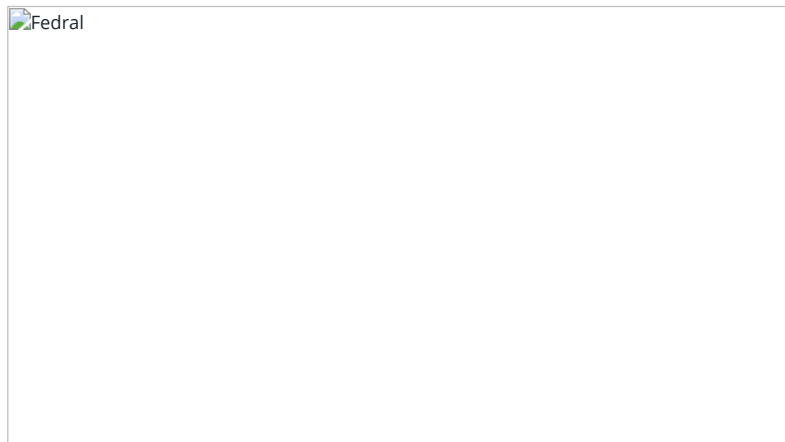


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TODAY'S EDITION



Anambra communities lament dearth of social amenities, death of natives

BY OUR REPORTER ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2015

ORIENTAL NEWS

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From Obinna Odogwu, Ekwulobia

For residents of Ndiukwuenu, **Okpeze and Amaetiti communities in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State, life has become hellish.**

This follow near absolute lack of basic amenities. The three communities are not happy that in the 21st Century, their people cannot boast of any functional health system, school, roads, electricity and other basic facilities that support life.

Their plight they said was one that has led to high death rate, infant and maternal mortality, crime and other social misdemeanours in their communities.

When Oriental News visited the communities recently, the residents could not hide their heartrending stories as most of them lamented over the lack of basic amenities that have made life miserable for them. Recounting their ordeal, the residents said that they walk or ride on bicycle for over 15 kilometres to Awgbu community to get treatment when they are ill, adding that sometimes some of them die on their way.

They cited a recent tragic death of a pregnant woman, Mrs Luisa Obiekwe, from Umuakata Village, Okpeze, who was buried with her unborn baby.

According to them, she was in labour and on her way to Awgbu community the vehicle got stuck on the road and as they were trying to push the out, the woman who was in intense labour and needed a caesarean operation gave up the battle and died.

The incident, the people said, was just one of the numerous in the area, which Dr Gabriel Ugochukwu Nweke, the Medical Director of Ugochukwu Medical Centre, Awgbu, confirmed.

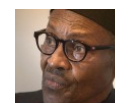
When Oriental News visited a health post in Amaetiti, which is in shambles, Mrs Blessing Azulu from

Umuegbue village, Amaetiti, was seen wailing over the death of her new born baby that morning.

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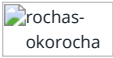
According to Miss Rita Nwankwo, a volunteer nurse working in the health post, they lacked some drugs that were supposed to be given to the new baby and on their way to Awgbu to get the drug the baby died. Hear her: "She was delivered of a baby boy successfully, but the baby was not strong; he could not cry and needed an injection that would save the situation. We moved to Awgbu for the baby to be injected but along the road, he gave up and we sorrowfully returned to Amaetiti. There is a drug I am supposed to give to the baby based on the condition but we don't have it and every effort to get it proved abortive and we lost the baby boy by 9:00a.m."

Ndiukwuenu community

Life in Ndiukwuenu community is better experienced than told. Oriental News checks showed that the community lacks every basic amenity, including a secondary school. Because there is no access road to it, a visitor from any part of the state would go through Ugwuoba community in Enugu State in order to branch off to Ndiukwuenu. In the town, the Central Primary School, Ozzu located in the outskirt has been deserted due to its level of dilapidation even as the pupils have been relocated to St. John's Catholic Church. The Chairman of Ozzu Village, Fidelis Chukwudi Nweke confirmed the relocation of the school. Oriental News gathered that the rafters of the school were removed for renovation by the council administration of Emeka Aforka but was allegedly abandoned in 2012. The President General of Ndiukwuenu, Hon. Chidozie Okoli alleged that Aforka abandoned the project which was roofed in 2014 by the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB), pointing out that over N12 million has been expended on the project without anything tangible showing in the place. Hon. Okoli also lamented that Governor Willie Obiano has abandoned the N10 billion road contract awarded by his predecessor. "Our road is inaccessible for several years and we were like an abandoned people but luckily former Governor Peter Obi remembered us and awarded a major road contract traversing all the communities from Amansea-Ndiukwuenu-Amaetiti-Awa-Ufuma to a South African contractor with their Nigerian counterpart, Stefanutti Stocks Hapel, at the tune of N10 billion. "The contracting firms were doing a good job, if not this road would be worse than what you met on the ground. Our governor, Chief Willie Obiano has abandoned the road tactically. But the problem is that the contractor has pulled out of site, stalling the road project. There is electricity but is epileptic. Our health centre and maternity is an eyesore. The government refused to take over the clinic we started building since 1964 although not completed because it is community effort. Many have lost their lives under emergencies, especially women in labour," he said. Also a retired civil servant from Ozzu village, Chief Anene Andrew Nwankwo lamented that the situation of the primary school has set the pupils backward, decrying also the socio-economic and infrastructural decay in the community. His words: "We have no infrastructure, no road, no secondary school, no health centre, nothing at all and we are desperately in need of infrastructure. Due to lack of access road, we can't evacuate our farm produce to the urban centres. Any pregnant woman in labour is in danger if it could not be handled here." The maternity in Ndiukwuenu which construction began in 1964 has been taken over by rodents, insects and reptiles just as its primary health centre could pass for a poultry house. When Oriental News visited the health centre, Blessing Udeh and her two assistants, were seen on duty and they are volunteer staff working in the place. According to them, they volunteered because of lack of job, hoping that they would be absorbed by the state government. The PHC, which is a three-room mud house with a thatch supporting beans apartment has no toilet facilities, making the workers to use the bush when pressed. The room serves as office, ward and labour room. But they have a super solar panel system working for 24 hours, which was donated by the National Primary Health Centre Development Agency, Abuja. However, Udeh told Oriental News that "we have a volunteer medical doctor, Dr Gabriel Ugochukwu Nweke that comes from Awgbu once there is need because he asked us to call him any moment issues went wrong or beyond us. "He is the medical director of Ugochukwu Medical Centre, Awgbu. Awgbu is 15 kilometers from here. We are doing everything here from immunization to child delivery, but this structure is dilapidated and lacking all requisites of a health centre. We need a standard structure and medical equipment. No crater, no toilet facilities, no water, no basic needs of a health facility at all here and we need staff. "Why should they not employ us having volunteered here for many years now? But there are two beds, and we have minimum of four deliveries in a month because of lack of facilities that made many to look for elsewhere before their delivery date. This is the only health centre around. You can see the windows and doors as well as ceilings



natives



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are failing off. We buy drugs but sometimes government will supply us some."

A patient, Mary Ideghi from Ebonyi State suffering from malaria was at the health centre when Oriental News visited and she said: "As far as I know the health centre is doing well and they attend to us very well even pregnant women for antenatal, but I am sure they need modern medical equipment to work with to be able to save lives because many lives have been lost to emergency situations."

According to Hon. Okoli, the Commissioner for Health, Hon Joe Akabuike had been written and met over the dilapidated state of the maternity and health centre but nothing came out of it.

He regretted that one Mrs Obiageli Nwafor from the community died after delivery because of bleeding and no road to take her to Awgbu or Awka for better attention.

Government reacts

The Anambra State government reacting condemned the situation of the school, saying that the school management committee ought to have brought it to its attention for action.

The government, therefore, ordered a probe into the deplorable situation of the primary school.

Speaking with Oriental News, the Chairman of the Anambra State Basic Education Board (ASUBEB), Sir Nzemeka Olisah blamed the school management committee set up for the school for failing to bring the situational report, assuring that a probe panel would immediately swing into action to unravel the true picture of what transpired.

"I will investigate this matter and get back to you. I am not happy to hear this and I blame the school management committee for this, but let me not conclude until I investigate the matter," he said. Efforts to speak with the Health Commissioner, Dr Joe Akabuike was not successful as at the time of filing this report as he was said to be in Abuja for a meeting.

But his spokesman, Prince Ikechukwu Kodilinye said that they may not have written to the present government of Governor Obiano, saying that his style is different from any other previous governors. He said the state government has ordered for re-certification of hospitals in the state as a measure to determine the status of each of them, disclosing that the director, Planning, Research and Statistics and the director, Medical Services are in the field already to ascertain the major problems in the hospital sector for them to know how to come in.

He said at the end, every community would be represented, adding that the Governor Obiano-led government was trying to evolve a world class health system in the state hence the efforts to ensure that every sector of the health system was standard.

Okpeze community

In Okpeze community also in Orumba North Local Government Area the story is not different.

The community comprising Ozegu, Umunkwo, Gbalagu, Umukata and Umuadabili villages has a modern hospital they built and handed over to the government, but this is not functional.

Also the Federal Primary Health Centre started since 2007 during former President Olusegun Obasanjo's era has been abandoned.

An old woman, Priscilla Nwafor from Umuadabili told Oriental News that child delivery in the area was still a nightmare.

Another native, Chief Ifeanyichukwu Okeke from Ozegu village noted that "we are in pains; we have a hospital that is not functional. We have a health centre inaugurated by the Orumba North Local Government after we built and handed over, but nothing is happening there. Now, anybody that is sick must be taken to Awgbu or Awa for attention as the one in our neighbouring Ndiukwuenu is nothing to write home about. We have a nurse there but she is idle. There are no drugs in that health centre not even Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT); a riverine community at that."

Also speaking, Dr Gabriel Ugochukwu Nweke, a native and medical director, Ugochukwu Medical Centre, Awgbu threw more light on the plight of the people.

Hear him: "This community is in need of infrastructure and you won't believe it hosts the largest forest reserve in this part of the world if not beyond, yet there is nothing to show for it. The reserve has been on since 1939 or thereabout. Former Governor Peter Obi gave us road but it has been abandoned by the contractor and we are asking Governor Willie Obiano to intervene for the contractor to return to site. Obi also gave us water but it was not reticulated and we are hoping it would be done this time around.

"There is a Federal Health Centre initiated during the tenure of former President Olusegun Obasanjo but it was abandoned since 2007 Obasanjo left office. It is despicable. Since the foreign company stopped work, vehicles hardly access Okpeze unless on a sunny day. We access this community by Okada and that is why

nobody is at the markets you are seeing because customers could not come and if you carry your farm produce to them, they almost take it from you for free as the price they would bargain would be meaningless."