

5,000 persons displaced in Niger communities



• State government and NSEMA Officials on the spot assessment of flood affected communities.

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persons. Apart from residential homes, private and public organizations including government agencies did not escape the fury of the flood.

The multi-million naira Sunti Rice and Sugarcane Farms belonging to the Nigeria Flour Mills Plc, was completely washed away by a heavy downpour in Mokwa Local Government Area. The 900-hectare of rice and sugarcane farm located on the Bida-Mokwa Road acquired by the company in 2011 lost about 500 hectares of its farmland with farm produce estimated at over N300 million swept away by the flood after three days of rainfall.

Aside the farmland, the company's heavy duty equipment such as bulldozers, pay-loaders and excavators were also submerged, while drainage channels, irrigation pumping stations and internal road networks among others were also swept away by the three-day downpour.

This came barely four days after the rains washed away a bridge on the Minna-Bida Road, leaving hundreds of commuters stranded for days. It also led to two boat mishaps with no fewer than 13 persons killed at Kontagora and Agwara rivers.

Reports said the Kontagora River, a tributary of River Niger had over flowed its banks following a heavy downpour the previous night which raised the water level.

It was learnt that the accident in Kontagora occurred when the villagers numbering 17, were going to the farm to harvest groundnuts. While six of the passengers were rescued by local divers, the remaining 11 including a married woman and teenage girls were said to have perished.

Director General, Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), Mallam Ahmed Ibrahim Inga, who confirmed the mishap to Daily Sun said: "There was rain upstream and the travelers did not know that more water was coming."

Two females also lost their lives in a related incident which occurred when the boat in which they were travelling to a nearby community capsized on Agwara River in Agwara Local Government Area.

Before the recent flood disaster, a heavy downpour, which lasted eight hours, killed four persons while about 23 villages and several farmlands were overrun by flood in some communities in Lapai Local Government Area. Communities affected included, Cheku, Lambata kwan, Cheppa, Alaba, Bina and Muye. Others were Ebbo,



• Governor Bello (in front) during his visit to some of the affected communities.

Egba, Gagbe, Tanna and Bazhi.

Edati, Mokwa, Katcha and Bida, are among the local government areas where communities were ravaged by the recent flood. Also affected were, Lapai, Shiroro, Muyan, Gurara, Layun, Wushishi, and Borgu councils.

Worried by this development, Governor Abubakar Sani Bello directed residents of over 250 communities sacked by flood along the River Niger and its tributaries to be evacuated and resettled upland as a temporary measure.

He mandated NSEMA to ensure that the affected communities are taken to safe haven following reports that the water level would continue to rise as the rain intensified.

Addressing victims in some of the communities visited for an on-the-spot assessment, the governor gave assurance that government would provide them with basic needs and drugs as well as food and other relief materials to cushion the effects of the disaster and checkmate an outbreak of epidemic.

Bello further directed relevant authorities saddled with the relocation exercise to ensure immediate compliance, warning that he will deal decisively with any act of laxity or non-compliance. While promising that government would initiate a lasting solution to the perennial flooding, the

governor appealed to the Federal Government for quick intervention to address the ecological challenges faced by communities in the state:

"The solution to the ecological devastation is beyond the state government. I have spoken to the President about our challenges and the need for Federal Government intervention. I am still going to reach out to the Federal Government for intervention in tackling any future re-occurrence.

"However, as a government, we sympathize with the communities and we will give our support despite the lean resources of the state to reduce the hardship of our people. The State Emergency Management Agency will come to the aid of the affected people."

The disaster, the governor noted, had further brought to the fore, the need for immediate take-off of the Hydro-electric Power Producing Area Development Commission (HYPPADEC), to provide a holistic solution to the perennial ecological problems facing the state.

Spokesperson of one of the communities, Mallam Hassan Umar, the Sonfada of Ketso village, appreciated Bello's visit and said it had reassured the people that the government was not only responsive, but also responsible. He assured the governor of their resolve to cooperate with government at relocating them upland.