

Wicked flood sweeps away 5 schoolchildren in Enugu

•Residents lament as govt offers intervention

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From **Magnus Eze**, Enugu

Several communities in Nkanuland, comprising the Enugu East Senatorial District of Enugu State, have suffered the pangs of the heavy rains since the month of August began. The ensuing devastation was such that some communities were separated from their kin, following the collapse and washing away of wooden bridges that connected them.

Farmlands and livestock were submerged, even as some lives were lost. The most sorrowful was the drowning of five schoolchildren while they tried crossing the Ogbafu makeshift bridge at Aguiduma-Aniyi Amagunze Community in Nkanu East Local Government Area of the state.

The incident, which occurred on the Ogbafu River as the children were returning from school on Friday, August 13, 2021, has thrown the whole community into mourning. Consequently, the community sent an SOS letter to Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi for urgent intervention on the collapsed wooden bridge.

In the letter, dated August 19, 2021, signed by Chief Hyacinth Obisi and Nweke Uchenna, chairman and secretary, respectively, the community lamented that they had been cut off from other communities in the area by the collapse of the bridge.

They said: "Sir, with a sorrowful heart, we wish to inform you that we have no access road and the wooden bridge constructed by our community to enable us access our country home and interact with our neighbouring communities has been swept off by flood on the 13/08/2021.

"Your Excellency Sir, recall that on the 12th day of August, 2015, we lost five of our beloved children (students coming back from school) to flood on the same Ogbafu Bridge, which links Aguiduma-Aniyi Amagunze to other neighbouring communities in Enugu State."

They regretted that schoolchildren were no longer going to school because they could not swim across the Ogbafu River, the only access point to the community.

In a similar stroke of fate, flood had on August 12 swept away the bridge constructed by Amuzam people in Umunevo Amagunze with which they accessed their homes. The said bridge linked the community with other communities in Amagunze.

A community leader, Ozor Francis Nnamani, who spoke to Daily Sun on the plight of his people, said: "Right now, the villagers are in dilemma as there is no way their people can go to Community Secondary School, Amagunze, and even to attend Eke Market. In a similar way, there is no alternative route with which they can visit their kindred living in other parts of Amagunze. They are, therefore, crying out and beckoning for assistance from government and other relevant agencies."

The situation appeared more terrible in Eziamma community, in Amechi-Idodo, Nkanu East, where more than 5,000 people, men, women and children, have been cut off from the rest of the state due to the heavy rains that caused the Idodo River to overflow its banks. The flooding damaged an estimated 4,000 hectares of farmland and destroyed crops that were the people's primary source of food. Worse still, catastrophic floods frequently disrupt inhabitants' everyday commute in the hamlet and neighbouring communities such as Iyonu, Amagunze and Ezza.

Chief Jerry Ngene said teachers and students were not left out, noting that students from the community usually fall behind their peers in examinations that decide advancement to higher classes as was witnessed that day.

"This has been the scenario for decades, a condition so deplorable that villagers travelling to the Afor Market or out for any other reason have to enlist the help of young men who are masters at swimming and enabling people to cross the river for a small fee," he lamented.

Residents of Eziamma Amechi-Idodo, Amagunze and Iyonu communities, as well as motorists and motorcyclists plying the Amagunze-Amechi Idodo Road, who spoke about the flooding, urged the Nkanu East LGA chairman, Uchenna Nwobodo, Gov. Ugwuanyi and the emergency management agencies to come to their aid.

This is as those engaged in fishery whose fish farms have been washed away are also seeking assistance.

Enugu govt, NEMA offer hope

Gov. Ugwuanyi used the occasion of the kick-off of the 5.4-kilometre Amagunze Road being funded by an illustrious son of the area, Evaristus Nnaji, popularly known as Odengene, to announce that his administration would fix the bridge across the river linking Amagunze-Amechi Idodo-Oruku, in Nkanu East.

He stressed that his administration was committed to the development of rural areas and he had not left any stone unturned in changing the fortunes of rural dwellers.

Chairman of Nkanu East LGA, Nwobodo, had disclosed that the governor, upon getting information about what happened to the bridge, dispatched him and a team of engineers to the site to ascertain the true situation for necessary action.

Nwobodo informed the governor that the team had inspected the bridge, expressing confidence that, true to Gov. Ugwuanyi's character of keeping to his word, he would intervene accordingly.

"Your Excellency, your goodness to our people is immeasurable. We remember when Nkerefi and Amechi Idodo roads were impassable. You also came to our aid in fixing the bridge that connects Nara community. Our people are very grateful," he said.

Meanwhile, special adviser to the governor on agriculture, Mike Ogbuekwe, last week, led a team of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Enugu State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to assess the flooding that ravaged farmlands and fish ponds in Amaechi-Idodo.

Zonal coordinator of NEMA, Major James Eze, led his team, while his SEMA counterpart, Mrs. Chinasa Mba led her own team.

Speaking, the traditional ruler of Amechi Idodo, Igwe Edeani, asked for support to end the perennial flood, which had taken over the whole community and destroyed roads, homes, farmland, crops and fish farms.

During the team's visit to a fish farm cooperative cluster in Amechi Idodo, their chairman also asked for support to help them cushion the effects of the losses.

Ogbuekwe told community leaders and other stakeholders that their mission was to ascertain the extent of damage done by the flood, assuring them that their report would be forwarded to the Federal Government to send relief materials and support to the affected farmers in the locality.