



Features

FEATURES EDITOR: ROLAND OGBONNAYA

'I Can't Believe My Two Kids Disappeared'

After three days of heavy downpour in Calabar, Cross River State, many families are counting their losses, including a woman whose two children were swept to death by the flood.

Ernest Chinwo
writes

Saturday June 22, started like any other day in the metropolis. Quiet, bright and sunny. Residents were going about their chores with the grace that is characteristic of the tourism destination of Nigeria. But at about noon, the cloud changed and the rains began to pour as if the heavens were angry with the city and its dwellers. The rainfall which lasted for about five hours surprised residents in terms of deaths, destruction and the disruption of the quietness of the city.

One of families that lost their children in the flood include Mr. and Mrs. Sunday Jerome. Their two children Blessing and Joseph were swept away by the flood, while assisting their mother in domestic chores. According to the 28-year old mother of Blessing and Joseph, Patience, the kids were assisting her to collect rain water on the Saturday afternoon when they were swept away by flood that over ran their compound at No. 2, Ikot Uduak, close to the Parliamentary Village, Calabar.

"My husband, Mr. Sunday Jerome, a carpenter had gone to work when the rain started at about 3 pm. I called the children to assist me fetch rain water. They were collecting the water from the gutter created on the roof of the building while I was filling the drums inside. I went to the back of the house where our room is to pour water into the drum. When I came back I did not see any of them but when I asked their three-year old brother, Samuel where they had gone he said water had carried the sister," said Mrs. Jerome in tears.

She said a frantic search was organised for the kids, but they could not be found that day as the flood had carried them far into the big gully some yards away. She said the body of the boy was found on Sunday while that of the girl was found two days later on Monday after the body had become bloated.

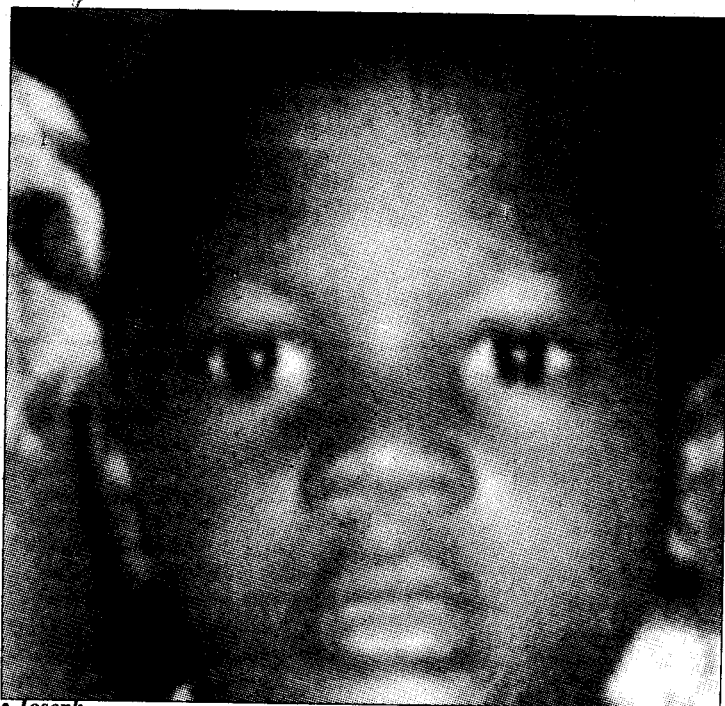
She believes one of the children may have slipped and perhaps in the process of trying to save the other both of them ended up in the gutter and were both carried away by the flood. "My life is over. I finding it hard to believe that my two kids had disappeared just like that," she moaned.

According to her, the children were pupils of Ishie Presbyterian Primary School before their lives were cut short by the flood. The bodies of the children had since been buried at the Ikot Ansa Cemetery, she said.

The past three weeks have not been the best of times for most residents of Calabar, the Cross River State capital, following heavy rains that left in its trail death and destruction of properties worth millions of Naira. At the last count, at least four persons have lost their lives in the flood which ravaged the city, widely acclaimed to be the cleanest and safest in the country.

Areas worst hit by the flood included parts of the Murtala Mohammed Highway, MCC Road, Ndidem Usang Iso (Marian) Road, Mary Slessor Avenue, IBB Road, and Target Road, as well as most parts of Calabar South Local Government Area.

When THISDAY went round the city during the heavy downpour, it was observed that water



• Joseph



• Blessing

overflowed the major drainage canal that runs through most parts of the Metropolis, causing the flooding of the adjoining roads and streets.

Many vehicles that could not withstand the effects of the flood broke down and littered most of the streets in the city. At Ibom Close, the rain overran a residential building, flooding about eight vehicles parked in the premise. The flood also fell the perimeter fence and damaged household properties at the residence of the Catholic Archbishop of Calabar, Most. Rev. Joseph Ukpo, at Bishop Moynagh Avenue, State Housing Estate. It also damaged the fence of the Governor's Office Calabar as well as the fence of the State House of Assembly members' quarters at Ekorinim.

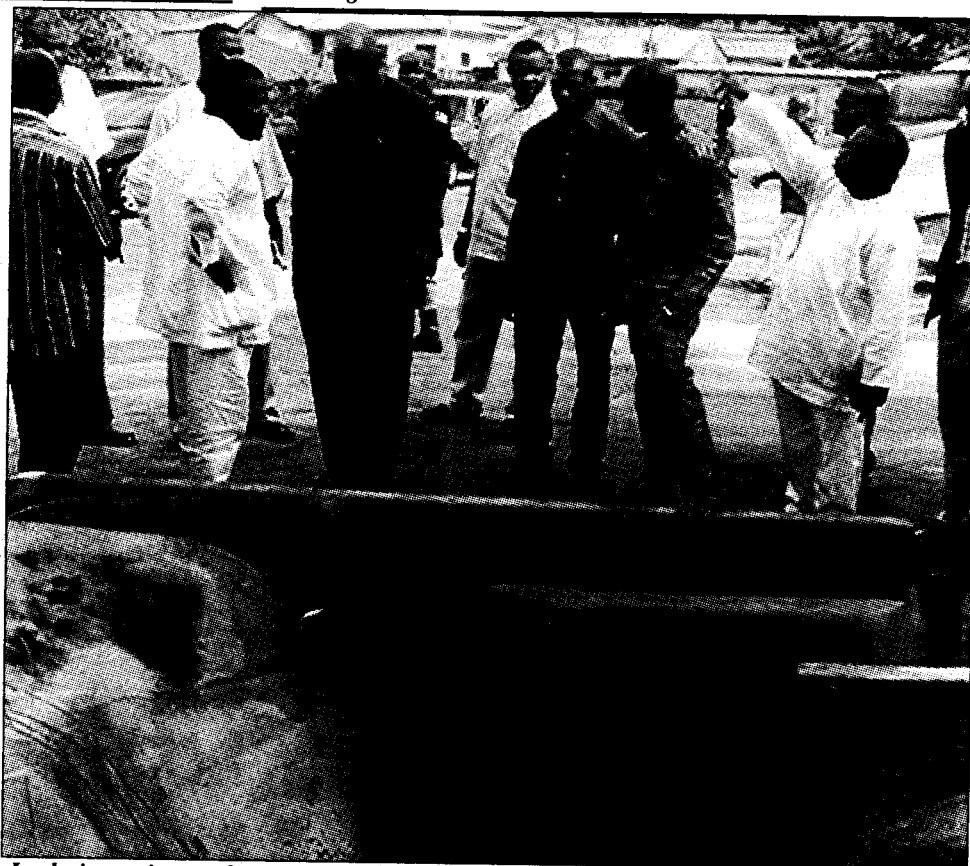
At Calabar South where most of the roads are bad, many households had only tales of woe to tell as their residences were rendered uninhabitable and their property destroyed. However, the most devastating aspect of the flood was the death of two and a half years old Anaikorishor Ogbohor. Little Ogbohor drowned when their residence at 15 Iso Oqua Street was overrun by flood.

The death of Anaikorishor Ogbohor brings to four the death toll from floods in Calabar in less than two weeks. Penultimate Saturday, three children were also drowned in the floods occasioned by heavy rains in the Calabar metropolis. Two of them, Blessing and Joseph Sunday, aged five and seven years respectively and from the same parents, died at Ikot Uduak area of the metropolis when they were swept into a ravine by flood. The third victim was also swept away by strong flood currents at Beebosco/Murtala Mohammed Highway junction.

Worried by the development, Governor Liyel Imoke on Sunday visited the family of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Ogbohor and consoled them over the loss of their son, Anaikorishor in the Saturday flood. Imoke also visited the residence of Bishop Ukpo, the State House of Assembly quarters, Ekorinim and other areas affected by the flood. He expressed shock at the deaths and havoc caused by the flood and promised that the state government would work out modalities to tackle the perennial flooding of the Metropolis during rainfall.

He said the government would widen the gutters and also strengthen the canals running through the metropolis to ensure uninterrupted flow of water to designated points. He however frowned at the habit of residents who dump refuse into the drains, obstructing free flow of water as well as where de-silted drains are not cleared.

He disclosed that government would soon enact a proper legislation to back up its policy to keep Calabar neat and tidy. He ordered immediate and compulsory sanitation exercise in the city to check a reoccurrence of the incident and declared Tuesday, July 11, as special and compulsory sanitation days by



• Imoke inspecting a culvert washed away by flood

residents of the Metropolis and agencies charged with sanitation.

The Governor also set up Special Sanitation Task Force (SSTF) to ensure that residents obey all sanitation laws and rules in the state. He also mandated the Ministry of Environment and Calabar Urban Development Authority (CUDA) to ensure that the incidence of flooding of identified areas in the city were checked.

The Commissioner for Works, Mr. Edward Ogon, who accompanied the Governor on the tour, disclosed that a flood maintenance unit would be established in the ministry, while all blocked drains would be cleared because during the course of the assessment, it was evident that disasters were recorded within areas with blocked drains.

The Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Tom Agi also said though rain is a natural occurrence, one should pray that the accompanying flood should not happen again because of its sad experience as well as its attending economic problems. Agi noted that the clearing of drains was one major challenge of maintaining the tempo of keeping Calabar as the cleanest city in Nigeria. He said that the ministry had commenced a major exercise to clear the metropolis.

He said the framework would be maintained and sustained for the state to achieve its goals as all stakeholders involved in the exercise were working towards attaining an excellent result. The Chairman of CUDA, Mr. Gabriel Egari, corroborated the views of the commissioners and said they would work with determination to keep the city clean and reduce the incidence of flood whenever it rains.

When THISDAY went round the city, Wednesday, residents were seen clearing the drains around their houses while officials of the Special Task force, CUDA and the Ministry of Environment were clearing refuse from refuse dumps and the major drainage canal that runs through most parts of the City. The sanitary condition of the city acclaimed to be the cleanest in the country has in recent times been a source of concern to the state Government which has not been satisfied with the changing status of the metropolis.

Refuse dumps and blocked drainages, which had been alien to the city, have in recent times been gradually returning to the city and both residents and the new Cross River State government has expressed dissatisfaction with the trend. While the Government had commenced remedial work on blocked drains, residents of the metropolis only wish that the flood incidents will not happen again.