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By Samuel Oyadonga

Posted to the Web: Tuesday, August 28, 2007

YENAGOA—The problem of flood has been a part and parcel of life for the people occupying the geographical entity known as Bayelsa state for years.

However, the people have been disturbed lately by this awesome power of nature which has claimed lives and property as well as destabilizing villages and towns in the some parts of the country.

For a state with the longest coastline in the country, measuring approximately 800 miles and lying below sea level, the fear of the people is understandable as it has suffered far more reaching losses to life and property in the past than one could ordinarily imagine. It is on record that it's landmass on the Atlantic fringe is being swallowed up gradually by the surging ocean.

While it's semi-diurnal tidal regime ensures two tidal floods and two low ebb tides within the course of each day, wave action along the coastline results in both depletion and loss of sediments in the beaches. A classical example of this is Koluama I and Koluama II where the offshore facility operated by Chevron was once on land but is now an offshore well.

Also, some of its riverine settlements such as Peretorugbene, Algbere, Ofoni, Ayamasa, Sabagriea, Igbedi, Adagbabiri, Famgbe, Ogu, Fortorugbene, Agbura, Aguadama-Epetiama, Oporoma, Ndoro, Tombia, Sagbama, Peremabiri, Elemebiri, and Asamabiri Agalabiri among others are on the verge of being washed away by marine erosion if urgent remedial steps are not taken to tackle this yearly menace.

Although this year, the flood is yet to reach its peak, residents in

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the riverine enclave of the state are already apprehensive of a likely deluge as the month of September approaches when the rivers often overflow their banks.

This reporter, who went round some of the riverine settlements of Amassoma, Tombia, Gbarantoru, Sagbama, Sabagriea, Opokuma, Kaiama and Odi among others that could be accessed by road, observed that the greatest single problem in the physical environment of these communities is that posed by water.

The very low elevations, decreasing to below sea level in some parts of the state brings about an annual ritual of flooding in which the rivers overrun their banks and floodwaters spread submerging entire settlements.

In all the communities, residential and public buildings including schools, churches town and community halls are often submerged by flood at the peak of the rainy season between the ember months of September and October leaving in its trails pain and sorrow to the locals as they are forced to flee their homes abandoning their economic means of livelihood.

The situation is, to say the least, pathetic as several thousands of people are usually rendered homeless and compelled to relocate to neighbouring upland communities in search of shelter.

Investigations revealed that the hardest hit segments of the population during this period of the year are not the fishermen and the conventional formal occupations but the farmers, palm wine tapers, and distillers.

In some cases, the entire yearly harvest of the farmers such as cassava, sugar cane, yams plantain, rice and other perishable farm produce are lost to the flood leading to a sharp increase in the prices of these products during the dry season due to absence of modern storage facilities.

Lamenting the plight of the people, an indigene of Sabagriea, Mr. Seyeifa Uzaka noted with concern the speed at which the water level is rising this year warning that this could spell disaster for communities along the waterways considering the situation in other parts of the country especially in the north.

Mr. Uzaka was particularly worried that if the dams in the northern parts were eventually opened to control the flood in the northern part, then the communities in the state along the route of the River Niger and its tributaries would suffer greater ecological crisis.

“The economic frustration, loss of lives and property in submerged communities and farmlands is one of the major source of anguish and despair in the area,” he lamented adding “As you can see,” pointing towards the usually busy waterfront, “the entire area is deserted not because of anything but it might interest you to know that here our people are racing against time in anticipation of the September flood. Unlike other times when there are sacred days people don’t go to farm the reverse is the case today as the people are on a daily basis going to their farmland to harvest their crops so

as to avert the resultant losses that often accompany the deluge.”

He further noted with sadness that sometimes during the peak period of the flood season, some sections of the community are submerged destroying life long acquisition and industry that gives the inhabitants economic means of livelihood.

In some areas of Ekeremor, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and fishing ports in Nembe and Brass, close to the sea, some of the inhabitants are forced to flee their homes to distant upland areas from the riverbanks, creeks and waterways.

state government embark on land reclamation, shore protection, sand filling and canalization.

This projects, though capital intensive may appear insurmountable but the benefits derivable far outweigh the financial implication. Communities such as Otuokpoti in Ogbia local government and Sagbama headquarters of Sagbama council area could have been lost communities today but for the shore protection device put in place some 27years ago by the then Chief Melford Okilo administration when Bayelsa was part of the old Rivers State.

This problem of flooding is not limited to the communities in the riverine areas alone as residents of Yenagoa the state capital are also subjected to the harrowing experience of battling flood whenever there is heavy downpour because of the poor drainage system. This situation is further compounded by the illegal erection of structures along the right of way of the natural canals, some of which residents have since converted to dump sites.

During this period, many residents in the low land parts of the state are seen scooping water from their homes with some of the streets not accessible thereby forcing the people to construct makeshift wooden bridges to link their abodes. While those that owned cars abandon them along the few tarred roads at the mercies of thieves.

The problem notwithstanding, it is the general consensus of analysts that, with the required political will and proper planning, the perennial menace of flooding could be tamed in the state, as there is no problem without a solution.

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