

Residents paddle canoe as flood cuts -off East-West Road

- 1 dead as bus driver, passengers plunge into river in Delta
- Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom axis under siege; bridge under threat

By Emma Amaize, Regional Editor, South-South, Akpokona Omafuaire, Chioma Onuegbu, Emem Idio and Ochuko Akuopha

THE ravaging flood in the country has submerged and cut off about 12 segments on the East-West Road linking the six states of the South-South region, forcing some residents in Delta state to paddle canoes across the expressway, yesterday.

Flood also drowned a middle-aged woman, learned to be a post-graduate student of the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port-Harcourt, commuting to start her examination, and dangerously threatened to collapse the Umeh Bridge in Delta State.

It commandeered all the sections of the East-West Road in Akwa-Ibom state, while the overflow plunged a commercial bus driver plying the Ughelli-Port-Harcourt section, and his passengers, into a river at Umeh Junction in Delta state.

Passengers traveling to parts of the region and Southeast region through Bayelsa and Port-Harcourt in Rivers state have found it difficult to access their destinations, in the last few days.

The surging flood inundated the road at Okogbe, Ahoada West local government area, Rivers State, immediately after the Mbiama Bridge.

A clerk in one of the transport companies, Miss Joy Saviour, said the company had to refund the passengers when the driver on the first trip, yesterday, got to a snowed-under spot and could not continue the journey to Uyo, Akwa Ibom state.

She said they informed them that there was a diversion.

However, a commuter traveling to Owerri from Yenagoa, Mr. Uchenna, told Saturday Vanguard that on getting to the spot, he boarded a tipper truck that managed to navigate the spot and continued his journey.

A commercial vehicle driver, Patrick, who plied the road, on Thursday, said: "The only remaining portion of the road that was still motorable after the washing off of some parts at Okogbe axis finally cut off in the early hours

of Friday."

"I came in from Port Harcourt on Thursday and as at the time we passed the Okogbe bad spot, we were still managing a small portion that was hanging after other parts of the road have been washed off.

"Only this morning (Friday morning), we heard that the small portion has finally cut off. Now, I cannot go back, I must remain here till the flood recedes because as it is, it is only trucks that can cross the spot."

A couple traveling to the East said the overflow of the road by flood forced them to cancel their journey.

The post-graduate student allegedly drowned because of the impact of the heavy current while she was trekking across the Okogbe-Ahoada axis of East-West Road from Yenagoa to Port Harcourt.

She was returning to the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port-Harcourt, to write her examination, scheduled to start, yesterday, when the tragedy occurred.

An eyewitness said: "The commercial bus she boarded dropped their passengers to cross the flood-ravaged section on foot but the surging flood swept her off her feet, as other pedestrians in her company scampered for safety."

"Some persons tried unsuccessfully to pull her out of the heavy current flowing southwards into the mangrove forest," the source said.

Meanwhile, truck and trailer drivers made brisk business ferrying passengers across the overtaken spots, charging as high N3, 000 from Mbiama to Choba and N1, 000 to cross the troubled 1-km stretch of the East-West Road, threatening to cave in as the turbulent flood escalates.

Flood took over all the sections of the East-West Road in Akwa-Ibom state. Residents, who spoke to our reporter, expressed worry that the stretch of the road in the state was poorly finished and could disintegrate within a short period.

Abandonment of the Oron-Calabar section of the East-West Road has remained a source of concern to the people of the state, over the years.

Commuters traveling from the Ikot Abasi local government axis to Eleme in Port Harcourt, yesterday, lamented the bad portions



on the Eleme axis.

Residents were displeased with the construction of a by-pass on the Eket Local government axis, which many stakeholders had severally condemned, saying it was a diversion from the original design of the Road.

At the weekend, a commercial bus plying the Ughelli-Port-Harcourt section of the East-West Road, forced to lose control by flood,

under by flood.

At about 3.00 pm, the other lane, after Umeh, have been cut off as the water level on it continued to rise ceaselessly.

Residents displaced from their homes by flood at Uwheru and Ohoro have moved to the pavements on the expressway with some of them peeling cassava they salvaged from their flood-laden farmlands.

A Warri-Port-Harcourt, transporter Mr. Choke Menkiti, described the situation as terrible and devastating, warning that the flood poses a critical threat to the lives of those plying the expressway.

Menkiti said: "Yesterday (Thursday), I tried to cross the road to Port-Harcourt. At Umeh, there were many vehicles; you cannot go and you cannot come. I managed to cross and on getting to Mbiama in Bayelsa State and going further, You cannot go, you cannot come because the force and pressure of the water is just too much."

"Even if you try to put in your vehicle, you may drive it into a pit because the place is not organized; there is nobody is controlling the vehicles. As we speak, almost about eight places are cut off and it is still cutting and cutting."

"My advice to people is that they should stop plying the road for now because the water level keeps increasing, so many people do not know. When you drive down, you cannot even do a U-turn and it traps you."

"Look at my Siena there, when I was coming back I tried to maneuver. Some part of the other side is a bit dried, but it is blocked. If you try to do a U-turn, you will fall into a pit. As of yesterday, two trailers and a bus have fallen into some pits."

Another resident of Ohoro, Mr. Kelvin Igbo, said: "The flood is too much; all our houses have been flooded. We decided to move to the road because we have nowhere else to stay."

"As we speak now, this road is as it is now, everywhere is blocked at Umeh. It is difficult for people to get there from here and it is difficult to get here from there," he said.

On the threatened Umeh Bridge, an indigene, who preferred anonymity, said the flood was washing away some of the major pillars underneath the bridge.

The Regent Odio-Ologbo of Irri Kingdom, HRM Joseph Akokohor Aghagba, said the problem has compounded the suffering of the people in an already difficult time, economically and socially.

The monarch, in a statement, said: "It was so furious in the past week leaving us marooned. Though not as furious today (yesterday), it is still gradually spreading and causing havoc."

"As a result, no vehicular movement in/out of Irri Town, and thus other satellite Irri communities, as well as other Isoko kingdoms like Aviara, Uzere, Oyede, Okpe, and Ndokwa kingdoms.

"The outcome of this challenge is massive for individuals, communities, states, and at the national level.

"One wonders whether this could not have been anticipated over the years, and some form of mitigation put in place; as this cannot be truly accepted as a natural disaster," he said.