

## Coastal Erosion Threatens Livelihood of Three Communities in Bayelsa State



Whenever environmental issues being faced by communities in Bayelsa State are reported in the dailies, the first and probably the only challenge that comes to mind is environmental pollution occasioned by many years of crude oil exploration and exploitation activities. But today, many villages and communities in the State are becoming more worried about coastal erosion and flooding.

In recent years, in many coastal communities, people have lost or abandoned their houses, while farming and other land activities have been paused due to effects of perennial flooding and erosion. Their ancestral lands are rapidly giving way. Coastal erosion and flooding are two disasters confronting the major communities in Bayelsa State. Bayelsa state is bounded in the south by the Atlantic Ocean which has been day to day impacting the shoreline causing either deposition or erosion depending on how the shoreline has been structured towards the ocean. The State is divided by rivers, streams and creeks which are channels of transportation to the riverine communities where there are no motorable roads. The environment in Bayelsa is characterized by activities of tides, current and waves which are major contributors to environmental changes.

The whole of Bayelsa State is surrounded by water, there is no locality in Bayelsa State where streams, creeks could not be seen. It should however be pointed out that coastal erosion and flooding are also caused by rainfall, river discharge and human activities but the non-existence of necessary infrastructures to mitigate against the impact of these two destructive disasters has increased the occurrence and resultant effects on the communities in Bayelsa.

Akipelai, Ayakoro and Otuoke are some of the coastal communities in Bayelsa and close to the state capital, Yenegoa. These communities are not new to coastal erosion and the associated landslide has been destroying houses and properties annually. The residents of these communities whose houses are close to the riverbank in most cases during the raining season start to dismantle their buildings in preparation for relocation. The constant impact of destructive erosion led to the agitations of the people of the communities of Akipelai, Ayakoro and Otuoke which led to the Nigerian Port Authority awarding a contract as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility on 22nd March 2012.

The contract was for the Shore Erosion Control Works at Akipelai, Ayakoro and Otuoke towns in Bayelsa State. The shore erosion control project was awarded at a contract sum of ₦7.5 billion with 14 months completion period. According to the 2017 Audit Report of the Federation, a payment of ₦4.2 billion was made in 2015

representing 56.61% of the contract sum that had been paid to the contractor. According to the 2017 audit report, during physical inspection of the project, it was revealed that the contractor had since abandoned the project site; and the duration of the project had since lapsed without approval for its extension. Through this act the Nigerian Ports Authority has shown no concern or taken any significant measures to recover this unaccounted sum from the contractor which implies expenditure inefficiency on the part of government and loss of benefits to communities where the project was meant to be implemented.

This act of corruption contravenes Financial Regulations 224 and 230 (2009) which provides that all services rendered by government must be paid for immediately on completion of the service and where possible, payment may be made in advance; and where payment is outstanding, a system of follow-up by means of reminders and final demand should be made.

Paradigm Leadership Support Initiative (PLSI) through its Value for Money advocacy project embarked on independent findings after analyzing and simplifying the 2017 Audit Report. Value for Money reporters visited the project site on 31st March 2020 to verify the status of the project as highlighted in the 2017 Audit Report of the Federation. It was discovered that the project for Shore Erosion Control Works was indeed planned to cover three communities in Bayelsa State - Ayakoro, Akipelai and Otuoke. The project would have positively impacted the three communities as most houses are built close to the riverbank.

Young people in these communities complained about the abandoned project and the effects of flooding on their communities. One of the youth representatives who identified himself as Mr. LoveGod Daniel told our reporters that the contractor installed a signage of the project only to come back months later to remove it. Mr. LoveGod further said that nothing happened since the project signage was installed and removed. Also, a community Leader Lucky Ekalemo stated that the project was a good initiative which was supposed to serve the three communities effectively but was unfortunately abandoned. The project was originally planned to keep Ayakoro community safe from persisting erosion menace affecting the community. For instance, one of the government schools (Government Craft Development, Ayakoro) is almost washed off due to its proximity to the riverbank.

Value for Money team held a community engagement meeting with residents of the three communities on 19th August 2020 with all stakeholder groups duly represented. Participants disclosed that the contractors are “Bayelsans” (indigenes of the state) and by that should even be more accountable. About 30,000 (15,000 in Ayakoro, over 5000 in Akipelai and more than 7,000 in Otuoke) residents of these underserved communities are being exposed to flooding and shoreline washed away by erosion.

## Recommendations

- Immediate recovery of the unaccounted sum from the contractor and prosecution of the contractor by Anti-Corruption Agencies.
- Enforce Financial Regulation 3117: There is the need for immediate implementation and enforcement of the Financial Regulation 3117 on the Managing Director of the Nigerian Port Authority as well as the Authority’s Tenders Board as this will help prevent reoccurrence in future contract awards.
- Re-award of Contract: In other to achieve the aim of reducing or mitigating coastal erosion and flooding in these communities the contract of erosion shore control works project should be re-awarded with adequate monitoring to ensure quality materials are used and contract fully executed.
- Measures should be put in place by Ministries Departments and Agencies to reduce project abandonment by contractors. MDAs should adopt adequate planning and monitoring mechanisms for projects from award to full execution.

*Images of flooding in Akipelai, Ayakoro and Otuoke*

