

# Nowhere to Go

JOINKRAMA

EREMA

AKABUKA

**Living with Climate Change:  
Flooding in the Niger Delta**



*We the People is a human and ecological rights organisation that supports vulnerable communities and individuals to protect their social, political, economic, and ecological rights. We give them tools, teach them skills, and provide them with networks to project their voices and protect their rights. We co-create alternatives that respect their rights, protect their livelihoods, conserve their environment, and promote their existence. Our goal is to create an open and free society founded on a modern social contract.*

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## Introduction

### Towards the Next Floods

Several communities in the Niger Delta and other sections of Nigeria, particularly those on the coast, have endured annual floods that have overwhelmed broad areas with alarming and devastating consequences during the last decade. The first significant floods that deviated from expected seasonal trends of sea level rise along coastal areas occurred in 2012. Several settlements were drowned that year, resulting in extraordinary forced relocation. The floods destroyed an entire farming season's harvest, resulting in a previously unknown rural poverty dynamic. People lost assets worth billions of naira, and hundreds of people died. The flood that year was described as the worst in recorded history. Since then, flooding throughout the coastal plains has been an annual occurrence. Without a doubt, the floods exposed citizens to enormous stresses, disarticulations, and harmful consequences. For example, during floods, members of affected areas, who are primarily fishermen and farmers, are forced to abandon their livelihoods and go months without income. Similarly, floods destroy farmlands, threatening food security.

While the 2012 floods very likely caught everyone off guard, including the government and its emergency response agencies, successive floods have been predicted, sometimes months in advance. Regardless, the flooding continues to catch the government and its response

organisations off guard. Every year, thousands of families are forced to flee their homes and spend three months in refugee camps. They are affected by the loss of property and revenue sources. Sickesses become common and spread quickly, exacerbated by the poisoning of drinking water supplies. Floodwaters act as a breeding place for mosquitos. Water-borne ailments like dysentery, diarrhoea, and cholera become common. People must bathe in the same waters they consume in various regions. Malnutrition sets in as food becomes scarce, and desperation spreads. For students and pupils, schooling is halted in favor of the more pressing challenge of surviving the floods.

The floods' impact and intensity appear to be escalating. The 2022 floods killed up to 630 Nigerians, ruined infrastructure worth over 4 billion naira, and destroyed over one million homes. It is estimated that the floods destroyed or damaged about 569,000 hectares of farmland. But despite the recurring and predictable nature of the deadly floods, the state, federal, and local administrations' responses have been generally halfhearted and inefficient. The National Emergency Management Agency, Nigeria's federal government entity tasked with ensuring that events like these have limited impact on people, has performed poorly, as have other subnational emergency response systems.

The intensifying flood situation in the Niger Delta is a direct consequence of climate change. The changing

climate is causing significant changes in rainfall pattern, resulting in more intense and untimely downpours. Aside from flooding, this has also resulted in soil degradation, landslides and erosions. The varying rainfall pattern has equally impacted on the seasonal farming practices of indigenous people. Ironically, some of the most impacted areas in the Niger Delta are also the areas where crude oil and gas are extracted from. For many community people, there is a sense of 'double jeopardy'. Not only have these communities bourn the ecological and livelihood impacts of hydrocarbon extraction, they are now faced with the climate change consequences of the same extraction. This is made worse by the fact that neither the government nor the multinational oil companies who continue to recklessly extract from the region are making any efforts to support the people as they struggle to adapt to their new reality.

Climate change is directly responsible for the worsening flood scenario in the Niger Delta. Significant changes in rainfall patterns are being caused by climate change, resulting in more powerful and untimely downpours. Apart from flooding, this has caused soil degradation, landslides, and erosion. The fluctuating rainfall pattern has also had an impact on indigenous people's seasonal farming practices. Ironically, some of the Niger Delta's most afflicted communities are also where crude oil and gas are mined. There is a sense of 'double jeopardy' among many members of the community. These communities have not only suffered the ecological and livelihood repercussions

of hydrocarbon extraction, but they are also dealing with the climate change effects of the same extraction. This is exacerbated by the fact that neither the government nor the international oil firms that continue to extract recklessly from the region are taking any steps to assist the people in adjusting to this new reality.

The responsible agencies have again announced that Nigeria will witness longer days of rainfall and Niger Delta will experience more devastating floods in 2023 and beyond. By all indications, this is the new reality for several communities who, sadly, did not contribute to creating the conditions for climate change. But beyond warning coastal communities about the impending floods, the authorities will do next to nothing. Communities will again be inundated by floods. They will lose their farm crops and their homes. They will get sick, migrate, become destitute and depend on handouts to survive.

Is there anything the government can do differently to assist affected people? Is there a framework in place to address impacted communities' health, livelihoods, and housing? Can the government undertake long-term strategies geared at assisting people in adapting?

At the moments, no government in Nigeria has established any plans in that regard. When next the floods arrive, the nightmare will just continue.

**Ken Henshaw**












The restriction of movement was one of the first effects of the flood. The roads in each of the communities were completely submerged by flood water. Community members were forced to rely on canoes to get around. The East West Road, which connects several Niger Delta communities, became impassable for small vehicles in key sections. As a result of the flooding, some sections of the road collapsed. Trucks became the only way to travel through the flooded roads. Scores of passengers would board a truck for N2000 and make the perilous 45-minute drive through the flooded roads.





A photograph of a concrete bridge structure over a river. The bridge has a low wall with rectangular openings. Several people are sitting on the bridge. The river is flowing, and there is lush greenery on the banks. A yellow text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“No means of transportation. Nothing! They are supposed to bring flying boat to transport people... nothing like that.”

“From here to Mbiama is N2000. You’ll have to pull a canoe from here to Mbiama now. So we are suffering”.














A photograph of a banana plantation in the Niger Delta. The image shows a dense stand of banana trees with large, broad leaves. Some leaves are vibrant green, while many others are brown and withered, indicating damage or decay. In the foreground, there is a body of water, likely a flooded field or a canal, which reflects the surrounding foliage. The background shows more banana trees and a glimpse of a building with a corrugated metal roof. The overall scene suggests a rural agricultural setting that has been significantly impacted by flooding.

People in the Niger Delta make their living primarily through fishing and farming. Cassava, plantains, and bananas are grown in Joinkrama, Erema, and Akabuka, and are traded in the cities. It is the primary source of revenue. These crops require one year to mature. The people's farming system has been disrupted as a result of their farmlands being flooded for 3-months out of the year, resulting in an unusual poverty situation.





"We want food. Our crops have been damaged, so we have no food"







Governments at all levels have largely ignored the Niger Delta's communities. The flooding made matters worse. All government presence vanished with the arrival of the floods. Hundreds of thousands of people were left in need of assistance. Those who could, move on to join friends and extended family members in less affected areas. Others set up tents, built makeshift shelters, or simply wandered.



“Most persons are at the risk of pneumonia because they sleep on the bare floor for lack of foams.”






"This is not the first flood we have seen. We have seen several floods in our area, but up till date, government has done nothing, absolutely nothing. That is why we are really angry"







"I believe you people entered into the village, and you have seen how the houses have been submerged. There's nowhere for people to sleep. They roam on the road till day breaks"

"We are angry because the government has not given us any attention. No food, no medical care, that's the problem"









**"In the night, up to 300 persons, both male, female, and children sleep here. Some persons have already gone out because there is nothing to eat this morning"**



"We learnt the Governor of Rivers State awarded a billion naira to Ahoada West. To be frank, we have not seen anything. What we saw that they brought, was just two bags of rice for each community"









"No drinking water. The rivers have been polluted. It's not good for drinking, that's why people are suffering".





"The occupants here are terrorized by mosquitoes as the place is constantly open, and in the night, the place is congested"





When the floods arrive, the health of the community deteriorates. Flood water serve as mosquito breeding ponds. Water-borne illnesses such as dysentery, diarrhea, and cholera are caused by contaminated community drinking water sources. The people have to wash in the same water they drink.

Because the few available health care facilities have already been flooded and evacuated, illnesses go untreated for weeks.











Floods typically last 3-months. This also means that schooling is on hold throughout that time. Every year, children lose 3-months of schooling and are now far behind their peers in other areas.



We the People

"We cannot all go back to our houses because it has been washed away by the flood. Most of us will have to remain here for 2 years after the flood because there is nowhere to go"











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