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CHALLENGES OF RESPONDING TO EVACUATION NOTICE BY COASTAL RESIDENTS OF NIGERIA: WHAT POLICY/DECISION MAKERS MUST KNOW

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This publication is supported by the Think Tank Initiative Programme Initiated and Managed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

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Preface

This policy paper is part of an in-house research activities of Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) under 'Climate Change with Particular Reference to the Wetland and Coastal Regions' in its research agenda, supported by the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) programme of International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Flooding remains a recurring phenomenon in most parts of Nigeria.The first factor attributed to flooding is climate change, which has been shown to contribute to more extreme storms and rainfall. In addition to more intense rain storms, the other possible cause of flooding in coastal regions is rising sea levels. According to the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Capacity Assessment Report (2012) an estimated 25 million people or 28% of Nigeria's population live in the coastal zone and are at risk from flooding.It is against this background, therefore, that this policy paper explores the current threats of river overflow in River Niger coastal communities, the perceived barriers to yielding to the evacuation notice by relevant authority and the incentives demanded from government and relevant stakeholders by residents of these coaster communities before responding to evacuation notices.

We are particularly grateful to Think Tank Initiative for the support given to CPED which has enabled the Centre to carry out the research from which this publication emanated. I want to thank all members of the communications division of CPED for their hard work in the design and printing of this paper.

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CHALLENGES OF RESPONDING TO EVACUATION NOTICE BY COASTAL RESIDENTS OF NIGERIA: WHAT POLICY/DECISION MAKERS MUST KNOW

Introduction

Weather-related natural hazards are increasingly making our environment an unsafe place for human habitation. According to the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disaster, CRED, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNISDR (2015), over the last twenty years (1995-2015), overwhelming majority (90%) of disasters have been caused by floods, storms, heat waves and other weather-related events and that a total of 6,457 weather-related disasters were recorded worldwide by the Emergency Event Database, EM-DAT. Over this period, weather-related disasters claimed 606,000 lives, an average of some 30,000 per annum, with an additional 4.1 billion people injured, left homeless or in need of emergency assistance (CRED & UNISDR, 2015). This no doubt includes the 2012 flooding in Nigeria which had an enormous impact in terms of human, material, and production loss, with 363 people killed, 5,851 injured, 3,891,314 affected, and 3,871,53 displaced (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2012).

Although the amount and devastating effect of flooding in Nigeria varies from one region and state to another, flooding remains a recurring phenomenon in most parts of the country. The first factor attributed to flooding is climate change, which has been shown to contribute to more extreme storms and rainfall. In addition to more intense rain storms, the other possible cause of flooding in coastal regions is rising sea levels. Although up-to-date data on the rising sea levels in Nigeria are scarce, it is believed that if nothing is done, this is likely to aggravate heavy flooding in the future, particularly in coastal cities. Heavy rains are likely to cause rivers to overflow their banks and cause flooding in the adjoining communities. Communities on the coast, as well as the Niger Delta region which has many low-lying towns and villages are the worst hit by the devastating effect of flooding. Being on the coast also makes these places more susceptible to storm surges. While these areas are no stranger to floods, evidence suggests that floods have become increasingly common and intense in recent times.

With respect to flooding, the coastal residents, especially those along major rivers like the Rivers Niger and Benue of Nigeria,are more prone to flooding that would

result from river overflow due to heavy rainfall. According to the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Capacity Assessment Report (2012) an estimated 25 million people or 28% of Nigeria's population live in the coastal zone and are at risk from flooding.

It is against this background, therefore, that this policy paper explores the current threats of river overflow in River Niger coastal communities, the perceived barriers to yielding to the evacuation notice by relevant authority and the incentives demanded from government and relevant stakeholders by residents of these coaster communities before responding to evacuation notices.

The data used for this report is primarily based on field survey, interviews and focus group discussions carried out in Agenebode and Udaba-Ekpere, River Niger coastal communities in Edo North senatorial district of Edo state, Nigeria. The selection of these two communities was done using purposive sampling. Other sources of data include secondary sources like news online and traditional media (prints and electronics), and review of articles on the subject matter.

Key Challenges of Responding to Evacuation Notices by Coaster Residents

Right ahead of any further revelation of the possible River Niger flooding over coastal communities, since 2016, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) have been giving warning order for coastal communities along River Niger in Nigeria to evacuate to safer places (Vanguardngr, 2016; Punchng, 2016; Dailypostng, 2016).

In a press statement issued by the agency's Head of Relations, Yushau Shuaib, NEMA (in Channels Tv, 2016), he said:

> "the order comes because the dams have attained their highest water levels in 29 years which is unprecedented in the history of Jebba and Kainji hydroelectric power dams. The threat has created a high risk of imminent flooding in the downstream of the river. NEMA asked the residents of the communities along the river plain to move to higher grounds for safety. The statement reads: already the agency has notified the affected states to take the necessary precautionary measures by relocating people from the

> flood prone areas and activated the National Contingency Plan as well as alerted all stakeholders to take necessary actions in line with their various mandates. The states are to ensure compliance with the threat in order to avert imminent loss of lives and properties that would certainly arise in the event of flooding. Furthermore, information available indicates that the gauge for monitoring the flow of water in the river has already exceeded the maximum height by over one meter."

This warning is sent out yearly especially when heavy rainfall is foreseen. Sadly, coastal residents continue to defy this warning evacuation directive. Experts have set the safe ground in River Niger coastal plain to be from 65 metres above sea level. Based on historical records of the 2012 flooding in a River Niger plain (Agenebode, Edo State), the level of flooding was between 45 – 50m above sea level (Ehiorobo, 2017). However, based on the topography of the area, it was predicted that an elevation of 60 – 65m and above is safe zone and thus presents a lower risk of flooding from the River Niger (Akpejiori, Ehiorobo&Izinyon, 2017). According Ehiorobo (2017: 76): "any area below this level is considered to be at risk of flooding." Furthermore, based on a case analysis of Agenebode, Edo State a river Niger coastal plain, Ehirobo (2017: 76, 77) made the following analysis that led to determining a safer River Niger plain:

> "From the flood hazard map produced 1.05Km^2 (about 42% of the total built up area) in Agenebode were affected by the flood of 2012. This consists of areas below the flood plain elevation. The built-up area affected on the flood plain region is about 0.15Km^2 (6% of the total built up area).
>
> Given that a reasonable level of projection of 60 – 65m elevation is assumed to have a low probability of flooding the projected area in anticipation of future flooding is 0.74 Km^2 (30% of built-up area) i.e. in addition to the already projected area of 1.05 Km^2 of the previous flood of 2012. This brings the total built up area that will be affected by future flood to 1.79 Km^2 which is about 72% of the built-up area. This is the extent of the area that will be inundated in the event of future flood in Agenebode."

An interview with some of the residents revealed that those that are at the bank of

the river know that the threat of flooding resulting from the river overflow is reveal. Most of the land space that have been covered with water as depicted in figure 1 to 6 are used during the raining seasons although not reasonable living. For instance, one of our key informant, the river transportation chairman states:

> The buildings that are abandoned during the raining season are used for marketing and fishing activities in the dry season, even in the raining season until it becomes obvious that they are beyond habitation. Notwithstanding their value is not as the same.

Some of those in the river bank are aware that there houses are the target of river flood every year during the raining season. They have a mental gauge of when in the raining season they have to evacuate. Interestingly some houses were just affected in the year 2016.

A female residents who was interviewed as regard their anticipation for the present year responded thus:

> We don't know oo. We are just hoping it does not repeat itself this year. Last year it is toward the ending of September it occurred, so as the water level rises, we will know what to do.

This comment revealed that most of them are waiting for environmental cues to action as explained by Lindell (2012) where environmental indications becomes glaring before deciding to leave a place that is known to be prone to evacuation. The residents of these communities have, however be demanding for some incentives before relocating from the flood prone zone.

Demand by Coastal Residents from Government and Relevant Agencies before Heeding the Evacuate Warning to Safer Grounds

About three hundred and fifty-eight (358) coastal residents in Agenebode and Udaba-Ekpere were sampled and asked an opened questions regarding what they

need before responding to evacuation notices issued by government. Over 90% of them responded and their demands as summarized in the table below include; land to relocate to, food supplies, employment for the youth, provision of adequate land for farming, resettlement plan for the community e.t.c.

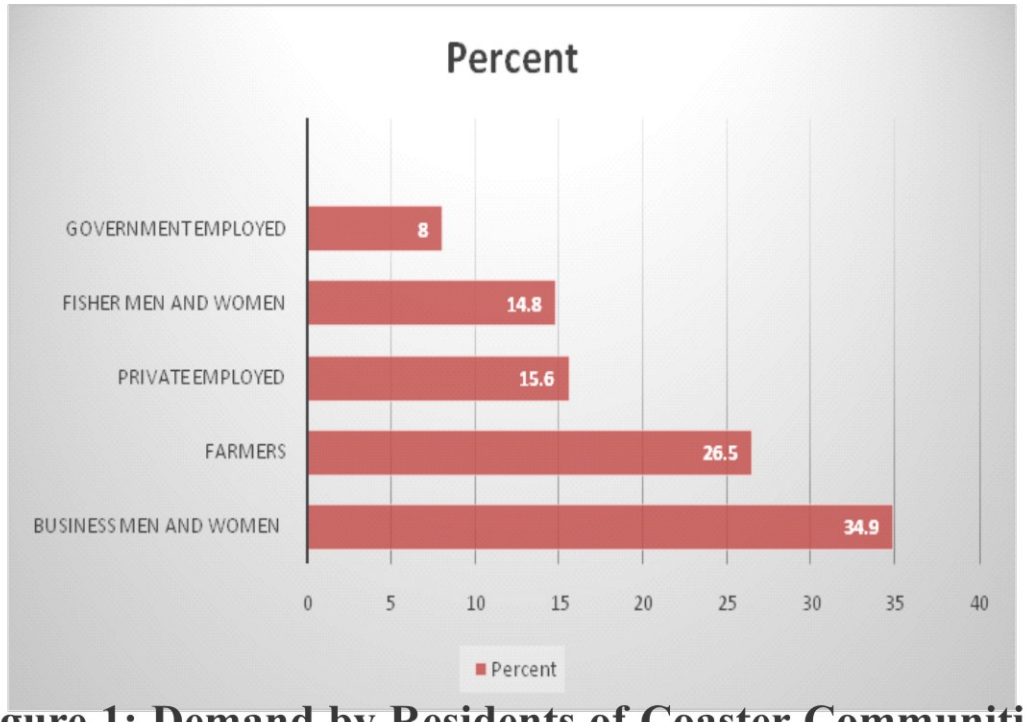

Figure 1: Demand by Residents of Coaster Communities in Edo North Senatorial District

As can be seen from the figure above,35 percent of those surveyed demanded for land to relocate to. This has become a major demand by the residents of coaster communities in the surveyed areas before responding to evacuation notice by government and its relevant authority.Employment and financial support for families to resettle and relocate to a safer ground were other demands by the residents constituting 25.5 percent and 20 percent respectively.

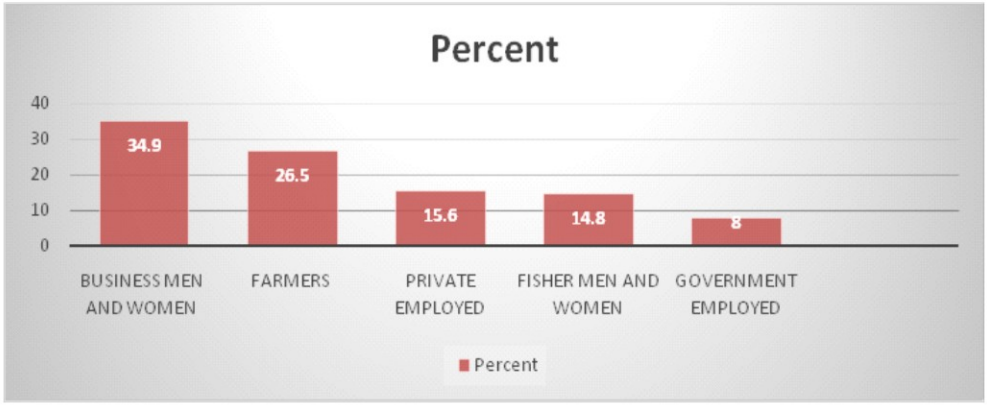

Figure 2: Occupation Level of the Residents in the Surveyed Communities

The figures from the above data implies that majority of the residents in this areas benefit from the natural and socio-cultural resources of their community of residence and evacuating and abandoning these same resources that brought them to this risky location will be a difficult task if their demands are not met.

Conclusion and Actionable Recommendations

From the foregoing, it can be said that despite the fact that the coastal residents are aware of the threat of flooding resulting from the river overflow during raining season, they defy evacuation order because of some of the benefit they are deriving from their present location of residence and are afraid of facing economic hardship should they have to relocate from the area. This is clearly evident in the incentives demanded before relocation. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government of Edo state, NEMA and relevant stakeholders should not wait until the controllable becomes inevitable. The concerned people in the coastal communities should be dialogued with as regard the incentives needed until a workable decision is made which should be strictly followed and quickly in order to ensure evacuation to safer and habitable locations. This will ensure environmental safety for all the residents of Niger coastal communities.
2. The federal government agencies should go beyond the traditional media to inter facing with the people one-on-one at the grass root level in passing evacuation or any other environmental safety warnings.
3. As a matter of urgency, the emergency hostel under construction in the region should be expanded, completed and equipped with modern facilities to accommodate residents who are displaced these communities due to persistent flooding.
4. Evacuation directives from relevant agencies should be back up with immediate actions like indication of where to evacuate to and the provision of basic incentives needed which is based on due consultation with people of the coaster region.

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Job Imharobere Eronmhonsele holds Masters Degrees (***M.Eng***), (***M.HPM***) in Production Engineering and in Health Planning and Management, respectively, both from the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. He joined Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED), Benin City, Nigeria in 2008 after completing his one year compulsory time in the National Youth Service Corps in Mobbar Local Government Area, Borno State, Nigeria, 2007 as a research intern. He was later employed as Programme Officer in same organisation in 2009 and rose to the position of Senior Programme Officer in 2012. He been involved and implemented a substantial number of intervention and research projects across Nigeria including building the capacity of Local Civil Society Organisations for Participation in CPED projects. He has in-depth understanding of community mobilization and engagement and high interest information systems and community development. He is an expert in communication with policy makers, currently the head of policy engagement and communications division of CPED. He has participated and made presentations in different conferences/workshops in Nigeria and different countries abroad. He has published in reputable peer-review journals.

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About CPED

Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) is an independent Think Tank organisation dedicated to promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty and inequality through policy oriented research and active engagement on development issues. Established and registered as a corporation in October 1999, CPED is located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. CPED key research areas are (1) **Climate change with particular reference to the wetland and coastal regions (2) Gender and development (3)** Health Systems and health care delivery (4) Growth, development and equity (5) Niger Delta region, peace building and development. CPED is a grantee of the Think Tank Initiative (TTI), a multi-donor program of the *International Development Research Centre (IDRC),* Canada.