

Nigeria: The Other 'Flooded' Cities

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This Day (Lagos)

ANALYSIS

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Lagos

Yesterday, Lagos gulped too much water. The whole city was awash with water that the town almost ground to a standstill. But Lagos is not the only thirsty city in the world. There are others, but they do not halt when they get the water they don't require.

Although the worst floods in living memory were in Southern Africa, including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana, several cities around the world have had problems with flooding, but they have also confronted the menace headlong and come out smiling. Some of such cities are Iowa, London, Stockholm, New Orleans, and Copenhagen and even nearer home in Africa, Sfax, the second largest city in Tunisia.

A brief example of how these cities managed their flooding will suffice.

Rotterdam: The entire nation of the Netherlands (meaning, below sea level), provides perhaps the most famous example of urbanised land reclamation project from the Atlantic seafloor. "Polders" is the Dutch name for such rigorously flood-controlled territory. It provided a solution to flooding in the Netherlands permanently.

Iowa: The Cedar Rapids flood has compelled the town to remain a city under water. But the encouraging news is that flooding has ceased to be a problem in the small riverside town, thanks to concerted flood management efforts of the government.

London: With all the floods hitting Britain in the past few years, one would think that the last thing London needs is more water. But it gets more and more, thereby compelling it to manage its floods with the most comprehensive of abilities aimed at ensuring that the normal day-to-day activities of the city never suffers. Today, the country's wetlands are among its most useful landscapes.

Sfax: In 1983, about 313,000 residents lived in Sfax, Tunisia's second largest city. This port city lies at the foot of a gently sloping plane with sandy soil and sparse vegetation. Annual rainfall ranges from 37 mm to 650 mm, averaging about 200 mm, with torrential rains striking in October. The high water table, extensive urbanisation, and lack of vegetation contribute to intense flash floods and heavy erosion.

Since 1934, five major floods have caused severe damage in the city and surrounding areas. In October 1982, a flood hit Sfax, of a severity estimated to occur every 150 years. Seventy lives were lost, and more than 700 houses were destroyed and 8,000 damaged. At the time, flood protection measures were minimal. Plans for more systematic protection had been under consideration since the 1950s, but were not acted on for lack of financing.

The Tunisian government reacted quickly to the flood, requesting bank assistance for the design and construction of flood protection facilities. The bank also moved expeditiously. A project was approved in May 1983, with a total cost of \$48 million. The bank was to provide \$25 million.

The project sought to provide flood protection for Sfax and neighboring communities at an economically acceptable cost. Protection facilities were to be able to withstand a flood of catastrophic proportions occurring once every 100 years.

Works were to consist of rehabilitating and increasing dike protection on two natural water courses that bracket the city on the north and south. A semi-circular "belt canal" was to be constructed some 4 km from the city centre. Plans also included minor works to protect adjoining municipalities, and establishing and equipping a maintenance unit in regional offices of the Ministry of Equipment, which was charged with administer.

A related project, the Second Urban Sewerage Project, called for the construction of three storm water collectors to evacuate flood waters from the city centre. Overall, the project was successful. The goal of reducing the risk of flood was met. Recent heavy rainfalls have been evacuated with greater ease than in the past.