

Gas Explosion: 23 Dead, 200 Injured, 500 Displaced and Over 170 Buildings Destroyed at Abule-Ado Area, Amuwo-Odofin LGA, Lagos State.

March 15, 2020.

BACKGROUND



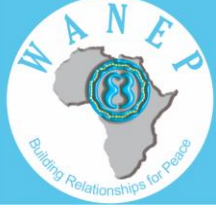
Fig.1 : Map of Lagos State¹

- Amuwo-Odofin is one of the Local Government Areas (LGA) in Lagos State, South-West Region of Nigeria. The LGA has been a major hotspot of oil pipeline vandalism².
- The affected area (Abule-Ado) hosts both residential buildings and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's (NNPC) pipeline Right-of-Way (ROW). Though the recent explosion is not connected to the activities of pipeline vandals, the explosion was allegedly caused by human error that led to gas leakage from the NNPC pipeline, resulting in the fire explosion. The proximity of residential buildings to pipeline ROW, increases their vulnerability to human-induced disasters, such a fire explosion, health risk, etc, in cases of negligence, technical faults and vandalism.
- Poor town planning regulations and enforcement operations by relevant State Government agencies, amid the rapid urbanization in the State further complicate the menace.

INCIDENT PROFILE

On March 15, 2020, 23 people were reported dead with 200 others injured³ including students in a gas explosion incident at Abule-Ado area, Amuwo-Odofin LGA of Lagos State. In addition, over 170 buildings and properties including houses, shops, hotel, three churches, five schools including a girls' boarding secondary school and 43 vehicles were destroyed⁴ in the incident. Also, the Chairman of the Mechanic Village Automobile Association has stated that over 2,500 vehicles were damaged in the incident⁵. The explosion has rendered an estimated 500 people internally displaced⁶ with major impact also experienced in neighbouring communities resulting in infrastructural damages at Egbeda, Agege, Ejigbo, Festac, Okota, Ikotun, Iba and Igando axis, amongst others in the State.

Preliminary investigations reveal that the pressure exerted on the NNPC gas pipeline by a truck laden with granite led to gas leakage and resulted in the fire explosion and collapse of buildings⁷. This has led to deliberations at the House of Representatives, regarding the depth of gas pipelines in the affected area, as standard operating procedures indicate a depth of about 300-meters in the ground as against the alleged laying of the pipeline on ground surface⁸.



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RISK ANALYSIS:

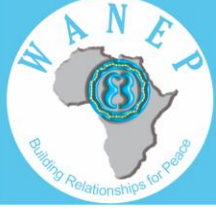
The gas explosion incident has affected populations, evident in fatalities, destruction of properties and internal displacement. Although the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has clarified the remote causes of the explosion, further investigations are underway regarding its connection with acts of negligence, complicity or criminality either by government agencies, residents and/or vandals. Nevertheless, the affected community residents are also alleging a bomb detonation on the pipeline in the area⁹.

The construction of buildings on oil/gas pipelines right-of-way (RoW) and their proximity to pipeline structures poses a major risk to public safety and urban development. Apart from the environmental and infrastructural damages occasioned by the explosion, the incident also poses a health risk with heavy presence of soot in the affected community as recorded by WANEP NEWS¹⁰. Although, there are Federal Government laws for land use and development in areas neighbouring pipeline installations in the country, communities have been complicit, erecting buildings on or close to pipeline RoW. Also, the inadequacies of government agencies to effectively monitor compliance with land acquisition and development has been attributed to persistent breach of building control laws in the State. According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), this has further aggravated the impact of the explosion, as pipelines in the affected area were shut down as precautionary measures to reduce the intensity of the accident.

Moreover, the emerging discussions by the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) to take possession of the affected community¹¹, exposes residents to the risk of losing ownership of their properties and land. As such, they become subject to heightened vulnerabilities in areas of personal safety, economic security and human rights violations, especially at the hands of State agencies responsible for their protection. Additionally, the education of school children is affected due to forced relocation of affected families. The consequences emanating from the collapse of school buildings and injuries sustained by the children further results in the disruption of their education. However, the mitigation plan of the State Government and its agencies serves to ameliorate the conditions of the affected victims.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS

- On-site-assessment of the affected area by the Lagos State Governor and other officials of relevant Government Ministries including the National and State Emergency Management Agency (NEMA and LASEMA), Federal Housing Authority (FHA), to ascertain the extent of damage. The Lagos State Government has inaugurated an investigative committee to unravel the cause of the explosion to forestall future occurrences. Also, the State Government has announced a two-billion-naira relief fund to cater for the affected victims¹².
- The proactive response of relevant State Government agencies including; Lagos State Fire Service, Red Cross, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Police, Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC), NEMA, LASEMA, Lagos State Environmental Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA) in search and rescue operations of trapped victims is commendable.



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- The Senate has issued directives to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development to provide relief materials to the affected victims with the provision of resettlement shelters at Igando Camp for the displaced victims.
- A Joint Information Centre (JIC) has been established for proper documentation of all affected residents. This is to ensure proper dissemination and receipt of information to the affected population and stakeholders as well as ensure judicious dispensing of the relief funds to the rightful victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The State Government in collaboration with the Federal Housing Authority, Nigerian Institute of Town Planners, Ministry of Urban and Physical Planning and the National/State Emergency Management Agency, should ensure strict enforcement of building laws/regulations by land developers and communities situated around oil/gas pipelines and Government's Right of Way (RoW) in the State.
- The State Government in collaboration with the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), local non-governmental organizations and other humanitarian agencies should increase support for affected victims, especially the aged, women, children and the physically challenged in terms of psychosocial and livelihoods assistance to rebuild their lives.
- The Federal and State Governments should strengthen the relevant institutions to effectively enforce building regulations especially monitoring of building permits and land acquisition processes.

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(A pipeline "right-of-way" is a strip of land over and around natural gas pipelines)
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