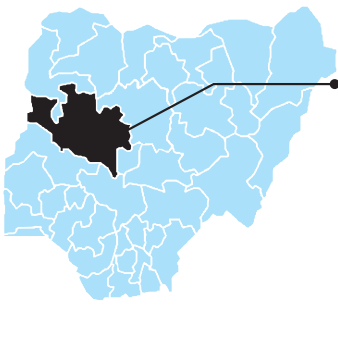


SPECIAL REPORT

Damned by dams: How hydro-dams affect Niger communities

Rather than provide succour, riverine communities are living in fear of dams around them.



Niger state is transverse by 8 rivers - Niger, Kaduna, Gbako, Eko, Gurara, Ebba, Egga, Mariga, and their tributaries. The state houses three dams - Shiroro, Kainji, Jebba with the construction of the fourth one, Zungeru, on-going.



Infographic Ali A. Geidam

Ahmed Tahir Ajobe, Minna

Abdullahi Maidamu, 12, was badly cut in a boat mishap. He was returning home to Malale, Borgu Local Government Area, Niger State, with three of his siblings, from a farm across the river, when their boat developed a fault midway into the two-hour journey.

Sudden heavy downpour and turbulent waves overturned their boat. But the operator and his brothers rescued him and his sister.

He said, "As I tried to find my bearing, a tree stump cut through my leg. The pain was so severe, I thought I would die as Iya Ramat and my sisters did."

Iya Ramat, Abdullahi's grandmother died with his two older sisters and 23 others, in a similar accident in 2015.

For one hour after the accident, Abdullahi switched from stump to stump for support, as the waves recklessly slapped him, before help eventually came.

After two weeks with no improvement at a patent medicine store in Tungan Nailo, his father took him to the dispensary in Malale. The facility, not well-equipped, is what habitants of the 16 communities in Malale Ward, rely on.

Abdullahi and his father, Umar, travelled 17 kilometres from Tungan Nailo, a community downstream of Kainji Dam for treatment in

Malale.

Upon arriving at River Niger, his father, carrying him on his back, deftly guided him to his right shoulder and eventually to face him, beckoning on the boat operator, Hamisu Wawa, to help lower Abdullahi into the boat.

Annually, these communities along with 45 others across seven wards downstream of Kainji Dam, are threatened by flood, heavy downpour and activities of the dam.

Although they frolic with the hydropower, only six communities enjoy electricity. They all lack water, access roads and medical facilities.

In Malale, Usabatu Muhammad, 16, and a herd of cattle arrived at different points of the river simultaneously. They all went in knee dip, drinking directly from it, just as water vendors fetched some, for sale in the community.

Usabatu sells food to boat operators and passengers commuting to neighbouring communities.

Her mother, Aisha, 47, and two siblings - Maimuna, 9, and Fatima, 12, - died in a 2015 boat accident in the same river. Regardless, the river is where she raises money every holiday to pay her school fees. The JSS 3 student desires to become a nurse, to assist victims of the yearly floods.

Eight major rivers - Niger, Kaduna, Gbako, Eko, Gurara, Ebba, Mariga - and their tributaries traverse Niger, making it disaster prone.

Borgu's Emir, Alhaji Muhammad Dantoro, Kitoro IV, said Kainji Dam is considered the most important hydro-electric power plant in the country with a 760 megawatt generating capacity.

However, its establishment in 1968 came with a steep price for host communities in

Borgu and Yauri emirates.

The Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA) said the project displaced 44,000 inhabitants in the upstream, who were also forced to abandon their ancestral land through what experts call "forced evacuation" but authorities tag "resettlement." They were resettled in New Bussa, Yelwa, Wawa, Nasarawa, Shagunu, Sabo Pegi and Monai.

Like Kainji, the construction of Jebba Dam in 1985, displaced 6,000 from 42 villages. They were resettled in 21 locations in the hinterland known as Jebba villages within the Lake Basin.

The construction inundated about 950 hectares of land from New Bussa to Jebba. Settlements along the shoreline that were 102 meters below sealevel were merged and resettled into new communities further inland.

Similarly, the construction of Shiroro Dam with a 600 megawatt generating capacity, displaced 36 communities.

Forfeiting ancestral lands among others came with high expectations and optimism that the projects would further enhance their fortune.

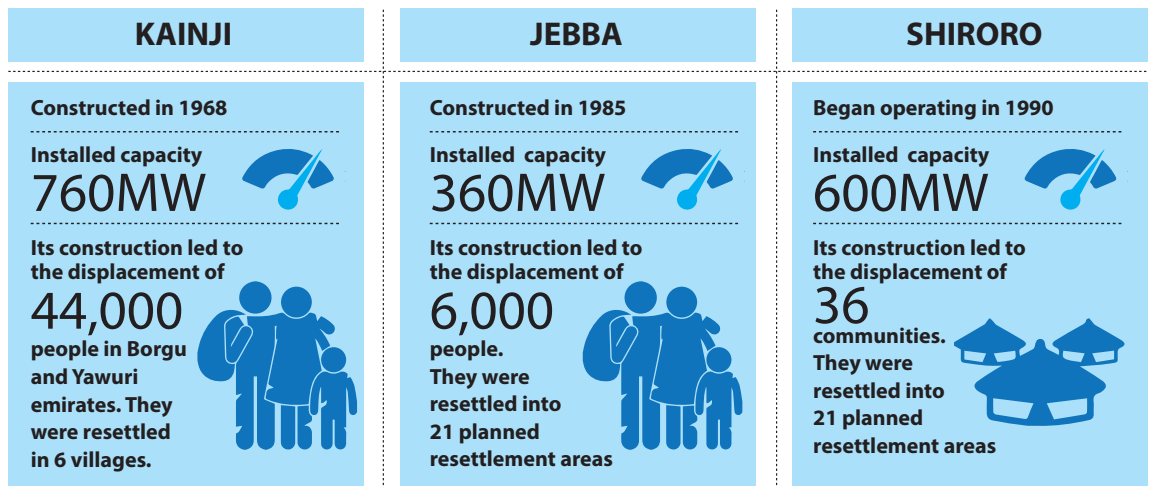
Danjuma Iliya's family abandoned their family burial ground.

"We do not know what happened to the corpses after we left. We couldn't exhume them to the new site," he lamented. The family shrine was also lost to the hydropower project.

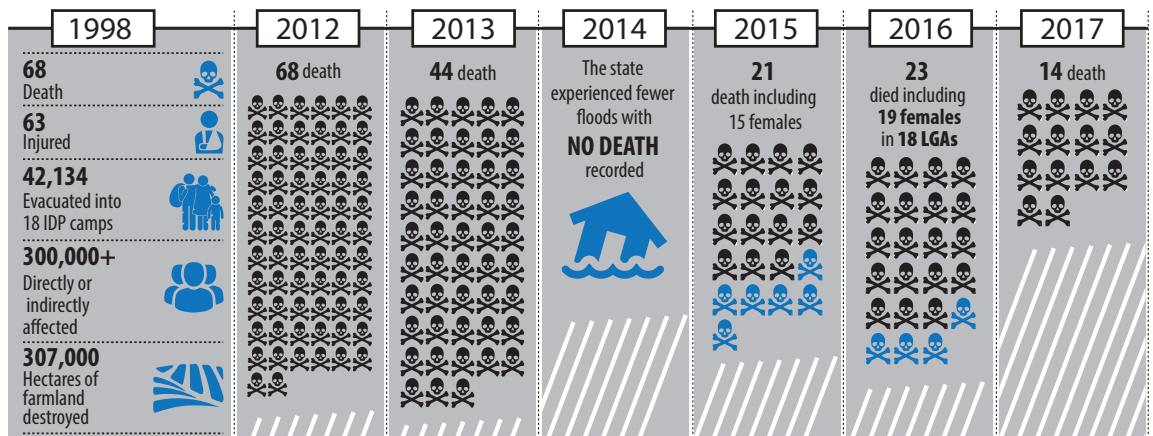
Haliru Suleiman in New Bussa, said most of the artifacts and monuments of their forebears were lost during the relocation.

The economic, social and environmental impacts of the dams on communities inhabiting the floodplains and downstream

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Timeline on flood related deaths and destruction due to river surge and dam activities across the state



■ Burial site in Kuduru for flood victims