

● By Funke Oduwole

Tired of the deplorable environment in which they exist and unfulfilled promises by government functionaries, residents of Apollo, Abiodun, Erejua and Adogbo areas of Makoko, Lagos Mainland Local Government, Yaba, Lagos, are now crying out to the Lagos State government, the federal government and international organisations to improve their environment by providing certain basic amenities. The community overlooking the Third Mainland Bridge with an estimated population

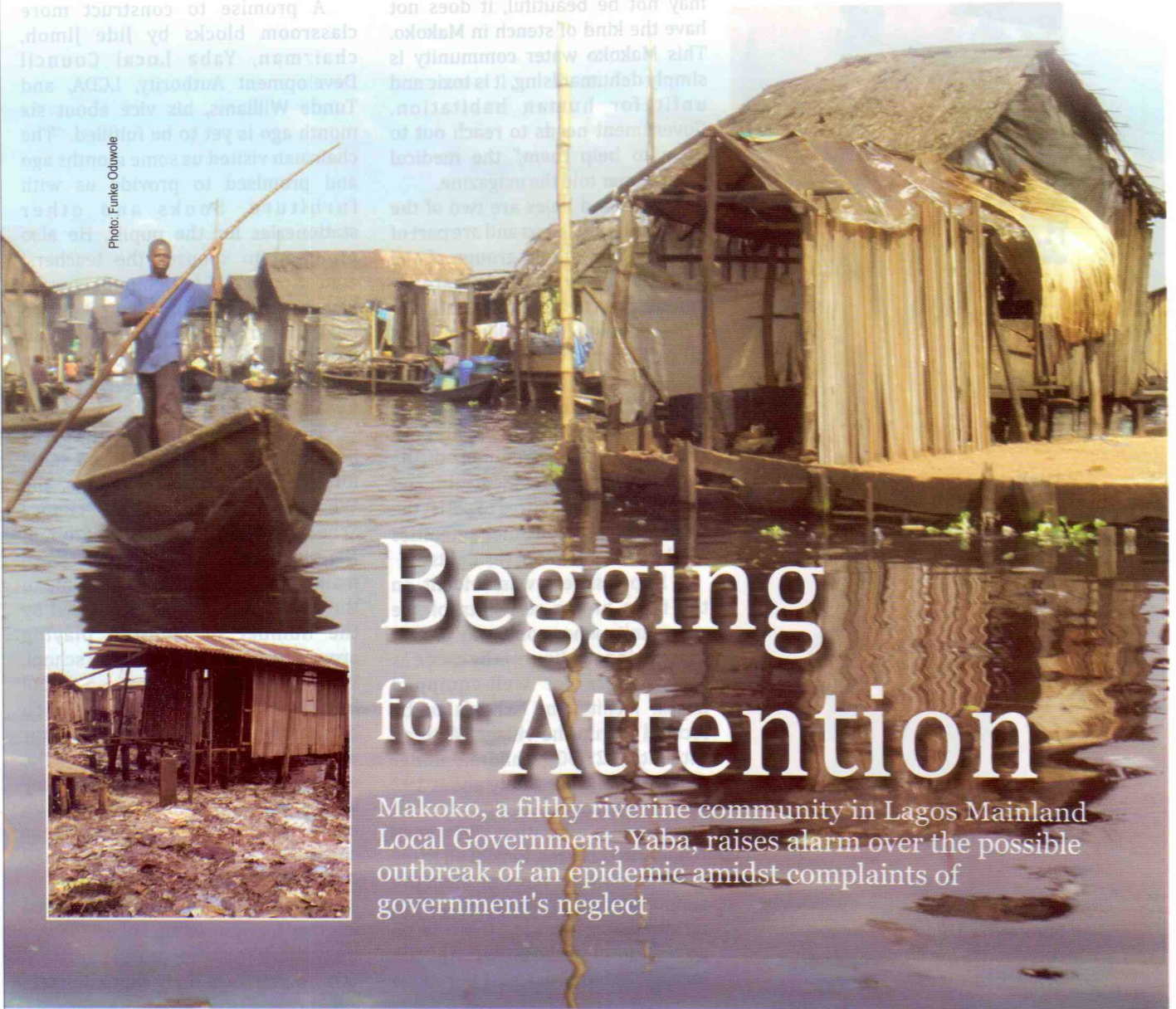
of about 500,000 is made up of wooden shanties and sitting on the shore of a large lake that feeds into the Atlantic Ocean.

With neither electricity nor running water, health facility or school, the community can easily pass for a rustic village as the inhabitants — mainly Eguns and llajes — dwell in houses built with planks atop water. In this deplorable environment, children play in stationary canoes anchored to the shanty plank houses, happily splashing the dirty, stinking water and swallowing drops that slip into their mouths from their faces

oblivious of the health hazard.

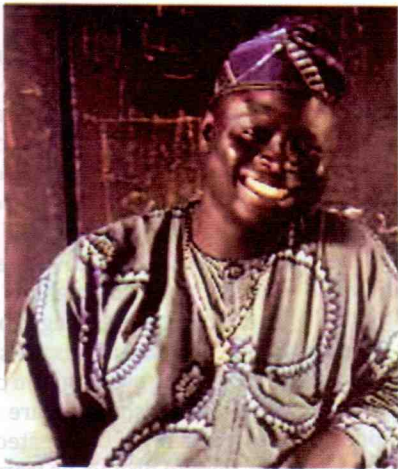
The living condition in the community is so deplorable mainly as a result of a heavy stench from the water into which residents defecate as there are no conveniences. Hence, they have to endure the very bad odour by day and suffer intense mosquito bites by night as the village by nature is a breeding ground for all kinds of mosquitoes. "As from six o'clock in the evening, you cannot stay here, the mosquitoes are too much. We need a lot of the treated mosquito nets here to protect us from mosquito bites especially the children," Ebifemi Femi, a resident of the area said.

Photo: Funke Oduwole



Begging for Attention

Makoko, a filthy riverine community in Lagos Mainland Local Government, Yaba, raises alarm over the possible outbreak of an epidemic amidst complaints of government's neglect



Shemedede: Pleads for government's assistance



Atigbere: Laments the neglect



Shemedede: School Cert holder, coordinates the biggest school in Makoko

The highly-polluted community located a few kilometres from the council secretariat on Herbert Macaulay Way in Ebute Metta, is a sharp contrast to the gale of environmental upgrading being carried out by the state government. A medical doctor with one of the private hospitals in Lagos described the Makoko community whose air is always saturated with putrid burning fish smoke, awful sewage and waste smell, stench of human odour, as worse than Ajegunle. "Except for the fact that it is an unplanned, disorganised ghetto, Ajegunle is dry, it is not as filthy as Makoko, the environment may not be beautiful, it does not have the kind of stench in Makoko. This Makoko water community is simply dehumanising, it is toxic and unfit for human habitation. Government needs to reach out to them to help them," the medical practitioner told the magazine.

Eguns and Ilajes are two of the major tribes in Lagos and are part of the founding ethnic groups of the state. "It is a pity that we that are the founding settlers of this state are the ones being treated like refugees in our state," Ogede Atigbere, coordinator, Apollo Street, lamented, adding that the state government should assist in improving the environment of the community and provide health and skill acquisition centres to assist the youths and provide other amenities for the convenience of residents.

Hopelessness was evident on the faces of the residents of the community whose only way to visit even their neighbours is by canoe as they agitate for well-equipped health facility and schools to be located within the village. With an estimated 25,000 children under the age of 12 years, only about 192 go to school, about 24,808 children are without education. "We need schools in this area, look at all these children playing, most of them are supposed to be in school but are left to stay home because there is no government school within the locality," a lady who said her name

was Mama Ibeji, told the magazine.

Although there are a few kindergarten private schools also built with plank in the village, in many of these schools, the children and teachers sit on plank panels and some on wooden benches. The biggest school in the community, Whanyinna Nursery and Primary School, a two-storey, four-classroom school with a population of about 200 pupils, is headed by a school certificate holder, who coordinates the running of the school. "We have about 2,000 pupils who have already registered but cannot be accommodated yet because of lack of space," Noah Shemedede, the coordinator, told the magazine.

A promise to construct more classroom blocks by Jide Jimoh, chairman, Yaba Local Council Development Authority, LCDA, and Tunde Williams, his vice about six months ago is yet to be fulfilled. "The chairman visited us some months ago and promised to provide us with furniture, books and other stationeries for the pupils. He also promised to sponsor the teachers' education to NCE level but till now we have not heard from them. It is the baale (head) of this community that has been giving the teachers here stipend since the school started about a year ago," Shemedede said.

The community has since last year been receiving assistance from some foreign nationals. For example, the Whanyinna Nursery and Primary School was built by Yacht Club of Nigeria, a club whose members are mainly foreigners. "They just came to the community and were amazed by the number of children playing around when they should be in school. We told them that we have no school here, they were moved with compassion so they built this place for us and they were taking care of the welfare of the teachers but since they left the country, we have been left on our own and the state government has completely neglected us," the school coordinator said.

Recently, the community received another foreign visitor, Mike Schadt, a missionary from the American-based SOS Ministries, a body that ministers

