

Buchanan May Cease to Exist: As Atlantic Ocean Gradually Swallows up City

12/23/09 - Mae Azango, mazango@FrontPageAfrica.com (077-545-960)

Buchanan, Grand Bassa County



A DYING CITY: Very little is being done and Residents of Buchanan are frustrated, disappointed, and angry as the sea continues to advance on the City, destroying business houses, dwellings, and streets.

The port city of Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, may soon be wiped away due to massive sea Erosion, technically known as Marine Transgression. The Atlantic Ocean has already swallowed number of homes and undeveloped but valuable properties, leaving many dwellers displaced and homeless.

The transgression was brought to light almost two years ago, when FPA and others reported the creepy situation. A visit by the President and her Minister of Lands Mines and energy, Dr. Eugene Shannon, revived hope that something would finally be done.

Dr. Shannon promised to erect boulders along the coast line in Buchanan to arrest the situation.

But nothing has been done so far and Residents of Buchanan are frustrated, disappointed, and angry; meanwhile the sea continues to advance on the City, destroying business houses, dwellings, and streets.

This history of this problem is well known to the older generation of Grand Bassa citizens, who witnessed the establishment of the Port of Buchanan by the LAMCO J V Corporation in the mid 1950s. Old man Robert Garpue, an elder from Buchanan , who was badly affected by the erosion, and had to relocate, told our reporter that the erosion of Buchanan, is a “man-made disaster” that could have been avoided forty Years ago.” He said, “If the government had followed the professional advice of LAMCO’s engineers, who made it clear that Buchanan was the wrong place to build a seaport, we would not be suffering today.”

Mary Marshall, a resident of Buchanan said: “LAMCO signed an agreement with the Government of Liberia to explore the Nimba Mountain for Iron Ore. They

Background to the Problem



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needed a sea port from which to ship the iron ore abroad. A survey was conducted along the coast--- from Cape Mount to Cape Palmas ---to find the most suitable place to build the sea port. LAMCO's hired engineers concluded that the most suitable place to build the port was in the Timbo District area of what was then River Cess Territory (currently River Cess County).

Grand Bassa in those days was represented in the Senate while there was no Senator for River Cess, so they were not represented in the Senate, therefore it had no lobby to counter the big shots who wanted the Sea Port built in Buchanan instead of River Cess.” He furthered that engineers from LAMCO came to River Cess in 1956 to explore the area and informed the superintendent that River Cess was the place to build the Port. “Most in the territory rejoiced that day, as they were excited over the job opportunities for citizens that would result. The old man explained.

Some of Grand Bassa's movers and shakers decided that since River Cess was a Territory under Grand Bassa County , development should go to the County before it extends to the Territory. The idea behind the Buchanan port, of course, was to ensure that they cashed in from the sale of their properties; so the plan was changed.

A controversy erupted between River Cess and Buchanan that claimed President Tubman's attention, FPA was told. Tubman weighed in on the Lafayette Morgan and Faye (or Faith) Harmon lobby that would result in a windfall when parcels of property they owned were acquired to facilitate construction of the port. The two had campaigned on Tubman's behalf for a second term of office, and saw a chance to cash-in on the political debt Tubman owed.

The Consequences

The Lamco People warned the government that the sea would take over the City since Buchanan was a sandy zone without rocks to stop future erosion. “In light of that, LAMCO issued a statement that the company would take no responsibility for erosion in the future. Quite interestingly, Harmon Law firm owned by Faye Harmon, signed the document on behalf of the government, and the transaction went through.



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The financial windfall led to the construction of the Morgan

Apartment Buildings, and Morgan Travel Agency and properties on Broad Street . Old man Harmon built the 'Harmon, Morgan and Grimes office building on Lynch Street and undertook other development in Monrovia and Buchanan, we were told. Today, a concession in the same area, Mittal Steel, benefits from the same disclaimer against erosion-related liability in the future.

No way forward

Today, the residents of Buchanan feel that there is no way forward; they are suffering and the sins of their fore-fathers, are hunting them and their grand children. Everyone is saying let's raise money to

save Buchanan, but nobody wants to talk about what caused the problem in the first place.

“This should be a lesson to our planners and developers: give engineers and environmentalists a chance to determine the right sites for construction to avoid embarrassment in the future, Old man Robert Garpues threw in.

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The town that is considered a Kru town is being taken over by the Fanti of Ghana, who fish for a living.

One of the fishermen kojo, who was weaving a big fishing net along with some of his friends, told our reporter that he was born in the town, and as a little boy, he and his father used to live in a house, at a spot that the ocean has now taken over. Pointing far into the ocean to where they once lived, he said, “Our house used to be way out there and where we now sit, used to be bush; but because of the water’s encroachment, we kept moving back until we found ourselves here.

Asked if they were not afraid of the sea coming into their living quarters, Kojo replied, “What other business do we know other than fishing? We have no choice but to push back when the ocean comes closer; no one is coming to our aid so we have to protect ourselves.”

In the same Balleh Wleh Town, a concrete story building is being washed away gradually by the angry ocean that has broken over half of the building down. The amazing thing is that people are still living in the standing portion of the building that could be consumed by the sea come tumbling on heads at any moment.

When FPA contacted Grand Bassa Superintendent, Julia Duncan Cassell, about efforts to arrest the devastation, she said her office was doing everything to relocate those affected to a place in Central Buchanan where they could start a new life.

She further said the Ministry of Lands Mines and Energy and the United Nation Development Program (UNDP) had conducted a study to find a way to solve the erosion problem, she added.

As to when the study would be completed to stop the advancement of the Ocean, she didn't say, but the citizens are living in fear because the entire City might soon be wiped away.

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