

I'm heartbroken my husband was killed over plantain – Widow

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| By Chukwudi Akasike

Mrs Chibuzor Nwagwu, the wife of late Ezechiyere Nwagwu, who was killed by her brother-in-law during an argument over a bunch of plantain, shares her pain with CHUKWUDI AKASIKE on how she would cope after her husband's demise and the need to get the suspect arrested and prosecuted

Where are you from?

I am from Umuezeala Nsu, in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area of Imo State.

Can you recall the circumstances that led to the killing of your husband?

It happened on March 8 this year. It was on a Sunday. Chukwudi, my brother-in-law, went into our plantain garden and harvested the plantain there. I was not around that morning because I went out to quickly check on my neighbour.

I planted the plantain. I was at my neighbour's place when my daughter, who is my last-born, came to inform me that Chukwudi had harvested our plantain. So, I rushed back home and saw that Ifeanyi Nwagwu, a stepbrother to my husband, and Chukwudi were dragging the crop and ready to fight over it.

As this was going on, Chukwudi was shouting angrily. I immediately told them to hand over the plantain to me. I then grabbed the bunch of plantain from Chukwudi and took it inside. Immediately, Chukwudi went ahead to harvest the second plantain without my permission. I told him that it was wrong for him to harvest the plantain because I planted it.

What happened thereafter?

My husband and I began to struggle for the second bunch of plantain with Chukwudi. When we retrieved it from him (Chukwudi), I gave it to my daughter to take inside. We thought the matter had ended there, but while my husband was about to enter the house, Ifeanyi (stepbrother to my husband) told him, "I hope you are happy that you have won today."

But my husband told him that the plantain belonged to his wife and that it was neither his nor Chukwudi's crop. That was when Ifeanyi used the flat side of a cutlass to beat my husband on the leg.

When my husband tried to pounce on him in reaction, Ifeanyi then attacked him on the hand, cutting him deeply. Immediately, my husband began to bleed. He was later taken to the hospital, where he died.

Why did you take him to a hospital in Owerri, knowing full well that Owerri is far from Ehime Mbano?

No, my husband was first rushed to Etiti Hospital, but he was rejected there. We were told that he had lost too much blood. We then went to Our Saviour's Hospital, where we were told that the doctor had gone to church. We had to

move him to the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri.

That was where he died. He was being treated before he died. We were told that my husband lost so much blood and could not survive it. While he was rolling on the floor after he was attacked, at a point, he stopped bleeding, and only water was coming out from where he had the machete cut injury.

Where exactly was your husband hit?

Ifeanyi gave him a machete cut injury between his left hand and the elbow.

Has the suspect been arrested?

He fled after the incident happened, and we have not seen him since that day. I also learnt that some youths in the community searched for him without finding him.

It was gathered that Chukwudi Nwagwu was arrested by soldiers, but he wasn't the person who attacked your husband. Why was he arrested?

It was Ifeanyi who called Chukwudi to come and harvest the plantain. He did not show concern when Ifeanyi attacked my husband the first time; he also watched while Ifeanyi attacked him the second time. My husband would have been alive if Chukwudi had intervened and ensured that Ifeanyi did not attack my husband with a machete.

The second attack was the one that killed my husband. Chukwudi is the firstborn of their father's first wife. Again, he was there when my husband was attacked with a cutlass, and he did nothing to prevent the incident from happening. When my husband was attacked, he ran to the main road to see who would take him to the hospital, but Chukwudi stood by watching without doing anything.

It appears Chukwudi and your husband were not on good terms before the incident happened.

Yes, Chukwudi and Ifeanyi had issues with my husband before he was attacked. That was why Chukwudi did nothing while my husband was attacked.

Why did the youths destroy properties, including buildings, in the family's compound?

All these happened before we came back from the hospital. I still can't understand why it happened.

What were you told happened to the buildings in your compound?

The youths were angry after they learnt how my husband was killed. They stormed our compound and set some buildings ablaze.

Have you reported the matter to the police?

Yes, we have reported the matter to the police.

How far have they gone with the investigation on the matter?

They said they would visit the mortuary where we deposited my husband's body. According to the police, they wanted to go there to take a photograph of my husband's corpse.

They told me to make an entry on the matter, and when I did, they asked me who was present at the scene where my husband was attacked. I told them that Chukwudi was there. They then said I should give them money to move to Owerri and take a photograph of my husband so that they could confirm that he had actually died.

How much did the police demand from you?

They demanded N40,000.

Where is their station located?

I have given them N20,000 as an advance. It is Otoko Police Station.

It is in Obowo Local Government Area. I was told that they would go to the mortuary to take photographs of my husband's corpse after I paid the remaining N20,000.

Do you mean the police said the transport fare from Obowo to Owerri and back is N40,000?

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Yes.

When did they say they would begin the investigation?

They said the investigation would commence after we had brought the doctor's report to them and paid the remaining N20,000. According to them, that is when they will make a move to investigate the matter.

Have you given the police the balance?

We have not given them the money because we don't have it now.

Whose houses were razed by angry youths?

It was my husband's younger brother's house that was set ablaze. He had just come back from Ghana, where he is based.

The angry youths were said to have discovered some fetish materials, including carved images, at the back of the building. How did that come about?

Yes, we never knew that my husband's killer was into fetish things.

What about the mother or any other close relative of the man who allegedly killed your husband?

They are all on the run. None of them is at home. They have not returned since my husband was killed.

Has Chukwudi been released by the soldiers who arrested him?

Chukwudi was arrested alongside the owner of the big bungalow in our compound, but they have been released since then.

Did the man go back to Ghana after he was released?

I don't know, but I have not seen him since he was released. I have not seen any of them in the compound since the incident happened.

What do you want the Nigeria Police to do for you in this matter apart from taking a snapshot of your husband's corpse?

I want the police to apprehend the person responsible for my husband's death. They should arrest whoever is hiding him because I know that if the person hiding him is arrested, they will reveal where the suspected killer is.

How did the elders in the community intervene to resolve the enmity between Ifeanyi and your husband before he was killed?

Some elders in the community had earlier intervened. The issue between my husband and Ifeanyi is connected to a property owned by the first wife of their father.

They had been saying that my husband's blood would be spilled in the compound. They say it every time; it is not the first or second time. There was a time they attacked my husband with a stick. He was hit on the hand, but he survived. All of them, including their mother, are involved. So, they should all be arrested.

Did you inform the police when they threatened your husband?

The elders of the community always said we should leave the matter for them, and when they gave their verdict, the two parties would not agree with it.

Now that your husband is no more, what are the elders saying?

The elders only said my husband would not be buried immediately until the suspect is seen and arrested.

How do you feel knowing that your husband is lying in the mortuary over an incident that could have been avoided?

I have been in pain since the day my husband was killed. My heart bleeds because I never expected this to happen. How can I become a widow at this early stage of my life? I am heartbroken because of my husband's death.

How old are you?

I am 48 years old.

How old was your husband?

He was 52 years old.

What would you miss about your husband?

My husband was a good man.

He was a man who knew how to treat a woman. He treated me very well. He indulged me so much. That is why I am feeling his absence. He was husband material.

How many children do you have?

I have five children: three males and two females. Taking care of them now will be difficult. One of my children, who gained admission last year to study Architecture at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, has come back home. He will soon go back to school to pack his belongings.

Are you satisfied with the way the police are handling the matter?

They have not been able to do anything because there is no money. We have given them N20,000, and the remaining N20,000 is yet to be paid. That is why they have not come to do their job.

| Chukwudi Akasike