

Residents flee Ogun communities after six killed in foiled abduction

June 11, 2026 5:46 am



Deserted buildings in one of the communities. Photo: Johnson Idowu

Johnson Idowu and Iyanuoluwa Abiola

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Some residents of Fowowawo, Ajero gun and Magbon-Etido communities in Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State have fled their homes following a failed abduction attempt that left no fewer than six people dead.

PUNCH Metro correspondents who visited the communities on Wednesday observed that several houses and shops were under lock and key, while activities in the usually busy settlements had significantly reduced.

Recall that suspected kidnappers invaded a dredging site in the area in the early hours of Monday in an attempt to abduct a Chinese national, but the operation was unsuccessful.

The Ogun State Police Command had confirmed that the attack resulted in the deaths of a soldier, a local hunter and four other persons.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Babaseyi Oluseyi, also disclosed that one of the suspected kidnappers was killed during a gunfight with security operatives who responded to the incident.

Our correspondents observed that many houses appeared deserted, while residents who remained in the communities expressed fears that another attack could occur.

It was gathered that a similar kidnapping incident occurred in the communities about three years earlier, with the suspected abductors reportedly collecting ransom before releasing their victims.

Similarly, it was observed that the road linking the communities to Ofada, where the nearest police post is located, was in a deplorable condition, making access to the communities difficult and strenuous.

Speaking with our correspondent on Wednesday, a resident who pleaded anonymity and claimed to have been among the local hunters who responded after hearing gunshots narrated that about five gunmen carried out the operation.

The resident noted that they initially thought there was a clash among workers at the dredging site, prompting local hunters to move to the area.

The resident said that upon getting to the scene, they unknowingly walked into an ambush laid by the gunmen.

He added that when they realised it was an ambush and fired a shot into the air to alert one another, the gunmen responded with sporadic gunfire, leading to one of them being shot while others fled for safety.

The resident narrated, “We were informed that some boys were fighting, and our Baale called us to go there. When we got there, we were in the midst of the kidnappers, but we didn’t know they were kidnappers. There were five.

“The Agbekoya that was among us shot into the air so that we could know where they were, but they responded by firing at us. It was a bullet from their gunfire that hit one guy called Ewe. Everyone began scampering for safety. I escaped through the water.

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“When we came out to call for support at about 2pm, the security forces did not arrive until about 6pm. When we got back to the scene, Ewe had already died. A similar kidnapping had occurred about three years ago, and the kidnappers escaped through the river.

“It was because the kidnappers realised that they might not be able to escape because many people were already coming out that they resorted to killing those they killed. One of the women who sold koko (a local meal made from corn pap) was said to be selling to one of the soldiers when they shot the soldier.”

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The resident noted that the presence of the two soldiers engaged to guard the dredging site and the workers prompted the gunmen to open fire in a bid to abduct the Chinese national.

He expressed concern that such an incident might occur again, considering that a similar attack happened about three years earlier, adding that many residents had fled their homes since Monday’s incident.

Also speaking with our correspondents, the Baale of Ajerogun Community, Nurudeen Salisu, narrated that the peaceful Monday morning became tense at about 10am when reports emerged that some gunmen had attacked the dredging site.

He noted that the gunmen, upon realising that the dredging site was secured by soldiers, killed one of the soldiers, injured the second and abducted four persons, including three workers and a trader.

Salisu said, “An incident like this happened about three years ago when some workers at the dredging site were kidnapped. They were released after a ransom of N5m was paid. Since then, we told the dredgers to engage security operatives, which they did by employing the services of soldiers.

“It was a Chinese man who joined them at the dredging site about a year ago, who was the target of the kidnappers, but I guess when they arrived and saw the soldiers, that was why they killed one of them and broke the leg of the second soldier.

“When we heard that they had taken four people with them after killing the soldier, I called Oke-Oko Community to alert them that the kidnappers might want to pass through the area and that they should be vigilant. The Baale of Oke-Oko sent some men to ambush them, but the kidnappers killed two of the men and killed three out of the four people they took from the dredging site.”

Salisu added that one of the victims who escaped identified the attackers as suspected Fulani gunmen, adding that one of the kidnappers was shot during an exchange of gunfire with the soldiers.

“The man who escaped explained that the injured soldier shot one of the kidnappers, and when his colleagues realised that he was weak, they shot him dead themselves.

“The police, army, and other security agencies have tried their best since the incident happened. They combed all the bushes. But the first set of policemen that arrived were not adequately armed, which the government must look into. About eight policemen came with just one gun. Our local hunters were not adequately armed either. The road is also not good, which was the excuse they gave, and it is understandable because the road is bad.

“Most people who lived here have left their homes. Many people have packed up their families and left the community. I am just appealing to them to return because the situation is under control,” the community leader added.

Another resident, who identified himself as the Chairman of the Agbekoya group in Fowowawo Community, Musbau Adenekan, narrated that the incident had thrown the community into panic, corroborating claims that many residents had fled their homes due to uncertainty.

“This community is always full of activities from traders and dredgers, but since the incident happened on Monday, there has been panic, and some people have already left their homes,” Adenekan added.

Meanwhile, the state police command has assured residents of the state that the incident is not related to banditry.

The command had also stated efforts were ongoing to apprehend the fleeing suspects.