

Six killed, 12 houses burnt as villagers rise against royal father

CHUKWUDI ACHIFE, Enugu

SIX people were feared killed and over 12 houses, including the residence of the traditional ruler, burnt yesterday at the Obodo-Uvuru autonomous community in Nkanu East local government area of Enugu State during a rampage by irate youths of the community who were said to be protesting the death of one of their kinsman in police custody.

Sunday Champion learnt that the traditional ruler, Igwe Dumeh Nnamoko with hundreds of villagers has already fled the town out of fear for his life and the expected crackdown by police which have already drafted a contingent to quell the crisis.

Sources traced the immediate cause of the trouble to the arrest late last month of a deceased, identified as Chikaodi Nnamoko by the police allegedly at the request of the traditional ruler for his role in a protest by the youths of the town against him (traditional ruler) over his refusal to account for the financial proceeds from some communal trees that had been felled and sold in pursuit of some community development

projects.

It was learnt that the youths had sought the release of Nnamoko only to be told by the Divisional Police Officer at the nearby Amagunze station that he was not detained there. The youths were said to have taken their search last Friday to the state police headquarters, Enugu after searching in vain at other stations at the vicinity. It was there that they learnt that the detainee had died at the Park Lane Hospital Enugu where he was taken to after he slumped from wounds inflicted on him while allegedly being tortured by the police.

The irate youths were said to have immediately headed home to confront the traditional ruler over Nnamoko's death and sources said that it was in the process that trouble ensued.

Sunday Champion learnt that the traditional ruler who was until his appointment by the state government to lead the community when it was carved out of Akpofu town, a popular broadcaster with the state-owned Enugu Broadcasting Service (ESBS), fled to Enugu as

soon as the crisis erupted and has been hiding there.

Villagers who spoke to *Sunday Champion* said the latest development was the climax of many grievances long nursed by the youths of the community against the Igwe Nnamoko whom they accused of highhandedness and greed.

They described the late Chikaodi Nnamoko as an enterprising young man who commanded the respect of his contemporaries in the town due to his commitment to its progress, adding that the youths believed the Igwe must have conspired with the police to 'eliminate him' while in custody.

The embattled traditional ruler could not be reached for comments on the matter but the state Police Public Relations Officer Mr Mike Abattam confirmed the development and disclosed that a detachment of officers had been sent to bring the situation in the town under control.

The identities of those killed during the rampage and the owners of the burnt houses, minus that of the Igwe, could not be obtained as at press time.