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Clash over farm land leaves one dead, houses burnt in Gombe village

By Haruna Gimba Yaya, Gombe | Publish Date: Jul 16 2016 5:00AM


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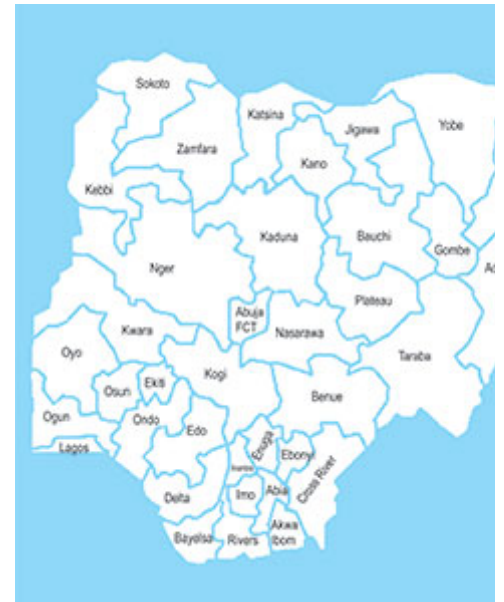
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A communal clash over farm land has left one person dead and no fewer than 17 houses burnt and properties worth thousands of naira destroyed in Laschikoldok and Kufayi villages in Billiri and Shongom Local Government Areas (LGA) of Gombe State.

A watchman was killed and a Honda Accord and motorcycles allegedly burnt by youths from Laschikoldok village, who looted foodstuff and livestock worth hundreds of thousands of naira, after they invaded Kufayi village late Monday evening.



The development rendered many residents homeless, forcing women and children to flee to Billiri town for safety, leaving the once lively village a shadow of its former self.

Daily Trust gathered that the communities, who share the same border, have been involved in communal clashes for over a long period of time over farm produce which each claimed belonged to their forefathers.

Mr. Simon Istifanus Abdullahi, a resident of Kufayi village narrated how the incident took place.

“On Monday evening around 5:30pm we were resting under trees after returning from our farms when unknown people carrying dangerous weapons, including guns, invaded our village. They killed one person and set our houses on fire.

“We trekked for about ten kilometres to seek refuge in Billiri town, before security agents came to our rescue. By then they had burnt over fifteen houses and carted away our belongings,” Abdullahi said.

It was observed that there is only one police outpost with less than ten policemen on duty. But, “they don’t work in the evenings, therefore there was no single policeman on duty when we were attacked,” Mr Abdullahi said.

“It was the arrival of policemen from the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad that saved the situation. They chased the attackers back to their villages,” he added.

Investigations revealed that authorities at the three neighbouring LGAs headquarters of Billiri, Kaltungo and Shongom, have over the years submitted files of reports to the state government after each clash, but government failed to take action and as a result the clashes keep occurring for years unchecked.

Not satisfied with the failure of the state government to take appropriate measures to curtail the crisis, youths from Billiri town last Tuesday took to the streets and blocked the Gombe-Yola Federal Highway to protest the alleged injustice, rendering many motorists plying the highway to Adamawa, Taraba and Benue states stranded.


According to an eye witness, Mr Musa, who spoke to Daily Trust on phone during the crisis, the youths, mostly women carrying machetes and







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cutlasses, set fire on tires to protest what they described as failure of the authorities concerned to take action in what is becoming a daily occurrence.

To address the situation, a government delegation led by the Acting Secretary to the State Government, Mr. James Pisagi, paid a condolence visit to the communities on Wednesday. The delegation which comprised the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Austin Iwar, state Director of the State Security Service (SSS), Commander of 301 Artillery and some members of the state House of Assembly, visited the two villages to preach for peace.

Addressing communities of Laschikoldok and Kufayi in separate visits, Mr. Pisagi expressed his dismay over the unfortunate incident which resulted in loss of lives and properties. He warned that perpetrators will be fished out and brought to book.

In their responses, Chairmen of Billiri and Shongom LGAs, Barrister Faruk Dankuka Lawaning and Reverend Timothy Burak respectively, blamed the attack on some miscreants from the society.

The executives of the two LGAs called on the state government to arrest the perpetrators and punish those found wanting to serve as deterrent to others. They also urged the state government to work on the previous security reports sent by the local council to find a lasting solution to the problem.

Speaking to newsmen after inspecting the affected areas, the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Austin Iwar, said the police were able to bring the situation under control and normalcy has since return to the communities.

“Police and other security agencies are stationed in the affected areas to provide security against future attack. We have spoken to them on the need to preserve security of lives and live in peace and work together as they have been doing for many years.

“As security operatives this time around we will carry out a comprehensive investigation. We have confirmed the death of one person and a number of people that sustained injuries. We have already set up a powerful investigation team and people who are found culpable will be charged to court accordingly to make sure it doesn’t happen again,” the CP said. Mr. Iwar added that preliminary report has shown that the cause of the crisis is related to farm lands.

“The problem is that people lay claim to farm land and instead of following the normal process of seeking redress in court, they chose to take laws into their hands. So far we have not made any arrest because we are still investigating to know the root cause and where the problem started before we begin to make arrests,” he added.

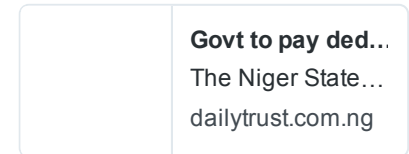
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