

Sad tale of Dangote drivers killed by suspected IPOB members

Three weeks ago, suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) attacked a Dangote Cement Company trailer returning from the company's depot in Orlu, Imo State. The driver and two driver's assistants were killed and their remains burnt. *Daily Trust* on Sunday traced the families of the victims as they mourn their losses

From Lami Sadiq, Kaduna

Halliru Rabi'u thought he was making his family proud when he pleaded to replace his brother as a driver's helper, working under Alhassan Saidu, one of the drivers working under the Dangote Cement Company in Obajana, Kogi State. It was on a Sunday morning and Halliru had met his father, Malam Rabi'u, at his okra farm in Panmadina, a community in Zaria, Kaduna State to ask for his blessings. His older brother who often followed Alhassan, a popular trailer driver had been indisposed, drying and preserving his recently harvested maize. So, Halliru, who was a commercial motorcyclist before the recent ban by the Kaduna State Government, decided to cash in on the opportunity which he thought could earn him some extra money. With his father's blessings and his wife's prayers, Halliru joined Alhassan Saidu and Umaru Abdulyasar, a retired but recently recalled trailer driver for the long journey to Obajana.

However, three days later, their families in Panmadina were shocked to hear that the three had been gruesomely murdered after they offloaded cement at the Dangote Cement Depot in Orlu, Imo State, and were returning to Obajana.

Relatives say suspected members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), on rampage, had intercepted their trailer along Orlu-Ihiala road and after profiling them, killed them and set their corpses ablaze.

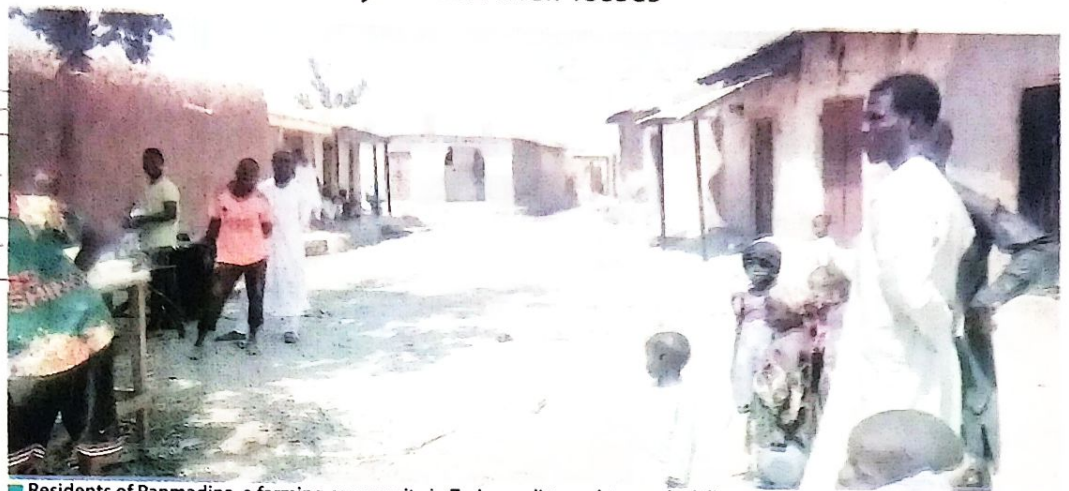
Grief had enveloped the farming community of Panmadina in Kaduna's Zaria Local Government Area on the day our correspondent visited. Residents of the closely-knitted community, now more bonded by fear and tragedy, claimed the decomposing remains of their children had been returned to them, forcing them to arrange a funeral prayer around 2am.

"We couldn't call people to attend the Janazah and we couldn't wait till the morning, we had to bury them around 2am. By 3.16am we had returned from the cemetery," said Abdulyasar Shehu, the father of one of the victims.

For a community with as many as 30 youths working as trailer drivers, some with the Dangote Cement Company and conveying goods to various parts of the country, elders say it is time to take action on unprovoked and targeted killings in the South East. "We have lost children in the past but the killing of Halliru, Alhassan and Umar is by far the most gruesome and wicked. They were not just killed, their corpses were abused," said Aliyu Shehu, an elder in the community.

"We are all related, so what affects one, affects the other. This is not the first time such targeted killings are occurring in the South east but we continue to remain patient, we are living peacefully with the Igbos in Zaria and they enjoy a lot of privileges that our own people cannot enjoy in the east," an angry Shehu said. He urged the government to put an end to all killings, while urging the Dangote Cement Company to compensate the families of the deceased.

Since news of their demise circulated, Mansur Saidu who also drives a Dangote



Residents of Panmadina, a farming community in Zaria are distraught over the killing of 3 of their youths by suspected IPOB members in the South East

trailer and is said to have been trained by his older brother, Alhassan Saidu, said he has remained edgy, fearing for his safety and those of other northerners conveying goods to the South east.

At Alhassan's home where *Daily Trust* Saturday found Mansur together with their frail and aged mother, it was gathered that her health had deteriorated since the unfortunate news broke. Alhassan, who was behind the wheel when death stroke had left behind three wives but at the time of the visit, his first wife had been at the hospital prepping for a surgery while the other two wives had relocated to their parents' home.

However, a few meters from Alhassan's home, Umar's two wives sit amidst six children as they mourn a husband they spoke with a day before his life was cut short. Maryam and Sadiya - his wives, said they knew something was amiss when their husband's uncle came to their home with a grim face and restlessly paced the compound. Because he could not tell them the terrible news, his wife had prepared the co-wives for the devastating blow that has now changed their lives forever. "All I can say is that the government needs to take action to ensure that more people are not killed. Our husband is gone but I think the government can put a stop to these senseless killings of our men,"

Maryam said in tears.

Her plea was re-echoed by Abdulyasar Shehu, Umar's father, who said he had spoken to his son on Tuesday but became worried by Wednesday when two of his older daughters tried unsuccessfully to reach Umar and later reported to him that his phone had rung consistently, but there was no answer on the other end.

"The next day, a relative came to inform us that Alhassan (the driver) had died alongside one of the driver's assistants but could not say whether it was Umar or Halliru. You know it is heavy to tell someone to his face that his son had died," he said chocking back tears.

Abdulyasar's son, Umaru, according to residents used to drive one of the Dangote trailers before some complications resorted to him staying back home without a job. His father explained that, "the company had recalled him and others and so he had attached himself to Alhassan pending when he would be given a vehicle," but this would never happen as Abdulyasar, a septuagenarian and also an Islamic teacher, said he had called a relative who also worked with the cement company at Obajana who broke the news that his son had been among the victims.

"The question I asked was: did they hit someone in an accident and a mob turned

against them? But I was told that it is part of the IPOB routine to come out on certain days, attack and kill specific people," the septuagenarian said.

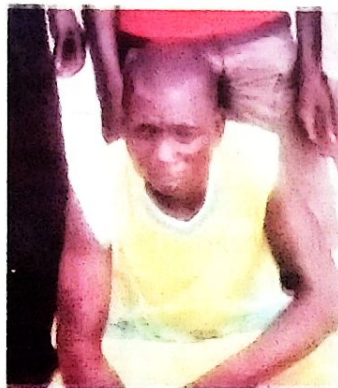
As the terrible news engulfed the community, a vehicle had been commissioned to bring their dead home but they were informed that the company had provided a vehicle to handle the task. Having retired as a truck driver himself who has passed through the Orlu-Ihiala axis during his truck-driving years, Abdulyasar said he could not have believed that the area would now remain indelible in his mind for the rest of his life.

For Halliru, what started as a first experience to travel outside Panmadina soon became his last. His father, Malam Rabi'u, recalled that his deceased son had been excited when he gave him his blessings. His widowed wife, Jamila Mustapha, also recalls that her husband's journey had been instinctive but she remains faithful that it was the act of God.

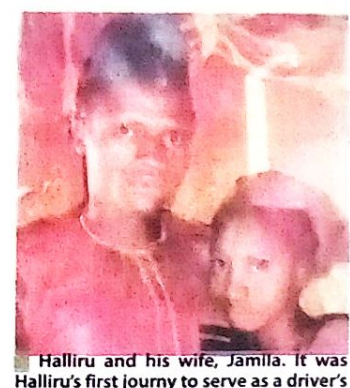
For a community still shaken by the tragic incident and now trying to make sense of what happened along Orlu-Ihiala road in Nigeria's South east region, residents have appealed to Dangote Company to compensate the families of the three deceased and to temporarily suspend assigning northern drivers to the South east.



Alhassan Saidu, the Dangote trailer driver killed by suspected IPOB members



Umar Abdulyasar, a drivers assistant attached to Alhassan, was also killed



Halliru and his wife, Jamila. It was Halliru's first journey to serve as a driver's assistant but was killed by suspected IPOB members