

# Jos residents jittery over resurgence of Sara-suka gangs

The resurgence of the activities of dreaded criminal gangs, popularly known as Sara-suka in the mostly Muslim communities of Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State in recent times, has become a source of concern to many Jos residents, especially considering the number of lives being lost and properties destroyed in the affected communities on a daily basis, *Daily Trust Saturday* reports.

Ado Abubakar Musa, Jos

The mode of operation and kind of dangerous weapons used by members of these groups, mostly made up of youths between the ages of 17 and 25, have been generating fear and resentment within the affected communities. Many residents of the area are saying that if the problem is not tackled by relevant authorities, the activities of the militant group would wreak a huge havoc.

Prior to the recent development, various stakeholders had employed different mechanisms to control the menace, which made many members of the criminal gangs to denounce their membership.

In the last five years, a non-governmental organisation known as Peace Vanguard (PV), has been making efforts to curtail the menace of the groups. As a result of these efforts, many of them were enrolled in secondary schools and tertiary institutions to continue with their education. Some were also taken to various workshops for skills acquisition to become self-reliant.

The Operation Safe Haven (OPSH), a multi-security taskforce maintaining peace and harmony in Plateau and some parts of Bauchi and Kaduna states, also in its efforts to tackle the menace of Sara-suka, had severally engaged the youth on many occasions on the need to stop causing mayhem in Jos North and its environs.

In 2019, the taskforce rehabilitated about 60 repentant members of the criminal gangs. They were part of the 500 said to have denounced their membership of the gangs, according to the then commander of the taskforce, Major-General Augustine Agundu.

However, the resurgence of the deadly gangs in the last couple of months has put fear into many communities within Jos metropolis. For example, on March 3, 2022, a 21-year-old **Usman Musa**, also known as **Baffa**, was stabbed to death in front of his home when a rival group of Sara-suka stormed Anguwan Rogo community in Jos North to take revenge against another group said to have earlier attacked them in their domain. The clash occurred about 9pm when many residents of the area were still in the streets.

Abba Musa, an elder brother to the deceased, told to *Daily Trust Saturday* that Usman was a victim of circumstance as he was never a member of Sara-suka, but he was a younger brother to one of their members.

He said, "He just went out of the house when he suddenly met with members of one of the gangs who were on a revenge mission in the area. They also wounded



■ Some of the suspected members of the groups arrested last week by vigilante group



■ Usman Musa killed by the group



■ A lecturer killed by the Sara-Suka gangs

other passersby."

Similarly, on April 11, a lecturer at the Department of Psychology, Federal University, Gashua, Yobe State, **Sani Muhammad Mazadu**, and a tailor, **Safiyu Sa'id**, were killed during a clash between two rival groups of Sara-suka around Yankwaba in the same Jos North. They were said to have been hit by a stray bullet.

Few days after the incident, another member of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Jos North command, **Suleiman Sa'adu**, was killed. A good number of rival group members were also killed.

*Daily Trust Saturday* reports that during their operations, valuable properties, especially vehicles, are usually destroyed.

**Why there was resurgence of the gangs**

Many residents who spoke with our correspondent said there was resurgence of the groups in the state due to lack of good parental upbringing, joblessness, drug abuse, among other things. They added that those engaging in the recent activities of the gangs were new.

Malam Nura Alhassan, the chairman of the Peace Vanguard said, "One of the major problems is the inability of parents to give moral training to their children. We have reports that many parents of these hoodlums don't know the movement of their children, including where they eat. They don't take the responsibilities of their kids, let alone giving proper training."

"We have received reports that most of those hoodlums are newcomers. They also block major roads to snatch phones and collect money from passersby. We believe that those who stayed long in the system have already repented because as a group we had done a lot in the past to take them from the streets."

The commander, Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Jos North, Sani Kachalla, also said the resurgence of the activities of the groups could be connected to lack of seriousness from the side of members of the communities, including influential individuals.

He said that hardly a day would pass without the news that one or

two persons were stabbed, adding that in many occasions they collect people's money, phones and other belongings.

"Our community leaders are not helping matters because any time we make efforts to arrest these criminals and hand them to the authorities, you will see them in the communities tomorrow. Parents often go to any length to ensure the release of their children."

"In some cases, when the criminals are arrested, their parents would complain and ask that they should be released, claiming that they are innocent. Some parents would even say that our volunteer service is irrelevant. These and many more reasons have contributed to the resurgence of the groups in recent times," Kachalla said.

He further said that prior to the resurgence of the gangs, his organisation was not getting any financial support from the government, but now, the chairman of Jos North Local Government, Shehu Bala, is giving them adequate support to do their job. "He provides stipends to fuel our patrol vehicle," he added.

Condemning the activities of the gangs, Suleiman Tanim, a councillor representing Anguwan Rogo/Anguwan Rimi ward, said they had done all they could to stop their atrocities without success.

"Even before the killing of the lecturer and the tailor, we met with these boys, warning them not to continue with such activities, but they went ahead to fight."

"We will not continue to fold our hands to see these perpetrators holding the communities hostage. Whoever is caught perpetrating evil will be made to face the law. We will ask security agents to do their job," Kachalla added.

What is common now with these gang groups is the use of locally made guns during their operations.

Before the resurgence of their activities, members of the gangs were known to use knives, cutlasses and daggers during their operations, but in recent times they reportedly use locally made guns to operate.

Many Jos residents who spoke with *Daily Trust Saturday* said that if the activities of the groups were not checked, everyone would soon fall a victim.

Aliyu Muhammad Danbadawai, the Mai Anguwa of Anguwan Rogo, said, "With this development, one can say that members of these groups can go to any length to take your life because whoever holds a gun intends to kill. I think the major problem is from members of the communities. Parents are not playing their roles. Government alone cannot solve this problem, so communities must make efforts. Again, people must pray and match their prayers with action."

**How to end the menace**

Kachalla further said that to tackle the activities of the groups, all hands must be on deck.

He said, "Whoever is found guilty of the offence must be allowed to face the law. Members of the communities should remove fear from their minds and provide us with information about the activities of these groups."

"We have already sacrificed our lives for the comfort of the communities; they have to sacrifice too. That will give us courage to continue the volunteer services we have been rendering, which will go a long way in tackling the problem."

On his part, the chairman of Peace Vanguard also suggested that for the problem to be tackled, government and individuals who are financially buoyant must be involved.

"The government should empower those who have repented to enable them become self-reliant. Rich individuals within the communities should join hands by providing scholarship to those who are interested in going back to school. These will go a long way in tackling the menace," he said.

Speaking on the development, Major Ishaku Takwa, the spokesperson of the OPSH said, "Sector 1 of our operation, which is in charge of Jos North, is not sleeping over the activities of Sara-suka. It has to do with drug addiction. They started like local thugs, fighting one another with bare hands. They later moved to carrying knives and daggers."

"Now, you see them with locally made guns. There is no day our men will not arrest two or three of these boys. These are new groups that are coming up, and they are very dangerous. Sector 1 and vigilantes in Jos North are seriously collaborating to tackle the problem. I believe those that have been rehabilitated before are not the ones committing the crimes. They are new ones. They look younger. We have them in our custody."

"Skills acquisition programmes will help a lot to reduce the menace. Individuals and other politicians should come in. If they can remove 10 to 20 people from the streets, it would go a long way. Solving this problem requires a collective effort."