

THE bakery on No. 3, Olokodano Street, off Liasu Road in the Alimosho Local Council of Lagos State is well known to people in the area and beyond.

Not only do many youths in the area work there, quite a number of women buy bread, which they sell on retail from the bakery.

The women always come in the early hours to wait for their allocations. On Friday, June 1, they did the same.

But this time, things went very, very wrong.

They were attacked by a marauding gang of armed robbers who raped three of them and went on to wreak havoc on many families in three streets in the neighbourhood.

Residents told *The Guardian* they never imagined that what they had heard happening in some other parts of the Lagos metropolis could befall them.

They spoke of a gang of about 50, mostly young people in their 20s and 30s, who robbed and injured their victims and raped their wives and daughters.

For want of better description, those that saw what happened likened it to clips from a Hollywood film.

Several days after, they still speak in awe of the frightening, deafening roar of gunshots "as if it were a battlefield". The precision of the incursions into different houses, the thoroughness of the robbers and the evident lack of concern that anybody could stop them.

"They were so sure of themselves and were hardly in a hurry. For the over four hours they operated, they acted as if they knew help would not come," a resident, who lost an undisclosed sum of money to the thieves, said on Tuesday.

"The robbers had a field day, making life hell for the 200 households in three streets they robbed of their cash, handsets and jewellery.

"Four women waiting to collect bread from Ayan Bakery were raped.

"A little boy called Malik died strapped on his mother's back. He was hit by one of the hundreds of bullets from the robbers' guns," the resident said.

According to Ayankujo, whose bakery and home were robbed:

"The robbers came in one Sport Utility Van,

By Bertram Nwannekanma

two BWM cars, two Mitsubishi buses and one Superbike".

Ayankujo, who escaped the robbers' bullets by the whiskers, described the operation as a sign of how inadequate security is the bane of the nation, but especially Lagos.

He said: "I am happy today that God spared my life from their bullets. I do not know how I managed to escape because they shot in my direction. God delivered me.

"They were in their mid-twenties and very ruthless. They took a huge sum of money from me, as well as electronic equipment".

Another victim, the landlord of No. 23, Okewo Street, lost to the robbers N250,000 he intended to pay for a piece of land.

They broke his head when he tried to hide some of the money.

Sporting a strip of bandage on his head, he told *The Guardian*: "That I am alive today is God's mercy because the robbers intended to kill me.

"But one of them said I was a good man and that they should not kill me.

"That was how they ended up not shooting at me but broke my head instead," he said.

A resident who gave his name simply as Baba Segun, said he watched the robbers operate from a pent house near the street.

He said: "As they were making their way to their vehicles at about 4.25 a.m. that day, they intensified their sporadic shooting.

• One of the gates smashed by the robbers

"The neighbourhood was so quiet and you could hear murmurs of prayers from frightened people in their homes.

"Then, suddenly, one of them shouted that they could still rob the street before day broke.

"They started on the street, smashing into gates and doors. There were cries and wailing in the homes they invaded."

According to Baba Segun, those who came for the robbery knew the terrain very well, "because it takes people who live in the area and who know the terrain well to be able to access Ikotun Road through Synagogue Church. It is not a familiar route," he said.

One of the women attacked at the bakery said she was raped by two of the robbers.

She said she hopes God would protect her from contracting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from the robbers.

The incident has left many residents perturbed and disoriented, with some relocating from their homes to sleep in churches.

Others fret whenever night is approaching, as they never know when next the robbers would pounce.

"The failure of the Police to come to our aid, though many telephone calls were made during the four-hour robbery, is also indicative that we are not safe", a victim said.

Their fear was heightened by the discovery of a Police baton at the scene of the robbery and another attack the same day at a petrol service station less than 10 hours after the incident.

PHOTOS: BERTRAM NWANNEKANMA

The robbery has forced an unpleasant entry into the history of Egbe and its environs which have now joined the league of areas that have lately fallen victim of armed robbers in the Lagos metropolis.

The incident came barely a few days after gangs of armed robbers struck at Shogunle and Mafoluku areas.

Reacting to the incidents, the Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Olabode Ojajuni, who spoke to *The Guardian* on phone, expressed worry on the development, saying it may be the same gang that robbed Mafoluku residents that also went to Egbe, spreading fear.

He gave assurance that the police would live up to the challenge as a joint military and police patrol would take off in Lagos very soon.

He said: "I assure you that the police are not sleeping and we will do all within our powers to bring the perpetrators of the robberies to book.

"In the interim, a joint police and military patrol will commence just like we did at Shogunle to prevent a re-occurrence".

As if to prove Ojajuni right, the Police in Idimu two days ago arrested seven young men suspected to have been involved in the Egbe robbery.

In fact, a man who lost his handset to the thieves when they broke into his house at Okewo Street, was given back the handset, which the police recovered, from the suspects.

There is a groundswell of opinion that the suspects should be charged to court, as there may be enough grounds to make a credible case against them.

"Some of them were in the gang that attacked us at Okewo Street," a victim said yesterday.

"How else did they get the handset? It would be best to prosecute and put them behind bars rather than let them go free only to rob and kill the next day," he said

When a few weeks to the last general elections, well-meaning Nigerians complained that there were too many small arms and guns in circulation in the wrong circles. But they were not taken seriously

Now, innocent Lagosians are reaping the deadly fruits of the dangerous mix of such weapons in the hands of unemployed youths.

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