

# NEWS

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### Three feared dead in Benue, Cross River communal clash

*From Simeon Nwakaudu, Makurdi*

**RURAL** communities in Benue State have continued to boil as three persons were feared dead and 50 houses torched in the land dispute between Mbakpeghe in Benue and their Bebe neighbours in Cross River State.

The Guardian learnt that the crisis started last weekend over claim by the two communities to a stretch of presumably fertile land.

As at the beginning of this week, hundreds of residents of Mbakpeghe Village had fled to Adipko, headquarters of Kwande Local Council, where they took refuge amongst their kinsmen. Those who escaped the fighting zone on Tuesday evening claimed that the Bebe people were still attacking more villages.

John Ternenge, a community leader in Mbakpeghe said that though fighting had subsided in the area, it was still not safe for his people. He accused Bebe of hiring militiamen to unleash mayhem on his people, with a view to taking over the disputed land from them.

He praised the Benue State Police Command for promptly intervening in the crisis. Ternenge said that it was the timely intervention of the police that saved the day, claiming that the militiamen were prepared to decimate his community.

He called on the Benue State Governor, Gabriel Suswam to work with his Cross River State counterpart, Liyel Imoke to resolve the crisis.

When contacted, the spokesman of the Benue State Police Command, Mr. Emmanuel Deebom confirmed the skirmishes, but insisted that only one person was killed during the incident. He, however, admitted that several houses were destroyed during the crisis. Deebom also said that some public buildings such as primary schools and clinics were destroyed.

He said that the police learnt of the feud when the people of Mbakpeghe claimed that their land had been taken over by their Bebe neighbours.

Deebom said that it was the Bebe people that first attacked the Mbakpeghe after a peace meeting that failed to yield results.

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