



Body of chief Bassey Ikpaisong, dumped under a heap of grass

Akwa Ibom: A Peep At Cultists' Desolation Of Etim Ekpo Communities

BERNARD TOLANI DADA writes that residents of over nine villages in Etim Ekpo local government area of Akwa Ibom State have been on exodus from their ancestral homes as two leading cult groups in the Niger Delta region turn the places into theatres of war.

For the past three months, residents of the villages of Udianga Enem, Abak-Obong, Ikot Udobong, Oruk Ata 11, Ikpe, Otoro, Edem Akai and Obon Ebot in Etim Ekpo local government area have been under siege of cultists, bringing socio-economic activities in the areas to a standstill.

Investigation by our correspondent revealed that local residents in some of the affected communities including Udianga Enem, have resorted to seeking refuge in safer grounds such as the nearby Iwukem, Utu Etim Ekpo, Abak, Ikot Ekpene and Uyo, following the total collapse of security infrastructure in the affected areas.

"I have resorted to migrating away from my community, Udianga Enem to rent a house for myself and my children at Iwukem, because my house in the village was attacked and all I labored for taken away by cultists.

"They broke into my house and took my personal belongings including cash and also carted away several liters of palm oil I stored in drums for my customers, who use to come from the nearby Aba, Abia State to load the product," disclosed a

45-year-old widow, who would not want her name in print.

Another woman, who would not want her name in print, told our correspondent that:

"I came home to take some vegetables, yams, corn, gari and other foodstuff from my farm. Since the crisis started, we fled to the neighboring Okoyo village, but when we started facing starvation, I took a decision to return to the village to take some foodstuff from my farm.

"After harvesting the commodities, we sold some and took some back to our refugee camp in Okoyo, but along the road, a criminal accosted me and my son and threatened us with a gun to surrender the cash.

"My son pleaded with the criminal not to take all the money, but remain some for me so I can take care of the family in a strange land. He became angry, pulled a gun and shot my son in the leg. Right now, we are still battling with no money to get the pieces of bullets extracted from his leg."

At the last count, unofficial record put deaths toll in the cult crises in Etim Ekpo, involving the Debam and the Dewell cult groups at about 54, in the last couple of months.

In the latest attack, according to the Village head of Udianga

Enem, Chief Mendie Josiah Udoekoriko, five persons including a pastor, Mr. Uwem Monday Ananki, were shot dead, while the village Affhong Market and one Akpanowo Ukongwo compound were torched by the invading cultists.

Besides, the nearby village of Abak-Obong, was attacked by the hoodlums, leaving the village head, Chief Bassey Ikpaisong; his brother, Mr. Fred Ikpaisong and two others dead.

Speaking to journalists, after assessment tour to the affected areas, the Chief Udiang Etokakpan, a community leader in the area, explained that "the exodus of the people from Udianga Enem to other safer areas was borne out of fear.

"The people had to migrate from the troubled area because immediately the incident happened, the local government chairman, Hon. Udeme Wilson Eduo, who is an indigene of Udianga Enem, had to evacuate his aged parents and other valuables to Uyo, the state capital.

"As the chief security officer of the local government, he has not visited the troubled areas of Udianga Enem, where he comes from, instead he is preparing for local government election to transit himself as elected chairman from November 11, 2017," he lamented.

It was gathered that as the people migrated from the troubled areas, local criminals said to be the remnants of the Dewell and Debam cult groups have resorted to combing the Udianga Enem village and

embarking on stealing spree.

For instance, it was gathered that they stormed a compound along the Coal City Road in Udianga Enem, disposed a widow, popularly called Ifeke of her personal belongings including N30,000, several litres of palm oil, clothes and other valuables.

"I was chased late in the night and beaten to stupor, before they took my N30,000, many litres of palm oil that I stored in drums for my customers from Aba. They also raided my neighbours' homes and carted away valuables including cash and clothes", Ifeke narrated in tears.

Also, Chief Akpanuko Aniefiok, a youth leader, who called for increased security surveillance in the troubled areas, recalled that the criminals, cashing in on the isolated environment stormed some compounds along Usung Ikot Obioma and broke into Ifiok Reuben's house and stole her personal effects as she fled to live in safer area of Iwukem.

Cash and several goats, it was gathered were also stolen in the late Sunday Ekponta's compound, when the hoodlums broke into the family house along Ikot Obioma Road, late in the night.

Worried by the development, concerned stakeholders have petitioned the Commissioner of Police (CP), Muazu Zubairu, however is of the opinion that some political leaders are behind the mayhem.

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