

Why We

Robbery gang members speak on their operations and why they have to kill their victims sometimes

By Chris Ajaero

THERE IS A SURGE IN THE incidents of armed robbery in Nigeria. Most Nigerian cities and highways are no longer safe.

Aba in Abia State, Lokoja in Kogi State, Lagos, Abuja, the federal capital

city and many major highways are under the siege of dare-devil robbery gangs. They kill, maim and forcefully take away people's valuables.

In Lagos, police cells are bursting in their seams with armed robbery suspects. They are mainly youths desperate to make money. There are also citizens of

Niger Republic and the Republic of Chad among them.

Last week, *Newswatch* trailed some of the robbery suspects to their cells in the Lagos State Police headquarters, Ikeja and the anti-robbery unit of the Lagos Criminal Investigation Department, LCID, Panti, Yaba, where

Kill

they confessed how and why they kill their victims.

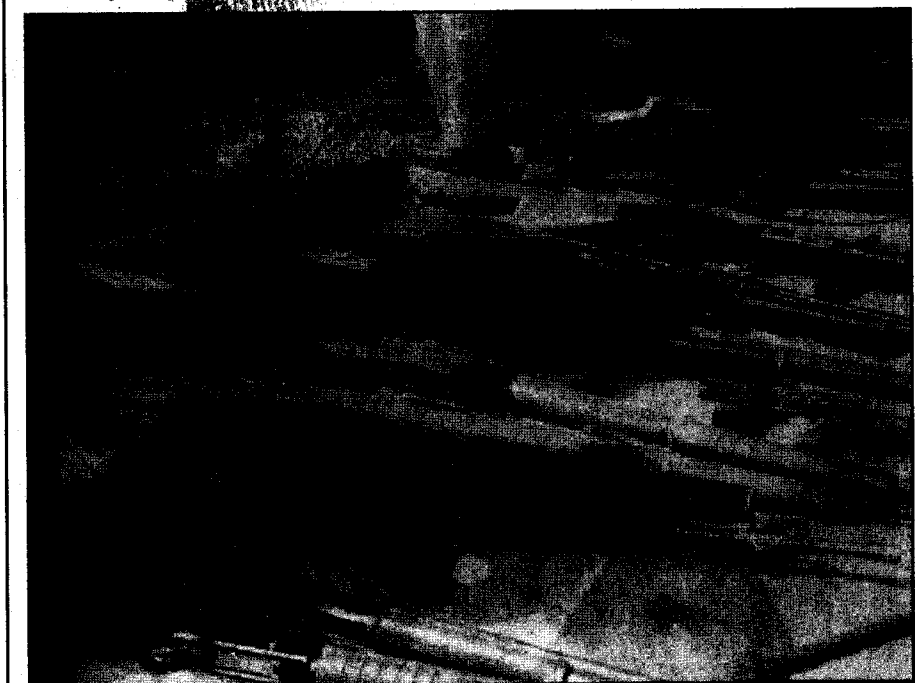
Although the armed robbers were usually callous when dealing with their victims, they were reluctant to admit that they killed innocent people when confronted by *Newswatch*. However, after thorough cross-examination, some of them confessed that they killed whenever their victims resisted them or made some wrong moves. According to them, the survival word for any of their victims who wanted his or her life spared



Robbery suspects: Yinusa, Bello, Hammed, Bato and Yusuf



Robbery Gangs: Cross section of arrested armed robbery suspects



Recovered ammunition from robbery suspects

is 'cooperation.' They detest a situation whereby their victims argue with them or try to recognise them. All they want from victims is for them to look down and answer whatever questions asked pertaining to where they kept their money and jewellery. This is to enable them quickly finish their operations and escape with their loot.

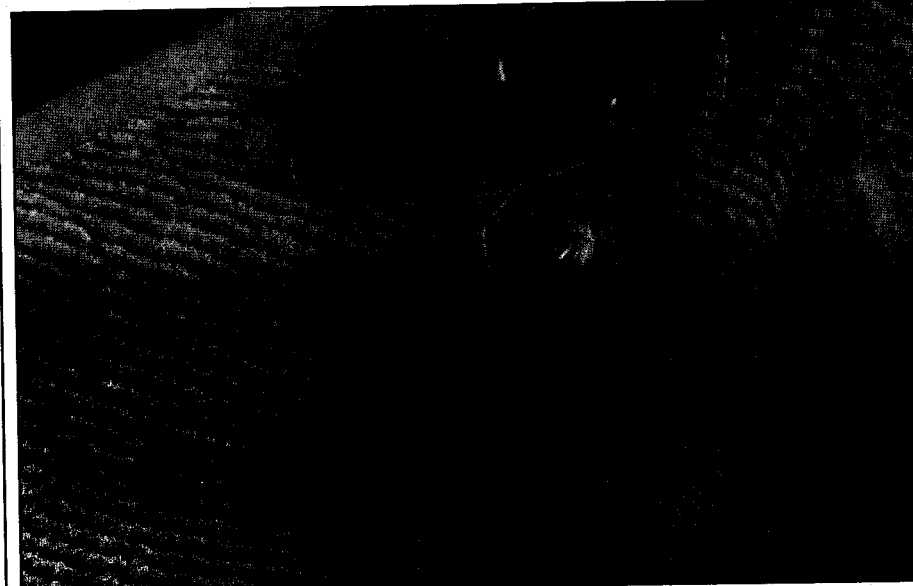
The robbers confessed that they also killed either under the influence of drugs or in panicky moves to escape when confronted by the police. In such circumstances, the robbery gangs who operate with military precision and



Adekoya

peculiar stamp of brutality shoot sporadically into the air to scare people. One of such instances was the robbery at the Ogudu branch of a highly successful new generation bank on June 21 this year, during which one Corporal Okoro was felled by the superior gun power of armed robbers.

Ajibola Adekoya, driver of a 20-man robbery gang in the operation told *Newswatch* that they killed the policeman in a bid to escape arrest. Adekoya who reached his Waterloo after that operation is now being detained at the police headquarters, Ikeja. He was arrested



Locally made ammunition recovered by Police

along with Saheed Ogunshola, his conductor while trying to escape after the police foiled the robbery attempt.

Newswatch learnt that the gang had stormed the bank, after an unsuccessful attempt to rob a branch of First Bank, at about 10.00am on that day. Clad in military camouflage, white t-shirt and caps, the robbers who came in with a white Mitsubishi bus with Lagos registration number XL433JJJ, subdued both customers and staff of the bank. But before they could have access to the vault, words had reached the officers and men of the Nigerian Police, Ogudu

division, which incidentally shares the premises with Area H Command.

In a swift reaction, the police anti-robbery squad led by ACP Olusa, an assistant commissioner of police and Funsho Ajao-Olarinoye, divisional police officer, DPO, confronted the robbers. Wading through the gutter that is close to the bank, some of the police officers took strategic positions from where they engaged the robbers in a shoot-out that lasted up to 10 minutes.

Despite the sophisticated weapons used, the robbers, eventually beat a retreat when they saw the gallantry and determination of the police. When the robbers noticed that the game was up, some of them abandoned their operational

vehicle and escaped in a boat stationed by the sea shore, at the Orioke end of the road. But in the process of escaping they killed three men as they were shooting indiscriminately.

Newswatch learnt that of the three persons killed by the robbers, one was a customer of the bank; another was a security man, who was trying to lock up the gate to the compound he was guarding, while the third was one of the robbers identified as Roy Adams. Many innocent people, including Tijani Stephen, a commercial motorcycle rider were hit by stray bullets. He was rushed to the emergency unit of Gbagada General Hospital, where he is now recuperating after the extraction of the gun pellets from his system.

Jide Bankole, who sells recharge cards within the area, said people in the area were taken unawares by gunshots which came sporadically. Not quite long after, people were inundated with deafening gunshots, which came as a result of the challenge posed by the resistance of the police anti-robbery squad. According to him, the situation threw the area into confusion as people ran helter skelter. However, luck ran out on Adekoya and Ogunsanwo as they were confronted by the youths in the area when they made spirited efforts to escape. The youths who had been watching the hot exchange from a distance accosted them because the robbers had exhausted the bullets in their guns and other gang members had escaped in a boat. They were subsequently handed over to the police.

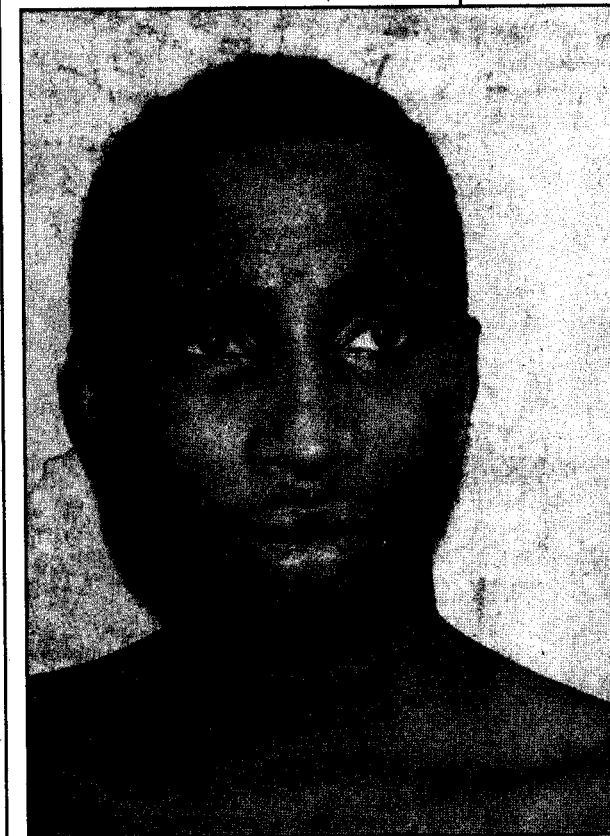
Adekoya confessed that before setting out for their operation in Ogudu, members of the gang had a good dose of Indian hemp. This, he said, was why they could kill and maim anybody who stood in their way, including policemen.

Another startling revelation on why the robbers kill their victims came from Kingsley Ikona, a notorious armed robber who is said to have terrorised most parts of Lagos with his robbery gang. He is a grim example of a killer robber as he had participated in many bloody operations which he had lost count of. He, however, met his Waterloo in June, this year when he was arrested by officials of the Lagos

State Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, in his hotel room following a tip-off.

Ikona, 24, who hails from Cross River State told *Newswatch* that his gang usually kill their victims when they refuse to cooperate with them by giving them access to where they keep their money so that they could rob and escape. He confessed that although they never set out to kill their victims, circumstances during operations often prompt them to pull the trigger. Sometimes, if they suspect that their victims might have recognised one of them, the best option is to eliminate the person in order to leave no trace.

He added that sometimes, members of his gang embark on vengeance mission against the police each time any of their members is killed in a robbery operation.



Ikona

They consider policemen as the major obstacle to their dastardly act.

Officials of SARS told *Newswatch* that Ikona had killed several police officers and other hapless citizens during the escapades of his gang. Ikona who said he is also a footballer joined the armed robbery gang in 2000. He confessed that

within the six years he had been involved in the nefarious act, his gang had engaged in house-to-house robberies in highbrow areas of Lagos like Ajah, Surulere and Bode Thomas. He said that they usually rob people of cash and jewellery and those who resisted them were killed.

Newswatch learnt that a few weeks before his arrest, when Ikona got information that the police were closing in on him, he initially relocated from Lagos to Abuja. Apparently not comfortable with Abuja's lifestyle, he returned to Lagos and was apprehended shortly after.

Darlington, Ikona's elder brother was killed by the police recently during a robbery operation in Ajegunle, Lagos. *Newswatch* gathered that although Darlington was a danfo driver, he often joined in armed robbery operations.

But Ikona claimed he did not know that his brother was an armed robber until he was killed during a robbery operation. Even though Ikona is noted for his passion for killing his victims, he exonerated himself from the blood of innocent people wasted by his gang. He told *Newswatch* that he never knew that he could be caught because he had mastered the act of escaping during robbery operations. He said: "When I started robbing, I was expecting the repercussion, but I got used to it and comfortable that I thought I would never be caught. But now that it has happened, I pray that God will forgive me and bring me out of this case. I

don't want to die." Monday Timothy, from Cross River State is another dreaded armed robber who has killed several of his victims, particularly policemen both in Lagos and Delta states. He is the leader of a four-member robbery gang who rob people along the Seme border as well as certain



Partners in crime: L-R; Ogunsanwo, Jaiyesimi and Adekoya

bus stops in Ijesha, Festac and Oshodi in Lagos.

In most of their operations, they also use motorcycles to disarm their victims. Pius Ikechukwu, a commercial motorcycle rider is the one who aids them in the operations. He told *Newsweek* that his passengers are usually the victims of their operations. "We come riding through bus stops like other normal commercial motorcyclists but when I carry a passenger, I will race off and take him or her to where my gang members are strategically positioned where we rob them of cash, handsets and other valuables," Ikechukwu said. However, the gang usually operates in the evening between 4.00pm to 8.00pm. Other members of this gang are Lekan Bolarinwa from Ibadan, Oyo State, Sarafa Fasasi, his younger brother from the same mother and one Kafaya, alleged to be Timothy's girl friend. Apart from Kafaya, other



Security guards arrested for armed robbery

How To Handle Armed Robbers

Security Tips

The following security tips are meant to help you avoid being a victim of armed robbery attacks and burglary:

1. Report any suspicious movement within your vicinity to the police
2. Restrict information about your absence from home from untrusted neighbours and unknown persons
3. Design and discuss security plans with your household and get the entire household prepared for any eventuality.
4. Anyone who can acquire and use a rifle should do so with the appropriate legal authorities.
5. Don't keep large sums of money at your home. Don't also carry large sums of money about

6. Don't discuss big business deals in the presence of your driver, domestic servant, extended relations and strangers.
7. Don't expose or exhibit large sums of money in a public place or in your car.
8. Refrain from boasting about wealth in public place.
9. When armed robbers have entered your house, cooperate with them. The survival word is C-O-O-P-E-R-A-T-E. Don't argue with them. Don't try to recognise the robbers. Always look down and answer whatever questions they ask. Don't volunteer any information. Beg for your life. Let your wife and children beg too. Put your hands up to show total surrender.
10. Don't drive a very flashy car in a lonely place.



Another set of robbery suspects: L-R; Okechukwu, Bolarinwa, Fasasi and Thimoteu

members of the gang are now in the police net. Bolarinwa, however, denied ever killing his victims. "I have not had cause to kill anyone during operations because immediately I fire into the air, my victims come trembling and they willingly surrender all their money and valuables to me," he told *Newsweek*.

One dangerous dimension that has crept into robbery operations in Lagos is the involvement of security guards popularly known as *Maiguards* who are mostly from Niger and Chad Republic, in robbing people they were supposed to guard. An eight-man robbery gang which was recently smashed by the police is a typical example of the syndicate which specialises in robbing residents of the streets they were employed to secure. They are currently being detained at the Force CID, Panti, Yaba, Lagos. Members of the gang are Segun Shakiru alias *Orobo*, from Shagamu, Ogun State, Tijani Hassan,

11. Motorists should wind up their door glasses and pin down their door knobs in traffic hold-ups, and must not expose their wrist watches through the windows.
12. Unknown persons pretending to be NEPA meter readers, salesmen, NITEL staff or evangelists must properly be screened and made to identify themselves before being allowed entry into premises.
13. Don't just employ anybody as a domestic servant; screen a prospective, domestic servant thoroughly. Such persons must submit their passport photographs and must have people of proven integrity as guarantors.
14. Do not allow your domestic servants or security guards bring or harbour unknown persons as they may be thieves studying the position of things in your premises.
15. Do not board a taxi with strangers. They may be armed robbers.
16. When driving along the streets, motorists should be observant of all vehicles carrying more than two people, especially young men who look curiously at other motorists.
17. When driving or parking, motorist should observe their centre and side mirrors after every two minutes to know who are coming towards them.
18. When driving into your premises, observe vehicle(s) trailing you and avoid driving into your residence so long as you can drive straight to the police station or a safe place.
19. Motorist should not drop any member of their family exactly at bus stops. It is advisable that they should drop them a pole from the bus-stop and not in the midst of men.
20. Motorist should endeavour to slow down or accelerate their speed as soon as they are uncomfortable with any vehicle occupied with young men trailing them.
21. If after accelerating your speed and you are being pursued by a vehicle, drive to the nearest "pin down point" and alert the police. Avoid such a car or bus coming in contact with you.
22. After parking their vehicles, motorists should use steering locks, pedal locks and other security appliances in order to prevent hoodlums from moving the vehicles away.
23. When approaching your vehicles where it is parked, you should take precaution. You must watch out for street miscreants who, in pretence of begging, may turn out to be armed robbers.
24. In public places such as markets, churches, mosques, night clubs, night vigil scenes and crusades, ear label system should be used with private security guards employed to checkmate hoodlums.
25. Vehicle owners should endeavour to mark on their windscreen identification numbers and other identities. Properties in the house such as electronic should also be so marked.
26. When motorists are carrying cash, they should get adequate police security for such money in transit and ensure that appropriate approval for money-in-transit vehicles are used to convey such large sums of money.

Abdulrahman Zakari, Musa Dahiru and Musa Azari, all Chadians. Others are Mohamad Ahmad and Saidu Adamu, both from Niger Republic. They are all security guards who were employed to secure an area called Abidjan in Ajah area of Lagos. But instead of providing the necessary security for the area, they resorted to robbing those they were supposed to protect from armed robbers. The gang leader is Shakiru, alias *Orobo*, while Sokoto receives and sells the properties stolen by the gang.

Police officers in Pantl told *Newswatch* that apart from robbing residents of the street whom they were paid to guard, the gang also carried out dangerous trans-border robberies, killing and maiming a lot of their victims.

Emmanuel Adebayo, commissioner of police, Lagos State, said that the command is aware that the nature of crime is constantly changing. "The best thing is for the police to think ahead because robbers are forever coming up with new ideas. So, we also have to be on

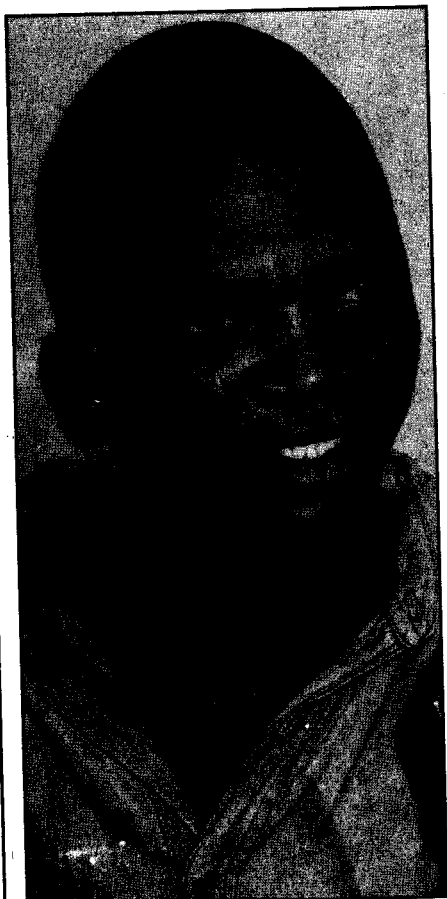


Yinusa

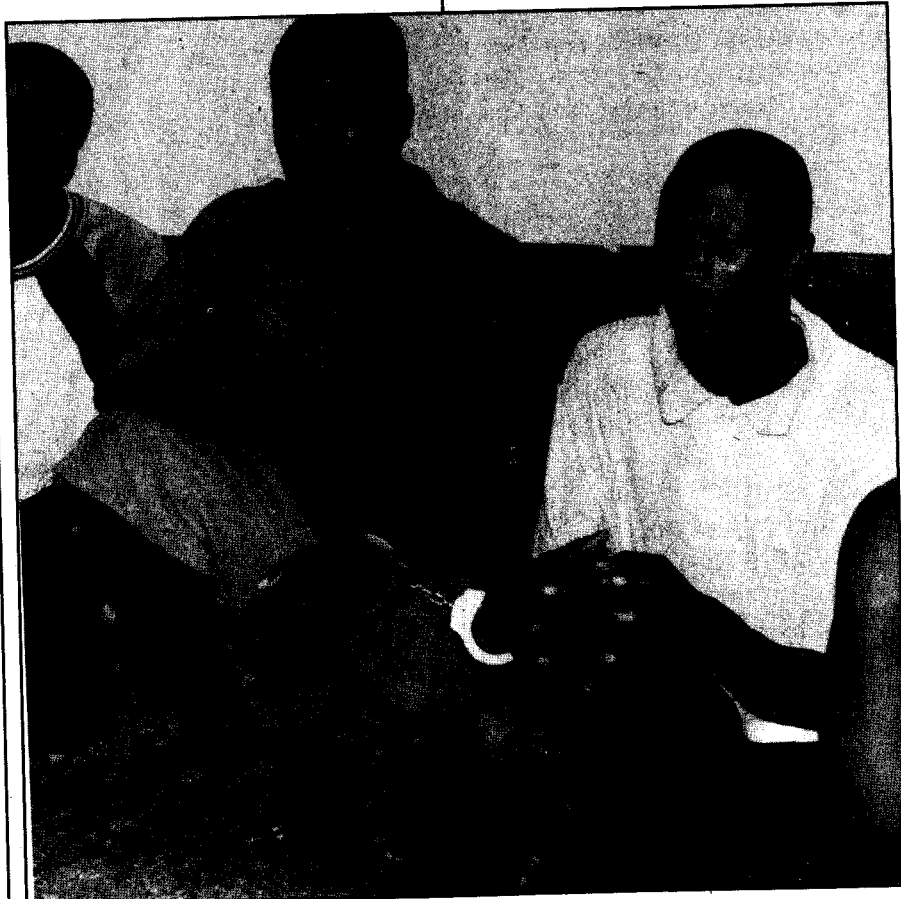
our toes. Robbers are always planning and monitoring their victims. But we have tried to maintain a low crime rate in Lagos," he said.

Apart from Lagos, Aba, the commercial nerve centre of the South-East is another city where there has been incessant attacks by armed robbers in recent times. *Newswatch* gathered that the targets of the robbers are mainly the banks, petrol filling stations, luxury buses and few individual homes. The robbers who carry sophisticated weapons operate in daylight and have made life unsafe for both people living in the city and hundreds of people who troop into the town daily for business transactions. The modes of their operation, especially the manner with which they kill hapless citizens have left sour tales on the lips of inhabitants of Enyimba city, as the commercial town is popularly called.

Luck, however, ran out on two of the robbers who specialise in terrorising luxury buses when they were recently fished out during the pre-boarding search.



Bello



L-R: Sikiru and Hassan

The two suspected armed robbers were trying to board a Kano-bound luxury bus belonging to G.U.O. Group of companies. They were immediately lynched.)

Christian Chukwu, one of the managers of the transport company told *Newswatch* that while they were conducting search at about 5pm, two guns were found in two separate bags and the owners sensing danger took to their heels. "Aba people pursued them and we learnt they caught them and burnt them to death," he said.

The manager did not, however, know that danger was lurking for the company. After the suspected robbers were lynched, their colleagues quickly regrouped and laid ambush for the company's buses. One of the vehicles billed for Maiduguri which took off at about 5.30pm was waylaid around Osisioma area of Aba. It was gathered that the robbers on vengeance mission trailed the bus with a motorcycle and a Mercedes Benz V-boot. As it came out of the filling station where it had gone to refuel, the robbers pursued it and opened fire at it. Their first shot got the driver of the vehicle on the head. He was said to have continued when they overtook the vehicle, blocked it and released several bullets which killed the driver) on the

spot. Two passengers in the bus were wounded. One of the passengers hit by the bullets fired by the robbers whose name was given as Emeka Nwachukwu later died, while the other one with light injury was treated and discharged at the General Hospital, Aba.

The G.U.O driver who lost his life during the attack by robbers is B. Nwogbaru. He was said to be one of the most experienced drivers of the company. He had worked with the company for more than five years.

The menace of the robbers did not stop there as they have consistently operated at the popular Ariaria International Market, Aba. During one of their operations, a lady was killed. Consequently, market women led a protest reminiscent of the 1929 Aba women riot. They were protesting the high level of insecurity in the town.

Indeed, the armed robbers are said to be having a field day in Aba. In one of the robbery incidents, around Eziukwu market, the robbers were said to have spread money realised from the operation on the streets and beckoning on people to pick them. They claimed that the money was part of the loots from politicians stashed in banks. The robbers' style of operation was reminiscent of the



Hammed

Lawrence Anini saga in the 1980s in the old Bendel State. Managers of most commercial banks in Aba have been gripped with fear and residents of the city now walk along the streets extremely frightened because the robbers kill at will. The sickening regularity of their operations has turned the commercial city into a ghost town at night.

Charles Akaya, commissioner of Police, Abia State command has, however, stepped into the matter and promised that the police would intensify its security measures. He has already held a meeting with bank managers in Aba with a view to getting assistance from them to equip the police with fast-moving vehicles to enable them effectively patrol the Aba metropolis and chase the robbers whenever there is a distress call from their victims.

While Aba is boiling with incessant robbery operations that invariably left many dead, reports from Kogi State indicated that robbery incidents are equally on the rise. *Newswatch* investigations showed that Kogi State is gradually becoming a den of armed robbers. The frequent armed robbery incidents on Okene-Lokoja and Ajaokuta-Anyigba roads have become a source of concern to road users and members of the public.

Tade Omolayo, a student of the Federal College of Education, Okene, was one of the recent victims. He was abducted in a taxi cab by an eight-member



Sokoto

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robbery gang along Lokoja-Okene road on June 16. Omolayo was on his way to school. He said the journey was smooth till their vehicle got to a place called Mark Farm where the robbers used big stones to block the road, thereby preventing free movement of vehicles.

Their driver had to stop as gun-wielding young men emerged from the bush. "We were ordered to come down and lie on the ground while the robbers searched our pockets and our bags. They went away with all the money I was taking to school and all the handsets of the other passengers were also collected," he said.

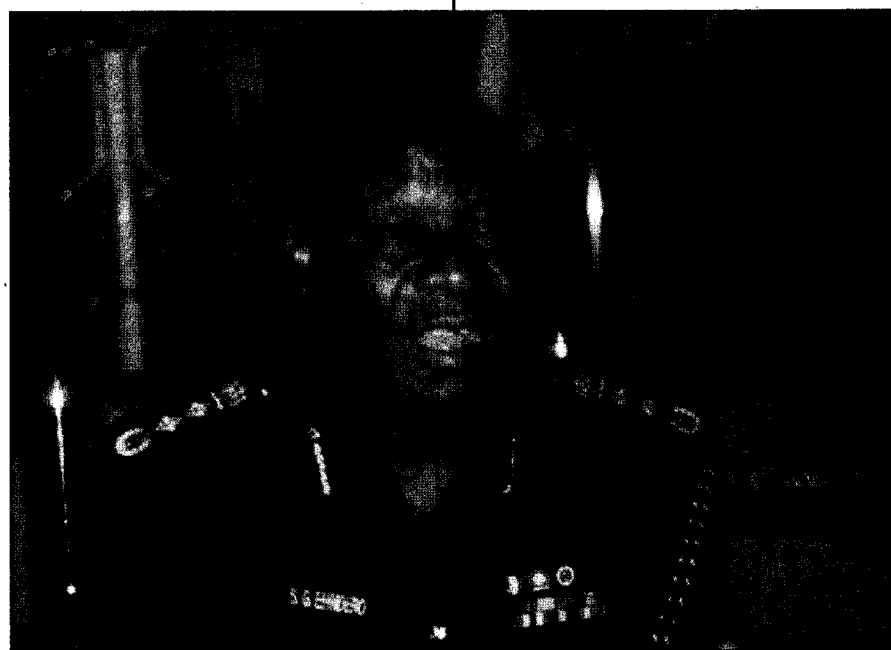
He explained that all the cars coming behind them were also stopped and for three hours they were held captive and the only thing he could do was to pray to God for intervention. "I kept on praying and reciting some Bible passages for God to spare my life so that the robbers will not shoot me," he said.

Ojone Musa, a trader in palm produce in Ajaokuta was on her way to Anyigba for her usual business when another gang of armed robbers attacked the vehicle in which she was travelling and dispossessed all the passengers of all their valuables. "The robbers knew we were all business people so they ordered us to empty our bags. We were told to obey or be ready to receive bullets for disobedience," she said.



Adebayo

She said the robbers were familiar with the terrain as they carried on with confidence, without any sign of fear of the police in the area. Kogi State University, Anyigba has also not been spared by the robbers. The students now live in fear of robbers. Victoria Adejo, a political science student said robbers visited their hostel recently and carted away all their belongings. The situation



Ehindero

is so bad that once it is 7pm students would stay indoors.

In Okene, Stephen Okatachi, a clergyman was killed by armed robbers recently. He was on his way from Okene to Lokoja, and the following day another un-identified man was killed on the same road and at the same spot.

The clergyman was shot at several times in his car. But sources said there were no signs of bullet scars on the car. Nothing was taken from him, not even his handset and the money inside his pocket.

The incessant cases of armed robbery in the state have forced civil servants who are fond of spending their weekends in their home towns and villages to drastically reduce such trips. Sal Fache, a human rights activist alleged that these armed robbers get their weapons from politicians in the state. "These robbers are the thugs used by politicians to get into power and when they got the positions they simply forgot to help the boys. Out of frustration these boys have now turned the guns against the public in order to get their daily needs by robbing them. The robbers live within the communities where the robberies take place," he said.

The Kogi State House of Assembly has expressed concern over the general state of insecurity resulting from incessant cases of armed robbery across the state. Mohammed Onusagba from Okene Central Constituency told *Newsweek* that for two weeks now he has not been able to go home because of the fear of armed robbers. "I have to keep away from home. Last Friday, I was stopped after Jumat service from going home. I was informed that the robbers were still on the road. The road was completely deserted throughout the duration the robbers operated on the road. And you begin to question the usefulness of police on the roads when they can hardly face criminals. Some policemen have either turned the gun of the state against its citizens or provided safe landing for criminals without any recourse to the oath they took to protect the state and its people," he alleged.

Following the upsurge of armed robbery in the states the police have intensified efforts to bring it under control.

Samuel Adekunle, commissioner of police, Kogi State command told *Newsweek* that since he assumed office in October 2005, crime in the state has reduced drastically compared to what it was before he came.

He said strategies have been mapped out to tackle robberies. Adekunle told *Newsweek* that the command has reviewed and strengthened its security network in line with the security needs of the residents of the state. He also noted that these efforts were already yielding dividends as many armed robbers have been arrested in recent times.

He, however, said that the effectiveness of the strategy should be determined by how it has been able to secure lives and property at a given period. "For security to prevail in the polity there must be adequate policemen and weapons. So I am calling on the federal government to come to our aid," he said.

The Kogi State government has taken measures to curb the menace of robbers. Omeiza Salawu, the deputy governor told *Newsweek* that the state government has donated 24 patrol vans to the police to enhance the on-going fight against criminals. "Ibrahim Idris, governor of the state being one of the most security conscious governors in the country has also donated several vehicles equipped with communication gadgets to the state command of the Nigerian Police Force," he said.

In Rivers State and other parts of the Niger Delta region, rampaging armed robbery gangs have brazenly killed and maimed many of their victims. The latest incident occurred in Port Harcourt in the early hours of last Monday when a 25-man gang shot and killed Johnson Esebane, a pastor. The robbers invaded Haruk Estate, Rumuigbo, Port Harcourt, shooting sporadically and causing fear in the area for hours.

Newsweek learnt that the police arrived the estate shortly afterwards and engaged the robbers in a gun duel. When the firepower of the police became too much for the robbers, they took to their heels. The police later found the lifeless body of the pastor who lived at 53 Kenquip Avenue, Rumuigbo.



Ogunsanwo: Bus conductor

The robbers were said to have entered the estate through a bush path and the deceased pastor was being robbed when the police arrived. It was gathered that the robbers killed him when they discovered that policemen had swooped on them. All the robbers were said to have escaped into the bush after eliminating their victim.

A few days before this incident, Patrick Dorgu, resident at Jacob Valley Street, Woji, Port Harcourt was shot by another gang of robbers when they stormed the street at about 8.30pm. The deceased was said to have resisted the robbers and they had to pull the trigger. Police arrived the scene shortly after the departure of the robbers. Although Dorgu was still breathing after his encounter with the robbers, he died while being conveyed to the hospital.

Many victims of armed robbery attacks whose names were spared told *Newsweek* the experience is harrowing. To them, it is like spending 365 days in hell. They believe that "the fear of armed robbery is now the beginning of wisdom."

The new wave of armed robbery has become more worrisome because the police appear handicapped to curb

their nefarious activities. Security experts contend that for the country to achieve the desired socio-economic and political process, the lives and properties of its citizens must be safeguarded.

Ibrahim Sidi Ali, former security officer of the defunct National Security Organisation, NSO, said effectiveness is determined by how security agents are able to secure lives and property at a given period. "For security to prevail in the polity there must be adequate policemen and weapons to deter criminals from taking advantage of the people. Thus, the problems of the police are inadequate men and materials. The policemen are not enough. Most of them are not adequately armed. We are operating the police without providing them with the technical know-how which will enable them perform well in this age of internet," he said.

Sunday Ehindero, inspector-general of police, IGP, is equally worried by the increasing crime wave in the country. He is also aware of the current staff strength of the police which at 320,000 is not sufficient to police the country effectively.

He told *Newsweek* recently that the police headquarters is making efforts to address these pitfalls so as to effectively check the rising wave of armed robbery. "We have established that we need about 500,000 people and that is why government has approved that we should start recruitment of about 50,000 in the next two years," he said.

To address the problem of inadequate weapons, the Presidential Committee on Police Equipment Funds is set to raise N100 billion that would be used to equip the police to discharge their duties.

Perhaps, with a better equipped and motivated police force, Nigerians would be rescued from the nightmares victims of armed robbery pass through in the hands of dare devil robbers.

Additional reports by Godfrey Azubike, Sebastine Obasi, Grace Alegba, Andrew Airahuobhor, Blessing Ajayi and Joseph Onyekwere.