

NEWS

He was about to go to bed at the end of a hard day's work. Then, his telephone rang. He jumped out of bed, put on his dress and went out. He never returned. He was shot dead. That is the story of an Edo community leader as reported by **JOHN MAYAKI**.

Death most cruel

THE family of the late Chief Imariagbe Ogundezi, the Uzebu Community chairman in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State, won't forget December 21 last year, in a hurry. Their breadwinner was murdered.

Although Uzebu boys and well-wishers had staged a public protest over the gruesome murder of their leader, and the Edo State police command had swooped on the suspected persons linked with the act, the late Imariagbe's wife, Gladys, is still weeping uncontrollably unable to fathom how her hubby was killed in such a mysterious circumstance.

Mrs Imariagbe and her children narrated the tragic experience to *The Nation* at their house, No 18, along Ihaekpen Street, Benin City. This was where the late Imariagbe received a phone call at about 9pm on the fateful day from a lady popularly called Baby, a prison warder. She invited him out.

Perhaps, the relationship between them had broken down. The prison warder who is now in the Police custody was reported to have welcomed the community chairman but also on the spot, he was shot dead by some gunmen.

The police are working on the theory that the deceased was deliberately set up.

According to the late Imariagbe's first daughter, Bobra, a 20-year old student of Ekiadolor College of Education, "when the prison warder called my father, he was about to sleep. He had called my sister to bring him a mattress so

that he could sleep in the sitting room but his phone rang. He went and answered his call. The next thing we heard was a gunshot and everybody started running helter-skelter.

"My sister said it was a sound of fireworks or policemen at the junction firing into the air. About 30 minutes later, a woman ran to our house to announce to our mum that dad had been kidnapped.

"Already, my mum was sleeping. I woke her up and on hearing what happened to my father, she made straight for the scene and saw my dad lying lifeless.

"I also visited the scene. I was trying to drag him on the floor, I was shaking his head but he was lifeless. People certified him dead on the spot.

Bobra was one of those who experienced a bitter Christmas. She said, "I hoped to enjoy the Christmas and New year, but now that my dad is deceased, there is no hope anymore. Not even for my education" she regretted.

Imariagbe's widow recalled, "we ran to the scene and when we got there, we met his corpse on the ground. I don't know the people and he had no quarrel with anybody".

The widow, Gladys, now has a responsibility; to cater for the seven children her husband left behind. She felt very bad just as she was in pains when this reporter spoke with her.

According to her, "only God can take care of these children since I have no job. I am in pain. The Police are investigating the matter. I also learnt that they have arrested the woman that called him that night. I don't



•Some of the late Imariagbe's children

'We ran to the scene and when we got there, we met his corpse on the ground'

really understand the relationship between my late husband and the woman but I believe they are close friends. It is not up to a year when my husband was made the Uzebu Community chairman, now, he has been killed.

"I have a seven-month old baby and he is the only boy I have, others are girls". She explained that the remains of her husband had been deposited at the Central Hospital Morgue.

Ebuwa, 18, is also Imariagbe's

daughter who just finished her TC II programme at Esigie Teacher's Training College. She described her dad as a very nice person who provided all she needed for her. "He was a generous and simple man. He didn't make trouble. I felt like dying when I heard of his death. It's painful. I don't have a dad again", she regretted.

Meanwhile, the police in Benin said on Tuesday that they had arrested the prime suspect in the murder of the Chief Ogundezi. The Commissioner of Police, Mr. Bala Hassan, told reporters in the city that the suspect (names withheld) was arrested last Friday in Benin, two weeks after he was declared wanted.

Hassan said the police declared the suspect wanted because he ran away shortly after the murder following allegations by the family that he was behind the murder.