

# Plateau, Delta communities in the throes of Gang wars



• A suspected gang member in police net

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of both Yan-Daba and Yan Sara-Suka are restricted to Jos North Local Government Area of the state, with their main base located along Bauchi road and the Hausa-Muslim dominated areas.

According to sources, the groups' members are believed to be former mercenaries hired from outside the state to support their kinsmen at the height of the violence that threatened to tear Jos apart, particularly between 2001 and 2011.

They allegedly chose to make Jos their home at the end of their assignment. Said to be between the ages of 10 and 30, the young men were said to have become more powerful than their former masters, a situation which has made it almost impossible for them to be chased out of the area.

A resident of Jos South LGA, Bitrus Mang, said: "These boys that formed these gangs are not natives of Jos. They were brought in at a point by a particular people to fight the indigenes of the state. Now that the fighting is over, the boys have become a burden on their sponsors who have used and dumped them. Now, these boys have refused to return to where they were brought from. They have become uncontrollable and lawless."

The gang members, who have no meaningful source of livelihood, have made living in the area tough for the residents, as they engage in all forms of crime to survive.

Their activities, according to a source in the neighbourhood, include raping of teenage girls and petty thefts. Dispossess-

ing hapless residents of their property and kidnapping of young children have become the two common crimes in the area since the groups began their operations.

"To get high, these boys smoke anything, ranging from hemp to every other thing they can lay their hands on," a source, who wished not to be named, said.

Recently, the State Police Command paraded a suspect, who allegedly kidnapped a three-year-old boy. The State Commissioner of Police, Adekunle Oladunjoye, said the suspect, Umar Isa, lured the toddler at Naraguta village in Jos Metropolis, and took him to Bauchi, from where in demanded for the payment of ransom.

According to the police, Isa was apprehended as he was about to collect the sum of N250, 000 he demanded. The suspect was paraded along with 20 other youths, who were arrested for various offences.

Apart from their criminal activities, the fight for supremacy between the two gangs has led to many battles that often leave innocent victims to suffer untold hardships.

A resident of Yantipa Jos, Sanusi Yahaya, told *The Nation* that the activities of the two warring gangs brought home to the people of the area the reality of the existence of cult groups. He said: "There was a deadly clash between the Yan-

Daba gangsters around the Yan-Tipper Junction on Bauchi road early this year. It was a terrible fight and it surprised many people. The fight started suddenly and we were later told that it was a fight between two rival cult groups. It was at that point that we knew that these boys were really here among us."

By the time the smoke from gangs' guns

cleared, one person lay dead. His death was said to have led to more fights and reprisal attacks, with more deaths recorded on both sides.

One month after the deadly clash, the residents of Sabon Layi woke up one morning to the gory sight of a lifeless body of another youth, another victim of cult gangs. Just as the people were trying to come to terms with the latest death, another gang member was hacked to death in the Angwan Rogo in Jos North.

Residents have accused local vigilance groups of not doing enough to stem the tide of the ugly trend. According to them, the vigilance groups looked the other way while the gangs continue to terrorise the people.

A resident of the Hausa settlement area in Angwan Rogo, said: "These boys have taken the laws into their own hands. They are involved in various kinds of criminal activities. You could just wake up in the morning to find out that all the windscreen of the vehicles parked along the streets have been broken. They say they are carrying out their ritual, tagged *shara* (sweeping in Hausa language). For the people, every day is a nightmare."

The resident said it is worrisome that despite the overt display of lawlessness by the gang members, nobody has taken any action to stop them. Findings also revealed that the gangs have made areas like Nasarawa, Anguwan Rogo, Yan Tipper, Sabon Layi and Rikkos, all in Jos North LGA, their operational base.

It was also revealed that the activities of local politicians, who provide covers for members of the gangs, have made the job of the security agencies difficult. "These politicians make it hard for security agencies to track these boys down. It is because they work for them," a source claimed.

The source also accused the Plateau State government of inaction on the activities of cult gangs in the state. A resident, Jacob Attang, said: "Governor Lalong is not doing enough to tame these boys. That is the main reason why they are growing in powers and are boasting that they are powerful. At the beginning, I thought the governor was too busy because of other state matters. But we need to draw his attention to this because these gangs have already constituted themselves into terror groups and they should be declared enemies of the state."

Another resident of Jos North, Alhaji Zekeri Baba, said: "The youth engage in this kind of attitude because they are jobless. I want to plead with the government to create jobs for these youths. They steal to survive because they don't have any means of livelihood."

**Delta: The fear of gangs...**

For many communities in Delta State, peace has taken flight, leaving

• Delta CP, Aikali Baba Usman



hapless residents at the mercy of merciless cult groups. In most communities, bands of marauding youths act as lords, holding the residents by the jugular.

The activities of the cult groups have reached unprecedented and dangerous heights in the state, with the gangs collecting ransoms, raping innocent girls, killing, maiming and imposing illegal levies and tolls on the hapless residents.

But more worrisome for the people is the fact that security agencies in the state seem helpless in the face of the daring exploits of the vicious gangs. And expectedly, the deadly activities of the cult gangs have taken a huge toll on the socio-economic activities in Asaba and other major towns in the state.

For most of the residents of these towns, the approach of dark is greeted with trepidations. Workers now rush back into the safety of their homes at the close of each day's work, and fear to venture out until day break.

According to findings by *The Nation*, being a member of a cult group has become more attractive to most youths in the state than seeking a legal way to earn a living. Also, one important feature of the groups is that they are populated by artisans, commercial motorcyclists and secondary school students.

Though most of the groups have names that are similar to those cult groups in tertiary institutions, but they have no sem

