

• Rivers communities take cult killings to God

EKPEYE land in Rivers State was relatively quiet, peaceful and of no news significance until the July 13, 2012 Okugbe fuel tanker disaster which claimed no fewer than 230 lives.

Ekpeye Land is made up of two Local Government areas, Ahoada East and Ahoada West, both situated on the coast line of Orashi river close to Bayelsa State from the West and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area on the East.

The 2013 flood, which swept across Ekpeye land and submerged homes, farmlands, killing and sacking families and their members among others, also brought the area into media reckoning.

The violence which characterised the last general elections saw Ekpeye at the receiving end. The land has not rested from mourning and crying from the murder of their love ones, and family members by youths suspected to be cult boys.

No fewer than 100 persons have been killed in the area since mid-2014. There has hardly been any month, week or even day that passes without news of murder of person or persons being heard. Some were killed and their heads taken away; others were killed and their heads left but their bodies taken away or thrown into the river, creeks.

Cult groups, such as the Icelanders and the Greenlanders, De-gham and De-well group or the most recently the Ekpeye Liberation Movement are believed to be behind the killings.

Although the latest group has not been associated with any killing, and their enemies not yet defined, but they reportedly claimed responsibility of bombing one Akarolo pipeline in Ahoada East.

One of the groups, months back, invaded and attacked the residence of their highly revered monarch, (Eze Ekpeye Logbo), Eze Robinson O. Robinson, at Ahoada East, destroying cars parked and other valuables.

They also killed the son of the Anglican priest who led

'The hoodlums destroying Ekpeye land are our own children'



• A clergy praying for the members of Peace, Security and Reconciliation committee at the event

From Rosemary Nwisi,
Port Harcourt

the first move to find peace. The attack on him devastated and forced him out as the chairman of "Peace, security and reconciliation committee" of the two Ahoada LGAs.

However, the reconstituted "Peace, security and reconciliation committee", led by another cleric, Friday Anthony, fondly called F.O.C., recently organised a one-day fasting and prayer to seek God's intervention on the situation. The programme, which held at the Headquarters of Ahoada East, was well attended.

Eze Robinson said: "It is very unpalatable, disheartening shocking. Degrading, sacrilegious and unpatriotic for some youths in Ekpeye land to sporadically and 'chameleonically' disguised themselves to fight, kill, kidnap, assassinate, steal, rape, commit Arson, Armed Robbery and go into war with their own blessed communities in Ekpeye land.

"All economic activities in Ekpeye land have shattered and crumbled. No Ekpeye man or woman goes to the farm again to grow crops for the future. Our children do not go to school again, traders don't go to the markets again to sell their wares. Tenants have deserted Ahoada main town and all Ekpeye

communities.

"Strangers (none indigenes), have all ran away to Port Harcourt for safety, because of our children who have decided to be hoodlums/criminals, committing so many atrocities at our watch and detriment.

"Let us mirror ourselves and watch the communities we now ran to for shelter and security. Are there no youths in the areas we have run to? Don't the youths there have parents and relatives to kidnap, assassinate, steal from and rob with arms, burn their houses, rape their wives, mothers and sisters as our Ekpeye youths are doing here?"

He accused parents of encouraging the criminality in the land, when he said: "The hoodlums destroying Ekpeye land are our own children. They bring all the loots to our houses while we watch them with enthusiasm. Are we not ashamed that our sons are among the criminals that are unleashing mayhem on our land?"

"How can a responsible indigene of Ekpeye choose to live in the forest like wild beast when there are houses and homes to comfortably live in and thank God for creating them human being? Are they blaming and asking God why He did not create them to be wild animals that are living in the forests? Let them

note that no one that has ever challenged the authority of God that was not visited with doom, King Nebuchadnezzar and lot's wife are classical examples.

"Let me once again plead with all Ekpeye sons and daughters who have contributed in one way or the other, to disparage, disintegrate, annihilate the unity of Ekpeye land to have a second thought and stop sponsoring the hoodlums by providing them with arms, ammunitions.

"I beseech all my children who have taking to the paths of militancy to return home and surrender their guns to the police for safety sake and reunification of Ekpeye land, and also ensure your names are subsequently profiled for amnesty program and reintegration."

The Care Taker Committee (CTC) chairman of Ahoada East, Britain Ewor, admitted grave security challenge of cultism, kidnapping and other criminalities.

Ewor expressed the willingness of the government to ensure sustained safety across the area and noted that his administration's operation "Know your neighbour" pet project should be encouraged.

"It is obvious that security in the two LGAs in Ekpeye land (Ahoada West and Ahoada East) is at its lowest ebb. All of our communities have suffered one form of in-

security or the other, ranging from loss of loved ones to outright destruction of property.

"There are others that are wounded either physically or psychologically. As a government we are doing our best to the safety of all, but it is shocking when the people easily compromise security.

"The hoodlums who daily maim and kill our people live among us but our people either for fear; fail to volunteer information that could assist the security agents; I am appalled by this.

"In as much as it is not within my powers to pass judgement on the grievances that gave rise to the present security challenges, it remains our right to condemn acts that are not part of our known norms and values.

"The various killings and wanton destruction of property are alien to us and must be condemned. Ekpeye land has been so much streamed with blood, this is unacceptable and I condemn the perpetrators of the callous, senseless and wicked acts."

Rev. Anthony said it would take only God to ensure lasting security in Ekpeye land.

He said: "As responsible citizens of Nigeria, we have quickly realised that the security and peace of our land will be possible only by the infinite grace and boundless mercy of our Supreme God.

"This is why we have set up three types of prayer for Ekpeye land between now and October: Mercy prayer (already been held), Prayer of Peace and restoration and Prayer of thanksgiving."

The committee members warned against further killing of the 'bad boys' by the vigilante members of the community.

"The Vigilante people must not go after the aggrieved sons and daughters of Ekpeye land and vice versa. The role of the vigilante however from now henceforth is limited to fighting thieves and armed robbers caught disturbing the peace of our people.

"No robber caught will be set free. Let there be calmness everywhere, we restate at this point that peace must return and gunfire must cease from all quarters in the land."

In his keynote message, title: "The roll of the Church in times like this" Rev. Ben Avor of First Baptist Church regretted that there is no respite despite the efforts by members of the committee to appeal and several visits to the youths camps to make them see reason to stop further killing and maiming.

"The activities of these boys have disarranged, communities destroyed, families members have been killed, there are weeping, crying and mourning in families because of insecurity in the land," he

'Oil giant's scheme helped reduce HIV prevalence rates in Bayelsa'