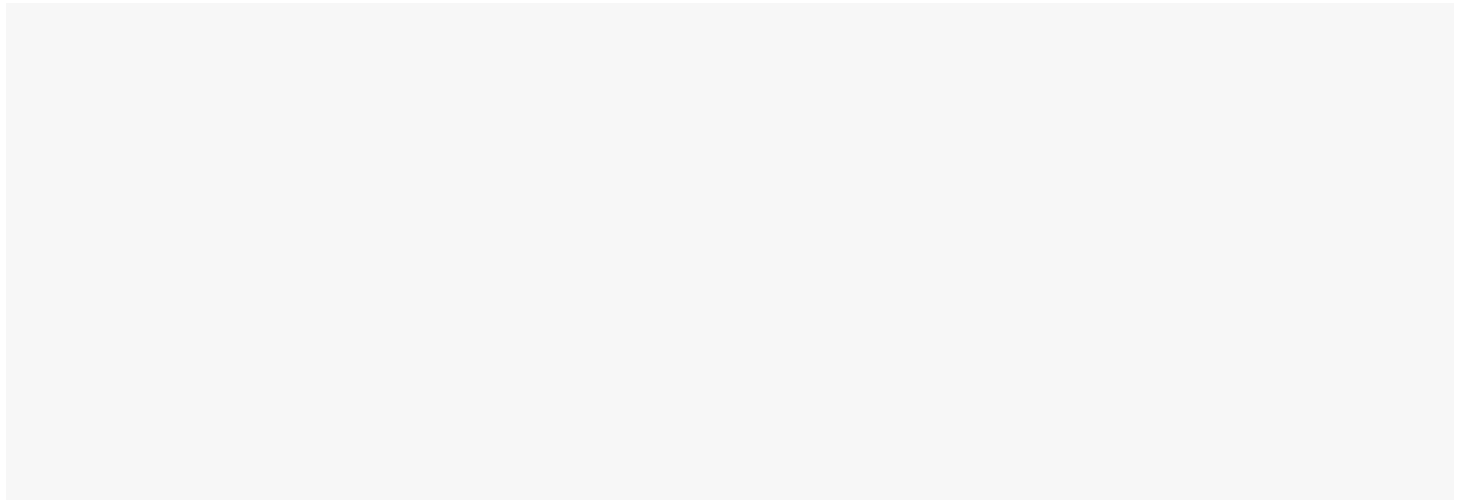


We watched helplessly as bandits killed our kinsmen, torched our houses

•But for sound of guns, we would have been wiped out –Survivors



by **ABDULGAFAR ALABELEWE** September 7, 2019



After a long period of relative peace in southern part of Kaduna State, bandits on Thursday last week, attempted wiping out Zangang village in Kaura local government. Seven persons were reported killed during the attack, while several houses were torched. ABDULGAFAR ALABELEWE brings the sad accounts of survivors.

“I heard gunshots. I rushed towards the scene. I saw tens of gunmen, shooting every living soul around. Only then I realised how curiously stupid I was.” Those were the words of Emmanuel Kushwai.

Kushwai is not just a member of the attacked Zangan community. He is the Head of the village’s vigilante group. But, like the proverbial bulldog, himself and the entire team of security men he commands are toothless. Worse than the bulldog that at least barks, the security watched their attackers with fear of raising alarm.

According to him, government had in the heat of crises in southern Kaduna stopped all vigilante groups from carrying arms. “So, our work is now more of surveillance. When we see anything or observe any suspicious movement, we report to the authority.” He said.

Narrating the incident, Kushwai said, “Around 4:30 in the evening of Thursday 29th August, 2019, I was in the village, when I heard gunshots. As the head of security, I rushed towards the scene, then I saw many gunmen, shooting every living soul around.

“Then, I suddenly realized how stupid I was in my curiosity. I was carried away by my position as a security man and the spirit of defending my people, not realizing that, I didn’t have what it takes to confront the attackers.

“We are the community vigilantes, but we don’t have guns, government stopped us from using guns. What we do is that, whenever we see anything, we inform the Police and wait for the police to take action.

“From my hiding, I saw the attackers bearing AK47 rifles. They were many in number. By my estimation, they were up to 100. They were actually on their way to the village, so they met some people in the farm and opened fire at them. Some of the farmers escaped.

“I saw as they fired at our defenceless brothers, but I could not do anything but just hide. All of a sudden, I decided to take another route to the community to alert the people of the coming danger.

“By the time I arrived the community, some of the farmers who escaped from the farm had arrived the village too. So, we asked people to quickly leave the community. You know, like I told you, we don’t have guns to retaliate.

“That was how everyone quickly left the village. Women and children were quickly taken to the neighbouring communities. But, some of us went into hiding, to study the movement of the attackers.

“When they entered the community, they opened fire again, shooting at buildings. They were obviously disappointed that, they did not meet people in the village. Then, they started burning houses. They did not even spare the church and the hospital.” He said.

Another resident of the village

Benjamin Bala told Saturday Nation that, the attackers were ruthless and were not prepared to spare anyone if they had met them in the village.

According to him, “Our saving grace was that, we heard the gunshots before they could enter the village. So, as we heard gunshots, we sensed trouble, then, we started evacuating the women and children. After that, we went to hide too to see what exactly the attackers were up to.

“When they entered our village, they were close to 100, almost all of them carrying guns, while few of them carried machete and swords. So, if not that we heard gunshots, they would have rounded us up

and wiped out the entire village.

“But, unfortunately, some of our people were caught up in the farm by the attackers on their way to the village. They opened fire at them and killed them. Some of them escaped to the village too.

“So, when they discovered that, we had run away, they looted our property, including food stuffs and set the houses on fire.” He narrated.

Also speaking on the attack, the Councillor of the area, Mr. Godwin Cletus said, “after a relentless search for the two persons who were initially declared missing during the attack, their bodies were found between Zangang and Ryom two days after the attack and they have been buried.”

He however said that, despite the heavy security presence in the village and its surroundings, people of Zangang village have continued to flee for safety as they were seen packing their belongings and leaving the village for fear of unknown.

“Even though security agents are doing their work and safety and normalcy have returned, people are still seen packing their mattresses, food and other valuable items and leaving the village.

“The Zangan people who deserted the community are still afraid of returning because they think the criminals may come back and relaunch attack on them. That has been the way they operate.”

“Before the incident, villagers noticed suspicious movements of Fulani herdsmen relocating with their cattle and wives from the village, but they assumed there was no cause for alarm.

“On Tuesday, prior to the attack, something happened. There was a sign that, the Fulani people came to the area and had a meeting. So some people in the village began to suspect them that, it is any time they want to launch an attack that they will begin to move their cattle, wives and children out of the village.

“A villager adept in security measures observed a gathering of Fulani men and quickly notified security men and probably he might not have followed the right channel. Even after the security men came, they told the Council Chairman that the place is safe and immediately they left, around 4 o'clock, the bandits came in large number and attack the villages when the people were harvesting in their farms.

“Almost all the village was burnt down. They burnt hospital and before doing that, they packed all the items in the hospital like drugs. When they entered people's house and noticed there is a good mattress, they take it.

“The villagers observed that these people used to come from Ryom, after they finish attacking, they will go back to a village called Ganawuri. And they hide in that community and so it will be very difficult

for security men from Kaduna to arrest them inside Plateau state. Any time they are being pursued they run into Plateau and constitutionally, there is no any way they can be apprehended.

“When these people come for attack, they first divide themselves into three and start shooting. Immediately there is no response from security, they start attacking.

“There would have been more casualties on that very day if not that the villagers devised a tactic of hiding their relatives inside their corn farms.

While disclosing that, they have submitted some report to security agents that can aid in arresting the perpetrators, Cletus argued that, the only way to stop the incessant attacks on Zangan village is for security agents and government to question the chief of Ganawuri on why the criminals are being harbored in their place.

President of Kaura Youth Coalition, Darek Christopher who also condemned the attack said, “killers who crossed the border in their hundreds surrounded the village and burnt about 36 houses, including St. Peters Catholic and Anglican Churches, and killed seven natives.

“The attackers who were unmasked stole livestock, and burnt food stuffs.” He said.

Christopher alleged that, the main objective of the bandits is land grabbing, arguing that, “another Attakar Chieftom’s settlement of Kirim-Mayit in Ryom Local Government Area of Plateau State was attacked and its people were displaced into IDP Camps and their lands were being farmed by some people who were believed to be from Ganawuri.”

He said, though, calm has returned to Zangang, as security forces have taken over, leadership of Kaura and Ryom LGA should as a matter of great importance set up a Conflict Resolution or Dialogue Committee to look into the conflicts and proffer solutions that would restore the peace that was once enjoyed.

He also called on the state government, donor agencies, religious organisations, all community development associations of Kaura Local Government Area, humanitarian organisations and individuals to come to the aid of the affected people of Zangang.



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