

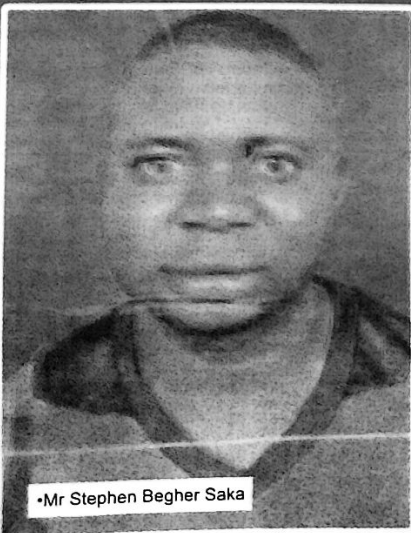
WEEKEND LIFE

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I watched helplessly as 13 herdsman slaughtered my husband like goat - Widow

• Recalls deceased breadwinner's battle with assailants

•Rose, the widow



•Mr Stephen Begher Saka

■ Linus OOTA, Lafia ■

FRIDAY, April 1, 2022, is etched in the memories of Rose Orguga Saka. It was the day the husband of the 26 years old native of Antsar village, Kwararra District of Keana Local Government Area, Nasarawa State was gruesomely murdered by marauding herdsman.

The day had begun like all others, and Rose's 28-year-old husband, Stephen Begher Saka, a farmer, joined his children to take the breakfast that Rose had prepared for them before the couple left for the farm to harvest locust beans, leaving their children at home.

Our correspondent gathered that after harvesting the locust beans, they decided to head to a nearby stream to catch some fish. It was gathered that Saka had removed his bag containing his traditional powers and gave it to his wife while he entered the stream to hunt for fish.

Saka, reputed in the area as a very strong man, had been a strong defender of the Tiv farmers in the area against herdsman invasion and he had consequently become a target of the herdsman for a long time.

So while he was in the stream trying to catch some fish, heavily armed herdsman numbering about 13 and were believed to have been trailing him from his farm, appeared from different directions, surrounded the stream and

asked him to say his last prayers.

Saka, it was learnt, quickly turned to his wife and asked her to throw to him the bag apparently containing his charms, but it was too late as the herdsman immediately opened fire on him.

"They must have directed more than 70 gunshots at him but none of the bullets penetrated his body, so they decided to use their sharp knife to slaughter him like a goat. That was when they were able to kill him.

"But none of them touched me. I watched the entire episode live as they struggled to kill my husband. They butchered him like a cow after they had succeeded in killing him," Rose said.

Giving further details about the battle that ensued between her deceased husband and his assailants, she said: "I watched helplessly as the herdsman used a machete to inflict a deep cut on his forehead after bullets had failed them even with their AK47 guns. He lost consciousness and later gave up the ghost.

Asked how she became the late Saka's wife, she said: "I married Saka many years ago, and until his death on April 1, he was a farmer, a hunter as well as a defender of his community against herdsman invasion.

"We had seven children, five boys and two girls. We ate breakfast together on that fateful day before we left for the farm to harvest locust beans. Little did I know that it would be our last day together.

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'I watched helplessly as 13 herdsmen slaughtered my husband like goat'

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"His death is painful because that was not what I bargained with him. Where do I start from? His death has crippled me and it looks as if my world has stopped moving

"It is looking as if the world is against me now. It is as if I'm still in a dream and hoping to wake up to realise that it is just a scene in a movie.

"Who will now protect this community against herdsmen? The entire community is in trouble. The herdsmen will clear all of us if we don't move out of here immediately, because there is no body to stop them any more" she said

At her house in Antsar village where the atmosphere was tense when our correspondent visited, Rose obliged the correspondent with an emotional account of how her husband and herself left home for

the farm in the morning of April 1, noting that her husband was full of life on that fateful.

She said: "In the morning of that April 1, 2022, he woke up and asked me to prepare food for him, saying that we were going to harvest locust beans in the farm while the children would stay at home.

"He woke up hale and hearty and was full of life on that fateful day. In fact, he had no sign of any illness and there was no premonition at all about the unfortunate incident.

"As he was leaving home to the farm with me, he told his kids that he would be back to meet them again, but he never did.

"I refused to break the news to them and rather went to inform some people that my husband was killed and slaughtered in my presence."

Rose said her husband was not afraid of death going by the manner he fought the

13 heavily armed herdsmen without any weapon on him.

She said: "He was not afraid of death. I'm very sure he is in heaven with his Creator. He died a hero. He died fighting for his people. He died defending his community against herdsmen

"Although he is no more, he will rise again and we will meet again. He did not die. I'm sure he is sleeping.

"It is not how long but how well. He spent all his life fighting and defending his people against herdsmen invasion. May the heavens receive his soul.

"Before death came knocking on April 1st, we were inseparable. My husband gave me true love. He cared so much about me and his children. We will all miss him."

Rose's trauma is compounded by the gloomy prospect of raising seven kids all alone.

"I am a poor village woman whose only livelihood is farming. How I will cater for these seven kids now, I don't know.

"Life will be very tough for me and my children. Who will encourage me now? My husband was my hope, who will be my hope now? I don't know what to do.

The late Saka is due for burial on April 14.

The entire Tiv population in Nasarawa South senatorial district was in tears as they mourned the death of their courageous son who, on many occasions, had stood up to invading herdsmen that seemed to derive joy from spilling the blood of innocent Tiv farmers.

A resident of the community, who identified himself simply as Mr Isaac, told our correspondent that with Saka's death, nobody in the village was safe from the marauding herdsmen as he had been their only stumbling block.