

WEEKEND LIFE

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North-Central communities where farmers harvest more corpses than crops

- *We're tired of collecting dead bodies daily - Villagers*
- *'How stench from decomposing bodies helps us to find missing relations, colleagues'*
- *Concerns over imminent food crisis*

Farmlands in many Northcentral states have become places for harvesting dead bodies instead of crops. From time to time, fresh or decomposing corpses of farmers allegedly killed by murderous herdsmen litter the farms, scaring others from carrying out their legitimate business. The ugly trend is said to be taking a turn for the worse every passing day following the failure of the relevant authorities to give it the necessary attention. INNOCENT DURU

MRS Miriam Terwase, a native of Tse Aban in Tombo Council Ward, Logo Local Government Area, Benue State, gladly left home on April 29 in the company of her third child to apply herbicide and salvage whatever was left on her groundnut farm.

As they moved around the farm, the young boy plucked edible fruits at intervals, lovingly putting some in his mother's mouth because she could not hold them with her soiled hands.

"Mummy, please let us also pluck some vegetables so you can make that delicious soup you usually make for us," the boy requested while the mother nodded with smiles. Elated by the mother's positive response, he ran to give her a warm hug, which, unknown to him, would be his last for the mother.

Towards the end of the herbicide application exercise, a murderous, haggard-looking herdsman appeared from nowhere and attacked Miriam with a sharp knife. Her efforts and the son's attempts to ward off the assailant failed to save her life and she was heartlessly murdered before her son. Her corpse was later recovered and deposited in the mortuary of NKST Hospital Anyiin.

"I buried her at the weekend. She was my younger sister," Miriam's brother, Jeyol Jeremiah Hilenen, said as he recalled how his beloved sister was murdered.

Jeyol, a personal aide to the council chairman on security matters, is responsible for mobilising and alerting the joint

security operatives in the area on security threats in any part of the local government area. He was also responsible for taking our correspondent round the highly volatile area when he visited.

"She had five children. She was murdered right in front of her third child. The poor boy personally witnessed how his mother was hacked to death. He tried to help the mother but he was too small to do that. The herder mounted the mother and was stabbing her. The boy took a cutlass and hit the herder on the head.

"The guy rose and moved to also attack the boy and he ran away. He saw everything. He watched the mother killed by the herder. The boy is highly traumatised now. He will never forget that experience.

"He is living in an internally displaced persons' camp now. It is very pathetic. If this is allowed to continue, how are we sure that some of us will still live?"

Apart from the mother of five, two other farmers, according to Jeyol, were also killed in different farms that same day.

Miriam's case is just one out of the numerous incidents of mindless killing of farmers, male and female, in different parts of Benue and some other Northcentral states.

Across rural farmlands in states like Benue, Plateau, Niger and Kaduna, killer herdsmen are said to have brazenly slaughtered and spilled the blood of harmless farmers. The bestial and barbaric practice, checks revealed, has caused many farmers to flee their farms.

The consequence, according to findings, is yawning food scarcity and famine in most of the communities that hitherto

farmed and produced the food eaten not only in the affected communities and their states but across the country.

"Here, it is obvious we are going to have a food crisis," Jorgba Terkura, a frontline farmer in Logo who had two of his farmer in-laws killed just on Tuesday, said.

"We have a peculiar case here; a case that the federal government is not even helping matters about. People cannot go to their farms. The little that our people have wanted they cannot go and harvest.

Three of the people killed on Tuesday were my in-laws and they were farmers. At times, the herdsmen would stand by the road, catch our women who are going to fish rivers, rape them, collect their money and phone and ask them to go.

"At times, they would beat and wound them. Farms are no-go areas here in Logo."

Umishi Manasseh, a native of Tombo Ward in Logo, has lost a number of his farmer relations to the inhuman activities of the herdsmen with the latest being that of Tuesday. Manasseh regretted that farmers were leaving the villages in droves to settle in Ayilamo town.

He said: "Coker Dada, a relation of mine and a farmer, was killed on Tuesday. The rural communities are prone to attacks because there is no security there. The killings have instilled fears in our people.

"I am very annoyed about the killings. It is unfortunate that there is nothing we can do about it. We have no weapons or help from anywhere.

"How can we confront people who are carrying sophisti-

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