



SOUTHEAST REPORT

Curbing Enugu's bloody communal clashes

In the past few years, increased communal clashes in some communities across Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria, have resulted in dozens of avoidable deaths, injuries and destruction of properties. However, some residents and stakeholders have put forward proactive, appropriate and quick measures to nip the situation in the bud. **DAMIAN DURUIHEOMA** reports.

ENUGU State, Southeast Nigeria, is bedevilled by challenges that constantly lead to avoidable loss of lives and properties. While some communities have been battling invasions, destructions and killings by herdsmen, others have also suffered unmitigated kidnappings allegedly by herdsmen and other criminal elements often referred to as unknown gunmen.

However, one of the worrisome challenges that hardly receive sincere attention is communal clashes. In recent years, communal clashes have become a regular occurrence, but only clashes that claimed several lives and properties received adequate media coverage.

The most notable of these were the Oruku crisis and Akpawfu killings, all in Nkanu East Local Government Area of the state; Oyofo and Awha crises in Ezeagu Local Government Area, Mgbowo in Awgu Local Government Area and the most recent, the inter-communal dispute in Ikolo Community in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, among others.

Expectedly, these clashes resulted in deaths, burning of houses and shops, foodstuff and people were displaced from their homes in droves.

Findings by our correspondent show that at the core of these hostilities are the bloody battles for supremacy and the control of land in various affected communities. There are also crises occasioned by leadership tussles.

Only recently, tension escalated

in the Ikolo Community when three youths from neighbouring Aku Town in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State, reportedly went missing after visiting the home of one Mr. Chibueze Anidiobi, a herbalist from Ikolo on August 1, 2024.

Interestingly, a few days after the strange disappearance of the three youths, the leadership of the Aku Youths General Assembly organised a search party to locate the missing youths. However, four members of the search party were allegedly gruesomely murdered in the process.

It was gathered that the three missing young men from Aku identified as Frank Didigwu, Chibuike Nnadi and Obiora Dugwu had gone to Ikolo to seek traditional medicine for the sick mother of one of them.

A village source, who narrated the incident, told reporters that one of the missing people contacted his sister immediately after they got to Ikolo to inform her of their safe arrival.

"Immediately they got to the premises of the herbalist, one of the victims called his sister, confirming that they had been brought to the residence of the herbalist and awaited their turn to be attended to.

"Since that call, the three young men have not been seen or heard from, and their phones have remained switched off.

"Shockingly, the three Aku boys are yet to be seen; their whereabouts remain known," he said.

It was further gathered that the search party, which began its journey

on Thursday, August 8, was allegedly ambushed by armed people suspected to come from Ikolo, leading to the killing of four of them, while others were said to have sustained gunshot injuries.

However, in a reverse attack about nine months earlier, particularly on November 28 2023, no fewer than two persons from Ikolo were declared missing and 17 houses burnt down, following an alleged invasion of the community by youths from the Aku Community.

While none of the missing people had been seen till date, it was learned that properties worth millions of naira were lost in that attack alone.

According to the people of the community, over 50 youths from the neighbouring Aku community swooped on them around 2:00 a.m. with guns, machetes and petrol bombs with which they set many houses on fire.

In March this year, four people from Aku were severely afflicted with machete cuts by the armed youths, reportedly from Ikolo. The victims included Chinonso Ogbebe, Dan Mbah, Akunaesiobike Ike and Ogbu Chkwube who narrowly escaped death.

The Ikolo/Aku killings have been blamed on a protracted boundary dispute between the two neighbouring communities of Aku and Ikolo.

In another development, in April 2024, the people of Akpawfu Community in Nkanu East Local Government Area conducted two mass burials for no fewer than 20 people



• Some of the properties destroyed during one of the communal clashes in Enugu

who were killed during the crisis that befell the community over a protracted land dispute.

While Umuanihigbiyovo Oyiwode and Akpawfu conducted a mass burial for eight members of the community, Umu Ani Oyiwode Akpawfu as well as many others did the same. There were also several missing people, who are yet to be seen since the crisis got out of hand in 2021.

During the crisis, which left hundreds of people of the community fleeing the town as they were rendered homeless, numerous properties owned by several members of the community, particularly at Ajame Ameze Akpawfu Autonomous Community were destroyed. Other houses and shops were looted; as individuals lost thousands of drums of stored palm oil, yam and maize barns, motorcycles and livestock. These properties are worth millions of naira.

In yet another instance in August last year in the Ezeagu Local Government Area, no fewer than four people

lost their lives while properties worth millions of naira were destroyed when Oyofo and Awha communities clashed over land disputes in the area.

In June this year, Umu-Ezuboike Village in Umuakor Community in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State witnessed a gun attack from their neighbours, Amankanu which left no fewer than four people hospitalised with multiple gunshot wounds. The matter was a dispute over land which spans over 500,000 hectares.

There have been several others, which have been happening without any strong action by the state government to arrest the situation and bring the perpetrators to book permanently.

'Government's insensitivity, negligence fueling crises'

While some of the communal clashes were fueled by a proliferation of small arms and light weapons in remote and marginalised areas in com-