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Oil community bemoans neglect

•Asks NPDC to quit or give employment to youths

•We're doing our best —Official

BY FESTUS AHON

AFTER over 56 years of exploration, Eruemukohwarie oil-bearing community, Ughelli North Local Government Area, Delta State is crying of abandonment by oil companies.

Many youths in the community with more than 14 oil wells and host to the Ughelli Pumping Station, UPS, formerly operated by Shell Petroleum Development Company, SPDC, and now the Nigeria Petroleum Development Company, NPDC, are reportedly jobless. More than 500 women of the community stormed the premises of the UPS, Ughelli, lately to express their grievances.

Clutching placards, which bore inscriptions such as, "Employ our children, NPDC," "FG, our lands are infertile, our crops are dying", "We are being enslaved in our land", "Pay us our expired leases and rents", "NPDC, give us what is due to us" among others, they demanded jobs for their sons or asked the company to quit their land.

Public Relations Officer, Mr. Naira Idogun, said the women decided to embark on the protest because NPDC did not deem it fit to dialogue with the community before going

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Gangsters seize 10 Rivers towns

•Kill 17, abduct 5

•Establish operational headquarters in Okogbo town

•Amaechi accuses ex-Police Commissioner



•Weapons recovered by police from criminals

•Anti riot policemen drafted to crime scenes

BY JIMITOTA ONOYUME

KIDNAPPERS and cultists, allegedly bankrolled by politicians, have laid siege to at least 10 communities in Rivers State, killing more than 17 persons, abducting about five persons and razing homes of citizens, who opposed their reign of terror.

Residents flee

Horror-struck residents are fleeing the communities in droves to Port-Harcourt, the state capital and other parts of the state, as security agents seem not to have immediate solution to the brazen assault by Icelanders and Deybam, two major cult groups fighting for supremacy in the state.

Emoghan and Aminigboko communities in Abua Odua Local Government Areas were among peaceful communities in the state, until about a year ago, when the dare devil cultists struck. The cultists have supposedly extended their battle for territorial control to Okogbo, which is currently used as an operational headquarters, Otaori and Amalem.

Also held hostage by kidnappers, cultists and sea pirates are Ibba community in Emohua Local Government, parts of Omoku in Ogbia-Egbeme-Ndoni Local Government, Khama and Gokhana Local Government Areas

A native, who spoke to the Niger

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Gangsters seize 10 Rivers towns

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Delta Voice in Port Harcourt under anonymity said like many other villagers residing in Port-Harcourt and Lagos, he had not been to his Owerere hometown in the last one year because of the "boys."

"It is so bad in Owerere, these boys have taken over the whole place. Sometimes, they ride on motorcycles holding guns. Nobody challenges them. This is the situation in the communities," he said. Investigation revealed that the evil men were formerly street urchins, who metamorphosed to hard gangsters, and now, they are cultists using the communities as battlegrounds for territorial control.

Osila's house razed

Residents, who opposed the operations of the gangs in their areas met with cruel realities. A community leader in Owerere, Mr. B. B Osila had his house razed by cultists for raising his eyebrows at their activities.

A group, Concerned Citizens of Abua Odua Local Government Area, in a statement, urging government to intervene, said the various cult groups now rob travellers and business operators in broad day light. The group said a gang of mobsters, killers, kidnappers, sea pirates and armed robbers have ganged up to terrorize the local government.

Kidnapped in broad day light

"The gang has been terrorizing and killing people, including National Youth Service Corps, NYSC members. One John Sokolo from Ogbema communi-

ty and the sister of the chairman of the Abua Odua Local Government Council were kidnapped in broad day light.

"The gang also kidnapped Mr Opozar from Ogbalom community and many others in the local government. They have been operating for the past two and half years. The Abua Council of Chiefs and the present government have not done enough to bring the criminals to order," the group said.

It alleged that some chiefs and political office holders were protecting the gang in Okogbo community because of their political interest in 2015, adding, "The chiefs and politicians are so powerful in the local government that even the security agencies are confused on how they operate and the way to bring the criminals to book."

Cover up! They also said: "The police in Okogbo are working in harmony with this gang. Imagine the gang members leave Okogbo for operation and return to Okogbo after operation, while the police are there. During the Omagbala Masquerade festival in Abua Central, the said gang exchanged gunfire with men of the Joint Task Force in which one of their gang leaders was shot on the shoulder. He was

arrested by the police, taken to the BMH hospital in Port-Harcourt for treatment, but released by politicians."

More killings: The group disclosed: "Last year, one Mr. Innocent, bread supplier in Obroyan village was killed in a robbery operation by the gang. In another instance, they invaded Eminigboko community and killed three boys, among them, Ibem Issac and Vandick Osiler.

Lucky to escape assassination

"Citizens plying Akukuwo, Oghoro and Okogbo roads are not safe because of these criminals. December 26, last year, they killed six boys during the yuletide. At Amalem community, they stormed Mr. Henry Okary's residence with AK 47 rifles and stole the N700, 000 used to pay for a land bought by Chief L.K Adoki.

"Again, the same gang went to a restaurant and killed Otaboy from Omalama community. A Special Assistant to a member of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Mr. Victor Peter, was lucky to escape assassination in their hands, but at Owerewara community, they killed Gift Oliver and two others, after which they raped a young girl and robbed the entire village," the group stated. At Otari community, the gang reportedly razed the houses of Mr. Collins Dibia, Mr. Obenoma Oghu and Elder Crowder, and on April 25, 2014, two youths, U. K Itoday and Eghueen Moses were killed in cold blood.

"Recently on May 4, which was during the Omelama Masquerade festival in Amalem, the gang killed Mr. Umor Moro at about 7.00 pm and raided the community, Okana and Emelaghan villagers."

Why they killed my father

At a time, Ibaa in Abua Odua Local Government was completely under the reign of cultists. A villager (names withheld) told *Niger Delta Voice* how his father was killed for questioning the activities of the cultists. He lament-

ed that some of the cultists were minors, saying, "They are teenagers, which is what is paining me. Teenagers who should be in school or be learning a trade,"

The source said chieftaincy tussle was what gave rise to cultism in Ibaa, as some of the contenders for traditional titles allegedly enjoyed support from some youths, who probably unknown to them, were cultists. "These youths took up the fight for the titles for some of the contenders," he added. In Omoku, an oil-rich community in Ogba Egbe- ma Ndoni local government, it is the same story of insecurity occasioned by the activities of cultists. The story is not different in Etche and Ogoni areas of the state.

Otari villagers move against cultists

Luck reportedly ran out of one of the cult groups and their sponsors, Sunday, May 26, in Otari, as the natives rose against the "boys" when their leader, backed by some chiefs, sent a town crier to announce the banishment of some persons opposed to the group from the community.

A youth leader told *Niger Delta Voice* that some courageous

villagers descended on the cultists that accompanied the town crier, killing two of them, igniting fresh tension in the uneasy locality.

Police doing its best — PPRO

Contacted for comments, Police Public Relations Officer, Rivers State Police Command, Grace Koko, who confirmed the activities of cultists in parts of the state, said the police were doing their best to wipe out the activities of hoodlums and cultists, adding that several arrests had been made.

Amaechi blames ex-CP

Governor Chibuike Amaechi had blamed the outgoing Commissioner of Police in the state, Mr. Joseph Mbu, for the sad situation. He had also accused the then Police boss of conniving with his political opponents to allow the cultists and hoodlums he had allegedly chased out of the state to return to the streets.

Residents fault politicians

Some residents disagreed with the governor and accused politicians of the various parties in the state of allegedly funding the groups and using them as private armies in preparation for 2015 election.

Landmine to Jonathan's countryside

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si, aka, Minister for Works, told Vanguard that the road was impassable before their intervention. He lamented that the group lost one of their colleagues in the process of constructing the bridge.

Danger: However, Vanguard noticed a cause for concern. The wooden bridge is not strong enough and could cave-in due to the huge traffic on the road.

According to Inengesi, the bridge was originally built for tricycles, popularly known as Keke NAPEP. His words "After the flood, we decided to come together to construct this bridge, we were four in number, unfortunately we lost one of our man due to the tedious job. We were doing it for Keke NAPEP but we never expected that it can carry bigger cars."

Toll: "After building the monkey bridge, we decided to levy commercial cars N100, 000 and Keke NAPEP, N50 daily, but some persons out of appreciation used to give us N500 or N1, 000.

A commercial driver who plies the road, Mr. Tunde Abiodun, told Vanguard that they were indebted

to the villagers for their efforts, adding that they were not bothered that they have to part with N100 to cross the bridge.

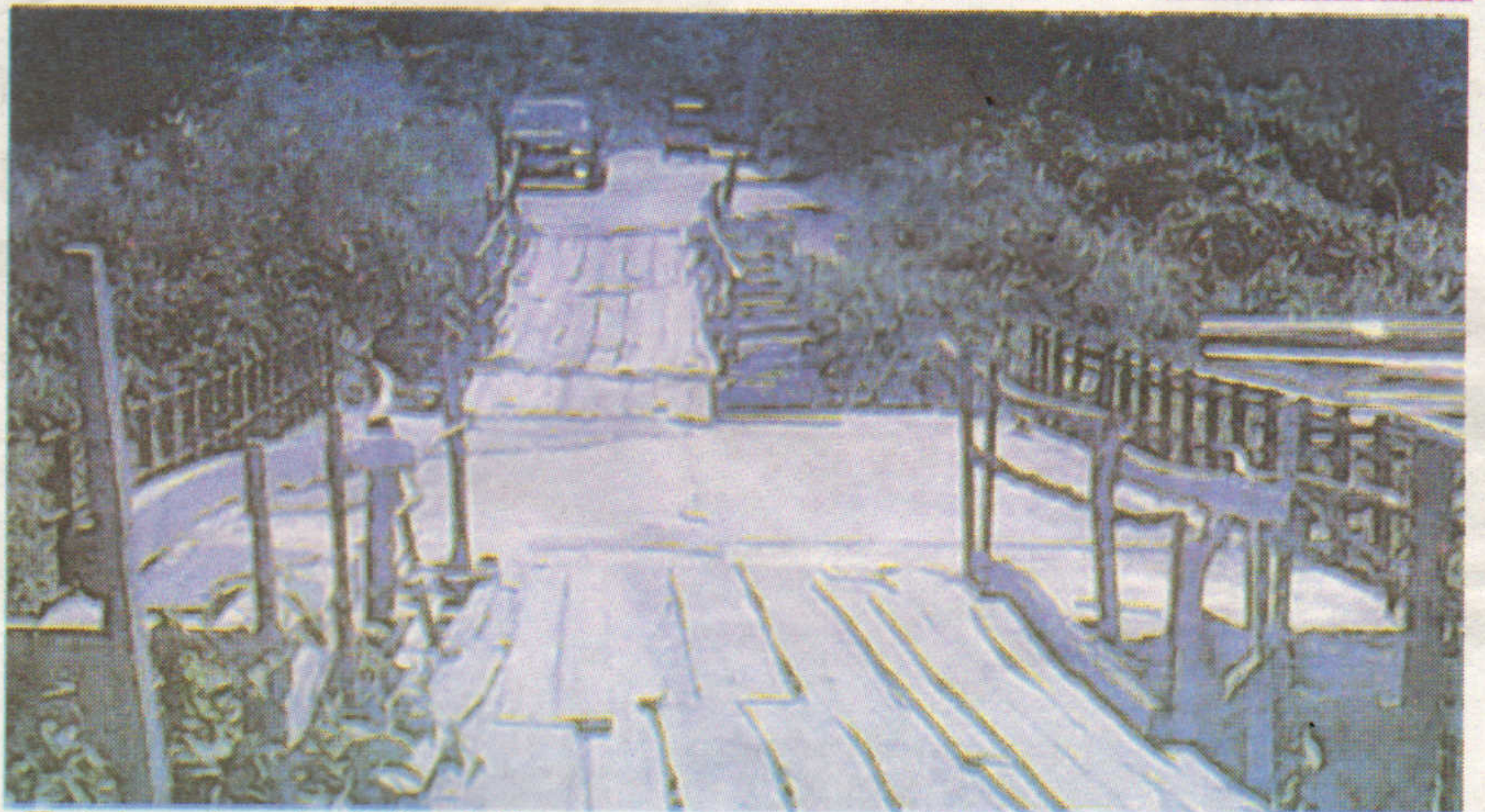
Grumble: Residents of Kolo Creek community, who are the direct victims of the pathetic road, have at different times articulated their disillusionment on the state of the road. As much as it had inhibited communication, the people said it has affected their means of livelihood and increased suffering.

Spokesman for the Kolo Creek clan, Comrade Ootobo Victor, told Vanguard that the people were not happy over the continued neglect of the road, describing the wooden makeshift bridge as an eyesore and a time-bomb.

He said the road was a total embarrassment to the people considering the fact that Mr. President is from the area.

Contract awarded

But the Bayelsa Commissioner for Works, Mr. Lawrence Erudjakpo, did not mince words when he told journalists, recently, in Yenagoa that contract for the reconstruction of the road had since been awarded and that the contractors would soon mobilize to site.



The twin wooden make shift twin bridge

Oil community bemoans neglect

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ahead with its operation. Idogun said: "The people had taken several steps to ensure that we have a round table talk with NPDC, but all to no avail. That is the major reason why the women are protesting so that they can pour out their hearts and tell the world in general the gross marginalization that is being meted on the community.

"We are being marginalized in terms of non-employment of the teeming youths of this community. Upon NPDC taking over affairs and running from SPDC, it has refused to employ a single individual from our community and we have graduates from all spheres of endeavor, who are qualified to occupy any position in the facility."

The eldest man of Eruemukohwari community, Pa George Idogun, who spoke through his spokesman, Prince Sylvester Ogherohwo, decried the underdevelopment of the community and the non-employment of the communities' youths, despite the devastation of their farmlands by oil companies.

Contacted, a senior official of the company said four youths of the communities were currently being interviewed for employment at NPDC office in Benin-City, Edo State. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity said: "The youths have to go through the process. We are doing our best considering the fact that we just took over this facility from the SPDC. We have good programmes for our host."