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## When Fulani murdered peace in Benue

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JOHNSON BABAJIDE writes on the possible causes of constant invasion of Benue by Fulani herdsmen and what should be done to halt incessant killings and destruction of properties in Benue communities.

THE constant invasions of Benue communities by Fulani Herdsmen, in recent time, have become a source of concern to residents of the affected communities as well

as people of Benue State in general.

The sight of Fulani herdsmen by residents of the state is even said to have always evoked feelings of fear and disgust, as many residents believe that the herdsmen are murderers who derive joy in inflicting pains on them.

Though the claim of the residents may not be totally correct as the herdsmen have constantly claimed innocence and blamed some residents of the state for being the cause of the problem, the fact remains that killings have continued unabated in Benue.

Most of the worst hit communities in the orgy of violence that has gripped the state are found in Guma, Gwer West, Agatu and Makurdi local government areas of the state; all of which, incidentally, are on Benue-Nassarawa border.

It will be recalled that about 15 persons were killed recently in a clash between the herdsmen and natives of Tiv community in Gwer West Local Government Area of the state, while silent killings of many residents are said to be carried out on a daily basis.

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When the herdsmen stormed the local government in the last attack, they were said to have gone straight to Tyoughatee and Gbaange-Tongov districts in the local government and killed many, while houses, huts and properties were burned.

It will also be recalled that the Fulani mercenaries also attacked Adake and Adaka, suburbs of Makurdi and left behind sad tales.

With the invasion of Adake and Adaka, residents have begun to talk about security lapses in the state, in view of the fact that the communities host many Federal Government security formations and also very close to the state capital. Ironically, Adeke, one of the invaded communities, hosts a Mobile Police barracks.

Other security formations within the capital city are: Tactical Airforce Command, Navy Training Center, Nigeria Army School of Engineers, 82 Mechanized Division of the Nigerian Armed Forces, zonal and state commands of Nigeria Police, yet Fulani marauders often beat them to unleash terror on hapless Benue residents.

Checks revealed that the Fulani invasions were always well planned and executed, as some residents alleged that in the last invasion, truckloads of Fulani mercenaries were sighted in the affected communities a day before the crisis.

"As the mercenaries were moving in, families of the cattle readers were being evacuated from the community. Women and children were evacuated, while their husbands remained until the mercenaries struck at the wee hour of the fateful day," a resident, who simply called himself Tyoemba, told Sunday Tribune.

Sporadic gunshots were said to have woken up residents of the community as early as 2a.m. just as many residents fled for their lives when it dawned on them that marauders had arrived.

It was also alleged that many of the residents, who attempted to take refuge at the mobile barracks, were prevented from doing so.

Speaking on the situation, the Chairman, Makurdi Local Government Area, Mr Godwin Donko, decried the destruction of lives and properties in Adeke community and explained that he had always been settling Fulani/Tiv farmers crises ever since he assumed office.

He disclosed that some measures had been taken by the local government and Benue State government to find a lasting solution to the crises. He also called on the Federal Government to intervene because the crises were fast assuming alarming proportion.

"It is a pathetic situation. There seems to be no solution to these crises. I have been confronted with these crises ever since I assumed office as the chairman. The local government lacks the capacity to handle the situation alone," he said.

Many reasons have been given for the constant invasions of Benue communities; the most tenable of them all is cattle rustling as many Fulani herdsmen claimed that about 200 cows had been stolen from them so far.



Another reason for the attack was said to be a reprisal to the attack of a Fulani man who allegedly raped a lady in the area.

However, a resident of the community, Chief Abu King Shuluwa, traced the constant invasions to high rate of unemployment among youths in the area, which he said, had pushed some youths into criminality. One of the acts of this criminality, according to him, was

cattle rustling in the area.

According to Shuluwa, "over the years, we have lived peacefully with Fulani herdsmen; the Boko Haram problem in Borno State has forced some of these Fulani to migrate to Benue.

"We all know that Fulani people value their cows so much because it is their source of livelihood, while Tiv farmers also value their farmland, because it is their source of livelihood as well.

Clash occurs most times when these cows invade Tiv farmlands. However, the recent attacks were

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caused by these jobless youths who went and stole Fulani cows and sold them at a giveaway price," he added.

Sunday Tribune learnt that the similar invasion of Guma Local Government Area last December was caused by cattle rustling.

A member representing Makurdi South at the state House of Assembly, Honourable Benjamin Adayin, accused the Deputy Police Officer (DPO) of 'D' division in the state police command of complicity, saying the man was aiding and shielding the marauding Fulani mercenaries since he, too, was a Fulani man.

When Sunday Tribune visited the community, some residents had returned to their homes, while some of them described their experience as very traumatic.

According to Dauda, a resident of the community, "It was around 2a.m. that we woke up hearing heavy gun shots which lasted for about three hours. As soon as the day broke, my family and I ran away through a footpath to my one-room office at Wadatta until yesterday when we returned to our house. Now that normalcy has returned, we don't sleep with our two eyes closed."

Most of the Tiv farmers, who spoke with Sunday Tribune, expressed their readiness to live peacefully with Fulani herdsmen, saying they too should learn to live peacefully.

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