

Kaduna: How *katakata* in Godogodo claimed 50 lives

A communal clash between indigenes of Godogodo in Kaduna State and their Fulani herdsmen neighbours has claimed about 50 lives. MUHAMMAD SABIU writes that the clash between the two erstwhile amiable neighbours had left the town in tatters.

GODOGODO town is the headquarters of Godogodo chiefdom in Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The people of Godogodo are predominantly farmers who had lived together peacefully with Fulani herdsmen and other ethnic groups even from other parts of the country like the Yoruba and Igbo for many years.

Going down memory lane, Mr Joseph Ishaya, one of the residents of the area told the *Sunday Tribune* that "forty years ago, our house was very close to a Fulani settlement. My brother and I will go to the settlement to play with their children and eventually my brother fell in love with one of the Fulani girls."

"The relationship was based on trust and love. During *Eid* festivals, we celebrated with the herdsmen, likewise during Christmas they came to our houses to rejoice with us," he stressed.

That good-neighbourliness has, however, disappeared. In fact, the events of the past months which led to wanton destruction of houses as well as the killing of several others raised serious concerns about security in the area. A source who pleaded for anonymity explained how the crisis in Godogodo escalated.

He told *Sunday Tribune* that: "one day, one of the farmers in this town came to the farm and discovered that cows had eaten all the crops on his farm," an recurrence that pushed the embattled farmer to procure some poisonous substances the following day, which he spread on the farm. However, unknown to him, while he was spreading the poisonous substance, some Fulani youths were watching him from a distance.

Later, it was learnt, the youth met the farmer and asked him why he poisoned his farm. Though, there was no evidence of what actually transpired between the farmer and the youths, *Sunday Tribune* investigations gathered that when the news of the Fulani youths' visit spread across the town, youths of Godogodo went after the Fulani youths. Unfortunately, they could not find them in their houses as they had moved together with their parents to another grazing land somewhere around Nasarawa State.

The youths, it was learnt, met a 75-year-old Fulani man whom they allegedly murdered. Indeed, the killing of the old man infuriated his kinsmen. It was gathered that it was from that moment the Fulani herdsmen began to unleash series of attacks from their hideouts. Findings gathered that among the attacks they carried out was the one on penultimate Tuesday which led to the murder of two policemen, while four other policemen sustained injuries.

Barely four days after, precisely one week ago, the suspected herdsmen stormed Godogodo village again. Eyewitnesses remarked that when they came, they started shot sporadically in the air and set fire on some houses. According to a source, some of the inhabitants were



File photo of a crisis



Burnt property

burnt inside their houses, while those who were trying to escape were gunned down.

"We counted over 20 bodies of our people that were killed on the first attack. Later, we discovered another 20 bodies on the second day of the attack, the source who did not want to be named told *Sunday Tribune*."

However, in a reprisal an unconfirmed report said the Godogodo youths attacked a bus conveying several Fulanis during which about 14 of them were allegedly killed.

In a swift reaction, the area's interim local government Chairman, Mr Humble Katuka, imposed a dusk to dawn curfew. According to him, "We have to take this step in order to control the situation. Also, the police image-maker, ASP Aliyu Usman, confirmed the mayhem at

Godogodo and that the state police commissioner, Suleiman Lemu, has asked for the enforcement of more policemen in the area.

Also, the state government has condemned the crisis. Speaking, during a visit to the town, the state deputy governor, Barnabas Bala, while commiserating with the families of those who lost their lives, reaffirmed the state government's determination to ensure that the lives and property of its citizens are protected at all the time.

He said that the state government would fish out those responsible, including their sponsors. He also said that the state government will send relief materials to the affected victims immediately.

Even with the assurance of the deputy governor, as of the time of filing this re-

port, the town was still deserted. A native of the area, who gave his name as Simon said: "people have left the town for neighbouring villages. We will not come back until we are sure measures are being put in place to protect us."

However, *Sunday Tribune* findings gathered that apart from the exodus of the people, schools, shops as well as markets remained closed, despite the curfew has being relaxed.

Disturbed by the situation in the area, a Senator representing Southern Kaduna senatorial district, Senator Danjuma Lah, condemned the act of wanton destruction and loss of lives, describing the carnage as a crime against the people of Godogodo, Southern Kaduna and humanity.

In a statement issued to newsmen in Kaduna, Lah stated: "I heard about the happening, but I was stopped from rushing down here. I want to say that what I have seen here is a huge crime. It is an unforgivable crime against the people of Godogodo, Southern Kaduna and humanity."

"No group of persons must be allowed to escape with this impunity. My heart bleeds for you."

Also condemning the attack, the state chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Haruna Usman, maintained that the perpetrators should be identified and prosecuted. He, however, called for the need to be cautious in blaming Fulani herdsmen, saying the real herdsmen who had lived in the area could not have carried out such acts.

The Southern Kaduna Peoples Assembly (SOKAPU), reacting through its National Publicity Secretary, Reuben Buhari, noted that both the federal and state governments should intensify security in the area.

"There are quite a number of internally displaced women and children roaming about without shelter and food," he said.