

Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital, is far less developed than most outsiders would think. Twenty years after it metamorphosed from the headquarters of a local government into a state capital, it still has its fair share of crumbling huts that pass for houses, as well as dark alleys and windy lanes that pass for streets.

Everywhere one turns, squalor and neglect are conspicuous. The death traps which pass as 'feeder roads' are also unmitigatable as one approaches the town. Most of the streets are narrow pathways filled with potholes, while unemployment forces thousands of able-bodied men to idly roam the streets. Worse, with large portions of land in the state composed of sand and clay which cannot support the growth of crops, the garri and yams sold in Uyo markets come from farms in Taraba and Cross River states.

The absence of industries and a thriving economy to provide employment, and arable land to engage the teeming youths in farming, has forced youths in the state to take to crime. Consequently, phone snatching, rape, car stealing, armed robbery and assassination are fast becoming the order of the day. The crime rate in the city surpasses what obtains in most cities in the South-South. While Port Harcourt is under the seige of militants, Uyo is groaning under robbery and assassinations.

The attacks are indeed frequent, and there are no exemptions. Banks, homes, offices, filling stations, offices, individuals are randomly attacked and robbed even in the daytime, making residents to live in fear. Nightlife has come to a standstill, as most residents keep indoors rather than venture



Men and women arrested for armed robbery in Uyo. In front of them are items they looted and a robber killed by a mob.



Cartridges recovered from robbers in Uyo.

Reign Of Robbers

Armed robbers and other unscrupulous elements make life unbearable and insecure for residents of Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital

• Crime •

out and get attacked. To make matters worse, virtually everyone treats the other person, particularly strangers, with deep suspicion.

The police seem patiently incapable of handling the situation. In the middle of May, robbers spent over five hours robbing a new generation bank situated along Ikot Ekpene Road. "It was like we were in a war zone. The firing was so loud that it could be heard as far as Ikot Ekpene, some 20 kilometres away. The police without a doubt heard the booming sound of gunfire but dared not come out", Israel Bassey, an Uyo-based journalist told TheNEWS. The next morning, the area was littered with corpses.

Occasionally, however, the police parade some persons they claim are robbers to prove that they are recording successes against men of the underworld. On Tuesday 26 June, the Akwa Ibom Police Command paraded 15 suspects arrested in the state. Recovered from them were one Sendo, three Nokia and one LG handsets, and one 14" television set.

Ostensibly to instill fear in the citizenry and further weaken the police, robbers murdered an operative of the State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) on Saturday 11 August at his home in Nung Oku Ibesikpo, Asutan on the outskirts of Uyo. Mr. Gabriel Ngban, the Akwa Ibom Police Command Public Relations Officer, said Inspector Patrick Etim, a senior by four men who rode to his compound on a Kymco motorcycle and rained bullets into his head and chest. The calibre and number of suspects arrested by the police