

Looting, deaths as Lagos' notorious gangs clash over assault on kingpin's lover

Published February 14, 2021



Scene of the clash (*left*); one of the vandalised shops

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Two rival gangs from Alakuko area of Lagos and Dalemo, a border town between Lagos and Ogun states, held the neighbourhoods to ransom for days last week, unleashing terror without let or hindrance.

From last Friday night to Monday afternoon, the warring hoodlums took charge of the communities, killing one another, vandalising shops along their 'battle ground' on Alakuko-Agbado Road and stealing goods.

Six persons were reportedly feared dead while others sustained varying degrees of injury before a combined team of police and the military were able to restore normalcy.

Amid the chaotic scenario and its attendant losses, no one could pinpoint the immediate cause of the mayhem. Many thought it was another dose of deadly violence which has been on in the area for about three years.

But our correspondent, who visited the communities on Tuesday gathered that an assault on the girlfriend of one Abiodun aka Confidence – the gang leader of Dalemo boys – led to the fight.

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It was learnt that Confidence's lover attended a nightclub in the neighbourhood on Friday evening and was beaten by some boys from Alakuko.

After being informed of the assault, Confidence was said to have led his gang members in a reprisal that night, resulting in deaths from both rival groups and destruction of property along the road.

“An attempt to avenge the assault on the girlfriend was what actually led to the fight but many people don't know,” a resident, who identified himself only as Tunde, told *Sunday PUNCH*. “This was not the first time issues over the girlfriend would result in a fight.”

A resident familiar with the activities of the gangs also confirmed that the assault led to the crisis. The resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity, identified the majority of the hoodlums as youths aged between 18 and 25.

He said, “Confidence who was trying to avenge the assault on his girlfriend is just 25 years old but dreaded. He had been arrested more than twice but was later released. He was released from prison last year after spending eight months. Residents were shocked when they saw him walking on the streets again. It seems he has connections.

“The fight died down on Sunday until Alakuko boys went to attack Confidence's second-in-command at a place where he was being treated for injuries he sustained on Friday night. They hacked him to death.”

Traders count losses

Our correspondent who moved round the scene of the clash on Tuesday noticed that glass doors and windows of several shops had been shattered. There was still fear in the air as many shops had yet to reopen for commercial activities.

A boutique operator, Olayinka Oladipupo, whose shop was destroyed, lamented how she had serially become a victim of the clashes.

“This was the third time they would vandalise my shop,” she stated, casting a sorry look at glass remnants littering her shop frontage.

She said, “It was someone who called me around 10am on Saturday and told me that my shop had been attacked again. I wanted to eat when the person called me but I couldn’t eat again. I reported to the police and wrote a statement.

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“The second time they vandalised my shop, they carted away goods worth about N2m. I also reported to the police at Alakuko but they could not do anything about it. We didn’t know the major cause of their fights. I was lucky this time that they only destroyed the glasses.”

Like Oladipupo, it was the third time a barman, Oloruntoba Adegboyega, would suffer losses for the crises he knew nothing about. He was in his shop around 11pm last Friday attending to customers when the fight broke out. By the time the dust settled, he could not accurately account for the overwhelming loss the gangs had caused him.

He said, “We saw some young boys moving from Dalemo to Alakuko. This was not the first time something like that would happen so everybody started closing shops. On Saturday morning, I was called that my shop had been burgled and drinks carted away. They took away 70 crates of empty bottles and several drinks.

“Around 9pm, on Saturday, they started again. It was on Monday when the military came that the fight was quelled. Till now (Tuesday), many people are still scared of opening shops. It’s really a bad experience. It has been happening but this was much.

“It happens almost every four months and most of the time, it is over the night. Police had to negotiate with them for peace on Monday. The last time they burgled my shop, they took away three plasma televisions. Late last year, they fought and burgled my shop too.”

Another affected shop owner, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the hoodlums created chaos in the community at will, adding that she had no means of fixing the shattered glasses of her shop.

She explained, “People have been complaining that there is someone who harbours them along this road. The person runs a nightclub and the police know the place. They smoke and do all sorts of things there. This problem started about three years ago but it escalated during the COVID-19 lockdown. Apart from Confidence, other notorious hoodlums in this place are Gbese and Marindoti.”

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But an artisan, whose shop was spared of the looting, said the gangs especially their ringleaders, had become almost invincible.

He said, “From Alakuko to Dalemo, they broke into many shops and stole goods. I was inside my shop when they started the fight around 11am last Friday. They left of their own volition around 2.230am. They came out in broad daylight on Sunday and Monday. No policemen came that night and on Sunday.

“It was on Monday that the police came to make peace and arrested some of them. But their kingpins are still moving around. No shop is safe here. We report the crises to the police. Those boys even broke into shops at Alakuko close to the police station. What did the police do about it? Policemen always see Confidence. He moves freely around this community but they won't arrest him.”

The Chairman, Fola Azeez/Fagbenro Landlords' Association in Alakuko, Chief Rasaq Oyedokun, said that residents were always in fear each time the rival gangs foment mayhem, urging security agencies to ensure lasting peace in the neighbourhoods.

He added, “They burgle shops and create panic. We want peace in our area. Government should come to our aid. This has been going on for three years now and we always report to the police.”

The Chairman, Dalemo/Opeoluwa Community Development Association, Mr Idowu Audu, said the incessant crisis had altered the peace he met when he settled in the community 20 years ago, noting that the hoodlums were not resident in the area.

He stated, “They are outsiders. They burgle shops during their clashes. The policemen were unable to quell the crisis on Monday. They had to invite the military, including OPMESA operatives. Some residents could not return home on Friday from work. On Monday, many traders returned home when they started again.

“To solve this problem, we need to find its root. The police have been trying their best but their best is not enough. They are also human beings. Policemen and soldiers had to call some of the boys and talk to them. That was when peace returned.”

A community leader, Dr Akindayo Akinronbi, said most of the hoodlums were jobless, appealing to the government to create employment opportunities for them.

He said, “Idle hands are the devil's handiwork. This (Dalemo) is a boundary between Lagos and Ogun states. They use all kinds of weapons such as cutlasses, bottles and even guns. Even when the police and the military were around, they were still brandishing weapons. They have turned this road to a robbery spot and they are outsiders. No landlord's son is among them.”

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During the robberies that greeted the COVID-19 lockdown last year, our correspondent reported that Confidence allegedly led his gang members numbering about 200 to invade Dalemo around 9pm on Tuesday, April 7, 2020, robbing any residents in sight of their valuables, including phones and cash.

The gang also overran a checkpoint at Dalemo junction where some policemen enforcing the COVID-19 lockdown order were deployed.

The hoodlums operated freely until a reinforcement team led by the Agbado Divisional Police Officer, SP Kuranga Yero, arrived at the scene.

“They collected phones and money from anybody they saw and beat them up. They also invaded the police checkpoint at Dalemo Junction. They (hoodlums) were about 200 led by Confidence. He is a young slim man of about 25 years old but he is dangerous,” a tenant in the area, who gave his name only as Debo, told our correspondent.

The Police Public Relations Officer in Lagos, CSP Muyiwa Adejobi, said the state police command was working with the Ogun State Police Command to tackle the security challenges at Alakuko-Dalemo and other border areas.

He added, “We have some suspects who are assisting the command in unravelling the situation at Alakuko and its suburbs. Normalcy has been restored to the area and the two commands, Lagos and Ogun, are on the matter.”

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