

## After herdsman killed my son, I abandoned farming, resorted to begging – Mother

*Mrs Patricais Idodo, 52, shares with GODFREY GEORGE the pain of losing her 19-year-old son to suspected herdsman, who allegedly shot him dead in February 2021, while they were working on their farm in Delta State*

**What is your name?**

My name is Mrs Patricia Idodo. I am 59 years old. I am from Origo, Delta State. I was a farmer before, but I am now a beggar.

**You lost your child on your farm earlier in the year. Can you recount what happened?**

It happened on February 12, 2021. My son, Marvis Abanum Idodo, who was just 19 years old at the time, went to the farm with me and his father to weed. So, hours into our work, we saw some herders approaching our farms with their cattle and they didn't seem like they were going to stop. So, as my husband sighted them, he alerted us to abandon whatever we were doing and run. As I ran, I heard my husband ask them, "What have you people come to do on my farm again? Are you not tired?" Then, he ran and our son followed him. The next thing I heard was a gunshot and my son was down. We took cover first, but the herders, seeing that one of us was down, took to their heels with their cows, shooting in the air to scare us from running after them. My husband and I rushed to the scene and saw blood gushing out of his chest. It was a hopeless situation as we couldn't feel his pulse anymore. He couldn't make it out of the farm as he died on the spot.

I couldn't hold myself when I saw it. My husband and I ran into the town and shouted so that the villagers would come to our aid and see what had happened. I fell to the ground as I couldn't find the strength to stand up. I couldn't believe it. It happened so fast. One moment, we were working on the farm and the next thing was my son in the pool of his blood. It looked like some kind of a nightmare to me. I crawled to the market and I was shouting. I untied my wrapper. I was mad. I fainted and was carried to the house. I really loved that boy. Of all my children, he was the most hardworking and respectful. He never allowed me to go to the farm alone if he was not in school. He'd abandon everything and come

to assist me. He sometimes missed classes just so he wouldn't leave all the farm work for me.

**Why do you think the herders shot at your son?**

This is not the first time they'd be doing that. They are always used to terrorising our people. I don't even know how they came into our village. They just wait for us to suffer and plant our crops. When they begin to spring forth, they storm the farm with their cattle and vandalise everything. They are always fighting us in our lands over our crops in our farms. I have not seen a bolder set of people. They'd challenge you and threaten to kill you if you don't leave the road for them to do their bidding.

**When your son died, did you seek redress?**

What do you expect us to do? Who are we but poor farmers? Who knows us? I am even surprised how you got to find us here. All I have is God. I know that my God is not asleep and he will avenge my son's death for me.

**Was your village head aware of this?**

Yes, he was. But, what do you expect him to do? He is just as helpless as we are. He is also affected as his farmworkers are also attacked by these herders who have taken our farms as their grazing routes.

**Recently, there were reports of attacks in your community by suspected herdsman. Is this true?**

Yes, it is true. They are back. The herdsman are back. It is not like they left anyway. When they killed my son, everything was tense so they had to leave and hide in other neighbouring communities, but they are back in full force now. They attacked a few farms a week ago and carted away people's crops which they forcefully uprooted. It has become an act of wickedness. They would just enter a farm and destroy everything and go. Some of the crops, they'd just uproot them and dump them there.

**What do they really want? Is there something your people did to them in the past?**

Sincerely, I don't know. They just want trouble. We are a peace-loving people and we have said we don't want them in our lands again, but they have turned deaf ears. They kill and shoot people now the way they like. Before they used to hide their weapons; now, you'd see the guns in full glare. How would you dig out the cassava people planted and give it to cows? Is that not wickedness?

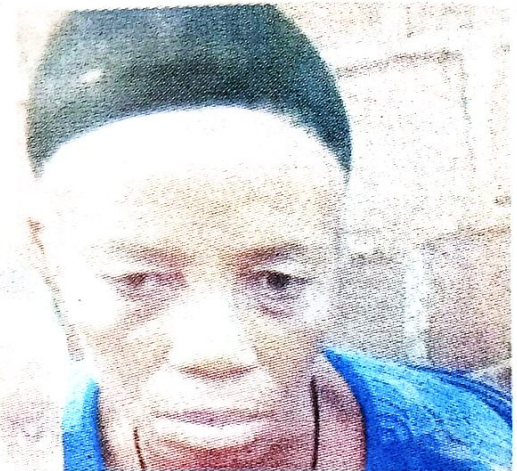
Now, we have a famine in our land. Everyone is hungry. We are known as garri producers in the whole of the Niger Delta region, but go and check how much cassava we have left on our farms. They have finished everything. The markets are empty. Where is the money to buy things at the market if we don't farm and sell the farm produce?

**Before your son's death, was he a pupil?**

He was one of my children who loved school. He wanted to take this year's West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. He normally would tell me whenever I lament, "Mummy, don't worry. I will take you out of this suffering when I grow up to become an engineer."

**Did he want to be an engineer?**

Yes. He was very passionate about schooling, and we



• Mrs Idodo

made sure we supported him, but now that he is dead, there is no need to be hopeful for things to get better. He was our hope that we'd have better tomorrow. It is a sad thing. Whenever I think of it, I feel like going to join him. (sobs)

**What is the local government doing about this?**

Our townsmen went to meet with the herders to beg them to leave. As they have caused us nothing but pain, but as we can all see, they are still where they are wreaking havoc, so they haven't gone anywhere.

**Did you report this to the police?**

They (police) came. What would they do? They went to the bush to arrest the herders, but they had fled before the police got there.

**Did they flee with all their cattle?**

They fled.

**Do you still go to your farm?**

I won't lie to you. Since then (when my son was killed), I have abandoned farming. That is why I told you that I was a farmer, but now I am a beggar. It is not just me. A lot of farmers have stopped going to the farm. The ones who go, go with local hunter guns to protect themselves. I, my husband, and my other children who are remaining, we are not going anywhere until all of this is over. It is our family people around who give us food to eat. If they don't give it to us, we won't eat. I have seven children. I have lost two already. The one who died was my penultimate child. I have suffered too much in this life. I don't know why my life keeps getting worse by the way.

• The late Marvis