

# War veteran, farmer murdered in cold blood as vigilantes hold Benue community hostage

Tessy Igomu 28 May 2022

Kindly share this story: [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [in](#)



## • He was slaughtered like a chicken –Son

*Activities of splinter vigilance groups in Benue State that claim to have state backing have continued to generate outcry and criticism. Following the recent destruction of property and alleged killing of two family members, one of which was a war veteran, **TEESY IGOMU** reports on how an apparently governments' good intention seemed to have turned awry*

Up until April 16, 2022, the Nyior-Kalagba family of Agerabul-Mbamo community, Kpav District in the Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State lived happily and looked forward to a stress-free planting season.

As light of dawn seeped into the agrarian community that Saturday, members of the large, extended family, were oblivious of the ugly fate that awaited them; one that would tragically alter their lives forever.

An ugly event that started unfolding in the morning would, by midday, lead to blood-curdling scenarios that left two of the family members, David and Jonathan, dead and others fleeing for their lives.

The men, based on eyewitness accounts, were allegedly killed extra-judicially by members of two vigilance groups- Ashe Atyoo, known as Community Watchers and Mba Asimov, the Benue State Livestock Guard.

*PUNCH Investigations* gathered that they were inflicted with life-threatening injuries, shot and their throats slit.

It was learnt that seven houses belonging to members of the family, farm implements and foodstuffs were also allegedly set ablaze by the armed men, who were majorly youths from the TIV-speaking community.

At the moment, members of the Nyior-Kalagba family, *PUNCH Investigations* learnt, have fled the community to unknown destinations due to safety concerns.



### Escaped death by a whisker

Henry, a member of the family, witnessed the carnage and revealed seeing “extreme form of bestiality displayed by the vigilantes with impunity.”

The man, who is in his 50s, said he escaped death by a whisker.

He gave graphic descriptions of what actually transpired, noting that it played out like scenes from a horror movie.

The man also made available to PUNCH Investigations, disturbing visuals of the dead men lying in grotesque positions.

### Alerted to danger

Henry resides in Jos, Plateau State and only visited the Agerabul-Mbamo community to spend time with his elder brother, David and other family members.

He recalled being on the farm planting groundnut and yam seedlings with David, his wife and four children, when he (David) got a call that the two vigilance groups were on rampage in the village.

Henry said the caller, who refused to disclose his identity for security reasons, claimed the armed men were on a revenge mission and had already burnt houses belonging to the Nyior-Kalagba family members, and were heading for David's house.

He said as soon as the call ended, a disturbed David told his children to rush to the house and remove valuables that included two three motorcycles, a pumping machine and generator.



The man noted that they succeeded in taking some things to the farm, adding that when they went back with their father for other valuables, the vigilantes surrounded the house.

He said, "After waiting for about 20 minutes and not seeing them, I walked to the house because it was not far from the farm.

"On getting there, I saw the vigilantes with guns, machetes and sticks surrounding the house. One of them said I was not a known face and asked if I lived in the house and I replied yes. He asked if there were other people on the farm and I said no."

Henry added, "They pushed me into the house, where I saw my elder brother, his children and wife lying on the ground. They had cuts and bruises all over their bodies and were bleeding. The men were kicking and beating them with machetes and clubs. I had to tell them that I was a visitor, but even at that, they beat me mercilessly."

Henry said the men dragged them outside and lit bundles of raffia grasses with which they set David's house on fire.

He said as the flames gathered momentum and ferociously licked through the building, which consisted of four blocks of flats, the vigilantes continued with their brutality.

"It was like a horror movie. My elder brother was bleeding terribly. He watched as his house burned," he said in an emotion-laden voice.

Henry said that when he was ordered alongside those identified as visitors to move to a corner of the compound, he used the opportunity to sneak out and ran away. The man said he rushed to the Katsina-Ala Divisional Police Division, to make a report and get help.

### **Policemen reluctant to respond**

Henry claimed that after informing the policemen on duty about the incident, they were unperturbed.

He recounted, "I told them my brother's house was set on fire and that his family members were being subjected to the worst inhuman treatments. One of them reluctantly asked for the exact location of my village and put a call across to someone.

"After the call, the policeman said he was told the vigilantes came with military personnel and that they were not ready to have an altercation with the military. I told him that the information was not true, but they were still adamant.

"I was told to write a statement and while on it, a relative, Peter Anshaa, called to inform me that the vigilantes had killed my brother and uncle, Jonathan. He said they cut their throats after shooting them.

"I begged the policemen to follow me to the village to evacuate the corpses, but they said that their patrol van was faulty. They demanded N3, 000 to open a file for the case and I gave them."

Henry claimed that he was told to charter two vehicles to convey four policemen and a photographer to the village, but by the time he did, the investigating police officer had disappeared into thin air.

"They just wasted my time. I went to the police station at about 10am and left by 6pm. I called the IPO on the phone several times, but he kept telling me to wait and never showed up, "he lamented.

#### **Area command delayed response**

Henry said when it became obvious that help was not forthcoming, he went to the Police Area Command, Katsina-Ala, to formally lodge a complaint but was told the Area Commander was not around. He claimed his next in command attended to him.

"He told me to write a petition before anything could be done. He later said they would act on the petition on Tuesday due to the long Easter holiday.

"I told him that human lives were at stake and that they needed to act fast, but nothing was done. I became frustrated and returned to the police division, "He said.

#### **Barbaric killings**

Henry said that he was joined at the station by his relative who had called to inform him about the killings, and they left for the village.

The distraught man said when he saw the level of destruction by the vigilantes, he broke down in tears.

In a barely audible voice, he recounted, "It was as if there was a communal clash. Houses belonging to my brother, uncles and nephews were burnt and foodstuffs worth millions of naira destroyed.

"Yam barns and seedlings, bags of groundnuts, soya beans and guinea corn were burnt. The vigilantes poured dirt inside our well and contaminated it. That was the only source of potable water for the clan.

"I was told that when my elder brother was shot on the waist, he kept asking them what he did. His throat was slit in the presence of his wife and children. The same thing happened to my uncle."

### Children with multiple fractures in hiding

PUNCH Investigations gathered that two of David's children were being treated for multiple fractures in an undisclosed hospital.

An apprehensive Henry said he fears for his life and that of other family members, adding, "Our lives are at risk. No one can guarantee our safety, not even the elders because they are also afraid of the vigilantes. This is my village. I don't have anywhere to go if I leave Jos."

Brutalised, humiliated for daring to bury his dead

PUNCH Investigations learnt that after getting a grip on his emotion, Henry arranged to have the corpses buried but was almost killed for making such a move.

He said, "The vigilantes didn't want the men to be buried. They returned and asked us who authorised the burial. They shot into the air and chased away villagers that came to commiserate with us. They only left my brother's widow.

"We were ordered to lie down and beaten. I told them that the elders permitted the burial. It was after a family member called security agents that they allowed the burial to take place, but under their supervision."

He was slaughtered like a chicken -Jonathan's son

Henry said at the moment no member of the Nyior-Kalagba family lives in the community for fear of being killed.

PUNCH Investigations was, however, able to trace one of the late Jonathan's children, Terkimbi.

The young man claimed that his father, who was in his 80s, was "slaughtered like a chicken."

He alleged that after the Ashe Atyoo vigilance group was formed in 2021, and he turned down an invitation to join them, they have been baying for his blood.

Terkimbi said on the day his father was killed, he was asleep in his house when his son woke him up and said some people were looking for him.

"It turned out to be members of the vigilance group," he said, adding "As I tried to wear a shirt, they ordered me to lie down or they would shoot me. I was beaten with machetes. They dragged me to my father's house, where there were about 300 of them. My father was weak from their beatings. They later brought David and his family and they were bleeding terribly.

"My father was dragged to the backyard, shot and his throat slit. The same thing was done to David. The vigilantes attempted to burn me but I begged for my life. They burnt my house, that of my three brothers, and destroyed everything we had."

**We are now homeless -David's widow**

Aluashima, David's widow was also located and she gave a chilling account of the incident.

She told PUNCH Investigations that life would never be the same again.

Speaking in Tiv dialect, interpreted by her daughter, Mabel, the widow noted that she could barely sleep since the incident happened.

In a voice hoarse from crying, she lamented, "They beat my children and injured them. I am left with nothing. I can only trust in God now. I can't sleep at night because I fear the vigilantes might come for me."

The 40-year-old said she has been hiding in a relative's place in another community with some of her children, noting that they were homeless and living like refugees.

Aluashima called on the Benue State government to arrest and prosecute her husband's killers, adding, "I have lost my husband and there's nothing that can bring him back. All I want is justice."

**Unending land dispute likely liable**

Weeks after the incident took place, discreet investigations by our correspondent uncovered details of age-long land tussle, among other mind-boggling factors that might be responsible for the alleged bloodletting and carnage perpetrated on April 16.

It was gathered that the families of Nyior-Kalagba and the Tsebee-Abuku, who are from the same forefather and collectively called Nasho, have been at loggerheads over a piece of farmland.

The land tussle, from available information, had created a monstrous gorge stealthily swallowing both families.

With horns locked over the matter, several lives, PUNCH Investigations gathered, have been lost.

**Lingering legal tussles**

It was gathered that in 2016, the Tsebee-Abuku family took the Nyior-Kalagba family to an Area Court in Michiche District in the Katsina-Ala LGA, over the land.

Judgement was awarded in favour of the Nyior-Kalagba family, but an appeal was later filed in 2018, by the other party at the Benue State High Court, sitting in Katsina-Ala.

In 2021, the Tsebee-Abuku family filed for stay of execution to stop the other party from farming on the land, but judgement has yet to be delivered.

### **The murder angle**

However, members of the Nyior- Kalagba family alleged that since they won the case, the other family has been aggrieved.

### **Read Also**

- ▶ Police arrest illegal miners over murder of Osun farmer
- ▶ Suspected hoodlums kill Plateau farmer
- ▶ Suspected herders kill 20 in fresh Benue attack

They accused the Tsebee-Abuku family of being the head of the two vigilance groups that killed David and Jonathan, noting that they were hiding under the excuse that the Nyior-Kalagba family had a criminal record to carry out the extrajudicial killings.

Shedding light on this, a lawyer and member of the Nyior-Kalagba family, Sekulla, said in 2018, a member of the Tsebee-Abuku family, Terver, was killed by unknown men, but the police, acting on claims made by the elder brother to the deceased, Emmanuel Iorundu, arrested the late David and one Gemanen, and charged them to court for the killing.

He said the two men were arraigned on April 6, 2018, but that the case was dismissed for lack of evidence.

The lawyer alleged that since then, coupled with the land matter, his family members were being haunted and killed.

### **Militia Gana's connection**

PUNCH Investigations also gathered that the incident might not be unconnected to the family's affiliation with the late Terwase Akwasa, head of a militia in Benue State, popularly referred to as Gana.

The late Jonathan's son, Terna, who worked with the warlord, was accused of making away with a gun bought by the community for security.

Sekulla, however, said the allegation was a smoke screen used by the vigilantes to "cover their nefarious activities."

He said, "When the community formed the Ashe Atyoo vigilance group to work with the state government's livestock guard, Terna (late Jonathan's son) and three other young men that worked with Gana, refused to join because they felt it was a ploy to kill them. When I heard about it, I innocently encouraged them to join.

"But when two of them were killed within three days, Terna and the other young man ran for their lives. Since the vigilantes can't get hold of Terna, they then accuse him of absconding with the community's gun.

"I am against extrajudicial killing and told them to allow the police to arrest and charge the young men to court if there is any incriminating evidence against them."

Corroborating Sekulla's claim, Henry told PUNCH Investigations that when Terna and the three young men renounced Gana's militant group, they were reintegrated into the community after a cleansing ritual was performed.

He noted that the elders, on their part, resolved to keep an eye on them. Henry said, "They were asked to buy cartons of beer with which a ceremonial leg washing was done at the river bank. The boys went back to farming, but two were killed not long after. This made Terna run away. We don't know if he is still alive."

Henry said shortly after, the vigilantes accused the late Jonathan of shielding Terna and gave him an ultimatum to produce his son.

### **State created hydra-headed monsters**

The Benue State Livestock Guard, which was one of the vigilance groups accused of being complicit in the incident, was a child of necessity established to enforce the Anti-Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law enacted by the state government.

However, over the years, its operation had been trailed by complaints and criticisms.

The outfit, among other things, has been accused of getting away with egregious crimes, including extrajudicial killings, illegal detention, torture, extortion, seizure of property from members of the communities, and other serious human rights violations.

In November 2018, the Nigeria Police Force threatened to arrest operatives of the outfit, which it described as an illegal security agency, following the arrest of its leader for allegedly being in possession of two AK 47 rifles and 436 rounds of AK47 ammunition.

According to the then Force Public Relations Officer, acting DCP Moshood Jimoh, "People should know that the livestock guards is a criminal gang being used to terrorise innocent citizens in Benue State and such would not be allowed to continue.

"We have shut down their offices and we are arresting their members. Anywhere we see them, they will be arrested and prosecuted."

The police action was strongly condemned by some key stakeholders in the state, this was despite accusations that the state government failed to act or promptly put a stop to the activities of the vigilantes.

### **Illegal arm bearing group**

Curiously, based on PUNCH Investigations findings, while the Benue State Livestock Guard was inaugurated and recognised by the state government, Community Watchers' existence seemed to be unknown to constituted authorities and said to be operating illegally and with firearms.



Speaking with our correspondent, the District Head of Katsina-Ala, Clive Ioraa, said the Community Watchers, also known as Ashe Atyoo, was illegal.

Ioraa said, "Anyone operating under Ashe Atyoo is illegal. We don't have vigilance groups again. The Ashe Atyoo was scrapped and incorporated into the Community Volunteer Guards, which is what we have. The state government said they don't want those names. The CVG is backed by the law."

Another villager who spoke on condition of anonymity said despite not being recognised, the vigilance group, which claimed to work with the state government recognised Livestock Guard, had constituted themselves into a terror. "They have the backing of the elders and district heads. If there's anything worse than jungle justice, that is what they keep doing," the source added.

#### **Meeting for settlement inconclusive**

Nine days after the incident, precisely on April 25, a petition was written to the Benue State Government by the Nyior-Kalagba family demanding justice.

Following the petition made available to PUNCH Investigations, a meeting was summoned by the Special Adviser to the Benue State Governor on Security, Lt. Col. Paul Hembra.

Present at the meeting were community leaders, district heads, members of the Nyior-Kalagba family and representatives of the vigilance groups allegedly involved in the killing.

However, it was learnt that no representative of the Tsebee-Abuku family was present.

Speaking on the meeting outcome, Henry said those allegedly involved in the incident were asked to defend themselves and they explained that the killings were unconnected with the land dispute and had more to do with Terna's disappearance with the community's gun.

He added, "I asked them why they burnt our houses and killed my elder brother and uncle. But the district head and community leaders pleaded that the matter should be resolved at the local government level because they don't want the governor to be aware of it.

"We were not happy with that decision but agreed. Since they are the traditional rulers and custodian of our culture, let it not be on record that we disobeyed or embarrassed them. We want to give them the benefit of doubt."

#### **Uncertain about possible outcome**

Henry said that his family members were apprehensive and uncertain about the terms of settlement that might be reached based on utterances of the elders during the meeting.

He said, "They said it was people in the community that mandated the vigilantes to watch over them. But I asked if it was part of their mandates to kill and burn people's homes? We want justice and they must promise that nothing

would happen to any of us again.”

As of the time of filing this report, no reconciliatory meeting had been scheduled by the elders.

#### **Investigations ongoing—Security adviser**

Contacted, Hembra said that he was surprised that our correspondent knew about the meeting, stressing that “it’s was a close family meeting.”

He, however, said investigations were ongoing, noting that it was too early to speak on the matter.

He said, “At this stage, it is premature to talk to the press because we have not even completely sorted out the issues. I appreciate where you are coming from. Please, be patient. When we sort out the issues, I can give you details. Some of the things we are hearing are allegations and counter-allegations.

“We are handling it from the family perspective, not legal or to blame anyone. We want to ensure that if it indeed happened, it does not happen again. We have another meeting next week.”

#### **‘Security agents, LG chair know better about incident’**

The District Head of Katsina-Ala said that he was aware of the incident, adding that efforts were ongoing to settle the matter amicably.

He, however, said security operatives and the chairman of the local government knew better.

He stated, “I am trying to settle them because we are of the same sub-clan. When it happened, someone called me to inform me. It was when I went to the meeting held by the security adviser that I heard the full details. I can’t say this is the particular cause because there are lots of insinuations and different accounts.”

#### **Family should contact me, not the press –LG boss**

The Chairman of Katsina-Ala Local Government Area, Mr Alfred Atera, initially claimed ignorance of the incident and asked how our correspondent got his mobile.

He said, “I was not informed of any killing. I am the chairman of the local government and if anything happens, the families should reach out to me and not to the press.”

However, when he was contacted after the inconclusive peace meeting, Atera retorted, “I don’t want to comment on that issue. Can you force me to respond to an issue against my wish? I don’t want to say anything on this matter and I choose not to respond. Please, respect my decision.”

#### **Contact the PPRO, says CP**

Also when contacted, the state Commissioner of Police, Akingbola Olatunji, declined to speak, but referred our correspondent to the state police spokesperson.

He said, "I am in a meeting. I only stepped out because you said you were calling from PUNCH. Speak to the police public relations officer."

Initially, when spokesperson, Catherine Anene, was contacted, she said the state police command had yet to receive any complaints from Katsina-Ala Police Division relating to the killings and destruction of property.

"I can reach out to them but they may not be able to give you any information," Anene said.

When contacted again, she asked for details of the incident and promised to get back to our correspondent.

She acknowledged the message, noting that it had been sent to the DPO for clarification.

Days after, she called and said, "The DPO said no incident of such was reported at the division. I sent him the message you forwarded to me."

#### **Matter not reported –Area Commander**

The Area Commander of the Katsina-Ala Area Command, ACP Musa Bulus, said he was not aware of the incident.

"I don't know what you are talking about. Nobody ever reported it," he insisted when told about Henry's claims.

He further said, "This is mischief. If it is true, he should have returned on Tuesday. If you are to submit any petition, you are not submitting to my assistant, you submit to the admin. Usually, the petitioners will include their phone numbers and a call would be put across to them for clarifications before we commence investigations. Nobody submitted any petition. No one reported any killing whatsoever.

"If there's a complaint, it must be properly reported. The person making the complaint must answer some questions that include where it happened, who are those killed, have they been buried and are they in the hospital? If anyone has a genuine complaint to make, let them come to my office."

#### **No member in Katsina-Ala–Livestock Commander**

The state commander, Benue State Livestock Guards, Linus Zaki, said that the outfit didn't have members in Katsina-Ala LGA.

He added, "We are just trying to recruit members. We have in other places but not in Katsina-Ala."

### Tsebee-Abuku family members unreachable

Attempts made to reach two individuals said to be spokesmen for the Tsebee-Abuku family, Emmanuel and Aondosoo, proved abortive.

A man who picked the call made to a number purportedly belonging to Emmanuel claimed to be from Taraba State. That of Aondosoo was unreachable, but a text message was sent to it.

After sending several text messages to members of the Tsebee-Abuku family, PUNCH Investigations later received a telephone call from a man who identified himself as Innocent.

Innocent confirmed being a member of the family. He, however, told our correspondent that he was outside the village at that moment and couldn't speak on behalf of the family.

He said, "I'm not at home. I heard about the killing but I'm not in the village now. Even on the day it happened, I was not around."

He also promised to send the mobiles of one of his siblings to our correspondent. He had yet to do so as of the time of filing this report despite reminder calls and texts sent.

### Copyright PUNCH.

*All rights reserved. This material, and other digital content on this website, may not be reproduced, published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed in whole or in part without prior express written permission from PUNCH.*

**Contact:** [theeditor@punchng.com](mailto:theeditor@punchng.com)

**Tags:** BENUE KILLINGS FARMER VIGILANTES WAR



Kindly share this story: [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [in](#)

Nigerians can now profit from USA stock options. Our team of experts helps with the entire process. We traded Netflix stock options and earned 900% profit even when the stocks went down in April. Now you too can start earning in US Dollars. [Click here to join](#)

#### FOREX, BITCOIN AND BINARY TRADING:

We help you professionally trade your forex, bitcoin and binary accounts for minimum 20% weekly profit. For details, visit [www.standfx.com](http://www.standfx.com). Whatsapp [+2348030797998](https://wa.me/2348030797998)

### TOP STORIES



**Alleged fraud: I'm innocent, says Okorocha as court orders remand till May 31**



**I don't know if Zenab'll say yes to me, says Kunle Adeyanju who rode motorcycle from London to Lagos**



**Atiku's candidacy: Pro-zoning forces angry, slam PDP, Tambuwal**

Download PUNCH NEWS app:



### From the Web

revcontent.



**Lagos Millionaire Reveals How to Get Rich with**



**Lagos Millionaire: The Rich Don't Want You To Know This Secret**



**Lagos Millionaire Reveals: How to Make Money Working from Home**



**If You Have Joint Pain, Read It Before It Gets Deleted!**

Bitcoin, Without Buying Bitcoin

Daily Finance



This Is A Natural Blood Vessel Cleaner!

Carditone

Invested

Daily Finance

Arthrazex

Search ...

- News
- Sports
- Metro Plus
- Politics
- Featured
- Latest News
- Business

- Business & Economy
- Opinion
- Entertainment
- Auto Famous
- Auto Punch
- Barka Da Sallah
- Barrier Breakers