

Top Stories Extra

Lagos community under siege of criminal gangs

BY LUKMAN FABIYI

The peaceful atmosphere which once prevailed in Ebute-Meta, a community in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos is gradually giving way to a new era of terror following upsurge in the activities of gangsters from the community in recent weeks. In the last six months, no fewer than 20 lives have been lost in separate attacks allegedly carried out by members of rival gangs with several others injured.

The attacks, according to sources, were precipitated by battle for supremacy between two major groups in the area. The two rival groups, *Sunday Sun* learnt, control different areas in the community. While streets like Jones, Vaughan, Otto and Railway Line are said to fall within the territory controlled by one Seyi Olaleye, (a.k.a Seyi Rugged) an executive member of a branch of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) in the community, areas like Brickfield, Olokodana, Ilogbo and Fagbayimu are said to be controlled by one Waheed (a.k.a Skippo).

Although the rivalry between the two groups had festered in subtle form for a while, the activities of the groups took a more dangerous dimension in January when Seyi Rugged, who was then vice chairman of Costain branch of NURTW was killed in a clash by a gang allegedly led by Waheed.

The crisis, which eventually claimed Seyi's life was said to have begun few weeks earlier when youths loyal to each of the factions were said to have engaged each other in a serious fight during a carnival in the first week of January.

Sensing the implication of the crisis, elders in the community, were said to have intervened in a bid to broker peace between the rival groups. A source at the truce meeting informed *Sunday Sun* that Seyi Rugged and Skippo agreed to sheathe their swords and give peace a chance to the delight of the elders.

But in a sudden twist of event, the late union boss, who was said to have constantly complained that his group was being marginalized by the local government authorities, which outsourced jobs to rival faction headed by Waheed Skippo, was hacked down following a disagreement over money doled out to the group by a prominent member of the ruling party in the area.

Subsequently two suspects, Kabir Gogobiri, 36, and Adisa Olawoyin, 34, (aka Omo Simbi) were arrested in connection with Seyi's death. They were charged before a Chief Magistrate Court, Ebute-Meta, for alleged conspiracy and murder. The trial magistrate, Mr. K.O. Ogundare, *Sunday Sun* learnt, was said to have ordered that the suspects be remanded pending the advice from the state's Director of Public Prosecution (DPP). But a source who craved anonymity informed *Sunday Sun* that both suspects currently walk the streets freely courtesy of the



•Burnt houses in Toluwani Community



•Vandalised vehicles



•Injured resident



•The late Awotunde

DPP's advice, which cleared them of complicity in the murder.

Not recovered fully from the January murder of Seyi Rugged, Ebute Meta community was thrown into pandemonium once again when the news filtered through that one Kunle Awotunde, an All Progressives Congress (APC), youth leader, was also killed in the area on April 29, *Sunday Sun* reportedly gathered that the late Awotunde was a member

of the faction that killed Seyi, a development, which fuelled suspicion that he was killed in retaliation of Seyi's death, although no one has been arrested in connection with the killing.

Barely a week after Awotunde was killed, precisely on May 5, the supremacy battle between rival gangs in the community also claimed another casualty. The incident took place on Jones Street with the victim simply identified

as Lateef, a 48-years-old auto-mechanic.

On May 19, the residents of Toluwani community also had their share of the crisis, as no fewer than 58 shanties alongside some houses were set ablaze, with some ladies allegedly raped while property worth millions of naira were destroyed by a gang of thugs identified as Otto Boys. The attack on Toluwani community, sources claimed, was visited on the

community for allegedly harbouring members of rival group and for serving as informants to the press and police.

A day later, one person was also reportedly killed while four buildings on Dawodu Lane were razed when gunmen attacked the community. Some residents of the area who spoke to *Sunday Sun* said the attackers came about 9.00 p.m.

Yet the reign of terror continued on May 22 when the gang war in the community claimed another casualty. The victim, a member of Neighbourhood Watch in the area identified as Muritala Ajala (a.k.a Koledowo) was hacked down by hoodlums while on duty in the premises of Marywood Primary School, on Franklin Street, Ebute-Meta West. His murder which was allegedly carried out by a gang from Fagbayimu/Olokodana was said to be fallout of the gang war ravaging the community.

The crisis which has paralyzed both social and economic activities in the community, it was gathered, has led to the death of over 20 people, while property worth millions of naira have been destroyed.

Speaking on the attack on Toluwani Community, Chairman of Toluwani Community Development Association, Mr. Odafe Ovuafor, described the development as worrisome, lamenting that the development had rendered the victims homeless. The community chairman expressed concern that if the government fail to live up to its duty in securing lives and property of the residents the state might soon witness a replica of what was going on in some northern states.

Meanwhile, some elders in the community are pointing the finger at politicians in the area for fuelling the crisis. They accused politicians of using the hoodlums for their security and also to settle scores among themselves. Even some of the notorious gangsters terrorising the area were alleged to be on the payroll of authorities in the area.

A member of the community who craved anonymity, pleaded with the state government and security agents to provide adequate security for the community.

A cleric, who is a stakeholder in the community, described the situation as very disturbing as the community had hitherto been peaceful.

Another source, who does not want his name in print said the situation has shown that there is no government's presence in the community, as both social and economic activities had been paralyzed. He urged security agencies and the government both at state and local levels to wake up to their responsibility of maintaining peace and order, as well as to go after sponsors of the groups.

Sunday Sun gathered that residents of the community, under the aegis of 'Concerned Elders and Residents of Ebute-Metta West,' had alerted security operatives in the state to come to their rescue.

Lagos State Police Command's spokesperson, Ngozi Braide, said the state police command was aware of the development in the community and assured that everything would be done to restore normalcy. "I am aware of the incident. There was a problem there caused by some Otto Boys, and as you can see, the police are handling it. And it's not up to three weeks that this started. We have beefed up security and normalcy has been restored in the area."