

INSIGHT

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Who will feed us? Who will save our women and girls from being raped at will? Where do we run to? Those are some of the questions which farmers in Ukehe, who live and farm at Agu-Ukehe (Ukehe Farm Settlement) in Igbo-Efite Local Government Area of Enugu State are asking, and they want urgent answers.

On Saturday August 16, 2014, the Catholic Women Organization of St Peter's Catholic Parish, Home and Abroad, Ukehe, led by Professor Lizzy Ngwu took to the street to protest what they termed threat to their existence as a community.

They alleged that the farmers who live with their wives and children at Agu-Ukehe where they farm had suffered the most degrading human treatments in the hands of Fulani herdsmen. They alleged that the herdsmen rape their women and girls at will, rob the farmers of their money, handsets and other property as well as destroy their crops and farmlands without let or hindrance.

According to Prof Ngwu, who is also the President of the Catholic Women Organisation of St Peter's Parish, "We are protesting against oppression and harassment of our women and men at Agu-Ukehe by the Fulani herdsmen. Our women and men who live at Agu-Ukehe are no longer safe. The harassment ranges from robbery, rape, assault to destruction of crops and farmlands."

She said the protest became necessary after the women wrote two letters to the Igwe of Agu-Ukehe, urging him to find a lasting solution to the problem and they didn't see any action. She lamented that if they failed to act, their women and daughters would not only be raped at will but also the entire old Ukehe community would be faced with severe famine in no distant time.

Apart from saving the women from being raped with reckless abandon and destroying their means of livelihood, she said they were also protesting to avert the ugly and unpleasant security situations witnessed in many communities of Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nassarara and Plateau States respectively.

Also speaking during the protest, Dr Betty Agujiobi wondered why the herdsmen should be allowed to wander about bearing deadly weapons considering their cantankerous nature. "Actually, I find it embarrassing that they move around with weapons, when the security agents know very well that they kill without a second thought. They should be disarmed because they use the weapons to rape our women and beat our men to submission. Rape is a criminal offence and jailable for years but these people rape our women at will. And the worst is that they rape these women before their husbands; we don't know how to express that. Our husbands and women don't go to farm anymore and those who are still there live in fear. They break into people's houses and ask for their personal effects like money, handset and other valuables. We want the government to do something about it. We are in a troubled situation and our women are traumatized. Who will feed us? That is our question."

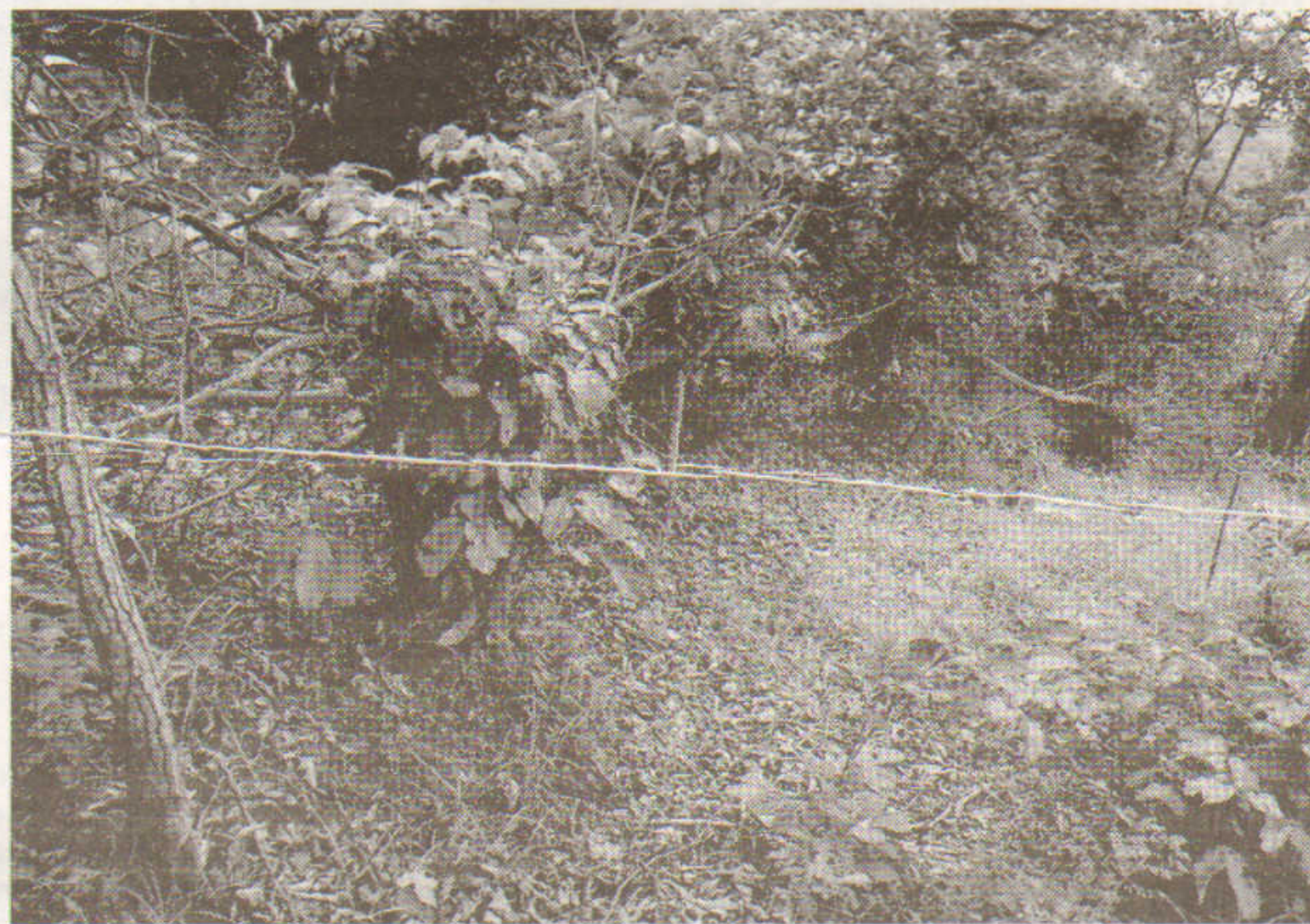
Investigation showed that Agu-Ukehe is a farm settlement where Ukehe farmers go to do farm works. The farmers live in the settlement with their families during the planting season to have easy access to their individual farms. The farm settlement is mapped out for indigenes of Ukehe or those who live there and want to go into crop farming.

Checks revealed further that over 30 people have already fallen victims of their incessant attacks - 17 males and 13 females with one woman already dead. She was allegedly gang raped mercilessly to death by the herdsmen. The people cited instances of harassment by the herdsmen to include raping of their women and girls, destruction of their crops and farmlands, forceful collection of their crops, palm produce and farmlands, burning of their huts/tents, battering and stealing among others.

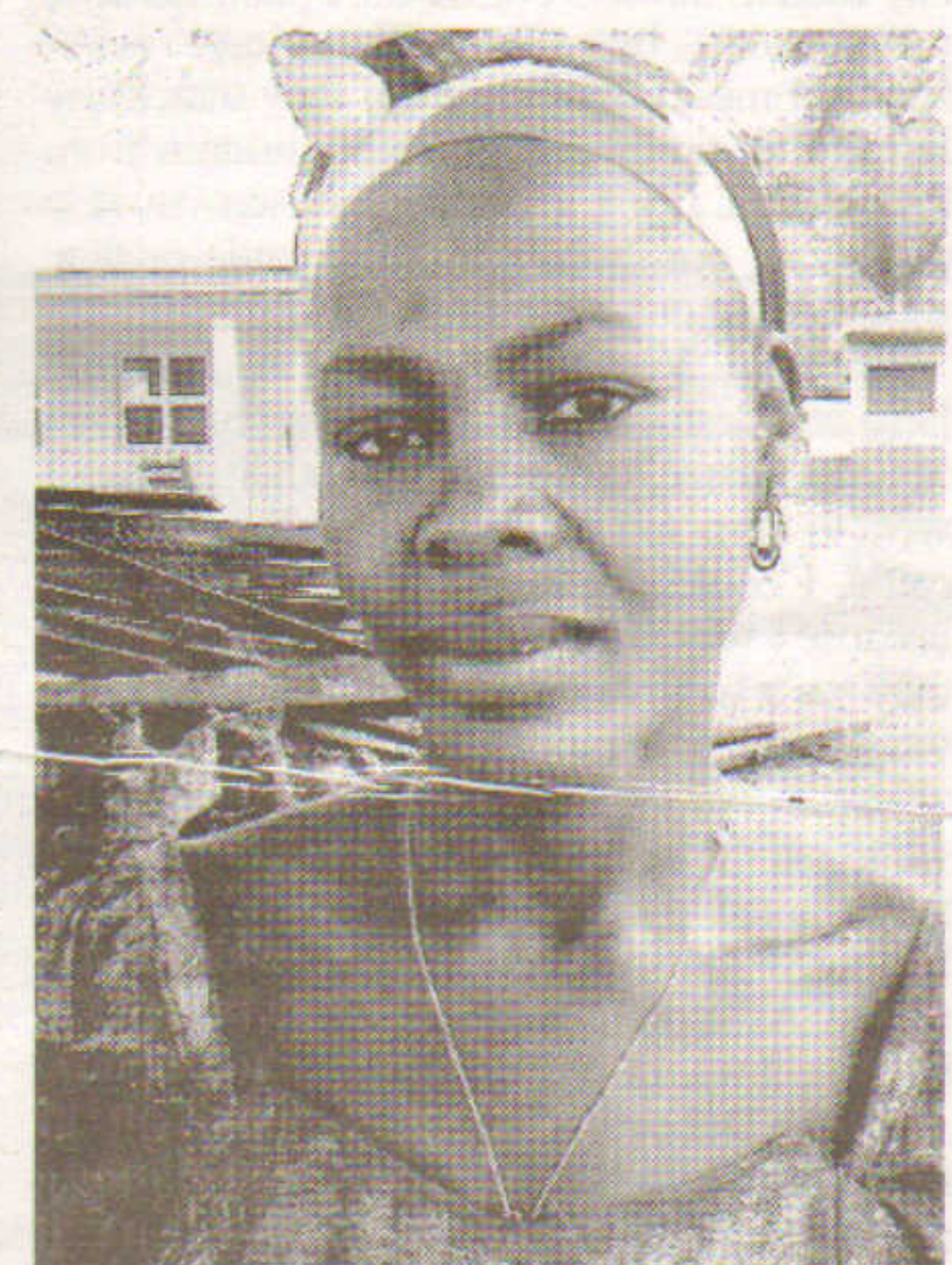
When our reporter visited the Agu-Ukehe, the destruction was conspicuous but the

Enugu community cries out

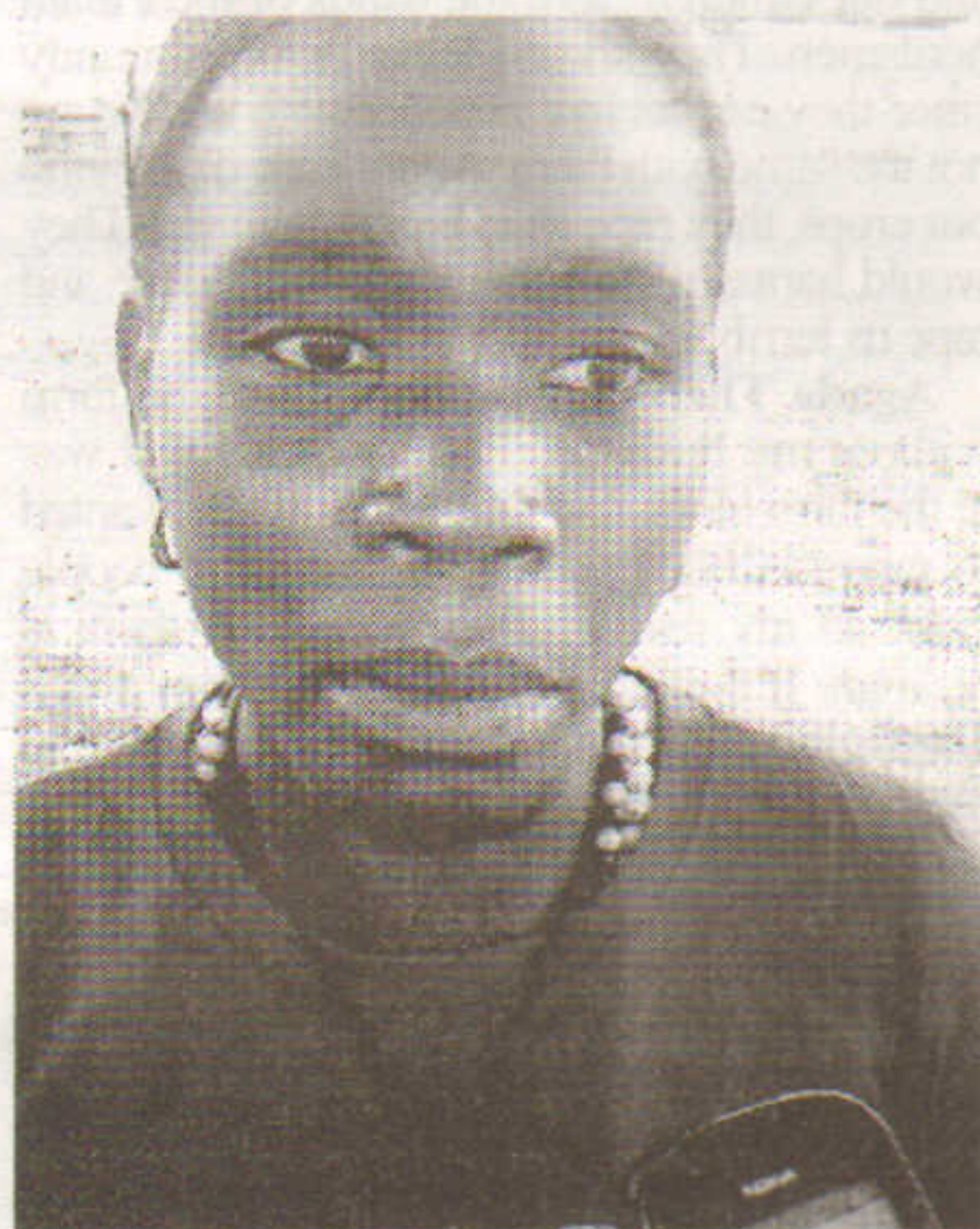
As Fulani herdsmen rape women, steal, destroy crops



• The barricade



• Veronica



• Debora



• Igwe Aruah



• Agada

herdsmen were nowhere in sight. The people alleged that they had disappeared to a far place but would come back to attack them at night.

According to the Public Relations Officer of Madunagu Union, Agu-Ukehe Farm Settlement, Francis Nwaonu, who led the reporter to the farm in company of other victims, they no longer live in the farm for fear of attack. He narrated what he personally lost to the herdsmen to include his sister, whom he said was raped to death by a group of four herdsmen in June. Apart from his crops and farmlands that were destroyed, his hut/tent was also burnt down. He said the herdsmen knew that on Eke and Afor market days, they don't go to farm and so, on those days, they would invade their farms, destroying their crops and farmlands. He also said that those who had been raped were mostly the ones who went to farm without their husbands.

Recounting how her sister met her untimely death, he said: "The Fulani herdsmen have

not given us any breathing space in our community. As I speak, my heart is heavy. In June this year, I just buried my elder sister whom the herdsmen gang-raped to death. She died few minutes after a group of Fulani herdsmen seized and serially raped her when she went to the farm. So, all the women that were in the farm that day took to their heels. No woman goes to farm without a man."

Still speaking on why his heart was heavy, he also said: "Secondly, I am also grieving because they have destroyed my means of livelihood completely. They destroyed my farm and crops. They went as far as setting on fire, my tent at the farm. The tent was completely razed. And they commit most of these evils on Eke and Afor market days because those are the days we don't go to farm; they are major market days. Even when we are at the farm working, they would still sneak into our tent and steal all the already cooked food, which are meant for the labourers working for

us in our farms. They will take the pot of jollof rice alongside the pot and later throw the pot away after they had emptied its content. I will show you evidences of what I am saying. We are in real trouble."

He also revealed that some women were raped in the presence of their husbands whose hands were always tied while the abomination went on. He said: "A situation where these people will tie a man's hands and lead his wife away to be raped by as many as four or five men is most unfortunate and nobody is listening to us. We are crying to the government to save us, our means of livelihood and our honour and integrity as human beings. They steal, rape our women and destroy our crops."

Lamenting about their present condition, he said: "We used to live in the farm but not anymore. The herdsmen would just break into your house in the night to steal whatever they could lay hands on and rape your wife in your presence. If you make noise they would design your body with knife if you are lucky otherwise they would kill you outright. They

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