

FROM CHRIS NNADI, NSUKKA

Python terrorises Enugu community

...Kills, maims natives

The people of Okpuje community in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State are currently living under siege. For over a decade now, not less than 12 persons have gone missing, and after about three days, their headless bodies would be found inside the Ekwumiri Forest.

This mysterious incident has continued to happen till few years ago, precisely in 2012, when one of the community dwellers, Omada Iyieke Asogwa, also disappeared as she went to fetch firewood inside the Ekwumiri Forest.

One of the relatives of the deceased, Mr. Johnson Asogwa told Oriental News that in 2012, one of his relatives, Mrs. Omada Iyieke Asogwa, disappeared when she went to fetch water at Ekwumiri Forest. "We looked for her for about two days without getting hint of where she was. Then on the third day, we discovered her body with her head already cut off by unknown persons inside Ekwumiri Forest. We were very much worried about this mysterious discovery. We took her headless body back home and buried it. Few months after her burial, another man was also found dead inside the forest with his head also cut off. He went to the forest to get herbs for malaria. His headless body was found two days after he disappeared."

Mr. Johnson disclosed that it was after the second incident that some people started discussing in a hush voice that they were killed for rituals by the python at Ekwumiri Forest.

"After the disappearance and eventual discovery of the headless bodies of these two persons, we started hearing in my community that both my relation, Omada Iyieke Asogwa and some other persons



• Eze

that have disappeared whose heads later found were killed by a python in Ekwumiri Forest for ritual purpose. We carried out an independent investigation into the matter by consulting soothsayers and it was

proved to be true. Because it has ritual connotation and everybody is afraid to dare those who are being fingered for this evil act, we couldn't do anything. The situation was even worsened by the fact that at that

time, we didn't have any recognized traditional ruler in our community who would have handled the situation," he said.

2 Then, early last year, another community dweller, Mr. Victor Eze from Ikwuoka village became a victim of the dastardly act.

Eze in an emotion-laden voice said: "It was late last year when I was feeling symptoms of malaria that I went to the hill of the forest to get anti-malaria herbs. I started hearing strange noise. I looked up to the trees around but I couldn't see any dangerous wild animal around. I continued digging out the medicinal roots, thinking that it was monkeys that were playing somewhere inside the forest. The strange noise persisted and before I could realize what was happening, a very big snake has stretched itself to where I was standing, circled itself around me and wanted to pull me back to the top of the tree. With what I can call divine help, I used the machete I was wielding to hit the python as much as my strength could carry me. The python loosened itself around me and went back to the tree. I ran back home and narrated the ugly incident to one of my friends. I didn't know we have such dangerous animal in my community. I went back with my friend, Mr. Ofoma Ugwu to kill the python. When we got to the forest, we discovered that the python was

sleeping. Seeing the huge size of the python, my friend advised me that the best way to kill the python is using gun."

Eze explained that he heeded his friend's advice and headed for Kogi State and hired the services of a popular hunter in one of the communities to kill the dangerous python.

"On getting to the forest with the hunter, I discovered that one of the Okpuje community dwellers, a native doctor who has severally been accused of rituals has drafted some men numbering about 15 who waylaid us and forcefully ejected us from the forest. They warned us not to dare touch the python for any reason as this will result in total war between the offender and the native doctor. The same day, the native doctor hired some security men who have been guarding and taking care of the python even as I am talking to you now while the dangerous animal continues to unleash its terror on innocent community dwellers," he said.

Eze disclosed that he later reported the matter to the Nigeria Police at Area Command, Nsukka, but regretted that nothing meaningful has been done about it as the python was still being guarded by the paid security men while it continues to kill and maim their people.

When this reporter visited the Nsukka Area Commander, ACP Halladu, he was absent, but a senior police officer who pleaded anonymity confirmed the incident, saying that the matter was being investigated.

All efforts to get the new traditional ruler of Okpuje community, HRH Igwe Oliver Ayogu for comments over the telephone proved abortive.

At the moment, Ekwumiri Okpuje has remained a no go area even as greater per cent of the community dwellers highly depend on the forest as their source of firewood and herbal medicines which contribute to about 40 per cent of their livelihood.