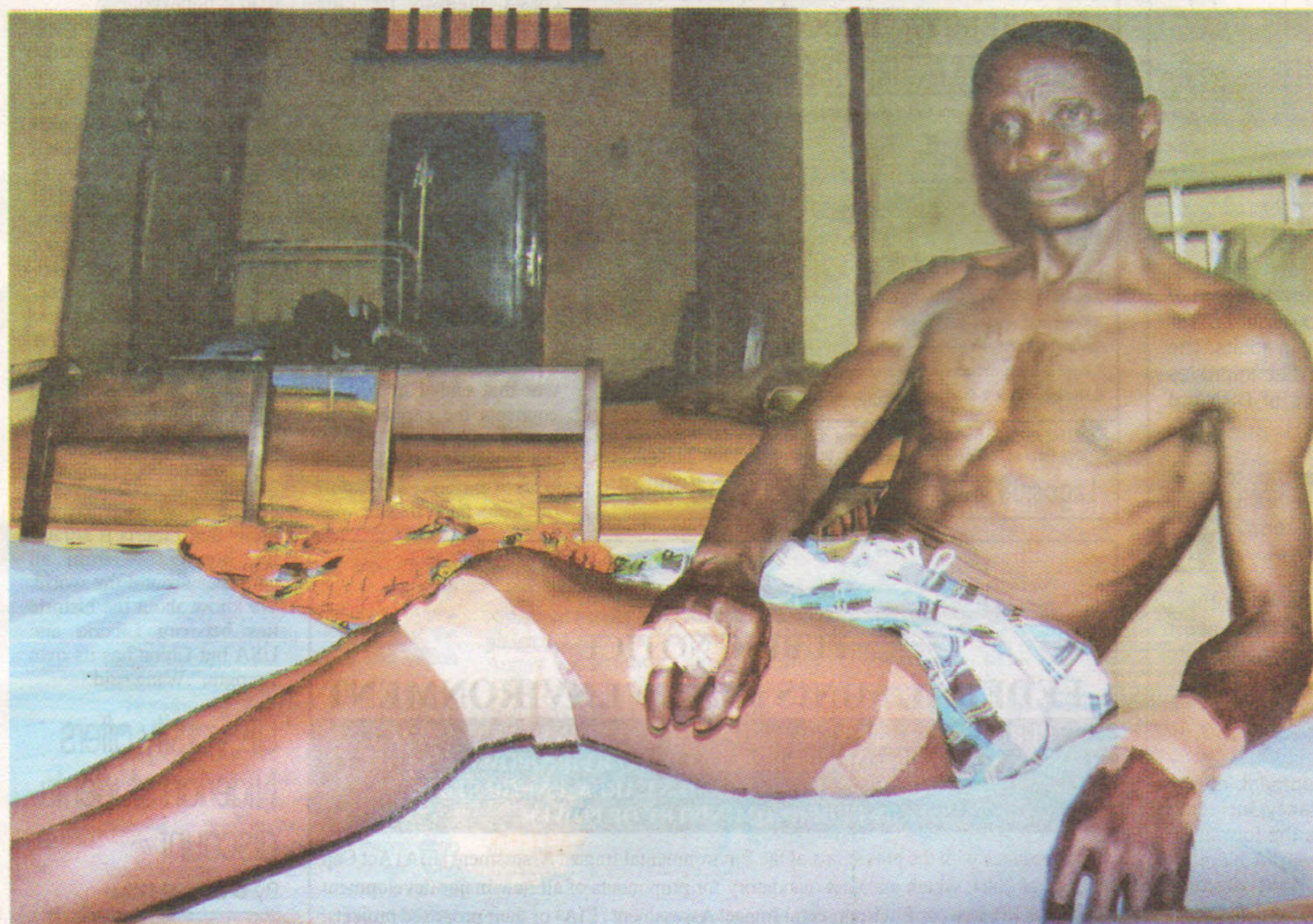


NEWSPLUS

Fulani herdsmen terrorise Enugu communities

• Cattlemen slaughter man, as another narrowly escapes death



• Okoro

By SAM OTTI

MR. Samuel Okoro, an elderly man from Ugwuobi Abbi, Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State was gunned down recently by Fulani herdsmen in the presence of his children. His tragic death came barely few weeks after Mr. Robert Ezugwu, from neighbouring Amaikwu Village in Ugbene Ajima community, was hacked down in his farmland by the herdsmen, who left him in a pool of blood. He escaped death by a whisker, with fatal wounds all over his body.

Okoro, 60, a father of three, met his untimely death in the hands of the herdsmen when he accosted them for molesting his under-aged children in the farm. A close relation of the deceased, Tiodivine Ajogwu, told Daily Sun that the victim approached the herdsmen to find out why they were battering the children, but his peace mission provoked the assailants who shot him at close range.

Ajogwu said the deceased fell down critically wounded after

the shot and attempted to escape from the armed herdsmen but they swooped on him and stabbed him to death with their daggers. The tearful children, who were witnesses to the horror, ran for their dear lives and returned to the village with the bad news.

Angry villagers mobilized themselves and rushed to the farm but the herdsmen had already escaped with their cattle, trampling on food crops and cassava plantations in their frantic rush to escape a reprisal.

While the Abbi community mourned their loss, another victim from a neighbouring town, Ezugwu, lay in bed nursing his wounds after a close shave with death.

Ezugwu, a father of seven, told Daily Sun that the herdsmen attacked him at Isi-Uvuru farmland, located near Abbi community. He had gone to the farm on a market day for farm work, unknown to him that the herdsmen were parading the area with the lust to kill. Although the farm was lonely because most of his kinsmen went to the local

market, he had no premonition of the sad fate that would befall him.

No sooner had Ezugwu settled down for the day's work than two sword-wielding herdsmen approached him, and waved a decimated human hand in his face.

"When they showed me the human hand still dripping with blood, I was shocked. I knew that there was trouble. They had attacked another farmer, maybe from Nimbo community, and cut off his hand. I started pleading with them to spare my life. I knew one of the herdsmen because he had been coming around our farm with his cattle. I reminded the one that I knew that we were friends and I had never offended him or got in his way," he said.

Ezugwu's entreaties fell on deaf ears, as one of them kept speaking Hausa Language to his colleague, possibly urging him to launch an attack. The fire in their eyes, he said, sent cold shivers down his spine. But he had a momentary relief when the two men quietly left him.

"When they left, I quickly packed my items to leave the farm.

I went to the place I parked my motorcycle and decided to wheel it quietly out of the area. I was afraid that the noise of the motorcycle would spell doom for me," he explained.

He was stealthily taking his steps along the bush path when the two men suddenly jumped on his way. According to him, they had taken another route and laid ambush on the pathway that he would take home. He abandoned his motorcycle and fled but the men, who were much younger, soon caught up with him and descended on him with fury, cutting him mercilessly with their razor-sharp swords.

"One of them targeted my head with his sword, but I used my bare hands as a shield. I was screaming till I lost my voice but they kept on cutting me. Blood covered all my body and I became weak. I think they thought that I had died because they then went to vandalise my motorcycle," he said.

Ezugwu said he mustered courage and crawled into the bush, with blood everywhere.

In his hiding place, he heard the chattering noise of his motorcycle being vandalized by the men. He defied the odds and crawled to the popular road in the area, where he was later rescued by a man, identified as Agbawu. With the help of other villagers, he was bandaged in old clothes and rushed to a private hospital in Nsukka, where an experienced medical practitioner, Dr Cletus Eze, battled to save his life.

"I saw hell during the stitching of the wounds. Some of the nurses could not withstand the sight," he recalled.

The sight of flesh dangling from his bone was so horrifying that Ezugwu passed out in shock during the process. He spent over two months in the hospital, with a heavy bill on his neck.

While lamenting the criminal escapades of the herdsmen, a married woman from the community, Mama Oriefi Ikowa, said the fear of herdsmen had pervaded the area. According to her, some of the herdsmen made erotic advances at both the married and single ladies, often threatening war if their advances were rebuffed.

"In the past, a woman can go to the farm and stay as long as she wanted. But with the current situation, no woman goes to the farm alone. We have to wait for others so we can go as a group. Moving in groups is the only way to escape sexual molestations by these herdsmen," she lamented.

The reporter gathered that the herdsmen had recently run away from Nimbo community after prolonged feud with the farmers in the area, who had bitterly complained of the mindless destruction of their farm crops by the herdsmen with their cattle.

A farmer in the area, Ugwu Enechi, said the herdsmen take the law into their hands by allowing their cattle to destroy cassava plantations in the area. According to him, the herdsmen control large herds of cattle, such that the flocks sometimes run out of their control to wreak havoc in people's farm.

"They break people's local pots where we preserve water for use whenever we are in the farm. If you challenge them, they would brandish weapons and draw a battle line with you. It is unfortunate that nobody can call them to order," he said.

The lawless act of the herdsmen, according to Daily Sun findings, was fuelled by the lack of police posts in the three communities - Abbi, Nimbo and Ugbene Ajima. The nearest police post for the people living in the area is located at Nkpologu, Adani or Nsukka township, which often takes as long as five hours before the villagers could reach them for help. No security help-lines or emergency lines function in the area, save for local vigilante groups with limited training and experience of policing.