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One of the houses, burnt to the ground in Idima community

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50 feared killed, property worth N500m destroyed in Ebonyi land tussle

From **Obinna Odogwu**, Abakaliki

The communal feud between the Ogiri and Okporojo quarters in Idima community, Afikpo South Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, which has lasted for several months, took a dangerous dimension on June 10.

On that day, in the dead of the night, the people of Okoboji allegedly invaded Ogiri.

In the attack that lasted for several hours, no fewer than 12 persons were feared killed and about 50 persons declared missing. Also, more than 300 houses, according to residents, were razed.



Rev. Umueme distributing relief materials to Ogiri people

The residents, who were aroused from their sleep in a ferocious manner, it was gathered, scampered to safety in various directions.

Oriental News learnt that those who escaped death spent the remaining part of the night in the bush before they made for safer grounds at daybreak.

Genesis of the trouble

Ogiri and Okporojo are large quarters that make up one community. According to residents of Ogiri, both are one community geographically divided, but with a common monarch.

Like brothers, they had shared things in common and lived peacefully before a squabble over a piece of land put knife in the cord that binds them together.

According to the people of Ogiri community, a certain man (names withheld) from Ifuesene-Owutu community had, some time back, started laying claims to ownership of a piece of farmland which is known to be fertile and suitable for rice cultivation.

Sensing that he might not be able to wrest the land from the Ogiri people, he allegedly connived with another man from Okporojo who made arrangements to sell the contentious land to him.

This arrangement, according to the Ogiri people, was to co-opt Okporojo people, who allegedly have a long-standing frosty relationship with the former, into the land tussle so as to enable them 'strike.'

The tussle, which started as a mere verbal war, graduated to the usage of firearms. This, according to sources, continued until the people of Ogiri allegedly gunned down one Mr. Eme Agha from Okporojo.

Sources alleged that the inversion of the former by the latter was simply a revenge of the death of their son, Agha.

A community leader in Ogiri, Mr. Hyacinth Igwe Okoro, said the contentious land case had been in the court.

"We went to court over the land tussle but Ogbaga family grouped with Okporojo people to struggle over the land with us. Along the line, we engaged each other with firearms and eventually a man from Okporojo was gunned down.

"In the midnight, other neighbouring communities joined Okporojo to invade our community. And they were able to achieve their aim because we are in their middle," Okoro explained.

Okoro, who disclosed that they cheated death by the whiskers, lamented that the residents have been left in the lurch by the Ebonyi State government several weeks after the ugly incidence.

Mrs. Blessing Ukegbu and Mr. Emmanuel Nkama are also bitter over how the Ebonyi State government has handled the matter.

"Ebonyi State government has done nothing except that they promised that they would rebuild a community hall to enable our people return and settle in it until repairs are carried out on the damaged houses," Mrs. Ukegbu, whose husband has remained missing, said.

She urged the government to wake up and stop treating the matter with kid's glove.



Several attempts to contact Igwe Osuu Oduko, the traditional ruler of the community who is from Okporojo quarter, to comment on the situation proved abortive, as his mobile line was not reachable.

But the chairman of the council, Eni Uduma Chima, told Oriental News on the telephone that that he had already brought the situation under control.

He said with the support of the state government he had been able to address some of the challenges facing the people.

"I ensured that the police were stationed in the area. I am the one sustaining them there too. I offset the hospital bills; the mortuary bills for the dead. I have also written to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), State Emergency Management Commission Agency, National Refugee Commission, and I have liaised with our representative in the House of Representatives to follow it up from there," he said.

Church brings succour

Disturbed by the sufferings of the Ogiri people, a religious group, The Evangelizers Team Ministries International (TETMI), brought succour to the residents.

TETMI, headed Rev. David Umune donated two bags of onions, five bags of rice, two big bags of beans, five cartons of tomatoes, two cartons of seasoning, one carton of soap, three bags of salt, four bags of garri, 10 largest-size Ghana-must-go bags of cloths, shoes, caps, hats and handbags.

The cleric pointed out that "Ogiri community seems forgotten and neglected; it seems like a community abandoned for several years by the successive administrations. Maybe our coming here will now draw the attention of government to do the needful for this community."

He regretted that several weeks after the attack, the government was yet to come to the aid of the community.

He, however, pleaded with government to "act fast and rebuild the homes that were destroyed and to keep checking on them medically.

"Some of them probably may be walking around thinking that they are healthy but the trauma of what had happened is still there. Constant medical checkup is needed. Government and other Christian organisations should come in and help them."

Receiving the gift items, members of the community expressed happiness that they were remembered at their time of need.

They, however, lamented that life has become more miserable for them since after the attack.

Reacting, the Chairman of Afikpo South Local Government Area, Eni Uduma Chima, dismissed all the allegations, pointing out that both the state and local governments have been fair to the community.

He disclosed that the government was making plans to bring more dividends of democracy to the people of Ogiri.

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