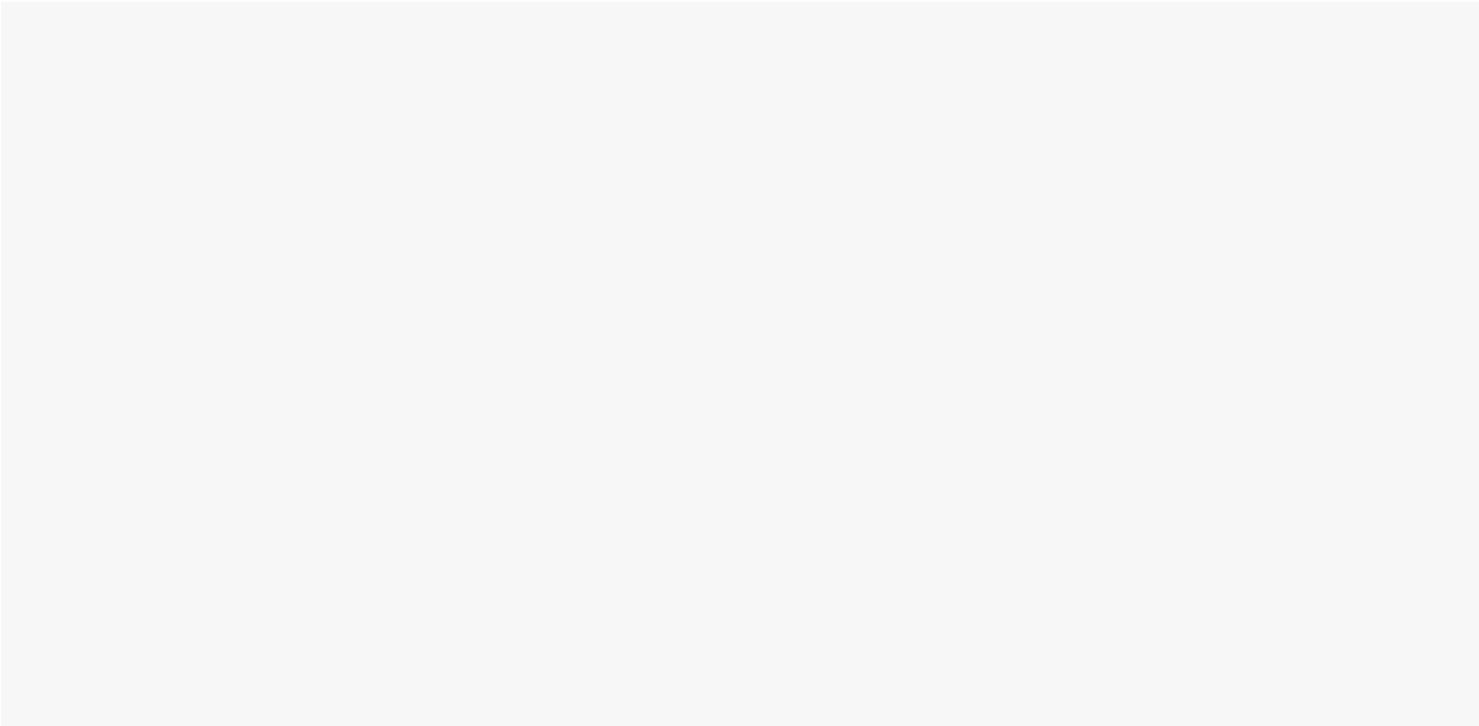


Bayelsa community battles mystery ritual killers

•How assailants went away with female victims’ brains, pants

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Femi Folaranmi, Yenagoa

It was a routine errand, but for the family of Mr. Samuel at Akenfa, a community in Bayelsa State, it could have ended in tragedy.

On Friday, February 1, 14-year-old Ogogo Samuel was sent on an errand to get a box of matches from a relative living a few metres from her house. She got to the house and discovered that the occupants of the house were still sleeping. She came back to her house but she did not go inside. Instead, she decided to stay at the veranda for a nap on the bench. She was still dozing when suddenly two men in black approached her and one of them touched the back of her head. She promptly went blank.

Ogogo's parents cried for help when they realised that their daughter was missing. Neighbours formed a search party, and policemen from Akenfa Police Division came in four vans to lend a helping hand. Even clergymen were not left out, as two pastors came to the house and began a prayer session.

When all hope appeared lost and Mr. Samuel was about to officially lodge a report at the Akenfa Police Station, a phone call from the house informed him that Ogogo had been found. She was discovered in the bedroom on her foam, shivering and foaming at the mouth. It took 48 hours of intense care at a private hospital before Ogogo could regain consciousness. She thereafter narrated a bizarre story to the bewildered people of the community. She explained how she saw two men dressed in black. One of the men, she said, touched the back of her head and she thereafter went blank.

Ogogo is alive to tell her story. But not so lucky were Glory Omo-Ohwo and Goodnews Stephen. They were gruesomely murdered, and their panties and brains were collected and taken away by their assailants. Omo-Ohwo, a fish seller and mother of four from Uhweru in Delta State, was killed and dumped in an uncompleted building metres from her residence on Tuesday, January 29. Stephen a mother of two from Kolokuma/ Opokuma Local Government area of Bayelsa State who was a pastries seller, had her head smashed with a pestle and her lifeless body was dumped and covered with debris at the back of Akenfa Community Secondary School.

Mrs. Beni, a woman in the community, said she could have been killed by those that murdered Mrs. Stephens. Her words: "I had passed Mrs. Stephens on the road and quickened my steps because the area was dark. I had not gone

far when I heard her shout. I immediately ran to a secure place, took my phone and called her husband to check on his wife because I heard her shout after I passed her.”

According to investigations, Mr. Stephens and the search party got to the area and saw the meat-pie she was selling scattered on the floor. The trail of her blood was found and her lifeless body was traced to where her killers hid it under a pile of debris.

Indeed strange things are happening in Akenfa community, which has put it on edge. Fear now pervades the once boisterous community, and the people live in utter dread each day of the week. Activities of cultists, burglars and petty thieves who snatch phones and rob people of their money are not strange to Akenfa. But the killing of Omo-Ohwo and Stephen was a macabre incident to the people, and they now go about their daily duties with apprehension.

“The two events are strange, in context, content, form and activity. Everything about it is strange. Though there have been cultism attacks, raiding of shops, burglary, snatching and robbing people of money and phones, it never got to the level we experienced recently, on Tuesday, January 29, and Friday, February 1. It was completely strange,” said Mr. Nnamdi Johnson Abas, the acting Chief of Akenfa community.

“The strange thing about the killings is that the victims had their pants removed, their heads cut open and their brains removed,” he adds.

Abas said the activities of the assailants were bewildering. He said he could not fathom why they did not remove the victims’ eyes or breasts but took the brain and pants. In his view, that made the situation even more confusing.

“It is believed generally that ritual killers remove eye, breasts, tongue, and private parts. The two victims had those parts of their body complete,” Abas noted.

But Mr. Chima Jackson, the acting youth president of the community, believed ritual killers were on the prowl in the community because of the nature of the two deaths. He said the incidents had thrown residents of the community into a panic mode. A reliable security operative said security agents are working on the theory on ritual killings in Akenfa.

Abas said the community would not wait for the next victim to be found dead and had decided to put security measures in place to forestall a recurrence of such horrible incident.

“I gathered everybody both indigenes and non-indigenes in the community hall and told them that we must take the security of the community by ourselves and not wait for anybody to guide us. We have therefore formed a vigilance group,” he said.

Findings revealed that, as part of the security measures, a dusk-to-dawn curfew has been imposed on the community to allow the vigilantes nab those behind the killings. All the four entry points to the community have been

adequately put under security surveillance, it was gathered.

“We have put those entry points under close watch. During the curfew nobody is allowed to do any business and cannot come out until 6am. Vigilance group comprising indigenes and non-indigenes have cordoned off all the areas,” he further explained.

Jackson said Akenfa has not remained the same after the two killings and the residents are going around their daily business with trepidation.

“Everybody in the community is aggrieved. Nobody is happy about the ugly incidents that happened within a week. It has dampened the morale of residents of the community, both indigene and non-indigene.

“As the acting youth president, I am not happy and we are taking drastic measures to make sure that the culprits are brought to book. We have set up security measures. We have a serious vigilance team taking charge of the whole area to ensure this incident do not happen again,” he said.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr Asinim Butwats in an interview said the security agencies were on top of the situation in the community. According to him, the gruesome killings of the two women had received the attention of the Police Command and investigation has commenced in earnest to unravel the killers.

In Akenfa now when it is night people are seeing hurrying to finish their businesses and lock themselves in. The implication is that nightlife suffers and the excitement that usually draws people to Akenfa is not there anymore. The town has lost its appeal, and people are afraid of the killers lurking in the dark.