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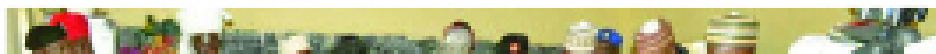
# E-x-p-o-s-e-d: How bandits killed 70, injured 100 in 20 hours after surveying Niger communities from helicopter

■ Controversy as Senator, state govt bicker over casualty figures

7th July 2019 in [Features](#)



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**John Adams,** Minna

**Worrisome fresh facts have emerged on how a well-armed group of bandits attacked some communities in Shiroro Local Government Area, Niger State, after the targeted areas had been allegedly surveyed with a low-flying helicopter.**

The involvement of a helicopter has since fuelled suspicion among the people that powerful individuals with clear ulterior motives may be sponsoring the rampaging bandits.

From the accounts of the survivors, it emerged that the bandits operated in a well coordinated manner as the two attacks which happened on Sunday night, June 9 and Monday afternoon, occurred after a helicopter flew around the communities and also hovered for some time.

A former supervisory councillor in Shiroro LGA and spokesman of one of the affected communities, Isaiah Ikko, told Sunday Sun: “The two times that the attacks happened, we saw a helicopter hovering round the villages. This gave us the impression that the attacks had the backing of some powerful people with an aim to wipe out the people.”

Eight communities in Shiroro LGA, namely Kwaki, Barden Dawaki, Ajatawyi, Gwassa, Ajayin, Bataro, Bwailo, Baton and Giji were attacked by the bandits, first in the night of June 9. When sound of the guns died down after about three hours, 12 people were killed while 20 others sustained serious injuries in Kwaki village. during the first attack on Sunday night.

The next day, Monday, while the people were still shock over what befell them the previous night as efforts were being made to gather the bodies of the dead and take those injured in the attack, to the hospital, another helicopter flew around the communities and hovered too. Three hours

later, about 2:00pm, seven other communities came under attack by a horde of well armed bandits, who were said to have stormed the communities on 52 motorcycles in commando manner.

“We saw the chopper hovering hours before attack and the bandits used sniper guns with telescope. They were all dressed in black with some of them wearing masks,” Isaiah further disclosed.

Similarly, another member of the community, Jafaru Ibrahim from Kwaki, told our correspondent that the helicopter was seen before the two attacks on Kwaki and other communities. This fueled serious suspicion that “the bandits were only hired to kill our people and nothing more,” he said.

He pointed out that the bandits had first attacked Kwaki on Sunday and proceeded to Ajatai-Kwaki where they raided the community and rustled cattle.

But youths from Kwaki community in response to distress call from other neighboring communities, mobilized and intercepted the assailants and prevented them from taking the animals away.

The brave action of the youths did not go down well with the bandits who vowed to return to Ajayi-Kwaki the next day on revenge mission.

“They kept to their threat and the second attack was more devastating. The assailants came with sophisticated weapons which had telescopes. You will think it was like an American war movie, they aimed at the intended target through a viewer attached to the rifles,” he explained.

By the time the dust settled, he said that 58 people were killed while about 100 others sustained injuries, adding that most of the survivors were those who were lucky to have escaped into the bushes during the first attack on Sunday. The attackers raided everywhere in the communities, including shops and ransacked all the houses for essential items and cash.

### **Victims recount ordeals**

In tears, anguish and frustration survivors of the attacks recounted the tales of the 20 hours of horror in the hands of the attackers. Some of the victims who spoke to our correspondent at the IDP camp in Erena recalled the horrific encounter, which they said was better imagined than experienced. .

One of them, 40-year-old Usman Kuyabana, said that his younger brother was shot dead in his presence but he himself escaped being killed just by the whiskers.

He said that the bandits intercepted him and his brother as they were both running away from the attackers. “They ordered us to stop and two of them advanced towards us, one confronting my brother, while the other spoke to me. They asked for money and phones but my brother said he had nothing on him and the one who spoke to him, shot and killed him right there. But I told the one who approached me that I had a phone and money in my pockets. He took the money and the phone, but still shot me on both arms. I fell to the ground. He then turned me face down and asked me to remain like that or others would kill me if they discovered that I was still alive and that was how I survived,” he said.

He said he suspected that there were informants among them because those that wore masks were the ones that pointed out houses to be raided by the bandits.

Hear him: “One of them pointed to where our uncle who is a trader and wealthy farmer used to hide money at the back of his house inside yam barns.”

But the case of Abdulhamid Lawal, a 35-year-old driver and his late friend, 37-year-old Audu is pathetic. Though Abdulhamid and his late friend were not natives of the affected communities, they had gone for the burial of one of their friends who was killed during the Sunday attack in Kwaki.

While returning home from the burial, Abdulhamid said they ran into the bandits. He said he was sitting behind his friend on the motorcycle. Without uttering one word, they began shooting at them and killed his friend instantly.

Abdulhamid said he sustained bullet wounds on the right leg and fell on the ground unconscious.

“I fainted and they thought I was dead and that was how they left me,” he explained.

### **Controversy over casualty figures**

Meanwhile as the people continue to mourn their loved ones and using every available space to bury the dead, a controversy has erupted over the casualty figures from the two attacks.

The Police Public Relations Officer, Niger State Command, DSP Abubakar Mohammed, while confirming the Sunday attack, put the casualty figure at one dead and 12 injured. This was, however, changed to 12 dead on Monday after the second attack on seven other communities.

However, Senator David Umoru, representing Niger East at the Senate, and in whose constituency the incident occurred, put the total figure of the dead at 70, and added that the Sunday attack claimed 12 lives while the Monday invasion left 58 people dead and 100 others seriously injured and in critical condition.

The senator also disclosed that over 2,000 people were displaced while about 800 cattle were rustled by the bandits.

Giving the breakdown of the death figures, Senator Umoru said that in addition to the 12 that were killed on Sunday night, 19 people died in Kwaki village, 14 in Barden Dawaki village while eight died in Ajatayi village.

Other casualties included seven dead in Gwassa, five in Ajayin Bataro, four others in Bwailo, three in Baton village and two reported dead in Giji village.

But the state government faulted the claim by the senator in a statement, saying: “Figure is not only grossly exaggerated, but the reports in the media credited to Senator Umoru are spurious and an unfortunate attempt to make Niger State unsafe in the eyes of the world.”

The government in a statement signed by the Permanent Secretary (Cabinet and Security), Alhaji Isah Aliyu Ekan, further said: “The Senator’s claim is, to say the least, fictitious and also a mischievous attempt to generate ill-will between the people of the affected area and the state government. First, the death toll before the swift intervention of the military joint taskforce was 12 with 22 wounded and not 70 as purportedly claimed by David Umar.”

The Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), whose officials were the first responders, to evacuate both the dead and injured said that 40 bodies were recovered as at Monday evening but added that they were still searching for more.”

However, the state governor, Alhaji Abubakar Sani Bello, during his on the spot assessment visit to the IDP camps on Monday, June 20th, one week after the attacks, gave figures of the dead, which were different from that of the Permanent Secretary. The governor said that 37 were killed in the two attacks with 20 others injured.

### **NSEMA struggling to cope with IDPs**

Since penultimate Sunday when the attack occurred, NSEMA has continued to struggle to cope with the increasing population at the four camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Erena, Zumba, Galadima-Kogo and Gwada. No fewer than 2,358 people are currently taking refuge at the four IDPs camps, a situation that may likely trigger humanitarian crisis following shortage in the supply of relief materials to meet the immediate need of the people.

NSEMA’s acting Director General, Malam Abdulsamad Zumba who put the number of displaced persons at 2,358, said 2,043 of that number are in Erena Central Primary School.

Sunday Sun reporter learnt that most of the displaced persons in Erena are from Kwaki, which also had higher casualties from the attacks.

On Saturday, truck loads of relief materials provided by the state government through NSEMA headed towards the affected camps. Zumba told newsmen in an interview that some the items include rice, millet, corn, beans, red oil, groundnut oil, blankets and mosquito treated nets and medicament.

### **Deployment of security personnel**

As at Friday, the Commissioner of Police visited the troubled areas after a similar visit by the Deputy Governor, Ahmed Mohammed Ketso. The villagers acknowledged the presence of security agencies in the area after deployment of combined team of military, police, DSS and Civil Defence personnel. The village head of Kwaki confirmed the area to be relatively safe but called for permanent security presence in the area.

Despite assurances of adequate security of their lives and property, the displaced people have rejected the call on them by Governor Sani Bello to return to their communities.

The people told the governor during his on-the-spot assessment visit to the IDP camps that they were not sure of the security of their lives and property and therefore were not in a hurry to return to their ancestral homes.

### **Erena, the next point of attack**

The village head said there was urgent need for the government to fortify the entire state, especially with the threat by the bandits of advancing towards Erena and other towns. “We heard them saying they would attack places like Erena, so there is the urgent need to take more security precautions,” he said.

Erena is the next most important town close to the border communities where the attacks took place. Security agencies said the bandits infiltrated the state from Birnin Gwari in Kaduna and neighbouring Zamfara States and are taking advantage of the thick forest stretching through the affected states where they retreated and from which they launch offensives on border communities.

The village head said the bandits always come in on motorcycles, adding that security agents always have difficult accessing the area with their Hilux vans because of poor road network.

**Rapheal**