

Clouds of suspicion over the septuagenarian

This was what happened to 70-year-old Saratu Iliya from Akpaika, a greenbelt of Obi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The old woman and mother of twelve children, was reportedly accused of being responsible for a litany of illnesses and deaths in the community. As a result, the elders invited a native doctor to detect, with his accoutrement, alleged witches and wizards responsible.

This they did with the consent of the Akpaika community leader and some youths now in police custody as at the time of this report. But trouble started when the said native doctor, popularly known as Allebura and from Obi town allegedly prepared a special concoction different from the one he gave to the generality of the people and forced the poor woman and one other woman to drink. She reportedly fell down and lost consciousness while the other woman was said to have started behaving abnormally like a deranged fellow. The native doctor who doubles as a headmaster at LGEA Primary School Ikposogye in the local government is now said to be at the centre of a raging controversy that is threatening to tear the community apart.

According to a source, the old woman had been in coma after ingesting the alleged poisonous concoction administered by him. Biographical sketches provided on her person say that she initially hailed from Sara. A native of Sayawa, Bauchi State, she is said to have migrated from Bauchi and settled in Akpaika with her family, in 1971. That is to say, they have been living in the community for the past 49 years.

Her son speaks, defends her innocence

One of her sons, Kyauta Iliya, who spoke with *Saturday Sun* in Lafia, narrated what happened: “The trouble started in 2018, when one woman from Akpaika by name Eliza accused our mother of being a witch. She accused her of removing her womb through witchcraft power and making her barren. She said that our mother is responsible for her (Eliza’s) poverty. Ever since she made the allegations people in the community have come to see our mother as a witch and have been calling her names.

“From that time, there have been cases of illnesses and deaths in the community, and people in the community said they would take measures to address the situation. The matter took a different turn when one Pastor from Plateau State came to greet his brother in Akpaika and claimed that he is into deliverance prayer. He started praying for children in Akpaika and some of them confessed that they were into witchcraft. A daughter to Eliza, the woman who accused our mother of witchcraft also came for prayers. And when the man prayed for her, she confessed that she was into witchcraft and that it was our mother who initiated her into it.

“Afterward, the elders of the town sat and agreed that they would bring a powerful native doctor to handle the issue. Towards that, they tasked each member of the community N500, which we also paid. In fact, everybody paid, both men and women. They collected the money and assigned some people to bring the native doctor to tackle the issue of frequent deaths in Akpaika. Among those assigned the task are Solo, Bukata, Malla Jamis and John Bablan. This delegation met the community leader of Akpaika, Mr. Sunday Nuhu, who gave them his blessing to bring the native doctor to address the community problems.

“That’s how they brought one Alleburah from Obi. Before they did so, they announced to the entire members of the community that nobody should go to farm or any other place. When the man arrived, he asked our mother to confess that she is a witch. But our mother said she didn’t know anything. The man asked her to sit aside. After that, he mixed a concoction and gave members of community to drink. They did so, line by line, including the sick persons who were there. Even us, Mama’s children we drank the concoction. After we did so, Alleburah said those children and other sick persons who were tied down by witches had been freed.

“But the problem is that the concoction he gave to our mother was different from the one he gave to all of us. He prepared it separately and gave it to her to drink. As soon as she did so, she fell down and fainted. Since the incident our mother has been in coma. She has not been able to open her eyes or move. On seeing her in such a

condition, the native doctor now claimed that it is a sure proof that our mother is a witch and said that before he can restore her to consciousness, we will pay him N20,000. We told him that we wouldn't do so."

Asked why and his siblings refused, he said that it is because they sense some sort of conspiracy against their mother. But determined to see the matter through, they reported it to the police.

His words: "When I saw our mother in a critical condition, I went to the Obi Police Division and reported the matter. I did that so that the police can come and rescue our mother from their hands so that we can take her to hospital." Mr. Iliya then appealed to security agencies, human rights activists to come to their aid in order to save the life of their mother who, at the time of this report, is undergoing treatment. What's more, he is calling on security operatives to arrest Alleburah the said native doctor and bring him to justice to serve as deterrent to those who may want to do what he did in future.