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20 burnt to death at oil bunkering site in Rivers

FROM **TONY JOHN**, PORT HARCOURT

RIVERS

MORE than 20 youths have reportedly lost their lives in a petrol pipeline explosion, which occurred in Rumuekpe community in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Saturday Sun gathered that the incident occurred on Thursday, as a result of oil bunkering activities carried out by youths, who siphoned petroleum products from many of the pipelines located on the stretch of the adjoining villages within the community.

An eyewitness, who gave his name as Chikwem Godwin, told journalists that the incident happened when those involved in the criminal activities attempted to cut one of the petroleum pipelines.

According to him, more than 20 persons might have died in the inci-

dent, giving the number of persons that gathered at the scene of the incident on a daily basis.

He said: "I can confirm to you that more than 20 persons died in that very incident. The particular place where this incident occurred is very notorious for bunkering activities. Youths from various communities gathered there to carry out criminal activities of cutting oil pipes.

"The place is the centre of oil bunkering activities. There are so many oil, petrol and gas pipelines that crisscross the community. Some multi-national oil companies own the pipelines.

"NLNG also has its gas pipeline crisscrossing the stretch of the community. Those involved in these criminal activities may have ruptured petrol pipeline, which

ignited fire and burnt to death so many persons. This incident may have affected many families from all the neighbouring communities, as many youths involved in this nefarious activities comes from different community."

Another resident of the community who simply gave his name as Amadi, disclosed that he saw several corpses burnt beyond recognition.

He blamed the incident on oil bunkering carried out by youths from communities that make up Rumuekpe.

State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Nnamdi Omoni, a Superintendent of Police (SP), has confirmed the explosion.

Omoni said that he was yet to ascertain the number of casualties, adding that the State Police Command had deployed personnel to ensure there is no breakdown of law and order.