

# Herdsmen on rampage in Enugu communities

• Maim, kill, kidnap, molest women

By Sunday Ani

**SEVERAL** communities in Enugu State are under attack by suspected Fulani herdsmen. From rural communities in Awgu to Oji River, Udi, Igbo-Eze North and South, Isi-Uzo and Uzo-Uwani, among others, the story is the same.

Residents of these areas live in perpetual fear as the herdsmen run riot, killing, maiming, kidnapping and raping women without any resistance from security agents. This has led to an increase in the internally displaced persons' centres in these areas.

The other week, some farming communities in Eha-Amu, Isi-Uzo LGA of the state, specifically Agu-Amede, Ohuolu, Ebo, Akparata and Mgbuji communities, came under heavy attacks, leading to the death of no fewer than 70 persons, with survivors leaving the communities in droves and finding refuge at the neighbouring communities and IDP camps.

In the same vein, members of the rural communities in Uzo-Uwani LGA of the state have also been living in fear, as armed herdsmen unleash terror and mayhem on farmers and residents. They kill, maim, rape and kidnap without let or hindrance.

On November 8, a 40-year-old man, Chidi Lazarus, was hacked to death at an Isi-Uwani farmland. The unfortunate incident, in addition to the past killings, has triggered panic in the area and forced the farmers to abandon their farms and harvest.

Chidi, a commercial motorcyclist from Amunu village, was reportedly contracted by a local farmer to convey cassava tubers from her farm on Tuesday, November 8, 2022. It was reported that the young man, whose wife was heavily pregnant, left his house for the day's business without any premonition of what fate had in stock for him.

A member of the community, Udeh Ezea, explained that the late Chidi went to the farm with a lady identified as Ngozika. While he waited for the lady to harvest the cassava tubers, three armed herdsmen accosted them over an alleged missing cow. The deceased explained to them that he was a commercial motorcyclist contracted to convey cassava tubers from the farm, but the gunmen would not listen to such an excuse as they descended on him with several machete cuts. The lady that was harvesting cassava tubers fled for her life and alerted other farmers in the area.

It was reported that Chidi effortlessly tried to ward off the machete cuts with bare hands but he couldn't do much. When his right and left hands went limp from the deep cuts, more cuts landed on his skull till he passed out. A rescue team, mostly farmers, rushed to the scene, but it was late as the assailants had escaped, leaving behind the mutilated body of the victim, drenched in blood.

Further checks by Daily Sun revealed an upsurge in bloody attacks by herdsmen across different communities in Uzo-Uwani. In Nrobo community, one of the victims, identi-



• Pregnant wife of Chidi with her first child

fied as Mrs. Igamadu, suffered deep machete cuts from suspected herdsmen during an attempt to rape her on the farm. She was later rescued by vigilantes and rushed to a hospital in a pool of blood.

The herdsmen, armed with guns and machetes, sneaked into the farm where the woman was working and leered lasciviously at her. But, she noticed what was happening and courageously rebuffed their sexual advances, and that incurred their wrath as they pounced on her with fury.

Again, an unidentified woman from Edem was reportedly abducted along a bushy road called Ugwu Ebere in Nrobo, while a commercial cyclist, Aaron Ugwuoke, escaped with machete cuts by the same tormentors. A few weeks ago, there was a reported attack on a 504 car along Ebere farmland in Nrobo, leading to the abduction of six people. The taxi driver, identified as Matthias from the neighbouring Abbi community, was among the victims. Another young man, Albert Okanya, from Ugor in Nrobo community, was abducted while returning from the farm by the same herdsmen.

A native of Nrobo community who gave his name as Okanya, told Daily Sun's reporter that people in the area now live in fear as armed herdsmen invade and kidnap them, with little or no help coming from security agents.

"There is no effort from the security agents to rescue the abducted victims or even to prevent further attack," he said.

He explained that the economic losses suffered by farmers in Nrobo in the hands of armed herdsmen run into millions of naira. According to him, farmlands have been deserted out of fear, while the herdsmen continue to terrorise the locality. He lamented that

many farmers in Nrobo known for their massive food production now suffer food scarcity due to the activities of the killer herdsmen.

Some natives of Uzo-Uwani expressed disappointment that despite the anti-open grazing bill signed into law by Governor Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, herds of cattle have continued to roam freely in their area. The Forest Guard, a security outfit set up by the state government and deployed to local communities, has been ineffective to tame the rampaging herdsmen.

Checks revealed that Uzo-Uwani has remained a flashpoint after the gruesome killing of the local government secretary, Nnamdi Ogueche, in 2019, by suspected herdsmen around Olo town in Ezeagu LGA of the state. The victim was reported to have gone to broker peace between the communities and the herdsmen, who had been terrorising the area, but he was ambushed on his way back and shot dead.

Despite the high-profile killing, the security of Uzo-Uwani has remained porous. Natives are worried that no serious security measure has been taken to secure the area from armed herdsmen, who are bent on occupying the area as their grazing route.

Worried by the developments, a Catholic priest from the area, Rev. Fr. Paulinus Ike Ogara, lamented that the recurring bloody attacks by suspected herdsmen in the area have turned the area to a killing field. He said Uzo-Uwani has been turned to a slaughter house by the terrorists masquerading as herdsmen.

"It is sad that our local government area has become home to attacks by Fulani herdsmen. So far, evidence has been offered linking the murderous herdsmen to a series of kidnappings, rapes and killings in almost all the communities in the area. The latest



• The late Chidi

incident in Ugbene Ajima, where Chidi was macheted to death, is just one in a series of deadly attacks that have become our nightmare," he lamented.

The priest wondered why those daredevil herdsmen could not be held in check by the authorities, noting that such unprovoked attacks erode people's confidence in government. He urged political leaders in the locality to reassess their attitude to the menace of insecurity and reassure the people of their safety.

"While the terrorists do their work, all of us, particularly those of us in the flashpoints, should fight for our lives to be on the safe side," he added.

Another native of Uzo-Uwani, who is a legal practitioner, Ikechukwu Onodi, also frowned at the gruesome murder of Chidi by armed herdsmen, describing such descent to anarchy as unacceptable. He wondered why a young man in search of his daily bread in his own ancestral farmland should be subjected to such a cruel end in the hands of foreign mercenaries.

"These are not the traditional nomadic Fulani that we were used to playing with in our youthful days. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no indigenous Fulani person in Ugbene-Ajima. Granted that every Nigerian has the constitutional right to move freely and settle in any part of Nigeria. That freedom, however, does not extend to cattle and other animals," he argued.

While giving a legal interpretation to the incident, Onodi explained that the Nigerian Constitution does not recognise or empower anyone to forcibly annex lands of indigenous communities. He explained that anyone who has not acquired land through legitimate transactions, such as assignment, leasehold