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A communal work turned bloody



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By **CALEB ONWE** reports



Chafuyi village



The burnt chemist shop of Kingsley Nwachukwu, one of the suspects

On October 27, 2019, a communal labour to clear a major street and pave way for a road expansion project in Chafuyi village led to a bloody encounter that left on its trail death, sorrow and anguish. **CALEB ONWE** reports

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Chafuyi is a rural community, not far from the popular Apo Mechanic Village, located in the Abuja Municipal Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory.

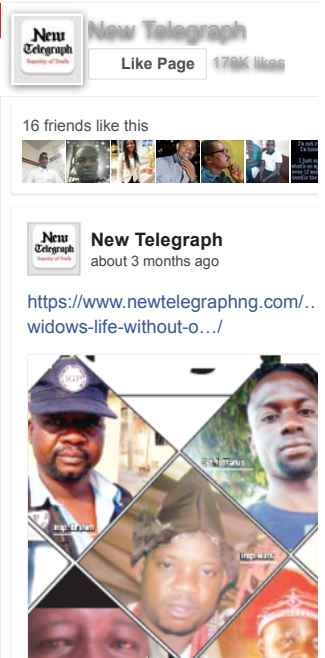
The community is home to the indigenous Gbaygi people but also hosts other Nigerians from various ethnic nationalities. Many of the residents fall within the middle and low income brackets who survive essentially on farming and petty trading.

Inside Abuja's investigation revealed that this rustic but bubbling community lost its peaceful co-existence when the people decided to expand some of its arterial roads through communal efforts.

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When the taskforce commenced the enforcement order to remove all structures encroaching on the road, it met a stiff resistance from one of the residents and hell was let loose.

Acting Village Head of Chafuyi, Chief Shekwoyiyna Danjuma, who is still battling to overcome the unfortunate death of one of his subjects and the ensuing violence that led to destruction of properties, may struggle for a long time to restore the mutual respect, confidence and even deep sense of security said to have existed in the community.

Danjuma said that when the elders conceived the road expansion project, he never envisaged that trouble was going to erupt in the community.

According to Danjuma, the community agreed that the roads would be expanded to make them more motorable and also for easy traffic flow. He said that those whose structures obstructed the roads were given a two-week ultimatum to remove them, for the road repair works to commence seamlessly.

“We decided that the community cannot continue to wait for government to come and repair our roads; so, we agreed to do it ourselves. To achieve this, both the indigenes and other ethnic groups met and we agreed to form a committee.

“This committee agreed that all attachments that obstruct the roads be removed for the expansion work to start. The committee gave two weeks ultimatum to all whose structures extended to the roads to remove them. The ultimatum expired 26th October, and on the following day, the committee decided to enforce the order,” Danjuma said

According to the community leader, the operation of the committee started smoothly until they got to a shop owned by Kinglsey Nwachukwu, a patent medicine dealer.

It was gathered that Nwachukwu questioned the propriety of the committee coming to dismantle part of his shop without due notice, as he allegedly claimed that he didn't know about the ultimatum to remove all obstructive structures from the road.



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“He allegedly started videoing the operations of the committee with his phone, and some members of the committee opposed his action. This resulted to hot argument between them.

“I was told that the hot argument persisted to the extent that a fight ensued and a brother to the Chemist shop man who was present there picked up a stick and hit one Jonathan Nuhu, who fell to the ground and was rushed to hospital. Afterwards, he was certified dead on arrival at the hospital by a doctor,” said Danjuma.

The sudden death of Jonathan Nuhu, a father of one, was not the only thing that has destabilized the peace of the community but the reprisal attack launched on Nwachukwu and his family.

It was gathered that aggrieved youths of mainly indigenous people after learning that their kinsman had died, rushed to the scene of the encounter and set the shop ablaze. The angry mob also set ablaze the homes of Nwachukwu and his brother and brutalized both men and members of their families.

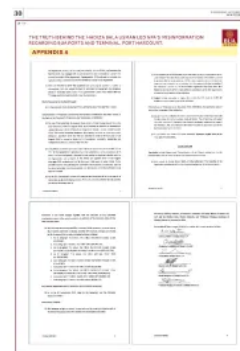
Danjuma noted that both men and their family members would have been lynched by the angry mob but for his quick intervention.

“When I heard that the victim was dead, and that these people were assailed by the angry youths after burning down their proper ties, I quickly rescued them and called the Police to take over the matter”, he stated.

While the remains of the deceased is still in the morgue and the two suspects in police custody since the “black day,” a cloud of apprehension is still hovering around the community.

The situation has become more confusing given the allegations that a segment of the elders of the community are insisting that the suspects, who are still in detention would have to bankroll an expensive sacrifice to be performed before the burial of the deceased.

Inside Abuja also gathered that the entire Igbo Community there and the family members of the suspects were disillusioned by the demand that the suspects pay the sum of N7 million as compensation to the family of the deceased.



Although, Danjuma said the alleged N7 million compensation was not the official position of the elders, he noted that the appeasement sacrifice was compulsory and the items for the sacrifice must be provided by the suspects.

“The issue of buying land and building a house for the family of the dead man was not the official position of the elders of Gbaygi people but an opinion of some aggrieved youths. However, the sacrifice that need to be performed by the elders, is very important and the list has been given to the suspects by the elders concerned “, Danjuma noted.

While the leader of the community expressed optimism that the Police would soon release the remains of the deceased for burial, he allayed the fears of another attack and assured that the peace of the community won’t be distributed again.

Inside Abuja’s effort to see the suspects at the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) detention facilities was not successful, but a family member of one of the suspects was tracked down for their own side of the story.

John Ogbodo, who said he is a brother of one of the suspects, debunked the claims that peace had returned fully to the troubled community.

Ogbodo claimed that he is the blood brother of Kingsley Nwachukwu, whose chemist shop and residential home were burnt down.

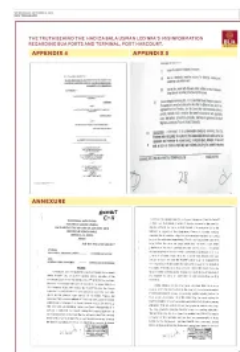
His narratives about the incident was not completely different from that of the community’s chief, except that he alleged that his brother was attacked by those who came to forcibly dismantle part of his shop.

He also alleged that the second suspect who hit the deceased with a stick was said to have done that to defend his brother who was already under attack.

According to him, his brother’s ordeals were complicated as the Police had established by an eye witness account that the death was not caused directly by his brother but has refused to release him.

He was not only troubled by his brother and friend’s continued detention by the Police, but the colossal loss of source of livelihoods following the burning down of his shop and residence.

He was equally destabilised by the demands that the deceased family must be compensated to the tune of N7 million, including the required sacrifice to appease the gods.



Inside Abuja learnt that more worrisome to the entire Igbo community in Chafuyi was the fact that one of the suspects, Kingsley Nwachukwu lost his first child, two weeks before the incident.

“It has been established that it was not my brother that killed the deceased but his friend who attempted to defend him when the whole Gbaygi youths attacked him.

“He and his friend have been in SARS custody since October 27th 2019. We have done everything within our reach to get them out but to no avail. More disturbing is the fact that we have been asked to buy land and build a house for the dead man.

“The Gbaygi people also said we must buy things to perform a sacrifice before the man is buried. In fact, when you put everything together, it will amount to over N7million.

“Nobody is talking about my brother’s shop and residential home that were burnt down by the Gbaygi youths. All we want now is the life of my brother and that of his wife and children who are still in hiding since the incident,” Ogbodo said.

While both the families of the victim and the suspects are counting their losses, some residents of the community have said they are still living in fear.

A resident of the community, Joseph Ikem, claimed that since the incident two months ago, many non- indigenes have moved out of Chafuyi for fear of reprisal attacks.

Ikem alleged that for almost two weeks after the incident, economic and social activities were paralyzed in Chafuyi because the indigenes were demanding that all non- indigenes must leave the community.

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By **Deborah Ocheni Abuja**