

**OKAFOR OFIEBOR/Port  
Harcourt**

**T**he relative peace that reigned among Ogoni communities after the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 has in recent times suffered a series of setbacks. While there had been minor clashes involving communities in the area, none can be compared to the violent crisis that erupted on 19 February between Mogho and Bodo communities in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The immediate cause of the violence was the disappearance of a widow, Mrs. Kpegesigia Badom-Zorol, who left Mogho community for her farmland on the outskirts of the town to fetch some firewood on Monday, 19 February, but did not return home.

By nightfall, members of her family alerted neighbours and friends that the widow was missing. They also alerted the paramount ruler of Mogho community, Chief Dandison Opbe. Elders of the village promptly reported the matter to the Police Divisional Headquarters at Mogho. A search party comprising youths and elders of the community immediately went looking for the missing woman.

On Tuesday, 20 February, her decapitated body was found in the farm. Apart from the severed head, her breasts and private parts were cut off. The shocked search party immediately alerted the police on their grim discovery. The police in Mogho advised them to stay calm and invited the homicide squad of the Rivers State Police Command, Port Harcourt to investigate the matter.

When the body of the woman was taken to the hospital, it was discovered that her heart had also been removed. This incensed the youth of Mogho, who reasoned that no one in the community would be so heartless as to butcher one of their own in such a callous manner.

# Mindless Carnage

The murder of a widow sparks a crisis in Ogoniland that results in the invasion and sack of an entire community



• Top and bottom: Houses destroyed in Bodo.

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And since the farm on which the body was found was close to Bodo, the largest community in Ogoniland, Mogho youths pointed accusing fingers at Bodo people as the culprits. In a fit of anger, they blocked the Mogho road and harassed people from Bodo, which is more than five times the size of Mogho in terms of landmass and population.

According to an eyewitness, on

Thursday, Bodo youths staged a peaceful protest march against the harassment in Mogho, and warned of the adverse consequences of blocking the Mogho road. The protesting Bodo youths were attacked and one of them killed.

This further enraged the Bodo youths, who went back home to regroup and armed themselves with sophisticated weapons. At about 3p.m. on Friday, Bodo youths, some of who wore Army uniform, shot and killed Mogho inhabitants at random.

As the shooting Bodo combatants advanced on Mogho, there was pandemonium. Those who could, ran as fast as they could into the bush or to nearby villages like Kpor. The attackers from Bodo made sure there was no building left standing in Mogho.

When *TheNEWS* visited Mogho to assess the situation, it was evident that powerful explosives were used in demolishing the buildings and those not brought down were petrol-bombed.

Narrating the invasion of his community to reporters on Monday, February 26, the paramount ruler of Mogho, Chief Opbe claimed that not less than 25,000 people from Bodo "came to our community armed to the teeth like soldiers, killed our youths, destroyed our houses and our household properties. Those important valuables they could loot, they looted."

Chief Opbe was emphatic that Mogho and Bodo had enjoyed a cordial relationship before the death of the widow from Mogho.

A dazed Opbe said over 500 buildings in his village were destroyed by rampaging Bodo youths, adding that about 65 Mogho youths were either dead or missing. "For now, we cannot pinpoint what the cause of the invasion was. Bodo people invaded our community with people decked in army combat uniforms in broad daylight. Members of my community have been rendered homeless. Those remaining are those who have nowhere to go," he lamented.

Corroborating Opbe's story, Chief Fred Kpakol, the Chairman of Gokana Local Government Council, described the destruction of Mogho as "colossal and horrifying, as over 500 houses may have been destroyed in the attack."

Speaking in Port Harcourt, Kpakol said, "Although I cannot give you a casualty figure, I can tell you that the entire village is deserted and a lot have been killed, while many sustained injuries." He described the attack as senseless and confirmed that security agencies have made some arrests.

Beyond the immediate crisis, however, *TheNEWS* discovered that Bodo has been enmeshed in a fight for supremacy between two deadly cult groups known as Degbam and Dewell. The two groups are



• Governor Peter Odili of Rivers State.

representative of the people and I cannot be a party to violence. They now went to Mogho, invaded the place and after they finished, they came back to Bodo and went straight to my father's house, shot three persons in my father's compound and burnt the house."

Pidomson added: "The crime I have committed is that I have refused to be part of violence and cultism. Because I never supported cultism they are constantly threatening my life and they have vowed to deal with me and other members of the community who toe my line."

Marvin Yobana, President of Ogoni Youth Council, condemned the resort to violence. He blamed the leadership of both communities and called for the institution of a Commission of Inquiry to look into the crisis and quickly issue a white paper on it. Those indicted, he counselled, should be made to face the law.

Kobana said it was high time Ogoni people started thinking of allowing oil companies to resume business in Ogoniland to absorb the teeming unemployed youths who were being used by political leaders as their foot soldiers. He also blamed the government and security agencies for not nipping the crisis in the bud, as there had been signs of trouble from Monday until the onslaught on Mogho on Friday.

It was learnt that on sighting the Bodo attackers, officials and men attached to the divisional police station in Mogho took to their heels.

Bemene Tanin, a broadcaster with Radio Rivers FM who lost his house in Mogho lamented: "I have lost all I have."

Of a population claimed to be over 25,000 by the paramount chief of Mogho, only about 50 persons were

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in Mogho when *TheNEWS* visited on Monday. And they are those that have nowhere to go for refuge. Those who escaped have vowed not to come back because they would not have any home to live in.

Relief materials had not begun arriving in Mogho as at Wednesday, 28 February, a week after the crisis erupted.