



# Kidnappers still terrorise Enugu communities

- Herders, local criminals fingered
- LG boss swings into action

By Ikechukwu Odu

The dying embers of kidnapping and suspected herdsmen heinous activities in some communities in Uzo-Uwani and Nsukka local government areas of Enugu State seem to be regaining life with the recent kidnap for ransom of members of the communities.

While some residents in Uzo-Uwani fear that the remnant of once dreaded group in the local government area, *The Malaysian Boys*, could be resurfacing, others blame it on Fulani herdsmen.

The story is the same for Ibagwa Ani, Okpuje, Okutu and other adjoining villages in Nsukka Local Government Area which have now become flashpoints for kidnapping and other forms of criminalities.

## Rescue mission

In June this year, personnel of Enugu State Police Command rescued three kidnap victims, including a reverend father along Adani-Opanda axis in Uzo-Uwani Council Area. The heavily armed kidnappers waylaid their victims at a failed portion of the road, from where they ordered a cleric driving the vehicle to a stop, before abducting him and others. Luckily, the timely intervention of the police led to their rescue. The police later busted the syndicate, leading to the arrest of three kidnap suspects, including one Okweli Edwin Nnamdi, 26, and a 23-year-old Nnadi Victor, both from Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area with their accomplice, Chisom Nwankpa, from Ezza Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. A senior police officer who pleaded anonymity told *Vanguard Metro* that following the arrest of Nnamdi and his gang members, kidnapping stopped at Uzo-Uwani at that time.

## Back to base

However, latest development has shown that the monsters are rearing their ugly heads again. One month after the killing of Cordelia Utazi on her farm in October this year by



• Late Madam Cordelia Utazi, killed on her farm at Ugwujiro Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State.

suspected herdsmen, another man who is yet-to-be-identified lost his life to suspected marauding herdsmen at Opanda, Nimbo while working on his farm settlement. He was allegedly macheted until he breathed his last. A security source in the council area informed *Vanguard Metro* that the suspected herdsmen used their cutlasses on the victim after attempts to pump bullets into his body failed. Another victim of the attack was the wife of Gilbert Iga-Mmadu, who was allegedly gang-raped while working on her farm at Nrobo, also in Uzo-Uwani Council Area.

## Area under-policed

Residents who discussed security challenges in the council area revealed that Uzo-Uwani is under-policed given its different borders with Anambra, Kogi and Benue states. They alleged that most of the crimes happen at the fringes of the border communities where the

perpetrators sneak in to carry out their dastardly acts and sneak out. They pleaded with the state government for more police presence, especially, at the border communities.

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## Attacks in other communities

Other areas which have become a source of worry to security agencies in Enugu State are Ibagwa Ani, Okpuje,



• The Chairman of Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State, Chukwudi Nnadozie (middle), bothered by security situation in the area.

communities. "Initially, we didn't know they were kidnappers, we thought they were robbers. They normally block the roads to carry out their operations. We noticed they were kidnappers after Ifeoma's case. They called the family and demanded for N2,000,000 ransom before she could be released.

"In all these things, the people involved are internal. Look at the position of Ibagwa Ani, Okpuje and Okutu. How would kidnappers operate and go without people knowing about them? We have called stakeholders meeting where we asked parents to warn their children to desist from crime. It was happening at Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Council Area and the people thought the perpetrators were Fulani herdsmen until we busted the gang that carried out the kidnappings. Two of them were from Nimbo," the source explained.

## Fmr Local government boss laments

Speaking on the security situation in those criminal flashpoints, a former chairman of Nsukka Local Government Area, Onyema Idoko, said: "Those areas have become a threat to security in Nsukka. It started when unknown gunmen killed a businessman identified as Innocent James, at Ibagwa Ani on October 1. They came again, blocked the road between Ibagwa Ani and Okpuje and kidnapped one girl. They equally killed a security guard at his duty post."

## Residents too

Some residents who bared their minds on security situation in their communities called on government and security agencies to intensify efforts in addressing the situation especially in view of the coming Yuletide.

## LG boss swings into action

It was gathered that piqued by the ugly development, the Chairman of Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area, Chukwudi Nnadozie, swung into action by mobilising all the security agencies in the area and storming suspected hideouts of the criminals. He reportedly combed all the bushes and interior settlements in the communities bordering the local government and ended up setting up vigilante groups and youths with marching orders to be at alert and forestall further kidnapping and killing of people.

Edem Ani and Okutu communities in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

A girl named Ifeoma who was said to be negotiating for goods at the border between Ibagwa Ani and Edem Ani was kidnapped in November. Though *Vanguard Metro* gathered that she has regained her freedom after the kidnappers who initially demanded for N2,000,000 ransom were settled. Also, Nicholas Ezema, a security guard at Ibagwa Ani was equally gruesomely murdered on duty by yet-to-be-identified gunmen. His decomposing body was discovered after three days of searching by community members.

## Local criminals fingered

A senior police officer in the local government alleged that internal criminal gangs were responsible for the security issues in the aforementioned