

Story OF THE Week



AMID UROMI SAGA:

Fear in nine states

...as suspected herdsman resume abductions, killings

- Residents make gripping sexual assault claims
- Police rescue three, 13 kidnapped victims of Benue Links bus rescued

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What seems like relative respite in herdsman disturbances across the country appears to have given way to despair, fear and anxiety across some states.

This is a result of the resurgence of kidnappings, rape, killings and other forms of crimes perpetrated by suspected herdsman. At the moment, no fewer than nine states are living in fear over the development, which threatens lives and property, especially in rural areas.

The affected states include Ondo, Ogun, Ekiti, Osun, Edo, Enugu, Delta, Ebonyi, and Benue.

"Our sons and husbands can no longer go to their farms. I have seen a situation where a herder inserted sticks into the private parts of our women. We can't continue like this", the leader of a group protesting the activities of suspected herdsman, who sexually assaulted women in Enugu, said.

Sunday Vanguard findings came on the heels of the killing of 16 northerners travelling through Uromi in Edo State who were mistaken for kidnappers and attacked by a mob.

Many parts of Edo were believed to have been traumatized by kidnappings and killings allegedly perpetrated by herdsman, forcing residents to raise vigilantes to redress the situation.

The slain northerners, described as hunters, were travelling from Rivers State to Kano for the recently celebrated sallah when the truck conveying them was stopped in Uromi by some

vigilantes, searched and several dane guns reportedly uncovered.

The resultant mob action saw the 'hunters' being lynched.

The jungle justice meted to the victims has drawn nationwide condemnation but some analysts say this is the result of the peoples' loss of confidence in the nation's justice system as there is no guarantee that when a suspect is caught and taken before the authorities, justice will be done.

ONDO: Killings, raping, sacking of communities

The surge in kidnapping by suspected herdsman in Ondo State, lately, has put the people on the edge.

Residents have been gripped by palpable fear following killings by suspected herdsman.

25 persons were said to have been murdered by rampaging herdsman after they invaded and sacked four communities in Akure North Local Government Area of the state and Aba Oyinbo community in the same council area.

The incident took place within two weeks without being challenged by security agencies or local security groups.

In fact, the state has been turned into a crime resort as kidnappers now operate in broad daylight.

There is anxiety after a series of abductions, especially in Oba Ile, in Akure North and also in the northern senatorial district, specifically in Akoko axis.

The number of reported cases of abductions across the hitherto peaceful state keeps increasing daily.

Suspected herdsman, recently, ambushed an 18-seater bus along Owo-Akoko Expressway while en route to Akure, the Ondo State capital.

All the passengers were abducted and later released after alleged payment of ransom.

The state security outfit codenamed Amotekun also rescued some of the victims.

Five farmers

Also, three students of Federal College of Agriculture, Oba Ile were abducted by suspected herdsman a few metres from Akure airport.

Five farmers, also, working on their farms at Ajegunle-Powerline community in Akure North of the state, were gruesomely murdered by suspected herdsman.

Barely a week after, seven travellers along the Benin/Owo/Akure highway were abducted.

A female septuagenarian farmer in Ifira Akoko, Akoko North East LGA was gang-raped by suspected herders.

She was later rescued by Amotekun personnel.

Also, a 46-year-old health worker, Akinola Oyabiye, in Eleyowo community, was shot dead by bandits while returning home after the day's work. He was said to have been shot when he reportedly wanted to escape.

His son, who accompanied him, was abducted but was released 10 days after ransom was allegedly paid.

Another ugly incident was the abduction of a farm owner, Olanrewaju Oyeleye, and his manager in Akure North.

The farm manager, who just returned to the country to invest in farming, was abducted and his captors demanded N100 million ransom.

The unending killings by herdsman led to a protest by market women in the council area after nine surveyors were abducted.

While lamenting that the state government

was unconcerned about the killings in the area, the protesting women accused the police of not making any arrest.

Corpses

Meanwhile, the corpses of five farmers allegedly murdered by suspected herdsman while working on their farms at Ajegunle-Powerline community in Akure North were taken to the Governor's Office by some protesters.

The deputy governor of the state, Dr Olayide Adelami, addressed the angry protesters who accused the governor of not being sensitive to the killings by suspected herdsman.

Reacting to the surge in criminality in Ondo, the state Commander of Amotekun, Chief Adetunji Adeleye, said that no fewer than 114 people found wandering in the forests across the state had been arrested on the suspicion that they could be criminals.

His words "Our people should not panic. We are not relenting."

"In recent times, there has been a significant influx of strangers into our state, particularly at our borders."

"Trailers have been arriving and dropping off individuals who are unfamiliar with the terrain."

"They simply penetrate the bush, leading to an increase in criminal activities around our border towns and cities."

"The governor has directed us to ensure that all miscreants and those with no legitimate business in the forests are removed."

"We have commenced a clearance operation to achieve this goal."

The state government, he said, has directed Amotekun to immediately establish security posts in communities under attack by suspected herdsman.

OYO: Upsurge in Akinyele, Akinmorin, Jobele, others

In Oyo State, there has been an upsurge in the attacks by herders in the last two months.

Due to the resurgence of the atrocities of these bandits, affected victims and other residents have been crying and pleading with security agents including hunters to increase surveillance in the forests.

Places where the herders carry out their nefarious activities in Oyo State include Akinyele Local Government, Akinmorin, Jobele and Iseyin-Ibadan road.

One of the victims, Damilare Aduloju, a farmer, who spoke on a private radio in Ibadan, said he was working on his farm when the bandits who were armed with AK 47 rifles swooped on him, tied his hands and also blindfolded him.

"They led me into the bush. When they were crossing the road at Akinmorin, they stopped articulated trucks and took over the road", Aduloju narrated.

"The vehicles waited when they saw that they were all armed."

"They beat me mercilessly and dragged me with a long rope. We trekked a long distance in the bush. During the day, they would order me to stop and hide in a bush until nightfall."

"They demanded about N50 million but my friends and family got some millions of Naira, which we gave to them before they released me."

Another victim narrated that the herders came to his residence at Jobele area at 1 a.m.

"When I heard dogs barking, I knew there was something fishy. I peeped through the window and saw about six of them trying to force the gate open", he said.

"Our dogs were barking seriously. They fired a gunshot at the dogs but they missed their target."

"By this time, we were making calls to security agents, especially Amotekun Corps. To my surprise, when the dogs heard the gunshot, they stopped barking even though they were not hit by bullets."

"I, my wife and baby were in the house. I had to tell them that they should be patient."

"I said I would open the door. I said it because they had broken all the window glasses."

"Later, I secretly opened the backyard door and jumped over the fence and escaped."

"I hid myself somewhere close and I saw the kidnappers. They were six in number."

"After escaping, I thought about my wife and baby. I had to surrender to the kidnappers. One was trying to speak adulterated Yoruba and the other was speaking pidgin."

"They tied me up and allowed my wife and baby to go."

"We trekked from minutes past 1am to 4am. They gave me water from a stream and fed me with fruits."

"But, as God would do it, we were trying to cross from a cassava farm into a thick bush when we heard some voices."

"All the five kidnappers moving behind me suddenly overtook me and started running."

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"When I knew it was Amotekun Corps and other security agents, I raised my two hands, shouting that I was the one they kidnapped so that the security agents would not mistake me for bandits.

Hunters

"I thank God for the security agents including our local hunters who started combing the bushes around searching for me. "It happened about two weeks ago and I'm yet to get over the shock."

Speaking with Sunday Vanguard, the President of Soludero Hunters Association, Oba Nureni Akintola, urged state governors in the South-West to empower hunters so that they can fish out the kidnappers hibernating in our forests.

"We are hunters and we are familiar with all the nooks and crannies of the forests around us. The governors should mobilise us. We can enter the bushes and smoke the bandits out," he added.

OGUN: Havoc on farmlands

Suspected herdsmen have returned to some communities in Ogun State, wreaking havoc on farmlands.

Sunday Vanguard reliably gathered that the herdsmen with an estimated 500 cows invaded farmland in Obafemi/Owode Local Government, Ogun State, destroying over 30 acres of cassava farms.

It was also gathered that a yet-to-be-identified group of herdsmen with a large number of cows allegedly invaded and destroyed a five-hectare rice plantation belonging to one Okegbenro Julius, in Ilupeju Ibaro Village, Abeokuta.

Police spokesperson, Omolola Odutola, said the owner of the farm, Julius, reported the incident to the police.

She stated that the herdsmen, who had caused extensive destruction to crops, fled the scene leaving one of their cows behind.

One of the affected cassava farmers, Adeogun Olamide, said he was shocked to discover that the entire 4.5 acres of cassava farm were destroyed by the herdsmen.

Another farmer, Ismail Ajanaku, said: "Over 30 acres of cassava farms had been destroyed by herdsmen. Herdsmen invaded my cassava farm and destroyed everything."

"They also invaded adjoining farms, uprooted the cassava and fed their cows. This impunity poses danger to farmers and farming activities in the South-West."

In a related development, a group of women from Araromi-Ibese community in Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State appealed to the state government, security agencies and traditional rulers in the state to take drastic measures to curtail the excesses of herdsmen, who invaded their community and destroyed farmlands.

The women expressed their frustration and fear over the constant attacks and harassment they face at the hands of herdsmen.

One of the protesters narrated how her daughter gave birth in the bush while running for her dear life.

Pregnant woman

She said: "We no longer feel safe in our community anymore."

"In the process that my daughter and I were running for our dear lives, she fell into labour at 1 am and gave birth in the bush."

Reacting to the development, a member of the House of Representatives, representing Yewa North/Imeko-Afon Federal Constituency of Ogun State, Gboyega Isiaka, described the invasion of the community by herdsmen as a tragic event.

Isiaka, in a statement issued by his media aide, Femi Peters, lamented the distress caused to women farmers in the community.

The lawmaker reaffirmed his commitment to protecting his constituents amid the recurring threat of herdsmen attacks.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Dr. Olusola Akinbode, has constituted a 'Conflict Resolution Committee' with a charge to proffer a lasting solution to the perennial herdsmen and farmers conflict in the area.

Reacting to the invasion of farmlands, spokesperson for the state Police Command, Omolola Odutola, said the Commissioner of Police, Lanre Ogunlowo, has taken decisive action to prevent any escalation of conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Ogun.

Odutola said: "The Police will continue to engage all parties involved to foster



understanding and prevent conflicts.

"Ogun State Police Command remains vigilant and dedicated to upholding law and order, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts between farmers and herdsmen to maintain peaceful coexistence in the community."

EKITI: Working to stop attacks

Ekiti is one of the South-West states where attacks by suspected herdsmen seem to be a major source of concern, especially in border communities with Kogi State.

Killings, abductions, rape and destruction of farmlands are common crimes associated with herdsmen in the rural areas.

However, it appears the strategy put in place by the security team led by the Special Adviser to the Governor on Security, Brigadier General Ebenezer Ogundana, is working.

Explaining the secret of their success to Sunday Vanguard, Ogundana, said: "I think by the grace of God, the kind of synergy among the security agencies in Ekiti has helped us a lot."

"We have a platform where we review security arrangements in the state weekly."

"Before, it was monthly, but since we started having reports that Boko Haram (members) are being dislodged in the North-East and North-West, we now meet frequently."

"Our non-state actors, the Amotekun Corps, Peace Corps, Agro Marshal and Anti-grazing Marshal have been giving us information."

"Officers of these agencies are living in the communities at the grassroots. The

It was learnt that the recent lynching of some travellers in Uromi was connected to years of kidnappings, killings and destruction of farmlands by suspected herdsmen

information is helpful. The proactiveness of security agencies is making the bandits relocate from our state.

"We don't want to sleep and say Ekiti is safe while things are happening around our borders, like what is happening in Ondo State."

"We sympathize with Ondo State. We are already working with Ondo State on how we can synergise efforts."

OSUN: Bloody clashes

Despite the existence of anti-open grazing

law in Osun State, farmlands and farmers are under attack by nomadic herdsmen.

Koka, an agrarian community located off Osogbo/Ibokun Road, was identified as a hotbed of violence between farmers and herdsmen, who often engage in bloody clashes over the destruction of plantations by cows while grazing.

BENUE: Regular attacks

Attacks by suspected herdsmen are still issues of concern across many LGAs in Benue State. To date, the state remains the hotbed of criminal activities perpetrated by suspected herdsmen, who kill and destroy with impunity.

Recently, two soldiers and three others were killed in an ambush by armed herdsmen in Anyase community near Jato Aka in Kwande Local Government Area, LGA, of Benue State.

Several communities around Jato Aka have repeatedly come under attack by armed herdsmen who sacked several of the communities, forcing the locals to flee to the centre of Jato Aka for safety.

It was gathered that three locals were also killed during the attack.

Lamenting the development, President General of Mzough U Tiv, MUT, Worldwide and Chairman, Leaders of Benue Socio-Cultural Organisations, Chief Iorbee Ihagh, who hails from Kwande LGA, said: "Five persons made up of two soldiers and three natives were killed in the attack."

Ihagh, who appealed to Governor Hyacinth Alia to intensify efforts at improving the security in the state, also urged Benue people to always defend themselves.

1804 traditional way

He charged the people to "re-enact the 1804 traditional way of confronting the invaders with poisonous arrows to defend themselves."

EDO: Anger, fear in communities

At the inception of the Sen. Monday Okpebholo administration on November 12, 2024, one of the first things he did was to strengthen the anti-kidnapping and anti-cultism laws.

Regardless of that, many communities across the three senatorial districts are under attack by suspected herdsmen, who attack farmers and carry out abductions.

In the last month, not less than eight people have died as a result of herdsmen attacks in the state.

Among the dead was a seminarian, Peter Andrew, who was said to have been shot dead by his abductors.

The hot spots of such activities include Edo North, Akoko-Edo, Okpeke in Etsako East Local Government Area, and Awain in Etsako Central, Erah in Owan East, Egor, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East, Esan West, Etsako Central, Etsako East, Orhionwon, Ovia North East and Ovia West.

Findings revealed that disturbances by herdsmen have become alarming in Edo State. It was learnt that the recent lynching of some travellers in Uromi was connected to years of kidnappings, killings and destruction of farmlands by suspected herdsmen.

Some residents of the area, who pleaded anonymity, said many farmers in the agrarian community no longer go to farms because of herdsmen.

They noted that the herdsmen kill, maim and rape their women, noting that they act as if they are above the law.

One of the natives said: "Our people have suffered a lot in the hands of these cattle rears. "We were abandoned by both state and federal governments. We are no longer safe in Esanland."

Also speaking, another resident said: "People are blaming us; yes, the people who carried out the act may not have acted well."

"But the truth is that we are under siege. Herdsmen have reduced us to a bunch of conquered people."

"They rape our wives and mothers and kill our men. The police can't do anything. The herdsmen are on the loose in Edo State."

"Go to Ovia, Okada area, and see what they are doing. They murder people in their sleep. "Videos of such incidents abound, and government is doing nothing."

"Last month, there were protests in some communities between our border with Agbor. "The rural dwellers protested against killings by herdsmen."

"The highway was blocked. So Edo State governor should stop playing to the gallery and save us."

Insecurity

To underscore the frustrations the resurgence of attacks by herdsmen has caused in the state, hundreds of people under the auspices of Agenebode Youths Forum took over the streets of Agenebode, the headquarters of Etsako East, and protested.

Speaking, leader of the group, Samik Akhor, said: "We are out today on a peaceful process to say no to what has been happening here. Kidnappings, killings, and raping are common here. "They are stopping our farmers from going to their farmlands. Our sons and daughters abroad can no longer come home because of insecurity."

A few weeks ago, some communities on the Benin/Asaba highway barricaded the road, protesting attacks and destruction of their farmlands by suspected herdsmen.

They accused government of not doing enough to safeguard their lives and property.

ENUGU: 'We are being raped, beaten'

Despite security measures put in place by Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State to protect lives and property, suspected herdsmen still constitute a threat to rural dwellers.

Farmers and communities are still being attacked by the herdsmen, who occupy the forests.

In some cases, joint community efforts put in place by various communities have failed to address the situation.

Eha-Amufu in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State is one of the flashpoints.

Recently, more than 1,000 women protested incessant attacks on farmers by suspected herdsmen.

The women from seven autonomous communities blocked the two-kilometre, 1.2-mile stretch of the Nkalagu-Afor Federal highway in Eha-Amufu, Isi-Uzo LGA.

Leader of the protest, Angela Ogenyi, said hundreds of women had been killed or displaced from their farms and homes since 2021.

"We are being raped, beaten, and mutilated by criminal herdsmen for stopping their cattle from eating our crops", Ogenyi said.

"Our sons and husbands can no longer go to their farms. I have seen a situation where a herder inserted sticks into the private parts of our women. We can't continue like this."

EBONYI: Sustained attacks

Some communities in Ebonyi State live in fear following sustained attacks by herdsmen who destroy their farmlands, rape and abduct people.

This is despite efforts by security agencies to address the situation.

Recently, suspected herdsmen reportedly invaded Amegu Nkalaha community in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State and killed scores of residents, with many others escaping with various degrees of injuries.

A member of the community and former Ebonyi State University chapter of Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASUU, Prof Ndubisu Idenyi, who confirmed the attack, said: "My village, Amegu Nkalaha, was attacked today by herdsmen."

"Many have been killed and houses razed. What a black Sunday!"

Idenyi said the herdsmen attacked the community, killing and injuring an unconfirmed number of people.