



NEWS SITUATION TRACKING – NIGERIA

185 RITUAL-RELATED DEATHS RECORDED BETWEEN JANUARY 2021 TO JANUARY 2022 IN NIGERIA Vol. 15

Location : NIGERIA

Issue: 185 ritual-related deaths including 43 females and 30 children².

Date: February 13, 2022

COMMUNITY PROFILING

CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

INCIDENT PROFILING

Population: Nigeria currently has a population of over 214,237,248.³

Basic Demography and Geography of Hotspots:

Nigeria shares land borders with the Republic of Benin, Chad, Cameroun, Niger and the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean. The country has 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). There are 774 Local Government Areas (LGA's) divided across six (6) geo-political zones.

Ethnicity: Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups with Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba⁴ in the majority.

Direct Actors:

Community residents including youths and traditional priests.

Affected Persons:

Community residents including minors.

Interested Actors:

Federal and State Governments, Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Military, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Service (DSS), National Film Video Censors Board, Local Security Outfits including Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), Federal and State Assemblies, National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), Traditional Religion Worshippers Association, Muslim Associations, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Nigerian

The trend of ritual killings in Nigeria has generated increased public conversations and condemnation, particularly regarding the rationale behind the criminal act. Aside from the practice of cannibalism by some communities and occultic groups, the phenomenon of ritual killings also termed 'human sacrifice' have been practiced for centuries by some cultures as part of their belief systems. Further analysis into ritually motivated killings has shown that the practice is thought to lead to transformation, wealth, protection as well as for the appeasement of traditional deities⁵ or as a retainer sacrifice wherein a monarch's servants are killed for them to continue to serve their master in the next life⁶, amongst others.

Between January 5 and December 28, 2021, the statistics of ritual-related deaths generated from Nigeria Watch and WANEP's National Early Warning System (NEWS) has shown a total of over 168 deaths in 80 incidents across 20 States in Nigeria⁷. Out of the total recorded deaths (168) in the reviewed period, 29 were females and 30 children⁸. In most cases, the identity of the gender is unknown due to severe mutilation of the victims.

Another aspect found in connection with ritual killings in Nigeria is the evidence of acts not necessarily to bring about the death of victims, as witnessed in cases of mutilation of victims and rape of females and minors by the perpetrators.

The rising cases of ritual-related killings motivated by the quest for wealth has again gained widespread media attention considering the involvement of teenagers as perpetrators and accomplices. On January 29, 2022, four (4) teenagers between the ages of 17 and 19 years-old were arrested at Oke Aregba Community in Abeokuta in Ogun State for beheading a 20-year-old female for money ritual with her head burnt to ashes⁹. In a related development, three (3) teenagers aged 15-years-old were apprehended on January 3, 2022, for the attempted ritual murder of a 13-year-old female victim at Sagbama LGA of Bayelsa State¹⁰. The victims' fingers were cut off in the process for ritual purposes.

Also, in the case of Zamfara State, three (3) persons between the ages of 14 and 20 years-old were contracted by a 57-year-old male to source for human parts in exchange for money, which

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?xsrf=ALeKk024WZQdV9kevtu8o3POhTqEE6kSdQ:1602836211476&source=univ&tbm=isch&q=map+of+Nigeria&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjQ-5GY1rjsAhURCWMbHXBQDDQ7A16BAGBEHE&biw=899&bih=578>

² www.wanep.org/news, <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?urlaction=evtListe>

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/>

⁴ <https://photos.state.gov/libraries/nigeria/487468/pdfs/Nigeria%203overview%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/ritual-killings>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sacrifice

⁷ <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?urlaction=evtListe>; www.wanep.org/news

⁸ www.wanep.org/news

⁹ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/money-ritual-in-nigerias-zazoo-republic/>; <https://tribuneonline.com/i-had-sex-with-sofiat-before-we-cut-off-her-head-removed-flesh-from-her-thigh-for-money-ritual-lover-boy/>

¹⁰ <https://punchng.com/three-15-year-old-suspected-bayelsa-cultists-hypnotise-teenage-girl-attempt-ritual-killing/>

Tourism Corporation.

Development

resulted in the killing of a 9-year-old boy with his body parts severed and sold in Gusau LGA on December 12, 2021.¹¹

The current security dynamics is further compounded by the activities of merchants who trade in human body parts to unsuspected individuals for rituals and consumption. Instance of this was recorded in the Zamfara State, where the arrested suspect confessed to eating human body parts. The activities of these merchants have been partly attributed to the surge in kidnapping and missing persons across the country. According to the statistics generated by the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) on missing persons, an estimated 24,000 reported cases of missing persons were recorded in Nigeria resulting from armed conflicts and other forms of violence as of February 2, 2022¹².

On January 22, 2022, two (2) male suspects were arrested in Osun State with confessional statements of killing over 70 females in the past with their body parts harvested for sale¹³. Several other suspects have also been arrested in Osun, Lagos, Oyo and Ondo States in the South-West Region of Nigeria¹⁴ with human body parts, while other suspects claimed to have exhumed the human organs from graves in cemeteries as recorded in the WANEP NEWS. Similar incidents of unknown identities were recorded in Cross River State where 15 beheaded bodies (including males and females) were discovered at Five Miles area on April 13, 2021. Also, on February 9, 2022, security operatives uncovered decomposing human body parts in an uncompleted building along Oyo-Ilorra Road in Oyo West LGA of Oyo State¹⁵.

In addition to the statistics generated above on ritual-related deaths, the WANEP NEWS recorded 11 incidents of attempted and actual murders for ritual purposes in Nigeria in January 2022. In the reviewed month, 17 people (including 14 females) were reportedly killed in Plateau, Delta, Lagos, Anambra, Cross River, Ondo, Osun and Ogun States, while 3 others including 2 children and one female sustained injury in Bayelsa and Anambra States.

Current Interventions:

To mitigate the recurring incidences of ritual killings, the House of Representatives on February 9, 2022, sought declaration for national emergency on ritual killings in the country by the Federal Government¹⁶. The House of Representatives has also requested that the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Usman Baba Alkali, take urgent steps to increase surveillance and intelligence gathering with a view of apprehending and prosecuting the perpetrators of the crime¹⁷.

Other actions taken at the State-level to mitigate the crime include efforts by the Ogun State Police Command to apprehend the social media user who posted a get-rich-quick video on social media platform 'Facebook', from where four (4) Ogun teenagers learnt money ritual by using human body parts¹⁸.

RISK ANALYSIS:

- While kidnapping for ransom has become a trend in vulnerable communities in the country, there is a gradual shift to kidnapping for ritual purposes. This emerging trend in kidnapping is also motivated by financial gains, where kidnapping syndicates trade the mutilated bodies of their victims. The witness account of kidnapped victims evident in Rivers State¹⁹ has further shown that most kidnapped victims who are unable to pay the negotiated ransom are murdered with their body parts sold. This inhumane practice continues to have a cascading effect on the public safety of citizens regardless of age, social class or economic status.
- The dimension of young people becoming part of the violence in a bid to amass wealth reveals the issue of youth unemployment and associated social pressures on young people in communities. Apart from the get-rich-quick-syndrome amongst young people, the alleged involvement of fake clerics, rich and influential personalities in ritual killings for alleged spiritual defence, to sustain affluence and/or remain in positions of political power were evident. These justifications were corroborated by arrested suspects who accused politicians, government officials and wealthy Nigerians as sponsors in the

¹¹ <https://www.channelstv.com/2022/01/14/police-arrest-killers-suspected-cannibal-for-eating-selling-human-parts-in-zamfara/>

¹² <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/24000-nigerians-missingsays-intl-red-cross/>; <https://www.africanews.com/2021/08/30/nearly-45-000-people-currently-declared-missing-across-africa-icrc/>

¹³ <https://www.jungle-journalist.com/we-have-killed-over-70-girls-in-hotels-for-rituals-ritualists-arrested-in-osun-hotel/>

¹⁴ <https://dailytrust.com/four-ritual-killing-cases-that-shocked-nigerians-in-2022>

¹⁵ <https://punchng.com/human-parts-uncovered-in-oyo-building-police-arrest-suspects/>

¹⁶ <https://dailypost.ng/2022/02/09/rep-ask-buhari-to-declare-national-emergency-over-ritual-killings/>

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ <https://punchng.com/sofiat-ogun-police-begin-search-for-facebook-user-who-posted-money-ritual-video/>

¹⁹ <https://www.lindaikojisblog.com/2021/5/victim-narrates-how-she-was-kidnapped-by-human-parts-dealers-after-entering-a-mini-bus-in-port-harcourt-video-2.html>

crime²⁰. In this regard, such influential persons may likely use their power to undermine efforts of law enforcement agencies to curb the crime and protect the safety of vulnerable people.

- Closely related to the above, is youth bulge and the increasing rate of unemployment in the country which poses a significant risk and heightens the vulnerability of idle youths to seek other illicit alternatives to sustain their livelihoods. This socio-economic gap is likely to accentuate the cycle of ritual killing in the country. Moreover, the prevailing economic hardship and poverty in the country remains an indicator in ritual-related killings and is increasingly declining social and moral values in the family and society at large. Instances were recorded in Lagos and Ogun States where parents colluded with their children to engage in ritual killing for wealth²¹. This decline in societal values has ripple effects on social cohesion in the country.
- Despite the impact of social media globally, the growing criminal dependence on such platforms to coordinate violent crimes, recruit new members and lure victims remains an existential threat. The vulnerability of young people to harmful contents on social media also shapes their behavioural pattern. Unguarded exposure to social media content and poor parental supervision during online activities is facilitating young people's vulnerability to criminality. In Ogun State, the arrested teenagers who beheaded their female victim as highlighted above, made reference to their acquisition of the knowledge of money ritual through Facebook.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Federal and State Governments should continue to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies in intelligence gathering and surveillance to prevent the ongoing criminality leading to the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators. This should be bolstered with enhancing the effectiveness of community security systems in crime prevention and detection.
- The Federal Government should provide adequate funds to the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to enhance its ethical and attitudinal re-orientation of the civil populace with respect to the sanctity of life. This should be implemented in collaboration with the National Film and Video Censors Board, educational institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), traditional and religious organisations as well as the media in the dissemination of societal values.
- The Federal and State Governments should continue to create and increase sustainable employment and skill acquisition opportunities for young people including out-of-school youths in sustainable income generation ventures to reduce poverty and mitigate their vulnerability to perpetration of crimes.

²⁰ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/05/the-scourge-of-ritual-killings-in-nigeria/>

²¹ <https://punchng.com/anambra-council-boss-monarch-lament-ritual-killings-want-bloody-deity-destroyed/>