

THE BRACELET

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Hot, hopeless and desolate were the best words to describe the village. A fifty kilometre bumpy drive from Endebess town along a rough road and further two kilometers through a shrubbery from a junction that led to a clearing where a row of mud walled and iron roofed structures lined what looked like a road into a shopping centre.

A good number of idle men were sitting together enjoying a draft game, sipping mugs of black tea and telling stories of a time when wads of notes in their pockets allowed them to enjoy finer things of life. That was a time when the shopping centre bustled with life, the time when sleek vehicles lined the dusty streets.

Everyone was dismayed when the Forest Department banned cultivation of crops and firewood from trees that had fallen down. The residents never knew that many years down the line, after voting in the politician who gave them the land near the forest and promised them to be cultivating in the forest while they didn't consider that the residents

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To make the situation bizarre, a game ranger had gone on to shoot a woman who was found in the forest collecting herbal medicine. The act had been a public outcry from the villagers but their pleas fell on deaf ears because no action had been taken against the ranger and worse still, the killings were still being committed on innocent children who happened to be in the forest looking for firewood.

The program to include them in the conservation of forest resources had also hit a snag after the residents were told they were on illegally acquired land. No one was there to precipitate their grievances. Then there was marauding elephants which were terrorizing them, placing them under day and night curfew. The jumbos were destroying all the crops and leaving a few who dared to fight them dead. The Forester had then assembled people and assured them of safety and compensation for the deceased's immediate families.

One year down the line, nothing had been done. This had forced angry residents to pelt stones to a forest officer who had stopped in a nearby bar to get to get a tin of *busaa*, local brew, killing him