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## EXPLORING THE LINKS BETWEEN RURAL BANDITRY AND DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES IN NORTH CENTRE NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Nigeria's rural communities face formidable foe: rural banditry. This widespread phenomenon, characterized by armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and violent attacks, not only wreaks havoc on lives and livelihoods but also poses a significant obstacle to the nation's developmental aspirations. This paper aims to examine the relationship between rural banditry and developmental challenges in north-centre region. The region has been plagued by rampant criminal activities, including banditry, which has significantly undermined socio-economic development efforts. By investigating the underlying causes and consequences of rural banditry, this paper intends to shed light on the complex dynamics involved and suggest potential strategies for sustainable development and conflict resolution. The paper analyse the phenomenon of banditry in north-centre Nigeria using frustration and aggression theories. The method of this study is qualitative and descriptive. Data were generated through secondary sources extracted from library and official sources including books, journals, magazines and online materials. The paper recommend that federal and state government must show high level of commitment to war against banditry by embracing advance security technology and putting in place functional security system, like community policing, proper utilisation of vigilantes who understand the terrain more than the security agent to complement the operation of other security agencies in the state.*

**Keywords:** *Banditry, kidnapping and development.*

### Introduction

The pervasive banditry and its associated threats to security, which have enveloped the North-centre region of Nigeria, particularly, Niger, Nasarawa, Kwara, Benue and Plateau States, have become a worrisome national security issue of public concern. It is

a well-known fact that states around the globe are currently battling with the issue of insecurity and therefore, insecurity is viewed as a global phenomenon. Nigeria as a state is not an exception to the challenges of kidnapping, banditry and terrorism. Rural banditry has remained a persistent issue in North-centre for decades particularly in States such as, Nasarawa, Kwara, Benue, Kaduna, Niger, Nassarawa, and Plateau where communities are constantly attacked by armed bandits and a lot of people and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. This has led to political instability, migration and problem of food security posing significant challenges to the regions development and stability.

### **Concept Clarifications**

#### **Banditry**

Conceptually, banditry is a derivative of the word 'bandit' meaning an unlawful armed group terrorising people and confiscating their properties. It is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups who use small and light weapons to attack people. In this regard, banditry could mean set-up criminal activities deliberately designed and carried out for personal gains (Rufa'I, 2021). Due to the complex nature of bandits' activities, Egwu (2016) in a restricted manner, described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle. In the same vein, banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen (Uche and Iwuamadi, 2018). In his perception, Shalangwa (2013) regards banditry as the practice of raiding and attacking people by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defence, especially in semi-organised groups for the purpose of overpowering the victims and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals. Such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified and detected.

However, while the term banditry is connected to 'rural', it implies a group of rural outlawed involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnapping and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorising and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including, in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people (Abdullahi,

2019). In another sense, banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling and village or market raids. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill (Okoli and Okpaleke 2014). Thus banditry, in the context of this paper, is defined as the totality of incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids as well as highway raids which involve the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape, kidnap or kill the victim.

### **Kidnapping**

The concept of kidnapping is difficult to define with precision, because it varies from state to state and from country to country. Kidnapping is defined as the forceful seizure, taking along and unlawful detention of a person against his or her will. Kidnapping is a dreadful problem that disrupts the tranquillity and harmonious cohesion of a state and it has spread to different parts of Nigeria as a result of poverty and unemployment (Abdulkarim, 2017). Kidnapping for ransom has taken centre stage in the increased rate of crime in the country (Asuquo, 2017). Kidnapping is also perceived as unlawful seizure and detention of a person by force against their will or taking somebody away illegally and keeping them as a prisoner, especially in order to take money or something else for returning them.

### **Development**

Scholars have proffered different definitions of development. According to Rodney (1974) who views development in human society as a many-sided process, at the level of individual, it implies increase in skill and capacity; greater freedom. This reveals that development is a process and system by which a government manages the resources of a society to address socioeconomic and political challenges. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, development is seen as the way and manner in which power is exercised in managing the socioeconomic and political resources of a country for the proper wellbeing of the state. According to Burkey (1993), economic and political development translates into social development. As a broad concept, development has been extensively explored with a view to achieve economic growth and social development. Economic growth may bring material gain to the people, but development is more about enrichment of the lives of all in the society (Edward, 1993). Todaro and Smith (2006) also agree with Edwards that if a development strategy results into economic growth and political stability without a significant change in the quality of life of the masses, it means something is wrong.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted Frustration-Aggression Theory as its analytical framework. Frustration-Aggression theory was propounded by Fereabend and Feirauben (1972). The major assumption of the model is that aggression is always a consequence of frustration, and that the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. However, a significant modification came from Berkowitz (1989) who argued that aggression can be driven by inherent personal benefits to the aggressor and not necessarily by past wrongdoings and that people are more akin to attack when they discover that they are wilfully sabotaged or denied what is legitimately theirs than when the interference is an accidental occurrence. He surmised that frustrations are aversive events and generate aggressive inclinations only to the extent that they produce negative effect (Berkowitz, 1989). Thus, the high rate of bandit attacks across the country, most especially in North centre, is largely driven by frustration and the struggle to generate economic assets. The alarming acts of banditry such as cattle rustling, kidnapping, physical attacks and encroachment on farms are produced by frustration (Uche and Iwuamadi, 2018).

Furthermore, Fereabend and Feirauben (1972) opine that aggression is as a result of frustration which results from an individual's inability to attain their goals. Accordingly, banditry is the product of aggressive behaviour which results from issues such as poverty and unemployment, among others (Maureen and Blessing, 2018; and Adegoke, 2019). Applying this to the study, banditry in the country is caused by the need of the dissatisfied people in the society to get out of poverty and climb up the ladder in socioeconomic considerations. That is why the phenomenon of ransom taking is prevalent in banditry operations.

### **Causes of Banditry in North Centre**

Several factors have been adduced as the driving forces of banditry in Nigeria and most especially in the north-centre region of the country. Drivers of banditry in north-centre Nigeria consist in some socio-existential conditions that characterise the interior as well as the frontiers of the region. Prominent among these conditions are the scarcely governed spaces- the hinterlands, forestlands and borderlines of the region. There is no gain saying the fact that weak security system complements the alarming rate of banditry in the north-centre region of Nigeria. This could have possibly been caused by the inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013). This is in addition to poor

attitudinal and behavioural disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring. Even when these exist, some personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and are easily prejudiced by their personal interest to serve their people, rather than the nation (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013). Thus, instead of being national watch dogs and defending national interest and values, and protecting people from being harmed by criminals, they soon become saboteurs of government efforts, by supporting and fuelling insecurity through either leaking vital security information or conniving with criminals to acquire weapons or to escape the long arm of the law (Offem & Ichoku, 2015).

The north-centre hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed rural settlements, separated by rangelands and farmlands that are susceptible to violent contestations (Gaye, 2018). They are also interspersed by diverse forested landscapes, some of which are dotted by wetlands, rocks and caves. Apart from being separated from each other, they are equally far separated from the centres of governance at the local and state levels. The forestlands of the region are vast, rugged and hazardous. Most importantly, they are grossly under-policed to the point that makes them conducive for all forms of jungle criminality. Related to the above are the following causes of Banditry:

### **Unemployment**

Unemployment in Nigeria has its attendant social, economic, political and psychological consequences. One of its social consequences is that it encourages the development of street youths and urban urchins (“area boys”) that grow up in a culture of criminal behaviour, rising crime wave are consequences of this phenomenon. Furthermore, Kilishi, Mobolaji, Usman, Yakubu and Yaru (2014 as cited in Abdulkabir, 2017) canvassed that the rising wave of crime in Nigeria has been blamed on the increasing level of unemployment. Thus, the idle youths tend to engage in illegal activities in order to meet up with contemporary trends. Suffice to say that the youths easily get enticed to riches as a result of the prevailing “get rich quick syndrome” that pervade the country. Hence, they tend to do whatever it takes to get rich quick. Therefore, the Nigeria's high rate of unemployment, especially the increasing rate of youth's unemployment is what majorly prompts the jobless youths in the country to resort to violent crime like banditry (Adagba, Ugwu, & Eme, 2012; Epron, 2019).

### **Poverty**

Many rural areas in North-centre suffer from high level of poverty and lack of economic opportunities. It has been contended that economic deprivation influences people to resort to illegal means of meeting their daily needs. It was discovered that because of the attractive benefits accruing from banditry activity, most people, especially the youths tend to join the bandit gangs in the North-centre of Nigeria (Epron, 2014; Adegoke, 2019). The poor in every society remain not only politically volatile and seedbeds for urban socio-political intrigues when not catered for, their utter neglect creates social imbalance and can provide ripe conditions for the outbreak of urban social disorder which may find expression in the form of urban riots, criminal gangs, banditry and other clandestine activities as a means of survival.

### **Illiteracy**

Education is not only a social service but a transformative act which is fundamental to social and personal development because when there is access to education, there is an increase in social and political awareness and heightened aspirations, self-assurance and self-assertiveness. Many rural communities in Northern Nigeria lack access to basic social services such as education. This contributes to a sense of marginalization and alienation leading some individuals to turn to banditry as a way to assert power and make a living.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflicts**

By ethno-religious conflict, we mean a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. In Northern Nigeria is a region marked by deep-seated ethnic and religious tension, which can fuel conflict and violence. Banditry in this context can be seen as a way for certain groups to assert their power and dominance over others.

### **Indigene/Settler Conflicts**

Indigene-settler problem has been a recurring issue in Northern Nigeria threatening the peace and tranquility of the region. Indigene-ship is a weapon commonly employed by various groups to exclude other Nigerians from certain privileges due to scarcity of resources in the society. For this reason any indigeneity claim by any community is not just a claim for territorial control per se almost invariably, it is an issue of political economy i.e. it is usually inspired and fired by a natural struggle for access to, or control

over, economic activities or means of survival in a given locality. It is sad to note that there seem to be no restriction to the level of contribution settlers“ offer in their places of residence in form of payment of taxes, rendering of services and so forth, it is only when such settlers are to enjoy some opportunities and privileges that segregation and discrimination sets in, such individuals treated as settlers are psychologically upset; they do not fill belonging and are emotionally unsteady to render hearty services to the host community, As a result of these, conflicts, banditry arise in the country.

### **Farmers/Herdsman Feud**

Conflicts between nomads and the settled farmers goes back to the earliest written records and are mythically symbolized in many cultures. Such conflicts existed since the beginnings of agriculture and increased or decreased in intensity and frequency depending on economic, environmental and other factors. For example, increases in the herd sizes, due to improved conditions of the cattle, compelled the pastoralists to seek for more pastures beyond their limited range. Nigeria, however, presents a very special situation quite unlike other African countries, for two reasons; most notably the ambiguous prestige of pastoral culture particular to Fulani pastoralists but also because of its large and comparatively wealth population. The cattle-based pastoralism of the Fulani has thus been the most significant focus of herder/farmer conflict in Nigeria.

### **Proliferation of small arms and light weapons:**

Another driving factor of banditry in north-centre Nigeria worthy of mentioning is the issue of arms proliferation. There has been an incremental influx of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) into Nigeria from the Sahel since the fall of Ghadaffi“s regime in Libya (Gaye, 2018). These arms and weapons end up in the hands of non-state actors like terrorists, militants and bandits, who use them to terrorize individuals and communities. The easy availability of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria has contributed to the rise of banditry in rural areas. Criminal gangs are able to easily acquire weapons, who use them to terrorise individuals and communities

### **Implication of Banditry on the Development of North-Centre**

Banditry is destructive to the economic, political and social development of North–centre region. As a result of bandit attacks, the state of the economy has been adversely affected and Livelihoods destroyed. Farmers are afraid to tend their fields, and herders lose cattle to rustling. This drastically reduces agricultural output, a mainstay of the economy and resulted into decrease income, food insecurity and high-cost of foodstuff. Some places known over the years as major market for cattle and farm

produce have been closed thus affecting cattle trading while insecurity on roads discourages trade and movement of goods, hindering commerce and local markets. Similarly, the unstable environment discourages investment and destruction of infrastructure like roads bridges, irrigation and businesses which bring about job creation crucial for development.

Banditry has created a Humanitarian Crisis in the North centre. Violence from bandit attacks leads to fatalities and injuries, causing immense emotional and social trauma. The Fear of attacks and kidnappings has lead to social disruption and loss of community cohesion. Most rural dwellers are driven from their homes, creating internal refugees who depend on aid for survival. The effects of this banditry is not only limited to lives and animals as it also affected the quality of leadership in the state. An acceptable and responsible leadership is not only concerned about the development of the present generation, but to act in a responsible manner so that the future of generations yet unborn will not be compromised (Edobor, 2015). It is important to note that good leadership is the key element to overcoming many challenges that frustrate development because cooperation is required to achieve meaningful development. Banditry leads to weakening of governance and state authority, particularly in remote areas, which can results to erosion of trust in authorities and institutions responsible for security and well being. The act of banditry is responsible for the violation of the fundamental human rights in the zone. Cases of rape and unending harassment of women is also one of the consequences of bandits' activities on good governance.

The acts of bandits also limited the chances of many children from accessing basic primary and secondary education as majority of educational structures are either damaged or destroyed. More children were forced out of their school due to the declaration made by the Ministry of Education. Also, schools in Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger, among others were closed and this affected their fundamental human rights.

### **Efforts of Government in the Fight against Banditry in North-centre**

The Federal Government through its various security agencies has involved military and paramilitary agencies to bring an end to banditry, kidnapping and other criminal activities in the state by launching series of security operations under different codes in tackling the members to end the insecurity in North-centre and other states in Nigeria. Five security operations are counter and pre-emptive being undertaken by the Nigeria Police, the Army and the Air force to deal with banditry and kidnapping. State

government in the region also engaged in effective inter-agency collaboration with visit to high profile stakeholders like the Chief of Army Staff, Air Staff, Inspector of Police and Commandant General of National Security and Civil Defence Corps to solicit for their commitment towards the eradication of banditry in the region. The government in the affected states also put measures to ensure the efficiency of the vigilantes in the affected local governments by providing them with more than motorcycles, Hilux vehicles due to poor road networks (Binniyat, 2015).

The state government in the regions has been supporting the various security operatives financially and with logistics to be able to carry out their duties effectively; punitive actions were always taken by state governors in the region against village heads or Divisional Police Officers (DPO) who were alleged to be conniving with the bandits. This is in addition to promulgating laws that stipulate death penalty for those involved in kidnapping and cattle rustling in the state.

However, all these efforts failed because of corruption, lack of commitment from the side of the government and lack of proper coordination between various security agencies such as the police, army and air force that are involved in the fight against the bandits.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Rural banditry in the North centre region poses significant development challenges that require a comprehensive and multi-dimensional response. Combating banditry requires a multi-pronged approach with improved security presence and intelligence gathering. Investigating and addressing the underlying causes of banditry, such as poverty, unemployment, and competition for resources, is crucial for long-term solutions. The study concluded that rural banditry has affected rural economy and subjected the masses to social penury. A lot of energy, time and resources have been invested by both state and non-state actors in the fight against rural banditry. Unfortunately, the more the efforts, the stronger they become, due to the involvement of multiple “invisible factors and actors” benefiting from the conflict. It is therefore recommended that there should be adequate supply and installation of modern technology as well as increased surveillance while border security personnel are urgently required to check trans-border crimes which are part of the igniting factors accentuating banditry in Nigeria.

Government at all levels should put in place functional security system like community policing, with sophisticated weapons to supplement the operations of other security

agencies. There should be proper orientation of Nigerian security personnel on the need to maintain peace and order in collaboration with the local vigilante as the local vigilante understands the terrain of their communities and environment better than the newly posted police officers from other states.

Nigerian government should strategise to create meaningful employment for the youths trapped in the phenomenon through the creation of programmes which aim at addressing the menace of poverty in North-centre in particular and the country in general. State government in the affected regions should sustain military efforts in prosecuting the war against banditry as well as equip the security forces with both types of modern equipment and necessary incentives to enable them carry out their duty without obstacles. There should be re-orientation to inculcate ethical values and the significance of patriotism in the development of any community. Government should intensify efforts to mobilise financial and human resources to fund disarmament and to curtail the problems of arms proliferation across the region.

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