

THREATS OF RURAL BANDITRY ON HUMAN AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research is on rural banditry on human and food security, in Niger State, Nigeria. The research design for the study is a descriptive survey method; a sample of 90 respondents was drawn from the three most affected local government areas where rural banditry thrives in the state. The questionnaire was used as major instrument for collection of primary data; in-depth interviews were also conducted by the researcher to elicit further information from respondents. Secondary data was sourced from books, journals, newspapers and online peer reviewed materials. The routine activity theory was adopted to explain rural banditry in Niger State. Findings suggested that kidnapping for ransom, mining activities, collection of farmlands amongst others were major causes of the phenomenon while the loss of lives, farmlands, psychological depression amongst others were discovered to be the major effects of rural banditry in the State. The study recommended the provision of more sophisticated detection equipment in the rural areas for early detection of arrival and settlement of bandits in the forestlands, provision of more sophisticated arms and ammunition to the security forces to eliminate the bandits in order to enhance human and food security.

Keywords: threats, rural banditry, human, food security

Introduction

There has been growing concern in parts of Nigeria over insecurity caused by bandits. The frequency with which they attack communities has become a very worrisome development to every Nigerian, particularly those living in the northern parts of the country. Onah (2010) subscribes to the view that the frequency of attacks may be attributed to the ease with which these bandits move in and out of rural communities without any form of resistance.

Arising from the strategic neglect of rural communities in terms of socioeconomic developments, Asiwaju (2004), held that many rural communities have been turned into areas of concentration for bad roads, absence of health facilities and educational institutions, and have also become sites for poorly managed forest reserve that are now providing cover as hideouts for rural criminal bandits.

Bagu and Smith (2017) noted that organized research on banditry is still at its nascent stage. However, Kunn and Jibrin (2016) and Centre for Democracy and Development (2015), noted that

there have been some scholarly works on the subject matter. They unanimously contended that rural banditry has become reasonably most prevalent in some parts of the North-Central region, with states like Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue becoming more affected by the phenomenon for sometimes now.

The increasing incidences of banditry has affected both human and food security in Niger State. In an attempt to further discuss how to curtail the threats of banditry, (Gadzama, Oduebe and Dariya, 2018) opined that human security goes beyond the concept of mere physical security in the traditional sense. Ewans (2007) was however of a different view, he saw modern concept of human security as that which tries to identify the inherent weaknesses of the traditional security pattern which fundamentally focuses on the security of the state instead of the protection of the individuals and communities. Therefore, Ewans (2007) believed that security in modern times should be more redirected towards the protection of lives and properties of individuals and communities rather than concentrating more on state functionaries, their families and allies, and by extension what they define as critical infrastructures.

Tadjbakksh and Chenoy (2007) and Johns, (2014) all defined human security as the absence of insecurity and threats. To be secured and free from both fear of physical, psychological abuses, violence, persecution or death from want of food, good health and job. They concluded that human security should therefore deal with the capacity to identify threats, to avoid them when possible, and to mitigate their effects when they occur.

Food security on the other hand is simply the access to basic nutrition and food supply at all times needed for man's survival needs. The United Nations (2014) defined food security as the opportunity for all people, at all times, to have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needed for an active and healthy life.

Okpaleke (2014) in attempt to define rural banditry maintains that banditry has to do with armed violence perpetrated by criminal opportunists and syndicates along the country's border lines and rural interiors. The above writer believes that acts of criminality by armed bandits are targeted at human lives or property; armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and allied violence. But McGregor (2014), added to the list of criminalities of rural banditry. According to him, rural banditry activities also include village market raids, rape of women, arson and outright killings, these actions have also always involved the use of force, threats and intimidation. Okpaleke (2014) however further maintained that there are different perspectives of rural banditry, according to him; some are motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while others are motivated only by the quest to rob, assault or even liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political, ideological or religious considerations.

Beyond the conflicting and contending definitions, dimensions and perspectives, rural armed banditry in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. In this direction, Ja'afar (2018) is of the view

that there were records of instances of rural banditry in colonial Nigeria, as far back as the 1930's. According to him, in those days, wayfarers and merchants travelling on the local shallow feeder roads were sometimes faced with ambush by criminal bandits who were basically targeting goods carried on donkeys, camels and ox carts. Such bandits at that time forcefully took away goods and disappeared into the bush, or at some other times, the bandits raided villages and carted away valuable properties and produce. So this criminality according to him has existed in pre-colonial times.

The Humanitarian (2018), also stated that the first case of banditry was documented around 1901, and the incidence was said to have occurred somewhere between Western Hausaland and the border of the Republic of Niger. In the said incident, it was recorded that over 12,000 strong camels, laden with assorted grains were attacked and 210 merchants were killed. But the disturbing development is captured more by Egwu (2016), when he stated that rural banditry has moved from its rudimentary phase to a more complex and complicated pattern of criminality. Little wonder Bagu and Smith (2017) submitted that “gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities have taken advantage of the growing insecurity in the country to launch their attacks on villages and communities to loot, engage in highway robberies, cattle rustling and killings for personal gains”.

Niger State with the largest landmass distribution in the country is viewed by this researcher as one of the states affected by rural banditry, with an overstretched forest hinterland mass of 76,363 square-kilometers, as against the populous Lagos state with only 4,000 square kilometers of land mass, followed by Kaduna and Zamfara states with 46,053 and 39,762 square-kilometres respectively. Adeniyi (2018) believes that their stretched large landmarks and forest zones are enough and comfortable to become hideouts and effective camp training grounds for bandit activities.

Statement of Research Problem

Certain socio-existential conditions have been opined to be sufficient reasons why rural armed banditry has successfully thrived in Nigeria. Some of these characteristic conditions have been identified to be both the interiors and borderline ecological challenges. Gaye (2018) maintained that prominent among these conditions are the scarcely governed hinterlands and forestlands. According to him, the North West and North Central regions of the Nigerian hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed normal settlements, which have been separated by rangelands and farmlands with extreme gaps for settlements, these have served as hideouts which are rarely discovered.

According to Okoh and Ugwu (2019), these forestlands are vast, rugged and hazardous, and are highly under-policed to the point that it makes them conducive for to all forms of jungle criminality. The above scholars were also of the view that the rugged open stretched forests provide

sufficient avenues for all manners of violent crimes like cattle rustling, kidnappings, arsons, maiming and killings.

Adeniyi (2018), posits that, in addition to the under-governed rural territorial spheres highlighted above, banditry also thrive because of the material incentive of the poorly regulated mining, trans-human and illicit arms and artisanal activities taking place in these forests, as bandits occasionally attack mining sites in order to steal gold and cash. Okoli (2017) further elucidated on the above, he pointed out that, sometimes the lethality of the attacks are merely reprisals, designed to show down communities, which have hitherto challenged or resisted the bandits' onslaught through vigilantism. Niger State which is the subject matter of this research has the largest landmass in Nigeria, the same ecological structures in the forests as those mentioned earlier.

Consequently, bandits move in and out from the Birnin-Gwari forests into the stretch Sarkin-Pawa extended landmass up to the Allawa forest in Rafi local government of the state which has become notorious for camping bandits.

As if these were not enough, Saturday Tribune of 15th August, 2020 reported by one Adelowo Oladipo, a journalist, that "no fewer than fifteen (15) people were feared dead, killed by gunmen suspected to be armed bandits in Ukuru Community of Mariga local government of Niger State, the Chairman of the vigilante group in Ukuru, Mallam Maikera Ashafa who was interviewed confirmed that the gunmen invaded their community on no fewer than 52 motorcycles, carrying sophisticated weapons killing, kidnapping and burning down houses seem to be getting worse daily and continues unabated.

The researcher therefore set for the study the following objectives:

- (i) To find out the threats of banditry on human security in the three most affected local government areas of the state and
- (ii) find out the effects of rural banditry on food security in the three local government areas of the state.

Consequently, the following research questions served as the guide for the study

- (i) what are the effects of banditry on human security in your local government area?
- (ii) what are the effects of banditry on food security in your local government area?

Empirical Literature Review

Smith and Bagu (2017) are concerned with this new development in banditry when they maintained that, most of the bandits are gangs of criminal, often youth from farming and herding communities who have left their domains and have internalized new values and habits of robbing people on the highways and rustling cattle for personal gains, and both the farming and herdsmen communities are also victims of this criminality. The Centre for Democracy and Development

(CDD, 2015) supports the above assertion, when it reported that the bandits have increased their penchant for criminality from highway robbery and rustling to include looting, laying seize on local markets and killing unarmed innocent Nigerians.

The Humanitarian (2018) opines that some bandits have gone to the extent of kidnapping foreign miners and demand payments of appropriate ransoms before their releases. Viewing the dangers associated with the above, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016); Okoli and Lenshie (2018), averred that the Federal Government of Nigeria in a bid to curtail illegal mining and banditry directed the suspension of all forms of mining activities in Zamfara State in the early weeks of April, 2019. Ewans (2007) advocated that there should be concerted efforts to shift attention from the normal State centered approach to security and surveillance to people-oriented approach to security, he was of the view that the rural people best know the routes used by the bandits into their communities, in other words, they should be allowed to play pivotal roles in actualizing their own security, necessary state laws should therefore be put in place to allow them access effective security equipment needed to safeguard their lives and properties. As Krauye (2004); Axworthy (2004); Fukuda-pan and Messineo (2012), puts it, sovereignty and security of life are the direct responsibility of government, to which its civil populace depends on to protect their populations against insecurity.

A document from, the West Africa Network of Peace Building (WANEP, 2019) reported that 1,000 civilian deaths were recorded from January to December, 2019, all from the North West region through the activities of bandits in the region. With this alarming development, the same source maintained that a committee was set up headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former Inspector General of Police to negotiate with bandits in Zamfara State between June 2011 and May 2019, the committee discovered that 4,983 women were widowed; 25,000 children were orphaned; and more than 190,000 people were displaced as a result of armed banditry in the State.

However, John Campbell in his blog recorded in a broadcast on July 23rd, 2020 on the programme, Africa in Transition and Nigeria on the brink”, suggested that though the army introduced several military operations in the country to quash banditry, operations like the “Operation Puff Adder”, “DiranMikya”, SharanDaji”, “HударinDaji”, “Thunder Strike”, “Exercise Harbin Kunama III”, they have only created mixed feelings in the minds of Nigerians. The operations only succeeded in pushing back the bandits and destroyed some of their hideouts while some were killed, but Campbell maintained that however according to Campbell, attacks have continued without any sign of stoppage. Campbell further submits that, it was in the light of these challenges that the Governors of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara, agreed on a peace deal with the armed bandits in 2019. But accordingly, the agreements did not last. This is because only recently, on the 24th of August, 2020, the Nigerian Tribune Newspaper published a document written by Lanre Adewole, a journalist, suggesting that 1,126 persons were killed, 380 were abducted in the seven northern states as declared by Amnesty International, through its Country Director in Nigeria, Mr. Osai Ojigho.

Theoretical Framework

The Routine Activity Theory, which is a recent approach to the explanation of crime falls within the social-structural perspective. The main exponents of the theory are Cohen and Felson (1979). The theory attempts to explain predatory criminal activities. Its three main postulations are: (i) where there is a motivated potential offender, (ii) suitable or attractive targets and (iii) the absence of capable guards, crime is likely to take place. Adopting this theory to rural banditry in Niger State, the presence of motivated potential offender in an agriculturally and herding-based communities which are under-policed are likely targets for bandit activities.

The Humanitarian (2018) supports this assertion when it opines that ecology of such communities brings about not only motivation but temptation alike for criminal indulgence. Consequently, bandits who are predators in these communities are likely to have sustained field day engaging in all manners of criminal escapades including lootings, robberies, maiming, rapping, kidnappings and outright killings without any form of resistance.

Methodology

The research design for the study is a descriptive survey method which was used to describe the causes and effects of banditry in Niger State. The open and closed ended questionnaires were used as instruments for collection of primary data from respondents, while secondary data was sourced from journals, books, newspapers and online-peer reviewed works. A sample size of 30 respondents were drawn from the three local governments each, namely Shiroro, Munya and Rafi respectively, making a total of 90 respondents. The justification for the above was the accessibility of respondents who were direct victims of banditry.

In-depth interviews were also conducted by the researcher to elicit deeper information where the questionnaires could not explore in details. The SPSS package was used to analyze the collated data accordingly.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Effects on human security

Effects of attacks	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Death	55	61.1%

Hospitalization due to shock	12	13.3%
Horror due to shock	23	25.6%
Total	90	100%

Table 1 shows the specific devastating effects of banditry on human security with majority of the respondents 55 (61.1%) maintaining that it brought about deaths, 12 (13.3%) stated that it brought hospitalizations due to shock, while 23 (25.6%) of them asserted that it brought horror due to shock.

Table 2: Effects on food security

Effects on food security	Frequency	Percentage (%)
closure of markets	5	5.6%
closure of businesses	10	11.1%
loss of cattle	15	16.7%
loss of other animals	20	22.2%
loss of farm land	40	44.4%
Total	90	100%

On table 2 above, respondents indicate that banditry has affected food security with closure of markets having 5 (5.6%) people, the closure of businesses 10 (11.1%) people, loss of cattle 15 (16.7%) people, loss of other animals 20 (22.2%) and finally, loss of farm land claimed the highest number of killings with 40 (44.4%) people.

In-depth Interview Analysis

In a bid to elicit further information on banditry from the above respondents, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with some respondents. The following were some of the responses received and transcribed from the respondents.

When questioned about the general effects of banditry on human security, respondent (1) had this to say

“I never knew that after 58 years of my existence in my community, I will wake up one day to witness the burning of my family farmland and crops, the shooting and killing of my family members on the farm and the raping of my three innocent daughters in my presence, and I wept bitterly without anything to do”.

Respondents 2 and 3 were from the Munya and Shiroro local government areas of the state and had these to say on their personal safety and human security;

“Our youths have now found new businesses, collaborating with bandits, they know the spies of the bandits in the community and often go there to give information about who is keeping money at home, the bandits will just ride on bikes numbering between 20 to 30 in broad day light and come straight to your house to demand for the money and even direct you to where

you kept the money to bring it out or they kill you. They will collect the money and yet kidnap your wife or daughters and still ask you to look for money to pay as ransom to serve as punishment”.

Respondent 4 added that:

“In my other areas like Pangu in Berivillages of Rafi and Mariga Local Government Areas, an area which has been known over the years as major cattle markets, the bandits have rustled over 1000 cattle heads and headed to their Allawa settlement forests, now we are witnessing shortages in our meat consumption and a large chunk of our sources of livelihood and cattle trading has been affected”.

When further prompted to find out whether they have received any support from the government so far, respondent 4 had this to say;

“Which government? The same government whose security officers even know the routes used by the bandits, let me tell you, some of them even have the telephone numbers of the bandits, which is why when the bandits strike, you don’t see any security personnel around, they also serve as informants to the bandits. Do you know what happened in Kagara recently, when they attacked the town? All the security personnel couldn’t resist them, when they did nothing, our vigilantes rushed into the police station, picked the arms of the police officers and retaliated the gun shots, the bandits ran away after killing eight vigilantes’, the next day police officers started raiding our houses to arrest those vigilantes’ that entered they police station. Do you know that the vigilantes willfully returned the guns to the station? Yet many of them were arrested by the police. We are now leaving in fear, afraid of our lives and having shortage of our cash and food crops to survive”.

Respondent 5, interjected,

“do you know that if we want to go to the farms to harvest our farm produce, we now have to go to the spies and informants with money to inform them to kindly tell the bandits that we are hungry and need to go to our farms to harvest food and cash crops? This is how serious the situation has become”.

Respondent 6, 6 and 7 however were more concerned with government’s intervention. Respondent 8 had this to say

“kindly go back and tell the government to provide new places for us, we don’t know where to go, our great grandfathers were born here, our farmlands are here. We are not educated and cannot do government jobs in the city, please help us convey our situations to the government”.

Respondent 9 and 10 each disagreed with respondent 8, respondent 9 had this to say; *“which government are you talking about, they will only take you to the camps located in Kuta town and be feeding you and your family with bread”*. While respondent 10 maintained that

“I have lost hope in government since our chief was kidnapped, I was among those that took my motorcycle to Kuta town to dispose of it in order to bring my own contribution to be taken to the bandits in the bush, we are now contacting our fore-fathers and invoking our masquerades to come out, we spend so much time in our individual shrines praying against the bandits return to our villages daily”.

Generally, if nothing drastically is done by government through protection of lives and properties, the situation of anarchy may take place as citizens and indeed residents of Niger state are likely to resort to self-help of any form in defense of their existence.

Discussion on Findings

Findings have suggested that the phenomenon has created devastating effects on human security, these effects range from loss of lives with the highest percentage, to hospitalization and horror due to shocks. The study has been able to suggest that banditry also has a devastating effect on food security. The loss of cattle and other animals with higher percentages indicate that animal husbandry which has often been the source of livelihood for the respondents has been seriously affected. Others include the closure of businesses and markets.

In all, these incidences are capable of reducing the production of crops for both local production and exports. The losses of lives, hospitalizations and horrific fears expressed by the respondents have added to the general challenges of banditry on human security.

Thus, if people are killed on daily basis and those alive cannot freely go to the markets, how do they sell their farm produce? If they cannot go to their farms, how do they harvest, consume or even process the products for export or guaranteeing market value for their cash crops and those meant for domestic consumption?

Definitely, the crisis of survival will arise, giving way for food scarcity and by implication, food security challenge as the case may be. It is also pertinent to note here that, the fact that people constantly live in perpetual fear of attacks to outright killings amongst many others, may have the tendency of affecting human security.

The finding on the effects of banditry on human security has answered objective one (1) of the study which sought to find out the threats of human security, while the finding on food security above has also answered objective two (2) of the study which sought to find out the threats of banditry on food security. The above findings have been supported by Okoli (2017) when he pointed out that; “sometimes the lethality of the attacks are reprisals designed to show down

communities which have hitherto challenged or resisted the bandits' onslaught through vigilantism.

All the above findings are also in tandem with the adopted theory for this research, which is the routine activity theory. This is so, because the activities of bandits who are the motivated potential offenders find suitable targets in under-policed forest farming and herding communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from this study have considered the effects of bandit activities on human and food security. In all, it has been able to establish that some respondents have been killed, while others have faced hospitalizations due to shock and living in horrific fears. Others are: loss of lives, destruction of farm lands, loss of animals, amongst other experiences of the respondents in this study.

Something very drastic needs to be done in order to curb the excesses of bandits. It is therefore recommended that government takes immediate steps to stop the wanton killings of innocent Nigerians through the provision of very sophisticated detection equipment in the forestlands to detect incursion into the communities by bandits.

It is also recommended that all the security agencies be provided with more sophisticated arms and ammunition, sufficient enough to confront the bandits in order to enable people go to their farms without intimidation, this will enhance the production of food supply and hence, the challenge of food security can be better addressed.

It is recommended that government becomes more proactive in arresting and prosecuting criminal bandits in order to reaffirm its position as principal provider of security to the people. This will improve the level of human security and create more confidence by the people.

It is further recommended that the communities organize themselves as community vigilantes with the necessary ammunition in order to protect themselves.

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