

DYNAMICS AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF RURAL BANDITRY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper takes a historical glimpse at the phenomena of rural banditry with specific attention to the drivers and its changing patterns or dynamics with a special reference to Northern Nigeria. With the use of secondary and oral sources in line with an interdisciplinary methodological approach, the paper examines the causes and the negative economic consequences of rural banditry on the focal area; emphasizing its effects on farming, pastoralism, and market operations. The paper argues further that rural banditry became so rampant and has assumed more catastrophic dimensions in the area under consideration since the resurgence of democratic administrations spanning over two decades. The study analyses the efforts of state actors in containing rural banditry for the restoration of Northern Nigeria's economy and society. It concludes that, thus far, the efforts made in containing rural banditry have produced a marginal result at best, since there are still multifarious cases of banditry in the rural areas in the region with ravaging effects on the economy and society of the people. Arising from the above, the paper recommends that for rural banditry to be eliminated, there must be lasting solutions to the causes of this social malady. To achieve this, the Nigerian State must inter alia do away with poverty, unemployment, ethno-religious crises, and greed, amongst others.

Keywords: Rural Banditry; Northern Nigeria; Economic Consequences

Introduction

Security threats are among the most critical challenges ravaging many nations of the world. The Third World Countries (TWCs) are usually the flash spot of these security threats. In Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, the Federal Government usually allocates a huge sum of money to the security sector for it to be stable and carry out its duties effectively to enhance the peace and progress of the Nation. However, the desired result remains a paradox (Ityonzughul, 2017). With the resurgence of democracy in Nigeria, the country witnessed more cases of security threats. These security threats manifested themselves from common street crimes to Muslim-Christian violent conflicts; activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP); *Boko Haram*, farmer-herder conflicts; and rural banditry, among others.

Rural banditry in Nigeria especially in the North has reached alarming heights in recent years. Bandits terrorize villages with impunity and settled in some of the villages. In the North, they set up fortified enclaves in the hinterland and on the frontiers from where they plot and carry out their operations

(Al Okoli, 2019). The underlying causes of rural banditry are unemployment, ethno-religious conflict, greed, robbery, insecurity, and psychological needs, among others. Banditry activities in Nigeria until recently were not prevalent and were conducted without the use of sophisticated weapons or much force. In this regard, farmers were still attending to their farming activities which had not affected Nigeria's food security. Today, the scenario has changed since the bandits are more aggressive in their operations.

Rural banditry is characterized by cattle rustling, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, collection of illegal tolls in village markets, depredation, *et cetera* (Mohammed and Alima, 2015). Even with the above dismal scenario, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the affected state government have intervened by developing measures to nip in the bud the activities of the bandits. However, it seems that their efforts are yet to yield the desired result; since the perpetrators of the act continue to ravage Northern Nigeria's economy and society. To corroborate this fact, Ibrahim and Dabugat (2015) reveal that there is a very high increase in rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. As the phenomena grow, popular narratives creating meanings, context, and understanding have been emerging. Some narratives present banditry attacks as a result of intense competition over increasingly scarce resources and water resources between different rural communities that exist in the Northern part of the country; referring basically to farmers and nomads.

The main aim of this paper, however, is not to establish a debate on what is responsible for rural banditry in northern Nigeria, but to analyze its drivers, and changing patterns and to show how it adversely affected the economy /livelihoods in the study area. In doing this, the paper emphasizes the aspects of the economy including farming, pastoralism, trading, and marketing. It argues that the effects of rural banditry have retard the development and progress of Northern Nigeria's economy. This paper has four set objectives, first to address the question of what were the initial and new patterns of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. The second is to determine the causes or drivers of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. The third relates to the implications of rural banditry on the economy of the area under review. The fourth is to attempt a critique of the efforts of the FGN and the affected states in containing the menace. To address these objectives, the paper also discusses the concept of rural banditry, the emergence and dynamics of rural banditry in the Northern part of the country, the implications of rural banditry on Northern Nigeria's economy, and the responses of the stakeholders to rural banditry. It attempts some concluding reflections and advances some policy options in stemming the rising tide of rural banditry.

Understanding Rural Banditry

An understanding of what rural bandits is will enhance the understanding of rural banditry. Hobsbawn (1959) considers bandits as peasant outlaws who maintain some respect within peasant society. Bandits are sometimes considered heroes, champions, avengers, fighters for justice, and perhaps even leaders of liberation. In any case, they were seen as, men, to be admired, helped, and supported. This description could be understood within the purview of what Blumel (2007:10) described as "ancient banditry" or possibly "traditional banditry" which thrived in the pre-industrial era. This form of banditry is different from the modern form of banditry. Modern-day bandits are more vicious and destructive. They can strain government capacity by overwhelming the police and legal system through sheer audacity, violence, and numbers, challenge the legitimacy of the State and act as surrogate or alternative governments, dominate the informal economic sector, establish small businesses, and using violence and coercion to compete with legitimate businesses while avoiding taxes and co-opting government regulators. Infiltrate police and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to further their goals and in doing so, demonstrate latent political aims (Sullivan, 2012).

Rural banditry is conceived as armed violence prompted basically by criminal intent to steal and plunder. The most common examples of rural banditry in Nigeria are armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village raids (Al Okoli, 2019). Rural banditry also means the practice of stealing cattle and other animals from herders or raiding cattle from the ranches. Although driven by different needs and factors, it is an increasingly economically-based form of criminality perpetrated by informal networks (Kwarja, 2013). Kwarja's definition is weak because his thought of rural banditry is one-sided since farmers, traders, other businessmen, and the general members of rural communities are also victims of rural banditry. Egwu (2015:14) shows that rural banditry thrives as a means of the "primitive" accumulation of herds of cows in

the context of subsistence and commercial pastoralism. He explained further that, rural banditry is accompanied by rape, kidnapping, organized attacks on villages and communities, and looting. In the context of this study, rural banditry is conceived as criminal activities perpetrated by outlaws with the use of threat or violence. A person who involves in this act is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or group. In this context, banditry is a form of criminality synonymous with gangsterism, brigandage, marauding, and thievery.

Drivers of Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

The driving forces of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria are multitudinous. First and foremost is greed. There is a popular cliché in Economics that, “human wants are unlimited”. Given the above, the desire of some people to meet up with their unlimited wants/needs lures them into greediness making them take up different crimes including rural banditry (oral interview with David Polang, 2021). To corroborate the above, an oral informant, Dennis Enegele (2021) was more forthcoming when he noted that:

Some people want to possess what they do not have or labor for. But greediness compelled them to commit to rural banditry to forcefully achieve their needs. Some indulge in this heinous act to kidnap, suffer the victims, and extort money from their relatives or government authority.

Deducing from the preceding, it is clear that rural banditry has become a booming “industry” in contemporary Nigeria. The perpetrators amass wealth to the detriment of the kidnapped victim and failure to pay the ransom means killing the victims. Besides, there is a high level of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, Northern Nigeria inclusive. On yearly basis, Nigeria produces a lot of graduates in Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnic, and other institutions of higher learning but securing jobs after graduation has remained a major challenge for them. The implication is that these people became subjective to all forms of crimes including banditry. An interview with Changwak E. Jonah (2021) revealed:

Poverty is the underlying cause of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. It is from poverty that all other causes of banditry menace emanated. Once poverty is done with, rural banditry will die a natural death. This is because whenever banditry cases are discovered, the intention of the bandits is always to make money and improve their standard of living.

Agreeing with the above position, statistics from the World Bank (WB) and other sources depict a high level of unemployment in Nigeria (including the northern region) giving impetus to poverty. The statistics in Table 1 present a graphic of this scenario.

Table 1: Unemployment in Nigeria, 1996-2020

Year	Unemployment Rate	Year	Unemployment Rate
1996	3.769999981	2008	3.539000034
1997	3.760999918	2009	3.721999884
1998	3.757999897	2010	3.76699996
1999	3.792999983	2011	3.769999981
2000	3.779999971	2012	3.734999895
2001	3.778000116	2013	3.703000069
2002	3.816999912	2014	4.561999798
2003	3.821000099	2015	4.31099987
2004	3.786000013	2016	7.059999943
2005	3.74000001	2017	8.388999939
2006	3.645999908	2018	8.243000031
2007	3.565000057	2019	8.095999718
		2020	7.960000038

Source: World Bank's World Development Indicators, 2020

The preceding table 1 shows that for over two decades, unemployment has been one of the major challenges in Nigeria. The level of unemployment fluctuates over the years but is generally high. From 1996 to 2013, the increment was marginal through progressive. From 2014 to 2015 it increased though not so much, however, there was astronomical inflation between 2016 and 2019 while in 2020 the level of unemployment has been partially reduced though it was still very high thereby creating a fertile atmosphere for the banditry activities to flourish.

The act of cattle rustling and the proliferation of small arms are also considered causal factors of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. The cow is one of the most expensive animals in northern Nigeria and the nation as a whole. In developed countries like the USA, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, among others, cattle are ranches, but in Nigeria, cows were allowed to stray on the streets even in capital cities. In Nigeria, northerners especially Fulani dominated the business of cattle rearing and hence their cattle are fed through open nomadism, they are usually rustled by the bandits who easily carried out the act as they received motivation from the proliferation of Small Arms & Light Weapons (SA&LW). Egwu (2015:44) insists that:

The rising incidence of cattle rustling as a part of the problem of rural banditry may also be partially attributed to the problem of small arms of light weapons (SA&LW) that have found their way into the hands of non-state actors, part of the wider challenges of human security confronting Nigeria.

State failure and political influence have also been identified as a cause of rural banditry in northern Nigeria. An oral interview with Enegesele (2021) disclosed that the Nigerian state has failed to provide the necessities of life to her citizenry and this, in the long run, has degenerated into diverse forms of conflict and insecurity. Contributing to this matter, Momale (2015:72) poignantly pointed out that:

Conflicts and rural bandits are closely interlinked as they are all forms of social insecurity, characterized by weaknesses in the institutional capacity of the state to address the problems of insecurity, joblessness, and acute poverty. While conflicts could trigger and cause cattle rustling, incidences of cattle could also trigger and cause violent conflict between pastoral and farming communities.

The menace of rural banditry in northern Nigeria has received impetus from the political class. The Governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma (2021) stated in an interview on Channel's Television on April, 22 that, "bandits are been funded by politicians. Politicians are doing this to bring down the government of President Mohammadu Buhari". The point of emphasis is that rural banditry has negatively affected Nigeria's food security. According to Egwu (2015), rural banditry in Nigeria is caused by the following interrelated factors as shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: underlying causes of rural banditry in Nigeria

S/N	Causes	Percentages
1	Unemployment	44 percent
2	Ethno- Religious conflict	23 percent
3	Greed	18 percent
4	Robbery	5.9 percent
5	Insecurity	6.8 percent
6	Psychological needs	2.3 percent
TOTAL		100 percent

Source: Egwu, S. (2015), pp.14-68.

Table 2 shows that 44 percent of the causes of rural banditry are attributed to unemployment, while 23 percent identified rural banditry as fallout from frequent ethno-religious conflicts. Another 18 percent of the respondents identified greed as the underlying cause; robbery stands for 5.9 percent, insecurity 6.8 percent while 2.3 percent of the respondents were attracted to psychological needs.

Additionally, ungoverned forests have is one of the fundamental causes of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. Bandits know that there is a lot of unsecured forest in the North. The host communities of these forests have a reasonable population that is constantly under banditry attacks. The by-passers or travelers have also become a soft target for the bandits. Different areas in Northern Nigeria have had their fair share of the attacks. The table below graphically shade some light on the scenario.

Table 3: The Landmass of some Northern states with their population and major Forests.

S/N	State	Landmass in Square Kilometers	Population	Major Forests
1	Niger	76,363	3,702,676	Mokwa and Siche
2	Kaduna	46,053	6,113,503	Birnin Gwari
3	Zamfara	39,762	3,259,846	Mashema, Dan-Sadau and Gundumi
4	Kebbi	36,800	3,256,541	Lema and kasanu
5	Sokoto	25,973	3,702,676	Wassaniya
6	Katsina	24,192	5,801,584	Rogo and TudunMani
7	Jigawa	23,154	4,361,002	Gwaram
8	Kano	20,131	9,383,682	Falgore

Source: Egodi, U. and Kertyo, P.M., 2022.

The large landmass and forest, especially the twin forests of Mashema in Zamfara bordering the nearby Niger Republic and Birnin Gwari to the south leading to Kaduna state, Siche in Niger State, and Falgore in Kano have served as base and abodes for the bandits to stockpile sophisticated weapons (Oyinloye, 2020).

Relatedly, Okoli and Ugwu (2019) argue how North-western Nigeria is marked by scarcely governed hinterlands, forestlands, and borderlines. The region's hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed rural settlements, separated by rangelands and farmlands that are susceptible to violent contestations. They are also interspersed with diverse forested landscapes, some of which are dotted with wetlands, rocks, and caves. Apart from being separated from each other, they are equally far separated from the centers of governance at the local and state levels. The forestlands of the region are vast, rugged, porous, and hazardous. Striking to note is the fact that they are grossly under-policed, under-governed, and have since become conducive places for all forms of criminalities.

The Dynamics in Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

This segment of the study hinges on the former/ancient and current forms of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. Ancient bandits were less harmful to the people in society. They were considered the outlaws who maintain some respect within peasant society. Bandits were sometimes considered by their people as heroes, champions, avengers, fighters for justice, and perhaps even leaders of liberation. They were seen as people to be admired and supported, (Hobsbawn, 1959). According to Bill (2009), ancient banditry also known as traditional banditry was different from modern banditry both in form and nature since its impact was less severe on the victims and Nigeria's food security. In ancient banditry, bandits were attacking those they felt were against their philosophy or interest (most especially the rich). But currently, everyone either rich or poor are vulnerable to bandits.

Ancient banditry was not perpetrated with the use of sophisticated weapons like bombs, rocket launchers, armor tanks, AK47, and AK49, among others. This was because the intention of the bandits was not to kill, maim and cremate human bodies, they intended to use force to create an atmosphere of fear to influence the activities of the government to consider their welfare. In ancient times, rural bandits were less aggressive, less inhuman, and considerable to some extent.

Rural bandits in ancient times lacked the power to strain government capacity by overwhelming police, army, and legal systems through sheer audacity, violence, and numbers. However, the bandits currently have the intention of taking over the government machinery, since 1999 when the country reverted to democracy. Many security agents including the army are killed in Northern Nigeria by the rural bandits. This scenario was not so in the decades preceding the democratic administrations in Nigeria (Oral interview with Usman Musa, 2021).

The former/traditional banditry in Nigeria was done with little or no kidnapping and abduction. However now, the noticeable trend in rural banditry in Northern Nigeria is kidnapping and abduction. Both men of different pedigree in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere in the country are vulnerable to the activities of the banditry kidnapers. The bandits kidnap, place and collect ransom on them. It has taken a more critical dimension in recent years to the extent that even children are kidnapped. The adoption of school children started with the adoption of about 276 girls on the night of 14th and 15th April 2014 at Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok in Borno State, Northern Nigeria.

The philosophy of ancient banditry was very clear and based on popularity, heroism, justice, and liberation while the philosophical objectives of rural bandits in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere in the contemporary era seem to be focused on the economy, sex, and religious motives. However, these philosophical strands are not clearly defined by the bandits. This is because, at times, the bandits adopt people, negotiate with their relatives or government, and free the victims after collecting ransom. However, in most instances, the victims are killed after paying ransom to the bandits. The bandits at times rape the female victims describing them as infidels. It has become a source of confusion and worry whether the problem of the bandits is to make money, rape, or influence the religious life of the victims. Even when one thinks of influencing the religious life of the victim, it is still ambiguous since the bandits launch their attacks on people of different religious affinities or divides (Oral interview with Sani Zaga, 2021).

Banditry is more prominent in the North and the region, and since the region is dominated by the Islamic faithful, one tends to believe that bandits are Islamic fundamentalists. But their attitude of attacking both religious divides cast doubts on the above assertion. Table 4 below indicates activities of banditry in Muslims dominated areas.

Table 4: Some illicit Activities of Bandits in Some Communities, 2017 to March 2022.

S/N	Date of Attack	Place of Attack	Remarks
1	15 January 2017	Zagzaga village, Niger state	9 people killed
2	21 April 2017	Zagzaga village, Niger state	4 people killed
3	1 March 2018	Bawan Daji village, Zamfara state	30 people killed
4	9 June 2019	Klahu, Tsage and Geeri village, Sokoto state	25 people killed
5	4 July 2019	Kankara and Danmusa village, Kastina state	11 people killed
6	17 January 2020	Babban Rafi and Makosa village, Zamfara state	31 people killed
7	2 March 2020	Igabi and Giwa village, Zamfara state	50 people killed
8	24 April 2020	Akwunakwo, Kabinsha and Damba villages, Kaduna state	7 people were killed and one was kidnapped
9	20 May 2020	Tsafe village, Zamfara state	12 people were killed and cattle rustled
10	21 July 2020	Magani and Tungan Bajo communities, Niger state	16 people were kidnapped.
11	26 July 2020	Jema'a and Kaura, Kaduna state	10 people killed
12	4 September 2020	Dukku and Kagara LGA, Niger state	22 people killed
13	13 September 2020	Udawa village, Kaduna state	16 people abducted
14	18 September 2020	Tangaza police station, Sokoto	DPO, inspector killed, 2 women abducted
15	17 November 2020	Zaria	8 students abducted
16	20 November 2020	Mariya police station, Niger state	11 people were killed and 14 abducted
17	23 November 2020	Kanoma Mosque, Maru, Zamfara state	18 people killed
18	11 December 2020	Tashar Bama, Dogun Muaze, and UnguwarMaigayya villages, Kastina state	7 killed and 30 abducted
19	12 December 2020	GSS Kankara, Kastina state	333 school students abducted
20	23 December 2020	Birinin Gwari road, Kaduna	6 killed and 40 abducted
21	20 April 2021	Kaduna	Students of Greenfield University were abducted
22	5 July 2021	Kaduna	121 Bethel Baptist students abducted.

Source: Egodi, U. and Kertyo, P.M., 2022.

Table 4 above depicts the multifaceted nature of banditry attacks and operations. However, this list is not exhaustive. A detailed analysis of the group's incessant killings reveals that in 2017, the group was responsible for 894 deaths (Uchendu and Kerity). This was followed by 1,813 deaths in 2018 and 1,460 deaths from 330 attacks in the first seven months of 2019 (*Premium Times*, 29 August 2019). By December 2021, an unprecedented number of deaths were occasioned by bandits with Zamfara state having the highest toll of 703 deaths (*The Cable*, 14 January 2022). From 2011 to December 2020, bandits killed over 8,000

people in Nigeria (Uchendu and Kerityo, 2022). The dynamism that has characterized banditry attacks is worrisome and has made it difficult to decipher the main aim of the group. While in states like Zamfara, cattle rustling is the order of the day, in Niger and Kaduna, kidnapping, abduction, and attacks on military formations and government properties have remained the major trademark of banditry activities

Economic Consequences of Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Rural banditry is a deadly phenomenon that has scrambled the Nigerian economy with its hotspot in Northern Nigeria. The negative implications of rural banditry touched on all sectors of society. However, to deepen our analysis of the phenomenon; this attention has been centered only on economic sector/consequences with specific emphasis on farming, herding, and market operation. Rural banditry usually accompanies kidnapping, terror, and death, and as such in the course of perpetrating this unsavory act, a lot of people are usually displaced including farmers, and places farming activities on hold leading to hunger and starvation. For example, it has been reported severally that in Taraba State, banditry disrupted farming activities in nearly all farming communities. Mohammed and Alimba (2015) reveal that, in Ardo Kola, farming suffered greatly due to armed banditry; farming activities became impracticable for two or three farming seasons. This was because of the fear of the unknown and tension created by the attackers. In Lau, when the attacks occurred, the fear of reoccurrence often deters farmers from farming for some time. In Kaduna State, farming activities were seriously obstructed in Kaura and Birnin Gwari due to the internal displacement of farmers who relocated to safer places. The magnitude of the attacks in Jema'a was less severe since farming activities were going on irrespective of the little threats posed by rural bandits.

Rural banditry paved the way for the kidnapping and killing of farmers which in turn instilled fear in them (farmers) and subsequently led to the abandonment of farmlands. In the Zamfara axis alone, it is estimated that over 13,000 hectares of farmland have been either destroyed or rendered inaccessible as a result of attacks by the bandits or herder armed groups and other criminal gangs (*PM News*, 09 April, 2019). The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) reported as published by *Daily Trust* (2019) that, in Sokoto State, as of October 2019, some 21, 316 hectares of farmland across five local government areas remained uncultivated, as 80,000 intimidated farmers stayed away. The implication of the increase of uncultivated fields is the tightening of food insecurity in the North and Nigeria as a whole.

The burning and raiding of local grain silos by the rural bandits gave impetus to Nigeria's food security. Enegesele (2021) in a conversation explained how the activities of the rural bandits negatively affect the nation's food security, He emphasized that bandits are also drug and substance addicts, and whenever the drugs are active in their bodies and coupled with their bad mindset they perform any action. Some of their activities include the burning of grain silos. Similarly, Ladan and Matawalli (2020) reiterate that:

During large-scale attacks that involve a large number of bandits which lasted for some hours, the bandits engaged in the burning of local grains silos (*rumbu* in Hausa). These grains silos contained foodstuff that was stored by farmers which could have lasted for many months but were burnt by the bandits which created a lack of food for the villagers.

In some instances, the silos were not set ablaze but were broken and the foods were stolen, thus creating food insecurity in the North and Nigeria from the broader perspective. The bandits also burgled local shops that specialized in selling foodstuff and carried out their robbery activities for their selfish consumption usually in the hideouts in forestry areas thereby restricting the flow of foods to other parts of the country leading to hunger and an astronomical increase in the prices of food items. Examples of this situation could be seen during the attacks on Dankar and Tsauwa villages in Batsari Local Government Area of Katsina State on February 14, 2020, as well as the attack on Unguwar Gizo in the Faskari Local Government area on May 29, 2020 (Ladan and Matawalli, 2020).

Rural banditry also paved way for cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria. Cattle herders and crop farmers are mostly affected by rural banditry. Some of the herders are dispossessed of their herds and become impoverished (Oral interview with Sani Zagga). Similarly, the *Leadership Newspaper* (2020) brings to the fore that livestock has been lost; between 2011 and 2019, about 141,360 cattle and 215, 241 sheep were rustled in Zamfara State. This menace had impoverished farmers and herders alike, created food shortages,

and aggravated malnutrition problems, particularly among children. It was situations such as this, that prompted Abubakar Sani Bello in April 2020 to remarks that, “we were heading towards famine and starvation” (*International Crises Group, Africa Report*, No.288, 2020). Closely allied with the above, the National Bureau of Statistics (2014) discloses that in Nigeria livestock formerly accounted for about 26 percent of the agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about ten percent of the nation’s GDP in the 1990s but the level of this contribution has significantly declined with agriculture contribution only about 19.65 percent of the GDP in the first quarter of 2014.

Mamole (2015) attributes the decrease in livestock and its spill-over effects on Nigeria's food security to the crude form of pastoralism. He explains that cattle rearers usually embark on open nomadism, mainly through the use of natural ranges and grasslands. Grasses and woody plants (browse) provide feed for animals while also depending on natural sources of water, particularly rivers and streams. Many factors are limiting the contributions of livestock to Nigeria's food security, namely, low productivity emanating from traditional breeding techniques, degradation of rangelands due to overgrazing and climate change, herder-farmer conflicts, and cattle rustling, among others. Both herders and cattle faced a serious challenge of rural banditry; in that, both cattle rearers and cattle also die in the act of cattle rustling. Statistics are not commonly available to show the number of cattle rustled in Nigeria since 1999, but the authors were able to get the statistics for 2013 and analyzed as appears in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Estimated Number of Rustled Cattle and Associated Deaths in Nigeria in 2013

State	Herders Killed	No. of Cattle Rustled
Plateau	87	7,200
Nasarawa	125	12,000
Benue	17	2,000
Zamfara	37	2,462
Niger	15	500
Gombe	NA	99
Yobe	NA	92
Bauchi	NA	204
Kwara	NA	204

Source: *Sunday Trust*, June 1, 2014

The facts and figures of incidents of cattle rustling for 2013 alone are quite instructive, as reflected in Table 5. More recent figures of rustled cattle and the number of herdsmen killed across the country show the humanitarian crisis associated with cattle rustling as an expression of rural banditry, including incidents in the North Central states of Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kwara, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. According to Dr. Garus Gololo, Secretary of the Benue State branch of the *Myetti Allah* Cattle Rearers Association of Nigeria (MACBN), these include 28,000 cows rustled in Plateau; 25,000 in Nasarawa; 8,680 in Benue; 1,650 in Kwara; and 1,500 in the FCT. The human casualties include 2,500 herders in Benue; 264 in Plateau; 150 in Kwara; 70 in Nasarawa; and 7 in the FCT (*Weekly Trust*, May 16, 2015). The reports further indicate that criminal cattle rustlers have drifted southward to the North-Central states, having been dislodged from the northern states of Zamfara, Sokoto, and Kaduna (*Weekly Trust*, May 16, 2015).

Markets are the chief host of both commercial and social activities. Markets also suffered rural banditry attacks; some of these attacks were perpetrated on market days to get more targets and make more money or cart away with the articles of trade (Oral interview with Nicholas Butna’an, 2021). In Taraba State particularly in Ardo Kola, for several years the thriving town towns of Iware and Malum were repeatedly targeted for banditry attacks. The resultant effect is that these markets were shut down for several months

because of banditry in both 2013 and 2014 respectively. A Tiv labor migrant to Tarba State, Oker Nyande (2021) who is also an informant noted that:

For every month people completely stopped going to markets in the State. The majority of these markets are mostly situated in the Lau Local Government Area of the state because of the banditry activities. The most affected markets include Baba Gesa Market, Donada Market, and Sunkani Markets. When these attacks occurred in 2010, 2013, and 2014; people were skeptical to continue attending these markets for the fear of reoccurrence.

Kaduna State also witnessed sporadic attacks on rural markets. Puawayal and Birnin Gwari Green Market were also attacked in 2011 and 2014. In carrying out this heinous act; the perpetrators usually block the local trade routes along the roads linking rural markets. The bandits block such routes to intercept the vehicles carrying traders. The bandits usually forcefully collect the foodstuff intended to sell at the markets and equally the money of the buyers (Ladan and Matawalli, 2020). Regarding the blocking of local trade routes, an interviewee, David Polang (2021) noted that it has for instance paved the way for the abandonment and relocation of some market centers. He was more specific when he bluntly noted that:

Communities in Ekye Development Area of Doma Local Government Area of Nasarawa State no longer go to Doma Market because, bandits usually ambush on the road and collect their produce and money, any attempt to resist giving them is usually accompanied by death. A community in Assakio along Lafia (Nassarawa State)- Shendam road (Plateau State), relocated her market from where it was initially sited to the roadside town of Ashige due to the incessant crises arising from bandits who disrupted economic activities in the area (Oral interview with David Polang, 2021).

Rural communities in Bokokos and Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State particularly those along the border with Nassarawa and Kaduna States were once ransacked and taken over by the bandits. There is also a small village called Mahanga in Riyom Local Government along Riyom- Jos road; some few kilometers before the Science Secondary School Kuru which was taken over and occupied by the bandits before Operation Safe Heaven dislodged them but the natives were still afraid to come back leaving the place vacant as at the time of this study (Oral interview with David Polang, 2021). These activities of the rural bandits have negatively affected market operations. Traders were unable to sell their produce for a very long time and as such, some perishable items like tomatoes, pepper, vegetable, and onions were wasted in their homes since they lack modern storage facilities thereby leading to post-harvest losses. To make matters worse, the affected markets were temporarily closed down and this economically affected the communities, states, and local government's council earnings as a huge amount was lost during the affected period. This has also aggravated the poverty level of households operating in the area (Oral interview with John Igbughul, 2021). Statistics have shown that compare to other regions in the country the North has the highest level of poverty. Table 6 below gives a clear picture of poverty in Nigeria according to geopolitical regions.

Table 6: Poverty Level by Zones (in Percent)

Zone	Years						
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	2010	2019
South-South	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1	63.8	24.77
South-East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7	67.0	29.48
South-West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0	59.1	14.20
North-Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0	67.5	38.80
North-East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2	76.3	47.56
North-West	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.2	71.2	77.7	59.08

Source: Federal Office of Statistics (1999); National Bureau of Statistics (2005 & 2012a), *Federal Republic of Nigeria Poverty Work Programme, Poverty Reduction in Nigeria in the last decades*, Poverty Global Practice African Region, 2016.

Statistics in Table 4 show that poverty has often been more pronounced in Northern Nigeria than in Central Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. This is justified against the backdrop of a high birth rate, high rate of illiterates, unemployed youths, and geographical factors like desert encroachment in Northern Nigeria, and recently the activities of bandits.

Reactions of State Actors to Rural Banditry in Northern Nigeria

It is common knowledge that the government (at the federal or state level) is saddled with the responsibility of securing the lives and property of the citizens to be safe and participate in economic activities including farming and agri-businesses to earn a living. The Nigerian government does not watch the activities of the bandits in utter silence. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) had deployed security personnel to the affected areas to make sure that the bandits are flushed out. A special squad known as "Operation Safe Haven" was created for North-Central Nigeria and stationed in Plateau State with its areas of operation covering Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, and the Kwara States to deal with banditry and other related crimes (Joab-Peterside, 2020).

A similar operation known as "Operation Saharan/Operation Harbin Kunama II" was established for the North-West and charged with the responsibility of containing banditry and the related crimes perpetrated basically in Zamfara, Kaduna, and the fringes of Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, and the Kano States. However, banditry and other forms of insecurity still subsist. The review of the security situation in the area prompted the FGN to launch another operation on June 04, 2020, codenamed "Operation Accord" to deal with banditry (Joab-Peterside, 2020). According to Killte (2020), the troops of this operation through land and air offensives assumed responsibilities and swiftly neutralized 392 bandits and other criminal elements tormenting inhabitants of the zone.

Associated with the above, the then Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Yusuf Buratai announced the formation of "Operation Sahel Sanity" on July 06, 2020, as part of the activities of the Nigeria Army Day Celebration of the year. Immediately, the Nigeria Army super camp IV Faskari, Katsina State was put in place. The operation aims to support "Operation Hardin Daji" in stemming the tides of the rural banditry and other security threats in the North-West zone. The act of criminality orchestrated by the bandits crippled agricultural, social, and other economic activities thereby making Nigeria vulnerable to food crises (Oral interview with Babangida, 2021). It is on record that these operations, in a short while neutralized 8 bandits, arrested 33 suspects (of different crimes), recovered 943 cows, 633 sheep/ram, 7 AK47 rifles, 1 GPMG, 16 Dane guns were gotten from bandits in the onslaught in Katsina State. Several bandit camps

including the notorious "Dangote Triangle" and their logistics bases were destroyed within the first month of the anti-banditry operation codenamed "Operation Sahel Sanity" (Ndidi, 2020).

The above security operations of the FGN have performed marginally since the bandits continue increasing in number with their damaging effects; this motivated the governments of the northern states to establish their security outfits to work in synergy with the FGN forces to ensure the peace and safety of the people, crops, and food. For example, the Kaduna State Government 2018 established a security outfit known as the "Kaduna State Vigilance Service" to complement the work of other security agencies in intelligence gathering and other criminal prevention (Ojo, 2020). Relatedly, the Sokoto State Government created a security outfit named "*Yan Banga*", which patrols the rural areas in the State. The same government also established Sokoto Corps Marshal; the Marshal was posted to the State tertiary institutions and traffic joints to complement the internal security of the areas. The administration of Abdulaziz Yari in Zamfara State established an arm-bearing force called "*Yan Kasai*" Local Vigilantes but the current government scrapped it and empowered the local vigilantes to carry out security functions without carrying arms to check-mate and report the activities of criminal elements (Ojo, 2020).

Additionally, in Borno State, a lot of local security outfits were created by the state government. Hunters across the North and the neighboring countries were also approached to help in fighting banditry and other forms of criminalities for the safety of human life and food crops. The group carries light arms-locally fabricated guns and pump-action guns. Despite, all these efforts banditry activities and other forms of crime are on the increase in Northern Nigeria, this is to say that their efforts have not yet yielded the desired result. This has drastically affected the whole country in all areas of life and it has indeed negatively affected Nigeria's food security. Based on the foregoing, it is imperative to develop approaches or policy options that would help in stemming the tide of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria and beyond for ensuring human and food security in the country.

Conclusion: Containing Rural Banditry for the Restoration of the Economy

The preceding analysis highlighted the drivers and dynamics of rural banditry in Northern Nigeria. It noted that banditry is an age-long phenomenon. However, old/ancient banditry, on the one hand, had less effect on the people and society of Northern Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. The study has shown that modern banditry, on the other hand, poses a serious threat to the economy and society of Northern Nigeria, particularly in the area of farming, herding, and market operations. Given the strategic role, rural banditry has played in damaging the economy, the FGN and the affected state governments have intervened to deal with this ugly societal malady but their efforts thus far have produced a marginal impact at best. This is because banditry cases are on the increase and they have continued to ruin Northern Nigeria's economy. In this regard, the paper made some policy options that it felt, would help in containing rural banditry.

Greed has been identified as one of the causes of rural banditry in the study area. In this wise, the paper noted that Nigerians (especially the youth) should be satisfied with whatever they have. Whenever their earnings are not sustainable, they should engage themselves in different lawful ventures including farming, trade, and animal husbandry rather than taking to crime.

Secondly, many bandits are youth who are graduates of different institutions of learning without having been gainful employment by the Nigerian government, and coupled with their bad mindset they adopted criminality as their way of earning a living. Thus, this study suggests that the government at the federal, state and local levels should create more job opportunities to engage the youth to abandon criminality for lawful businesses.

Additionally, the study recommends the dismantling of the cattle rustling economy. Government should ensure that the demand and supply chains, as well as the operational routes, markets, networks, syndicates, and infrastructures of cattle rustling, are systematically identified and dismantled to do away with the criminal practice of cattle rustling and to ensure Nigeria's food security.

Furthermore, the FGN, state, and local governments in the North and elsewhere in the country should increase the quantity and quality of security agencies in the rural areas for a more proactive containment of rural banditry. Moreso, the farmers, and herders community should be encouraged to use dialogue to resolve disputes over cattle theft and crops destruction instead of resorting to violence which

usually paves the way for the destruction of lives and property of the actors involved and even beyond and making the country more vulnerable to food insecurity. Finally, they should be efficient penal sanctioning against culprits. The perpetrator of rural banditry and all other forms of criminality should be properly punished by the Nigerian State to deter further committal as well as dissuaded criminal impunity.

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