



Banditry and its Implications on Food Security in Northwest Nigeria: A Reflection on the Roles of the State¹

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Abstract:

The major threat to the realization of poverty eradication and food security through adequate domestic food production in Nigeria today is insecurity. Farmers/herdsmen conflict and operation of the bandits in the rural communities have negatively affected the livelihood of millions of rural dwellers whose activities is to cater for immediate family needs. It is on this note that the paper reflects on the efforts of Nigerian State to manage the insecurity problem for sustainable food production and reducing hunger and poverty. To achieve the paper objective the secondary source of data was employed to serve as means of analysis. By examining and analysing the data, this paper contends that the Nigeria state is not well coordinated in their approaches to curtail security problems instigated by bandits and farmers-herders violence. The criminals took advantage of uncoordinated response of the government to establish themselves and constitute security threats to rural communities across the country. The rural dwellers that are used to the system of producing food for family survival year-in-year-out were either kidnapped or displaced or killed by non state actors. This invariably reduced food production and increase level of poverty and hunger. The paper thus, concludes that if the current security situation is not properly addressed, it will hinder the chance of achieving SDGs, most especially hunger and poverty in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others that the government should be consistent in their approach to security problems and recognized the right of the victims.

Keywords:

Food Security; Conflict; Rural Community; Bandits; Farmer-Herder; Nigeria; Sahel.

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Introduction

The tool for the realization of poverty reduction and hunger elimination in Nigeria today is sustainable agriculture. The reason is that the sector is dominated by small scale farming system. This system involves about 95% of Nigerian farmers, while farmers employed on corporate and government supported large-scale farms account for only about 5 percent (Mgbenka & Mbah, 2016). Small scale farmers are critical stakeholders in crop production and farm enterprises due to their roles right from land clearing up to produce marketing. Over 12 million of them were scattered in rural areas across the country and carried out their farming activities on a farm holding ranging mostly ranging from one to two hectares (Chiaka, 2022). They produced 90 percent of total production in the country (Olalekan, 2020). This invariably explained why the agricultural sector form part of the tools adopted to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) programme for poverty eradication as well as hunger reduction in Nigeria.

Effort to increase the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale farmers, especially among the vulnerable ones, requires an enabling environment. Sustainable farming system depends on the ability of the government to ensure a peaceful co-habitation of producer communities. The primary obligation of the government is to ensure peaceful co-existence among different land users in the rural communities in Nigeria.

The major threat to the realization of adequate domestic food production in Nigeria today is insecurity. The activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, farmers/herdsmen conflict, banditry and kidnappers have had negative impact on agricultural activities. In the affected rural communities, the farming activities were suspended, domestic food production is subdued, farming communities are displaced and access to regional market become impossible (Eigege & Cooke, 2016) due to incessant attacks. The destructive impacts of insecurity are antithetical to farming activities with high consequence on existing poverty level and food security as well as food shortages profile of Nigeria. The violent activities related to herdsmen have grounded agro-economic activities in most of the communities involved across the country. The dimensions of this violence demonstrate lack of connectivity between the government and rural communities' activities in the country.

Meanwhile, Nigeria has been a focal point of insecurity due to the activities of insurgent groups, banditry, and kidnappings, which have destabilized communities and disrupted agricultural production in Northern part of the country. The rural community, known for its substantial contributions to the country's food supply, is now facing significant declines in farming activities due to threats to farmers' safety and the destruction of their farmlands by bandits. This has led to reduced food production, supply chain disruptions, increased food prices, and heightened hunger.

Thus, this paper intends to answer the following questions:

- i. How has a banditry activity in Nigeria affected food security?
- ii. What roles has the Nigerian state played in addressing the problem of banditry?

Answer to these questions require an understanding of the contribution of banditry to food production and overall security of rural communities with focus on the effectiveness of state interventions in mitigating the adverse effects of insecurity on agriculture and food production in Northern part of Nigeria. Findings will inform strategies to restore agricultural productivity and strengthen food security in the region.

Theoretical Framework

System theory was developed by Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1930s, to explain how systems function as complex, interrelated wholes, whether in biology, social sciences, or engineering. This theory influenced a wide range of fields by focusing on how components interact within a system and how changes in one part can affect the entire system (Bertalanffy, 1968).

System theory views societies as interconnected entities, where changes in one part affect the whole. In Nigeria, insecurity, including violence and kidnappings, disrupts agricultural production, leading to food scarcity. The state's role, according to system theory, is to ensure security to maintain the balance between food production and distribution. Failure to address security challenges can trigger a ripple effect, exacerbating poverty and hunger.

Thus, the government plays a central role in managing the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, particularly concerning food production. In this context, the government acts as a central system responsible for regulating the interactions between farmers and herders. The government is expected to develop policies that promote equitable access to resources such as land and water, which are primary sources of tension and conflict between the two groups. This can include creating land-use policies that clearly define grazing routes and farmland, thus minimizing disputes. According to Okoli and Atelhe (2014), poor land management and unclear property rights contribute to conflicts between farmers and herders, threatening food security by disrupting farming cycles.

Also, the government is expected to implement conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and peace-building efforts, aimed at preventing violence. The government can bring both farmers and herders to negotiate peaceful coexistence through dialogue and legal interventions (Adamu & Ben, 2017). These conflict-resolution systems equally expected to help stabilize the agricultural economy, preventing losses in crop and livestock production. Therefore, the government needs to invest in security infrastructure, including law enforcement and surveillance, in conflict-prone areas. This is because the absence of a reliable security apparatus allows these conflicts to escalate unchecked, affecting food production as farming communities are displaced, and herders lose livestock (Ezeabasili, 2020). And to maintain food production and ensure that affected communities rebuild their agricultural activities, the government is expected to play a crucial role in conflict management, offering compensation and rehabilitation to victims of farmer-herder conflicts (Ibrahim & Umar, 2021).

Historical overview of Banditry

Banditry in Nigeria has roots extending back to pre-colonial and colonial periods, evolving from localized acts of cattle rustling and raids on settlements to the modern forms of organized crime and violence. Historically, banditry was often linked to economic survival and socio-political resistance, especially in the northern regions where pastoralist communities and agrarian societies had longstanding tensions. The colonial government's repressive policies disrupted traditional socio-economic structures, increasing rural discontent and incentivizing bandit-like resistance to colonial rule (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014).

Post-independence Nigeria saw a rise in rural banditry driven by socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment, and the failure of governance, which further marginalized rural populations (Bashir, 2017). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as Nigeria's population grew and resources became increasingly scarce, banditry escalated, with armed groups carrying out raids, kidnappings, and cattle rustling. Poor policing, lack of resources, and inadequate response from the government compounded these issues, leading to greater lawlessness and insecurity in northern Nigeria (Higazi & Ali, 2018).

Recently, banditry has intensified due to the proliferation of small arms, conflicts between farmers and herders, and weak state presence, which allowed bandits to control vast rural areas, affecting millions. Modern banditry has become a complex criminal enterprise, with armed groups exploiting local grievances to gain legitimacy (Nnamani & Chidi, 2021).

However, these banditry gangs terrorize and dispose of local people in their communities or travelers of their valuable items or properties such as farm produces, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and outside rural communities with the assistance of informants which in some instances include state agents deployed to protect lives and properties of the people (Abdullahi, 2019). These criminal groups' activities in Northwest, Nigeria have destroyed the livelihood of several millions of people living. For instance, the activity of Bandits claimed 614,937 people live across the country between May 2023 and April 2024. The northwest recorded the highest figure with 206,030, followed by the northeast with 188,992, while the southwest accounted for the least 15,693 (Kabir, 2024).

The Nexus between State and Food Security

To establish the nexus between the state and food security, there is need to understand the relationship between the state and security. The reason is not far from the fact that the concept of security is now synonymous to human security because what constitutes threat to human existence goes beyond a threat from other states. Therefore, the nexus between the state and security is foundational, the primarily responsible of the state is to maintain order and safeguard its citizens. The concept of security encompasses

protection against both internal and external threats, ensuring the stability necessary for socio-economic development and public welfare (Buzan, 1991). States deployed different apparatuses such as policy, the police, military, as well as other security and intelligence agencies to establish firm control and protect against any acts that can constitute a threat to the stability of the societies. The categorization of states either as weak or failing states, often marked by inadequate security measures and corruption, struggle to protect their citizens, resulting in higher vulnerability to crime, terrorism, and other forms of violence (Rotberg, 2004). Thus, a state's ability to provide comprehensive security influences its stability, legitimacy, and effectiveness in fulfilling its social contract with the people.

States have vital roles in the realization of food security and elimination of hunger and poverty. Though the state is not mandated to feed its population directly, they expected to ensure a smooth and unbreakable channel for every citizen to access food. This is affirmed by the World Food Summit (1996) position, where it stated state needs to demonstrate its capacity to guarantee an environment where citizens would pursue their livelihood activities. As a provider of the public good, it is expected from the state to ensure that the public goods needed by the societies to remain peaceful and prosperous are available (Paarlberg, 2002). The international Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (CECSR) asserts that "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger" (UNHR/FAO, 2010:7) and specifies actions to be undertaken by nations to ensure freedom from hunger. These actions include improvement of methods of production, conservation and distribution of food while also achieving "the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources" (UNHR/FAO, 2010) through improvement in the production side of food system.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2002) has declared that the right to food is a human right and not a political option that governments can choose to implement or ignore. Acknowledging this means obligations for governments. It is not normal for the governments to observe their obligations arising from economic and commercial agreements on the international level at the detriment of ligations regarding human rights, which are, moreover, often incompatible with trade agreements.

Then, the State has the primary obligation to protect and promote this right. The core obligation of the state is to take necessary action to mitigate and alleviate hunger as provided for in Paragraph 2 of article II of the Covenant, even in times of natural or other disasters. Every state is expected to ensure that everyone under its jurisdiction has access to the minimum essential food, which is sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe, to ensure his/her freedom from hunger. These obligations are defined and guaranteed by both local and international law. The state obligation, according to FAO (2010) is divided into three categories, namely, the obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill.

States must respect people's existing access to food and means of obtaining food. This means that any measure which results in preventing access to food is prohibited. This obligation requires states not to take any measures that would hinder or prevent

individuals from having access to adequate and nutritious food. The right holders are at liberty of lawful and safe food. This can only be ensured via regular review of national policies and programs related to food to ensure that they effectively respect the equal right of everyone to food (Manitra *et al*, 2011).

Secondly, states must protect individual's enjoyment of the right to food against violations by the third parties. In addition to the state prevention of third parties from destroying sources of food, it is also an obligation of the state to ensure that food put in the market is safe and nutritious. States must therefore establish and enforce food quality and safety standards. A state must also consider its international legal obligations regarding the right to food when entering into agreements with other states or with international organizations (FAO, 2012).

Lastly, in the obligation to fulfill the right to food, the states must be proactive in strengthening people's access to and use of resources and means of ensuring their livelihoods, including food security. Typical measures include the implementation of agrarian reform programs or minimum income regulations. Meanwhile, in a situation where an individual or groups are unable (due to reasons above his power) to enjoy the right to food by the means at their disposal, the state has the obligation to provide it (FAO, 2012). Out of these three obligations mentioned above, protection is going to serve as parameters upon which this paper reflects on the role of the Nigeria state in food security in current insecurity situation.

The Nigeria Rural Communities and their Potential for Food Security

Attempt to address the objective of this study requires proper understanding of the characteristics of Nigeria and its population, most especially in rural communities. Nigeria is a country in the Sub-Saharan Africa with population of 213 million. The population distribution between the urban and rural areas of the country shows that significant percentage of the population resides in the rural communities (Sunday, 2023). These populations rely on agricultural related activities as a means of livelihood. In Nigeria economies, agriculture occupies an essential position. The sector drives economic growth and accounts for 70 per cent of the country's workforce and majority of this workforce reside in rural communities across the country. Farming occupation that account for 80 per cent of these farmers are smallholder farmers out of which 70 per cent are women and 30 per cent are male. Smallholder farming system characterized Nigerian food production. Majority of smallholder farmers are in the rural communities across the country. They produced 90 per cent of agricultural produce (Adedotun nd). The mode of operation of smallholder farmers is unique and essential to the realization of hunger reduction. Smallholder farmers produce a variety of foods in sufficient quantities to enable all household members to eat a nutritional diet as well as to have sustainable access to food supply (Faber and Wenhold, 2007).

In Nigeria, the activities of smallholder farmers are categorized into two. The first category is crops produced by farmers. They produce crops for domestic consumption. It is family needs that usually determine what to plant, the scale of production and

where the plots of farmland should be located. The farming activities are carried out by individual owners which could be supported with minor hired labour or exchange labour with other farmers using little modern techniques of farming system. Smallholder farmers source for factors of production within his/her family (Dunmoye, 1989; Mgbenka & Mbah, 2016). These farmers take care mainly the food needs of the farm family and produces little surplus for sale. The central objective of this category of farmers is to take care of their family food needs and sell the little that remains.

The second category is livestock producers. This is the second largest agricultural sub-sector that contributes 5 per cent of the agricultural Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The common livestock animals in Nigeria are poultry birds, cattle, small ruminates like goats, sheep. The federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, (Edward & Samuel, 2020) put the figure of livestock produced in Nigeria annually as follows; 180 million poultry birds, 76 million goats, 43.4 million sheep, 18.4 million cattle, 7.5 million pigs, 1.4 million horses and donkeys put together. 85 per cent and 81 per cent of rural households keep poultry birds and small ruminants respectively. The rural households keep an average size of 6 small ruminants and 6 birds, and they were raised in free range production system. Its serves as source of nutrition as well as safe net that help smallholder farmer to complement their source of income especially when there is low yield from their crops. In fact, as the beginning of farming season, some farmer sold their livestock to acquire agricultural inputs for their farms.

Rural women take a lead in livestock production in Nigeria. They rear and manage these animals in their backyard because doing that requires minimal time and capital to start and run. The livestock production provides income to women most especially those constrained women by socio-cultural and religious factors to meet their financial obligations. They rear these animals for the purpose raising income to complement their income from surplus crops production. In many instances, the income generated from livestock by these farmers is used to secure agricultural inputs for their farms at the beginning of farming season and other expenses (Ikore, 2022).

In livestock production, herdsmen play a significant role. They constitute the major breeders of cattle which serve as main source of meat consumed by Nigerians. Fulani herdsmen own over 90 per cent of the nation's livestock population. And contribute 3.2 per cent of the nation's GDP. This contribution strategically put herdsmen as stakeholder in the process of achieving food security in the country. According to Lawal-Adebawale (2012), the larger proportions of these cattle population are raised through the traditional method whereby cattle are moved from one place to the other in search of food, mainly grasses and water. The cattle farmers migrate toward south during dry season and toward north during wet season in search of better pasture, and water. Their movement, in most cases, lead to conflicts since these grazing lands do not belong to them, the herders faced with challenges, such as trespass to land and cattle eating farmers' crops, which further escalate into violence and insecurity (Ajayi et al, 2023). Thus, if anything alters the existing smallholder farmers' arrangement, there will be a steep drop in food production, hunger and poverty will mount up.

An overview of factors responsible for banditry and its implications on food security

In Nigeria, majority of violent and conflicts happened in rural communities. The conflicts are more pronounced in the rural communities than urban cities because, the perpetrator of these conflicts and violent take advantage of negligence of government at all levels in rural communities' development to establish, nurture their criminal gangs that later turned to a threat to the country.

Since return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria is facing series of security challenges instituted by non-state actors. These actors range from Niger Delta Militant, The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOB) to Boko Haram, Farmer/Herder Conflict, and Banditry. The mode of operation and the motive behind their formations of these groups varies. In the north, Boko Haram, banditry and farmer/herders conflict operation is more of rural communities than the cities. Except for Boko Haram that started its activities in Borno and Yobe states capital, other nonstate actors' origin are highly connected with rural communities. For instance, Niger Delta militancy emerged because of perceived marginalization and environmental degradation in Nigeria's oil rich states in Niger delta region. The militants who are mainly youths from host communities carried out their activities by targeting oil installations, engaging in oil bunkering as well as kidnapping of oil workers to demand a fair share of oil revenue. Thus, their activities were largely political, economic injustice and exploitation by the state and multinational corporation (Ikelegbe, 2010).

On the other hand, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist movement that struggles for the establishment of the independent Biafran State as a follow up for the historical Biafran War (1967-1970). The movement was rooted in political exclusion and ethno-nationalist ideology. Their initial mode of operation was peaceful protests and later metamorphous into confrontations with law enforcement including sit at home orders. The emergence of armed factions like the Eastern Security Network (ESN) from IPOB, make the movement more violence in nature (Onuoha, 2021).

Also, Boko Haram emerged as Islamic ideology with aim of rejecting western education and establishing a strict Islamic state. Looking at its mode of operation, Boko Haram remains one of Africa's deadliest terror groups defined by extreme violence, suicide bombings, mass abductions as well as control of territories which constitute a threat to state sovereignty (Zenn, 2014). The farmer-herder conflict is another security challenge that occurs between herders and farming communities across the country. The conflict is primarily driven by struggle over land and grazing routes. Though, this conflict is not ideological driven but is rooted in climate change, desertification, population

growth and weak governance were identified as factors responsible for the conflict (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014).

The persistence of conflict between farmers and herders was attributed to method of cattle rearing in Nigeria. The livestock rearing in Nigeria involves movement of cattle from one location to another location in search for grazing pasture. In this process, cattle move into farmland, eating up crops and destroying the livelihood of farm owners. The resistance of farmers and local communities often resulted in a serious conflict that claimed lives, properties as well as displacement of thousands of people across the country (Okpaleke, 2016). Recall that the causes of these conflicts are combination of many factors. But the common factor is population expansion in Nigeria. Nigeria population is one fast growing population in the world; this equally required an expansion in food production to meet the increasing demand for food. As a result, the routes initially designated for cattle, dated back to the 1950s, in line with colonial arrangements, have been overrun by new human settlements pushing herders further into contested territories (Orji, 2021). The farmers' cultivation encroaches into traditional cattle grazing routes forcing herdsman cattle to trample on crops cultivation by farmers result in escalation conflicts.

On the other hand, banditry has equally capitalized on disconnection between the government and rural communities to carry out their terror activities against the rural dwellers. Their mode of operation includes attacking, killing, robbing villagers and travellers, cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom and sexual violence. Northwest and North-central are seriously affected by the activities of the bandits. The violent act of the gangs has created fear and insecurity among rural communities. In the rural communities, these gangs are so bold to the extent that they sent notification to villages ahead of their attacks and for farmers to access their farmlands; the bandits impose tax on farmers. For instance, resident of Kidandan village in Kaduna state were asked to pay between N70,00 and N100,000 before they can harvest their farm produce (Mohammed, 2023), while in Katsina State, some communities were asked by bandits to contribute N200,000, N300,000 and N500,000 respectively to them before they can access their farms (Godwin, 2024). Many villages were attacked because of their inability to pay imposed tax as well as buying them motorcycles and cell phones. The communities' that raised the money and paid were either attacked by another faction of bandits or the same faction that collected the money few weeks later. Like this is issue of forcing residence of villages to work on their farm. The bandits, to raised funds to sustain their activities, in some communities, established their own farms and asked farmers to work on their farm first before working in their own farms. They sent message to community leaders requesting for specific number of farmers to work on their farms. Where they failed to comply with such request, the bandits will attack such villages (Emergency Digest, 2024).

Women and girls are also victim of these attacks as many of them are forcefully kidnapped and married or raped. For instance, in Niger State, bandits attack five communities in broad daylight and embarked on an indiscriminate raping of women

and girls in the present of their children (Adam, 2021; Ogalah, 2021). Also, in Tsafe Local Government Area of Zamfara State, bandits invaded communities for their inability to pay N3 million levy imposed on them and raped women and loot their properties. This, to greater extent, increases the risk of acute food insecurity and disrupts agricultural activities in the country.

As a result of these incessant attacks by bandit, majority of the rural communities, people were forced to abandon their farms. They chased farmers out of their farmlands during harvesting while some farmers were even killed. Some communities were deserted as all the people that are living there left with their livestock due to attacks. They set farm produces ablaze or cart away some harvested food. Those who stayed behind, among the farmers, were subjected to taxation by the bandits before accessing their farms (Punch, 2019). The aftermath of this growing security crisis is abandonment of about 30% of agricultural land in Kaduna State by affected communities, while farming activities in Zamfara and Katsina States were restricted to few areas thus resulting in decline in food production by 60% (WANEP, 2019). In Kebbi State, over 350 rice farmers were affected with farmlands abandoned because of bandit attacks (Punch, 2018). Due to security situation food items like cattle, rice, beans and vegetables, supply from the northern to the southern part has reduced. This had increased the rural-urban migration with serious pressure on available food as well as general agricultural deficit in the country. The outcome of the pressure in the cities on little available food is food inflation which stood at 21.85 percent in June 2021 (NBS, 2022).

Owing to the menace of conflicts, the chain of food distribution was also affected. The bandits attack Fulani herdsmen on their way to markets and robbed cattle traders of their money and goods. In some instances, they invaded markets in hundreds with sophisticated weapons, killed numbers of individuals and set the markets ablaze. For instance, many major local markets where traders from different part of the country buy and sell foodstuff were either shut down or traders are afraid of going due to frequent attacks on such markets. The adverse effect of attacks on markets is reduction in number of trailers of foodstuff coming and going out of the market. Similarly, Shinkafi market in Zamfara State was equally reported functioned between 30 to 40 percent while Dandume market in Katsina State functioned lower by 15 to 25 percent relative with a declined in number of sales and supplies of foodstuff from eight (8) trailers weekly to half truck in two months, according to a revenue officer in Katsina state. The devastated effects of the banditry activities in the northwest is so significant to the level that in Katsina and Zamfara States over 220,000 people were displaced, 8,319 people have been killed including women and children with 500 communities destroyed in Katsina State alone between June 2011 and May 2019.

The consequence of this on food production, according to Ofuoku & Isife (2009) is that more than 40 million tons worth of crops are lost annually in the South-South region of Nigeria, especially Delta and Edo States. The crisis has forced many farmers in the rural areas to flee to cities for lesser jobs like Okada (motorcycle) riding and other artisans' work. Some have even become refugees in neighbouring states. Those that

remains in the villages are afraid to go to farms in far place due to fear of attacks from herdsmen, Osimen, Edokpa & Daramola (2019)

The aftermath of these conflicts was also felt by herdsmen across the affected communities as their cattle were rustling and their women were raped and, in many instances, lives of innocent people were taken. The trend of livestock owner attacks cut across the country, though, the magnitude varies between north and south parts due to high concentration of their production in the north. 28,000 cattle were stolen, and 254 herdsmen were killed in Plateau state between 2013 and 2015 by rustlers, in incidents that affected eight out of the seventeen Local Government Areas in the state (Fidelis, 2021). In Benue State, about 8,680 cattle were stolen and 2,500 Fulani herdsmen were killed in the state. The region lost over one million cattle to Boko Haram insurgency, and the sect used the proceeds of cattle theft to fund their activities in the country (International Crisis Group, 2017). These security problems constitute threat to sources of livelihood in rural communities which is inimical to poverty and hunger reduction in Nigeria

The reflection on role of the Nigerian State

Measures are initiated by Nigeria government to address the challenges of insecurity in the country, most especially in area of banditry and farmer-herders' conflict. These measures include deployment of military personnel to assist other security agencies that are ordinarily charge with responsibility of internal security. This had led to the rescue of kidnapped victims from captivity as well as arrest and killing of bandits. Despite the involvement of security agencies in war against these non-state actors, their impacts in curtailing attacks yielded little results. The security agencies at this point were overwhelmed with resurgence of different non state actors threaten Nigeria security.

Inability of Law enforcement agents like the Police among others to protect the citizens and diminishing confidence of Nigerians in their capability to effectively curtail insecurity prompted some to call for establishment of state police which was vehemently opposed by some state and ethnic based organizations. They argued that state governors will use such security apparatus to victimize people residing outside state of their origin. This call, on the other hand, led to establishment of Western Nigeria Security Network, known as "Amotekun" by governors from six states in Southwestern Nigeria. This development is met with support and opposition among the members of the society and even from the central government. The supporters saw the law and security outfit as means of addressing the conflicts. Those that oppose it claimed that the decision of the governors does not align with the provisions of the Nigerian constitution (Premium Times, 2020). The Amotekun was established to curb the conflict and reposed confidence on the southwest people to return to farming business activities without fear of been attack.

In the Northwest, state like Zamfara and Katsina introduced amnesty program for repentant bandits and cattle rustlers to complement efforts of the central government. In October 2023, the Katsina State government established a lunched outfit known as

Community Watch to tackle insecurity in the state. All these security initiatives failed to bring expected results as bandits and cattle rustlers kept betraying their promises to the government. The perpetrators of these attacks are still carrying out their attacks on innocents' people across the country.

The cost of ransom and imposed tax paid by innocent Nigerians questions the capacity of Nigerian State to protect her citizens. The state security agencies have failed the citizens in recovering the ransoms paid out of fear or efforts to get their loved one released from kidnaper den. The defenceless people of Southern Kaduna, for instance, were forced to pay about N900,000,000 between January and December 2020 as ransom to free their people kidnapped by bandits. For kidnapped victims, the ransomed were raised by immediate family members or with inclusion of extended family. Payment of the ransom shows the level of trust and hope in the state security apparatus. Meanwhile, the nexus between amnesty program for bandits repentant and victims shows that government pays little interest to welfare of innocents' citizens.

The nonchalant attitude of the government to mitigate any further attacks on the farmers by herdsmen and bandits contributed immensely to the crisis. International Crisis Group (2018) reported that both farmers and herders complain that their demands for justice for past criminal acts and warnings of imminent attacks received little or no response from the government. The farmer perceived response of the state security apparatuses and that of government official as a tactics by the government to protect Fulani herdsmen. In his response to the crisis, the Defence Minister Monsur Dan-Ali, linked the growing violence between farmers and herdsmen to the blockage of traditional grazing routes by farmers. This statement, to some farmers, is portraying the federal government as the defender of herders (The Cable, 2021).

Also, the government does not appear ready to end the killing, kidnapping and destruction of properties of innocent rural people. The way bandits frequently travel in convoy of motorcycle to carry out their attacks on communities freely without interruption of security agencies is worrisome. The rural communities were left at the mercy of the bandits, as Nigeria government and her security agencies failed to protect their lives and properties.

The utterance of political office holders in charge of security and late response from security agencies to a distress call, not only affect the peoples' confidence on capacity of the. Nigeria state to protect them but equally shows the political office holders have little understanding of the relationship between peaceful environment and realization of SDGs. Former Minister of Defense, Major General (rtd) Bashir Magashi said people should come together and face the banditry with sophisticated arms (Leadership, 2021). This further explains lack of seriousness of government to tackle the problem.

The responses of the government towards the incidents further worsen the existing fear. In addressing the security situation, Nigeria government display nonchalant attitude. At a point in time, the government refused to openly condemn and to even punish the actors involve in violent conflicts. This attitude of the government has the



potential to encourage more people to be recruited, and it also serves as license to perpetrators to continue business as usual.

The deposition of the Nigerian government to open possession of firearms by herdsmen, also explain the nonchalant attitude of the State to the management of insecurity. Unlike when they carried and relied on long clubs, machetes, bows and arrows, they now carry AK47 and presumably use them on farmers and farming communities to create tensions. This is against Nigerian laws forbidding regular citizens to own and use gun, but this provision of law was ignored and license for herdsmen to operate with impunity despite that the laws do not permit private individual to carry firearms, Fulani herdsmen enjoyed the support of the government as none of them was arrested for violating the law. This was seen as Bauchi State Governor Bala Muhammed said the Fulani have right to carry firearms to protect themselves since government has failed to protect them.

Inability of the government to regulate firearms possession within the ambit of law and havoc they are using these firearms to cause in the country prompted some state governors to call for permission to allow their citizens to carry AK47 so that they can face the bandits with AK47 (Ochonu, 2016). Zamfara State government equally announced his governments' readiness to issue licenses for the people of the state to carry AK47 to face the bandits. This clearly shows that Nigerian state is confused on what to do to fill its constitutional mandate of protect life and properties. The reason is that the failure to explaining how arming people would address the attacks by bandits.

The persistent of these security problems not only has negative impact on development but also question the role of Nigerian state in providing peaceful and stabilized environment. Similarly, the absence of political will on part of the government to implement recommendations of commissions charged with investigating the conflicts between farmers and Fulani herdsmen is also identified as factor that sustained the crisis (International Crisis Group, 2017). Both parties have little hope in the government mediation system. They have little confidence in the operation of police due to bribes and prolong court processes. Victims often complain about the reluctant of security agency to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators even when the security agencies know them. This often led to tit-for-tat attacks among farmers and Fulani communities across the country. In many instances, there were cases of reappraisal attacks on farmers' communities and Fulani settlement across the country. On the other hands, the residents of affected rural communities resolved to engage the services of local hunters and vigilantes to replace the conventional security agencies. This community step also compounded the crisis as those they arrested are executed. They are, also, not free from the immune of extorting cash and cattle from herders as "protections levy" (International Crisis Group, 2017; Vanguard, 2018).

Herding communities also attributed the persistence of the crisis to failure of the government to arrest perpetrators of attacks and punish them to serve as deterrent (International Crisis Group, 2018). Failure of security agencies to intervene in what is called the excesses of both parties, prompted the mobilization of the communities'

militias or vigilantes to launch reprisal attacks. This has led to the death of citizens and those who survived among the farmers migrate to the urban areas abandoning their farmlands (John, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper examined the effects of insecurity on food security in Nigeria and reflected on the government's response to the crisis. The study identified various measures such as security operations and policy initiatives introduced by the government, that have not yielded the expected outcome of producing a peaceful environment needed for agricultural productivity. Persistent of security problem, particularly in rural communities where farming is their major occupation, has disrupted access to market, community forced displacement as well as loss of lives, farmlands, and produce.

The failure of these government interventions is because of the inconsistency of responses on the part of the government, especially concerning operation of banditry in all the affected communities. Majority of government interventions lack proper coordination, timely execution, as well as the involvement of local communities. The natures of government interventions undermine food production, distribution as well as eroding public trust in government institutions. Due to these security challenges, Nigeria risks missing the targets of hunger and poverty eradication under the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is need for comprehensive and inclusive approach that ensure sustainable peacebuilding and stronger institutional frameworks that capable of breaking the cycle of insecurity.

Recommendations

The study, thus, recommends the following measures to put an end to the security problems that it is affecting rural communities in Nigeria,

- i. The government should provide a highly coordinated security approach to this security problem. The cases of bandit's attacks reported so far shows that these criminals were moving in convoy of hundreds of motorcycles freely and carry out their operations without stoppage from security agencies.
- ii. The government should paid serious attention to the right of the victims of these attacks from bandits and farmer herders' conflicts. It does not speak well of a country that cattle were rustling without government through her security agencies arrest the rustlers.
- iii. The government should activate the grassroots security management with constitutional backing by involving traditional institutions, community-based organizations and the entire members of the communities to assist the already overwhelm conventional security agencies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

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