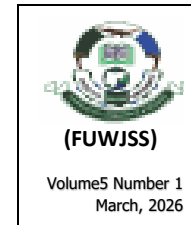


SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF BANDITRY IN THE MIDDLE-BELT REGION, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Banditry is a growing trend in Nigeria with monumental consequences on communities. This study examines the social-economic consequences of banditry in the Middle Belt, Nigeria. The study was guided by social disorganization theory. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey conducted in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas in Plateau and Kaduna States. The study's sample and locations were purposively selected. Focus group discussion (FGD) and key-informant interview (KII) guides were used to collect data. The researchers conducted sixteen focus group discussions and 14 key informant interviews. Data collected were transcribed and thematically analyzed using content analysis. Findings revealed that banditry has had devastating consequences on the social and economic life of the communities; it has soured relationships between community members that hitherto lived in peace. It has also drastically reduced economic production and accentuated poverty. However, the Nigerian military personnel deployed for peace-keeping operations in these areas have become corrupt and biased and have not done much in restoring peace to affected communities. Peace-keeping has become a '*business*' for military personnel. The study concludes that banditry has disorganized many communities in the Middle Belt region with devastating socio-economic consequences. It calls on government to improve security presence in places ravaged by bandits in Nigeria, and provided the necessary weapons to tackle banditry. The research also recommends that corrupt security personnel, individuals and government functionaries who collaborate with, or aid and abate banditry should be sanctioned appropriately.

Keywords: Socio-economic, social relations, banditry, peacebuilding, Nigerian military

Introduction

Banditry is a global problem that has affected the developed, the developing as well as the backward economies (Hobsbawm, 1969). History has demonstrated that banditry is an unfortunate phenomenon that has been experienced by many continents, regions and countries of the world; from north to south, and east to western parts of the globe (Beattie, 1974; Crummey, 1986; Slatta 1987; Bankoff, 1998). Just like this phenomenon has been witnessed in Asia, North and South America, and Europe, many countries in Africa such as Somalia, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have experienced frequent attacks from banditry. (Mburu, 1999, MacEachern, 2020; Jude, Hayatu & Paul, 2020). Banditry has added to insecurity and armed violence in Africa to reproduce conditions for instability and unpredictability, especially in west and central regions (Akanle & Omobowale, 2015; MacEachern, 2020).

Nigeria is one of the countries in West Africa where banditry has exponentially increased and become a major security issue among citizens (Abdulkarim, Sule & Tamizhazhagan, 2021; Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria, 2021). Uche and Iwuamadi (2018) have noted that it started as farmers – herders struggle which lured its ugly head in the country in the late 1990s. Banditry has claimed thousands of lives in Nigeria, destroyed properties worth billions of naira and displaced hundreds of thousands (Aban, 2021; Nwaechefu, Fatehinse & Kalama, 2021; Garba, 2021). Attacks by bandits started in north east and north western Nigeria in the 2010s. However, from that time, banditry violence spread to other States in the country including those in the Middle Belt region such as Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa. The growing number of raids and attacks by bandits have led to loss of many lives and properties, there have been increases in the number of orphans, widows and widowers. The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in camps continues to soar because of banditry across different regions of Nigeria. Attacks by bandit has created monumental humanitarian problems in Nigeria (Mustapha, 2019; United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2020; Jones, Michael, & Christopher, 2021).

Most recently, attacks by bandits in the Middle Belt of Nigeria have been increasing and becoming more ferocious (Abdulkarim et al. 2021; Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria, 2021). Prior to the present wind of banditry in the Middle Belt, skirmishes between farmers and herders occurred from time to time, but they were resolved (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). “The Middle Belt is not a geographical expression; it is a cultural and political affirmation ...” by the people of central Nigeria (Ishaku, 2014:104). Banditry has emerged as a very stubborn security issue in the Middle Belt. What was once localized assaults and sporadic

clashes has transformed into a full-blown one-sided violence involving armed attacks, mass murder, rape, mass kidnappings, displacement of thousands of persons, destruction of properties, stealing of available valuables, and land grabbing (Akowe & Kayode, 2014; Aina, Ojo & Oyewole, 2023). The bandits kidnap girls and women to service them; other kidnap victims are used for ransom; kidnap for ransom has become a viable alternative source of income for bandits. Thus, ferocious and brutal raids are frequently conducted in rural areas where about 70% of Nigeria's population live and carry out subsistence agriculture to get captives for ransom (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014; Oluwale et al. 2021).

There are different definitions of banditry by scholars. Egwu (2015) defines it as armed criminal enterprises which have consequences for socio-economic, political, cultural, and psychological life of affected society. Thompson, Awange, Obi, Aina, Adeosun and Jinadu (2024) define banditry as some form of acts of violence, robbery and pillage in places where the security structure of the state is no longer functional. Banditry is both a social and security problem by armed organized criminal groups who use violence to raid, rob, extort, and kidnap victims, most especially residents in the rural areas (Okoli, 2019). Banditry is distinct from other criminal enterprises in the sense that its attacks are focused on vulnerable rural dwellers who are usually farmers. Bandits are armed criminals who are linked to almost all types of crimes; they gruesomely destroy lives, engage in armed robbery and kidnapping, rape, arson, and drug abuse (Wagner, 2007; Curott & Fink, 2008; Umaru, 2020; Osasona, 2023). Cattle rustling is one of the activities carried out by bandits against sedentary farmers in the rural or semi-rural areas (Rufai, 2018; Osasona, 2023). Conception of bandits covers armed miscreants, armed unemployed youths, armed herders, and armed individuals (Abiodun & Abila, 2018). The criminal activities of bandits deliberately target personal gains or those of the criminals' constituency (Olapaju & Peter, 2021). Consequently, Okoli and Ugwu (2019), maintain that banditry is not just economically, but as well, politically motivated. Although efforts have been made by the state as well as non-state actors to bring banditry to an end in many parts of Nigeria, such attempts have remained largely unsuccessful due to lack of coordination (Ejiofor, 2022; Onyishi et al. 2021). Therefore, the hydra headed phenomenon still thrives, with consequences.

Historical Accounts of Banditry in Nigeria

Nigeria has been experiencing the stranglehold of banditry for a long time. Odinkalu (2018), and Garba (2021) trace the problem of banditry in the country to the twentieth century. But then, it was not pronounced, and

bandits were mindful of the law (Ogbonnaya, 2013). However, banditry has assumed a monumental frequency and ferocity in Nigeria in the twenty first century (Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria, 2021). In the last two decades, bandits have attacked several schools and kidnapped teachers, hundreds of pupils and students (Jacob & Ahaotu, 2021; Musa, 2021). Many schools have been closed with thousands of school children missing school (Abdulyakeen, 2020; Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021; Jacob & Ndubuisi, 2021). Similarly, bandits have attacked military bases, markets, worship centres, villages, and highways, and killed or abducted thousands of Nigerians, including security personnel (Jones et al., 2021; Garba, 2021). Scores of markets and schools have been closed with implication for commerce, income and education. Many villages have been sacked, farms and other assets abandoned, with millions of internally displaced persons (Abang, 2021; Nwaechehu et al., 2021). Communities have suffered property losses exceeding 65 billion naira due to banditry which has also adversely impacted their employment, livelihood and standard of living (Brigid et. al., 2022; Ojewale, 2024). Attacks by bandits have crippled social and economic life in many places, especially in the rural areas across the nation. Poverty levels in affected areas have been on the increase (Obasanmi & Enoma, 2022), and mutual trust is lost (Kennedy, Naomi & Halidu, 2019).

Holistically examined, banditry has implications for social, economic and corporate existence of Nigeria (Rotberg & Campbell 2021; Nwaechehu, Fatehinse & Kalama, 2021). It displaces people from their land and natural resources and this leads to food shortages, malnutrition, and increase of preventable diseases, especially among children (Brigid, Boniface & Okonkwo (2022). Banditry is an issue of serious security concern (Ibrahim, Mutawalli & Ladan, 2020); it instills fear of insecurity among citizens, disrupts and discourages developmental activities (Dami, 2021). Ojewale (2024) noted that banditry promotes tension, creates chaos, and destabilizes social life, especially in communities in rural Nigeria. Kennedy et al (2019) and Dami (2021) argue that apart from casualties, banditry attacks on communities usually discourage both local and foreign investment, set in motion economic doldrums for individuals and communities, and generate social risks.

Government and security agencies have implemented several strategies such as shutting down cell phone networks to prevent bandits from communicating, ban on sale of premier motor spirit in jerry cans, sim card registration, ban on the use of commercial motorcycles, granting of amnesty to repentant bandits, ban on ransom payments and setting up of local vigilante groups (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, (2023), as well as ban on open grazing to deal with the problem (Asadu, 2021; Barnett & Rufai,

2021). Government has also negotiated with bandits to broker peace, or deployed the military and paramilitary forces on internal security operations to restore peace in the nation. Some success has been achieved from these efforts. Through coordinated joint operations by security operatives many bandits have been killed or arrested and their haven destroyed. However, these strategies have not yielded optimal result as banditry thrives in Nigeria (Maigari, Dantani & Arafat, 2021; Onyishi, Obiorah & Oji, 2021; Ejiofor, 2022; Aina, Ojo & Oyewole, 2023). Several propositions have been advanced for lack of success with kinetic approach. For instance, military personnel have been accused for being biased, corrupt and/or not committed to restoring peace in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2017; Gulleng & Hunduh, 2018). Similarly, Ameh and Aliyu (2023) and Akinwotu (2017) maintain that the problem of banditry in Nigeria is escalating because of the slow response of the Nigerian government and unpatriotic attitude of security agencies. There have been allegations of corruption and the negative effects of the military's operations on some affected local communities, all of which have affected the war against armed bandits (International Crisis Group, 2017). In order to understand more deeply the socio-economic dynamics of banditry and the peace operations of the Nigerian military in the Middle Belt, it was germane to empirically study the issue in detail. Therefore, this study focused on socio-economic consequences of banditry and peace operations of the Nigeria military in the Middle Belt.

Theoretical Framework

The tenets of social disorganization theory guided the study. Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay propounded the theory in 1942. The theory assumes that social disorganization is a condition in which social control declines and contributes to crime and delinquency; it believes that criminal behaviour is associated with the social environment, especially environments where social change was rapid. In Nigeria, social change has taken place at fast pace since the civil war and the return to civil rule; and the rate of crimes such as banditry attacks have grossly increased in both urban and rural areas (Center for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria, 2021). Social disorganization theorists believe that where and when there is rapid social change, some individual members of society are not able to cope with rapid change and this predisposes them to deviant behaviour. Social disorganization may arise from cultural conflicts between different values of different sections of society. The difference may be between old and new values imposed on individuals by community, or on community by government or, other institutions. Social disorganization may also be explained in terms of culture lag which means that sometimes the various

components of culture in society grow unequally resulting in a gap between those components (Qadri, 2009).

Social disorganization theory links crime to factors such as residential mobility, and racial heterogeneity; it assumes that whenever and wherever there is social disorganization, there is an increase in crime that further disrupts or weakens the continuity of conventional neighbourhood traditions and institutions. Thus, this study believes that banditry attacks and its increasing frequency is a rapid social change in Nigeria which has impacted social and economic lives of individuals, families and communities in the Middle Belt. Furthermore, the study believes that as a result of banditry, the fabrics of social and economic life have become frayed giving rise to other crimes. However, the Nigerian military deployed for peace operations have not successfully carried out such assignment due to the general social disorganization in the country.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas in Plateau and Kaduna States in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. The research design adopted for the study was descriptive cross-sectional survey. The choice of these locations was based on the fact that they are among the States in Nigeria experiencing increasing high levels of criminal activities of bandits. The population for study in each of the selected communities was made up of male and female community members and security personnel.

It was mainly a qualitative research. The purposive sampling technique was applied to choose Plateau and Kaduna States that were ravaged by banditry; Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas respectively were purposively selected from the two States. The same purposive sampling technique was used to select all the respondents for key informant interviews and participants in focus group discussions. The researchers' entrance into the communities was facilitated by opinion leaders or community members whom we contacted. This approach helped gain the confidence and trust of respondents; it also facilitated the researchers' community accessibility and acceptability which made the fieldwork easy.

Focus group discussion (FGD) and key-informant interview (KII) guides were research tools used to collect data from respondents. The researchers conducted sixteen focus group discussions with male and female community members; at least two focus group discussions were conducted in each community. Eight focus group discussions each were conducted in Plateau and Kaduna States. Furthermore, 14 key informant interviews were conducted with community leaders and some personnel

of the military in the communities. Seven key informant interviews were conducted in each of the two states. At least two key informant interviews were conducted in each of the communities chosen for the study.

During the interactions one of the researchers took field notes while the other facilitated the discussions and monitored the voice recorder. The focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted in Hausa or English languages. Data generated from focus group discussions and key informant interviews were later transcribed in English language, thoroughly cleaned and organized on the basis of thematic issues in line with the research objectives. The data were then used for thematic content analysis and narrative report writing. Throughout the fieldwork and report writing, the researchers exercised controlled emotional involvement and remained neutral.

Ethical principles were upheld during the study; the researchers ensured the safety of respondents and those who assisted with the data collection process. Participation in the study was with informed consent and voluntary. In addition, we have as much as it is possible and necessary, concealed identities of participants. Furthermore, we have not falsified any information.

Results and Discussions

Banditry has consequences on social and economic life of those targeted and affected by it in the Middle Belt of Nigeria; the consequences are presented and discussed below.

Impact of Banditry on Social Life

Banditry has forced thousands from their homes and disrupted many social activities in communities in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. Respondents stated that banditry has reduced social interactions; exchange of social visits between community members during ethnic or religious occasions in Plateau and Kaduna States have significantly reduced. Highlighting the widespread and significant impact of banditry on both personal relationships and community cohesion, a male discussant in Zango Urban in Zangon Kataf Local Government Area of Kaduna State said,

There are places I can no longer go to do business or even relate and move freely. Honestly, things are no longer as before (FGD, Adult Male, Zango Urban, 12/08/2025).

Banditry has caused widespread displacement in the Middle Belt; many families have been forced to flee their homes and farms to safety elsewhere. Respondents revealed that some of the displaced persons who

flee come back after a while when peace returns to their communities, but others permanently relocate because they do not have a place to stay as their houses were burnt down, or have been taken over and occupied by bandits. Some community members were kidnapped, others lost one or both parents and are now staying with their parents' relations in other places. According to respondents, this mass abduction or displacement has disrupted the social fabric in the communities, leading to a loss of cohesion and support networks that are vital in rural areas. Schools, markets, and other essential services have been abandoned or operate at reduced capacity, thus, further destabilizing the community. Some women have divorced their husbands due to fear of bandits or hardship. A young man revealed;

Some women [who were attacked and displaced] didn't return to their husbands because their husbands can no longer take care of them due to economic hardship. In fact, there are marriages, as I'm talking to you now, that are at the verge of collapsing as a result of the inability of husbands to meet the needs of their wives (FGD, Male Youth in Gan Gora, 14/08/2025).

There are many people who were displaced and have relocated because of banditry, especially the aged. Some people's houses and properties were destroyed and because of worry, they died and their corpses were returned and buried in the communities. Others who did not die could not return because they could not have a place to stay.

Respondents noted that before the escalation of attacks by bandits, interethnic marriages were common. Farmers and herders would often celebrate these unions as a way to strengthen peace and cooperation. Marrying across ethnic lines was seen as a bridge between the communities. However, since the attacks by bandits escalated, families from either sides no longer consider intermarriage an option. Now, many parents discourage it outright, they are afraid of raising families with someone from the other side; they do not want their children getting entangled with a group they see as violent or untrustworthy.

More on effects of banditry on social life, festive periods such as Christmas, New Year, Sallah and Easter celebrations have been affected. Also affected are 'Matyei Day' and 'Ayet Atyap' cultural days which usually held in-between Christmas and New Year Day celebrations no longer take place. Wedding receptions are hurriedly observed. Whenever a marriage is contracted, the wedding receptions are observed within few hours and people disperse. Youth in Kurmin Masara and many other places used to organize parties, especially birthday or graduation parties, and some of the parties were all night long. During this period of banditry, they cannot do that in fear of attacks from bandits. Even if youth in Kurmin

Masara organize birthday or graduation parties, they do it within few hours. People do not freely enjoy and experience deep sense of jubilation anymore, rather, celebrations are done hurriedly and hastily. “When in a place for ceremony, everybody is hurrying to ‘flee’ home” (FGD, female discussant, Gan-Gora, 14/08/2025). However, discussants were optimistic that things are getting normal and they will begin to celebrate fully.

Many respondents maintained that banditry has affected intergroup relations in their communities, particularly in the area of night life. They expressed dissatisfaction with absence of night life which used to be an opportunity to socialize and unwind after a very busy day, especially on Saturdays. They noted that night life provided opportunity for those selling grilled meat, alcohol and disco clubs owners to make money from night crawlers. But banditry has disrupted these social and economic activities. Recreational activities have also been suspended in many places. To buttress the point, an adult male discussant in Matyei told one of the researchers, “You are talking to the coach for this place. I used to take my boys to [football] matches in different villages but today, we cannot meet to train, talk less of having a match” (FGD, adult male, Matyei, 17/08/2025). People are no longer free to relax and enjoy life and be happy, they live in constant fear of banditry violence.

Schools attendance have been badly hit by banditry and students’ academic performance has plummeted. A male respondent in Zango Urban observed that schools were not really closed but students/pupils were afraid to go to school. Most teachers are afraid to come to school during the periods of the attacks by bandits. A male discussant who was a secondary school teacher said,

I want to tell you that only 43 candidates wrote Senior School Certificate Examination this year [2025], and these candidates are coming from three secondary schools.... Before now, we usually had over one hundred candidates. In fact, this is the third year that we didn’t write National Examination Council examination. As a result, the examination center was moved away from our school because of lack of students to write the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. For the past three years, no student was registered for Senior Secondary Certificate Examination in our school. Some students got registered in other schools... because the center here has been closed (Male participant, FGD, Kurmin Masara, 15/08/2025).

Teachers and students are afraid to come to school during the periods of attacks by bandits. Some of the teachers and students have migrated to the cities to live with their relations, such students enrolled in other schools while teachers are engaged in businesses and other economic activities.

A community leader in a pastoral community in Dutsen Kura in Bassa Local Government Area summed consequences of banditry on social life thus:

Banditry has torn apart our community. Interethnic marriages have stopped, markets are divided, and we no longer visit each other during important events. All these changes feed into one another. Without intermarriages, there's no bond between families. Without shared markets, there's no reason to interact. And without social visits, we've lost the trust and friendship that held us together. It feels like we are living in separate worlds now. Before the armed attacks, for example, I used to trade freely with farmers, and we attended each other's ceremonies. Some of my closest friends were farmers, but now we only meet when there's a problem. The loss of all these connections has made life harder for everyone. We need to find a way to heal, but it will take time (KII, male community leader in Dutsen Kura, 04/07/2025).

The research findings agree with Kennedy et al, (2019) who found that banditry kills mutual trust; and cripples social life (Rotberg & Campbell, 2021; Nwaechefu et al., 2021).

Economic Consequences

Banditry has also forced many farmers in the Middle Belt to flee their homes, abandoning their farms. This displacement prevents them from planting, weeding, or harvesting their crops leading to a sharp decline in food production and income. Many respondents argued that as a result of banditry farmers were unable to engage in timely farming activities. Banditry has also led to a significant rise in the cost of farming; farmers are forced to invest more on security measures, such as hiring guards to protect their lands and livestock from attacks. Sometimes there is destruction of farms due to banditry violence and farmers have to purchase new seeds and replant. These added expenses, combined with the scarcity of labour due to displacement or fear of banditry, have driven up the overall cost of farming.

Bandits destroy foodstuff, loot properties and set house alight. Attacks mostly take place in the rainy seasons with implications on impoverishment of the people who are largely farmers. Respondents stated that even with the presence of security men, farmers cannot venture to go inside the bush to farm. "If anyone dares go to farm in the interior, it'll take the grace of God for the person to return safe and unhurt if not killed, except if the people are many. And even with that, you have to be careful because even small boys [who are bandits] know how to kill a big person" (female participant in FGD, in Matyei, 17/08/2025).

Before the attacks by bandits, some farmers could harvest hundreds of bags of assorted grains, banditry has affected such farmers' economic activities. Farmers only manage to produce what they can produce to feed their families. A male discussant in Mayayit boasted,

I could make billions before [banditry attacks], but now I don't have anything. Some farmers could harvest hundreds of bags of different farm produce, but now everybody is managing what he will eat with his family. These attacks have really, really dealt with us in this village (FGD, male discussant in Mayayit, 13/08/2025).

Another male adult respondent stated during Key Informant Interview in Gan Gora, "I used to sell a trailer load of grains. The buyers will come in here and buy these grains and take them away. Today I am managing to get ten or fifteen or even five bags" (KII, male respondent, Gan-Gora, 14/08/2025), the respondent said, shaking his head in anguish. Similarly, a male adult discussant in FGD at Matyei recalled,

Before the attacks, buyers used to come and full pick-ups vans with our farm produce and take them to sell in Jos, Kaduna, even to Lagos and Port Harcourt, but now we don't have such quantity of farm produce. Today, all effort is to get what somebody will eat with his family. Peoples' economic power is badly affected. (FGD, male adult, Matyei, 17/08/2025),

Farmers are afraid to go to their farms, especially if they're near herding routes, which means they can't fully use their land. Respondents in Jebbu Miango and several other communities in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas maintained that crop yields have dropped significantly, and many families struggle to make enough money to survive or send their children to school. The major source of economic power in these communities is farming and banditry has affected it negatively, therefore, the economic strength of farmers has fallen sharply. Transportation is another sector of the economy that has been affected by banditry. Several cars have been burnt during attacks by bandits in Matyei and other communities and drivers rendered unemployed.

Herders have also been affected by banditry; in some places in Bassa Local Government Area cattle have been stolen or killed by bandits. Some herders in Dutsen Kura are unable to access traditional grazing routes or water points in fear of attacks; this affects the health of their livestock. The herders also accused farmers of not only poisoning their crops, but also poisoning the grasses that are close to farmlands in fear that cows will stray into farmlands and destroy crops. This has led to the malnourishment and death of many livestock. Furthermore, herders accused the host

communities in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas of being hostile and unaccommodating, a charge the later denied.

Many participants in the study believed that banditry has deterred both local and external investment in the Middle Belt. Insecurity and instability have made it difficult for investors to commit resources to farming, businesses, or other income-generating ventures. It has also discouraged local farmers and entrepreneurs from making long-term investments in their businesses due to the uncertainty created by banditry attacks. For example, it has interrupted activities of micro finance banks which supported farmers and small and medium scale business owners with loans which they could easily pay back. Participants mentioned that recently most of the debtors were unable to service their debts due to destruction of their businesses and or displacement from their homes. Attacks by bandits have also disrupted markets and discouraged traders from coming to buy crops and livestock. Food prices have soared because there is less production, and some families are forced to buy food from outside the area, which is more expensive. Ukase and Ityonzughul (2020) had earlier noted that crisis deprived people of their basic rights such as food, clothing, shelter, medical service, and security. These research findings also corroborate the conclusions by Okoro (2018), who observed that banditry attacks create humanitarian toll across many communities.

Respondents noted that constant violence by bandits and destruction of farmlands and herds has led to significant income losses, thus, increasing poverty rates and decline of income in affected communities. It has also resulted in reduced agricultural productivity, both through a direct decrease in cultivated land, crop destruction, and the displacement of the farming population. The cumulative effect is a decline in farm produce and the economy. Our findings align with the works of Adamu and Ben (2020), who found that the reduction in productive land use limits both subsistence farming and cash crop cultivation, thereby lowering household income in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas. It also supports the positions of Dami (2021) and Kennedy et al (2019), who argue that banditry attacks on communities discourage both local and foreign investment.

Changing Dynamics of the Nigerian Military in Banditry Peace-keeping Operations

The Nigerian military is deployed for peace operations in many places in the country, including Plateau and Kaduna States. Although the Nigerian military has succeeded in restoring varying levels of peace in the country, there have been mixed reactions on their performance during such peace operations (Gulleng & Hunduh, 2018). Many participants in this

study, most of them farmers, accused the military of providing cover for the bandits/herders to destroy their crops. Some of the participants expressed disappointment in the military for responding late to distress calls. Many participants stated that soldiers conspire with bandits in their operations, that is why when soldiers are called to intervene to stop violent attacks by bandits they do not respond until damage has been done. A male respondent in Matyei community recalled an incident,

...when the attackers came the third time and scattered the place and set houses on fire, they were shouting religious slogans and yelling on top of their voices. In spite the uproar, no soldier or any security person came to our rescue that night. Everybody was running helter-skelter. It was in the morning that some soldiers came around and they didn't even stay long and they left (KII, male respondent, Matyei, 17/08/2025).

An adult female respondent in Mayayit alleged that each time there's a sign or threat of attack, community members report to soldiers, but the soldiers often neglect and do nothing about it, or they [soldiers] may come after the deed is already done. Some respondents alleged that some of the soldiers deployed for peace operations say their duty is to protect the herders and their cows but not individuals in the communities because the herders take good care of them, but the natives do not have money, so they will not waste time on them. A male discussant in Gan-Gora community decried a particular scenario where six persons were attacked and killed while soldiers were just some meters away, but they did not do something to save the victims. He claimed that the soldiers were privy to the incident.

Few participants in this study argued that soldiers are trying in their peace-keeping operations, but there are some soldiers who collaborate with the bandits and even collect bribe to allow bandits carry out attacks. Respondents also maintained that some bad military personnel are contributing to the persistence of banditry. Many participants in the research maintained that lack of punishment to bandits is a major factor encouraging banditry. A male respondent from Matyei village said, "Whenever these bandits are arrested, give them one to two weeks, you'll see them walking freely" (KII, male respondent, Matyei, 17/08/2025). Another male respondent in Mayayit said, "We saw a particular boy [a bandit] who was arrested passing by us one day, he was even jeering at us. They sometimes openly tell us that even if the security personnel arrest them, it's a matter of days, they will be released" (KII, male respondent, Mayayit, 13/08/2025). Some participants in this research alleged that soldiers on peace operations arbitrarily arrest and detain local chiefs on flimsy charges such as cattle rustling or poisoning. Soldiers on peace operations in the study areas denied allegations of being biased in favour of bandits; they also dismissed alleged high-handedness and financial

corruption against personnel as baseless and unfounded. Most of our findings on the conduct of the Nigerian military on peace operations in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas are similar to those of International Crisis Group (2017) and Gulleng and Hunduh (2018); they found that soldiers on peace operations in Nigeria were biased, corrupt and/or not committed to restoring peace.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Banditry has disorganized many communities in the Middle Belt with devastating social and economic consequences. It has caused social fragmentation, displacement of people, damage to property, destruction of lives, homes and farmland, unemployment, poverty, loss of investments among several others. Individuals have been forced to flee from their homes because of attacks from bandits. Displacement has caused people who before banditry attacks lived together to flee in different directions. Thus, breaking temporarily or permanently, social bonds or ties they had with each other. This finding resonates the interplay between armed attacks and social life; and it is line with Achoba and Ura (2023) who in their study concluded that armed attack has severe social consequences.

The findings highlight the significant disruption to intergroup relations; it suggests a profound deterioration in social cohesion and communal harmony, as reflected in the specific aspects of strained relations. The findings are consistent with previous studies on the consequences of armed violence on social relationships. For instance, Adisa and Adekunle (2010) observed that armed violence in Nigeria often result in the segregation of communities, diminished trust, and the breakdown of cooperative frameworks such as shared marketplaces. Similarly, Nori, Taylor and Suleiman (2021) have emphasized that conflict-related tensions disrupt socio-economic networks and cultural ties, leading to the polarization of communities and entrenched hostilities. The findings align with the broader literature on armed invasion and social fragmentation, which underscores that intergroup violence frequently extend beyond immediate economic and physical damages to undermine long-term social cohesion. Addressing such issues requires peace-building initiatives that focus not only on resolving disputes, but also on fostering reconciliation and rebuilding intergroup trust.

Banditry has had severe implications on agriculture and food security in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas in the Middle Belt; many farmers cannot go to work on their farms in fear of attacks. Where farmers are able to cultivate their farms and plant, farms are destroyed. There is connection between banditry attacks and food security. Therefore, there is need for interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of banditry

on agriculture and food security in the Middle Belt of Nigeria (World Bank, 2020). Addressing social disorganization caused by bandits could involve providing security for agricultural activities, and implementing policies to safeguard food supplies during periods of unrest.

Banditry has not merely disorganized and disrupted income-generating activities temporarily but also created systemic barriers to economic recovery and growth. As noted by Dami (2021) and Ojewale (2024), banditry has instilled fear of insecurity among citizens, disrupted and discouraged developmental activities. The destruction of economic products by bandits has diminished the availability of resources and goods, it has directly affected production and trade in many communities in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas in the Middle Belt. There is need for comprehensive economic recovery strategies, including rebuilding infrastructure, restoring investor confidence, and implementing poverty alleviation programmes to mitigate the enduring effects of banditry on livelihood within the region.

The fact that soldiers on peace operations allegedly collect bribes to provide protection is threat to enduring peace in communities ravaged by banditry. It means only those who have the resources to influence soldiers are being protected. Furthermore, since peacekeeping has become a lucrative business for Nigerian military, soldiers will not like banditry to come to end. In order to end banditry, there is need to adopt a holistic and inclusive strategy that combines immediate interventions, such as resettlement of those affected and sanctions for perpetrators, with longer-term solutions, like awareness creation and addressing root causes, to effectively mitigate the armed attacks by bandits and its effects.

In order to end banditry in the Middle Belt, and other places in Nigeria, the study recommends that government should improve security presence in Bassa and Zangon Kataf Local Government Areas as well as other places ravaged by bandits in Nigeria to prevent violence and ensure the safety of displaced persons living in internally displaced people's camps, or returning to their homes. In this task, collaboration between security forces and local communities is crucial for timely intelligence gathering and preventing banditry attacks.

Political will is a key fundamental measure that must be imbibed by all and sundry if banditry will be addressed squarely. The inability of the arms of government, particularly the executive to assent to the bill that bandits are terrorists was and has been a major setback on the fight against banditry in Nigeria. There must be political will to strengthen the law against banditry. Our political leaders and security agents must be honest and sincere to do what they took oaths to defend by applying the law to criminals and punishing offenders. They should stop favouritism, and

punish offenders. If our political leaders and criminal justice system will not be corrupt, selfish and partial, but treat everybody equally, banditry will reduce or end.

Security agents must be given free hand to defend and do anything necessary that will save lives and properties of law-abiding citizens without having to wait to be told to. They should be well provided the necessary weapons to tackle banditry. The Nigerian military have shown professionalism in dealing with crises outside the shores of this country. Unfortunately, they and other security outfits seem bedeviled and almost crippled by criminal elements in government in the country. Corrupt security personnel, individuals and other government functionaries who collaborate with, or aid and abate banditry should be sanctioned appropriately.

Government, traditional and religious leaders, and civil society groups should promote dialogue and mediation to help prevent banditry attacks. This framework should focus on mediating disputes, fostering dialogue, and rebuilding trust among the affected groups.

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