

Strategies for Tackling Rural Banditry and Security Challenges for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In the northern states, rural banditry as a result of the farmer-herder conflict has become a threat, so rampant that the state apparatus has begun to intervene. The safety of life and property has received priority attention from the governments of various countries in the world, both democratic and military governments. It is generally believed that development cannot progress in an atmosphere of excessive conflict, violence, anxiety, fear and destruction of property. There is no denying the fact that the absence of security or insecurity can have a negative impact on the overall well-being of rural farmers. The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by rural farmers towards sustainable democracy and the role of rural farmers in overcoming rural bandits due to the spread of conflicts that have affected national security and sustainable democracy. These measures include military action, vigilante groups, security intelligence, and a suspension of illegal mining activities in the northern state. The recommendations include: Governments should enhance rural security through the use of digital technologies such as sophisticated surveillance and detection tools and neglected security management initiatives in rural areas should be developed and enriched to reduce democratic illiteracy in rural areas

INTRODUCTION

In northern states and all over the country, rural banditry resulting from farmer herders' conflict has become a threat, so rampant that state device has begun to arbitrate. Rural banditry has resulted in excessive killings and destruction of properties have gained prominence in Nigeria because of different but also joint economic and socio-political interests of groups of people competing for space and survival within the same geographical landscape.

Security of lives and property has been accorded priority attention by governments of different countries of the world be it democratic or military administration. This is so because an atmosphere devoid of fear, anxiety, threat, harm, etc to citizens' lives and property is a sure means to bring about socio-economic development. It is generally believed that development cannot thrive in an atmosphere of conflicts, violence, anxiety, fear and wanton destruction of lives and property. Therefore, it follows that there is a strong link between security and development in any social setting. Security is seen as a situation in which citizens of any country are at liberty to go about their normal daily activities without threat to their lives and means of livelihood; safety from bodily harm, disease and human rights violations wherever they may find themselves (Adeleke, 2013).

Nigeria has been passing through a difficult security situation. There have been so many security challenges that have consistently threatened the corporate existence of the country. The Security challenges imply situations when citizens are not free to walk, work peacefully or harmoniously without fear of intimidation, molestation, or infliction of bodily injuries wherever they find themselves (Iwundu & Thomotuya, 2013). In other words, they constitute conditions that create or cause anxiety, fear, intimidation, threat, harm, etc to lives and property. Security challenges have continued to show an upward trend as they have taken different forms and dimensions ranging from acts of militancy and vandalism of oil installations in the South-South, massive robbery in the South-west, kidnapping in the South-East and terrorist acts, herdsmen attacks on farmers as well as cattle rustling especially in Northern Nigeria (Adebakin, 2012).

The activities of armed bandits have culminated in huge death losses as well as the destruction of properties. In more recent times, there has been a dramatic increase in the spates of conflict between herders and farming communities, alongside the attendant problems of rural banditry (Kuna & Ibrahim, 2016). It is, therefore necessary for a coordinated effort to be mounted to provide a solution to the problem of banditry. The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of properties and hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling (Rufai, 2017). Most herdsmen could do anything possible to prevent the rustling of their herds, then the bandit also apply force with the aid of Small Arms and Light Weapons to ensure the effective stealing of livestock. Hence, the application of force during livestock theft is what is here considered cattle rustling and armed banditry (Rufai, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research contributes to the understanding of the involvement of rural farmers in internal security operations and conflict management. It offers solutions to some of the challenges facing rural farmers in their intervention in rural banditry. The field observations of this study would be of immense assistance to the government, national security, the populace, communities, traditional leaders, as well as religious leaders for sustainable democracy.

METHODOLOGY

The importance of adequate security of lives and property for the democratic development of any country cannot be overemphasized. It is a well-known fact that internal security is a sine-qua-non for the democratic development of any country. There is no opposing the fact that the absence of security or insecurity could have a damaging effect on the overall well-being of the people.

This rural banditry has undermined human security whereby protection of people from traditional and non-traditional threats can no longer be guaranteed. Nearly all the prototypes and magnitudes of human security such as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security have been breached.

It has been argued that many companies and business concerns in most parts of the country especially in the North-western have closed shops owing to dangerous security situations in the region that are allegedly masterminded by rural bandits. There seems to be a general agreement that the number of lives and properties lost to rural banditry activities is unbelievable.

Kidnapping is also a main security challenge that has serious adverse effects on the democratic and economic development of a country. Kidnapping has assumed threatening dimensions as it has been embraced by criminally minded rural people who now see it as money spinning venture. It is argued that acts of kidnapping seem to have led to the closure of a good number of business activities, and rural markets and lead to thousands of hectares of land unproductive.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the challenges facing rural farmers toward sustainable democracy. The role of rural farmers in addressing rural banditry is due to the spread of the conflicts which has affected national security and sustainable democracy. The researcher, therefore delimits the scope of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural banditry is an old security challenge in Nigeria, Northwestern states in particular. In more recent times, cases of armed robberies and abductions for ransom have become a major security challenge. The Northwest region has been caught in a rapid increase of rural banditry along its international boundaries and forested interior. The northwestern region has been experiencing many security challenges that led to thousands of deaths and displacements as a result of rural banditry and cattle rustling, kidnapping and clashes between farmers and herdsmen in several communities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

The problems of rural banditry are most prevalent in the Middle Belt and North-western parts of Nigeria. In the Middle Belt, ethnoreligious conflicts provided fertile grounds for criminal activity to thrive, particularly in the States of Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue. However, this affects the increase in banditry activities in the northwestern region, as the states are connected to the middle belt through forested interiors or ungoverned spaces. In States like Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara in North-western Nigeria, rural banditry is carried out by armed bandits, mostly residing in remote rural areas and forests, with active collaborators in urban markets and estimated that 1058 individuals were killed in Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Niger State. Over 10000 cattle were rustled, and 2688 hectares of productive farmland were lost due to displacement and forceful migration (Kuna and Ibrahim, 2015).

Rural Banditry has led to the loss of lives and livelihoods, crippled economic activities, broken social cohesion and massive displacement of people. At present, the affected communities and authorities feel isolated and dissatisfied with the state of security infrastructures to defend and protect the people as well as democratic development (Mohammed and Alimba, 2015).

The problem of rural banditry borders on existing crises between the rural farmer who are competing over economic interests and sustainable development, which is indistinguishably tied to farmer-herder conflict. Rural banditry cannot be discussed outside of the Farmer-Herders conflict this is because of the similar underlying problems that produced the two.

Democratic and Sustainable Development

According to Ake (2001), democratic development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and is man-centered. It involves the process of giving empowerment to people to maximize their potential and develop the capacity to exploit nature to solve their daily needs. In the words of Abah and Nwokwu (2017), democratic development is a positive change and transformation in the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of the society. However, democratic development refers to the process of political and economic transformation in society.

Ewetan and Urhie (2014), examined the pertinent issue of insecurity in Nigeria and its impact on democratic development. It was established that insecurity has been on the increase, which has posed a serious threat to lives and properties; the threat had adversely affected political and economic activities and discouraged local and foreign investors; that insecurity has threatened the corporate existence of the country and indivisible political entity. For sustainability in political and economic development, the government should be proactive in handling security issues through effective intelligence gathering and sharing among security agencies; there should be regular training, logistics, motivation and deployment of modern technology in managing security issues.

Adeleke (2013), *Insecurity is a threat to Human Existence, Political and Economic Development in Nigeria.*” The study mainly on the causes of insecurity, government efforts at fostering peace and the impact of insecurity on human beings as well as the nation’s economy. Other factors that account for insecurity in the country include - intra/interparty rancor, porous boundaries, unemployment, job racketeering and illiteracy; that insecurity is detrimental to the general well-being of the people; it has led to the destruction of businesses, properties and closing down of businesses. On the bases of these, the government should give dialogue a chance through the convocation of a conference of major ethnic and minority groups to decide on a more peaceful way forward for Nigeria.

Sources of Rural Insecurity for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

In understanding the causes of insecurity as well as investigating their sources of social disorder and instability. According to Andrew and Kennedy (2003), it is necessary to distinguish between different causes as each may require a different remedy. However, policymakers are disinclined to isolate and clarify particular causes of insecurity are interwoven and contribute to one another. The sources of insecurity in Nigeria have been traced to several factors and explained by different people. These factors have been classified into external and internal factors. Sources of insecurity have also been classified as either remote or proximate and immediate sources/causal factors.

Lack of Institutional/Government Failure

Fukuyama (2004) described insecurity as the breakdown of institutional infrastructures. The institutional framework in Nigeria is very unstable and has provoked a deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability, thus, paralyzing the existing set of constraints including the formal and legitimate rules nested in the hierarchy of social order. Igbuzor (2011) observed, the state of insecurity in Nigeria is greatly a function of government failure or can be linked to government failure. This is manifested by the incapacity of the government to deliver public services and provide for the basic needs of the masses.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts

These have arisen from distrust among various ethnic groups and the major religions in the country. Igbuzor, (2011) identified ethno-religious conflict as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. The ethnoreligious conflict was defined as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by a lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. Frequent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions as a major security challenge.

Weak Security System

This results from inadequate equipment for the security arm of the government, both in weaponry and training. This is in addition to poor attitudinal and behavioral disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring.

Some Predisposing Causes of Rural Banditry in the Northwestern Nigeria

The proliferation of Fire Arms: A major cause for the escalating intensity of the rural banditry is the increasing proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria because many civilians have access to sophisticated weapons (Egbuta, 2018). The sources of these weapons include; military stockpiles stolen or seized by militants in Libya and Sahelian States such as Mali, weapons moved overseas via West African ports as well as homemade guns (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2022). The availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) created an avenue for nonconventional or non-state actors to possess weapons

Porous Borders: One major immediate factor which has enhanced rural insecurity in Nigeria is the porous frontiers of the country, where individual movements are largely untracked. The porosity of Nigeria's borders has serious security implications for the country. Given the porous borders as well as the weak security system, weapons come easily into Nigeria from other countries. Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation and the availability of these weapons have enabled militant groups and criminal groups to have easy access to arms (Hazen and Horner, 2007).

Ungoverned Spaces: According to Okolie & Lanshie (2018) argued that the nonchalant attitude of the Nigerian government towards control of her territorial areas contributed to insecurity by creating an 'ungoverned heaven' favorable for criminal opportunities. The geographical characteristics of Northwestern Nigeria amidst the lack of concern on the part of the government have made it possible for crime and victimization to thrive in several rural areas and forestlands. Northwest Nigeria's forestlands are vast, rugged, hazardous and as well grossly under-policed (Abdulyakeen, 2020).

Unemployment/Poverty: As a result of the high level of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, especially the youths, they are adversely attracted to violent crime. Nwagbosa, (2012) argued that the failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities is one of the major causes of insecurity in the country.

Struggle for Scarce Resources: Northern Nigeria in particular, is a gold-rich States these make it the major reason why some influential people who have an interest in the mineral deposit in the State sponsor the bandits to chase away the villagers for them to exploit the juicy mineral unlawfully without interference. In some rural areas of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Zamfara States, competition over limited access to land between farmers and pastoralists continues to devolve into violence Kwaja and Abdul (2015).

Way Forward Towards Tackling Rural Banditry and Security Challenges for Sustainable Democratic Development

The Nigerian Government has adopted different measures in tackling rural banditry in northwestern Nigeria. These measures include military action, vigilante groups, security intelligence and suspension of mining activities in northern State. The military strategy includes joint security raids/patrols and the creation of various operation troops, such as Operation Sharan Daji and Operation Harbin Kunama I-IV, where combatant soldiers the army and the air force were deployed to take over the forests of the Northwest Zone.

Moreover, as an effort at bringing an end to kidnapping and banditry, the Nigerian authority ordered the suspension of mining activities in the northern State in early April 2019. Most recently, the government of Katsina, kebbi and Zamfara took certain measures like banning village markets and restricting oil sales in some locations. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) was also ordered by the Federal Government to shut down all communications and internet technology to make the operations and survival of bandits more difficult.

In terms of improving political and economic development, several social investment and youth empowerment programs were introduced to reduce the level of poverty and youth unemployment. This includes Programmes like N-Power, N-Tech, Digital Youth Nigeria, National Youth Farmers Scheme, Development of Nigeria Creative Industries, Entrepreneurship Training Programme, Graduate Internship Scheme, and Youth Entrepreneurship Support Scheme among others. However, none of these efforts yielded any positive result or realistic impact in terms of improving the literacy level as well as reducing poverty and unemployment.

Other Solutions to Rural Banditry and Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria

Considering and understanding the implications of rural banditry and insecurity in Nigeria for economic, political and sustainable development, the solution displays both short-term and long-term perceptions to fight against and remove the sources and causative factors of rural banditry and insecurity.

Good Governance: According to Oluwarotimi (2012), good governance is the solution to rural banditry and insecurity challenges in Nigeria. The war against insecurity would be won only by raising governance standards that is, promoting the culture of good governance where the government is responsible and accountable to the people.

Political-Economic Development: This factor is strongly considered the major key to peace and security in Nigeria. According to Kufour (2012), solving rural banditry and insecurity issues in Nigeria is to hasten the pace of development. Development in such a way of creating an economy with relevant social, economic and physical infrastructure for democratic sustainability and industrial growth, to provide gainful employment, high-level education facilities and medical care for the people.

Security Strategic Management Approach: This approach comprises a combination of two models, viz, the two-way approach model, and the composite approach model. The two-way approach model aims at combating the creators and perpetrators of situations of insecurity, and simultaneously addressing and removing the causes or sources of dissatisfaction which cause security ruptures. The composite approach model aims at involving all stakeholders, both in a public and private capacity - government, communities, business organizations, civil society, religious groups and individuals - to supply resources, expertise and information that are required to ensure a safe environment.

The Role of Individuals: Security should be seen as everybody's business. As individuals need to develop the habit of security consciousness and report any security situation to the appropriate authority immediately. Every individual must demonstrate a high level of security awareness and alertness. This is because individuals understand their communities better and any report of suspicious activity. It will help to provide a safe and enabling environment for the people to operate in, and for economic development to thrive.

Other security management initiatives with the highest preference employed by the rural farmer and community members were Community policing and early warning, the introduction of dispute resolution rather than the police or judiciary (peace deal and negotiation) and the Provision of logistics for the security personnel and reporting banditry case to concerned stakeholders and a vigilant group of Nigeria would the activities of the rural bandit. According to Tukur, (2000), conflict at local and regional levels in Nigeria is mostly fueled by the dispute over natural resources, and ethnic and religious passion. The provision of water pump machines, tube wells and other productive assets by the state made the harnessing of these natural resources easy.

Another security management initiative by the leader of the Miyetti- Allah pastoralists, for instance, allowing animals to graze on another person's farm is punishable by twelve strokes of cane and or a fine amounting to the value of the damaged crops. Besides, no member of the community is allowed to move about with machetes and other offensive dangerous weapons, and the presence of a stranger in the community is reported to the village head. In addition, migratory pastoralists in some communities are required to meet the district or village heads. While on the local government level authorities also play vital roles in rural banditry prevention and resolution. Under the auspices of the authorities, certain land areas in the communities are designated "grazing land" for the pastoralists. Such grazing lands are, however, very fertile due to the animal dung, and are sometimes encroached upon by the farmers, resulting in damage to crops and conflicts among pastoralists and farmers (Tukur, 2000).

The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including, security agencies, traditional and religious leaders of the Hausa/Fulani community, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Farmers Associations and local vigilante groups have tended to give the process more credibility, with the seeming commitment of top political leadership towards inclusive processes (Momale et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Security challenges northern part of the country pose a serious threat to lives, and properties and discourage sustainable democracy in the rural areas. Nigeria's democracy has faced different forms of security challenges; the insecurity situation has not only continued to rise but has assumed a dangerous dimension on democracy and rural development caused by rural banditry. Thus, we can safely argue that there is a positive link between the current democratic instability and insecurity challenges that bring about poor political, democracy sustainability and rural development. Therefore, governments at all levels should adopt proactive measures to drastically reduce or tackle rural security for democratic sustainability. Considering and understanding the implications of rural banditry and insecurity in Nigeria for economic, political and sustainable development, the solution displays both short-term and long-term perceptions to fight against and remove the sources and causative factors of rural banditry and insecurity. This can only be achieved through good governance, Security strategic management approach.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Government should improve rural security through the use of digital technologies like sophisticated surveillance and detection devices.
2. Government should train forest guards that will provide security to rural areas.
3. There is a need for a democratic orientation that will lead to sustainable development especially rural security which is the basis for the inculcation of norms and values.
4. Neglected security management initiatives in rural areas should be developed and enriched to reduce the level of democratic illiteracy in rural areas.
5. Government should ensure that employment and appointment of democratic positions are based on merit and not based on preference and partiality.

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