

Interrogating the Impact of Banditry on Socio-Economic Development in Katsina Ala LGA of Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study interrogated banditry and socio-economic development in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State. The work anchored its argument on the state fragility theory which essentially argues that the fragile nature of the state which manifest in its inability to perform its essential functions breeds vices such as banditry. The study is qualitative in nature and utilized both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was obtained through oral interview from selected respondents. The major findings of these study are that youth unemployment, poverty, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons by politicians, the weak security system and socio-economic stagnation are the major causes of banditry in Katsina Ala local government. Further findings of the study indicate that banditry in Katsina Ala local government has considerably reduced agricultural productivity, destroyed hospitals, markets, and schools' infrastructure and above all forced many children out of school. The conclusion of the study is that socio-economic development will remain a mirage in the face of banditry. The work therefore recommends for poverty reduction, employment generation enforce existing laws against the proliferation of weapons, amnesty, value re-orientation, reposition the security and above all the institution of a selfless leadership that will champion the cause of development for the overall good of the state thereby resulting to an enduring socio-economic development.

Keywords: Banditry, impact, & socio-economic development

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria today is confronted with numerous security challenges which is threatening our corporate existence as a nation. The rate of insecurity which manifest in various forms such as Boko Haram terrorism, Fulani herdsmen, armed banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria today has reached an alarming stage (Hamisu, 2022). It is now a threat to human existence and that of Nigeria. It has formed news headlines of every broadcast station and newspaper. The alarming level of insecurity has equally raised tension and anxiety among the citizenry. As a matter of urgency, questions about what would be the fate of Nigeria within the next two years are daily echoed in the minds of everyone. People are not sure of their security due to high crime rate, incessant killings and threats.

The challenges of banditry and general insecurity in Nigeria today has history, and begins with an understanding that the present day Nigeria was home to a number of independent societies that lived side by side, before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa. Most of these societies were heterogeneous in culture, traditions, norms and religions. There were differences in their political existence, however, a major difference in their political organizations was the existence of a formal system of checks and balances inherent in them. The conquest altered the pattern of socio-economic and political system that existed in each of the empires, kingdoms and caliphates. Similarly, the inter-group relation was replaced by enmity, divisions and hatred with a sense of sectionalism, ethno-tribal chauvinism and geographical polarizations which essentially laid the foundation for rivalry and

discord which is a challenge to national integration. Indeed the British colonial administration encouraged communal sentiments among Nigerians. It seized every available opportunity to spread the myth and propaganda that they were separated from one another by great distance, by differences of history and traditions, and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social, and religious barriers.

At independence, the Nigeria state never really acquired any enduring legitimacy or trust from the various indigenous communities following the end of colonial rule because the nation was an artificial conglomeration of diverse communities and loosely united ethnic groups that were built by conquest and subjugation (Falola, 2018). As a result of this lack of proper national integration, the post-colonial Nigeria has witnessed ethnic, religious, cultural and regional contentions cumulating into several military coups that later led to a civil war in 1967, between the communities in the South-East (mostly the Igbos) and the rest of the country, the war lasted for three years from 1967 to 1970. The country has since witnessed series of political fiasco, military coups, and saw the rise of militant, socio-cultural and pressure groups, such as the Maitatsine sect, militancy in the Niger Delta oil region, Oduá People's Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Arewa People's Congress (APC), Farmers/Herders crisis, the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations, the recent problem of kidnappings and banditry whose activities is affecting socio-economic development in Nigeria.

As observed by Ofoma & Onwe (2023), in Nigeria, different states are faced with various security threats, with banditry in the North being an emerging threat in recent times. Starting in 2011 and worsening in 2014, the Northern region faced serious attacks from bandits. Initially, this threat was more prevalent in rural areas in the north east and west, but today, it has now spread to other states in the north central, such as Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger and Benue states respectively (International Crises Group, 2020).

As a result of the intense wave banditry, the socio-economic activities in Benue State and Katsina Ala in particular have experienced a significant decline. Agricultural productivity has been severely affected, as farmers are reluctant to go to their farms due to the insecurity. Academic activities have been repeatedly disrupted, hindering the progress of education in the local government. Additionally, market activities have been heavily impacted, as traders are compelled to pay taxes to the bandits before conducting business in the markets, causing economic losses. Moreover, traders are avoiding traveling to purchase goods due to the prevailing insecurity.

Consequently, there is a growing interest among scholars in understanding the menace of banditry in Nigeria. However, their focus has been limited, as there is little or no emphasis on the broader implications of banditry on the socio-economic development in Benue State. This observation has been made by Ladan, indicating that further research is needed to explore the comprehensive impact of banditry on the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. While there have been several notable studies on banditism, research on this phenomenon is still at an early stage of its development and no study has properly considered the threat in Katsina Ala, where banditism has become particularly disruptive and requires urgent attention. Given this void in research on the subject, this work primarily aims to investigate the impact of banditry on socio-economic development in Katsina Ala local government area of Benue State

Statement of the Problem

The intense phenomenon banditry and accompanying security dangers that have engulfed Nigeria have become a matter of public concern regarding national security (Abdullahi, 2019). Nigeria's North central is quickly becoming another significant regional theater of bloodshed. Initial disputes between herders and farmers over access to land have evolved into an intractable issue that poses a significant threat to national and regional security. Since 2014, the rate of rural banditry has been on the rise, generating a great deal of attention. While it is assumed that heightened political overtones are behind this trend, it has a significant impact on the survival of the common man and impedes national development. It is motivated by a desire to accumulate wealth. The victims are individuals and communities with material possessions, or in the vast majority of cases, ordinary people forced from their homes (Sanchi, 2014).

In recent years, banditry in the Benue state and Katsina Ala has reached frightening levels. Villages are terrorized with impunity by bandits. They have actually settled in Shitile, establishing fortified enclaves in the interior and along the borders from whence they plan and execute their operations. In Katsina Ala LGA, armed robbery, kidnappings, cattle rustling, and village raids are the most prevalent instances of rural banditry. Abduction, which is identical with banditry, is frequently followed by a ransom demand for money or other benefits. Thus, abduction is regarded a crime when a person is removed from his or her original place using persuasion, deceit, or coercion, which may involve violence. Despite the government's pretenses, banditry and kidnapping have a significant impact on national security and development.

As a result of banditry in some parts of Katsina Ala local government, life is no longer revered, and this trend will likely persist for some time. Clearly, both the government and the people are frustrated and powerless. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the complexity of the most recent growth in armed banditry, the difficulty of combating banditry, and how bandits and rebels can prevent the country from being completely shut down (Adeniyi, 2015). These bandits' operations vary from kidnapping to murder, robbery, rape, livestock rustling, and other crimes. Their method of operation includes maiming and killing their victims when they least expect it. They usually mobilized through the forests into the neighborhood on fast motorcycles, especially at night, and shot at will. Sometimes in the afternoon, when they are certain there will be no police or military presence, they unleash horror on the neighborhoods. Hundreds of people have been killed as a result of this expanding threat. Several children have been orphaned, and women have become widows overnight, while food insecurity and humanitarian disasters will make life even more difficult for many Nigerians. The reality is terrifying, in Katsina Ala, over 400 individuals were slain in 2018, more than 200 were killed in 2019, and 1,600 were killed between January 2021 and June 2023 many people are internally displaced (UNDP, 2023).

It is sequel to the above that the study seeks to examine the extent to which the deepening of banditry attacks has put a strain on socio-economic development in Katsina Ala Local government area of Benue State.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this work is to examine the impact of banditry on socio-economic development in Katsina-Ala local government area of Benue State. The specific objectives are:

1. Examine the nature of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State
2. Identify the root causes of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State
3. Examine the impact of banditry on socio-economic development in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State
4. Proffer possible solutions to the challenge of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area

Research Questions of the Study

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What is the nature and character of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State?
2. What are the root causes of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State?
3. In what ways does banditry affect socio-economic development in Katsina-Ala Local government area?
4. What are the practical measures that can reduce the scourge of banditry in Katsina-Ala Local government area of Benue State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Banditry is a menace, which has engaged scholars exhaustively in an attempt to explain its meaning and

implications on the polity. Several perspectives have emerged from people of different training and background; notably from history and social sciences. It is important to review this literature since knowledge is cumulative.

The Concept of Banditry

Banditry is a derivative of the term 'bandit' meaning an unlawful armed group terrorizing people and confiscating their properties. It is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups who use small and light weapons to carry out attacks against people. In this regard, banditry could mean a set-up criminal activity deliberately designed and carried out for personal gains. Egwu (2022) described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches though the definition has been criticized for its narrow based perspective. In the same vein, banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and brazen and gruesome massacre of people of Nigerian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected gunmen which carry reprisal attacks from surviving victims.

Shalangwa (2020) regards banditry as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group. Whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organized groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals, such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified, detected and arrested. However, where the term banditry is connected to rural, it implies a group of rural outlawed involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang or groups terrorizing and dispossessing local people or travelers of their valuable items of properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including in some cases, security agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people (Abdullahi, 2019).

Furthermore, banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids. It involves the use of forces or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). Economic or political interest motivates banditry. The former refers to banditries motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while the latter has to do with those driven by the quest to rob, to assault or to liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political or ideological dispositions.

Anka (2017) on his part asserts that banditry is the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not it was planned, using weapons of offense or defense, especially in semi-organized groups, with the goal of overpowering the victim and getting loot or achieving some political goals. Most people think of these bandits as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who don't have a home or a place to go. Instead, they wander around the forest and mountains to avoid being found, caught, and jailed. Thus, banditry in contents of this research work, it is defined as the totality of incidence of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids which involve the use of forces, or treat to that effect, to rob, rape, kidnapping, or kill the person.

Anka (2017) further opines further that the activities of bandits directly affect seven states in northwestern Nigeria: Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. He also said that the problem is quickly spreading to states in the north-central region, especially Niger, Benue and Plateau States. There is more and more evidence that terrorists and bandits are working together in Nigeria's northwest. This is shown by the way they recruit people and share logistics and weapons, as well as the fact that the area is a good place to carry out attacks because of its location and the fact that both groups are very good at the political economy of "kidnap for ransom," which is used to fund criminal enterprises.

The Concept of Socio-economic Development

Socio-economic development emphasizes progress in terms of economic and social factors within a society. Economic development is the process of raising the level of prosperity through increased production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Social development, on the other hand, refers to the complexity of social dynamics (the interplay of social structures, processes and relationships) and focuses on the social concerns of the people as objectives of development and people-centered, participatory approaches to development. Social development is about inclusiveness, social justice and the common good. Indicators of social development provide comparative information about areas such as income, poverty, employment, employment security, education, health, crime and civic participation.

Socio-economic development is any activity, or programme that creates sustainable access to the economy for its beneficiaries, it is the process of social and economic development in a society. It connotes meeting the basic needs that are essential to live a life of dignity by the people. This includes access to quality education, better health-care, decent housing, safe drinking water, good sanitation and the nation's wellbeing. Changes in less-tangible factors are also considered, such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and freedom from fear of physical harm, and the extent of participation in civil society.

Indicators of Economic Development

To understand the level of country's economic development, one needs to make comparisons with other countries, or different time periods. World Bank (2020) came up with the following as indicators of economic development

1. Growth rate of National income in this indicator, real income is calculated on constant prices if there is risen in national income, this indicates economic development when there is high rate of national income, development rate is high, and vice verses.
2. Per-capital income: The average income of the people living in the country is the per-capital income. A rise in per-capital income is an important indicator of economic development because it indicates economic welfare of the country.
3. Per capital consumption: The increase in consumption of goods and services by people is measured in per capital consumption. E.g. clothing, food, education, health etc. increase in per capital consumption shows better quality of life of people and higher economic development of a country
4. Physical quality life index and human development index: Physical quality life index is the overall welfare of the people in life expectancy, infant mortality rate, standard of living. Human development Index on the other hand, measures life expectancy, education and standard of living. There is a rise in PQLI and HDI shows an improvement in quality of life of people and therefore economic development.
5. Industrial progress: Is an important indicator of economic development of a particular country. It helps to increase per capital income and the national

Empirical Review

Adelakun, Adurogbangba and Akinbile (2015) sought to examine the socio-economic effects of banditry and herders-crop farmers' conflict on family farming in Oyo state of Nigeria. A multi-state sampling procedure was used to select 60 crop farmers and 60 herders for the study. Data were collected through the use of interview schedule and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study showed that about 60% of the farmers lose their farm products due to banditry related violence and ransom payment. Further findings reveal that 71% of the farmers' suffered economic losses resulting from herders'-crop farmers' conflicts. Also, the study revealed that majority of the pastoralists used more of emotion oriented coping strategies such as charms and vengeance whereas the farmers used more of problem oriented coping strategies. The findings of the study also revealed that crop farmers are the worst hit by the farmer-pastoralists conflicts as it affect their family farming. The study therefore recommended among others the setting up of a special security taskforce to handle

the problem of banditry and a three tier herders- crop farmers' conflict management committee for the resolution of herders'-farmers' conflict in Oyo state of Nigeria.

The work of Adeniyi (2020) interrogated the impact of banditry on Nigeria's security in the fourth republic. The study was a survey and the research instruments used were Focused Group Discussion (FGD), in-depth face to face interview, questionnaire, observation and content analysis. Emerging findings from the study showed that the high level of unemployment, weak security system, porosity of Nigeria's borders and proliferation of arms are some of the factors responsible for banditry in Nigeria. The study also unveiled that the root causes of conflict especially issues bordering on identity, poverty, deprivation, among others, have not been fully addressed.

Suleiman (2020) focused on the impact of banditry on food security in Katsina State. The study adopted a mixed method as it relied on primary and secondary data. Three Local Government Areas were purposively selected. In each LGA, 2 farming communities and 1 herdsman settlement were purposively selected. From each of the selected farming communities, 2 farmers and 1 herdsman selected respectively using snowball sampling technique. In all 12 farmers and 6 herdsman were interviewed. The findings of this study showed that banditry has negatively affected food security in Katsina state. These negative effects include killing and kidnapping of farmers, chasing of farmers from their farm lands, cattle rustling, burning and raiding of grains and blocking of local trade routes. The study recommends for the establishment of a joint taskforce to police the forest and border areas and also for the provision of employment opportunities for the youths.

Asmau (2021) insurgency, armed banditry and corruption in Nigeria, the bane of socio-economic underdevelopment. The sample size comprises of 120 crop farmers selected through multi-stage sampling procedure. The data were collected using structured questionnaire and interview. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data collected from the field survey. The results of the study showed that, unemployment, corruption, poverty, porous nature of Nigeria borders are some of the issues causing banditry in the country. He therefore concluded that the country should evolve a sustainable social security system which will discourage public office holders from engaging in corruption, good information sharing techniques, providing gainful employment opportunities for the citizenry and so on.

The study by Kitabu (2022) examines the effect of banditry on socio-economic development of Niger State, which has become of great concern to the Nigerian government, citizens and even international communities. The sample size comprises of 120 people selected through multi-stage sampling procedure. The data were collected using structured questionnaire and interview. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data collected from the field survey. The findings of the work indicate that the problems of banditry is traceable to the problem of unemployment among citizens, injustice by those in the position of authority, using and dumping of youths by politicians, porous nature of Nigerian borders, poor motivation of security agents among other. The work recommends among other things the need to acquire the security gadgets in curbing these menace of threats been faced by citizens for effective intelligent gathering, deliberate steps should be taken by government to reduce problem of unemployment by creating enabling environments for citizens to imbibe on the culture of farming business which will serve as a means of ensuring sustainable living through provision adequate financial incentives with lesser interest charges from intervention agencies, and lastly, there should be respect to rule of law and all perpetrators found wanting in the fight against banditry should be brought to the justice as this will serve a deterrent to others who have the same thinking.

Danbaki, Abdulrazak, Bilyaminu & Goje (2023) This study is designed to examine and assess the educational implications of Armed Banditry in the North-Western Nigeria. Five specific objectives and five research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study and review of related literature. The study adopted the descriptive research design, where copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 600 respondents selected from the sample states of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States using purposive sampling method. The secondary data were collected through literature review while primary data were collected from the respondents using questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using the mean and Standard Deviation methods of data analysis to answer the

research questions. The paper concluded that the menace of banditry is becoming rampant as a result of high level of unemployment, weak security system, poverty, porosity of Nigeria's borders and arms proliferations which has plunged the region into a state of insecurity in all spheres of life. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were put forward: Government at all levels should put in place functional security system and Government should intensify efforts to mobilise financial and human resources to fund disarmament to curtail the problems of arms proliferation across the region.

Ogar, Hamisu and Kabir's (2023) work examined banditry an impediment to socio –economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. a study of maradun local government area of Zamfara state, Nigeria. This study examined the extent to which the banditry has affected the socio-economic development of rural communities especially Maradum local Government Area of Zamfara state This study focused on Maradun, where many villages are rendered homeless, leaving their ancestral home to a more secured destination whereby affecting their socio-economic activities, such as farming, livestock, fishery and educational activities. Methodology used in the study was both quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaire and in depth interview) through multi-stage cluster and purposive sampling techniques. The conflict theory was adopted as theoretical framework. The findings show that there is significant relationship between banditry and socio- economic instabilities in North. The paper recommended among others there is urgent need for tight security in our international borders by the combined efforts of Nigerian security agents.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the state fragility theory as a framework of analysis, and maintains that in the modern political sensibility, the concept of state fragility (as that of the countries of the 'bottom billion') is highly contentious (Otaigbe, 2018). This is because of the complex and diverse nature of states which are referred to as fragile. Despite this contention, several scholars and development agencies define state fragility principally as a fundamental failure of the state to perform functions necessary to meet citizens' basic needs and expectations through the political process (McLoughlin 2012, p.9). Theoretically, state fragility can be understood as a composite measure of all aspects of state performance, such as authority, service delivery and legitimacy, that characterise the state (Brown 2009, cited in European Report on Development 2009:16). Although there are different levels of state(s) ranking in the global arena, some are strong while others are either fragile or collapsed (Zartman 1995; Reno 2002). However, if these states are placed on a continuum based on their ranking, a fragile state will be one which has not been able to perform its core duties as a centralised organisational structure, is unable to exercise its sovereign rights and is incapable of making binding decisions on its citizens, and lacks an effective engine of growth and appreciable development. Thus, a sovereign state which has lost total control of its duties or has failed to perform these duties is thus referred to as failed or collapsed (Carment 2013; Osaghae 2017).

However, a fragile state as opposed to a collapsed or a failed state may be defined

most simply as a distressed state that lacks the key elements necessary to function effectively. According to Osaghae (2017), fragile states are specifically

characterised by one or more of the following

1. Weak, ineffective, and unstable political institutions and bad governance, conducive to loss of state autonomy; informalisation; privatisation of state, personal and exclusionary rule; neo-patrimonialism; and prebendal politics.
2. Inability to exercise effective jurisdiction over its territory, leading to the recent concept of 'ungoverned territories'
3. A legitimacy crisis, occasioned by problematic national cohesion, contested citizenship, violent contestation for state power, perennial challenges to the validity and viability of the state, and massive

loss and exit of citizens through internal displacement, refugee flows, separatist agitation, civil war and the like.

4. Unstable and divided population, suffering from a torn social fabric, minimum social control, and pervasive strife that encourage exit from rather than loyalty to the state.
5. Underdeveloped institutions of conflict management and resolution, including credible judicial structures, which pave the way for recourse to conflict-ridden, violent, non-systemic and extra-constitutional ways in which to articulate grievances and seek redress.
6. Pervasive corruption, poverty, and low levels of economic growth and development, leading to lack of fiscal capacity to discharge basic functions of statehood, including, most importantly, obligations to citizens such as protection from diseases like AIDS and guarantees of overall human security.

It is based on these characteristics and theoretical underpinnings that it becomes appropriate to classify Nigeria as a fragile state because majority of the characteristics sketched out above are clear features in the country. Thus, one finds a link between Nigeria's weakness and the emergence and dynamics of terrorist operations in the country, especially from the Boko Haram group in the troubled north. The great expectations of the people that these social ills would ebb with Nigeria's return to a democratic government have nearly been dashed owing to successive bad governance from its leaders to date. It is a fact that majority of Nigerians still cannot meet their basic human and socio-economic needs. A large percentage of the youth lacks access to food, a quality educational system, effective healthcare service delivery, pipe-borne water, proper shelter, and employment opportunities. Yet in the face of these deprivations, the political elites embezzle public funds and engage in ostentatious living. The inability of the government to bring about good and effective governance for its citizens particularly in the northern region has created what Omede (2011) referred to as a 'frustration of rising expectations' which has in turn resulted in all forms of violence in the region, including such crimes as kidnapping, armed robberies and most importantly banditry which has reached its acme. My point here is that the weak nature of governance in Nigeria serves a wider function in the emergence and growth of insecurity such as banditry.

METHODOLOGY

The research is a qualitative research and survey design will be adopted for the collection of primary data. The advantage of this method emanates from the fact that a deliberate population with the required characteristics that are of interest to the researcher will be consciously selected and sampled. This research method will allow the collection of data on a particular problem by purposely selecting targeted respondents from a given population, with vast knowledge on the research problem which in this case is to examine the impact of banditry on socio-economic development in Katsina Ala local government area of Benue State.

Therefore, the study shall purposively select eight council wards out of the twelve for sampling. Taking into cognizance the large sample size, the characteristics of the population, and the accessibility of some elements in the population among other considerations, the study shall adopt purposive sampling technique. The choice of this technique shall help the researcher greatly as only people with in-depth knowledge of the issues under investigation will be selected and interviewed. Also this technique shall ensure convenience, cost minimization and representativeness of the sampled population.

Using this technique, therefore, forty (40) people, five (5) each will be selected across the eight council wards, from a local government selected, and interviewed through in depth interview. The study deliberately and carefully selected these forty (40) respondents due to the fact that they constituted key stakeholders with the requisite knowledge on issues of banditry. It is also worth mentioning that the selected local governments are made up of heterogeneous population pattern, cutting across ethnic and religious differences, urbanized and rural based and, therefore have a representation of the entire population.

The data generated in this work is presented with the use of descriptive statistics and qualitatively analysed based on the research sub-themes. Percentages and cross tabulation are used as the main statistical instruments. All

discussions with the interviewees and their answers to questions are carefully analysed in juxtaposition with the secondary data collected. Furthermore, by grouping and distilling interview texts, the researcher is able to extract a list of common themes that reveal the common meanings and expressions from the set of respondents. The distillation facilitated direct examination of the link between banditry and socio-economic development.

DISCUSSION

Nature and Character of Banditry in Katsina Ala

In explaining the nature and character of the banditry in Katsina Ala Tyowase Akpen, Tsafa Wuese, Yongo Nancy and Amase Terfa revealed that the militia group is name after the founder of the group, Late Terwase Akwaza popularly known as (sometimes spelt Ghana). The activities of the group according to them are more pronounce in Michihe, Mbacher, Mbajir, Mberev/Mbatyula. Mbayongo, Utange and Yooyo. axis of Katsina Ala local governments' area, for more than a decade. Gana was accused of massacres, kidnappings, assassinations, robberies, cattle rustling, terrorism and murders. He levied farmers, traders, and prominent people (Interview, 07/06/2026 at Mbayongo, Katsina Ala LGA Benue State).

Hagher (2019, p.18) captures the nature and character of the Ghana militia group thus: Ghana group is today a fearful criminal hegemon. He has an elaborate security network that traverse the whole Benue State. His network has continued to look out for him and provide elaborate intelligence, which he buys from corrupt government security agents and enforcers. Furthermore, he has established a quasi-fascists criminal government. At the apex of this strange contraption was Terwase Akwaza (Ghana) himself who had all the trappings of a Head of State. He was the Commander -in- Chief and his headquarters is at Gbishe. His brother, Aondofa Akwaza is in charge of revenue, Suku Oraondo is a Defacto-Chief Justice and combines the roles of the Head of the Pegan Religion that Akwaza is re-introducing.

Recruitment into this Ghana group is by force. In fact, Hagher (2019) stated that, apart from the ward commanders and kindred commanders who oversee recruitment of foot soldiers from villages to homestead, refusal to be recruited is a capital offence. It is estimated that Ghana has about three youths under his power and under the gun. Adult are obliged to enroll as members and pay membership fees. It is estimated that over 75% of the adult population of Shitile land either sympathizers, sponsors or informants. All motorcycle riders are recruits in the militia group (Hagher, 2019).

The security implications of the activities of this militia group are glaring. For instance, Jibo (2021) argued that the large ungoverned spaces in the area have made it easy for this group to operates easily. Not only have the people under this bandit's rule become 'non-people' they are impoverished and terrorized all the time and, therefore, live a wretched life (Jibo, 2021, p.180). In addition, as result of the "ungoverned space", the government is unable to provide basic amenities such as schools, hospitals among others. Even some of the amenities in the affected areas were closed down for years.

Root Causes of Banditry in Katsina Ala

Narrating on some of the root causes of banditry in Katsina Ala Destiny Amaakaven, Aondowase Igbawase, Dooshima Iwen and Aondofa Ageebie argued that youth unemployment and poverty are some of the root causes of poverty. The indices for measuring poverty by the NBS are based on access to education, health and basic services, employment, assets, and income (NBS, 2023). The rising rate of youth unemployment according to them is one of the causes of social crimes like prostitution, armed robbery, trafficking, rape, kidnapping, and banditry. They further stated unemployment is associated with economic deprivation, frustration, and helplessness, which lures many youths in Shitile land into violent crimes which has to the underdevelopment of the land (Interview, 09/06/2026 at Mbatyula, Katsina Ala LGA Benue State).

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is adjudged by Minenge Kwaghgba, Anas Igba, John Iorfa and Oryiman Kudam to be the most immediate root cause of banditry which poses a great obstacle to sustainable security and development (Interview, 12/06/2026 at Yooyo Katsina Ala LGA Benue State).. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons according to them is occasioned by the desperation or 'do or die' politics among Katsina Ala Politicians: to win elections and occupy political offices, leading to arming of unemployed youths to rig and manipulate elections for them. Again some respondents also accused the security personnel of selling arms to criminals. For instance, the Department of State Security (DSS) blamed the worsening insecurity in the country on corrupt members of the Armed Forces and other security agencies, who allegedly sell arms to criminals (Abagen & Tyona, 2018).

Again the weak Security System according to Ayese Uma, Linda Kudam, Bogo Igba and Awase Kwagba is a major contributor to the level of insecurity in Nigeria, and this can be attributed to a number of factors, which include inadequate funding of the police and other security agencies, a lack of modern equipment both in weaponry and training, poor welfare of security personnel, and inadequate personnel (Interview, 14/06/2026 at Michihe Katsina Ala LGA Benue State). According to Olonisakin (2008), the police-population ratio in Nigeria is 1:45, which falls below the standard set by the United Nations. The implication of this is that Nigeria is grossly under policed, which partly explains the inability of the Nigerian Police Force to effectively combat crimes and criminality in the country.

Other factors that causes of the banditry challenge in Katsina Ala according to Tyowase Akpen and Amase Terfa is the growing awareness of inequalities and disparities in life chances, which lead to violent reactions by a large number of people (Interview, 07/06/2026 at Mbayongo, Katsina Ala LGA Benue State).. There is a general perception of marginalisation by a section of the people in areas of government development policies and political patronage, and these are triggers of disaffection, resentment, and revolt (Achumba & Akpor, 2023). The incessant strikes by labour and professional groups and demonstrations by civil society groups are mainly due to pervasive material inequalities and unfairness. Their agitations are aimed at drawing public sympathy for their struggle for just and fair treatment by the government.

The Impact of Banditry on Socio-Economic Development in Katsina Ala

The banditry in Katsina Ala have negative implications for development in local government. The impacts of insecurity on development in the state will be interrogated under the following themes: food insecurity, destruction of lives and properties, destruction of sources of livelihoods (income) of victims, destruction of infrastructural facilities, reduction of internal revenue for the state, and disruption in economic activities, among others.

Aondona Agede, Mude Avaa, Shima Anum and Mvena Nyam in an in-depth interview reveal that Agriculture accounted for the main stay of their economy, but the rate of labour involved in agriculture has substantially declined due to the activities of the bandits who use violence to intimidate or coerce the local farmers. According to them banditry in Katsina Ala local government has considerably reduced agricultural activity and restricted access to land for raising crops and livestock (Interview, 14/06/2026 at Mbacher, Katsina Ala LGA Benue State). Since agricultural production has decreased, food prices have increased and households are now more susceptible to shocks and stressors. This has caused a significant increase in unemployment, food insecurity, and poverty in the area. In real terms, the crisis caused the poverty rate to increase from 47.3% in 2011 to roughly 71% in 2024. (Katyona, 2025).

The chairman of the Farmers Association of Nigeria, Benue State Chapter, Saaku Aondongu, collaborated with the above when stated that about 40 percent of farmers in the zone had been displaced in the state since the crisis escalated in 2018. The chairman further lamented that: Farmers in so many local government areas of Benue State are not able to cultivate crops. Half of Logo Local Government Area is left to insecurity. Farmers are all in IDP camps. So many farmers are being killed. There are no farms in Katsina Ala, Kwande LGA, the majority of the

people are not farming because most of the farmers were chased out of their homes by the bandits and herdsmen conflict. So, there is a real food shortage in the state. That is why the prices of garri, cassava, and yam are so high. There used to be a glut of these products (Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo, & Shabu, 2022, p. 20).

Farmers within this area may find it hard to go to their farms as well as to get enough food crops to the market, resulting in issues of food insecurity and a probable unprecedented hike in the prices of farm produce in the markets. The activities of these kidnappers have the potential to cripple the economy and breakdown the social and economic activities of the people. Traders, also for fear of becoming the next victims, have decided to sort for alternative options. All these seem to have affected the economy of the area.

According to Ortamen Adzer, Abati Aondofa, Mbayion Uke and Mercy Dondo (Interview, 16/06/2026 at Mbajir, Katsina Ala LGA Benue State) attacks by bandits, militants, and other criminals in local communities in Katsina Ala have destroyed hospitals, markets, and schools' infrastructure and forced many children out of school after displacing their parents. UNICEF (2022), agrees with the above submission that over 260, 000 children have left school due to unabated violence in villages in Guma, Gwer-West, Makurdi, Logo, Katsina-Ala, Agatu, Ukum, parts of Kwande, and Buruku local governments of Benue State. School enrolment has dropped significantly due to assaults by attackers as teachers and students fled for their lives, abandoning the structures as the violence persists in their communities. In Katsina-Ala Local Government Area, at least 66 primary and junior secondary schools out of the 140 have been either destroyed or abandoned and left to rot in rural communities, leaving 12,507 children out of school (Onyewuchi & Arinze-Umobi, 2021). Awortu (2024:8), therefore concludes that "conflict and insecurity have had a direct and compounding negative impact on children's access to education, the availability of educational spaces and materials and the ability of teachers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The study has examined banditry and socio-economic development in Katsina Ala local government area of Benue State and from the foregoing it is evident that banditry is threatening the corporate and peaceful existence of the people of Katsina Ala local. Banditry is therefore a threat to social and economic development in Katsina Ala. It has claimed lots of lives, aggravated food insecurity, and caused damage to the economy. Furthermore, banditry activities have continued to cause humanitarian crisis characterized by fear, displacement, disrupted services such as health care, schools, and food shortage.

This has led to a nutrition crisis as food insecurity increased, and childhood illnesses exacerbated by malnutrition, how can socio-economic development occur in an environment where the people are perpetually living in fear, malnourished and battling for their survival? Development therefore becomes a mirage under such prevailing circumstances of hopelessness and fear. Conclusively therefore, banditry has assumed a dangerous dimension and this has heightened serious fears among the people, hence an urgent solution is needed.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

Poverty Reduction

since poverty nourished banditry and threatened socio-economic development, its reduction will certainly

ameliorate the situation. Government at various levels must come up with genuine poverty reduction programmes aimed at building capacity among the vulnerable groups in the society-farmers, the unemployed, women etc. Government must also put in place policies that are sincerely targeted at achieving transparency and accountability. Genuine poverty reduction must intersect with other development and social change initiatives of

the government. Poverty can therefore be reduced through the establishment of cottage industries (that will provide jobs for the unemployed, improved supply of fertilizers and availability of agro-chemicals to farmers.

Employment Generation: Since unemployment was a major galvanizer for banditry and constitute an obstacle to national development, the challenge of unemployment will have to be addressed. Employment generation can take the form of the establishment of agro allied industries, cottage industries and other labour intensive enterprises. Relatedly graduates of tertiary institutions within the area should be employed or at least given loans to enable them start some business ventures. Government should also provide the enabling environment for a sound business takeoff. At the local levels, the government should establish demonstration farms or workshops to give youth vocational skills or knowledge that allow them to be self-employed in gainful enterprises. A special youth empowerment fund or financial facility should also be created; such a facility should be robustly structured to enhance transparency and accountability in its management to avoid unnecessary bottlenecks and patronage considerations that prevent youth who genuinely need such interventions from accessing them.

Enforce existing laws against the Proliferation of Weapons: Nigeria's Firearms Act and Electoral Act already prohibit illegal possession of arms and use of arms by bandits. There should be stricter investigation and the prosecution of politicians caught supplying weapons, to the youths and bandits. Relatedly, government should embark on a disarmament and amnesty with accountability. Create targeted disarmament programs that collect weapons and trace sources. Pair amnesty for youths who surrender arms with penalties for those who supplied them.

Reposition the Security

Once the intelligence infrastructure and military hardware are provided, training of security personnel in their effective and civilized or disciplined use is also required. Media reports have shown how low the morale of the officers has been in regard to the inferior weapons and poor training they go through.

These have caused poor motivation and weak response up to the point of flight in the face of superior threat from the bandits. In line with the above, the armed forces should be empowered and trained with the ability for swift response to attacks. There have been incidents of the security forces not coming to the aid of the victims during assaults by militants. The repositioning of the security intelligence infrastructure and hardware will surely achieve efficiency in the fight against banditry

Value Re -Orientation

The Nigerian government, religious institutions, the private sector, and civil society groups should invest more resources in promoting peace education, including reorientation programs that inculcate the value of peaceful coexistence. Peace education will help youth better appreciate the value of peace, making it more difficult for extremists to use them to foment trouble.

Peace education should be integrated in the educational curriculum of schools, from primary to tertiary education. Youth radicalization and insidious ideologies that underpin violent extremism also can be curbed through enlightenment programs delivered through radio, television, jingles, and group discussions. The Nigerian government, civil society groups, and the private sector could partner with Nigeria's film industry to produce movies and support radio and television programs designed to specifically counter narratives and messages promoting youth radicalization.

The Leadership Factor

therefore the need to institute selfless and accountable leadership that puts the people at the centre of development. The provision of quality and responsible leadership that sees governance as service to the people has a tendency to quell the various agitations and above all achieve national development.

Author Contributions

The study was conceptualized and initially drafted by Yange Terlumun Clement. Mnda Terver and Iorkaan Samuel Kuma were responsible for data collection, study design, and manuscript preparation. All authors participated in the critical review, revision, and final editing of the manuscript and approved the submitted version.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

The study was exempted from full ethical review in accordance with the guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC, 2007) and the Benue State Ministry of Health Research Ethics Committee, as the research was considered to involve minimal risk. Throughout the study, the ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw were strictly upheld.

Consent for Publication

All participants gave consent for their anonymized responses to be used for the purpose of reporting and publishing the findings of this study.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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APPENDIX A

Oral Interview Questions

Part One: preliminary Section

- (i) Opening Prayer
- (ii) Self-introduction of the researcher
- (iii) Self-introduction of the respondent
- (iv) Highlight of the aim and objectives of the interview and the study in general to the respondents (interviewer)

Part Two: Unstructured Interview Questions

1. In your opinion what do you consider to be the Nature and Character of banditry in Katsina Ala LGA
2. What do you consider to be the root causes of banditry in Katsina Ala LGA?
3. Has banditry affected agricultural production in Katsina Ala LGA? If yes, specify
4. In what ways has banditry affected infrastructure and socio-economic development generally in Katsina Ala LGA
5. What do you think can be done to reduce the menace of banditry in Katsina Ala LGA

APPENDIX B: List of Interviewees

S/N	Name	Sex	Age	Place of interview	Date
1	Tyowase Akpen	M	49	Mbayongo	07/06/2026
2	Yongo Nancy	F	28	Mbayongo	07/06/2026
3	Tsafa Wuese	F	30	Mbayongo	07/06/2026
4	Amase Terfa	M	35	Mbayongo	07/06/2026
5	Penda Clement	M	47	Mbayongo	07/06/2026
6	Destiny Amaakaven	F	37	Mbartula	09/06/2026
7	Aondowase Igbawase	M	42	Mbartyula	09/06/2026
8	Dooshima Iwen	F	53	Mbartyula	09/06/2026
9	Dickson Mayoyo	M	34	Mbartyula	09/06/2026
10	Aondofa Ageebee	M	38	Mbartyula	09/06/2026
11	Minenge Kwaghgba	M	45	Yooyo	12/06/2026
12	Anas Igba	F	42	Yooyo	12/06/2026
13	John Iorfa	M	47	Yooyo	12/06/2026
14	Mwuese Agba	F	34	Yooyo	12/06/2026
15	Oryiman Kudam	M	50	Yooyo	12/06/2026
16	Aondona Agede	M	41	Mbacher	14/06/2026
17	Mvena Nyam	M	33	Mbacher	14/06/2026
18	Mude Avaa	M	38	Mbacher	14/06/2026
19	Shima Anum	M	65	Mbacher	14/06/2026
20	Linus Luper	M	56	Mbacher	14/06/2026
21	Ortamen Adzer	M	60	Mbajir	16/06/2026
22	Abati Aondofa	M	52	Mbajir	16/06/2026
23	Mbayion Uke	F	42	Mbajir	16/06/2026
24	Mercy Dondo	F	30	Mbajir	16/06/2026



25	Ternenge Shima	,M	66	Mbajir	16/06/2026
26	Ayese Uma	M	38	Michihe	18/06/2026
27	Linda Kudam	F	29	Michihe	18/06/2026
28	Bogo Igba	M	47	Michihe	18/06/2026
29	Member Yina	F	38	Michihe	18/06/2026
30	Awase Kwagba	M	53	Michihe	18/06/2026
31	Sewuese Tor	F	30	Utange	20/06/2026
32	Amos Akange	M	46	Utange	20/06/2026
33	Mimi Aunde	F	25	Utange	20/06/2026
34	Terkula Wuam	M	47	Utange	20/06/2026
35	Alex Jija	M	46	Utange	20/06/2026
36	Atsinga Mattew	M	46	Katsina ala town	22/06/2026
37	Duniya Joe;	,M	44	Katsina ala town	22/06/2026
38	Duniya Elizaberth	F	26	Katsina ala town	22/06/2026
39	Jembe Austin	M	63	Katsina ala town	22/06/2026
40	Gbaeren Felix	M	45	Katsina ala town	22/06/2026