

BANDITRY AND LIVELIHOOD OF SMALL-SCALE FARMERS IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenon of insecurity has undermined Nigeria's global status as a peaceful country where people can live in safety and happiness. However, the country is facing political violence, armed conflict and violent crimes of all sorts, including rural banditry. This rising insecurity in the last decade has also made rural banditry to gain currency in Northwestern region of Nigeria. The aftermaths of rural banditry have been traumatic and reasonable proportions of small-scale farmers had lost their lives and agriculture-based livelihoods. It has also forced majority of them to be displaced with their families in this region. Additionally, investments in the agriculture sector are challenged by high poverty among the small-scale farmers due to lack of access to basic needs vis-à-vis social protection nets. The objectives of this paper are to examine the dynamics of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria, to determine the threats of banditry on source of livelihood of small-scale farmers, and to assess the coping strategies adopted by small-scale farmers to cope with banditry in this region. The paper adopts descriptive method by using secondary sources of data whereby the



materials were sourced from various knowledge repository centres and platforms, while Routine Activity Theory (RAT) was employed. The paper argues that there is a need for agriculture-based livelihoods for the majority of rural communities and the small-scale farmers in the region because they are facing threats from both natural and human-induced hazards. This paper concludes that there is also the need to strengthen the capacities of the relevant government institutions to build new, resilient food systems for self-sufficiency, work with organized institutions that can support and bring together a polarized population and promote social cohesion in Northwestern Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, Insecurity, Livelihood, Northwestern Nigeria, Small-Scale Farmers

Introduction

Over the years, peace and stability have been the core objective of government of most countries in the world, however, security challenges have thwarted the achievement of sustainable development in most African countries including Nigeria (Akinbi, 2015). Nigeria, a capitalist system is characterized by structural imbalance with manifestations of some features of inequality, unemployment, poverty, injustice, and inhumanity thereby responsible for the occurrences of armed conflicts such as rural banditry (Umar, 2010). Banditry mostly affects millions of people who live in rural areas (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2010). It was also observed that armed conflict and other criminal activities perpetrated by bandits in rural areas explain the apocalyptically volatile security ambience in northern Nigeria (Okoli, & Ugwu, 2019). Thus, the country is witnessing a tremendous setback in its socio-economic development occasioned by insecurity (Akinbi, 2015).

Nigeria's agriculture comprises of crop production, livestock rearing, forestry and fishing. In 2016, the agriculture sector



accounted for 21.2% of the GDP and employed 39.5% of the labour force (World Bank, 2018). However, it is often reported that as much as 70% of the labour force are involved in agricultural activities to varying extents. Crop production is subdivided into subsistence and cash crops. The most important subsistence crops are maize, cassava, sorghum, yam, beans, rice, groundnut, and to a lesser extent, millet, soya bean and cocoyam. The main cash crops are palm oil, cotton seed, cocoa, cashew and sugarcane (Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO], 2020). The livestock sector had an estimated 20.6 million head of cattle in 2016 - the largest herd in Africa. During the same year, the rapidly growing poultry sector supplied an estimated 146 million birds, while the numbers of goats and sheep amounted to 73.8 and 42.1 million, respectively (FAO, 2018).

The Northwestern Nigeria, is one of the six geopolitical zones, comprises seven of the country's 36 States namely; Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. It covers an area of 216,065 sq. km or 25.75% of the country's total land mass (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020). In this region, the major ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani, who historically share strong cultural ties and are very much intermixed, with other smaller groups especially in Kaduna State. The Northwestern part of the country has an estimated population of 33 million. Eighty per cent of the population are farmers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists or small-scale entrepreneurs. The region has substantial solid mineral deposits, including gold exploited by artisanal miners in open pit mines (ICG, 2020). It was also observed that more than 80% of Nigeria's farmers are considered as smallholders and they grow different types of crops and actively participate in livestock and fish farming. However, Nigeria's small-scale farmers own 0.5hectare (ha) of land on an average and they practice mixed crop-livestock systems (FAO, 2017).



This region has witnessed waves of violence including sectarian clashes, Islamist militancy and electoral violence. From 1980 to 2010, it saw numerous Christian-Muslim and intra-Muslim riots. Between 2011 and 2015, Kaduna and Kano States experienced many Boko Haram bombings and shootings, most notably the 20th January, 2012 attacks in Kano city that claimed about 185 lives of people (Crisis Group Africa Report, 2014). In April 2011, after the presidential election in the country ethnic and sectarian riots escalated that left over 1,000 people dead and 74,000 displaced (Crisis Group Africa Briefing, 2011). Since 2014, the Northwestern Nigeria has also suffered a surge of violence between pastoralists and allied armed groups called “bandits”. The situation has been further aggravated by the proliferation of deadly criminal gangs, small and light arms in rural areas. The violence has spread from its epicentre in Zamfara State to Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto States in the North West and into Niger State in North Central Nigeria (ICG, 2020).

In spite of its economic potential, the Northwest has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria. For instance, as of 2019, all the seven (7) States in the zone had poverty levels above the national average of 40.1%, led by Sokoto (87.7%), Jigawa (87%) and Zamfara (74%). Millions of the population lack access to basic health care and clean water, ironically, the immunization coverage is far below national goals (ICG, 2020). Also, five (5) of these States: Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi and Sokoto are faced with consequential effects of rural banditry. Among these, Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara States have been the most critical hotspots due to its magnitude and severity in this region (Kuna, & Jibrin, 2016). It is against this background that Olufemi (2015) posits that the Nigerian governments have spent over 462 trillion on national security and yet, efforts put in place in curtailing the menace seems not to have yielded the desired positive result.



It is a known fact that small-scale farmers produce 99% of Nigeria's agriculture major outputs, yet their productivity is hindered by several limitations (FAO, 2021). The major constraints faced by smallholder farmers in rural communities of Nigeria include lack of labour and agricultural inputs, limited access to information, modern agricultural technology and adequate financial services, and land tenure among others. Ironically, half of the people working in the agricultural sector are poor. Most of these small-scale farmers suffered from food scarcity and their means of livelihood (agriculture-based) are experiencing high vulnerability and weak resilience (FAO, 2021).

Several studies have been conducted on rural banditry in northern Nigeria, for instance, Rufa'i (2018) looks at vigilante groups and rural banditry in Zamfara State and their excesses and contradictions. Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduhie, & Dariya (2018) appraised the incidence of rural banditry in "Kamuku" forest in Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State. Kuna, & Jibrin (2016) assessed rural banditry and conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Olaniyan, & Yahaya (2016) focused on cows, bandits and violent conflicts in order to understand cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria. Shalangwa (2013) examined the nature and consequences of armed banditry in border communities of Adamawa State, Nigeria. This paper takes a different cue to examine the threats of rural banditry on agriculture-based livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Northwestern Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that the paper is divided into nine sections. The first section deals with the introduction where the problem of this paper is highlighted while the second section consists of the methodology. The third section explains the conceptual issues of small-scale farmers, banditry and resilience. The fourth section looks at the theoretical framework of Routine Activity Theory (RAT), and its applicability to banditry and livelihood of small-scale farmers. The fifth section examines the dynamics of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria. The sixth section focuses on the threats of banditry on source of livelihood of small-



scale farmers. The seventh section discusses strategies adopted by small-scale farmers to cope with banditry in Northwestern Nigeria, while the eight section provides policy recommendations and the final section highlights the concluding remarks of this paper.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this conceptual paper, secondary data were sought from a variety of sources, including records, authentic materials, published and unpublished articles, websites, journals, books, government reports, and media accounts. Only literature that focuses on small-scale farmers and the challenges of banditry in the Northwestern Nigeria was considered. Also, the documentary analysis examines current indigenous and foreign materials related to the objectives of this paper such as the dynamics of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria, the threats of banditry on source of livelihood of small-scale farmers, and strategies adopted by these farmers to cope with banditry in this region. Each of the literature reviewed has strengthened issues bothering on banditry and livelihood of small-scale farmers in Northwestern Nigeria.

Concepts of Smallholder Farmers, Banditry and Resilience

Smallholder farmers: According to Robert (2005), smallholder farmers are agricultural cultivators who practice vigorous, permanent, diversified farming on comparatively small farms in densely populated areas. Depending on the background, the farming region, and even ecological zone, smallholder farmers can be described in different ways and they can be a mixed group of individuals and households who face a range of limitations in their ability to participate in potentially lucrative agricultural activities. Zeidler, Kandjinga, & David (2010), noted that the concept of “smallholder farmer” is often used interchangeably with other terminologies such as small-scale farmers, resource-poor farmers, and peasant farmers.



Small farm is also the number of workers, capital invested, or amount of land worked. Land size is the criterion most commonly employed to define small farm. However, given the differing potential of land in soil quality and rainfall, a single measurement hardly captures the sense of limited resources or relative powerlessness characteristic of smallholders (Murphy, 2010). Overall, smallholder farmers are characterized by marginalization, in terms of accessibility, resources, information, technology, capital and assets, but there is great variation in the degree to which each of these applies (Murphy, 2010). Thus, smallholder farmers can also refer to artisanal fishers, gardeners, hunters and gatherers, etc. For instance, the FAO's adopted a 2-hectare (ha) threshold as a broad measure of a small farm excluding fishers and other small-scale food producers. IFAD (2011) noted that a significant proportion of smallholder farmers live in rural areas, although urban and peri-urban smallholdings are an increasingly important source of supply for developing urban areas.

Small-scale farmers manage over 80% of the world's estimated 500 million small farms. They also provide over 80% of the food consumed in a large part of the developing world, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and food security (IFAD, 2013). For instance, the increasing fragmentation of landholdings, coupled with reduced investment support and marginalization of small farms in economic and development policy, threaten this contribution, leaving many smallholders vulnerable security (IFAD, 2013). Smallholder farmers have often been neglected in debates on the future of agriculture, and left out of policymaking at numerous levels (Wiggins, 2011; Vorley, Cotula, & Chan, 2012). However, they have problems with availability of adequate labour in the rural area because able-bodied men are no longer interested in farming. They rather become commercial motor cyclists or taxi drivers than work in the farms. They also migrate to big cities to access social amenities and white-collar jobs for better living. This resulted in



scarcity and high cost of labour in rural areas (Mgbenka, & Mbah, 2016).

Banditry: The concept of banditry has been changing overtime, space and circumstances. For instance, a bandit in the 19th century Europe and America was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonized over the colonizer (Warto, 1994). Also, some bandits were celebrated as heroes of Mexican independence by others, while on the contrary, the State often considered them as nuisance and outlaws that need to be eradicated (Michael, & Watts, 1987). However, the term “banditry” is connected to rural because, it suggests that outlawed rural gangs are involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnapping and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, “bandits” are regarded as gang groups terrorizing and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable items or properties like merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, etc. The bandits’ modus operandi are mostly within and along rural borders. For instance, there are some individuals and State agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people who serve as their collaborators (Abdullahi, 2019).

Consequently, due to the complex nature of bandits' activities, Egwu (2015) describes banditry is seen “as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches.” Shalangwa (2013) sees the concept of 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”. For instance, the working definition of this paper holds that banditry is the totality of incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, village/highway raids and it involves the use of force or threat to



intimidate an individual or group of individuals in order to rob, rape, kidnap or kill the victims. To substantiate this, it was observed that:

Cattle rustling and rural banditry constitute challenges to public policy. An effective analysis must be situated within the wider crisis of pastoralism, the threat to livestock productivity, and the ways in which a combination of factors have framed the problem of material survival for both pastoralists transhumant and the crop farmers. Key relevant factors include climate change, environmental degradation, and over-farming. It is important to address specific issues, such as nomadic hunters' lack of voice, lack of political representation and lack of access to education. A broader policy framework, however, needs to be developed, with an expansive architecture designed to address the complex network of issues involved (Kuna, & Jibrin, 2016:53).

The increasing attacks of bandits in the Northwestern region are largely driven by frustrations and struggles to generate economic assets. The alarming acts of banditry such as cattle rustling, kidnapping, physical attacks and encroachments on farms are bred by frustrations (Uche, & Iwuamadi, 2018). It was observed that aggression is a result of frustrated individuals' inability to attain their goals. Today, banditry is labelled as "the product of aggressive behaviour" which results from issues such as poverty and unemployment, etc (Adegoke, 2019). Besides, Gadzama *et al.* (2018) see another dimension of banditry in Northwest region of Nigeria is cattle rustling. This is a form of organized cattle theft driven by allied accumulative or profiteering inclinations. In other word, they are criminal gangs engaging in organized rural banditry to profit from livestock theft.



On the other hand, Okoli, & Okpaleke (2014a) refer to rural banditry as armed violence perpetrated by criminal opportunists and syndicates in the countryside and frontiers of countries. While, Egwu (2015) said that rural banditry is an economically based criminality that is driven by different needs and factors such as unemployment, insecurity, ethno-religious conflict, greed and psychological needs. (Okoli, & Okpaleke, 2014b). It is also an act of armed criminality targeted at human life or property such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and allied armed violence. Also, Shettima, & Tar (2008) and Olaniyan, & Yahaya (2016) observed that the nature and incidence of rural banditry mostly perpetrated by nomads has yielded a number of thematic perspectives. Foremost among these perspectives is the narrative that situates the phenomenon as a necessary complication of farmer-herder conflict in a volatile security context characterized by the declining State's capacity to govern.

Migration from areas most prone to cattle rustling has been on a large-scale among pastoralists. For instance, in a study carried out by Kuna, & Jibrin (2016), participants were asked during focus group discussions (FGDs) to estimate the percentage of pastoralists that have adopted this option. Their responses varied. In worst affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) like Birnin Magaji and Zurmi in Zamfara State, and Birnin Gwari LGA in Kaduna State, between 80% and 90% of pastoralists migrated. In other LGAs like Kauran Namoda LGA in Zamfara State and Chikun LGA in Kaduna State, between 40% and 60% of these people migrated. In a related development, rural banditry in this region is caused by the need of some disgruntled elements to get out of poverty and improve their socio-economic status in the society. Hence, the phenomenon of ransom taking is the order of the day in banditry operations in Nigeria. However, where the ransom is not forthcoming, bandits became more tensed and frustrated and resort to killing their victims (Kuna, & Jibrin, 2016).



Resilience: Resilience is seen as the ability of people, institutions and systems to manage shocks and stressors and build stronger, more prosperous communities. Ibrahim (2017) sees resilience as “the capacity of communities to adapt when faced with hazards or shocks by taking the required actions to maintain an acceptable level of function and structure”. This suggests that community resilience like that of Northwestern region of Nigeria is the capacity to absorb shocks, cope with unforeseen disruptions and unpleasant emergencies. As such, it measures the ability to bounce back from setbacks by building on adaptive and proactive initiatives. Thus, resilience keeps the victims on the path of progressive self-renewal instead of giving up or relapsing to despondency and false sense of helplessness. Also, FAO (2017) defines resilience as “the ability to prevent disasters and crises as well as to anticipate, absorb, accommodate or recover and adapt from them in a timely, efficient and sustainable manner. This includes protecting, restoring and improving food and agricultural systems under threats that impact agriculture, food and nutrition security, and food safety (and related public health)”. The authors see “resilience” as a coping strategy for smallholder farmers to diversify their rural economy in order to cope with the effects of rural banditry in the Northwestern Nigeria.

Resilience is also coping strategies taken by smallholder farmers who have been threatened with loss of livelihood in rural communities. This involves managing resources during and after violence banditry attack to mitigate its effects. Eriksen, O’Brien, & Rosentrater (2008), described coping mechanism is described as actions and activities that happen within existing structures and systems, for example, diversification on farms. That is, small-scale farmers in Northwestern Nigeria have adopted several strategies like promoting crop diversification, introducing new crop cultivars, changing the time of farming operations, adapting crop rotation, and educating farmers about the negative effects of rural banditry. Therefore, enhancing the resilience of smallholder farmers through innovative technological interventions is of paramount importance



in this region. This is necessitated by the high vulnerability and risk of small-scale farmers to worsening rural banditry and generally lack of resources to adapt. This paper will inform policy and decision-makers on informed strategies that enhance the resilience of rural livelihoods. There is no clear understanding of how farmers can be helped and empowered to cope and adapt to rural banditry in the long run. Therefore, a framework for developing adaptation strategies for small-scale farmers to improve their livelihoods is necessary. These methods can be applied to other areas since adaptation strategies developed at the local level are more effective than those developed at the global level (Eriksen, O'Brien, & Rosentrater, (2008).

The resilience methods are aimed to provide improved agricultural inputs and technology to farmers to boost agricultural productivity. The use of extension service to receive up-dates on innovation/information on how to withstand shocks (Kebede, Haji, Legesse, & Mammo, 2016). Small-scale farmers can also boost resilience through social protection. This would help to lessen the impact of insecurity. Social protection in the form of relief could comprise of grains, assistances in cash or kind, oil and pulses. Farm inputs like cassava cuttings, seeds, etc could also be distributed to these farmers. Although, access to infrastructure like hospital, school, security, steady electricity, good marketable outlets, portable water, access to information technology, good transport systems, access to credit among others could help build smallholder farmers resilience (Kebede *et al.*, 2016).

Hailu (2013) stressed that the importance of building resilience in smallholder agriculture which constitutes over 80% of total agriculture in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP). According to him, building resilience in agriculture requires improved agricultural techniques and practices such as pest, disease and drought resistant seed varieties, reducing post-harvest losses and food waste, less dependence on non-renewable energy, improved



risk sharing and insurance schemes for smallholders, and providing better access to technology and information. Hailu (2013) further noted that building resilient agriculture also requires long term strategies and interventions that build on agro-ecological knowledge to enable small-scale farmers to counter environmental degradation and the negative impacts of climate.

Theoretical Framework: Routine Activity Theory (RAT)

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) also known as “Opportunity Theory” was initially developed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in the late 1970s (Cohen, & Felson, 1979). Felson has continued developing the theory, as well as extending it to white-collar crime. This theory holds that crime is likely to occur when there is a spatial-temporal convergence of three essential elements of crime namely; a motivated offender, an attractive target, and the absence of capable guardianship. The exponents of this theory hold that motivated offenders are individuals who are capable and willing to commit a crime while suitable targets can be a person or object that are considered by offenders as vulnerable or attractive. On the other hand, guardianship can be a person or an object that is effective in deterring offence to occur. Mere physical presence of guardianship in space and time can deter individuals to commit crime. RAT basic assumptions are that the factors that render a particular target attractive are situational and crime-specific. That, crime can be perpetrated by anyone who has the opportunity in terms of capability and availability of vulnerable target. That, victims have choices on whether or not to be victims mainly by possibly avoiding situations where a crime can be committed against them.

This theory is applicable to the phenomenon of banditry and source of livelihood of small-scale farmers in the Northwestern Nigeria. This is largely, due to crime that has been precipitated and sustained by the prevailing socio-existential environment in the rural sector characterized by a high proclivity to criminal indulgence. The



activities of rural bandits have affected agriculture in its entirety in this region. For instance, it was observed that the presence and prevalence of under-policed and unregulated hinterlands, forestlands and borderlands have provided an enormous opportunity for rural criminality in Northwestern Nigeria. Also, the presence of viable but vulnerable rural economy based largely on animal husbandry, crop production and informal mining, equally provides an avalanche of handy crime objects/targets: cattle, cash, treasure, etc. Most of the rural dwellers faced by these threats are the smallholder farmers. The virtual absence of governmental security apparatus in most of the rural communities gives incentive for criminal opportunism and impunity as well. This further suggests that crime brings about not only motivation but also temptation, for criminal indulgence. Under this circumstance, criminal deterrence takes flight of all forms of prevailing predatory crime. This is typically the situation in Northwestern Nigeria, where rural marauders and brigands are having a sustained field day in a criminal escapade that is threatening to overrun the entire region (The Humanitarian, 2018).

Dynamics of Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria

In the Northwest of Nigeria, banditry violence has affected populations living in States like Zamfara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina, and even Niger - a neighbouring State, is grossly affected by insecurity. About 21 million people living in these States have been exposed to insecurity from the activities of bandits. The banditry violence began as a farmer-herder conflict in 2011 and intensified between 2017 and 2018 to include cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, sexual violence and killings. This violence has affected every nooks and crannies of these States particularly in the rural areas (FAO, 2021). For instance, the presence of forests in this region also contributed to rural banditry because the bandits and other criminals use them as safe haven. “Kuyanbana” forest straddling Zamfara and Katsina States but it also stretching into Kaduna and Niger States and “Falgore” forest is



located in Kano State, while “Kamuku” forest covers an area of 1,121 sq. km from Kaduna to Zamfara, Katsina, Niger and Kebbi States respectively. Also, “Rumah/Kukar Jangarai” Forest Reserve covers an area of about 800 sq. km from Katsina State to Zamfara State while “Rugu” forest stretches from the Birnin Gwari LGA of Kaduna State to Katsina and Zamfara States (ICG, 2020).

In addition, the discovery of gold mines and the activities of illegal miners competing for the control of gold reserves have further intensified the activities of armed groups in the Northwest. As at March 2020, more than 210,000 people were internally displaced, and more than 35,000 refugees had crossed communal borders to *Maradi* in the Niger Republic (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020). While, it was discovered that Katsina State is hosting the largest population of IDPs with 150,785. Zamfara State is the second largest hosting 142,680 IDPs. Kaduna State is the third largest with 77,472 displaced persons. Sokoto State has 56,593 IDPs, while Kano State has the least with 25,668 displaced persons and *Maradi* is hosting 80,896 IDPs who fled from Nigeria. The increase in displaced individuals is as a result of attacks by armed bandits and any other security issues (UNHCR Niger (*Maradi* Factsheet), August, 2021 cited in International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021).

Typology of Banditry

According to Oyinloye (2020), in Nigeria, banditry can be grouped into different categories based on their course of action and the pattern of conflicts. The dynamics of kind of resources involved determine their conflicts typology. He classified it into the following: resources induced banditry, ethno-regional induced banditry, political induced banditry, and nomadic free-range grazing induced banditry.

Resources induced banditry: This type of conflict is usually among the actors because of the struggle for limited common



resources. It is on record that so many farmers fetch water from the stream for basic needs like cooking, drinking, bathing and laundry but if the herders visit such river with their cattle ahead of the farmers, they may have to wait till another time for their turn as the whole river may be in a mess. This happens mostly in the dry season and incidence of river poisoning is not unlikely to happen in a situation like that and this may snowball into reprisals by the herdsmen. Arable land is what every farmer scramble for and it has always been a point of intersection for herdsmen and farmers. This is simply because it is an area of land that yields good crops that also favours greener pastures. This attracts both farmers and herders, and in the cause of grazing and farming side-by-side, animals often stray into farms and crops are damaged. Farmers too may take some drastic measures which might result in casualties and loss on both sides. Similarly, it was corroborated that during FGD with farmers in Maradun LGA in Zamfara State, Nigeria. For instance, many of the herders have been allowing their cattle to overgraze on their farmland. They destroyed their farmland with the cattle and thereby making farming activities to be difficult. Therefore, the continuous conflicts between the farmers and herders can be attributed to the destruction of farmland, contamination of water, overgrazing and indiscriminate defecation by the cattle (Oyinloye, 2020; Bello, & Abdullahi, 2021).

Ethno-regional induced banditry: This happens when some neighbouring communities accommodate certain indigenes, therefore, the settlers have reasons not to tolerate them anymore. When tussles between the indigenes and settlers go beyond the threshold, some of them pretend and dress like herdsmen to carryout clandestine attacks. These people fight over boundaries, market or arable portions of land and such attacks take the form of ethnic cleansing whereby there will be no respect for gender, age or vulnerable individuals. Due to its severity, they simply wipe out all living things they come across (Oyinloye, 2020).



Political induced banditry: This is similar to ethno-regional induced banditry but this one has political undertone. The fight happens because of political positions and the issue of indigene versus settlers cannot be overruled. This type of fight can also lead to wanton destruction of many lives and properties. However, outsiders may not know the real identities of the gladiators and in most cases, they might misinterpret it as farmers-herders conflict (Oyinloye, 2020).

Nomadic free-range grazing induced rural banditry: This type of banditry smallholder farmers usually experienced in the dry seasons particularly by those who practice wetland farming. These nomadic free-range herders are foreigners who come from some African countries like Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Libya and Sudan and they entered into the country through the porous borders and all farms along the wetland area are grazed upon gallantly by them. The unique thing is that they herd their cattle in the night with flashlights and are usually armed themselves with sophisticated weapons. However, some farmers also keep vigil and lay ambush on such pastoralists which can lead to wanton destructions of lives and properties on both sides (Oyinloye, 2020).

Threats of Banditry on Source of Livelihood of Small-Scale Farmers

Small-scale farmers are faced with a series of unprecedented, intersecting challenges, often originating at global levels. Based on this, there is an increased in competition for land and water, increased influence of changing markets, rising fuel/fertilizer prices, and climate change. This changing context poses difficult challenges for smallholder farmers, who are more directly dependent on ecosystem services and have less capacity to adapt to changing contexts, compared with larger, more resource-endowed farmers (IFAD, 2013). It was approximated that 2.5 billion people live directly from agricultural production systems, either as full-



time or part-time farmers, or as members of farming households that support farming activities (FAO, 2008).

Smallholder farmers produce food and non-food products on a small-scale with limited external inputs, cultivating field and tree crops as well as livestock, fish and other aquatic organisms. Most poor families earn their incomes in multiple ways, and productivity on farms is viewed in the overall context of total family income (Reardon *et al.*, 1998). For instance, a study carried out by Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduhie, & Dariya (2018) in Birnin Gwari Local Government of Kaduna State, Nigeria revealed the adverse effects of banditry on rural communities. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents (small-scale farmers) indicated that it prevents them from farming, herding and hunting activities. Also, the Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN] (2017) opined that with a sustainable exploitation of its natural resources and endowments, Nigeria has the potential to become a major player in the global economy. After a shift from agriculture to crude oil and gas in the late 1960s, Nigeria's growth has continued to be driven by consumption and high oil prices (FGN, 2017). Despite the challenges the agriculture sector faces, Nigeria remains an agricultural economic country with a future of potential high growth.

The food security challenges in Nigeria are significant. The pressure from population growth is tremendous, with the population currently standing at 200 million and an estimated annual growth rate of 3.2% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). Furthermore, the agriculture sector is adversely affected by climate change. Depletion of water resources and unpredictable rainfall patterns are having a significant impact on production systems and leading to crop failure. Despite government measures on the importation of some food items such as rice, Nigeria is one of the world's largest importers of wheat, dairy products and horticultural crops. According to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), the main factors undermining production



include reliance on rain-fed agriculture, smallholder landholding, low productivity due to poor planting material, low soil fertility, land degradation, limited use of irrigation and limited agricultural extension system, among others (FAO, 2021). Chikwuma, & Francis (2014) in a study discovered the rate of rural banditry and cattle rustling in the northern part of Nigeria most especially in herding and farming communities have affected farm produce and livestock. For instance, the International Fund for Agricultural Development noted that:

Livelihoods are derived, to varying degrees, from smallholder farming - including livestock production and artisanal fisheries - agricultural wage labour, wage or self-employment in the rural non-farm economy and migration. While some households rely primarily on one type of activity, most of them seek to diversify their livelihood base as a way to reduce risk. Agriculture plays a vital role in most countries - over 80% of rural households' farm to some extent are the poorest and they rely mostly on farming and agricultural labour. However, non-farm income sources are increasingly important across regions, and income gains at the household level are generally associated with a shift towards more non-agricultural wages and self-employment income (IFAD, 2010:36).

Strategies Adopted by Small-Scale Farmers to Cope with Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria

Resilience or what this paper calls “coping strategy” offers a framework on how to improve agricultural production and nutrition, and strengthen the stability of food systems to withstand shock and continue to develop. Within this context, FAO (2021) recognizes that continuing and adapting its operations to changing



circumstances, with an increased focus on risk prevention, risk management and resilience building, is urgently needed in Nigeria. The FAO investments in past decades have significantly contributed to supporting the government in developing and improving the agricultural sector. For instance, the conflict in the Northwestern part of Nigeria is characterized by conflict over natural resources (water, grazing pasture, cropping land), coupled with population growth, rapid urbanization, inequality and increased unemployment rate, especially among the youth population (FAO, 2021).

Rapid population growth has pushed farmers into unsettled land traditionally used for cattle grazing. Also, as a coping strategy, most farmers have diversified their rural economy by using commercial fertilizers as opposed to dungs from animals for fertilizer in this region. Since many farmers and herders live at subsistence level, changes such as these have threatened their ability to survive (FAO, 2021). In addition, some States in northern Nigeria have passed pastoral legislation that contain restrictive clauses concerning the mobility of livestock. This legislation is aimed at confining livestock to areas reserved for grazing, limiting the movement of animals between States. This bold step taken by the government have benefited the creation of private ranches, which often involve the acquisition of large tracts of land; thus, considerably reducing the pastoral space available for mobile livestock (FAO, 2021). According to Rufa'i (2018), the inability of the State Governments to adequately address the challenges of rural armed banditry created an opportunity for the informal security sector to have a stake in the security apparatus of this region. A militant vigilante group (MVG), otherwise known as *Yan Sakai*, has emerged in Zamfara State. The word *Yan Sakai* simply means "volunteers". That is, people committed to protecting the territorial integrity of their community against hoodlums, bandits and armed robbers. Accordingly, Rufa'i noted that:



The problem of cattle rustling and rural armed banditry was under-rated at its inception about a decade ago in Zamfara State. Most of the security operatives showed little concern about the potential threat of this little quagmire until it became a serious nightmare in 2014. The dream of a common man in the rural areas is that the government will provide them with security, but when that proves merely impossible they relied on the vigilante group who are financially incapacitated, technically and even lacks confidence on the part of the general public. The last resort was to form up private security outfit that engaged the bandits in constant and perpetual armed conflict that claimed several lives and destroyed properties worth billions of naira. Even though, there were several attempts by the State Government to ban the activities and operations of this militant vigilante, but little success was achieved in that direction, simply because there were accusations in some quarters that the State Government is not up to its responsibilities (Rufa'i, 2018:73).

Similarly, a study conducted by Gadzama *et al.* (2018) in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria found that the major communal efforts adopted by farmers to end rural banditry and cattle rustling are vigilante/night watching and town-hall peace meeting. However, Rufa'i (2018) disclosed that the worst attack of the bandits against members of the vigilante group occurred on the 7th of April, 2014, in Yar Galadima in Dan Sadau Emirate Council of Maru Local Government Area in Zamfara State. The bandits came on over 50 motorcycles, each carrying three persons, and stormed a meeting organized by the vigilantes and instantly killed over 200 people, while over 50 people sustained various degree of injuries. This was seen as the most horrifying in



the history of rural banditry in northern Nigeria (Rufa'i, 2018). For instance, shocks are the major factor contributing to impoverishment or remaining in poverty. According to IFAD:

Poor rural people have less resilience to banditry than their urban counterparts because they have few assets to fall back on when shocks occur. However, it occurs, these poor people may have to resort to other coping strategies that involve incurring debt, selling assets, or foregoing on education opportunities for children and youth - all of which leave them that much more vulnerable to future shocks (IFAD, 2010:39 - 40).

Conclusion

This paper explores the phenomenon of banditry and livelihood of small-scale farmers in Northwestern Nigeria. The paper has established that with immense collective experience and intimate knowledge of local conditions, smallholder farmers hold many of the practical solutions that can help place agriculture on a more sustainable and equitable footing. To do this, they need help to overcome market failures and other disincentives for sustainable land use, including insecure land tenure, high transaction costs and weak institutional support. A major challenge will be to address the discrepancies between decisions made at the farm level and impacts at larger ecosystem scales. Successfully resolving and mitigating banditry and other violent conflicts can help build trust and confidence, and have a positive impact on agricultural-based livelihoods, food security and nutrition, as well as on peace-building between different livelihood groups in farming communities in this region. Thus, peace is the fruit of justice and the SDG 16 will sustain strong institutions in the society.



Policy Recommendations

To ensure that the Northwestern Nigeria is free from banditry, the country's Federal and the State Governments in that region should devote commensurate personnel and resources towards local intelligence gathering, early conflict warning signaling, and combat operations complemented by well-trained and well-regulated vigilante groups.

The Nigerian Government should ensure the provision of adequate security to all the nooks and crannies of Northwestern region to secure not only the smallholder farmers but other people's lives and property. That is, more security personnel should be recruited, equipped and reinvigorated by strengthening their capacity to combat security challenges. Security issues should not be treated on ad-hoc basis, rather the operatives should be more pro-active, efficient and effective in intelligence gathering.

Agriculture-based livelihoods can only be protected from multiple hazards if adequate disaster risk reduction, natural resource management and food crisis prevention and management governance systems are in place at the Federal, State and Local levels in Nigeria.

The Federal Government should device different strategies to tackle the issue of rural banditry as it has grossly affected small-scale farmers in Northwestern Nigeria. This is one of the sources of violence, conflicts, mercenary inflows, gun-running and/or small and light arms proliferation, etc which aggravates insecurity and lawlessness in the country.

Smallholder farmers must also develop the skills to combine their experience and knowledge with modern science-based approaches, and develop effective solutions to their challenges. This will require strengthening agricultural education, research and advisory services, and fostering greater collaboration, innovation and



problem-solving mechanism amongst the small-scale farmers, researchers and service providers.

Nigeria's Federal and State governments should facilitate settlements between farmers and herders - easing friction by reforming livestock production. They should cooperate with the neighbouring countries to stem cross-border flows of weapons and bandits, as well as to better police the forests and gold mining areas. By extension, international partners should help in addressing humanitarian needs.



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