Overview of Banditry in Nigeria: Implication for Youth Development

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ABSTRACT

Scholars contend that youth involvement in conflicts and banditry threatens many developing nations' economic, political and social security which is a significant element associated with underdevelopment. It depresses local and foreign investments, decreases the quality of life, rescinds human and social capital and damages relationships among citizens and the states; thus, discouraging democracy, the rule of law and the capability of the country to uphold development. No doubt, the impact of youth involvement in conflicts can be shocking, especially for crimes such as armed banditry which takes a toll on their victims, both in material and other losses, as well as, in social and psychological terms. These could be interpreted as material losses, physical injury or death, social fear, restrictions on freedom of movement and even the psychological fear of potential ill-treatment. Considering the high prevalence of banditry among youths in Nigeria, this paper aimed to examine the predisposing factors to banditry as well as its effect on youth development in the country.

Keywords: Banditry, Nigeria, Implication, Youth and Development.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of banditry in Nigeria is menace to the nation's economic growth and development [1, 2, 3, 4]. Despite efforts put in by the past and present governments toward youth development, they are still many uneducated, unemployed and impoverished youth who are inclined to anti-social conduct and violence because many of them seem to lack a home [5, 6, 7]. Some analysts observed that banditry has become an attractive method of income by mostly Nigerian youths due to weak governance, youth unemployment, poverty and inequality that leaves the youths with depleted options for livelihood [8, 9, 10]. Generally speaking, the issue of insecurity in Nigeria is a cyclical phenomenon that looms over the well-being of its citizens [11, 12, 13]. The multipronged incidence establishes a nuisance to development and leads to the propagation of crime among youths. As a multidimensional challenge, insecurity shoulders varying dimensions in different geopolitical zones of the country [14, 15, 16]. The South-West geopolitical zone has been afflicted by a surge in cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping, domestic crime, extrajudicial killings, herder-farmer conflicts, cultism and banditry. The South-East zone is also characterised as a harbour for ritual killings, commercial crime, secessionist agitation, abduction, herder-farmer clashes, and banditry [17, 18]. The South-South remains threatened by militancy, kidnapping, and environmental agitation such as oil bunkering. Similarly, in recent times, South East Nigeria has been classified as confrontation zones between the Nigerian state and non-state actors agitating for the secession of Biafra from the Nigerian state; while lingering demands for Biafran independence amplified following the restoration of democracy in 1999, these agitations further intensified around 2012 with the emergence of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB). IPOB grew out of the fracturing Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) around 2014, fast becoming the core of Biafran secessionist agitation following the advent of diasporic Igbo nationalist radio host Nnamdi Kanu as its leader. The North East has been subject to a humanitarian crisis lasting over a decade, caused by the Boko Haram

insurgency and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Meanwhile, North-Central and North-West were noted for illegal mining, ethno-religious killings, kidnapping and banditry. Indeed, the region has witnessed five separate mass kidnapping incidents since November 2020, in which tens and hundreds of children have been captured and carted away from public school premises. Likewise, farmers in the North West are forced to abandon their uncultivated farmlands or pay bandits' taxes to cultivate and harvest their crops. Female victims, including teenage girls, have been abducted and sexually assaulted. All the acts above are thus, attributed to youth as perpetrators. Many say the ongoing unrest has had a substantial human and economic cost for Nigeria. Considering the high prevalence of banditry among youths in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to examine the predisposing factors to banditry as well as its effect on youth development.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the structural conflict theory of the Marxist School personified by Marx and the Structural Violence by Galtung [1]. The structural conflict theory explains the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions and societies to change. It vies that discordant interests based on struggle for artificial scarce resources are responsible for social conflicts. Marxism in the historical materialism sees conflict and crises as rooted in the economic structures and social institutions of the society. This indicates that conflict is made into the social relations and the way societies are structured and organised. In other words, political and economic exclusionism, injustice, poverty, disease, inequality, and exploitation are bases of conflict and crises among struggling relating groups.

Overview of Banditry in Nigeria

Bandits often terrorise communities virtually across the regions. Their activities include kidnapping, arson, rape, cattle rustling, killing, and looting [2]. Some people believe that the frequency of under-governed spaces where the government's control is futile is a significant cause of banditry. Such areas are breed by bad governance, weak legality, prolonged conflict and poor governance which expose citizens to exploitation by bandits, traffickers and other criminal elements. It can be stated clearly that such areas are not generally entirely devoid of the government's control, but are governed poorly and differently from more prominent communities. These poorly governed territories are overwhelmed by bandits due to their remoteness with hills and thick forests, allowing illegal activities to continue. It is not exceptional to find human trafficking, cattle rustling and illegal mining in areas like Kaduna, Katsina, Niger and Zamfara States. Such areas stimulate illegal, informal economic activity. Meanwhile, the Nigerian security forces are generally understaffed and poorly equipped, making them vulnerable to promoting security in such areas. The country's porous borders have increased the influx of illegal arms and light weapons from neighboring countries such as Niger, Libya and Chad, thus leading to banditry and kidnapping acts.

The additional intricate by the poor socio-economic situations in the North East and North West exposes the youth to recruitment for criminal doings. The socio-economic realities include poverty, pervasive unemployment, dispossession, disparity, relegation and lack of access to basic amenities. Even though the aforementioned is a national catastrophe, the North is most affected by the menace. Analysts say the recent killings, conflicts, kidnapping, cattle rustling and banditry in some parts of Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi, Zamfara, Jigawa and Sokoto, Borno and the Yobe States have a link with abject poverty in the region [2]. Similarly, another factor identified by the analyst that increased the

incidence of banditry is the pastoralists and farmers' conflict. Conversion of grazing areas to farmland, desertification, drought, climate change, cattle rustling, insurgency and population growth have steered the migration of herders to green zones. This migration led to pastoralists' clash with farmers over the encroachment of farmland and damage to life and crops. In extreme cases, conflicts have led to the wanton destruction of life and property of both the farmers and pastoralists, thus contributing to a high degree of insecurity in the country.

The cause of banditry in Nigeria is attributed to illegal mining activities in some regions. Illegal mining is prominent in States like Niger, Birnin Gwari, LGA Kaduna, Kebbi, Katsina and the Zamfara States which has triggered conflict among youth over the control of minefields which has led to the deaths of many innocent lives. The situation displaces many people in the region due to youth engagement in banditry which they consider an alternate means of survival. In addition, the prevalence of poverty and widespread unemployment in the geopolitical zone, make the youth vulnerable to crime [3]. It was alleged that those foreigners live with the criminals in the bush, eating together. The International hostile bodies are also patronising the country's oil; so they have no business solving the problem [4]. Because of this, the consequence of banditry is widespread. In addition to complicating the security predicament in the country, it has also amplified the rate of forced migration, food insecurity, cattle rustling, destruction of property, health challenges, displacement, humanitarian crises and death. For example, between 2011 and 2022, an estimated 10,000 people lost their lives due to attacks in various places while over 100,000 internally displaced persons were recorded [5].

Youth and Pre-Disposing Elements to Conflicts and Banditry

Iheriohanma [6] contends that the political edifice of the nation and poverty amid the majority are responsible for youth involvement in conflicts and banditry. He states that "each of these is either a cause or a consequence of the sudden nose-diving and sweeping changes in societal values, behaviour and the political system." Some analysts, however, tend to place much emphasis on a set of related issues. This implies that conflict is built into social relations and how societies are structured and organised. Essentially, political and economic exclusionism, injustice, poverty, disease, inequality and exploitation are sources of conflict and crises among contending, but mutually related groups. Merton [7] in Iheriohanma [6] noted that society's social structure and cultural values use definite forces on members to adapt, yet these create some contradictions that necessitate deviation from norms. Merton further states that there are structural obstacles (for example. structure of economic resources and political power) that empower only a privileged few to attain these institutional goals. Thus, some elements responsible for insecurity are:

a. **Poverty and Unemployment:** In Nigeria, about 120,000 million people live below the poverty line, according to the country's National Bureau of Statistics. Coupled with a skyrocketing unemployment rate, which has shattered previous records and now stages at 40%, and a shrinking economy, most Nigerians face grim economic realities [9]. These realities have been recently compounded more by insecurity, with scattered and complex networks of criminal and terrorist organisations overwhelming Nigeria's security forces with kidnappings and killings. These global criminal groups take advantage of youth unemployment and abject poverty to recruit them into criminal acts.

b. **Communal Conflict:** For over two decades, Nigeria has witnessed many communal clashes and rivalry among various ethnic

groups, exposing the youth to conflicts and access to small arms in the name of territorial defense. Between 2001 and 2016, regions like the southwest, south, and southeast witnessed tribal conflicts, while in the north-central and northwest regions of Nigeria, was communal rivalry between nomadic Fulani herders and farmers over grazing areas. In this case, climate change has contributed to the herders' depletion of grazing resources, which brought the clash between the two ethnic groups. The clash has resulted in many losses of lives, animals and crops. Reports showed that a lack of government intervention to resolve the clash aggrieving the herders formed amorphous militia groups carrying out kidnapping for ransoms. Since the inception of banditry and kidnapping in 2011-date, more than 10,000 people have been killed and attacks and killings have displaced many rural areas [8]. Added to the farmers-herder crisis is a lack of access to education, veterinary services and animal feeds. Grazing routes and reserves are now mostly shared amongst politicians and traditional rulers in the state.

c. **Youth Culture of Material Acquisition:** The gap between the rich and poor in Nigeria psychologically affects youth and materialism. The culture of materialism hypothesis by most Nigerian youth emphasizes materialism and individual attainment of goals. The oppressors' in the society's display of wealth motivate some youth to strive for success and entrepreneurship without ensuring equal opportunities and means to attain these enviable and laudable set of institutional goals for all its members, creating room for anomic conditions of lawlessness that give rise to egoistic and anomic types of suicide [6]. Sequel to this assertion, analysts contend that youth were said to engage in illegal mining activities to make an income and immerse themselves in wealth.

d. **Political Landscape:** Analysts attributed youth conflict to politicians in the country who sponsored and armed some youth as political thugs to achieve their political ambition. After winning the elections, the youth were abandoned, went into drug abuse, cattle rustling and robbery and later transformed into armed bandits attacking villages on motor bikes. Contemporary armed groups first emerged around Dan-Sadau District, Maru Local Government area in Zamfara state, after the 2011 general elections. Several hypotheses, theories and schools of thought have evolved as to the reason for the rise of the criminal gangs in the area. The first motorbikes used in the attacks were donations from politicians during the elections campaign. This explains the connection between bandits and politicians in Nigeria.

To buttress this, at the onset of conflict in the North-West region, precisely Zamfara state in 2011, it was contending that authorities in the state were adamant and unresponsive, thus, adding support to politicians' connection to the conflict to maintain status quo. As against strengthening the state's formal and informal security architecture, the conflict was "sedated" and armed groups were calm to sleep through state amnesty. This is in line with the assertion of Rufa [2]. Indeed, Nigeria is currently confronted with multitudes of vigorous and undefined threats to national security that speedily deteriorate core productive and social sectors and unsettle economic firmness and growth. The fortune of every nation rests on a firm and robust economic and financial system and its incorporation into the global economy.

Future Implication of Youth and Banditry

Scholars contend that youth involvement in conflicts and banditry threatens many developing nations' economic, political and social security which is a significant element associated with underdevelopment. It depresses local and foreign investments, decreases the quality of life, rescinds human and social capital and damages relationships among citizens and the states; thus, discouraging democracy, the rule of law and the capability of the country to uphold development. No doubt, the impact of youth involvement in conflicts can be shocking, especially for crimes such as armed banditry which takes a toll on their victims, both in material and other losses, as well as, in social and psychological terms. These could be interpreted as material losses, physical injury or death, social fear, restrictions on freedom of movement and even the psychological fear of potential ill-treatment. Recent banditry activities show that Nigerians nowadays are afraid to travel far away from their locality to another, but if it becomes necessary, some resort to travel by airplane no matter the cost. Average citizens travel by train services which also experience the bandits' act. An example is the Abuja–Kaduna train attacks by bandits and the suspected Boko Haram sect in February 2022 which resulted in the loss of lives and many others kidnapped. This proves that even the train service is no longer safe because the Nigerian Railway Corporation shut down the train services along the Kano-Kaduna-Abuja rail track and the Zaria-Zamfara rail track [5]. As noted, many security analysts and economics experts opined that armed banditry affects education, food security, job opportunity, the health sector and the supply and delivery of essential social services by non-governmental and governmental organizations due to fear of attacks. According to National Security Summit [9], the effects of youth engagement in banditry on Nigerian educational institutions consist of:

a. Closure of educational institutions, most especially primary and secondary schools.

b. Loss of human resources in educational institutions because nobody wants to work in the prone areas.

c. Poor quality of education because there is not enough workforce.

d. Increased in educational spending because arm personnel must be deployed to protect against any attack.

e. Destructions of infrastructural facilities in places like Maiduguri, Yobe and Adamawa States.

f. Brain-drain as a result of the denial of the younger generation access to education.

g. Educational wastages which leads to losing the educated youth who are the future of the country.

h. Discouragement of educational pursuit by children and encouragement of foreign education.

i. Internal displacement of Learners, which is frequently occurring.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

From available literature, armed bandits are becoming more sophisticated in tactics and national and international connections. The gangs have transnational networks with similar gangs across different parts of the West African sub-region. These are confirmed by the contacts and connections with other terrorist groups within and outside Nigeria. Hence, it is pertinent for the government to improve its security architecture, citizens' livelihood and education programmes for viable and efficient education that will instill hard work, skills acquisition, self-reliance and entrepreneurship in Nigerian youths.

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