

CHANGING MODES OF BANDITRY IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPMENT DEFICITS

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ABSTRACT

This work uses a country case study of North-Central Nigeria to explore the economic implications of recent trends in the two major forms of banditry in Nigeria, namely, kidnapping and herdsmen attacks on farmers. This is a qualitative research which x-rayed how the changing patterns of these two forms of banditry impact on Nigeria's economy. Documentary evidences were used as means for generating data. Findings reveal that Nigerian government loses at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually due to the ongoing conflict between farmers and herdsmen across the North-central and South-East and no nation can achieve development when it is under crime siege. The work recommends that the herdsmen should be restricted from grazing their cattle outside those approved areas. Again, borrowing from the developed nations, the godfathers and sponsors of these herdsmen should be identified and licensed for proper identification. Provision of adequate security of lives and property for defenseless citizens by the state and creation of conducive environment to boost economic activities, with these measures in place, these crimes will reduce.

Keywords: kidnapping, herdsmen, criminality, youths, unemployment, development.

INTRODUCTION

Banditry, according to Collins Dictionary refers to acts of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down. There has been a steady rise in the incidences of violent conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers not only in Nigeria but also across the entire West Africa. North Central Nigeria comprises seven states which include Niger, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa, Kwara and FCT. This act of banditry in the North Central Nigeria has been frequent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in many states with particular focus on Benue state and some other places. Tracing the origin of these crises, one can see that Since the Fourth Nigerian Republic's founding in 1999, farmer-herder violence have killed thousands of people and displaced tens of thousands more in these areas. These acts of violence have spilled dramatically over the past few years and we are witnessing a transformation of conflicts between pastoralists and farmers into general rural banditry. In this paper, attempt is made to assess the changing pattern of banditry in Nigeria from the perspective of development deficits. It is generally acknowledged

that high rate of crime and violence reduces the vibrancy of economic performance of developing countries. For instance, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2014 claimed that theft, corruption, violence constituted a major challenge on the economy and financial budget where large sums of money were lost to criminals through fraud and forgery (Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), 2013). Other crimes like, smuggling, sabotage, kidnapping, theft and violence have negatively affected the revenue of government (Ahmed, 2013). Important theoretical works have shown that there is a link between development deficits and crime, especially in developing countries. What is still debated is how these hypotheses apply in concrete situations in different countries. This paper, therefore, tried to contribute to the understanding of the changing pattern of banditry from the perspective of development deficits. This question is important because Nigeria, as a developing country, is still struggling to have a model of development that is capable of bringing about the desired end of nation-building. Thus, the question becomes, how do we understand social problems that operate to hinder the pace of progress in the society through the prism of development deficits?

Paulo (2010), stressed that the higher the level of violence experienced by a region, the lower the region's investment attractiveness should be. Since economic growth is an increasing function of investment, crime and violence should be harmful to economic growth. Nigeria is equally experiencing a prevalence of rising crime rates in varying degrees ranging from kidnapping, armed robbery, rape etc. The crime rate in Nigeria increased from 65.93% to 66.28% in 2011 and 2012 respectively and subsequently increased to 66.45% in 2013. This rise in crime is accompanied by a decline in real economic growth from 5.41% to 4.98% in 2006 and 2010 accordingly and to 2.60% in 2013 (World Bank Indicator, 2016). This in effect, decreases the Nigeria's ability to meet the 13% average growth rate per capita income of 4,000 USD by the year 2020 as stated in their vision 20: 20, 20 (National Planning Commission, 2010). Attacks by Fulani herdsmen in the North-central Nigerian state of Benue has led to the killing of at least escalated 1, 269 persons, In Benue, North-East Senatorial District, for instance, as at 2016, the killer herdsmen have attacked all the other local government councils except Gboko. The council areas invaded and occupied by the killer herdsmen include Guma, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Buruku, Tarka and Makurdi local government councils. (Ibanga, 2016). The Paramount Ruler of Logo Local Government Area, Jimmy Memme, told this source, that between July 1 and 16, the herdsmen murdered over 85 persons, including women and children, from six out of the 10 wards in the area. The number is endless.

These forms of crimes have imposed a lot of costs on the economy. According to Becker (1968), the cost of these crimes to individuals and the society are their disruption of economic activities and diversion of developmental funds. These two

forms of banditry to a large extent have disrupted the economic activities in Nigeria by causing insecurity, fear, loss of lives and property especially in the regions thereby diverting developmental funds, discouraging investors and hampering economic development. Some of the key reasons for negative relationship between investment and violence are related to the fact that economic agents (firms and individuals) are sensitive to the set of environmental and institutional amenities offered by each company to prospective regions when they make production or consumption location choices (Paulo, et al, 2010). This work is focused on North Central Nigeria because of its strategic economic importance in Nigeria and the economic impact accompanied by the continued banditry if left to escalate

DRIVERS OF THE VIOLENCE IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

The Nigerian state has been under siege for a long time, by Fulani terrorists operating under a gorilla pattern of reconnaissance, attack and withdrawal, leading to so many deaths and social dislocations. Investigations revealed that Fulani herdsmen killers' major job description is just to kill. Most of them are employed by cattle owners mostly made up of highly influential elites in our society like the Emirs, Sultans, and heads of parastatals, oil barons, Imams, Governors, Federal Reps, and Senators as "security men" strictly to protect the cattle. They equally provide them with sophisticated weapons which they use in carrying out their onslaught. Instead of investing in ranches, they chose the cheaper alternative of having their kinsmen, take these cattle from the North to south seasonally; using the entire Nigerian space as their "grass kingdom". These cattle, in turn, destroy farms in their path, rendering farmers economically bankrupt to further enrich the wealthy Fulani "remote herders".

Again, for centuries, pastoralists drove their cattle East and West across the Sahel, the semi-arid zone south of the Sahara desert that includes Nigeria's far Northern belt. In the early 20th century, some herders started shifting their migratory routes further south, pushed by a series of droughts in the far north, but also attracted by heightened security in the central and southern Nigeria and a better control of parasitic diseases (such as trypanosomiasis or sleeping sickness) in the central and southern zones.

As cattle herds migrated southwards, so did conflicts between pastoralists escalated by the day. The spread of conflicts into Southern states is aggravating already fragile relations among the country's major regional ethnic and religious groups. The North-East, has also witnessed a wild spate of violence due to an alarming rate of kidnapping coupled with widespread and incessant rise in kidnappings and herdsmen attacks on various farming communities in the area. North central Nigeria is the focus of this study because of its economic importance to Nigerians. This region is very rich in natural resources. The region is also a home to many historical and colonial relics. For instance, Lokoja, which is the first administrative capital of modern day Nigeria, is steeped in Nigerian history as the name "Nigeria" was coined there by Flora Shaw, a

British journalist who presided over the leadership of the Nigerian state before independence. Again, due to its centrality, it shares boundaries with Nassarawa state in the North, Taraba state to the East, Cross River State to the South, Enugu to the South-West and Kogi to the West. The Nigerian federal capital territory, Abuja is equally located within the region. Benue state is often thought as the food basket of the nation as it has a rich agricultural region. Above all, anything that affects this region will definitely impact on almost the entire nation's economy and impact on the nation's development.

Theoretical Framework

The political economy frame of analysis is appropriate to the analysis of kidnapping in any society. There are different political economic models of analysis. However, there are common assumptions among them, the principal ones being:

- (1) That there are intricate linkages between political and economic structures of the society;
- (2) That the political and economic structures of a society determine its general values, cultures and norms as well as the direction and practice of governance, and
- (3) That a more robust analysis of society is provided by an understanding of the linkages between the economy and polity and their dialectical interrelations with other structures and social institutions.

The most popular strand of political economy in this work is the Marxist model. Its main argument is summarized by the famous statement by Karl Marx in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1970). According to Marx:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in their development of material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

The mode of production of material life conditions, the general process of social, political and intellectual life (pp. 20-21). Marx strongly argued that the economic structure of society determines the character of the superstructure which includes the political, legal, cultural and religious relations and institutions of society. But this does not imply a unidirectional model. Account is also taken of dialectical relations, a form of feedback process in which the superstructure also influences the economic substructure.

Applying the theory to this work, the theory suggests that the problems of armed banditry, arson and kidnapping, are to be understood as the reflections or products of the way the society organizes its economy, especially the dominant interests that

drives it. These dominant class here, like big cattle owners mentioned above are laws unto themselves. Instead of developing human capital, building ranches and employing these youths rightly, they arm them to kill and destroy their fellow human beings while protecting their cows. At the end of the day, none of these criminals are punished because they are protected by their owners. Criminal law, whose enforcement constitutes the rationale for the establishment of judicial institutions, contains rules prohibiting the behaviours and activities deemed detrimental to the dominant economic and political interests of society. But their enforcement is thwarted because of the godfathers. These killer herders go proudly free.

However, societies are constituted into classes and groups with varying degrees of power or influence over political and economic decision-making. Classes and groups with dominant economic power control political decision-making, including the enactment of criminal law by the legislature, its enforcement and interpretation by the judiciary respectively. The argument is that the evolution or emergence of banditry and kidnapping “is linked to economic specialization and differential access to resources that occur in the transition from a kinship to a class- dominated society. The theory argues that the society is divided into groups and classes with common interest in some areas and conflicting interests in many fundamental areas, including the organization, mobilization and distribution of economic and socio-political resources.

Socio-economic constraints of Herdsmen banditry in Nigeria.

”., Man’s economic need is his most fundamental need and man cannot exist in the first place unless he is able to meet his basic needs. At the same time, economic activity is man’s primary activity and it is geared towards satisfying our needs. While some satisfy their needs justly, others who cannot take to any means to satisfy theirs. Some take to all sorts of crime in order to satisfy their needs or to please them. Crime has existed in the world right from creation and has continued to grow. In fact, it has become a global problem to the extent that there is no section of the globe that is not battling with its peculiar crime problem because these acts of terrorism have spread to almost all nations in the globe. ISIS, Boko Haram, Islamic fundamentalists, al shabab etc are all over the place killing and maiming human beings

Nelson Mandela in his words said that,

“when a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become a criminal”.

In discussing the issue of incessant kidnappings across Nigeria, Bennel (2000), had argued that urban society is becoming increasingly criminalized, especially with the proliferation of youth gangs. However, it can be observed that in recent times, not only the urban society is affected but it has also spread to those at the remote and rural areas. This has gotten to the point that neither homes, nor markets are safe in Nigeria. While those in the cities are battling with kidnapping, those in the rural areas are

ravaged by the onslaught of the herdsmen. Recently, a 36year old high profile kidnapper and the richest in Nigeria by name Chukwudi Onuamadike was arrested in Lagos state Nigeria. He was arrested by the Inspector –General of police Intelligence Response team, (IRT). He confessed to having been behind virtually all the high profile kidnap incidents in places including but not limited to Lagos, Port Harcourt, Aba, Onitsha even in South Africa. (Nnadozie, et al, 2017).

Various cases of herdsmen attacks in North central Nigeria.

The increasing clashes between farmers and pastoralists have recently become worrisome, especially in wetland areas of the Middle Belt, North Central Nigeria.

The herdsmen are a group of pastoralists whose major occupation, as we originally knew was cattle rearing. The current turn in the herdsmen-farmers conflict must be noted. For instance, a report by SB Morgen Intelligence (2016) accounts that there were 18 attacks by Fulani herdsmen between 1997 and 2010, with majority of them happening in the North-central region of the country. Overall, violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen totaled 371 in the period between 2011 and 2015. These nomads effectively occupy any unused bushes by erecting shanty houses where they live. They destroy people's farms with their roving cattles; and fight the farmers in many cases with sophisticated weapons. Recently, it has been observed that these herdsmen have taken to crimes including killing, kidnapping, raping of women and arson. When villagers at local residents of their abode of settlement try to fight them or send them packing, they normally retaliate by burning down their houses and killing them. According to a former permanent secretary in the federal civil service, Mr Mike Onoja, he revealed on Monday March 27, 2017 that the herdsmen have adopted the guerilla-style approach in their attacks on communities. He described the attack by herdsmen as 'guerilla war' where they attacked, killed people, destroyed houses and run away like guerilla type of war. He was quoted as saying that, "it is surprising that none of the herdsmen behind the killings in Benue state and other parts of Nigeria have ever been prosecuted" (Ebhomele, 2017). Also, in Benue state, no fewer than 36 persons were killed by invading Fulani herdsmen who overran seven villages in Agatu Local Government Area of the state. The invaders reportedly attacked native farmers in Ikpele and Okpopolo community in the state killing seven farmers and displacing 6,000 inhabitants including children; women and the elderly persons while burning down houses, farmlands and economic trees. (Aghanya, 2016). These attacks on Benue communities have continued till date prompting the current Governor of the state to pass an anti-grazing bill in the state to forestall any further attack.

Cases: A case captured in Sahara reporters of January 26, 2016 shows that this problem of herdsmen is also ravaging the whole West African countries. A member of parliament in Ghana has led a group of local youths to demand for immediate eviction of herdsmen and their cattle from his constituency. According to Kwadwo Baah

Agyemang, in what he called “Fulani Menace”, he said that despite a 2012 court edict ordering for the eviction of the herdsmen, nothing seems to have been done in terms of actual implementation. He reiterated a popular sentiment that some people in authority are to be blamed since they actually own most of the cattle under the care of the herdsmen. “The cattle belong to the big men in society, chiefs, senior police officers etc. so there is not much political will to carry out the order”. The situation is further compounded by the “free movement” policy being pursued by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The West African States have the policy of free border crossing by member states with very minimal checks.

Talking about the constraints these acts of banditry have on Nigerian economy, it is pertinent to note that these rural areas affected by the herdsmen attacks are the economic mainstay of Nigeria. Benue state, for instance is called the ‘food basket’ of the nation. This is indicative of the quantum of agricultural products from this particular state. In the early hours of Wednesday February 24, 2016, rural dwellers in five villages of Aila, Ugboju, Akwu, Odugbeho and Enogaje of Agatu Local Government Area in Benue State, an area that has common borders with Nasarawa State, were awakened by sound of gun shots and flicks of machetes as suspected Fulani militias swept into the area unleashing an orgy of violence. The unfortunate incident left, in its wake, more than 300 dead, among which were more women and children because of their vulnerability.

Figure 1,
The 2016 Agatu massacre



People killed in Agatu. (<https://www.google.com>) Retrieved 25/5/2018)

Implications of Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria.

Both kidnapping and herdsmen attacks have taken a great toll on Nigerian economically, politically and socially. In fact, the ongoing low-level conflict is thwarting the country's development to a large extent. The implications of their activities are far reaching and overwhelming. For instance now in most parts of Benue state, Teenagers and even young boys carry machetes and daggers in villages in the Agatu area of Benue state. "Families have been separated or killed." Violence blamed on Fulani herdsmen has given Nigeria's government another security headache in addition to Boko Haram Islamists in the Northeast and militants in the oil-producing south. Locals now face food shortages. But attacks blamed on Fulani, driven more by a need for increasingly scarce resources such as land and water rather than radical ideology, are not a new phenomenon.

Economically, Part of the food crises we are having today is due to the criminal activities of these criminals. Why not? When these rural farmers abandon their farms, their homes and flee to Internally Displaced camps to save their lives. The Nation majorly depends on these rural farmers for their food supplies. According to a new report by a global humanitarian organization, the Nigerian government loses at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually due to the ongoing conflict between farmers and herdsmen across the North-central and South-East. The clashes which have resulted in the death of thousands of rural dwellers over the past two decades, usually arise from disagreements over the use of essential resources such as farmlands, grazing

areas and water (Ogundipe, et al, 2016). The contending issue remains that while the herder's prized possession is his cattle and does not joke with them because they are his main source of livelihood, the farmer's prized assets are his crops and neither would want their investment tampered with. Again, another issue bothers on investments levels in the country. It has been observed that foreign investors are daily closing up their factories and moving away due to rising insecurity and fear thereby increasing unemployment rate. In the words of Suarez and Pshiva (2006), they tried to measure the impact of crime on firm investment by exploring variations in kidnappings in Colombia from 1996-2002. Their central result is that firms invest less when kidnappings directly target firms affecting both firms that sell in local markets and firms that sell in foreign markets.

Politically, the nation's security and stability has been threatened by violent conflict between nomadic herders from the North and the sedentary agrarian communities in the central and Southern parts of the country. The country appears to be polarized politically by these acts of violence and extremism arising from either one ethnic group or zone against the other both politically and otherwise. The issue now is who is supporting who? This is a great challenge to not only Nigeria but to the entire African continent especially the West African sub-region, where most of the population comprises of Nigerians known as the giant of Africa. Due to the frequent attacks from cattle rustlers in the North coupled with the specter of declining grazing resources caused by encroaching desertification and other environmental challenge, these violent herdsmen are steadily advancing Southwards. (Nwanze, 2017).

Discussion of findings

According to Ake (2002), those from the economically privileged groups tend to be better educated, have higher social status, to be more 'successful' professionally and politically. This economic inequality tends to reproduce itself endlessly in a series of other inequalities. Furthermore, in so far as there is economic inequality in a society, that society cannot have political democracy because political power will tend to polarize around economic power. In effect, any society with high degree of economic inequality must necessarily be repressive. This repression according to Ake arises from the need to curb the inevitable demand of the have – nots for redistribution.

Obviously, there exists a wide gap between the rich and the poor in most societies including Nigeria. This to a large extent affects the society by increasing the rate of violence and restiveness. While the rich are getting richer, the poor is getting poorer by the day. This is because while the present economic down turn is favoring majority of the elites, politicians and public office holders, the condition of the poor continues to degenerate. The self-employed and the skilled workers find no meaningful future in their businesses as the poor infrastructures, power failures and the harsh economic

conditions make it highly impossible for them to thrive in their trade. According to Ajaegbu (2012), this is exacerbated by political corruption, poverty, poor governance, increasing population and lack of policy-initiatives and implementation. This has highly increased and encouraged the growth of criminal groups across Nigeria because the youths are deprived.

While some individuals are swimming in wealth and comfort, over-spending and in affluence, some are weeping and gnashing their teeth in penury and abject poverty. When these unprivileged groups can no longer endure their hardships, they tend to revolt against the entire society. Some will resort to all sorts of violent crimes like robbery, terrorism, thuggery and lately kidnappings to survive. The existence of this 'gap' between the haves and the have-nots, coupled with unemployment leads most of our youths into these criminal acts all in a bid to satisfy their hunger and equally feel belonged and recognized in their own society. The existence of this gap in our country has led equally to the high rate of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Some of the unemployed youths with no means of survival view the business as lucrative. This explains mainly why the rich are always their target.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the words of Emerson, he said,

“Crime and punishment grow out of one stem,
Punishment is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens with the
flower of the pleasure that concealed it” (Raiph Waldo
Emerson, 1803-1882)

According to the promise made by Nigerian president concerning the herdsmen problem, he said,

‘One of our pledges to Nigerians is that we will ensure the safety and security of lives everywhere in the country. We will keep this promise. Let me assure that security agencies are working to arrest those behind the regrettable attack in Benue State, and prevent further attacks.’ In spite of all these promises, much has not been done to curb this menace.

In spite of all the promises by the Nigerian president. Much has been done to protect the lives and properties of Nigerians. In order to contain the continuous upheavals and reduce kidnapping in our entire society, leaders of today have a choice of creating an environment that educates, empowers and encourages their young people to realize their potentials or continue to face youth restiveness and revolt in various forms. Undoubtedly, the future of our continent, the Nigerian nation and the entire society lie in the hands of these young youths. It is quite obvious that when the future of our youths is threatened, equally, the future of our country is threatened. The spate of

criminal activities in Nigeria is not only threatening the democracy, security but also the economy of Nigeria, Africa and the society at large. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to address these problems. A hostile environment equally produces hostile individuals and vice versa. Economic need is the main and primary need of every individual and economic productivity is the corollary of the primacy of economic need. Man can only satisfy his/her economic needs through his productive activity. It is a fact that man must eat to live, in order to eat, he must work. Therefore, our governments as a matter of priority and urgency should create enabling environment to promote investments and create job opportunities for our teeming, energetic youths to be able to sustain their lives.

Another important aspect is education. Education comes before question because the mentality of the youths has to be set aright before they can be used. A question of what should be more paramount is to identify their needs and be met adequately. An educated person is an asset for any country because in today's world, human capital is considered the best national resource. Educating a person can help him develop his mind, be a citizen with intellectual and moral integrity, who are neither fanatical nor cynical, but public spirited, tolerant and wise, exploring better opportunities for himself and the entire nation will benefit from his works.

To curb the menace of herdsmen, government of the day should first of all take immediate steps to shore up security for the farmers and herders by strengthening and initiating conflict- resolution mechanism between them. Herders should be encouraged and helped to create and own ranches for their cattle in government approved areas instead of destroying people's farms. Due to inevitable weather changes, these ranches can be irrigated to ensure an all season grazing. Also, stringent rules should be made to restrict the herdsmen from grazing their cattle outside those approved areas. Again, borrowing from the developed nations, the godfathers and sponsors of these herdsmen should be identified and licensed for proper identification. This will help in identifying the so called herdsmen. Government should also apply appropriate sanction on the culprits, be it the kidnappers or the herdsmen. Curbing these social malaise requires a collective effort, while we advocate that the culprits should always be apprehended and punished adequately. Focus should be centered on good governance with accountability, transparency and fair play.

There should be a fair distribution of resources as the government should ensure that the resources of the country are harnessed and properly managed to promote national prosperity. Our government especially the security agencies have a responsibility, without being told, to ensure that every Nigerian citizen is secured. They should to a great extent control the use and possession of illicit firearms and ammunitions, especially automatic rifles with which these herders use to perpetrate these criminal

acts. Youth employment should also be the priority of our various governmental bodies both at the federal and state level. This can be achieved by encouraging small scale industries, especially by improving on power generation and provision of soft loans to farmers, skilled workers, artisans and certain businesses to engage our youths adequately. With these variables in place, kidnapping will become less attractive and in turn stimulate more sense of compassion, patriotism, sustainable development and nation building.

CONCLUSION

Security is a central issue which no state in the international system consigns to the periphery; it is a core value that makes the state relevant in the international system (Ndifon, et al, 2012). The problem of violent crimes in Nigeria has been exacerbated by the high rate of unemployment and economic hardship which has pushed so many jobless youths, some of whom are graduates into various deadly crimes (Edward, 2011). Kidnapping in Nigeria began as side line by Niger Delta militants fighting the government. It has turned into a big business where both the rich and poor individuals are not safe in their own country. Research shows that part of the problem is that our leaders have embezzled the future of the next generation through incompetent economic management, under-investment in human capital and destruction of institutions to preserve their personal power and access to the natural resources of our continent. In the light of all these, the question that arises is how a nation can achieve development when it is under crime siege. Nobody can invest in an unsafe environment and insufficient power supply which are the backbone of development especially in the face of criminal destruction of the nation's power infrastructure. When there is no investment, unemployment rises and vice versa. From our table above, unemployment which has the highest percentage of 48% is the leading cause of crime in Nigeria. Armed robbery, kidnappings, murder and violence have the greater percentage in table 3 due to formation of youth gangs.

For our society to be safe, our government should invest heavily on developing the youths as they constitute the main crime perpetrators in the society. The activities of the herdsmen in Nigeria are another nightmare which should be tackled collectively by both the Nigerian government, the whole West African region and condemned by the international community. This will help in saving poor defenseless citizens who are hacked down daily by these terrorists called herdsmen. If government is able to check criminality and ensure security, a lot will change in respect of development which will reduce unemployment.

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