BANDITRY AND HUMAN SECURITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACEBUILDING AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Philip T. Vande
Department of Political Science, Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria
philvande@yahoo.com, philip.vande@fulokoja.edu.ng

Abstract

Banditry has engulfed the entire Nigerian landscape, manifesting in cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, raid on villages or settlements and indiscriminate killings, sexual and gender based violence, among others. This conflict has escalated and intensified over the past decade, threatening human security in Nigeria. This study therefore investigated banditry and human security, exploring the implications of these on national security and peacebuilding. The work depended essentially on secondary data and adopted the Human Needs theory as the framework of analysis. The study discovered a variety of causes or drivers to banditry, ranging from farmer-herder conflict, failing state capacity, rising criminality, high incidence of poverty, unemployment, and exclusive politics, among other factors. It also established that the conflict has adverse effect on national security, including human security and livelihoods such as loss of lives and property, forced displacement, rape and other sexual crimes, proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The study also established the shortcomings of the militarized responses to armed banditry and established that dialogue serves as a complement within a broader conflict management mechanism to address the threats. It therefore recommended that conflict reduction, peace and stability through this initiative will serve as a reference point that can be applied to similar context in other regions of the country. It also recommended that government at all levels address the challenges of human security by addressing livelihood issues. The government must stimulate job creation and guide inclusive growth, to reduce the high levels of poverty, unemployment, and social misery in both urban and rural areas.

Keywords: Banditry, Human Security, National Security, Peacebuilding and Violent Conflict.

Introduction

Nigeria has continued to encounter and battle series of security challenges that have engulfed the entire landscape. There is no gainsaying that the country has been over-run by various criminal and violent activities such as terrorism, militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, fraud, sexual violence, assassination, ritual killings, thuggery, cultism, drug and human trafficking, political, ethno-religious conflicts, communal clashes, the brutality of state security forces, among others in different parts of the federation (Lawrence, 2020). These security challenges have deteriorated (Aidoghie, 2020; Maina, 2020 and Odinkalu, 2018), resulted in the loss of lives and displacement of persons, compounded economic hardship, human security and retarded national development. Meanwhile, Nigeria was ranked 5th out of 20 most dangerous countries in the world (Schmelbruch, 2017). Similarly, in Forbes Media

(Benson, 2019 and Getzoff, 2019),Nigeria came third, behind Brazil and South Africa, as one of the 20 most dangerous places to live on earth.

Although the menace of Boko Haram insurgency and farmer-herder conflict has engulfed and escalated in most of northern Nigeria since 2009, Nigeria has increasingly faced devastating attacks from armed bandits, particularly in the north-western states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto, particularly in the last four years. Such attacks are driven by many overlapping factors, including cattle rustling, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, illicit artisanal mining, youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality (Egwu, 2015).As posited by Wodu (2020), this is further compounded by the weakened, stretched and demoralized security services, who are deployed in thirty-five of Nigeria's thirty-six states and will soon enter the

second-decade of their war against Boko Haram, one of Africa's deadliest terror groups. With the security problem of Nigeria now hydra-headed, banditry has emerged as the new bogeyman for insecurity in Nigeria, competing and overtaking the havoc caused byBoko Haram insurgency, herders 'menace, cultism, and militant agitations (Odinkalu, 2018). The pervasive armed banditry and its associated threats to human security in Nigeria, has become a subject of national security and public concern.

This study aims to systematically unravel the root causes and drivers of armed banditry and social conflicts, with specific attention placed on the effect of these on human security and exploring its implications for peace building and national security in Nigeria. The frequency and intensity of armed banditry in recent years is a cause for serious concern. Thus, most efforts to understand armed banditry in contemporary Nigeria are simplistic and have not provided a framework for better understanding of its varied forms, causes, patterns and dimensions. This is the problematique that this study has set out to achieve to fill.

Conceptual Clarification
i.   Banditry
The concept of "banditry" has assumed much publicity and attracted much commentary and discourses. Okoli (2014) avers that banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. To him, it involves the use of force, or threat, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape or kill. He maintains that banditry is a crime against persons. Thus, banditry refers to armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation. The victims are individuals and communities with material valuables. In Nigeria, banditry is characterized by depredations, cattle rustling, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, village raids, rape and illegal toll collection at village markets. These have become recurrent features of several communities in northern Nigeria.

ii.   Human Security

Human security, as a concept, was first put forward in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report that systematically expounded on this idea. The UNDP Report (1994) presents human security as a paradigm shift in thinking about security which has traditionally centred on the security of the state instead of people. Considering human security as the right of people to live in freedom and equity, free from poverty and despair, Tanaka (2015) outlines the types and sources of threats to human security to revolve around physical (natural disasters), living (biological disasters such as epidemics) and social systems (war and displacement). The UNDP Human Development Report particularly emphasizes that "Human security means safety from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression. It also means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of our daily lives-whether in our homes, in our jobs, in our communities or in our environment" (UNDP, Human Development Report, 1994, p.23).

As Dajahar and Alheri (2018) submit, human security aims to address complex situations of insecurity through collaborative, responsive and sustainable measures that are people-centred, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented. In addition, human security employs a hybrid approach that brings together these elements through a protection and empowerment framework. Consequently, the concept of security must change-from exclusive stress on national security to a much greater stress on people's security, from security through armaments to security through human development, from territorial security to food, employment and environmental security.

iii.   National Security
Security embodies the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-political and economic conditions. In conceptualizing security, (Adams, 2016) places emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-

economic objectives of a country. Thus, security is generally a term which denotes the absence of threats to scarce values. According to Fayeye (2010, p. 127), "security comprises the personal and communal state of being secure from a wide range of critical and pervasive threats including but not limited to all forms of violence, injustice and violation of human rights". Consequently, Odeh and Umoh (2015) aver that the concept of national security is associated with the safety and survival of the State and its citizens from harm or destruction or from dangerous threats. He accordingly identified seven (7) critical dimensions of national security to include economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. In this vein, national security can be viewed as the freedom of a nation and its citizens from danger or threats to lives and property as well as its cherished values. It is the ability of a nation and her citizens to feel safe and secured, protect and defend its cherished values and legitimate interests and the enhancement of general wellbeing.

iv.   Peace building

The concept of "peace building" has been defined by Galtung (1975, pp. 297-298) as "an endeavor aiming to create sustainable peace by addressing the "root causes" of violent conflict and eliciting indigenous capacities for peaceful management and resolution of conflict". For Lederach (1997, pp.84-85), "peace building "is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships". Thus, cultivating an "infrastructure for peace building" means being oriented toward the building of relationships that in their totality form new patterns, processes, and structures. Peace building is therefore understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. It is a wide range of activities that contribute towards the transformation of society

into a just and harmonious order and the development of an infrastructure capable of maintaining and sustaining peace. Peace building activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society politically and economically.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts and applies the Human Needs Theory as a most suitable theoretical framework. The Theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a generic or holistic theory of human behaviour. It is based on the hypothesis that humans have basic needs that have to be met in order to maintain stable societies. Human needs can be defined as a state of felt deprivation and necessity which have to be satisfied (Burton, 1990). Human needs theory lays stress on the satisfaction of needs essential for human beings, required for his survival, which when compromised act as a major source of conflict. As Burton (1979) avers, we believe that the human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs – such as security, identity, recognition, and development. More so, individuals strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs. This struggle cannot be curbed; it is primordial (Burton, 1979). This struggle for primordial needs is theoretically related to the Frustration-Aggression theory which is based on the stimulus-response hypothesis (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer and Sears, 1939). The frustration of not satisfying these needs leads to aggression and subsequently, conflict. What distinguishes Human Needs theory from the Frustration-Aggression theory is that the former is concerned only with absolute requirements (needs) while the latter is also concerned with wants and desires. Thus, unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies, unless in every social system there is distributive justice, a sense of control, and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable (Burton, 1990). There are

bold assumptions in this theory.

Furthermore, Maslow (1970) identified physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs; and classified them hierarchically into five stages in a definite order of priority. According to him, the more basic needs or wants which have the greatest potency must have to be gratified in an individual before he would strive to meet the higher needs. Similarly, Burton (1979) lists response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, meaning, need to appear rational and develop rationality, need for sense of control and the need for role defense. He refers to some needs as basic and these include food, shelter, sex, reproduction, etc. (Burton, 1979). More so, some basic needs like security, distinctive justice, social recognition of identity and effective participation in the process that shape such identities. Again, basic human needs comprise physical, physiological, social, and spiritual needs. According to him, to provide access to food and deny or hinder access to another freedom of worship will amount to denial and could make people to resort to violence to protect these needs.

The strengths of this theory are that it has wide applicability. While some see it merely as a tool to be applied in prevention or post-conflict peace building, practitioners like Rosenberg (2003) use Human Needs Theory in mediation in violent conflicts. Another major strength of the theory is that it focuses on the source of conflict, looking at how best the parties can have their needs met, and those of others. Human Needs Theory also emphasizes common humanity (Maslow, 1970). In a world context where differences are accentuated, Human Needs Theory attempts to unify human beings from different regions and cultures, creating a common understanding of who we are and how others need and feel the same way we do. However, Human Needs Theory has some weaknesses that lead to its drawbacks. Firstly, there are several discrepancies between the various theorists, even between Burton (1979) and Rosenberg (2003), who agree that all needs are universal, non-hierarchical, and

complementary. Secondly, should we prioritise certain needs over others? Is Maslow right in asserting that needs for food and shelter should be met before considering needs for self-esteem and self-fulfillment? Or is protection, rest and play equally important to secure human well-being? Thirdly, there seems to be an exaggerated belief in the importance of dialogue (Abiodun, 2012).

The relevance of this theory is that it recognizes and legitimizes bandits' needs in Nigeria. It posits that the needs of all individual citizens and groups must be met. This helps to move the conflict from zero-sum to win-win. The abstraction of 'human needs' helps to eliminate the sense of mutually exclusive goals. These needs are not satisfied at the expense of the other community but are realized along with the other community's needs. These needs are not mutually exclusive or gained at the expense of another; they are universal. It must be emphasized that the Human Needs Theory is significant and important as it shows us how conflicts can be managed and resolved through the satisfaction of basic human needs. Again, the theory stresses on the source or the origin of the dispute and looks towards resolution by satisfying the needs of the parties involved. Another reason why the Human Needs Theory is treated as an asset is because it works towards uniting human beings, makes us understand how the other party feels when their needs are deprived and provides us with a platform to aid in peace building.

Consequently, the key to human needs theory is the identification of the needs that are unmet which would lead to the conflict. The Human Needs model states that for resolution both the parties must sit together and acknowledge each other and their views, opinions regarding the issue. This mode of acknowledging and stepping into the other party's shoe is called 'Empathy.' Empathy is essential in the process of conflict resolution and analysis. The major issue between the two nations is the lack of trust due to the number of wars and tactics that have been employed by the nations over the decades, and thus for the conflict to be resolved, trust building exercises are a must between the nations, and

sitting together and empathizing with each other is surely a start. Other examples of trust building exercises can include bringing troops back from tense areas and cooling the tense environment between the armed forces of the two nations.

Human Needs Strategies aims at the integrative approach and tries to make the situation win-win for both the parties, thus any solution which encompasses the issues relating to both the nation shall be considered and eventually the conflict would cool down and be resolved. If all the needs of the parties are satisfied, then it is probable to find a win-win solution.

The Causes and Manifestations of Armed Banditry in Nigeria

An attempt to understand the causes and drivers of armed banditry in Nigeria requires a critical examination of the historical, socio-economic and governance contexts, as well as the conflict dynamics resulting from the interplay of resource conflict, pertaining to access to land resources. While Jumare and Surma (2015) reveal that those who lost their cattle transformed into bandits and rustlers in the rural areas, the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP, 2020) maintain that unemployment, abject poverty and social injustice contribute to the increase in the robbery of cattle. Suffice it to add that ecological changes and climate-induced pressures have increased conflicts in the agro-pastoral sector and the phenomenon also has linkages to banditry and governance challenges. More so, factors that drive banditry in the North-West region such as cattle rustling, illicit artisanal gold mining, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), youth unemployment, inequality, and poverty, indicate weak governance and security capacities across the States (WANEP, 2020).The bandits traversing Benue, Plateau, Niger, Kwara, Nassarawa, Zamfara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kano are involved in crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping. There have also been reported cases of rural banditry in Delta, Enugu, Ondo, Oyo and Ebonyi states.

This is further complicated by the existence of large unregulated and poor government-controlled forest areas in the region, some of which are situated within under-policed border areas between Nigeria and neighbouring countries (Olurounbi, 2021 and Lanshie, 2018).In essence, the porosity of these borders aid cross-border criminality. For instance, illicit proliferation of SALWs from post-Gadhafi Libya and other parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel region find their way to the region through the porous borders exploited by criminal syndicates (Osimen & Akintunde, 2015). Furthermore, weak regulation of pastoral activities has led to infiltration by livestock bandits, leading to an increase in cattle rustling (Otobo & Obaze, 2019). More so, the proliferation of non-state armed groups like vigilantes and civilian joint task forces have compounded the phenomenon of armed banditry in Nigeria.

Many scholars aver that cattle rustling is a major cause and driver of armed banditry in Nigeria. For instance, Ahmadu (2019) posits that, the sudden intensification of cattle rustling in the north-West and Nigeria, at large, particularly since 2010 is due to the conflicts between herders and farmers, commercialisation of cattle rustling, availability of SALWs, and the emergence of livestock bandits. He also maintained that bandits are also linked to local and transnational organised crime networks and markets for the sale of stolen cattle. He further submits that many of the rustled cattle have been disposed in many markets of major Nigerian cities, including Maiduguri (Borno State) and Agege (Lagos State) through the criminal intermediaries (WANEP, 2020).

Again, Egwu (2015) maintains that cattle rustling, and rural banditry appear to be tied to the incessant conflict between herdsmen and crop farmers. According to him, the conflict may be connected to the wider context of identity politics and intergroup relations, including the relationships between pastoralist groups on the one hand and the Nigerian state system on the other. Kwaja (2013) agrees with this submission and argues that transhumance pastoralists are perceived as violent and deliberately armed to deal with unsuspecting crop farmers; the farmers allege intentional crop damage by animals. The

herders, on the other hand, perceive themselves to be victims of political marginalization, lacking a voice within the Nigerian state system. The exclusion of nomadic Fulani herders from the policy process and their lack of voice is so acute that the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), an urban-based Fulani pressure group, stands as the only known civic group that engages in policy advocacy on their behalf. Egwu (2015, p. 15) therefore posits that "in more recent times, there has been a dramatic increase in the spates of conflict between herders and farming communities, alongside the attendant problems of rural banditry and cattle rustling". This increase in conflict results from increasing sedentarisation along grazing routes. Increased sedentarisation could be seen as pastoralist communities' response to the numerous challenges and constraints they are facing; sedentarisation has been one means of adapting to changing conditions over time.

In consonance with the foregoing, Oluyemi-Kusa and Salihu (2015, p. 111), affirm that, "rural banditry has taken on a life of its own, with dire consequences for the citizenry in Nigeria". Many analysts associate the phenomenon of armed banditry with the failure of the state to provide security and basic services for the populace. They also aver that banditry may well be a *political economy problem* resulting from the absence of equitable access to resources and a deliberate agenda to exclude others from social formations. In the same vein, banditry leads to disruption of life as we know it. The desire to avoid strife and its attendant consequences leads to displacement and loss of lives and properties. Again, armed banditry leads to the existence of constant fear of attacks, which take away human dignity and people's ability to organize, seek and engage in livelihoods.

As further examined by WANEP (2020), armed banditry, facilitated the emergence of a complex informal security sector in Nigeria, including the growth of armed local vigilante groups established to protect communities against bandits. Many of these groups lack adequate security training and often compete against one another. They have been implicated in acts of criminality including human rights abuses, armed robbery, extortion and appropriation of livestock and other properties from both bandits and their victims, which led a public commentator to label their activities as 'legalized armed banditry' (Rufai, 2018). It was clear that illegal activities perpetrated by these non-state actors contributed to heightened insecurity in many communities of the north-West region.

Overall, as a fall-out to the prevalence of criminal gangs in Nigeria, kidnapping cases in the rural and urban areas have increased sharply with reports on how families and communities have been terrorized to pay huge ransoms to save their loved ones. Individuals comprising of traditional leaders, business people, politicians, civil servants and a lot more have been kidnapped for ransom of varying amounts. It is obvious that the pervasive armed banditry and its associated threats to human security in Nigeria has become a subject of national security and public concern. As WANEP (2020) submits, the multifaceted layers of criminality involved, and recurrent nature of the armed banditry call for effective mechanisms to mitigate the threat it poses to peace and security in the affected States. Uche and Iwuamadi (2018) maintain that the phenomenon of armed banditry, which recently gained currency in Nigeria's public discourses, is a fallout of persistent violence in rural communities within the last ten years. The results had been traumatic. Thus, the declining capacity of the state to moderate these conflicts and undertake effective policing of rural areas led to unending cycle of violence. The attendant resort to self-help worsened the security gaps in rural communities.

The Cost of Armed Banditry on Human and National Security in Nigeria

The cost of banditry in Nigeria resonates in Usher (1992), when he argues that the costs incurred from the activities of bandits can be categorised into four categories. First is society's loss in terms of the opportunity cost of resources used by bandits. Second is the loss from the opportunity costs of the resources employed by members of

society to fend off bandits. Third is the destruction of assets by acts of banditry. Fourth is the social deadweight loss incurred because members of society shift resources from production processes relatively vulnerable to theft to less vulnerable production processes. In the same vein, Curott and Fink (2010) explore the havoc wrought by bandits upon individuals and societies. They argue that by stealing from a member of society, the bandit not only takes from the victim, (thereby breaking a widely accepted rule against theft), but also offends the unwelcome authority that oversees law enforcement. The victim suffers from the losses caused by the act of banditry. Bandits can also cause violence that governments find difficult to control, which leads to insecurity. Furthermore, Mburu (1999) opines that the activities of bandits are inhumane and lead to violence, creating insecurity challenges that encourage other forms of criminality. The large scale effects of contemporary banditry suggests that banditry as a social phenomenon adversely affects all spheres of life. Insecurity and instability easily surface in banditry-inflicted societies.

The deteriorating situation of human security in Nigeria accounts for the increasing incidents of armed banditry in Nigeria. As Kwaja and Abdul (2015) submit, human security shares the conceptual space of the people-centric approach to human development. Thus, central to the idea of human security are two important concerns: freedom from fear intended to indicate freedom from violence, and freedom from want, which is intended to indicate freedom from poverty. In this conception of human security, human beings become the 'vital core', with a 'fundamental set of functions related to survival, livelihood and dignity' as the irreducible minimum (Egwu, 2015).

The multidimensional nature of human security is underlined by the recognition given to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. The number of central issues is greatly expanded, to include the welfare of citizens, larger issues of development, and redistribution of wealth among the different strata of society. There is also concern given to issues of governance, the realization of social citizenship for subaltern social groups and classes, and respect for group identity and self-determination of minority groups.

The human security challenge is also evidenced by Nigeria's declining global status as a peaceful country where people can live in happiness. Once described as having one of the happiest populations on earth, it has become a country torn by civil strife, violence, and crimes of all sorts, including rural banditry that has made existence oppressive. In its Global Terrorism Index (2020), the Institute for Economics and Peace affirms that although terrorism has fallen in most regions, seven of the ten countries with the largest increase in terrorism were in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria features as the third most impacted country in the world, after Afghanistan and Iraq. The report further submits that, Boko Haram, Nigeria's deadliest terrorist group, recorded an increase in terrorist activity mainly targeted at civilians by 25 per cent from the prior year. Additionally, Fulani extremists were responsible for 26 per cent of terror-related deaths in Nigeria at 325 fatalities. This resonates Egwu's (2015) submission that Nigeria's global ranking along these dimensions is a consequence of the debilitating state of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy, all of which are compounded by the failure of democratic governance and state inadequacies. He also posits that, armed banditry associated with cattle rustling, kidnapping, robbery, and other forms of violent crimes are on the rise, with aggressors motivated largely by economic and commercial motives; they have been encouraged by the ready availability of markets serving their underground economy.

Furthermore, banditry and other forms of criminality constitute serious threats to national security. Although, the causal factors for banditry and terrorism differ, both phenomena locally thrive on exploiting the fragile or weak State capacity evident in human rights abuses, inequality, poor service provision and unemployment. While banditry, predominantly in the north-West contrasts the predominance of

violent extremism in the north-East, both constitute a common thread of the overlapping nature and characteristics of organized crime as well as its mirrored impact on peace and human security (WANEP, 2020). Beyond this, it further poses significant challenges to focused strategies to counter violent extremist which increasingly requires broader initiatives to address organized crime. In addition, robbery and kidnapping constitute a dominant criminal enterprise that are similar in the operations of bandits and extremist groups (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). In the light of this, the exigencies of banditry, insurgency and counterinsurgency have transformed the forests areas into highly militarized and securitized zones (Okoli & Chukwuma, 2016), stalling socio-economic development in the affected States.

One of the most visible impacts of armed banditry in Nigeria involves internal displacement of community residents. According to a 2019 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian Government, over 200,000 persons were internally displaced in several communities of Zamfara State, Katsina and Sokoto States between January-August 2019 (WANEP, 2020). The provision of humanitarian assistance for the displaced persons and communities was a complex humanitarian challenge due to the enormity of communities affected. Factors arising from irregular and/or zero food distribution, inappropriate shelters, poor medical services, and facilities, among others, were evident in some internally displaced camps in the host states. Similarly, a survey conducted in some assessed locations have revealed that 70% of the displaced population expressed irregular food distribution at the IDP camps (Momale, Nawaj & Dupeyras, 2019). A challenge for these outstanding IDPs is how to return to their communities having lost their properties and livelihood from violent attacks and fears of reoccurrence.

Another significant effect of the banditry in Nigeria is on gender dimensions. The criminal activities perpetrated by bandits heightens the vulnerability of women and girls in the affected areas. Some women in the affected communities were faced with early widowhood or death of their children, while some children were orphaned and forced to flee their villages for safety. This remains a critical human security concern as they also suffer varied forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Several cases of rape by bandits were reported (Momale, Nawaj & Dupeyras, 2019). More so, there were reports of SGBV amongst the displaced. Further reports have revealed that the highest risk faced by children in the affected communities is abduction, as majority of the children are abducted for ransom while female children are abducted for sex and others for child labor. This mostly occurred when collecting firewood, on the way to the market or during village attacks.

More so, education deprivation in affected areas has been exacerbated by armed banditry due to the mass displacements in affected communities. However, the escalation of banditry contributed to a high number of out-of-school children in the north-west region and north-eastern. Besides, insecurity in the communities had a negative impact on young boys and girls, as school activities in vulnerable areas were disrupted. The few existing schools were unable to operate properly for fear of kidnap of students or attacks and killing by bandits (WANEP, 2020). Thus, parents prevented their children from attending schools due to insecurity on major roads. This in turn increased the job turnover of teachers in these communities. This situation further exposes children to the risk of exploitation and violence.

Again, the insecurity has also impacted negatively on the exploitation of environmental resources (the case of gold mining in Zamfara State), thus affecting the livelihood and development potentials in the affected States (Anka, 2017). The presence of lucrative gold deposits in the State attracted artisanal mining activities, as bandits and families depended on it for livelihood sustenance. Nevertheless, the gold is smuggled and traded in the global market constituting a loss revenue for the Nigeria economy. Though artisanal mining has been linked to economic benefits including informal employment, the poor standards of extraction

resulted in land degradation, pollution of water sources and health risk.

Similarly, given the fact that farming is the mainstay of the local economy in the rural areas affected by banditry, the disruption in farming due to bandit attacks affect agricultural productivity with serious implications for food security. Majority of the farming communities were forced to abandon their farms especially areas in proximity to the forest areas, as bandits exploited these locations to attack communities. Few farmers who stayed behind were subjected to taxation by the bandits before accessing their farms (WANEP, 2020). Thus, while farming activities in were restricted to few areas thus resulting in a decline in food production and food security, the dwindling income of local farmers and other vulnerable groups especially women, also affect their capacity to support children's education and household income. In the same vein, banditry has escalated, where farmers are slaughtered, cattle rustled, crops stolen or wasted, thus, compounding the woes of Nigerian peasants who make greater percentage of food consumed in Nigeria (Musa, 2021). More so, the attacks on farmers and their farms by bandits further reduces nutritional availability for Nigerians.

Of significance is that the flow of illicit firearms in communities of the north-west region and Nigeria in general, is also a cause for security concern. Apart from fatalities recorded, bandits' attacks on communities increased social risks, discouraged investment and triggered economic crises for individuals and communities. The conflict is causing a spill-over effect on other neighboring communities and local government areas of Niger State in the North-Central region, hindering inter-communal and inter-state trade. Again, the insecurity has a significant impact on other economic activities in the region, as several major local markets suffer incessant attacks (WANEP, 2020). The strategic nature of the trading locations made them attractive to major merchants from across other regions of the country for foodstuff including maize, millet, guinea corn and beans. However, the proximity of these markets to the forest reserves made them vulnerable to attacks. This had an adverse effect on trading activities, as revenue generation and market sales/supplies in the markets declined.

Implications of Armed Banditry on Peace building and National Security in Nigeria

Given the seeming inability of the various interventions by the federal and state governments in effectively resolving and or successfully managing the violent conflicts, it has become necessary to explore peace building processes in effectively managing conflict. Suffice it to add that peace building proposes a strategy of engagement (Laderech, 2018). Similarly, Albert (2019) asserts that peace building suggests continuous contact, consultation, deliberate dialogue, inclusive of all views and development of processes with a focus on understanding accurately, the sources of violence, and addressing them through a range of non-violent change strategies. Thus, peace building attempts to transform `conflicts by creating societies that can address conflict without violence.

It is noteworthy that peace building approaches have shifted from a pure focus on security and peacekeeping, to establishing the socio-economic conditions for peace. This has been spurred by evidence on the linkages between poverty and conflict (Collier, et al. 2003) and increased interest in conflict-related issues by development agencies. The 2004 Utstein report is a good example of the broadening of the concept of peace building (Smith, 2004). This influential report outlines a framework of peace building activities, where providing physical security is as important as establishing good governance and the socio-economic foundations of long-term peace. It acknowledges that development, a return to democratic governance and the guarantee of a secure environment represents the most promising approach to post-conflict reconstruction and peace building.

Therefore, peace building is now understood more broadly. It often covers all activities related to preventing outbreaks of violence, transforming armed conflicts, finding peaceful ways to manage

conflict, and creating the socioeconomic and political pre-conditions for sustainable development and peace. Such a broad concept of peace building, however, suffers from including nearly all socio-economic development, poverty reduction or democratization efforts, making it difficult to determine when peace building activities end and regular development activities begin. In this vein, implicit causal linkages are constructed between general development activities and peace building objectives, but there is little evidence to substantiate these links. Service delivery, for example, is seen as conducive to peace building by helping to establish conditions conducive to peace.

One of the ways and the most common that the state in Nigeria has always employed in the management of violent conflict has been the use of force. The effectiveness of the use of force as conflict management technique leaves much to be desired. In other words, the use of force in the management of violent conflict has failed and has been counter-productive in many conflict situations like the Niger Delta imbroglio. Consequently, as WANEP (2020) advocates, integrative response approaches that require a combination of conflict management mechanisms such as consultation of actors and communities affected, dialogue, community policing, amnesty, reconciliation and security reforms is key to the mitigation of banditry in Nigeria. For instance, peace initiatives through amnesty programs and Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) efforts are laudable efforts (Momale, Nawaj & Dupeyras, 2019).

More so, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including, security agencies, traditional, religious leaders, Hausa and Fulani communities, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), Farmer Associations and local vigilante groups can give more credibility, with seeming commitment of top political leadership towards inclusive processes (WANEP, 2020). The participation of relevant stakeholders, especially peace building experts and civil society organizations would further erase all perceived political issues in the reform

process and make the process transparent. This also creates an enabling environment to sustain peace agreements. Thus, peace and reconciliatory interventions can result in the reduction of attacks and open armed confrontations, while encouraging the recovery of weapons, return of seized property, release of abducted persons and members of bandit groups.

Moreover, the successes of reform process have been attributed to inclusivity, credibility, transparency, public participation, appropriate and clear rules of procedures and an implementation plan. In expanding the peace initiatives, the roles of critical non-state actors to peace and development, community policing, including intelligence gathering and conflict resolution are relevant. Nonetheless, consolidating the peace process would involve sustainable platforms for dialogue, improved community policing and multi-stakeholder consultations. This will lead to strengthening the conflict prevention, management and peace building at the community, state and national levels.

Conclusion and Recommendations
It is obvious that armed banditry in Nigeria has undermined human security, and national security in general. This suggests that any actions by a group of persons or gangs to intimidate, kill, raid, and kidnap the citizens can threaten the well-being of the citizenry and by extension, national security. Conversely, if armed banditry is curtailed, national security would be enhanced. This reveals that there is an inverse relationship between armed banditry and national security. Consequently, the phenomenon of armed banditry remains a major security challenge that has created instability, hampered socio-economic development and undermined democratic governance and peace building in Nigeria.

The impact of armed banditry is noticeable but not limited to loss of lives and properties, sexual and gender-based violence, humanitarian crisis, the rising cases of internal displacements, food insecurity, devastation of the local economies and social systems. There has, thus, been an increase

in number of those living with disabilities, damage to infrastructure, out of school children, increase in poverty and food insecurity due to halted farming and economic activities. Other impacts of the conflicts include damage to social relations as intergroup relations are strained resulting in loss of confidence, disunity, and distrust amongst the people. There is no gainsaying that human security has been threatened in Nigeria with the escalation of violent crimes, and especially, armed banditry. Consequently, given the observable shortcomings of the militarized responses to armed banditry, it is imperative for the institutionalization of good governance and peace building, involving dialogue, as a complement within a broader conflict management mechanism to address the threats. The promise of conflict reduction, peace and stability through peace building will serve as a reference point that can be applied to similar contexts in other parts of the world devastated by conflict and banditry.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. Governments at all levels must make deliberate efforts to address the challenges of human security by addressing livelihood issues. The government must stimulate job creation and guide inclusive growth, to reduce the high levels of poverty, unemployment, and social misery in both urban and rural areas.

2. Deliberate and concerted efforts must be made to entrench democratic governance, and provide participatory space to those currently marginalised or excluded from the policy arena, so that they can be part of decision-making that affect their daily existence.

3. To maximize the utility of dialogue and sustain peace and security, negotiation processes must be facilitated by State Governors, Nigerian Police Force, Civil Society Organisations, Traditional and Religious institutions, among other stakeholders; to strengthen and sustain peace building in order to address the root causes of banditry in Nigeria.

4. Governments at all levels should encourage modern agricultural practices to boost food production through providing easily accessible credit facilities to farmers and cattle breeders. This will encourage them to invest in modern methods of food production, encourage the herders to sedentrilise and all will go to boost food and dairy production.

5. Federal government should engage peace and conflict resolution experts in dealing with issues concerning banditry. This will enable effective dialogues, negotiations and of course a win-win resolution, while encouraging early warning mechanism.

6. Government should adopt community policing model to forestall the breakdown of peace in the rural areas as it will enable the police and the community members detect when the bandits gain access into the communities to attack residents.

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