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## **INTERROGATING GOVERNMENT'S MULTI-LEVEL APPROACHES TO ENDING ARMED BANDITRY IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

*The phenomenon of armed banditry has been a general trend mostly in Northern Nigeria and one of the greatest security threats to the existence of human life in the country. Despite the efforts of both the federal and state governments to put an end to the menace, it has continued to escalate on a large scale. The federal government's strategy has been in the form of joint military-police internal security operations aimed at decimating the bandits, whereas, the North western states' government, to a large extent, preferred negotiation with the armed groups. These two approaches appeared contradictory in the anti-banditry operations of the government; hence winning the war has been a hard nut to crack. There is copious literature on armed banditry in the North western region of Nigeria which provides understanding to the rise, growth, activities and the menace of the armed gangs but there is little or no study on the approaches of government in tackling armed banditry. It is against this background that this paper seeks to interrogate the multi-level approaches to ending armed banditry ravaging the northwest region of Nigerian with a view to providing in-depth understanding to the lacuna in the approaches in the fight against the armed groups. The paper adopted analytical and interdisciplinary methodology using secondary sources. The paper argued that the approaches to end banditry in the region are not only contradictory but have further revealed lapses, huge monumental failure and incapacity to secure life and property. The paper concluded that both the federal and state governments must adopt the same methodology for peace building in the country.*

**Keywords:** *Banditry, Kidnapping, Military Operation, Negotiation, Amnesty*



## **Introduction**

The recent phenomenon of armed banditry has become a common act in every part of the country but is prominent in the Northwest region particularly the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi and Sokoto. Banditry has become a major menace to the people as thousands have become victims and hundreds of communities have also been sacked. According to the International Crisis Group (2020), Banditry in the Northwest Region has claimed many lives, caused desertion of many rural communities, loss of livelihoods particularly farming and pastoralism.

Since 2012, the activities of armed bandits have remained unabated in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto and the neighbouring Niger state. Many communities, markets, schools, religious worship centres, transport routes, commuters and military base have been attacked. The incessant attacks and the attendant security threat have compelled government at both the federal and state levels to respond in diverse ways to end the menace.

The federal government, through the joint military-police internal security operations, has launched several ground attacks and air strikes against the bandits with the view to decimating the criminals. When this approach appeared not to be effective most state governments in the region especially the States of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara opted for peace deal with the armed gangs by granting them amnesty, rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. Unfortunately, the peace only lasted for a few months and collapsed as the bandits returned to their enclaves and continued their criminal activities. Inability of both the federal and state governments to coalesce around methodology and approach to confront the bandits and to end banditry in the region has made the problem to linger.

The need to interrogate the multi-level-approaches in the anti-banditry war became imperative because banditry has not only wreaked havoc and destabilized the region, there is need to strengthen the anti-banditry war in order to ensure peace and stability. This paper is divided into six sections. Following the introduction, section two provides conceptual clarification of

banditry. Section three examines the rise of banditry in the region; mode of operation of the bandits is examined in section four. Section five analyzes both the federal and the states governments' approaches vis-a-vis inherent complexities and contradictions, and section six concludes the paper.

### **Conceptual Explanation of Banditry**

Bunker and Sullivan (1998) describe banditry as outlaw activities or criminals enterprises with insurgents or warlords who dominate social life and erode the bonds of effective security and the rule of law. Williams (1998) describes banditry as outlawry actions that endanger human lives. Bandits, in this case, are transnational gangs and criminals who extend their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organisations through persuasion, coercion and intimidation; they do so in order to facilitate, enhance or protect their own interest. Sullivan (2012) sees banditry as criminality such as insurgency and conventional terrorists. He argues that these groups are a cog in the wheel of democratic governance and free market economy. According to Okwoli (2019), banditry is a term used to describe diverse variants of outlawry which includes kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed robbery and other forms of criminality.

In Nigeria, banditry comes with high degrees of violent and dreaded weapons hence the coinage, armed banditry. Historically, bandits had earlier been called armed gangs whose activities revolve around criminality in the rural areas, but since the commencement of globalization, they are no longer confined to rural areas but have become a sophisticated enterprise with the capacity to challenge the authorities of weak and failing states. Researches and reports have shown that banditry has transmuted into a network, wielding strong forces mostly on rural areas but gradually extending its tentacles to urban settings and the expansion has been accompanied by increasing level of violence making it a lucrative venture. The scope, dimension and operational pattern of banditry have been enlarged globally but have become more intense in Africa. For the purpose of this study, the term banditry would mean glut of armed gangs and criminal activities which constitute violent threat to life.

## **The Rise of Armed Banditry in the North-West Region**

The Northwest region of Nigeria comprises states like Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto. Geographically, the region stretches across Sudan and Sahel savannah sharing borders with Niger Republic, Mali and Benin Republic. The region is inhabited by diverse ethnic groups and the Hausa and Fulani are the predominant groups. Due to the vegetation and other environmental factors of the region, majority of the population undertake farming and pastoralism with the Hausa being the dominant group in the former while the Fulani been the foremost in the latter. According to Shettima and Tar (2008), both the farmers and herders have enjoyed interdependent and mutual relationships which have lasted for centuries until the second half of the twentieth century that their relationship metamorphosed into a hostile one. According to Shettima and Tar, the history of armed banditry in northern Nigeria has also been linked to the unhealthy rivalry between the farmers and the herders arising from resource scarcity and competition between different occupational and ethno-cultural groups as both the farmers and the herders need land resources for survival (Shettima & Tar, 2008). Kuna and Ibrahim (2015) explained that their hostility and persistent clash and violence have been due to a long-running competition over grazing land and water resources. They maintain that farmers and pastoralists compete for land, water, fodder, and other resources. They also assert that in some instances, occupational identities of pastoralists and many sedentary cultivators are blurred, as many sedentary cultivators are also 'stock breeders', and vice versa. Therefore, scarcity of land arising from changes in agrarian relations, climatic change, and environmental decline raised excessive tension and it also became threats to the livelihood of peasant communities and, to a large extent, also responsible for the recurrent conflicts between crop growing farmers and Fulani herdsmen (International Crisis Group, 2017). The International Crisis Group (2017) reveals that the violence between the farmers and the herders in the Northwest region like any other regions in northern Nigeria has been compounded by climate change and explosion of other criminal activities like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery and all these have morphed into a complex vicious banditry.

In this circumstance, crops are eaten up or damaged during grazing. In retaliation, the farmers kill the cattle for damaging their crops. So, the relationship between the two dominant groups in the region has been altered from cooperation, mutual benefits, competition into hostility and violence. Corroborating the above assertion, Kuna and Ibrahim (2015) argue that armed banditry in the rural communities cannot be explained outside the context of multi-layered dimensions surrounding farmer-herder struggles for land resources, complicated by many factors which include environmental and climate change, weak government capacity in the provision of security, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) and weakening or, indeed, collapse of informal conflict resolution mechanisms.

In the course of struggle for land resources, there emerged armed gangs with sophisticated weapons who persistently engaged in animal rustling (mostly cattle) and this has resulted in the killing of many herders. The armed gangs were product of incessant clashes between the farmers and the herders, who exploited the age-long semi-cultural practice of cattle raids which was less ferocious. It is in this regard that Alemika (2013) maintain that rustlers' activities are now characterized by the use of modern weapons, and their operations are both trans-locational and transnational. The volatile environment, population explosion and high poverty rate as well as high prices of cows in every market were also identified by Olaniyan and Aliyu (2016) as motivations for cattle rustling. Therefore, cattle rustling have become an organized crime motivated by subsistence and commercial imperatives for sustenance of lives. Accordingly, victims of cattle rustling are mostly commercial livestock farmers and nomadic pastoralists who graze their cattle across the country. The International Crisis Group (2017) reveals that many herders have been completely stripped of their cattle which is the major source of their livelihood and some victims have been forced to migrate into neighbouring countries of Niger Republic and Mali while some went into criminality - kidnapping, armed gangs, etc and are taking refuge in the forests. Given the high number of bandits in Nigeria's ungoverned forests, Onwuzuruigbo (2020) noted that a larger number of those who lost their animals transformed into bandits and rustlers in the rural areas.

The International Crisis Group Report (2017) also identified non-existence or weak regulation of animal grazing in many northern states as one of the reasons which led to infiltration of livestock bandits, resulting to an increase in cattle rustling. In addition, weak state capacity in the provision of security and governance challenge particularly insensitivity to armed groups at the early stage, police incapability, increase in the rate of unemployment and poverty worsened the situation in the region.

While the farmer-herder clashes and animal rustling escalated, both the Hausa farmers and Fulani herders formed militia groups for protection. The Hausa communities increasingly organized themselves into vigilante groups called *yansa kai*, armed with locally made weapons like guns, machetes and clubs to protect their villages (International Crisis Group, 2017). In many instances, the vigilante groups were alleged to have been carrying out harsh punishments to real and perceived perpetrators of criminal acts, but mostly accused of targeting Fulani communities for complicity in criminal activity with sanctions such as indiscriminate arrests, torture, indiscriminate seizure of cattle and extrajudicial killings, with suspects sometimes hacked to death in markets and other public places. Sometimes, the vigilantes set ablaze Fulani villages and compel the victims to flee into the forests (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Indeed, the vigilantes' actions and carnages are perceived to have further heightened the tension between the Hausa farmers and the Fulani herders. In order to counter the Hausa vigilantes' actions, the Fulani formed militia groups referred to *yan-bindiga* meaning gun owners to protect themselves and their cattle and to also avenge vigilante atrocities (International Crisis Group, 2017). The Fulani militia groups were alleged to have acquired sophisticated firepower through funds raised from the community and proceeds from kidnapping and allegedly acquired sophisticated firepower largely from the weapons smuggled in from the Sahara and the Sahel via international routes, and some from the *Boko Haram* Insurgent groups in North-Eastern Nigeria (Conflict Armament Research, 2020). This has been linked to the *cache* of ammunitions in the hands of armed groups across the country. Besides, the porous nature of the Nigeria's

borders with her neighbouring countries allows smuggling of illegal weapons into the country.

The absorbency of Nigeria's borders with her contiguous countries like Republic of Niger, Mali and Republic of Benin has aggravated trans-border criminality. According to Musa (2013), many of the bandits arrested in Katsina, Zamfara and Kaduna States by the anti-banditry troops and the Police are Malians and Nigeriens. These criminal syndicates were alleged to have aided movement of illicit drugs and arms to Nigeria through the absorbent borders. The report also reveals that most of the illegal Small Arm and Light Weapons (SALWs) were largely acquired from post-Gadhafi Libya and other parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel region (Musa, 2013) Undoubtedly, the porous borders have allowed most of the illicit weapons to be smuggled to the Northwest region by the criminal syndicates.

Ladan (2014) and Onwuzuruigbo (2020) noted that the presence of large unfettered and poor government-controlled forest areas in the region also complicated the activities of the bandits. These unregulated forest areas are *Kumuku, Kuduru, Kwaimban* and *Kachia* in Kaduna, *Falgore* forest in Kano, *Dansadau* forest in Zamfara, *Davin Rugu* forest stretching through Kaduna, Niger, Katsina and Zamfara States and they are enclaves of the cattle rustlers and other criminals. In addition, the forest areas are the enclaves of bandits where kidnapped victims are kept for several days or months while their abductors are negotiating for ransom.

The presence of mining sites in some communities in Zamfara State has also precipitated and aggravated banditry. The sites were mined illegally with little or no government regulations. The bandits took advantage of government weak regulation of the mining activities and poor security system, and attacked many of the mining sites, murder the miners and carted away their precious stones, money and mining tools. Adepegba, (2016) reveals that almost 50 illegal gold miners were gruesomely murdered in November 2016 in Bindim community, Zamfara State as bandits numbering about fifty attacked the mining site in search of gold, other precious stones and money. Larger chunks of gold mined in the region were traded for money and arms at the neighbouring countries of

Mali and Republic of Niger (International Crisis Group, 2017).

These factors not only promoted banditry in the Northwest they have escalated to national security threats. Therefore, competition for land and water resources predominantly by Hausa farmers and Fulani herder has promoted tension, unhealthy relationship and armed conflict between the two occupational groups in the region. The conflict has been further aggravated by other factors such as high rate of poverty, porous borders, unrestrained easy access to arms by non-state actors, kidnapping for ransom, lack of government's presence in many forests and rural areas, availability of mining sites, and weak security system.

### ***Modus Operandi of the Bandits in the Northwest Region***

Bandits engage in dreadful activities in many of the rural communities and on the highway in the Northwest region. According to Rufai (2021), bandits in the region operate under different groups and under different leaders. Their activities are usually coordinated in the forests. They later attack their targets. Prominent and dreaded bandit leaders in the Northwest region include *Buharin-Daji BanderiIsiya, Dogo Gide, Kachalla Turji Gudde and Auwal Daudawa*. These groups have contingents of fighters and control a number of camps and territories (*Daily Trust, 2020*). The leaders emerge from among the growing criminal and volatile environment in different gangs. An essential feature of the different bandit groups is the frequent occurrence of intra and inter-group rivalries. Rufai (2021) identifies leadership tussle, supremacy for power, struggle for territorial control and recognition as the major reasons for inter and intra group rivalries. In 2018, for instance, it was alleged that *Buhari-Daji* was killed in a gun duel that ensued among the rival groups in Zamfara (*Daily Trust, 2018*).

Majority of the groups that are susceptible to armed banditry include the herders, the farmers, the villagers, the commuters, the vigilante groups, security forces and school children. In most cases, many of the attacks by bandits are usually well coordinated (both in broad day light and at night); the attacks are either on the roads or in the rural communities and sometimes



in the suburb of major cities. The bandits usually appear in military uniforms and wear masks to conceal their faces. All the time, they wield guns as they ride motorcycles and shoot indiscriminately to scare or instil fear into the people. Since they are heavily armed, their deeds mostly include cattle rustling, invasion and destruction of communities, carting away of food items from the barns, abduction of people for ransom, raping of women, invasion of police and military bases, among others. They have invaded many communities and this has resulted into desolation, death, burning of food barns, and kidnapping among other atrocities. Between 2013 and 2021, for instance, over 500 (five hundred) rural communities in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kaduna had been invaded by bandits leaving many people killed while thousands of people were kidnapped (International Crisis Group Report, 2020). Banditry also impacted farming negatively in some of these communities.

Since 2016, banditry had prevented many farmers from going to farm or harvesting their crops in some of these communities. Media reports have also revealed that bandits imposed levies running into millions of Naira on some farming communities mostly in Kaduna and Zamfara States. The levies had to be paid before the farmers were allowed to farm or harvest their farm produce (*Punch*, 2021 and *Thisday*, 2022). This has bigger negative implications within the context of food insecurity and hunger in the last few years. Farming and pastoralism, the two main sources of livelihood in the area of study, have virtually ceased to exist.

Also, many of the major inter-city routes and rural roads are constantly under attacks by bandits. The major roads where kidnapping has become rampant in the region include Kaduna-Abuja, Zaria-Kaduna, Zaria-Saminaka, Kaduna-Birni-Gwari, Birni-Gwari-Funtua, Malunfasi-Jibia, Kachia-Kachia-Zonkwa, and Gusau-Talata Marafa. Bandits often attack educational institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary) and have stopped all forms of educational pursuit. The schools have not only been attacked the students and workers are usually abducted for several weeks. Sometimes they are released after ransom has been paid or in certain cases they are killed.



**Table 1: Statistics of Persons Abducted in Selected Educational Institution in the Northwest**

S/No	Name of Institution	Location/State	Number of Person Abducted	Date and Year
1	Government Boys Science School, Kankara	Kankara, Katsina	340	December 11, 2020
2	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe	Jangebe, Zamfara	379	February 26, 2021
3	Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka	Afaka, Kaduna	39	March 12, 2021
4	Green Field University, Km 34, Kaduna-Abuja Expressway	Chikun, Kaduna	22	20 April 2021
5	Federal Government College, BirniYauri	BirniYauri, Kebbi	106	June 17, 2021
6	Bethel Baptist High School, Kujama, Chikun	Chikun, Kaduna	121	July 5, 2021
7	Government Secondary School, Kaya	Kaya, Zamfara	73	September 1, 2021
8	St Albert the Great Institute of Philosophy, Seminary School	Fayit-Kagoma, Kaduna	Unspecified Number	October 11, 2021

**Source:** Researchers' compilation

Table 1 shows that over 1000 persons made up of students and workers of educational institutions were abducted between October 2021 and December 2022 in Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara states, respectively. So, schools in rural areas had to shut down for several months till security around the schools were beef up.

Ransom for abducted people could be in cash, motorcycles and large amount of recharge cards of any telecommunication service providers. These items are paid as ransom after protracted negotiation by relations of victims. In a situation where such demand could not be met within the stipulated period, the abductors kill the victims. Sometimes, kidnapped victims suffer physical assault, rape and molestation, bruises, emotional torture and loss of valuable wealth.

## Federal and State Government's Strategies to Ending Armed Banditry

Since the upsurge of banditry in 2013 in the Northwest, the Federal Government has been using joint police-military operations to confront the bandits. Thus, there have been many joint police-military internal security operations to contain the armed groups in the region. The Police, the Nigeria Civil Defence and Security (NCDSC) and the Military have launched several joint anti-banditry ground and air operations. Some of the operations designed to end armed banditry and other criminality were named 'Operations Puff Adder', 'DiranMikiya', 'Sharan Daji', 'HadarinDaji', 'KaraminGoro''Thunder Strike' and 'Exercise Harbin Kunama I, II and III', and Sahel Sanity.

No fewer than 5,000 (five thousand) troops, drawn from the different Nigerian Military and the Police formations across the country are involved in the anti banditry operations. The military personnel are mostly drawn from 1 Division (Kaduna), 8 Division (Sokoto) and Army Brigade in Kano. The airpower personnel have been drawn from Nigerian Air Force Kaduna and Kano. The Nigerian Army specifically received special anti-banditry training for a minimum period of six months at the Nigerian Army School of Infantry (NASI), Jaji (*The Guardian*, 2020). The Nigerian Army acquired over 50 (fifty) Hilux Pick-Up vehicles and over 500 (five hundred) motorcycles for easier movement of troops and surveillance as well as armour tanks and other necessary gadgets to facilitate logistics. The troops have been using strategies like road block, stop and search, all-out-offensive and ground battle for their operations. The Nigerian Army has also banned the use of motorcycles within the hinterland and forests of Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi, States (Aluko, 2019). The police have complemented the fight against banditry by continuously working with community leaders on intelligence gathering, making arrests and prosecuting suspected bandits and their informants. The Nigerian Air Force has been engaging in aerial surveillance of the forest to displace the bandits using anti-tank aircrafts. There has been continuous surveillance over *Kumuku*, *Kuduru*, *KwaimbanaaFalgoreDansadau* and *Davin Rugu* forests. Many of the bandits' enclaves have been bombed and in that process some bandits were reportedly killed while others escaped with injuries.

To enhance the military-police joint operations, the federal government has established security cooperation with the contiguous countries like Mali and Republic of Niger for border patrol. In May 2019, for instance, a security team drafted from the 8th Division of the Nigerian Army, Sokoto had a meeting with Nigerien Army on border security strategies. The joint security cooperation recorded a remarkable success when the Nigerian Air Force aircraft bombed the armed groups in the Republic of Niger's border towns of Maradi and Dumbroun in a bid to release many Nigerians held hostage (International Crisis Group, 2020).

The police-military joint operations have recorded considerable success in the anti-banditry campaign in the region. Security report revealed that a considerable number of bandits have been killed while some have been arrested and handed to the police for interrogation and prosecution. Some of the bandits' enclaves have equally been destroyed and many ammunition recovered. Reports have also shown that a substantial number of rustled cattle have been recovered while hundreds of kidnapped persons have been rescued (International Crisis Group, 2020). In the early part of 2019, activities of the bandits reduced in the region when the joint military-police operations were intensified. But these gains could not be sustained as the military operations could not totally eradicate the vast array of armed groups.

The state governments in the region have responded to the threats of banditry with different strategies. One, the state governments gave financial and logistics supports to the security agencies mostly the police and the military deployed for internal security operations in the region. Governor Abdul-Aziz Yari of Zamfara state was alleged to have expended about N35 billion on logistics support and special allowances to the military and the police deployed to the state; relief materials for victims of attacks; and there was considerable respite between 2015 and 2019 (*Premium Times*, 2019). Katsina State Government said it spent over N19 billion on the purchase of vehicles and allowances to the joint police-military troops in the state between 2014 and 2019 (*Daily Trust*, 2020). Other state governments in the region also alleged that they had spent huge amount from their monthly security votes on logistics support and allowances

to the federal security personnel deployed to their states.

Besides logistics support and allowances to the federal troops, all the state governments in the region created ad-hoc security agencies such as Vigilante Groups and Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF) mostly in the rural areas to complement the efforts of the police and the military. Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi and Sokoto States government in particular encouraged the formation of Vigilante Groups and empowered them to protect communities from herder-allied armed groups. Between 2013 and 2014, Zamfara Government recruited about 12,500 vigilantes and paid them a monthly allowance of about N2,250 aside the logistics support provided for them (Rufai, 2018). In 2018, Zamfara State Governor Abdul-Aziz Yari recruited about 8,500 young men into the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to complement military efforts (Vanguard, 2018). But the efforts appeared to be counterproductive because there was no synergy between the security forces (military and police) and the CJTF one hand, and the Vigilante/CJTF had no weapons to match the armed bandits' superior fire power. Several members of the CJTF and Vigilante Groups were killed in many of the clashes between them and the armed bandits. The Vigilante and the CJTF, in many instances, had been accused of carrying out indiscriminate arrests and extra-judicial killings of suspected bandits and in Fulani herders' communities.

In view of the escalated violent attacks, Zamfara and Katsina State Governments opted for negotiation and peace agreements with the bandits. The governors of the aforementioned states offered the armed groups amnesty and other inducements to end attacks (*Daily Trust*, 2016). Katsina and Zamfara State Governments promised to rehabilitate and reintegrate bandits who willingly laid-down their arms, as well as establishing rural grazing areas including settlements with social amenities for Fulani herders and rehabilitate houses damaged during the attacks between herders and farmers.

But it was alleged that the Kaduna, Kebbi and Kano State Governments vehemently opposed negotiating peace agreement with the armed groups but preferred to use security forces and different approaches to subdue them. Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna vowed not to negotiate with bandits. He

insisted that bandits were criminals that should be eliminated in the society using security forces because they can never repent of their criminal activities. He urged members of the public neither to negotiate nor pay ransom to them for kidnapped persons because they get more empowered by the ransom paid. (*Vanguard March*, 2020). Kebbi and Kano State Governments also shared the same view with Governor Nasir El-Rufai.

Indeed, the peace negotiation agreement yielded results temporarily in Katsina and Zamfara States as bandits' activities reduced drastically. In Katsina State, for instance, the amnesty programme led to the recovery of 110 AK-47 rifles, 361 Dane guns and about 28,000 rustled cattle were exchanged for cash (International Crisis Group, 2020). In 2019, Zamfara Police Command stated that 100 assorted guns were recovered from the repentant bandits. The weapons comprised Dane guns, AK-47, RPG, LMC and LAR rifles, ten rounds of live ammunition and military camouflage uniforms. (International Crisis Group, 2020). Since the peace negotiation agreement was a continuous exercise, one of the notorious bandit kingpins in Zamfara, *Auwalu Daudawa* surrendered one AK-49 and 19 AK-47 rifles with 72 rounds of live ammunition for anti-aircraft rifles. There was a similar surrender in Kaduna state even though, Governor Nasir El-Rufai did not negotiate with bandits, the Commissioner of Police, Austin Iwar announced that about 1,150 bandits voluntarily surrendered their arms and ammunition and vowed not to go into banditry again (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2018).

However, the peace deals and amnesty programme only lasted a few months before it broke down. It was followed by a renewal of violent attacks by the bandits on a large scale. There were allegations and counter-allegations by the state officials and the armed groups. Zamfara State government blamed the failure of the programme on the bad faith of the bandit leaders (*Daily Trust*, 2017). On the contrary, Zamfara State Government was alleged to have failed to fulfil its promise to the different armed groups particularly in the areas of rehabilitation and reintegration of repentant armed groups. This made *Buharin-Daji*, one of the notorious herder-allied armed group leaders, with some of his lieutenants to breach the conditions of the deal and resumed violent attacks

which extended to Katsina, Niger and Sokoto States (*Daily Trust*, 2017). *Buharin-Daji* was, however, killed as a result of intense competition among the various rival bandit groups. Following his death, government arrested some *Buharin-Daji's* close associates (*Daily Trust*, 2018). What appeared to have led to the resurgence of violent attacks was that Zamfara Government was alleged to have negotiated with some selected bandit leaders. Meanwhile leaders of other rival groups who had fled to other states as a result of military pressure returned with fury because they felt alienated in the peace building processes.

Governor Aminu Bello Masari of Katsina State blamed the bandits for renegeing on the peace deal or ceasefire agreement. He said government kept its own side of the agreement but the bandits renegeed and recommenced violent attacks (*Thisday*, 2020). Following the escalation of bandit attacks on communities in Katsina in 2020, Governor Masari reiterated that Katsina government would never negotiate with bandits as he urged the security agencies to be ruthless with bandits terrorizing the state as well as neighbouring Kaduna, Zamfara and Niger States.

Another factor which led to a resurgence of violence in the region was insincerity of Bandit leaders. It was alleged that some of the armed groups surrendered part of their arms and ammunition in compliance with the spirit of the peace deal but kept a large chunk of the weapons in the forest. Less than 1,200 arms were surrendered in Zamfara and Katsina as at January 2020 (International Crisis Group, 2020). It is not surprising therefore that in spite of governments' efforts to disarm the armed groups, bandits still bear arms openly, attack communities, cart away food and cattle and kidnap people for ransom. Following the collapse of the peace deals and resurgence of violence by the bandits, some of the state governments have either terminated the negotiation or called for a review. Katsina State House of Assembly called for a review of the peace deal following the escalation of violent and ruthless attacks of bandits in many communities in Katsina. The State Assembly urged the state to seek alternative methods of ending the violence (*Daily Trust*, 2020).

Almost all the state governments in the region had proposed cattle ranching as an alternative to open grazing in the belief that it would be a major solution to the

perennial farmer-herder conflict. Zamfara State Government commenced the building of three rural grazing areas - one for each senatorial district at a cost of N8.6 billion in 2018, the completion and effective utilization of the project could help in reducing farmer-herder clashes (*Daily Trust*, 2019). Similarly, Governor Ganduje of Kano state inaugurated a \$95 million agro-pastoral development project aimed at developing pastoral communities and addressing security challenges caused by herder migration (*Punch*, 2020). Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai further proposed cattle branding, certifying cattle merchants, monitoring cattle markets and regulating slaughter houses as mechanisms to prevent cattle rustling (*Leadership*, 2016 ).

These efforts and proposals by State Governments' appeared laudable if faithfully implemented and devoid of politics. But there is continuous suspicion and animosity between the government and the armed groups. The persistence of the crises has thrown the State Governments in the region into confusion; In fact, Governor Masari Bello of Katsina, on several occasions, maintained that he regretted signing peace deal with the bandits.

### **Complexities and Contradictions in the Military and States' Government Approaches**

Despite concerted efforts by both the Federal and State Governments, the challenges of insecurity in the region have become compounded. This is because of the complexities and contradictions in both federal and state governments anti-banditry approaches. In the first place, the joint police-military anti-banditry operation is faced with enormous challenges. These challenges had been summarized by Tony Nyam, a retired military personnel and security expert, who said "there are huge logistics gaps which bother on insufficient equipment to respond swiftly to armed groups' attacks, inferior firearms, inadequate number of troops, inadequate intelligence gathering, political dimension to criminality among others" (Gabriel, 2020).

The challenges account for over 80 per cent failure of the joint police-military anti-banditry operations. Apart from that, the military has been overstretched in the internal security operations across the length and breadth of the country



given the number of ongoing internal security operations. There have also been alleged cases of politicians and traditional rulers' complicity with the bandits. In Zamfara State, for instance, the governor suspended some traditional rulers who were alleged to be working with the bandits (Uzoho, 2019). Some military personnel were also alleged to be supplying ammunitions and intelligence information to the bandits. Complicity, to a greater extent, has hampered effective operations of the troops in the region.

Many of the security personnel have been ambushed and killed in the course of anti-banditry operations in the region. In July 2020, bandits ambushed and killed over 20 soldiers in Katsina (*Africa News*, 2020). The killing of security personnel by bandits has persisted in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto states. However, continuous escalation of banditry made the Minister of Defence, Major General I. Danbazu (Retd) to authorize citizens to defend themselves against insecurity. The Governors of Zamfara and Katsina States have also asked the people of their States to resort to self-help.

The inefficiency in the State Governments' approach was first noted in the unarmed Vigilante and CJTF who neither synergized with the police-military troops nor provided useful information to the troops. Therefore, both the local security apparatus and the police-military troops worked at variance instead of sharing intelligent information. In most cases, the bandits noted this huge gap in the security coordination. Also the peace deal and amnesty programme of the State Governments for the repentant bandits had not been implemented efficiently. The bandits accused states government of gross insincerity for partially fulfilling part of the peace deal while the larger part of the agreement remained on paper. The governments, on the other hand, blamed the bandit leaders for renegeing on the agreement.

Negotiation and granting of amnesty to bandits has been a controversial subject in the public domain. To Sheikh Ahmad Abubakar Gumi (a Muslim Cleric) and some, granting amnesty to bandits would end banditry. Sheikh Ahmad Abubakar Gumi after meeting with some bandit leaders and fighters in the forests emphasised that granting amnesty to the bandits remained the best option for peace in the region. After he had successfully negotiated ransom between



the bandits and the kidnapped students in Kaduna on one or two occasions, public perception about him changed as certain analysts began thinking that the Sheikh was working in connivance with the bandits. He therefore withdrew his services and urged both the federal and states governments to dialogue with the bandit leaders.

On the contrary, Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai, former Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Yusuf Buratai and other prominent Nigerians differed on the subject of amnesty to bandits. They strongly believed that bandits were criminals that should be crushed. In the words of Governor Nasir El-Rufai, there can never be genuine repentance for bandits because after deceiving government and people they will go back to their acts of criminality. After the failure of amnesty programme in Katsina and Zamfara States, Katsina State Governor Aminu Masari sees amnesty programme as a ploy to deceive government because bandits would renege on the peace agreement.

As a result of what transpired in Katsina and Zamfara, the public has lost confidence and trust in the amnesty programme just as it doubts the sincerity of the programme and the genuineness of bandits' repentance. The public is of the view that, government should continue to exert maximum police-military force and ensure that any arrested bandit faces the wrath of the law rather than granting them state pardon. The contradiction of government's approach arises from the use of maximum police-military exertion and granting of amnesty. These are two contradictory and bipolar approaches of government at different levels. It is not surprising therefore, that in spite of many years of anti-banditry war in the region, banditry has continued to be on increase. The end is not in sight.

Another area of contradiction stuck out when the National Assembly legislated against payment of ransom to bandits/kidnappers. Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai concurred with non-payment of ransom to bandits. The complexities, contradistinctions in the use of the military, National Assembly laws and negotiation have constituted a very serious impediment to successfully winning the war against banditry in the country.

## **Conclusion**

This paper provided in-depth understanding of the complexity and contradictions of government's approaches to armed banditry in the Northwest region of Nigeria. Government can overcome banditry through well-coordinated multi-layered and multi-dimensional approaches which can take the form of strong political will, instrumentality of laws, coercion and inclusive policies. Government, at all levels, must not play discordant tunes in security matters. The protracted nature of banditry in the region in the face of intense police-military operations on one hand and peace deal on the other hand made academics and analysts sceptical about government sincerity. Government can restore confidence in the citizenry by demonstrating the political will and protect human life and property.

## **Recommendations**

This paper makes the following recommendations:

1. There should be comprehensive programmes and policies to prevent or reduce farmers-herders clashes, particularly the enactment of ranching law instead of open grazing.
2. Government should create a mechanism to trace lost cattle. Such systems would involve cattle branding, certifying cattle merchants, monitoring cattle markets and regulating slaughter houses. Governor Nasir El-Rufai had earlier proposed a similar system as a way to reducing cattle rustling (Olaniyan and & Yahaya, 2016).
3. Communities should be fortified through the establishment of community policing arrangements across the country. There is the need for a strong intelligence gathering mechanism around border communities aiming at intercepting illegal movement of ammunitions into the region.
4. Government should also intensify efforts at checking illegal cross-border movements of persons and cattle, and restrain the influx of

ammunition. More modern weapons and military hardware should be acquired for the military troops because it would empower them to take the battle to the bandits' enclaves. In 2021, government acquired six (6) Tucano Aircrafts for aerial surveillance and bombing of the bandits' hideouts. There is a need to add more aircrafts for a more assured victory.

5. The police, the military and other security personnel should be trained on modern intelligence gathering using drones. Besides, there should be synergy among the security personnel, particularly on training and sharing of intelligence information.

Enactment of laws to try bandits within the shortest period of time should be prioritized.

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