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**BANDITRY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN RURAL
COMMUNITIES OF BENUE STATE**

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Abstract

Banditry has become the second source of human casualty in Nigeria after terrorism. There is hardly a day free of banditry attacks, especially in the Northern part of the country. Their operation techniques are becoming more diversified and daring. The negative consequences on the economic lives of Nigeria are becoming very difficult to bear. The work examined the extent to which banditry activities have affected rural development in Benue State. The specific objectives included verifying the nature of banditry activities in Benue State, identifying rural communities with the worse experience of banditry activities, examining the consequences of banditry activities on the socio-economic activities of rural areas in Benue State, and suggesting ways through which banditry activities can be controlled in the state. Employing Robert Park's systemic conflict model, the work made use of secondary sources of information, and drew data from periodic materials, the mass media, library materials and security reports. The information gathered revealed that banditry is a reality in rural communities of Benue State. It manifest its operations in kidnapping, killing, invasion and displacement, extortions, violence and all forms of criminalities. The Local Government Area mostly affected include Katsina/Ala, Gwer-west, Agatu, Otokpo Kwande, Ukum, Logo, Shititle, Guma, and Ogbokpo. Banditry activities brought about disruption in socio-economic activities in these areas including marriage and burial ceremonies, markets, farming activities and educational activities. To control this situation, the study recommended among others, collaboration

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between rural dwellers, security agents and politicians for intentional and calculated fight against bandits and their syndicates.

Key Words: Bandits, Banditry, Rural Communities, Socio-Economic Activities.

Résumé

Au Nigéria, le banditisme est devenu la deuxième cause de mortalité après le terrorisme. Les attaques de bandits sont quasi quotidiennes, notamment dans le nord du pays. Leurs techniques opérationnelles se diversifient et deviennent de plus en plus audacieuses. Les conséquences néfastes sur l'économie nigériane sont de plus en plus difficiles à supporter. Cette étude examine l'impact du banditisme sur le développement rural de l'État de Benue. Ses objectifs spécifiques étaient de vérifier la nature de ces activités, d'identifier les communautés rurales les plus touchées, d'analyser leurs conséquences socio-économiques et de proposer des solutions pour les endiguer. S'appuyant sur le modèle systémique des conflits de Robert Park, l'étude a exploité des sources secondaires, notamment des publications périodiques, les médias, des documents de bibliothèque et des rapports de sécurité. Les informations recueillies confirment que le banditisme est une réalité dans les communautés rurales de l'État de Benue. Le banditisme se manifeste par des enlèvements, des meurtres, des invasions et des déplacements de population, des extorsions, des violences et toutes formes de criminalité. Les zones de gouvernement local les plus touchées sont Katsina/Ala, Gwer-Ouest, Agatu, Otokpo Kwande, Ukum, Logo, Shitile, Guma et Ogbokpo. Les activités de banditisme perturbent les activités socio-économiques de ces régions, notamment les cérémonies de mariage et d'enterrement, les marchés, l'agriculture et l'éducation. Pour maîtriser cette situation, l'étude recommande, entre autres, une collaboration entre les populations rurales, les forces de sécurité et les responsables politiques afin de lutter de manière ciblée et réfléchie contre les bandits et leurs réseaux.

Mots-clés : Bandits, Banditisme, Communautés rurales, Activités socio-économiques.

Introduction

Many countries of the world are today plagued with Banditry activities of various kind. The consequences on human lives and socio-economic activities are worrisome. Bandit activities range from armed robbery, kidnapping, killing, violent attacks, burning of residential apartments, destruction of crops and other property, and displacement of human beings. Orji, (2019) substantiated how violent acts of criminality have destabilised national security, peaceful co-existence, good living and development. The issue of bandit cut across many countries including Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Palestine, Niger, Somalia, Gabon, and Kenya. Nigeria, therefore is not an exception.

Alubo, (2017), recalled how Nigeria as a Nation suffered banditry activities for so many years, before the emergence of Boko Haram terrorism Fulani herders and various other bandit groups. The activities of bandits are more experienced in the North-west, North-East North-Central and South-East with pockets of such activities in other parts of the country. Nigeria as a predominantly agrarian nation has its socio-economic activities largely driven by agriculture, informal trade, and small-scale businesses. The agricultural sector remains the backbone of rural livelihoods, employing a significant portion of the population. Crops like cassava, yams, maize, and sorghum are widely cultivated, alongside livestock rearing, fishing, and poultry farming. Despite its central role, the agricultural sector faces challenges like violence, crime,

poor infrastructure, limited access to finance, and climate-related threats, which hamper productivity.

Beyond agriculture, informal trade is common in the rural area. Rural markets provide a platform for the exchange of agricultural produce, household items, and basic services. According to Iorfa (2018), in recent years, there have been a push for diversification, with initiatives supporting rural electrification and small-scale renewable energy projects, such as solar power, to boost local businesses. However, one of the major issues affecting rural socio-economic activities is criminality leading to poverty, with high inequality between rural and urban areas. Abah, (2021) observed that government have been trying to address these challenges through reforms, cash transfers, and efforts to improve rural infrastructure without much success due to banditry activities.

Benue State of Nigeria, popularly known as the “food basket” of the country, produces much of the food consumed in Nigeria, with rural communities bearing the burden of crop production and distribution. As an agrarian state, crop production has corresponding effects on all other aspects of the economy including rural markets development, marketing of crops produced like Rice, Cassava, Yams, Soybeans sesame, groundnuts and corn among others. However, Fiase and Abughdyer (2024) lamented how rural societies of the state are today faced with a lot of challenges including bandits’ attack which has displaced farmers and disrupted rural markets. In as much as the government through security agents have done a lot to curb this menace, it seems the situation is growing worse day by day since the perpetrators keep recruiting for more attacks. The major concern of this study, therefore, is to assess the the effect of insecurity situation in Benue State given the onslaught of banditry activities on socio-economic activities in the rural areas. The work therefore examined the types of bandits’ operation, nature of banditry activities, and how it affects the socio-economic activities of the rural people.

Conceptual Clarification

Banditry

Banditry refers to organised criminal activities involving certain groups of individuals, carried out with the use of arms, and with the intention of disrupting human existence through intimidation, killing, kidnapping, violence, robbery, stealing and all kinds of criminality and lawlessness. It is a violent crime involving the threat or use of arms to steal, extort, loot, or kill. Bandits are not mere criminals; they are outlaws who live by criminality. Simply put, banditry is an organized crime perpetrated by outlaws, brigands or marauders who are motivated to steal, rob, loot, extort, or pillage by threat or use of violence. These types of groups operate contrary to the norms, values and constitutional provisions of a society or nation (Ogbu, 2020). It is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups that use small and light weapons to carry out attacks against people. Onuoha (2018), narrated how perpetrators of banditry activities usually carry out such operations for personal gains and to counter the normal functioning of the society towards their selfish desires This could manifest in different ways at different times and places like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape, displacement and gruesome massacre of people. Banditry activities are therefore, motivated by economic and social reasons. While some bandits operate to extort money and other resources from the public, others are politically motivated, still some have ideological positions they want to protect by intimidating and disrupting the society.

The Seed of Banditry in Benue State

In Benue State, pockets of youth with anti-social practices and militia activities evidently commenced in 1998. It gradually grew into armed robbery, increased kidnapping, thuggery,

militia practices, and uncontrolled drug addicts. The groups were then supported by politicians who fund them with dangerous weapons to fight against political opponent and rig elections. However, many of these groups have gone out of hand. As rightly observed by Alubo (2017), many of these groups make use of weapons supplied to them by their sponsors as means of livelihood by robbing the general public, kidnapping and terrorising innocent members of the public.

Today, the initial home-grown banditry groups are being complemented by Fulani herders turned bandits who are using neighbouring States of Nasarawa and Taraba as platforms to launch repeated attacks on the Benue State. Unfortunately, the present condition of Benue youth is highly lamentable: unemployment rate is on the increase with little efforts and plan by the government for youth development. Such situation is encouraging youths' criminality and involvement in militia groups. To this end groups formed for political thuggery are found in every local government headquarters and prominent villages and hamlets in Benue State. Their services are provided for a negotiated fee. These groups are sometimes regarded as cultist gang, with leaders and member who celebrate violence. In 2015 and 2019 general elections, almost all leading politicians in Benue State had at least one youth group or another. For example, there were the "Bai boys," of Gboko, a gang that was initially involved in a killing spree in retaliation for the murder of the leader's son, Orkuma Ama Bai, later became a cultist group that committed atrocities and acted as a violent, politically connected force in the Gboko area. Every prominent politician has this type of youth group in their respective camps. Some youths engage in these actions because of poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, and frustration (Adebayo. 2021).

Methodology

This work predominantly made use of secondly data including periodic materials, the mass media and library materials to gather the relevant information needed for scrutiny. However, interaction with victims of bandits activities also helped to clarify other issues, and to access the nature of the situation in the rural areas. The work however concentrated on information regarding Benue State exclusively in order to be particular about pattern of banditry activities and its consequences on socio-economic activities.

Literature and Theoretical Frame Work

Bandit Operation

Banditry activities are those criminal activities carried out in the society by gangs which contravene the rules and regulations of the society. Such activities include kidnapping, robbery, gang raping, killing destruction of property and much more. Adebayo (2021) have shown how these activities were obtainable in the Western countries for a long time, and have penetrated into Nigeria. Banditry, he said was primarily introduced in Nigeria in the 21st century particularly in the North-Eastern part of the country when certain groups called Boko Haram started launching attacks on innocent citizens at various places. As time went on these groups extended its activities to attacking Churches and Schools, kidnapping people demanding for ransom, collection of compulsory taxes and levies from their victims and many other injurious activities directed at causing social unrest.

Their nature of net-working and interconnectivity among makes it very difficult for them to be comprehended since various groups of persons get involved at different levels. Explaining further Ogbole (2021) described how bandits established cells and recruit people as informants who moved about within the society under normal settings without carrying weapons yet quietly get detail information about innocent people, their income, family member's schedule of duty and where best to get them and report same to the bandit groups

for action. Bandits do not only work for themselves. They also operate largely as mercenary group that work for people under negotiated payment. In this context, bandits are also used for revenge mission, and to terrorise people. Some other people recruit them as guards for their security against other groups. This has brought about the multiplicity of Bandit groups.

Government weakness in enforcing security has contributed immensely to increasing banditry activities hence various groups of bandits find it very easy to move from one area to the other unchallenged. Fiase and Abughdyer (2024) argued that, the under-governed spaces coupled with the country's porous borders have increased the influx of small arms and light weapons, thus increasing the opportunities for crime. This is facilitated by vast forests which allow illegal arms trade to fester. It is further complicated by the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the North West, which leave the youth vulnerable to recruitment for criminal activities. The socio-economic realities that exist include multidimensional poverty, widespread unemployment, deprivation, inequality, marginalisation, exclusion and lack of access to basic amenities.

Banditry Net-workings in Benue State

Banditry activities in Benue state are carried out with the use of highly organised networking's that makes things easy for their operations and concealment of such. The net-working is so organised that sometimes even those who appear innocent turn out to be kingpins in the act. Onuoha (2018), explained the nature of this net-working to involve: Sponsors, perpetrators, Arms bearers, informants, hosts, Spiritual guides, and Defenders and Associates.

Sponsors: are those who finance banditry activities by supplying them with money to purchase arms, finance their trips, and provide for their feeding and general upkeep and all the logistics involved. Dura (2024) reported how the present governor of Benue State lamented over sponsorship of bandits by politicians. To him therefore groups of bandits are usually recruited by wealthy individual either in politics or otherwise who feel insecure in the midst of assumed enemies seeking protection from such bandits. As a result of this, the sponsors assume full financial responsibility for their operations. According to Francis (2024), banditry activities in Benue State are primarily driven by a mix of political, economic, and ethnic factors. The most notable instigators are armed herders who frequently clash with local farmers, leading to significant loss of life and property. There have been instances where security operatives (both military and police) have been accused of either turning a blind eye to banditry or being complicit in criminal activities. In some cases, corrupt officers also sell arms or provide protection to bandit groups in exchange for bribes.

Perpetrators: are gangsters who actively perpetrates violent activities on individuals, groups and communities in the society in form of robbing, killing, kidnapping, destruction of property and much more with the use of arms. Abah, (2021), substantiated the evil practices of these bandits as they carry out massacre of humans mercilessly and heartlessly just to fulfil their heart desires and that of their sponsors. In most cases, such attacks come unpredicted and swiftly.

Arms bearers: are certain individuals contracted by bandits to safeguard their arms. According to Danladi, (2020), bandits engage some collaborators who are paid for delivery of arms which are often conveyed safely from one point to the other until they get to the right hands of the bandits. Some of these people are custodians of arms who takes the responsibility of hiding the arms and ammunitions from the site and knowledge of security agents and the general public. These arms are issued out and received in from time to time to specific individuals on directives from specified members of the bandits' groups.

Informants: are groups of people who gather relevant information that aid and abet the operations of bandits. To Adebayo (2021), such individuals relate with members of the society

at different points with the aim of gathering sensitive information that help the bandits to know who, when, and where to attack successfully. They also check out for the rich people to kidnap, safe areas to rob, when to run for their safety, what the society says and plan against them, and when security people are likely to come after them. Unfortunately, many of such people operate in the normal setting of the society as neighbours, colleagues, customers, friends and sometimes even blood relations. Francis (2024) confirmed that informants also survey communities to identify easy routes and porous areas for passage. Informants operate through gathering local intelligence. In this context, they monitor the movements of security personnel and local leaders, relaying this information to bandit groups. This allows bandits to avoid detection, plan ambushes, or raid communities at times when security is weak. For instance, on July 2024, bandits attacked Katsina-Ala, community at night and targeted specific houses, suggesting they had prior knowledge of the area and victims, possibly from local informants. Informants often help identify wealthy individuals, vulnerable groups, or important figures in rural areas, leading to targeted kidnappings or killings. In one instance, bandits attacked Eguma in Agatu LGA, killing soldiers and civilians. The timing and precision of the attack suggest that informants provided information on the movements of the security personnel, as reported by Daily Trust (2024, July 28)

Hosts: are groups of people who participates in hosting bandits from one location to the other. By this, they provide conducive accommodation for them to keep adopters, lodge for operations, keep stolen properties, and hold meetings and use the location as hideouts for different activities. Ogbu, (2020) maintained that, such collaborators offer shelter to bandits, allowing them to hide in remote areas after conducting attacks or evading security forces. This often occurs in rural communities where locals may be intimidated or bribed into compliance. They also supply bandits with food, fuel, and other necessary resources. This support helps the bandits remain hidden for extended periods, especially in forested areas where they set up camps. In instances like the July 2024 attack in Katsina-Ala, the bandits were reported to operate from nearby hideouts, possibly within the same community or neighbouring areas.

Defenders: of Bandits are basically in two categories, one of which are members of the society who work hard to conceal the activities of bandits within them either by speaking in their favour or making efforts to hide them from being discovered or arrested. The other category is legal practitioners who legally file defence in favour of Bandits any time they are arrested or arranged before the court of law. In most cases these are hired on permanent bases to be called upon any time such situations arise (Ayo, 2024)

Spiritual guides: It has been substantiated that Bandits when apprehended are usually seen with items including arms, ammunition and charms. These are prepared by sacred authorities like Traditional Medicine Men, sorcerers, and magicians to assist the operations of the bandits. The prophets give counselling services predict fortune or otherwise of their outings. The medicine men work closely with diviners and priests who offer counselling services as to what ritual to perform, the sacrifices required and the sacrificial objects needed and at times, the objects require a number of human beings or human parts to fortify them against counter attack. Through this they give them courage and boldness to perpetuate all kinds of violence or terrorism, aiding insecurity and banditry in the society- (Nyamibo 2018).

Associates: cut across several groups including, family members, friends and accomplices at all levels. Some take care of business ventures setup by bandits to hide their identity, others run errand by transacting businesses on their behalf like cashing money for them from the bank which is usually delivered to them in their hideouts. Onuoha, (2018), is of the view that some people identify with Bandits in principle to scare away members of the society from them because of their association with bandits. Sometimes they appear as mediators between the bandits and the general public using such opportunities to intimidate

people. The nature of complexity involved in Bandit activities show why it becomes difficult to contend with this menace, some individuals who appear innocent of this practice by human evaluation sometimes happen to be part and parcel of the menace at one level or the other. This makes investigations very difficult since perpetrators of these acts have roots and solid backup of some influential members of the society including security agents as well as religious leaders.

Theoretical Consideration: Conflict Theory

This study draws its strength from the conflict theory propounded majorly by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920). The authors argued that society is not best understood as a complex system striving for equilibrium but rather as a competition. Society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources like money, leisure, power. Broader social structures and organizations like religions, government, educational and economic institutions reflect the competition for resources in their inherent inequalities; some people and organizations have more resources (i.e., power and influence) and use those resources to maintain their positions of power in society. Conflict model therefore argued that society is constantly in conflict over resources which gives room for competition and then, conflict becomes inevitable.

The theory anchors its explanations on certain primary assumptions which includes the following:

- a) Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships.
- b) Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.
- c) Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it
- d) Maintained change occurs as a result of conflict between competing interests rather than through adaptation.

The theory suggests, therefore, that human interest, desires and demands varies together with the ability to make such desires meet. Those who find it difficult to assess societal resources through legitimate means employ other illegal means thus exerting negative consequences on the welfare of the general society. With this situation, conflict and competition becomes the order of the day.

Robert Park (1921) model of conflict theory proposed four universal types of interaction in intergroup relations which explains the nature of human interaction warranting conflict. According to him, competition is the type of interaction where all individuals or groups pursue their own interests, without paying attention to other individuals or groups while conflict is the type of interaction where individuals or groups consciously try to eliminate other individuals or groups in order to dominate with their activities, actions or ideas.

The submissions of the conflict model become relevant in this work when considered that bandit activities are carried out in conflict with existing norms and values of the society. Bandits' activities range from kidnapping, killing, destruction of property, robbing etc. All of these are at variance with the norms and values of Nigeria and are aimed at illegally wealth acquisition through accessing the resources of people, and the society. Conflict and competition becomes instrument that bandit used to perpetrators violence, kidnapped, killed, and spread fear to enable them acquire financial wealth and impoverish other members of the society.

Result

Incidences of Banditry Attacks in Benue State Rural Communities

Many rural communities in Benue State have consistently been attacked by bandits at various times. A number of such communities are pointed out here with the nature of attack suffered and, in some cases, the specific time period stated, while in some cases specific dates were not recorded as obtained on the table 1.

Table 1: Some Recent Incidences of Bandits attack in Benue State

LGA	Affected Villages	Nature of Attack	Time Period
Guma	Tse-Ujoh	Killing, and Looting	24 th April 2024
	Kwenev	Destruction of property	
	Tse-Aondofa	Cattle Rustling, displacement	
	Laav	Destruction of property	10 th June 2024
	Mbamundu	Killings/displacement	
	Tse-ishan	Displacement/killings	
	Gber-ikyon	Displacement/killing	
	Yelwata	Killing, burning and displacement	13 th June 2025
Logo	Ayilamo	Killing, Looting, destructions	25 th Aril 2025
		Killing and displacement	
	Anyiin	Threat, Displacement	
	Ugba	killing/confiscation of goods,	
	Abeda Shitile	Farmer/Herder crises	
Agatu	Aila	Farmer/Herder crises	
	Ejima	Killing/Displacement	
	Okokolo	Farmer/Herder crises	12 th May 2024
	Ogwumogbo	Destruction of property, theft	
	Adagbo	Road blocks, robbery	
	Ikpele	Farmer/Herder crises	
	Obagaji	Killing and looting	
Katsina/Ala	Gbor	Robbery/killings,	5/ 5, 2024,2/6/24
	Mbayongo	Massacre /Robbery	15 th August 2024
	Abaji	Massive killing /destruction, of School, Robbing/	
	Tordonga	Robbery/killing /destruction	
	Gbise	Killing, Extortion, Robbery.	
	Mbamu	Destruction of farm lands,	
	Shikaan	Invasion of houses extortion	
Makurdi	Agan	Herders attack, Robbery	30 th April 2025
	Fiidi	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	
	Daudu	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	
Ukum	Sankera	Sexual, Assault looting, killing,	
	Zaki-Biam	Destruction of infrastructure,	20 th April 2025
	Kyodo	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	2025
	Akaazua	Targeted Assassination	2024
	Ayati	Massive, killing and destructions	2024
	Chito	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	2025
	Ucha	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	
	Afia	Killing, kidnapping destruction	7 th May 2025
	Gbeji	Burning of social amenities	
	Vaase	Herders/farmers crises, Robbing	
	Gbagir	Burning of social amenities	
Otukpo	Adoka	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	6 th June 2024
	Otobi	Extortion	
	Ugbokolo	Market Raids	

	Ojantele	Threats, killing and displacement	2024
Gwer East	Achamegh	Destruction of crops	
	Aondoana	Looting, Killings, robbery	2025
	Gbinde	Herders/farmers crises, Robbing	
	Akume	Herders/farmers crises, Robbing	2025
	Deda	Looting, Killings, robbery	
Gwer-West	Naka	Herders/farmers crises, Robbing	7 th April 2024
	Gbaanger	Kidnapping, Looting,	
	Mbachohon	Burning of houses, killings	
	Mbabuande	Burning of houses, killings	2024
	Ijime	Herders/farmers crises	
	Tsambe/Mbesev	Looting, Killings, robbery	2025
	Nyamshi	Herders/farmers crises	
Kwande	Gyaluwa/ Jimba	Burning of houses, killings	2024
	Ikyo-awen	Herders/farmers crises	
	Tse-akwente	Burning of houses, killings	2023
	Tomataan	Looting, Killings	
	Mbatura	Looting, Killings	
Oju	Ikyogen	Destruction of infrastructure,	2024
	Ibilla	Farmer/Herder crises	
	Uwokwu	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	2024
Buruku	Adokpa	Killing, kidnapping , Robbery	
	Usen	Destruction of property, theft.	2025
	Uga, Jingir,	Killings, Kidnappings, Robbery	
	Anvambe	Destruction of property, theft	

Source: Compiled from mass media and periodicals by the Authors

The information in table 1 show clear evidence of the fact that several rural communities in Benue State have experienced untold hardships in the hand of bandits; and there seem to be no end to it as different bandit groups are still perpetrating violent attacks in the State. This consequences of the different attacks range from killing, kidnapping, robbing from house to house, on rural roads, they also destroy crops on farm and those stored at home. Sometimes the Bandits disrupt rural markets collecting money from traders who come to buy agricultural crops. The bandits also engage in looting, burning of residential houses, schools, worship centres, and even Clinics. The situations are getting worsened day by day as bandits activities keep spreading to other rural areas thus becoming a big challenge to rural dwellers. Some rural communities like Mbabuande, Ijime, Tsembe have been completely deserted for years due to Banditry activities- (Nomor & Ikyoyer, 2022).

Given the wide scale of bandit operation in the State, the needed peace and harmony desired for agricultural productivity, which is the bedrock of rural economy, is hampered. These activities have not only led to lose of lives and property but also contributed to widespread displacement, economic hardship, and social instability in the rural communities. The security situation remains volatile, with many residents living in fear, panic, hopelessness and uncertainty.

Most residents and traders alike no longer feel secure to transact businesses in rural communities which used to be a conducive environment for businesses, farming, and other socio-economic activities. Francis (2024) reported that farming activities in some parts of the state like Ikyo-awen, Tomataan, and tse-akwente in Kwande Local Government areas have completely ceased, as farmers have been displaced by incessant bandits operation. This accounts for acute food shortage and a probable unprecedented hike in the prices of farm produce in Benue markets. These seem also to have affected rural livelihood with a direct bearing on towns and urban areas in the state.

The Influence of Banditry on Socio-economic activities of Rural areas in Benue State

Benue State is an agrarian state which survive primarily through agricultural production. Majority of Benue inhabitants earn their income strictly from farming, even those who engage in other economic activities like business, and white-collar jobs still engage in agricultural production at different levels, including feeding and income. To Abah (2021), the proceeds of agricultural production are used both for food and as a source of money to meet all other demands. Be that as it may be, anything affecting crop production has a direct implication on all aspects of human survival for the rural people which includes; access to food, shelter, clothing, health facilities, education, and a lot more. This been the case, banditry activities have affected the rural areas of Benue State in different ways including.

i). Decrease in agricultural production:

Displacement and killing of farmers with the destruction of crops has made agricultural production very difficult in many parts of Benue State including Mbaikyoendu, Sengeve Mbapupuu and Mbachohon in Gwer-West, Local Government and many other areas where farming activities are no more in operation. Nomor and Ikyoyer (2022) observed that, farmers can't go to farm for fear of losing their lives. In this context, very fertile farm land have been deserted for several years uncultivated. As reported by Abah (2021), in Gbor, Abaji and Mbayongu communities of Katsina/Ala Local Government where farming is still been carried out, bandits do subject farmers to stringent conditions like paying of taxes and levies and submission of a portion of their farm products for the feeding of bandits in the bush. With all these farmers are warned to conceal the evil practices without reporting or complaining. Since majority of rural dwellers in the state depend on crops as their primary source of income, the decrease in agricultural production has direct effect on the income and general welfare of the rural people

ii). Food insecurity

Food availability in Benue State is directly related to crops production, therefore, with the decrease in agricultural productivity occasioned by increase banditry activities, this has brought about shortage of food and high cost of foodstuffs. It then entails that availability, accessibility and affordability of food has become difficult, the number of people buying food keep increasing with the number of food producers decreasing every day due to insecurity. This gives room for hunger and suffering. Since human beings must eat to survive, resources meant to solve other life problems are channelled into financing the high cost of feeding. Those who cannot afford the prices of food either go about begging, some are compared to employ different measures to survive since human beings must eat. This further contributes to the social unrest and criminal activities in the society.

iii). Income

For many rural dwellers in Benue State, agricultural production is the sole life wire for earning income. Many of the crops like rice, soya beans, cassava and groundnut are produced particularly as cash crops. Such people sale their proceeds to earn money for feeding, shelter clothing, School fees, and general welfare. With this condition once production is affected, the income of the people is affected. Fiase and Abughdyer (2024) maintained that income is directly related to living standard and general welfare of citizens. Banditry activities in Benue state have sent farmers away from their farms hindering production which has brought about increased poverty and untold hardship to the general populace. This has also led to un-usual

congestion of towns and urban areas with unemployed people hanging around relations and friends for survival. The situation further heightened the livelihood of relations in towns as they have to accommodate their displaced brothers and sisters from the rural areas. As a chain reaction, other aspect, of human development like business expansion, building projects, among others, are either delayed and / or abandoned, thus leading to low living standard. With a significant portion of the population reliant on agriculture, disruptions caused by banditry exacerbate poverty levels.

iv). Disruption of settlement pattern

Bandit's Invasion of Benue rural areas have brought about total disruption of the settlement pattern in the rural areas. A lot of victims from banditry from Ukum, Gwer-West, Kwande, Logo, Agatu and Guma Local Government Areas are presently displaced out of their ancestral homes leading to loss of homes and social networks. Orji (2019), expressed worry over displaced individuals who migrates to urban areas in search of safety, further straining urban economies leading to informal settlements. The traditional settlement pattern has been destroyed and people are sent out into camps where social relationship is no more based on the traditional pattern. The disruption also affects kinship relationship since people who are socially knitted become separated, affecting marriage ceremonies, burial and many other festivities which needs to be carried out on kinship bases.

v). Unsatisfactory access to social amenities.

The displacement of people due to bandit's activities has deprived many people from accessing social amenities like schools, health care facilities, rural market, worship centres, water sources and halls of meetings. In many places these are destroyed by bandits. In other places where they are even available access to these becomes difficult.

vi). Disruption of social cultural activities

Rural societies of Benue State strive through socio-cultural activities like meetings at family level, District level, and Clan where deliberations are carried out among the "Tyo" (Council of elders) to decide on major issues of the society. At such meetings, disputes between individuals are settled, welfare of members are also discussed with blessing pronounced on deserving members while punishment and curses are given to erring members. In the light of the present displacement of the rural Benue Society, the 'Tyo' group is scattered and elders can't meet together to oversee the cultural activities of their subjects and perform their roles in their various jurisdictions; this then affect cultural practices of the people. Displacement by bandits brings about disorientation that breaks away the cultural support enjoyed by the rural people in times of sicknesses and other traditional predicaments. In addition, burial rites are not fully undertaken in some areas like Afia, Ikyoawen, where wake-keeps for burials are no longer observed for fear of attacks. In some instances, dead bodies are handed over to security agents for burial where it should, against the tradition of the people of Benue State (Nyamibo 2019)

vii). Disruption of Educational activities:

Due to the violent nature of banditry, many schools, especially in rural areas, have been forced to shut down temporarily or permanently. Ogbole, (2021) explained how many schools in rural communities have been destroyed as communities flee from bandits, school infrastructure abandoned, leaving children out of school without access to formal education. Iorfa (2018), therefore observed that, this disruption has widened the gap in literacy rates and educational attainment, particularly in rural areas, where most of the banditry incidents occur. Teachers are

often targeted by bandits or are fearful of working in high-risk areas, leading to a shortage of staff in affected schools.

Displaced students also face interruptions in their learning, which may last months or years, limiting their educational development. Ishaku (2019) and Danladi, (2020) lamented how in some places bandits have attacked schools, destroying classrooms, libraries, and other infrastructure. These attacks have left schools without necessary facilities for proper teaching and learning. Some of the schools affected in recent time include: Government secondary school, Guma; Government secondary school, Gwer-West; LGA primary school, Agatu; and LGA primary school, Logo.

viii). Decrease in the working population

There is growing number of rural youths (who have been displaced) who were brought up as active farmers producing food and happily earning their living from farm. On being displaced by activities of bandits, they have no land to farm neither do they have money to buy or hire farm land. With this situation such youths are prone to either join the bandits or get involved in other social vices to earn a living. The population of able-bodied people on farm is therefore reduced (Ogbu, 2020).

vix). Fear of Investment in Rural Areas

There is fear of investment in many rural areas of Benue State because people have witnessed how property worth hundreds of millions have been burnt down by bandits; others have abandoned their investment and ran for their lives. Such reactions have brought developmental sect back in rural areas of Benue State. Ayo (2024) reported that many traders who buy yams and grains from rural markets like Tordonga, Zakibiam, and Gbor in large quantities now find it evacuate them due to insecurity since there have been repeated Bandits attacks in the state causing fear and panic. This then hinders many Investors patronising the state leading to economic setback.

x). Disruption of rural markets

Markets have been seriously affected by the activities of bandits in Benue State. For instance, Daudu Market in Guma Local Government is a major agricultural hub in Guma LGA, known for trading in grains, livestock, and other farm produce. Due to frequent attacks by bandits and herders, traders have abandoned the market several times, and it has experienced periods of closure. This has severely disrupted economic activities and affected the livelihoods of the local population. Gbor, Abaji, and Tordonga markets in Katsina/Ala markets have also frequently suffered attacks by bandits who rob traders that come to purchase agricultural products from the markets. Sometimes bandits would block access road to the communities, thus hindering the markets from holding. This affects the economic state of the rural people in the state (Nomor & Ikyoyer, 2022).

Conclusion

Many rural dwellers in Benue State have suffered much in the hands of bandits for many years. Some people have lost their beloved ones in hands of bandits; some have lost properties, while some have been maimed in the process of running from bandits due to sudden attacks. Sometimes even those who seem to survive certain attacks still die due to condition occasioned by such attacks. For instance, many people usually run without opportunity to carry their necessary life support mechanisms which helps to keep life going. In such situations they still don't cope and had to die due to intense suffering. It has become clear that rural development which seems to be the desire of every regime in Nigeria and Benue state in particular, cannot be realised because of incessant banditry attacks.

Many rural areas and villages have been deserted in Benue State due to incessant attacks by bandits. For fear of being killed, many people have abandoned their ancestral home land and farms and are living in internally people displaced (IDPs) camps; those who still live in some rural areas are living in fear; distance farms and farmlands from the community have been abandoned. There is an increasing exodus of people from rural areas to towns and urban centres simply out of fear of Bandits. Many Deserted rural areas are currently inhabited by bandits who make use of them as safe-havens to perpetrate their wicked plans on other places. Displacement of people from the rural area is putting pressure on urban infrastructures and much more undermine desire to establish social amenities in the rural area. Something has to be done to address this situation for the security of human beings and the development of the rural societies.

Suggestions

The insecurity situation in the state needs serious steps to be taken in order to safeguard life and property; and enhance socio-economic activities in the rural areas. It is in this respect that the following suggestions are made:

- a) Traditional leaders should liaise with the elders to check the activities of bandits in their various communities;
- b) Rural youths should be engaged in productive ventures to earn a living such that, they will not get involved in banditry activities;
- c) Politicians should desist from engaging youths as thugs against their political opponents;
- d) Security agents should intensify their efforts to curb insecurity activities in the state;
- e) The government should address insecurity matters seriously and empower security agents to carry out their operations effectively;
- f) Efforts should be made to compensate victims of bandits, and help them to resettle back to their ancestral lands for agricultural production;
- g) Members of the rural communities should liaise with security agents to provide necessary information needed to control banditry activities.

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