

**Armed Gang Kidnappings and Its Socio-Economic Implication in Okunland, North-Central Nigeria.**

---

**Ige, Simeon Abiodun**

Department of Religious Studies  
Prince Abubakar Audu University  
Anyigba, Kogi State

**Olubiyo, Kolade Gabriel**

Department of History & International Studies,  
Prince Abubakar Audu University,  
Anyigba, Kogi State

**Abu, Leonard**

Department of History & International Studies,  
Prince Abubakar Audu University,  
Anyigba, Kogi State

**Asaju, Olasunkanmi Victor**

Department of History & International Studies,  
Prince Abubakar Audu University,  
Anyigba, Kogi State

**Abstract**

*The Nigerian State has been plagued with a series of security challenges since the enthronement of democracy in 1999. A plethora of studies on security have attributed the spate of insecurity in Nigeria to multi-layered factors including leadership gap and absence of good governance. Okunland in the North-Central, Nigeria is not insulated from the mammoth security threats confronting the country because of its strategic location as the gateway to the Southwestern States from the North. For over a decade, Okunland remains one of the dens of armed kidnapers who engage in ruthless kidnapping for ransom on the major routes within Okun communities. However, armed gang kidnapping has continued to affect the socio-economic activities of the Okun people; not only the major routes linking Okunland with another part of Nigeria have been deserted, but the rural farmers have also abandoned their farmlands. Against this background, this paper examines armed gang kidnapping in Okunland with the intent of providing insight into the impact on the socio-economic life of the people. The paper adopts qualitative and descriptive methods using both primary and secondary sources. The paper contends that kidnapping constitutes a huge threat to human and national security and further deepens poverty. It concludes by recommending a multidimensional approach to solving the perennial kidnapping in Okunland and the country in general.*

**Keywords:** Kidnapping, Security, Okunland, Socio-Economic and Ransom



## Introduction

Security challenges are unarguably a phenomenon in all parts of Nigeria. Since the return to democracy in 1999, the government has been contending with one form of security threat or the other. In the last two decades, the most prominent and protracted security challenges in the country include ethno-religious conflict, armed robbery, insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, Herders-Farmers clashes, secessionist agitation, and ethnic militia. Given the mammoth security challenges in the country, the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Nigeria as the third most terrorized country in the World for five consecutive years (2015-2020).<sup>1</sup> There are a plethora numbers of studies on kidnapping in Nigeria, which are largely captivated by the absence of good governance, and increasing socio-economic inequalities occasioned by pervasive poverty and youth unemployment. In addition, quite a lot of scholarly works have focused on the subject, with arguments centered on the need to strengthen the frail national security architecture. While all above have been over-flogged in the field of security studies, this paper takes a departure from such existing narratives by exploring a broad-spectrum and distinctive feature of kidnapping in Okunland. North-Central Nigeria.

Okunland is not immune to the country's huge security challenges. An empirical study of the security situation in Okunland reveals that armed gang kidnapping for ransom has taken centre stage since 2011. The general belief of people is that Okunland like other parts of Kogi State is under the siege/grip of kidnapers because of the frequent occurrence of kidnapping on the major routes and sometimes in the farmsteads in Okun communities. The strategic position of Okunland cannot be overemphasized; it is a hub for food production and also the gateway to the Southwestern States from the north central. Based on this economic importance, many federal roads connect Okunland with the States of Kwara, Ekiti, and Ondo, Ebiraland, and Lokoja.

Since 2011, armed gang kidnapping in Okunland has continued to put the people in a state of despair as hundreds of people have been kidnapped or killed while victims who survived after payment of ransom continued to suffer psychological trauma. In addition, the socio-economic implication of kidnapping in Okunland is hugely felt as the menace elicited fear, insecurity, poverty, and hunger among the people known for food production. The high preponderance of kidnapping cases in Okunland compelled the Okun community and its socio-cultural group to call on the government for swift action.<sup>2</sup> Thus, government at all levels, community leaders, and the people have made frantic efforts to combat kidnapping, however, these efforts appeared not to have yielded the desired results of keeping the marauders off in Okunland.

---

<sup>1</sup>Report of Global Terrorism Index 2015-2020, US IEP

<sup>2</sup>Boluwaji Obahopo "Kabba community cries out over incessant kidnap attacks" *Vanguard*. 25th December, 2015. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/12/kabba-community-cries-out-over-incessant-kidnap-attacks2>. See also "Buhari, please save souls on Kabba-Okene, Lokoja Roads." - *The Nation*. 9th August, 2015. <https://thenationonlineng.net/buhari-please-save-souls-on-kabba-okene-lokoja-roads/>

Against this background, the paper examines the ecological cum sociological drivers of armed gang kidnapping with emphasis on socio-economic implications in Okunland. It adopts both primary and secondary sources of data using qualitative and descriptive methods of analysis. Therefore, the paper is divided into ten (10) sections. Sections one and two introduce the study and conceptualize kidnapping respectively, while section three is on the theoretical framework underpinning kidnapping in Nigeria, and section four provides a geographical description cum strategic position of Okunland. Section five explores a synopsis of kidnapping in Nigeria, section six sheds light on germane issues of kidnapping in Okunland, while section seven examines the efforts of the government and Okun communities at combating the menace, section eight discusses variegated issues surrounding the anti-kidnapping operations, section nine assesses the socio-economic implication, while section ten concludes the work.

### Conceptualisation of 'Kidnapping'

The conceptualisation of kidnapping is central to understanding within the context of its usage in this paper. In the modern day of security challenges, defining kidnapping is quite daunting and challenging because the phenomenon differs from area to area, and the motives behind it vary. Okoye, Joe-Akunne, and Chine in a study titled "Rational Choice Theory of Crime: Punishment Implications for Kidnapping in Nigeria"<sup>3</sup> posits that kidnapping is difficult to define and could only be attempted in relation to a country's legal and moral perspectives as well as the availability of various forms of kidnapping such as hostage-taking and hijacking. Walsh and Adrian<sup>4</sup> see kidnapping from the perspective of the forceful seizure of a person to another country for instinctive servitude or the impressment of males into military or naval service by force or fraud. Robertson<sup>5</sup> sees kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confining, abducting, or carrying away persons by force or fraud often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime. In support of Robertson, Asuquo<sup>6</sup> defines kidnapping as an act of forceful confiscation, taking away, and illegal confinement of a person against his/her will. An essential feature of this type of kidnapping is that it is motivated by political or economic reasons and the victim suffers both physical and psychological abuse. Abraham cited in Ene<sup>7</sup> describes kidnapping as an act of capturing, taking away, and keeping people in custody either through force or deceit. Also, Samaha cited in Ugwuoke<sup>8</sup> defines kidnapping as taking and

---

<sup>3</sup>C.A.F. Okoye, C.O. Joe-Akunne and B.C. Chine "Rational Choice Theory of Crime:

Punishment Implications for Kidnapping in Nigeria" *Practicum Psychologia*. 6. 43-52

<sup>4</sup>D. Walsh and P. Adrian. *A Dictionary of Criminology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1983

<sup>5</sup>C. Robertson. "Kidnapping as Terrorist Tactic" in B.M Jenkins (ED) *Terrorism and Personal protection*. Stoneham, M.A: Butterworth Publishers. 1968. 8-22

<sup>6</sup>M.E. Asuquo. The Upsurge of Kidnapping and Its Influence on Public Order in Akwa Ibom State. Unpublished Term Paper, Department of Sociology/Anthropology University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State- Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup>W.R. Ene. Kidnapping and the Nigerian Society; A Sociological Insight. *International Journal of Development and Management Review* (INJODEMAR). 2018. 13 (1), 161-172

<sup>8</sup> C.U. Ugwuoke. (2011). Nigeria and the Menace of Kidnapping: The Way Forward. *The Nigerian Journal of Research and Production* 18 (2) 1-14

carrying away another person with the intent to deprive that person of personal liberty. In this case, either the perpetrator is aggrieved or has an intent of robbery like in the case of ransom collection. Nwaorah<sup>9</sup> describes kidnapping as a deliberate deed carried out by aggrieved persons with the motive of arresting and detaining people who are valued and could be salvaged by those who care for them. In most cases, victims are often freed upon payment of ransom.

Similarly, Ogabido<sup>10</sup> aligns with the position of Nwaorah when he describes kidnapping to mean abduction, capturing, carrying- off, removing, or stealing away a person(s). Dode<sup>11</sup> in his view sees kidnapping as a process of vehemently capturing a person or group of persons believed to be the reasons or causes behind the injustice agonized by another group. This definition can be applied to the initial cases of kidnappings in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where there was a perceived socio-economic injustice. Siegel<sup>12</sup> criminalizes kidnapping as a serious crime because the key part of it is that, the victim's fundamental rights particularly freedom of movement are violated. Alexander and Klien<sup>13</sup> see it as a popular crime against the law and an annoying action against the victims.

Given the plethora of studies on kidnapping, it is a crime perpetuated by either an individual or group of persons in order to achieve certain purposes. Kidnapping could either be motivated by economic or political purposes which include ransom collection, ritualism, and retribution, among others. Whichever and for whatever purposes kidnapping is organised, it is a crime against humanity. In Okunland, under the period of study, kidnapping is principally perpetuated and motivated by ritualism and ransom collection. Therefore, in this study, kidnapping is defined to mean the act of seizing or illegally taking someone away and keeping him/her as a prisoner to receive a ransom. It is the act of abduction of an individual against his or her will, usually in furtherance of other criminal intentions such as ransom collection and ritualism.

### Theoretical Framework Underpinning Kidnapping in Nigeria

The prevalence of crime particularly kidnapping in Nigeria necessitated the adoption of the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) to explain the spate of abduction in the country. Daniel Bell (1919-2011) influenced the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) when he attempted to explain the instrumental crux of organized crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing power. Okoli & Orinya while citing Mallory summarises the rudimentary assumptions of QLT as follows:

---

<sup>9</sup>NwagamaNwaorah. "Are Kidnappers Worst Criminals"? *Vanguard*. 29th March, 2009. p.1

<sup>10</sup>Gabriel O. Ogabido. "Kidnapping: New Brand of Terrorism". *Saturday Sun*. 31st, October, 2009. p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>R. O. Dode. Incidents of Hostage Taking and the Niger Delta Crisis in Nigeria. *South-South Journal of Culture and Development*. 2017. 9 (1), 162-179.

<sup>12</sup>L.J. Siegel. *Criminology* (2nd Ed.). New York, U.S.A: West Publishing Company. 2002. 82-106.

<sup>13</sup>D. Alexander and S. Klien. Kidnapping and Hostage-taking: A Review of Effects, Coping and Resilience. *Journal of Royal Society of Medicine*. 2009. 102 (1)16-20. Doi:10.1258/jrsm.2008.080347

- i. Organized crime is an instrumental behaviour it is a means to an end;
- ii. It is an instrument of social climbing and/or socioeconomic advancement and;
- iii. It is a means to accumulate wealth and build power.<sup>14</sup>

The theory further assumes that organized crime flourishes when the government is incapacitated to dictate, direct, control, sanction, and deter crime. The above situation describes Nigeria's situation in the last two decades. The ineffectual government has created a situation that fuels impunity, while corruption is prevalent, and the possibility of legitimate living is thin. Citizen's hope to live a prosperous life is dim. Under these circumstances, the probability of indulging in crime is high because the government is weak in deterring criminals. Many people indulge in criminal activities because the benefits of committing a crime surpass the costs and/or risks. Okoli & Orinya<sup>15</sup> conclude that the government's weakness would provide ample opportunity and motivation for criminal impunity and franchise. It is on this basis that kidnapping and other forms of criminalities exist with high intensity in Nigeria.

#### **The Geography and Strategic Position of Okunland**

Geographically, Okunland is located within longitude 5° 30' to 7°15' East and latitude 7°15' to 3°45'.<sup>16</sup> The people occupy the lower Niger-Benue confluence area alongside the Kakanda and Southern Nupe people. Okunland is bordered by the Niger River northward, Kwara Westward, Ekiti, Ondo, and Eberaland in its southward, while Lokoja is in its eastern border. Given the above, one can argue that Okunland is a gateway between the South-West and North-Central, as there exist many roads that link the region with the neighbouring States of Kwara, Ekiti, and Ondo, and the towns of Okene and Lokoja. Okunland is situated in the semi-forest and semi-guinea (open grassland) savannah zones. This makes agriculture, particularly farming, to be the dominant occupation among the people. Both food and cash crops are widely grown beyond the subsistence level. For instance, people grow food crops like yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize, sorghum, potato, pepper, tomato, okra, etc. There are also cash crops production like oil palm, cotton, tobacco, castor seed, and cashew nuts. In fact, in recent times, cashew nut has become the dominant cash crop in Okunland, produced in large quantities because of its commercial value.

In addition to farming, trading, and indigenous craftwork are among the leading occupations in Okunland. Produce from farms and indigenous crafts is readily available in the various periodic and daily markets. These markets attract significant sellers and buyers not only within Okunland but also from Okene, Lokoja, and the States of Kwara, Ekiti, and Ondo.

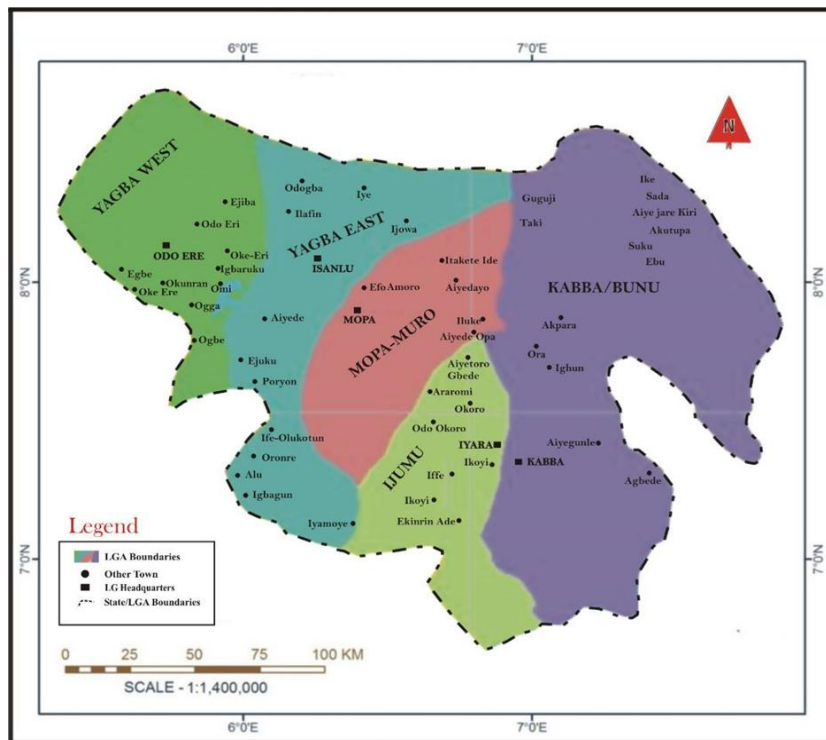
---

<sup>14</sup>A. C. Okoli and S. Orinya. Oil Pipeline Vandalism and Nigeria's National Security. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*. 2013. XIII, 67-75

<sup>15</sup>A. C. Okoli and S. Orinya. Oil Pipeline Vandalism and Nigeria's National Security. *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*. 2013. XIII, 67-75

<sup>16</sup>Bakinde, O.C (2013). Oral Narration on the Origin and Settlement Patterns of the Okun-People of Central Nigeria *Journal of Tourism and Heritage Studies* 2(2) 53-63

Figure 1: Map of Okun land



Source: GIS Lab Department of Geography and Planning KSU

Another vital aspect of the economy in Okunland is transportation. It is a strategic sector of the economy that helps to facilitate the movement of people and services from one place to another. The strategic location of Okunland and the road network need to be emphasized as one of the factors oiling the transportation sector. A chieftain and one-time Chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) Egbe Branch contends that transportation is a lucrative business and common among the people.<sup>17</sup> This transportation involves the use of vehicles buses, cars as well as motorcycles popularly called 'Okada'. The high number of commercial transport operators in Okunland is unarguably a testimony to the fact that it is a lucrative business. Transport vehicles convey commuters and goods to major cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, Kaduna, Kano, Onitsha, Abuja, etc. The popularity of the transportation business in Okunland made the transporters have trade unions such as the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and the National Union of Okada Riders (NUOR) in the major towns of Okunland. Due to the strategic location of Okunland, several of the vehicles and commuters from

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Chief. A. Balogun, one-time Chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) Egbe Branch at Egbe on 21st March, 2023

the Southwestern States going to the Northern cities like Lokoja, Abuja, Kaduna, Jos, etc have no alternative route other than going through Okunland.

From the foregoing, farming, trading, and transportation are vital occupations that reinforce one another in the economy of Okunland. This confirms the position of Ekundare when he argues that all the sectors of the economy are supportive of one another.<sup>18</sup> The foregoing accentuates the fact that the various sectors of the economy are intertwined as none of them could be said to be independent. These aspects of the economy are nonetheless significant to the people, particularly as sources of livelihood, employment, and income generation to meet other needs. However, the advent of armed gang kidnapping changed the narratives by disrupting the socio-economic life of Okunland as enjoyed for decades.

### Synopsis of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping has been a social menace in Nigeria from time immemorial, but the reasons for it differ in space and time. In the earliest times, individuals especially strangers were often kidnapped for ritual purposes, objects of slavery, or for the burial of prominent chiefs or warriors.<sup>19</sup> In the contemporary period, kidnapping for slavery and the burial of prominent chiefs or warriors seems to have greatly diminished, while the purposes for ritual and ransom collection are on the increase. Oyewole contends that kidnapping is an age long practice principally motivated by ritual sacrifice to a religious deity or spirit, a desire for power by humans in a bid to achieve fame, and a love for materialism.<sup>20</sup> This assertion was reinforced by Osuamah and Aghedo when they posit that the new trend in modern kidnapping is typically motivated by ritual sacrifice and commercial or political ventures.<sup>21</sup> This is because the cherished societal values have given-in to the mentality of get-rich-quick syndrome. Ritual killings in Nigeria became a major concern for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) when its 2020 annual report revealed high incidences of kidnapping for ritualism motivated by mounting desperation for wealth and security amid the creeping collapse of law and order.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, several cases of missing persons abound, of which some were never found, and many of those found were not alive as bodies are abandoned on roadsides, bush pathways, or within gutters, garbled, and their essential organs (head, genitals, breasts, eyes, intestine, womb, arms, and legs) dismembered. In many instances,

---

<sup>18</sup>R.O. Ekundare. *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960*. Africana Publishing Company. 1973. 34

<sup>19</sup>C.U. Ugwuoke. Nigeria and the Menace of Kidnapping: The Way Forward. *The Nigerian Journal of Research and Production*. 2011.18 (2) 1-14

<sup>20</sup>S. Oyewole. Kidnapping for Rituals: Articles of Faith and Insecurity in Nigeria. *Africology: The Journal of Pan-African Studies*. 2016. 9 (9), 35-52

<sup>21</sup>O. Osumah, & I. Aghedo. Who wants to be a millionaire? Nigerian Youths and the commodification of Kidnapping, *Review of African Political Economy*. 2011. 38 (128) 277-287. DOI: 10.1080/03056244.2011.582769

<sup>22</sup>Council on Foreign Relations. *Ritual Killings in Nigeria, Reflect Mounting Desperation for Wealth and Security Amid Creeping Collapse of Law and Order*. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/ritual-killings-in-nigeria-reflect-mounting-desparation-wealth-and-security-amid-creeping>

those found alive may go insane, die become destitute, deformed, or become a mobile corpse<sup>23</sup>

Modern kidnapping is flooded with a plethora of literature that traced the trend to the Niger Delta region in 2003. A few examples of such studies include the works of Turner, titled 'Kidnapping and Politics'<sup>24</sup> Akpan, "Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Exploratory Study"<sup>25</sup> and Aghedo "Sowing Peace, Reaping Violence: Understanding the Resurgence of Kidnapping in Post-Amnesty Niger Delta, Nigeria"<sup>26</sup> The above literature provided deep insights into the kidnapping and the operations of the militant groups in the Niger-Delta. The militant groups began with the abduction of expatriates and later indigenous oil workers as a way of drawing government attention to their demands, but victims were released upon payment of ransom. This ugly incident continued in the region until 2009 when President Umar Musa Yar'adua's administration signed an armistice with the militant groups and relative peace returned to the region, though kidnapping did not stop completely.<sup>27</sup> Thereafter, kidnapping spread speedily like wildfire to other parts of the country. Since 2014 for instance, the *Boko Haram* insurgent group, bandits, and other terrorist groups have adopted kidnapping for ransom as a means of raising funds to finance terrorism and other forms of criminalities. Their attention has been majorly on commuters, and school children and targeted rich people in the society. For instance, between 2014 and 2021, the terrorist groups abducted over 2000 school children mostly in the States of Borno, Yobe, Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, and Kebbi. Because of the economic gains, kidnapping has become a lucrative business, hence the marauders or armed groups have dispersed to every part of the country, taking refuge in the ungoverned space (forests) where they plan and hatch their kidnapping activities.

#### **Germane Issues in Armed Gang Kidnapping: Okunland in Focus**

Nigeria was enmeshed in an avalanche of security challenges in the first decade of the twenty-first century, these include ethno-religious conflict, militancy, insurgency, kidnapping, and political violence. Despite the huge security challenges in the country, Okunland was not insulated but was relatively peaceful. Kidnapping for ransom was the major security threat that first occurred on the Lokoja- Obajana-Kabba road in the early part of the 2000s before spreading to another part of Okunland.

<sup>23</sup> B. Gbinije "Politicians, voodoo and power." *Vanguard*. 21st December 2014.

<sup>24</sup> M. Turner. Kidnapping and Politics. *International Journal of Social Sociology of Law*. 1998. 26, 145-160

<sup>25</sup> N. Akpan. Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Exploratory Study. *Kamla-Raj Journal of the Social Sciences*. 2011. 24 (1) 33-42

<sup>26</sup> I. Aghedo. Sowing Peace, Reaping Violence: Understanding the Resurgence of Kidnapping in Post-Amnesty Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Sage Journals*. 2015. 7 (2) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0975087815580729>

<sup>27</sup> C.O. Bassej. Oil and Conflict in the Niger Delta: A Reflection on the Politics of State Response to Armed Militancy in Nigeria". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science*. 2012. 3 (2). 77-90.



The subject matter of kidnapping in Nigeria is over-flogged in a plethora of literature, while this paper intends not to duplicate scholars' submissions, generalise, or overburden the discourse, however, it is pertinent to provide deep insight into the distinct nature of the menace in Okunland. This is imperative because of the ecological and sociological peculiarity and other issues are critical in the discourse of kidnapping in Okunland. As noted earlier, the first incidence of kidnapping for ransom occurred along the Obajana-Kabba road in 2004.<sup>28</sup> Obajana-Kabba road had remained a den of robbers for long, it recorded high incidences of criminal activities such as armed robbery. The road was constructed between the 1960s and 1970s in the old days of Kwara State to link the State capital Ilorin with Lokoja through Kabba. After being used for decades, the road became decrepit, traffic on the road was reduced and at a point, it got abandoned by vehicles and commuters because it was no longer motorable. The brigands took advantage of the situation to occupy the road and persistently robbed a few vehicles plying the route. The construction of a multi-billion cement company at Obajana in 2003 revitalised the road back into a busy route linking the North-central to the Southwestern States. Thus, it became difficult to dislodge the brigands who had metamorphosed their activities from armed robbery into kidnapping for ransom.

Of very important factor in the understanding of brigand activities in Okunland are the geographical features of undulated hills, mountains, and caves in addition to thick forests which stretch for hundreds of kilometres linking to the neighbouring states of Ondo, Ekiti, and Kwara. For instance, the caves and the forests along Obajana-Kabba, Okene-Kabba, Ayere-Ikare, and Isanlu-Egbe-Ilorin roads became enclaves for kidnapers and other criminals who are either insiders or foreigners in Okunland. An essential feature of the forests is that most of them are not accessible by any means of transportation other than footpaths.<sup>29</sup> Those enclaves can be likened to what Onwuzuruigbo describes as ungoverned spaces which are harbouring criminal elements.<sup>30</sup> Several of the victims of kidnapping revealed that they were kept in these caves and forests for days or weeks while negotiation was ongoing for ransom collection.

It is also frightening that the Fulani ethnic group has been fingered in the majority of kidnapping cases in Okunland. Some of the victims confidently affirmed that their abductors were speaking a foreign language - Fulfulde (Fulani language) and they wondered how marauders were familiar with the geographical terrain in Okunland. The *Ardo* of Fulani explained that the Fulani had lived in many Okun communities for decades herding their animals and as such, have enjoyed cooperation from Okun people.<sup>31</sup> He cited a few instances of Farmer-Herder conflicts over farmlands, and such conflicts were resolved amicably with the intervention of traditional authorities and police. He concluded that perhaps the breed of Fulani perpetuating kidnapping in Okunland might have been those dislodged in the Northeast and Northwest of

---

<sup>28</sup> Oral Interview

<sup>29</sup> Oral Interview with Alhaji Suleiman Abdulkadiri, and Abiodun Oluwole at Isanlu. 28th February, 2023

<sup>30</sup> . Onwuzuruigbo. Enclaves of banditry: Ungoverned Forest spaces and cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria. *African Studies Review*. Cambridge University Press. 2020. 64(1), 168-191. doi:10.1017/asr.2020.46.

<sup>31</sup> Oral Interview with Ardo Abubakar Suleiman, at Kabba. 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2023

Nigeria by the military.<sup>32</sup>It is unarguable that the intensity of the Nigerian security agencies against the *Boko Haram* insurgent group in the North-East and bandits in the Northwest of Nigeria has displaced some of the marauders who now found the forests in Okunland and the lower Niger-Benue Confluence as nests. For instance, a large stretch of forests and the geographical proximity of Okunland with Niger and Kwara States are factors that could enhance the easy movement of the marauders.

Another issue surrounding kidnapping in Okunland is the availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALTs). In Okunland, AK-47 rifles, and locally made guns are possessed by unlicensed persons, particularly some politicians, Fulani Heeders, miscreants, and thugs. These firearms are a source of power and are freely used during elections and at the slightest opportunity to commit crimes such as kidnapping. The *Ardo* of Fulani in Okunland revealed that Herders bear arms while grazing in defence of themselves and their animals against attack. While he absolved the Fulani Herders of using the arms for criminality, but never ruled out the possibility of a few among the herders perpetuating such horrendous crime. At many fora, the traditional authorities, community associations, and security agencies are worried about the high numbers of arms in Okunland, this is because, on several occasions, such arms have been used to attack Police stations and rob banks in Okunland.

There is also an aspect of the conspiracy and complicity of the residents of Okunland who divulge vital information to the kidnappers. It is alleged that some unscrupulous elements in some Okun communities do provide valuable information to the kidnappers about the movement of people within the community. This usually happens as kidnappers trail their targets based on information provided by their informants. Several kidnappings in Okunland were alleged to have taken place in connivance with members of the community who are privy to the movement and status of the victims. In this case, the wealthy or persons of high status in the community are usually their targets. However, some of the accomplices within the community have been apprehended by the Vigilantes and the hunters and handed to the security agencies for prosecution.<sup>33</sup>

#### **Incidences of Kidnapping in Okunland**

There is no gainsaying that kidnapping in Okunland occurred mostly on the major routes and in rural communities. The Chairmen, NURTW of Kabba and Aiyetoro-Gbedde branches catalogued the routes where incidences of kidnapping are high to include Kabba - Obajana Road, Okene-Kabba Road, Kabba-Iyara-Iyamoye - Omuo-Ekiti Road, Kabba-Ayere-Ikare Road, Kabba-Aiyetoro-Gbedde road, Mopa-Amuro-Egbe Road, Egbe-Ilorin Road, Oke-Agi-Imela Road, Ogbom-Jegge Road,<sup>34</sup> etc. One of the drivers noted that at a point, many roads in Okunland such as Iyara-Aiyetoro-Gbedde, Kabba-Ayere, and Ogbom-Jege were not passable because they had become kidnapper's

---

<sup>32</sup>Oral Interview with Ardo Abubakar Suleiman, at Kabba. 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2023

<sup>33</sup> Oral Interview with HRH Akin Olugbemi, the Obamero of Gbeleko Kabba. 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023

<sup>34</sup>Interview with Mr.Ojo Tologbonshe and Bisi. Oloruntoba, Kabba. 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2023

dens.<sup>35</sup> Aside from the major routes where kidnapping occurs regularly, worship centres and residential areas have been attacked too. For instance, an Evangelical Church of Winning All (ECWA) church in Okedayo and a Poultry farm outside Egbeda communities in Kabba were once attacked.<sup>36</sup> There is a general belief that all categories of people are vulnerable to kidnapping in Okunland. This is premised on the grounds of the calibre of people kidnapped which include traditional rulers, clergy, public office holders, politicians, Corp members, security personnel, students, farmers, market women, etc have been victims at different times or the other in the area, but the unlucky ones among them lost their lives in the process.<sup>37</sup> Buttrressing the ordeal of the drivers, the Officials of the NURTW in Okunland detailed that the drivers and commuters have suffered a lot as victims of abduction since the menace commenced.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, several of the victims while recounting their ordeals stated that kidnapping is usually well-coordinated both in broad daylight and at night. The marauders station themselves on the road with their face-masked and fully armed. The kidnappers adopt different strategies such as ambush and surprise attacks, road blockades, shooting at vehicles on the motion, etc.<sup>39</sup> In a situation where the vehicle refused to stop, they shot at the driver or the tires to force the vehicle to stop in motion. The kidnappers engage in ruthlessness by trudging the victims into the forest by making them trekking for days covering a long distance in the forest and hilly areas until they get to their destination. For instance, several people kidnapped along the Kabba-Obajana-Lokoja road were made to trek to Okene, Ogori-Mangogo, and Ibillo in Edo State. Similarly, some victims kidnapped along the Kabba-Iyara-Iyamoye - Omuo-Ekiti road were taken to a forest in Ikare, Owo axis of Ondo State. In that process, many of the victims hardly survived the hazards of ruthlessness, which included trekking, inadequate food and water, fatigue, sleeping on a bare floor, the scourge of sun and rain, etc. Negotiation for ransom payment usually takes several days, because ransom is demanded in Millions of Naira. In a situation where a ransom is not paid early, the victim is killed. There were many instances where such happened, but the search crew made up of the Vigilante or the Hunters picked the corpse either by the roadside or in the bush.

---

<sup>35</sup> Oral Interview with Mr. Olusegun. Olubiyo, at Egbeda-Kabba. 13th March, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Elesho "Gunmen in Multiple abductions in Kabba, Lokoja" PM News, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2021. <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2021/10/9/gunen-in-multiple-abductions-in-kabba-lokoja>

<sup>37</sup> Oral interview with HRH Adebisi Obademi, the Oba of Apaa Bunu who was kidnapped along Obajana -Lokoja Road. Hon Victor Adewale Omofaye, Kogi State Commissioner for Environment escaped kidnapped along Iyara-Iffe-Road. In September, 20121, ECWA Goodnews Church Okedayo was attacked during Sunday service, 3 persons were abducted, but Chief Julius Oshadumo died in their custody. Punch (2021 November 2021) Scores kidnapped as Kogi Commissioner escapes, sustains gunshot wounds. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/socres-kidnapped-as-kogi-commissioner-escapes-sustains-gunshot-wounds/amp/the>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mr. Ojo Tologbonshe and Bisi. Oloruntoba, Kabba. 12th April, 2023

<sup>39</sup> Oral Interview with Mr. Sundayjufu and Dele. Olowosaiye at Kabba 13th March, 2023

**Table 1.** Incidences of kidnapping in the major routes of Okunland between 2013 and 2022

S/No	Routes	No of Occurrence	Estimated NO of Victims
1	Obajana - Kabba Road	23	253
2	Kabba - Ayere - Ikare Road	6	46
3	Kabba -Iyara - Iyamoye Road	6	38
4	Okene - Kabba Road	14	53
5	Mopa - Amuro - Isanlu- Egbe	4	N/A
6	Oke-Agi - Imela Road	6	16
7	Ogbom - Jegge Road	7	34
8	Iyah - Gbedde -Akutupa Road	3	N/A
9	Egbe -Ilorin Road	6	12
10	Oko-Egbe Road	5	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>470</b>

**Source:** Information therein was obtained by the Researchers during the field trips in Okunland. (January - May, 2023)

According to Table, there were 470 victims in the 87 incidences of kidnapping on the major routes within Okunland between 2013 and 2022. This information was gathered by the researchers during the field trip and other records from the Divisional Police Headquarters in the five (5) local government areas of Okunland. This includes those that occurred on the road, farms, worship centres, and resident areas. The researchers noticed that kidnapping cases during the period of study were under-reported by either the police or the media. This is because some of the victims and their families claimed they were avoiding stigmatization. Therefore, cases not reported by either the media or the law enforcement agency are believed to be non-existence. Also, some victims claimed that there was no need to report the incident because they escaped by God's providence, while some were rescued by local vigilantes or hunters.

#### **Efforts at Combatting Kidnapping by Government and the Communities in Okunland**

The incessant kidnapping made some communities and the Okun Development Association (ODA) cry out for government intervention.<sup>40</sup>Therefore, the government at all levels and the community leaders in Okunland summoned the courage to combat the menace with the following concerted efforts. In the first place, the federal government deployed military and police personnel to the major routes for 'operation stop and search'. For example, findings from the field trips revealed that the Obajana-Kabba road which is a distance of about

<sup>40</sup>"Buhari, please save souls on Kabba-Okene, Lokoja Roads."- *The Nation*  
<https://thenationonlineng.net/buhari-please-save-souls-on-kabba-okene-lokoja-roads/>.  
Boluwaji Obahopo "Kabba community cries out over incessant kidnap attacks" *Vanguard*  
25th December, 2015.  
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/12/kabba-community-cries-out-over-incessant-kidnap-attacks-2>.

45kilometres, had about eight (8) military and police checking points. The Kabba-Okene road, a distance of less than 25kilometres has 6 police checkpoints and the Egbe-Isanlu-Mopa road, a distance of over 40 kilometres has above 10 police and military checkpoints. The Security Personnel confirmed that some of these checkpoints are permanent (24 hours a day) while some are temporarily mounted. In all, there are 9 permanent military checking points and 28 police stop and search points across Okunland. The Kogi State government made considerable efforts to complement the efforts of the security agents. Between 2013 and 2016, the Kogi State Government under Alhaji Idris Wada partnered with security agents with gadgets, and patrol vehicles. The Governor announced a five-million-naira reward for information on kidnappers.<sup>41</sup>

Upon assumption of office in 2016, Governor Yahaya Bello reiterated zero tolerance for kidnapping and other forms of criminalities. He emphatically made it clear that the State would not harbour criminals. In furtherance to this, the Security Adviser to Governor Yayaha Bello, Retd. Navy Commander Jerry Omodara listed the State government's efforts in a bid to overcome kidnapping and other security threats in the State. According to him as reported in the media, the State launched "Operation Total Freedom", a codename of a joint taskforce made up of the 545 troops of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Police, the Department of State Security, and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. The State distributed 10 trucks (Toyota Hilux) and 260motorcycles to the Joint Task Force for 24-hour patrol as well as modern logistics gadgets.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the Kogi State government built a 'forward operational Base' for the Nigerian Army at the cost of N204.6 million. This is for the central coordination of troops in response to any form of insecurity in the State. The State government also has it as a policy to demolish any known kidnappers' houses and property. In 2017/2018, properties of notorious kidnappers were demolished in Okene, Ihima, Adavi, and Lokoja, while an uncompleted building housing gangs of kidnappers in Kabba was razed down.<sup>43</sup> In a bid to fish out the kidnappers, the Kogi State government also has a whistle blowing policy on crimes with the sum of five hundred thousand (500,000: 00) naira to those who provide credible information to the security agencies. As part of security efforts on the road, Retd. Navy Commander Jerry Omodara revealed that the Kogi State government in conjunction with the local government area authorities embarked on bush clearance at roadsides in places known as blackspot for kidnappers.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> John Akubo "Wada announces N5 Million reward for information on kidnappers" – *Guardian*, 11th June, 2015.

Wada announces N5 million reward for information on kidnappers-

<sup>42</sup>Itodo Daniel Sule" Kogi Govt Distributes 260 Motorcycles, 10 Trucks to Vigilante" *Daily Trust*, 18th May, 2017.

<sup>43</sup>Itodo Daniel Sule "Kogi Demolishes 13 Houses Over Kidnappings, Robberies" 18th March, 2017

. <https://dailytrust.com/kogi-demolishes-13-houses-over-kidnappings-robberies/>

<sup>44</sup>Oral Interview with Comdr. Jerry. Omodara at Lokoja 11th February, 2023.

The State government also encouraged the formation of Vigilante groups for community policing. About seven hundred (700) vigilantes were recruited, trained, and posted across the five (5) local government areas of Okunland to complement the efforts of other security agents.<sup>45</sup> The State government also embarked on clearing bushes along the major roads to allow the road users to see clearly if there are security threats. Aside from the government, various communities in Okunland have made and still making frantic efforts to get rid of kidnapping in their domains. The traditional rulers meet periodically to discuss security matters in their domain and report if any, early warning to the government. Chief Mathew Obawakun noted that such periodic meetings take place at the palaces of First-Class Chiefs or regents which include Obaro of Kabba, Olujumu of Ijumu, Olubunu of Bunuland, Olu of Gbedde, Elegbe of Egbe, Agbana of Isanlu, Elulu of Mopa, among others.<sup>46</sup> At such meetings, security reports are extensively discussed, and collaborative efforts with the government and the security agencies.

The traditional rulers in collaboration with the government encouraged the Vigilante groups and the Hunter Associations to complement the efforts of the conventional security agents particularly in road protection.<sup>47</sup> This is common in the rural areas of Yagba East and Yagba West, Mopa-Amuro and Ijumu local governments. The Hunter Association also helped in combing the forests whenever there was a kidnapping case. In several instances, they have helped in rescuing victims from kidnappers' hideouts in Ijumu, West and East local government areas. The Politicians as members of the community particularly the elected representatives both at the federal, state, and local levels in Okunland are not left out in security efforts. They also donate vehicles and security gadgets to the police and the vigilantes for effective community policing.<sup>48</sup>

There is no gainsaying that collaboration between the government and the community on kidnapping in Okunland has yielded positive results. These efforts have relatively returned normalcy on the roads. For example, the Security agents and the NURTW officials in, the Kabba branch noted that incidences of kidnapping have reduced drastically on the major roads hitherto abandoned by drivers and commuters. The State government on different occasions has intimated to the public that the marauders have been dislodged while the cache of arms is also recovered.<sup>49</sup> This feat was achieved through collaborative efforts and intelligent gathering from the various community leaders and their subjects who reported suspicious movements to the security agencies, hence this helped the government to arrest suspected kidnappers in their various hideouts. Also, the Vigilante groups and the Hunter Association have assisted in community policing by rescuing many kidnapping victims in Okunland.

---

<sup>45</sup> Oral Interview with Comdr. Jerry. Omodara at Lokoja 11th February, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Oral Interview with Chief Mathew Obawakun at Kabba. 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2023

<sup>47</sup> Oral Interview with HRH Sunday. Obaromi at his palace Kakun. 15th March, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Oral Interview with Hon. Sunday Omotolu at Kabba. 5th April, 2023

<sup>49</sup> "Police arrest Kidnap syndicate Terrorizing Kabba-Okene Area in Kogi" - *Daily Assets*, 17th June, 2021 <https://dailyassets.ng/police-arrest-kidnap-syndicate-terrorizing-kabba-okene-area-in-kogi/>

### Challenges of Anti-Kidnapping Operations in Okunland

Despite the concerted efforts of government at all levels and the community in curbing the menace in Okunland, there are many challenges confronting anti-kidnapping operations. In the first place, there is the challenge of inadequate numbers of armed security personnel deployed to Okunland for anti-kidnapping. An official document from the Office of the Security Adviser to the Governor revealed that the anti-kidnapping troops in Okunland have a maximum of 5 patrol units with less than one hundred and fifty (150) security personnel, which consists of the Army, the Police, and the NSCDC.<sup>50</sup> This figure is insignificant or inadequate for the efficient security system in Okunland which stretches for over a hundred kilometres in length and breadth. It was noted that in some communities, there was no presence of security personnel and when kidnapping occurs, the people resort to self-help while it takes the efforts of the community vigilantes and the hunters to dislodge the marauders. Secondly, there is the issue of inadequate logistics and outdated arms of the anti-kidnapping troops which are no match to that of the kidnappers. Some of the security personnel lamented inadequate logistics for communication and movement of troops during distress calls. Besides, the kidnappers possess modern and sophisticated weapons such as AK-47, AK-49, and RPG rifles which can discharge bullets for many rounds. Whereas, the security personnel lack adequate weapons to match that of the kidnappers.<sup>51</sup>

It was also noted that there is complicity among security personnel who sabotage the anti-kidnapping efforts. On several occasions, some unscrupulous elements among the security personnel in the Northwest and Northeast of Nigeria have been apprehended on offences ranging from supplying valuable information to selling arms to terrorist groups. Of course, security personnel collaborating with the marauders portend a danger in the fight against insecurity. While this may not have been established in Okunland, a noticeable malaise among the security personnel is that some are more interested in the extortion of drivers while on assignment on the road, hence vehicles are not properly checked, hence many illicit items pass checking points with little or no hindrance. This act is unprofessional of the security and it is a way of compromising security by making the fight against the marauders futile.

It is also noticed that there is a poor security network among the security agents. Intelligence gathering and information sharing are very key in tackling security problems in any society. However, in Okunland, the security agencies particularly the Police, the Army, and the NSCDC are somewhat working independently because of inter-agency rivalry or competition. The poor security network among the security agencies prevents the use of intelligence to fight crime in Nigeria. Many community leaders alleged that they have several times shared first-hand information on security threats to the Police, which are discarded or not handled with utmost priority. It is noted that some of the information is hardly shared with other security agents. Hence, the need for the two agencies to close ranks and strengthen their relationship within the ambit

---

<sup>50</sup>This is a classified document from the Office of the Security Adviser to the Governor.

<sup>51</sup> Oral Interview with Cpl. John Niamyap. Chari Maigumeri Barrack, Lokoja, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2023

of law and professionalism becomes imperative for national security. Notwithstanding government efforts in the anti-kidnapping campaigns, people have questioned the political will of the government in the exercise. This is premised on the fact that Nigeria has no adequate laws to prosecute kidnappers. Obarisiagbon and Aderinto harps on the inadequacies of anti-kidnapping law and this has continued to hinder the administration of criminal justice in Nigeria.<sup>52</sup> Trials of suspected kidnappers have been stalled because of the shortfalls of anti-kidnapping laws. Given the lapses, several of the suspected kidnappers arrested have either been freed or escaped from government detention facilities. The lacuna has given a leeway for the crime of kidnapping to thrive. Obarisiagbon and Aderinto have recommended the harmonization of the laws and empowerment of the judiciary as a way out.<sup>53</sup> From the foregoing, it is glaring that the security architecture in Nigeria is feeble, lacking the strengths to decimate the armed groups

### **Socio-Economic Implication of Kidnapping in Okunland**

There is no gainsaying that kidnapping has plagued the socio-economic development of Okunland in many areas. Kidnapping has affected the social-economic life of people as there is perpetual fear among the people. The fear has restricted the movement of people as people move with caution as they do not know who is likely to be the next victim. The restriction on movement has greatly affected sources of livelihood particularly the farmers, the traders, the drivers, and the commuters. Many of the farmers have been victims on their way to the farm, either they were kidnapped or killed. For instance, in October 2021, Chief Raphael Tolufashe a farmer in Kakun was killed while his daughter and Chief Obamakun Maji were kidnapped.<sup>54</sup> There were several other kidnapping cases on the roads involving drivers and commuters as reported in many daily newspapers.<sup>55</sup> The Chairmen of NURTW, Kabba, and Aiyetoro-Gbedde summed it up that no fewer than thirty (30) of their members have been victims in Okunland.<sup>56</sup>

There is psychological and emotional trauma for victims and their families. Okorie et al posit that some victims of kidnapping are killed, while many

---

<sup>52</sup>E. Obarisiagbon & A. Aderinto. Kidnapping and the challenges confronting the Administration of Criminal Justice in selected states of Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology & Justice Studies*. 2018. 11(1), 14-54

<sup>53</sup>E. Obarisiagbon & A. Aderinto. Kidnapping and the challenges confronting the Administration of Criminal Justice in selected states of Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology & Justice Studies*. 2018. 11(1), 14-54

<sup>54</sup>"Gunmen in Multiple abductions in Kabba, Lokoja". *PM News* 9th October, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Gunmen kid Ex-PDP Chairman's widow, 13 travellers in Kogi" - *Thisday*. 27th January, 2021. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/01/27/gunmen-kidnap-ex-pdp-chairman-s-widow-13-travellers-in-kogi/> See also, "Kidnappers on the loose in kogi communities with daily abduction, killings." - Sahara Reporters 17th July 2021. <https://saharareporters.com/2021/07/17/kidnappers-on-the-loose-in-kogi-communities-with-daily-abductions-killings> See also, "Bandits intercept passengers' bus, private car in kogi community, abduct all passengers" Sahara Reporters. 21st April, 2022 <https://saharareporters.com/2022/04/21/bandits-intercept-passenger-bus-private-car-kogi-community-abduct-all-passengers>

<sup>56</sup> Oral Interview with Mr. Tologbonshe, O and Chief Oloruntoba, B at Kabba. 12th April, 2023



sustained various degrees of injuries like lacerations, and bullet wounds.<sup>57</sup> Some of the female victims get raped by the kidnappers. Buttressing the above assertion, some of the victims while narrating their ordeal noted that they experienced life-threatening treatment which included torture, trekking for hours without food and water, sleeping in the bush under uncondusive weather, etc. Not all the victims survive such horrendous treatment. But those who survived the hazards lived with the trauma for life. In 2021 for example, Chief Julius Oshadumo who was kidnapped during the church service at Okedayo, died while in the custody of the abductors.<sup>58</sup> He could not withstand such horrendous treatment. The family members also suffer psychological trauma as they are kept in a worrisome state until the victim is released. Some women became widows as a result of the death of their husbands. The double jeopardy of the widows is that they have lost the breadwinners of the family and they continue to cater to the needs of the children.

Another impact of kidnapping is the indebtedness of the family who struggles to raise funds for the release of the victims. A substantial amount is paid as ransom. Some of the victims stated that ransom is paid in Millions of Naira depending on the bargaining power, which of course put the victim's family in a tight financial situation. Most of the ransom is usually borrowed with interest since the aim is to secure the freedom of the victims. To this end, this has made many people sell off their hard-earned properties such as cars, landed properties, etc to pay the loan. The economic loss as a result of kidnapping is not quantifiable. According to Inyang and Ubong, both individuals and the government lose huge economic value which is paid as ransom to kidnappers.<sup>59</sup> In Okunland, huge amounts running into Millions of Naira have been paid as ransom to kidnappers in the last decade. Even though the amount paid as ransom is hardly disclosed, there is no doubt that the huge sum of money spent as ransom payment affected the household economy, this could have contributed to the growth of the economy.

The fear of being kidnapped has made many farmers to abandon their farms. This means that few strong-hearted farmers go to farms. The fewer numbers of farmers who engage in farming are now producing far less, and by extension, prices of farm produce have gone up in the markets. Similarly, many commercial drivers have stopped plying some roads in Okunland. The adverse effects of kidnapping on farming and transportation aspects of the economy have continued to have serious implications in Okunland. Many of the farmers expressed their inability to assess their farms due to kidnapping, and by extension, it has led to food insecurity. The farm products which were hitherto in surplus at the various periodic markets are no longer available. The periodic markets which attracted traders from the neighbouring States of Ekiti, Ondo,

---

<sup>57</sup>B. Okorie, et'al. Socio-Economic Implication of Kidnapping and Hostage Taking in Southern Nigeria. *Journal of Law and Judicial System*. 2018.1 (1), 51-59

<sup>58</sup>"Gunmen in Multiple abductions in Kabba, Lokoja". *PM News* 9th October, 2021.

<sup>59</sup>J.D Inyang & E.A. Ubong. The Social Problem of Kidnapping and Its Implications on the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria: A Study of Uyo Metropolis.

*Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 2013 4 (6) 531-544. Published by MCSER-CEMAS-Sapienza University of Rome. E-ISSN 2039-2117 ISSN 2039-9340

and Kwara have shrunk in population since there is a shortage supply of farm produce in those markets.

Transportation is a key sector of the economy. Transportation is enhanced by the availability of good roads, efficient means of transportation, and security on the road. In this case, kidnapping posed a serious threat to economic development in Okunland. The security threats on the major roads have made many drivers and commuters from other states abandon some roads in Okunland, rather they prefer to follow other safer routes. Also, some businesses that are appendages to transportation like roadside trading and restaurants are affected. The big restaurant businesses along Kabba-Iyara Road, Kabba-Okene Road, and Okoro-Gbedde-Aiyetoro-Gbedde-Ilorin Road which were booming before are now forced to close down. All these show that kidnapping has a serious adverse effect on the socio-economic development of Okunland.

### **Conclusion**

The paper interrogated kidnapping and its socio-economic implications in Okunland. It traced the origin of kidnapping in the country to the militants in the Niger Delta region, a situation used to draw government attention to better share in the natural resources from their land. Thereafter, the problem of kidnapping persisted and it spread to other regions of the country. Generally, poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic inequality were identified as the causes of kidnapping. Aside from the above, incidences of kidnapping are worsened in Okunland, due to ungoverned space (forests) hosting the militant groups displaced in the Northwest and Northeast, proliferation of arms, and complicity of the security personnel, among others.

Kidnapping has affected Okunland in many areas. It has claimed the lives of many victims while many victims sustained varying degrees of injuries. The victims and their families also experienced psychological and emotional trauma due to the inhumane treatment suffered at the hands of the kidnapers. Kidnapping affected sources of livelihoods of the people, particularly farming, transportation business, and rural trading. The overall implication is that many people it increased poverty and hunger. Though the government at all levels and the community have made anti-kidnapping efforts in Okunland, weak security architecture and absence of political will on the part of the government have been the fundamental issues. As a matter of urgency, the government should take practical steps to address human security through the following:

- a) Entrenchment of good governance as it is the antidote to insecurity. Good governance is a suppository to curing pervasive poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, and proliferation of arms, among others.
- b) Border security is key to curtailing people and arm movement. Border personnel are required to conduct thorough checks to curtail illicit arms. The government should block all illegal border routes. Government as a matter of urgency should embark on a comprehensive policy to mop up illicit arms across the country.
- c) Enactment and implementation of a dynamic anti-kidnapping law in the criminal justice system. Adoption of stringent penalties particularly capital punishment in the form of extra-judicial killing for convicted kidnapers and

their collaborators. This will serve as a deterrent to those who may want to venture into kidnapping.

d) Sustenance and increase the intensity of military efforts. There is a need to increase the number of security personnel deployed to Okunland. The government should fast-track the creation of forest guards with the necessary gadgets not only to dislodge the criminal elements in the forests but also to monitor all human activities in forests.

e) Encouragement of community policing as it is very essential in the anti-kidnapping campaign. The Vigilante groups and the Hunters should be well remunerated. Community policing terrain of their immediate environment and as well provide vital intelligence gathering

f) Investment in modern technology (drones), which can be mounted at strategic positions for surveillance, particularly on the highways. The government should partner with the telecommunication service providers (MTN, Airtel, and Glo) to track the conversation and location of the kidnappers since the kidnappers used GSM to negotiate a ransom. The security agencies should be equipped with modern equipment while obsolete ones should be discarded;

g) The security network with the locals in Okunland should be strengthened. The government should encourage continuous collaboration between the security agencies and the various communities for intelligence gathering. Also, classified information supplied to the security agencies should be treated with urgency it's required.