

The Devastating Impact of Banditry and Kidnapping on Women and Children in North Western Nigeria**Felicia Itodo**

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Abstract

Insecurity remains one of the major challenges of Nigeria in achieving sustainable democracy. Significant amount of the national budget has been devoted to fighting insecurity since the return of democracy in 1999, unfortunately, there is a lot of grounds that is needed to be covered for Nigeria to achieve a secured country. Banditry, is one of the security challenges that reared up its ugly heads in the North-western part of Nigeria. Although, banditry is not a new phenomenon in the Nigerian landscape, the banditry in the North-Western part of Nigeria is on a deeper dimension. It has terminated the lives of innocent Nigerians. The paper argues that women and children are at the receiving end of the conflict that has engulfed the North-Western part of Nigeria. The paper relies on the use of primary and secondary sources to get at the root of the problem and to also assess the impact of banditry on women and children. Findings from the research reveal that the impact of banditry on women and children is in two folds. The first segment involve the use of women and children as perpetrators of violent crimes and the second segment are women and children who are victims of these violent crimes. The paper concludes that, to address the problem of banditry in North-Western Nigeria, the government needs to apply the doctrine of carrot and stick approach.

Keywords; Abduction, banditry, insecurity, Northwest, Women and Children**Introduction**

Criminality and violence pervades the Nigerian society in different guise. In the northern part of the country, the activities of terrorist groups, bandits, and farmer/herders crisis remain a hard nut to crack in addition to the ethno-religious conflicts that has erupted in different parts of the northern states of Nigeria. In the South West, South East and South-South there are myriads of security challenges which has posed serious threats to the corporate existence of the country.¹These security threats ranges from the activities of separatists groups in both the South East and South West areas of Nigeria. That of the South East is of grave concern to the security forces because of the violent approach of

¹ See, Epron, S. "Emerging security threats: Factors and implications for Nigeria socio-economic development 2015-2019." *Journal of Economics and Development Studies*, Vol 2, 2019, Bagu, C. and Smith, K. *Past is prologue: Criminality and reprisal attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt*, Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2017. Gaye, S.B. *Conflicts between farmers and herders against a backdrop of asymmetric threats in Mali and Burkina Faso*. Dakar: Friedrich EbertStiftung, 2018.



the agitators who have brought untold hardship to the region with their sit-at-home order and the sporadic attacks on innocent citizens.

Since the crack-down on Sunday Igboho, the leader of the secessionist group in the South-West of Nigeria, the agitation has died down. What is of serious concern in the South-West of Nigeria, in recent times, is the activities of internet fraudsters and ritualists, although this is not only peculiar to the region alone. In the South South area of Nigeria, the problem of militancy has not completely disappeared despite the amnesty programme granted to repentant militants. The security forces still battle with the problem of pipeline vandalism and oil theft which has affected the daily output of crude oil in the country. The Nigerian security forces are overwhelmed with the task of fighting issues related to insecurity in the country. Most of their problems stem from the logistical challenges, underfunding, corruption, inadequate manpower and sophisticated weapons to confront the enemies of the Nigerian state and poor welfare.

The problem of insecurity in Nigeria became intense in the Nigerian landscape with the proliferation of weapons into the country from neighboring African states. The fall of Col. Muammar Gaddafi regime contributed to the proliferation of large cache of weapons to the West African area. The activities of bandits blossomed during this period. The rise of banditry and kidnapping in the North Western Nigeria has had a devastating impact on the lives of women and children in the region. The constant threat of violence and abduction has created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, leaving these vulnerable groups caught in the crossfire of criminal activities. The paper will therefore, take cursory look at the background of banditry in the North-Western part of Nigeria, their activities and how it has affected the lives of women and children in the area.

Conceptual Issues

For the purpose of the study some concepts as used in the paper demands clarification. This is for the simple reason of giving the paper a direction and for easier understanding of the arguments of the paper. Some of the concepts to be clarified in the paper include; banditry, insecurity and the Northwestern area of Nigeria.

Banditry

Banditry is an age long criminal activity that has robbed many innocent citizens their belongings. More than most other social phenomena, the characterization of banditry depends upon how it is approached. Banditry can be seen as a legal category, a social category, and as a series of powerful stories and myths. Its meaning has changed across time and across disciplines. As a legal category, banditry is a pernicious form of crime that subverts the state's monopoly of legitimate violence.² From the perspective of the modern nation-state, bandits (or brigands, a term more popular in the nineteenth century) are criminals who resist the civilizing power of the state through violence, brutality, extortion,

² Hobsbawm, E. *Bandits*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981, 19

theft, and protection rackets. Bandits are seen as beyond the pale of "civilized society," a symptom of the low level of development of the countryside, a problem impeding progress and thus meriting swift, equally brutal, suppression by the army or police, without much regard to the constitutional human rights the modern state claims to protect. Most of the historical sources on bandits are the words of army or police officers charged with ridding the countryside of such "sores" or "plagues" and are thus highly partial. From the perspective of the "bandit" himself, the situation may look different. To him, an escape to the mountains may be the only way of avoiding an unjust state summons or pursuing a private revenge. Other sources, such as ballads, popular accounts, and oral history often bypassed by traditional historians engaged in depicting the history of the nation-state as the progress of civilization over barbarism concentrated on bandits' roles as popular heroes.

Two pioneer historians who emphasized the social aspects of banditry were Franco Molfese and Eric Hobsbawm. In his celebrated book, *Bandits*, Hobsbawm interpreted them as pre-political rebels. Social bandits were considered by their people as heroes, champions, and fighters for justice in a world that often denied them justice.³ Hobsbawm distinguished bandits from gangs drawn from the professional underworld and from communities for whom raiding was a normal way of life (such as the Bedouins). According to Hobsbawm, bandits were symptoms of major transformations in society, but they did not themselves transform it; they were activists, not ideologues, and after World War II they disappeared. Bandits were recruited from the most mobile segments of peasant society: young unmarried men, landless laborers, migrants, shepherds, ex-soldiers, and deserters. They took to the hills to right some personal wrong, becoming the noble robber. Although they were supported by the local community whose yearnings for a pre-political just world they embodied, they were usually betrayed. Bandit as used in the paper refers criminal elements in the society that have constitute a threat to the civilian population and women Nigeria.⁴

Security: Security is protection from, or resilience against, potential harm or other unwanted coercive caused by others, by restraining the freedom of others to act. Beneficiaries of security may be of persons and social groups, objects and institutions, ecosystems or any other entity or phenomenon vulnerable to unwanted change.⁵ Security mostly refers to protection from hostile forces, but it has a wide range of other senses: for example, as the absence of harm e.g. freedom from want; as the presence of an essential good e.g. food security; as resilience against potential damage or harm e.g. secure foundations; as secrecy e.g. a secure telephone line; as containment e.g. a secure room or cell; and as a state of mind e.g. emotional security. The term is also used to refer to acts and systems whose purpose may be to provide security.⁶

³ Hobsbawm, E. *Bandits*... 21

⁴ Paul S.C. Banditry, www.encyclopedia.com. Accessed 12 July, 2023

⁵ Barry, B. et al, "Rethinking Security: A Discussion Paper"
www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk.com Accessed 12 July, 2023

⁶ Barry, B. et al, "Rethinking Security: A Discussion Paper"
www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk.com Accessed 12 July, 2023

Insecurity

The word “insecurity” has myriads of connotations. It signifies danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety. Beland defines” insecurity as “the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection.” It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. This implies that insecurity is an absence of peace, order and security. Achumba, et al, defines insecurity from two perspectives.

Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune.⁷

These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur. People engaged in business activity, either directly or indirectly, to satisfy unlimited human wants. Therefore, business has become part and parcel of human existence in particular and global world in general. United Nations Development Programme defines Security as protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the daily activities, at homes, offices or communities etc. This implies that security borders on ensuring safety of lives and properties.

North Western Nigeria: often hyphenated to the **North-West** is the one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region of the country's northwest. It comprises seven states Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. Geographically, the zone is almost entirely within the tropical West Sudanian savanna eco region. Culturally, the majority of the zone falls within Hausaland—the indigenous cultural homeland of the Hausa people, a group which makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the northwestern population; however, there are sizable minorities of Fulani people and other groups, mainly on the zone's peripheries.⁸

Economically, the North West's urban areas—like the city of Kano—are large boosts to the Nigerian economy while most rural areas lag behind due to insecurity, low education rates, and government neglect. The region has a population of about 49 million people, around 23% of the total population of the country. Kano is the most populous city in the North West as well as the second most populous city in Nigeria and the twentieth most populous city in Africa.⁹

⁷ Achumba O.S. et al. “Security Challenges in Nigeria and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development* 4(2), 2013, 79-99

⁸ Quadri, O. Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria and the States Under Them” www.infomedia.com. Accessed July 20, 2023

⁹ Quadri, O. Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria and the States Under Them..

Background to Banditry in North Western Nigeria

Banditry as we have established earlier is not a new phenomenon in the Nigerian area. There are historical records that attested to the activities of bandits in the north western area of Nigeria before the coming of the Europeans. Bandits were known to have destabilized trade and commerce during the pre-colonial era. During the colonial period, there was a recorded case where bandits were said to have killed 210 traders and made away with goods worth a whopping sum of 165,000 pounds. These were traders who were on their way from Kano to one of the French territory via Zamfara where the incident happened.¹⁰ These attacks continued to worsen with persistent harassment and intimidation of traders who plied the area with their goods. This had a negative implication on the economy of the area. On the part of the British government they put in place security measures to curtail the negative effects of the activities of bandits seeing the negative effect it has on their economic interest in the region. They established police post on strategic routes with well-armed policemen.¹¹ As it was typical of the colonial government the policemen were expected to generate revenue from traders through the collection of tolls. This falls within the overall general economic interest of the British which was centered on exploitation. It is significant to note that banditry is not only common to the north-west region and Nigeria area but to the whole West African region. Therefore, we had cases of cross border crimes and the porous nature of our borders and Economic Community of West African States policy on free movement of people and goods encourages the infiltration of criminal elements into the region.¹²

The driving force for banditry in the region lies in the supposed economic benefit they derived from robbing people of their belongings and rustling cattle. They usually sold these cattle across the border to neighboring countries of Niger and Mali. In the post-colonial era, the activities bandits intensified. The porous nature of the borders between Nigerian and her neighboring countries encouraged the proliferation and influx of foreigners into the country who joined the bandits in their destructive activities. The aftermath of the Nigerian civil war too, was another factor that contributed to banditry in Nigeria. Many soldiers who fought in the war were demobilized without any economic activity to fall back to. Unfortunately, some of them took to criminality of which banditry was one of them.¹³ Odinkalu opined that in the southern part of Nigeria, there was the emergence of armed robbers who terrorized the urban areas. In response to this act of outlawry, the government introduced mandatory public execution by firing squad for armed robbers. Despite the stiff punishment, armed robbery did not reduce, rather, there was the emergence of more vicious bandits who terrorized the country. Some of them included the likes of Ishola Oyenusi and Anini who were publicly executed by the military junta.¹⁴

¹⁰ Rufai, M.A. "I am a Bandit,": A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry in Zamfara State" A Paper Presented at Usman Danfodio, University, Sokoto, 2021, 4

¹¹ Rufai, M.A. "I am a Bandit,": A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry..

¹² "Bandit Routes: How Nigeria's Porous Border with Niger Fuels Attacks in North-West" *Nation Newspaper*, 25 June, 2021

¹³ Odinkalu, C. "A Half Century of Banditry in Nigeria," *Vanguard Newspaper*, 3 July, 2023.

¹⁴ Odinkalu, C. "A Half Century of Banditry in Nigeria," *Vanguard Newspaper*, 3 July, 2023.

The present trend of banditry, in North-West is not any different from what was obtainable in the past. The only difference, is the level of sophistication in the use of arms and ammunition and the magnitude of brutality in the treatment of their victims. Scholars have traced the recent upsurge in banditry in the area to 2011.¹⁵ This is connected to the activities of politicians in the area. The popular position put forward in the emergence of bandits in the area was that, in the wake of the 2011 elections, politicians armed the youths to their teeth and gave them bikes to enable them win elections. After winning the elections they were abandoned. This infuriated the youths who took to cattle stealing, drug abuse, robbery and later transformed into armed gangs attacking villages on motorbikes.¹⁶ Rufai argued that the connection between the bandits and the politicians can be better understood from this perspective. It is on this premise that, bandits were treated with kid gloves and were even offered amnesty by politicians. The amnesty indeed did not achieve its aim, rather there was escalation in the conflict.¹⁷

Another thesis put forward for the upsurge of banditry in the area is the humiliation, exploitation and extortion the Fulani experienced from law enforcement agencies. They were made to pay exorbitant taxes of which they hardly get anything in return in terms of social amenities. The roads are terrible, most of the grazing routes have been erased as a result of urbanization. Also there is also no provision for veterinary facilities for their cattle nor are there hospitals to attend to their health challenges and schools for their children educational needs. Some of the Fulani, complained bitterly on how they were treated as second citizens in the country. One of them narrated sad experience where his cattle were rustled, he had alternative than to go into the forest and become a bandit.¹⁸

Another explanation for the upsurge in banditry activities in the North-West is the availability of minerals in the region. Zamfara states for example is known for its enormous endowment in gold. The unfortunate story on the continent of Africa over the years, is the painful fact that, mineral resources does not translate to prosperity and wealth. We have seen countless examples on the African continent, where endowed countries are riddled with crisis and strife as a result of the presence of minerals.¹⁹ The case of Zamfara State is not different from other parts of the country and Nigeria as a whole. The availability of gold has attracted illegal miners both local and foreigners. Illegal mining activity has contributed to the destabilisation of the region.²⁰ It is the popular belief of the generality of the people of the area that foreign miners supply weapons to the

¹⁵ See the works of Haidara M. 'Bad Leadership and its Impacts on Security Situation in Zamfara, Press Release by Zamfara State, Chapter of Northern Youths Assembly, 23rd August 2014, M. A. Rufai 'Vigilante Groups and Rural Banditry in Zamfara State: Excesses and Contradictions', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)* ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 – 7714

¹⁶ Haidara M. 'Bad Leadership and its Impacts on Security Situation in Zamfara...

¹⁷ Rufai, M.A. "I am a Bandit,": A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry..

¹⁸ "The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara" A British Broadcasting Corporation Documentary, 25 July, 2022.

¹⁹ Olanrewaju, F.O. et al "Natural Resources. Conflict and Security Challenges in Africa," *A Journal of International Affairs* 76(4), 2020

²⁰ Owasanoye, B. "How Illegal Mining Fuels Violent Crimes in Zamfara" *Premium Times*, November, 3, 2021

locals to engage their rivals thereby creating instability in the region. Helicopters have been sighted in some of the mining sites exchanging weapons for gold. Traditional rulers and politicians are equally not exempted in this vicious circle. They are also culprits in the crises. They are known to fuel crisis in the region so that their subjects could be displaced to pave way for mining activities.²¹ In recent times, some traditional rulers have been suspended for the role they play in the crises that has engulfed the region.²² There was an instance in Zamfara State, where a bandit kingpin who was on the radar of the Nigeria Police was turbaned as the Sarkin Fulani by the Emir of Yandoto of Tsafe Local Government Area.²³ This demonstrates the level involvement of the traditional rulers with the bandits.

Another disturbing factor in the rise of banditry in the area is the activity of non-state security operatives like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Ya-Banga and Yan sa-kai. These vigilante groups especially the Yan sa-kai are known for their notoriety in the handling of bandits. They raided villages and communities killing suspected bandits who are mostly Fulani. They engaged in extra-judicial killings of people perceived to be bandits in the public. This has drawn condemnation and public outcry from the public with regards to their brutal method of maiming and burning of alleged bandits.²⁴ This has contributed to fueling the crisis, some the bandits moved into the forest and ungoverned spaces where there is no presence of security forces to plan and execute their plans.

The activities of the bandits spanned across most of the states in the North-western states. Their impacts are more widely felt in five states out of the seven states, these states include; Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Sokoto States. The bandits are infamous for their daring attacks. They were emboldened by the inadequacies of the law enforcement agencies. They usually carried out their activities without any fear of being challenged by the security forces of the state especially in the ungoverned spaces where they operate. The rural areas formed part of their targets because of their vulnerability. They carried raids on such vulnerable communities, abducting young men, women and children for the purpose of ransom. They are cruel in their attacks on villages, they do not stop at abducting innocent civilians they go as far as burning down houses and murdering people. Thousands of people have lost their lives in the region as a result of this kind of senseless killings spread across the region. They also attacked passengers on the highway, killing and raping some of them. Some of the passengers who got lucky were abducted for ransom. So many cases of such attacks occurred on a regular bases in the heydays of their operation. One of the famous attacks in recent times was the attack on a train headed for Kaduna from Abuja. The bandits shot at the train killing some of its passengers, while making away with a handful of victims which they held hostage for over 90 days.²⁵

²¹ Rufai, M.A. "I am a Bandit,": A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry...

²² "Zamfara Suspends Four Traditional Rulers for Alleged Links to Bandits," *Premium Times Newspapers*, 26 November, 2018.

²³ Shibayan, D. Police: Bandit Kingpin Given Chieftancy Title in Zamfara on Wanted List," *The Cable News*, 19 July, 2022.

²⁴ Rufai, M.A. "I am a Bandit,": A Decade of Research on Armed Banditry..

²⁵ "Terrorists Hit Kaduna Train Station in Fresh Attack" *Channelstv.com* 29 March, 2022.

They also carried out attacks on school of learning. This is one of the lowest point of their heinous activities. Already the north is suffering from the problem of out of school children. To worsen the problem of out of school children attacks were carried out on schools to abduct young boys and girls from their schools. Some of the attacks included; the attack on Kankara Government Secondary School, Katsina State where innocent school boys were abducted, shortly after that, there was the abduction of Jangebe school girls in Zamfara State.²⁶ In Kaduna State, there were number of attacks on schools one of them was the abduction of students from school of forestry in Mando and also the attack on Nigerian Defence Academy where two officers were killed and some were abducted.²⁷ The attack on Nigerian Defence Academy was one of the most daring attacks in recent times, being that it is a military institution. In all of these attacks millions of naira were requested for the release of the victims. The numerous attacks drew sharp condemnation and criticism from both local and international community bearing in the number of lives lost. Many communities in the Northwest especially in the rural areas were deserted for the urban centres. This portends serious danger for Nigeria as a country being that, these rural areas are the agricultural hub of the country.

The Devastating Impact of Banditry on Women and Children

The activities of bandits have brought untold hardship to be people of North-west. The amount of destruction that has occurred in North-west cannot be quantified. Thousands of people have lost their lives in the hands of bandits and many others have been injured as result of the mayhem unleashed on innocent civilians.²⁸ Economic activities in the region witnessed a drastic decline. Many farmers have been driven from their farmlands while traders find it difficult to carry on with their trade. The worst hit in the crisis are women and children who are very vulnerable in such situations.

The impact of banditry on women and children can be viewed from two perspectives. The first perspective, is the use of women and children as perpetrators of violence. This one of the most devastating aspect of banditry. Women are recruited by bandits in their camps to engage in all manner of nefarious activities. Aside, cooking for the bandits they are used to run dangerous errands for them. Women by their nature, are vulnerable, the bandits most often than not use them as shield for the supply of ammunitions. They are less of a suspect at security checkpoints so they easily beat security measures to supply arms and ammunition to the bandits in the forest.²⁹When the governors of the north western states imposed restrictions on the use of motorcycles, the sale of petrol in jerry cans, ban on some market days and also the shutting of telecommunication in areas where the bandits were operational, women played a role in supplying fuel to the bandits. There were viral videos of

²⁶ "Over 1,000 Students Kidnapped in Northern Nigerian Schools Since December 2000 – Report" www.saharareporters.com.

²⁷ "Bandits attack NDA, kill two officers, abduct senior officer," *Premium Times* 24 August, 2021.

²⁸ Egbejule E. "Who are the 'bandits' terrorizing Nigeria's Wild Wild west?" www.aljazeera.com Accessed 20th June 2023.

²⁹ Oluwole O. Arms Trafficking/Women increasingly turn to bandit-linked arms trafficking in Nigeria. www.emactafrica.org. Accessed 12 July, 2023

how women concealed fuel for supply to the bandits in the forest.³⁰ Aside that, they also provide intelligence to the bandits in the forest. Sadly, too, women are also used in some of their operations. In the abductions of school children from Kankara and Jangebe in Katsina and Zamfara respectively, the victims attested to the fact that there were women amongst the people who spearheaded the attacks.³¹ The same also for some of the attacks in the villages. The women are being trained on the use of Ak-47 and the maintenance of weapons. Also, they are also used to guard some of the abductees.

The use of children by bandits is very disturbing. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) disclosed that over 8,000 Nigerian boys and girls have been recruited as child soldiers in the country since 2009 by various armed groups.³² The statistics portray the intensity of the problem at hand. Rufai bring to the fore the nature of the problem when he noted that;

The involvement of teenage boys, girls and even married women in the conflict complicated further. Some of the attacks and kidnappings were carried out by boys without the consent of their elders. Also, the young girls in the midst of these delinquent boys offered different services in the perpetration of the crime. Besides providing intelligence, they as well served as cooks and guards to the abductees either in the kidnapping den or ruga.³³

This x-rays the level of involvement of children by bandits. It is instructive to note this can be regarded as child abuse for the simple fact that they are under age children and this clearly contravenes international law.

The second perspective on the impact of banditry on women and children is from the position of victims, humiliation and dehumanization. Women and children being vulnerable are often victims of the conflicts. Many of them have lost their lives in the hands of the bandits. Countless stories exist of women and children being abducted from their homes and being killed even after the ransom that has been requested for has been paid. That is the extent of the inhumanity of man to man. Many of them suffer bodily injury during attacks on their communities. In Zaria, a pregnant woman was abducted from her house by bandits only for members of her family to find her corpse in bush path after some days.³⁴ Bandits have committed so many atrocities against women and children that it will take a long period of time to erase the memory of the pains they have caused. Many women and children have become widows and orphans and have displaced from their homes as a result of the activities of bandits. On the highways, bandits are known to attack passengers who are on transit killing some and abducting some. A sad incident happened on the highway in Sokoto State where they stopped a vehicle and set it ablaze with its passengers.³⁵ This caused so much outcry from the public. The devastating impact of banditry on

³⁰ Rejoice, I. "Police Arrest Women 'Supplying Fuel to Bandits' *Daily Trust*, 24 September, 2021

³¹ "The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara"...

³² "The menace of child soldiers" www.thisdaylive.com Accessed 25th July, 2023

³³ Ahmed Rufai M.A. "I am a Bandit,"...

³⁴ "Bandit Muder Pregnant Women in Zaria" *Daily Trust* 2 September 2021

³⁵ Paul, O. "Passenger burnt alive by bandits in Sokoto" 8 December, 2021

women and children is also reflected on the mental and psychological wellbeing of the victims and their family members. The story of the death of husbands and relatives has caused a lot of women depression and psychological trauma. A woman narrated a story of how her son was killed before her very eyes, this sent her into shock for many days.³⁶

Children are not also left out from the pains they feel when they lose their parents. This affects their mental health, the fact that they have lost their breadwinners is traumatizing. Another painful aspect of the devastating effect of banditry is the sexual abuse and exploitation they experience in the hands of the bandits. Sometimes the bandits raid villages for the purpose of sexual escapades as Rufai has demonstrated in his work on banditry. This causes a lot pains in the hearts of their victims. Women also suffer abuse from their parents who sometimes give out their female children to bandits for marriage in return for protection. This can be regarded as forced marriages as it is done against the consent of the bride. There are also cases of mothers who pimp their daughters to bandits for the purpose of meeting ends meets this also constitute another form of abuse on the girl child.

Also disturbing, are the wanton attacks on the schools in the North-West. Already Nigeria is grappling with the problem of out of school children. Over 10 million children are out of school in Nigeria, with worst case scenario in the northern part of Nigeria.³⁷ Attacks on schools in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto, discouraged parents from sending their wards to school for the fear of abduction. Some of the school children that were abducted from Kankara and Jangebe narrated their horrid experiences on the night they were attacked and their stay in captivity. They noted that they still have flashbacks of their sad experiences and will not want to return back school after they were freed. Many schools have shut down as a result of the activities of bandits in some of the states in Northwest.³⁸

Government Response

The Nigerian government, has not rested on its oars in combating banditry although citizens are of the view that their best is not good enough. The governors of the affected states have introduced a number of measures to curb this menace. Some of the governors have suspended traditional rulers whom they feel also have a hand as was the case in Zamfara state. There was a ban on illicit mining of gold in Zamfara. Despite the ban on gold illicit gold mining banditry did not reduce. In Kaduna State there was an executive order cutting of telecommunication to areas affected by banditry, there was also ban on the sale of fuel to motorcycles and those buying fuel in jerry cans. Much result was not achieved from this policy rather it brought untold hardship to citizens. The federal government has also attempted bombarding the camps of bandits. The problem of such aerial is the possibility of civilian casualties. In the words of the former Governor of Kaduna State; Nasir El-Rufai

³⁶ "The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara" A British Broadcasting Corporation Documentary, 25 July, 2022.

³⁷ "Nigeria's more than 10m out-of-school children" *Vanguard Newspaper* 31 January 2023.

³⁸ "The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara" A British Broadcasting Corporation Documentary, 25 July, 2022.

They kill people in Sokoto, you mobilise the army there, and chase them out, they move to Kebbi, from Kebbi if they are bombed, they move to Kaduna. What should be done is to bomb them from the air, ground, troops on the ground at the same time in all five, six states of the North West plus Niger. And this problem can be sorted out in my view, in weeks. I believe the levels of insecurity now are at a tipping point and something is got to give. My hope is that what will give is the end of this banditry once and for all. It is a problem.³⁹

Many analysts may not agree with this position because of the collateral damage it may pose and the civilian casualties. Bandits are known to use human beings as shield. Which makes it difficult for such wide range of bombardment. Some analysts have also argued that, the government should deploy Super Tucano it acquired to the region. Unfortunately, this will be against the agreement Nigeria entered with the US in the course of purchasing the Super Tucano which states that the Super Tucano cannot be used beyond the North-East.⁴⁰In all this, government response needs to be robust to bring an end to banditry in the region.

Conclusion

The problem of all forms of criminality and violence against the citizens of Nigeria is deeply rooted in the socio-economic conditions of the Nigerian state and the pervading injustices within the system. The inherent weaknesses of the law enforcement agencies have also contributed to be myriads of security challenges facing the country. The paper has made concerted effort to mirror the devastating effects of banditry on women and children in the North Western part of Nigeria especially in the states that are badly affected which include; Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi and Sokoto States. Women and children are the worst victims of the menacing effects of banditry. Many of them have gone through the psychological torture of losing their spouses in the hands of bandits and also physical abuse in the form of sexual based violence. The involvement of women and children by bandits was also brought clearly in the paper. The bandits capitalized on their vulnerability to exploit them in different forms. The activities of banditry has also brought untold hardship families who can no longer send their children to school for the fear of being abducted. Thereby contributing to the worsening case of out of school children. The paper therefore, suggest that, for this nightmare to be brought to end the government as matter of urgency must deploy a robust strategy that will cut across kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to resolving the conflict.

³⁹ "We know where they are" El-Rufai wants bandits camps bombed simultaneously" *Premium Times*, 31 March 2022

⁴⁰ "Why FG is yet to Deploy Tucano Jets in N/West" *Daily Trust Newspapers* 19 April, 2022.