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**Conceptual analysis of the implications of rural banditry and its implications in Nigeria: A study of the northern region**

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**Abstract**

*This paper conceptually analyses the phenomenon of rural banditry and its implications in Nigeria. The paper is descriptive and anchored on routine activity theory. The materials used for the paper were obtained from secondary sources, including published journal articles, textbooks, and other materials from internet sources relevant to the topic. The researcher posits that the current insecurity situation in many parts of Nigerian society manifesting in the spate of rural banditry, and other violent crimes has assumed a worrisome dimension across the country, with prominence in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Niger States, among others. The researcher identified poverty, unemployment and injustice among others, as the causes of increasing rural banditry in Nigerian society resulting to socio-economic decline, unwanted migration, loss of lives and valuable properties. The paper recommends among others the, need for governments in partnership with non-governmental organizations, well-to-do individuals, and community stake-holders to effectively eradicate the prevalence of poverty occasioned by unemployment and injustice which facilitates armed banditry and other violent activities in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Armed banditry, bandits, violence, economy, psychological trauma.

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**1. Introduction**

In every part of the world, security of citizens' lives and property is considered pivotal, and one of the key constitutional responsibilities of any government. The need for security is what necessitated the social contract between people and their state, where the former willingly surrender their liberties to what Thomas Hobbes in 1651 called "Leviathan" (Krahmann, 2003). The onus now rests on the state to ensure the security and survival of citizenry. Nigeria, however, has been witnessing a number of serious and increasing security challenges in recent times. These challenges including armed banditry which represents a horrible security issue in the North-Western part of Nigeria with its attendant implications on lives and property (Mmahi & Sunusi, 2019).

Reports reveal the flourishing of bandit groups with weaponry terrorizing settlements, farms, villages and the highways thereby kidnapping, killing people, and pillaging property, including cattle, especially in the rural areas (Olaniyan, 2018). It is evident that the problem of rural banditry has been leading to loss of lives and property, unwanted migration and other casualties, which in turn increase the number of destitute, orphans and widows in the rural areas of states like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Niger, Taraba, Benue and Kaduna.

The extent of banditry in contemporary Nigeria has become so pervasive that many Nigerians who regularly travel or live within North-Western States and other parts of the country have suffered its impacts. Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) noted that the pervasive banditry and its



associated threats to security of lives and property, which have enveloped the Northwest region of Nigeria, particularly, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Niger States, have become a worrisome national security issue of public concern. However, the issue of rural banditry is recently more rampant in Zamfara State. According to Rufa'i (2018), thousands of people have lost their lives and many properties worth billions of naira due to armed banditry virtually in all villages of Zamfara State. Rural banditry may take various forms in different places. It manifests in forms of waylaying victims on the highways and on transit points; storming and sacking of whole villages; stealing properties including hundreds of cattle; settling in villages and collecting taxes; and extortion on village routes (Shalangwa, 2013).

Meanwhile, several pull and push factors such as poverty, unemployment, marginalization, corruption, proliferation of arms and ammunitions and weak security system are responsible for rural banditry and the losses resulted thereof could range from monetary, material, valuables livestock resources and above all, human lives. It was reported that about 7,000 cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and traditional herders in Northern Nigeria between October, 2013 and March, 2014 (Bashir, 2014; Tauna, 2016). In addition, there were about 330 attacks made by armed bandits, and 1,460 deaths were recorded between January and July, 2019 (Abdullahi, 2019). In most cases, the bandits killed, maimed the people, and raped the females before dispossessing them of their cattle (Akowe & Kayode, 2014). As a matter of fact, the incidence and prevalence of banditry in Nigeria has raised a fundamental question about the government's ability to rule effectively (Okoli, 2015). In view of the above background, this paper, therefore, conceptually examines the phenomenon of rural banditry and analyses its implications

in Nigerian society with the aim of curtailing the trends of its menace.

## **2. Methodology**

In its attempt to discuss the problem of rural banditry and its implications in Nigeria, this paper uses a descriptive and analytical approach. The data used are secondary, obtained from published journal articles, organizational and institutional publications, newspapers and textbooks, and were subjected to critical analysis.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **Concept of Rural Banditry**

The concept of banditry has been variously defined by different scholars. For instance, Slatta (2004) sees banditry as the use of force or threat to take property by a group, usually men. It involves practically armed violence and criminality; raiding and attacking victims and their property including cattle by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organized groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining plunder or achieving some political goals (Shalangwa, 2013; Okoli, 2015; Egwu, 2016). One important point to deduce from the above definitions is that banditry involves the use of force, threat or violence to steal or dispossess people of their valuables, and sometimes kill them in the process. However, banditry is said to be rural when it is committed in rural areas by local criminals. In other words, rural banditry connotes the acts of raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth committed by individuals or groups in a rural or local setting.

In Nigeria, the issue of contemporary banditry started as a violent conflict between farmers and herders in 2011 before metamorphosing into cattle rustling, kidnapping, sexual violence and killings between 2017 and 2018. Most of the armed bandits have joined the gangs involving in



highway armed robbery, abduction and hostage taking in Nigeria. Some of the military actions taken against banditry in Nigeria include: Operation *Harbi Kunama*, Operation *Sharan Daji*, Operation 'Safe Heaven', Operation 'Thunder Strike', Operation 'Whirl Stroke', Operation 'Sahel Sanity', and Operation *Dirar Mikiya*. Despite the above militaristic approaches, the menace of armed banditry remained unabated in many parts of Nigerian society.

### **Changing Nature of Rural Banditry in Nigeria**

Rural banditry has been taking place in various forms and manifested in different nature. This simply means that the act of rural banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. According to Tauna (2016), bandits in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America were considered freedom fighters whose main objective was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonized over the colonizer. In contemporary Nigeria, however, the concept is now totally linked to various heinous criminal acts, such as cattle rustling, raping, kidnapping, sexual assault, arson and murder committed by groups of armed robbers. In other words, the most common features of banditry in Nigeria are maiming, killing and wanton destruction of properties, including cattle and other animals (Rufa'i, 2017). Reinforcing this view, Uche & Iwuamadi (2018) opined that rural banditry in Nigeria reflects in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape, brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims.

To some scholars, it was the clash between farmers and herdsmen that eventually metamorphosed to rural banditry that originally involved stealing and cattle rustling. In 2017, the clashes between nomadic herdsmen and local farmers led to

at least 549 deaths and displacement of thousands in 14 states (Ameh, 2018). The killings had continued unabated with the mass burial of over 70 native farmers that lost their lives through the attacks of herdsmen in Benue State in January, 2018. As such, the phenomenon of rural banditry in Nigeria has transformed "from crisis of nomadism to state crisis (Krahmann, 2003). In some Nigerian states, the act further changed to not only stealing and cattle rustling, but to also include arson, rape, murder and kidnapping of people for ransom. The changing nature of rural banditry also led to the emergence of new security threat. This is because the proceeds from bandits' activities are sometimes used in the procurement of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) for further operations, which led to a situation where some people along the border areas suddenly became 'gun-runners' at the expense of their communities' peace and security.

In a nutshell, rural banditry today takes the forms of waylaying victims on the highways and on transit points; storming and sacking of whole villages; stealing; settling in villages and collecting taxes; sexual violence; kidnapping; murder and reprisal attacks. By implication, the changing nature of banditry in contemporary Nigeria has led to a situation in which only a few Nigerians that travel or live within certain communities can claim not to have suffered its negative impacts. From the foregoing discussion, one can conclude that the problem of rural banditry in Nigeria has changed from simple robbery and cattle rustling to killings, rape, arson and general violence, thereby assuming a dangerous dimension affecting both rural areas and urban cities.

### **Causes of the Increasing Rural Banditry in Nigerian Society**

Like other security challenges, rural banditry in Nigeria has been attributed to many factors. In other words, there are



many causes of rural banditry in contemporary Nigerian society. In his research, Shalangwa (2013) found that banditry was caused by unemployment, influx of combatants from neighboring countries, and availability of arms. According to Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpan-Robaro (2013), Osumah (2013) and Bayode (2013), the issue of general insecurity in Nigeria is linked to the country's weak security system. This is evident in the rates of successful attacks by bandits on Nigerian communities and the manner in which criminal groups perpetrate their heinous acts. Other factors responsible for rural banditry and general insecurity in Nigeria revolve around poverty, illiteracy, corruption, boarder porosity, drug abuse, proliferation of arms and ammunitions, marginalization, injustice and economic stagnation (Bestman, 2007; Mustapha, 2019; Haruna, 2013; Umar, 2013; Atere & Alao, 2015; Egwu, 2016; Suleiman, 2019). However, Ameh (2018) specifically linked the issue of rural banditry to government negligence. To him, ungoverned places provide power vacuums, which are sometimes filled by religious extremists and criminal groups who have taken over the remote areas where the state presence is very less or totally non-existent. This simply signifies that rural banditry in Nigeria is a product of many factors, as the bandits engage in the act due to several reasons.

### **Implications of Rural Banditry in Nigeria**

In some Nigerian States like Zamfara, Katsina, Benue and Kaduna, many people have been forced into self-exile, because the security of their lives and properties is not guaranteed due to the activities of armed bandits in the areas. However, the following economic, physical, social and psychological consequences of rural banditry in Nigeria can only be estimated, given that the risks and agonies are currently going on in the country.

**Economic Implications:** According to Ogedebe & Jacob (2012), development of any society depends to a large extent on the degree of security of lives and property of its members. This may be why Mmahi & Sunusi (2019) opined that banditry constitutes a dire security challenge in Nigeria that results in grave threat to economic activities in the affected areas. This is true as one observes that the problem has caused a significant shortfall in production of food and cash crops in the affected areas. As a matter of consequence, there is a strong connection between the current food insecurity and prevalence of armed banditry in many parts of Nigerian society. Moreover, banditry reduces investment in the affected areas, as nobody will risk his/her life to invest in an area where he/she is not sure as to whether he/she will be alive to reap the fruits of his/her labour.

**Loss of Lives and Properties:** The problem of rural banditry in Nigeria has been leading to enormous human and material casualties, as several people have been killed and injured with their houses burnt to ashes. It was reported that there were about 330 attacks made by bandits and 1,460 deaths were recorded between January and July, 2019 (Abdullahi, 2019). Akowe & Kayode (2014) noted that the bandits sometimes killed and maimed the people and raped the women before dispossessing them of their properties. The increasing attacks of bandit groups have led to the destruction of lives and properties, displacement of people from their communities; and a growing numbers of widows; widowers and orphans, who now reside in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps (Okoli & Ochim, 2016; Mustapha, 2019). Furthermore, while more than 1,100 people were killed in 2018 in the six Nigerian states, over 2,200 were killed in 2019, and more than 1,600 fatalities recorded between January and June 2020



due to banditry (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

**Social and Health Implications:** The problem of rural banditry also leads to poverty and unemployment. This is to say that, apart from being an outcome of poverty and unemployment, banditry also causes ‘twin-sister’ social problems. According to the World Bank Report (2007), many of the poorest countries in the world are locked in a tragic, vicious cycle where poverty causes conflict and conflict causes poverty as well. Normally, when insecurity becomes persistent in a country, people who are living in the affected areas may leave their jobs and run for their lives and safety. This means that they will become unemployed with attendant consequence of poverty. For instance, countless people left their professional carriers and other jobs in states like Sokoto, Benue, Katsina and Zamfara due to the problem of banditry and migrated to various unaffected areas where they are now begging for food to eat and home to sleep. By implication, this situation can also breed other forms of crimes and social problems, such as theft, prostitution, homelessness, street begging, hunger, street gangs, armed robbery and drug selling. By September 2019, attacks by bandits had internally displaced over 160,000 people and produced more than 41,000 refugees (World Food Programme, 2019). Displacement numbers now stand at over 247,000 IDPs and some 60,000 refugees (Selim, 2020). Consequently, it has been reported that cases of theft, sexual and physical abuse, child abuse, prostitution, transmission of communicable diseases and even rape are very rampant in Nigerian IDPs camps. Reinforcing this, Musa (2015) argues that there is increasing cases of communicable diseases among the people who are displaced in Nigeria.

**Psychological Implications:** Violent and criminal activities of rural banditry lead to

psychological trauma. This is because violence experiences have the potential to result in some negative issues like aggression, traumatic disorder, anxiety, fear, nightmares, revenge seeking, depression and involvement in future criminal activities (Chinwokwu & Arop, 2014). As reported by Humanitarian Needs Overview (2014), an estimated number of 2.15 million Nigerians are facing physical and psychological trauma due to their negative experiences from insurgency and other violent crimes. As a matter of fact, regular loss of life, witnessing the death of love ones, watching one’s spouse being serially raped, bombing of one’s properties and other merciless activities of armed bandits are more than enough to cause post-traumatic disorders to their victims.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Although, there are many theories that could be used to explain the topic under study, however, this paper adopts Routine Activities Theory (RAT) as its theoretical framework of analysis. The RAT was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. According to Cohen & Felson (1979), for a crime of whatever form to occur, there must be at the same time and place a motivated offender and a suitable target without capable guardianship. By motivated offender, Cohen & Felson (1979) mean an individual who possesses both the “inclination” and the “ability” to successfully commit a criminal act. Suitable target refers to a subject or object which the offender wants to possess or attack. Capable guardian is a person or object that can prevent crime from occurring by disrupting the suitability of the target. According to RAT, therefore, crime is more likely to occur when the target is available and the capable guardian, who could deter the motivated offenders, is absent or not available.

With regard to the phenomenon of rural banditry, there is the convergence of the above listed elements that are needed for a



crime to occur. This is because the bandits are the motivated offenders whose motivations are mostly economic in nature. Rural residents, travelers, pastoralists, commuters and farmers constitute the suitable targets. Their suitability manifests in how they conduct their activities as some people travel during night time and some pastoralists rear their cattle in open fields. Absence of capable guardian is evident in the fact that most of the rural areas in Nigeria do not have police stations, military outposts or other security units that can timely disrupt criminal attacks. This situation makes it easy for bandits to attack and dispossess Nigerians of their valuables.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Following the conceptual analysis of rural banditry and its implications in Nigeria, one could infer that the issue of rural banditry is becoming worrisome due to high level of unemployment, corruption, weak security system, poverty, and porosity of Nigeria's borders, arms proliferations and marginalization of rural areas. The menace of banditry in Nigeria is now assuming a new dangerous dimension that threatens the peaceful co-existence of citizens occasioned by various human and material casualties. Thousands of Nigerians have been displaced and killed by bandits with their valuable properties stolen and their villages destroyed. Thus, the paper offers the following recommendations:

1. Governments in partnership with non-governmental organizations, well-to-do individuals, and community stake-holders should effectively eradicate the prevalence of poverty occasioned by unemployment and injustice which facilitate armed banditry and other violent activities in Nigerian society.
2. Federal Government of Nigeria should intensify its efforts to mobilize resources to fund disarmament and de-radicalization

programmes in order to curtail the problem of arms proliferation in the country.

3. There is need for the establishment of security formations in rural areas. This may ensure reliable and effective intelligence gathering and surveillance of "black spots" or "hotspot areas" to help law enforcement agents unveil the actual bandits, their locations, modus operandi and sources of weapons for effective intervention.

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