



THE ANATOMY OF ARMED BANDITRY AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The spate of violent armed attacks by armed bandits in northwest Nigeria has resulted in a serious humanitarian crisis in the region. This paper examines the current trend of armed banditry and assesses its impacts in exacerbating humanitarian crisis in the region. It also critically analyses the nature of state responses to the menace both in terms of military actions and amnesty programmes introduced especially by the government of the affected states in the region. Documentary research is adopted as its methodology. The paper discovers multiple factors that cause and perpetuate the problem including artisanal mining, perceived social injustice by pastoralists, criminal behaviours as motivated by material gains among others. It also discovers the magnitude of destruction and destabilisation caused by armed banditry and its humanitarian consequences in the region. The paper concludes that the magnitude of humanitarian crisis caused by armed banditry is enormous and it has also persisted, despite various peace measures and deal which seem to have had some successes, but could provide durable peace, and unless more armed groups are convinced to accept peace and lay down their arms, the possibility of ending the violence and achieving sustainable peace in the region, seems extremely difficult. Hence, the paper recommends an integrative Peace building approach that goes beyond mere amnesty deal, Poverty eradication project through vocational trainings, Forest reserve revival, and international civil society organisations should expand their presence and humanitarian activities in the northwest region.

Keywords: Bandits, Armed Banditry, Armed Violence, Humanitarian Crisis, Northwest region.

Introduction

The phenomenon of armed banditry especially in the rural areas of the northern part of Nigeria is not new in the political history of the country, however, in the contemporary time, banditry in forms of gangsterism, armed robbery, cattle rustling and kidnapping, is new and have assumed new dimension and transform into horrendous stage of monumental proportion resulting in a serious humanitarian crisis in the region. In the earliest time, banditry was organized in a rudimentary stage in which the dissident elements involved used to carry out a form of gangsterism against a selected target, and the mode of operations was narrow mainly motivated by financial or rather material gain or benefits for survival and or vengeance, settlement of scores between or among various rival bandit groups. However, in modern time, the trend transforms into a highly organized criminal activities, tactically guided and operated with goal of displacing and destroying the entire community in some cases, carrying out heinous atrocities of mass killings, mass looting, cattle rustling, arson, gang raping, mass abduction and kidnapping especially of vulnerable group particularly women and children.

In recent times, these attacks mainly pervade Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara states in northwestern part of Nigeria, thus, becoming more susceptible due to combination of factors, which include among others poorly managed resources, pastoralists/farmers conflict, illegal minings, rural poverty, connivance between local chiefs and bandits kingpins, poorly managed porous international borders,

inadequate presence of law enforcement and failure of security intelligence gathering (Ojewale and Sadiq, 2023).

International Crisis Group (2020, pi) reported that Nigeria's arid northwest is beset by violence between herders and farmers, which has been compounded by an explosion in criminal activities and infiltration by Jihadist groups into the region. The last decade has seen thousands of people killed and hundreds of thousand displaced, with many fleeing into Niger Republic. In addition, International Crisis Group (2021) noted that Nigeria's northwestern is sliding deeper into crisis, criminal gangs, some of which started out as ethnic militias or vigilantes, have proliferated in the region. And they are gaining strength, adding recruits, arming themselves more heavily and carryout far more audacious attacks on both civilians and military targets than ever before, and the economic and humanitarian costs are enormous. The picture of the trend of armed banditry is succinctly captured by Brenner (2021) when he observes that the population in northwest Nigeria are facing the ever increasing threat of banditry, a type of organized crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources. This has intensified security challenges in the Nigeria's northwestern region comprising of seven states: Kaduna; Kano; Katsina; Zamfara; Sokoto; Kebbi; and Jigawa).

In view of the spate of violent armed attacks by armed bandits in northwest Nigeria has resulted in a serious humanitarian crisis in the region. This paper examines the current trend of armed banditry and assesses its impacts in exacerbating humanitarian crisis in the region. It also critically analyses the nature of state responses to the menace both in terms of military actions and amnesty programmes introduced especially by the government of the affected states in the region. Documentary research is adopted as it's methodology.

Armed Banditry

Armed banditry is a criminal behaviour and actions deliberately perpetrated by group of individuals who might share certain ethnic, cultural or even sectional affiliation, motivated for material gains or vengeance against a perceived enemy.

According to Ojo (cited in Nextier.Policy Weekly, 2023, p2) Banditry is a metaphor for organized crime by clandestine, armed non-state actors who pursue economic objectives and other sectional interests by engaging in various forms of criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom, raiding/looting of communities, armed robbery, murder, rape and cattle-rustling, and other illicit economic activities from which they make illicit gain. In view of the sectional or rather ethnic interest, It is estimated that many of the armed bandits are of Fulani origin, as are many of the victims.(Campbell 2020).

AlJazeera.com (2022). Opined with particular reference to northwest Nigeria that the term bandits is a catchall for the criminal gangs masterminding frequent bouts of abduction, maiming, sexual violence and killings of citizens across the northern part of country. In a similar vein, Idayat (2021) opined that Bandits are heavily armed criminal gangs that have terrorized Nigeria's rural northwest, killing; kidnapping; forcing people from their homes; and taunting the authorities with their brazenness. Their mode of violence typically involves scores of gunmen on motorbikes sweeping into villages, shooting all the young men they can find on

the assumption they belong to local vigilantes, and then carting away livestock and everything else of value. In another submission, Osasona (2023, p736) described bandits as a loose collection of various criminal groups involved in kidnap for ransom, armed robbery, cattle rustling, rape and other sexual violence, and the illegal possession of firearms, pillage and attacks on traders, farmers and travellers particularly in Nigeria's northwest region (Ojewale, 2023).

To sum up, Rufai (2021,p24-25) in a more holistic manner described the mode of their operation engaging in range of criminal activities and perpetrate atrocities ranging from raping, cattle rustling, kidnapping, village raid, forced marriage, forced prostitution, gang rape, armed robbery, gender-based violence, forced displacement, forced labour, wilfully destruction of crops, mass killings, attacking security personnel and their vehicles and formations, military outpost and police stations.

In the light of the positions examined above armed banditry represents a form of complex criminal activities involving various forms of criminal elements individuals and groups, smaller and bigger, and manifest itself in a variety of forms ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, abduction, gangsterism, sexual violence, cattle rustling, driven by material gain, vengeance, or settlement of score against an intended targets.

Humanitarian Crisis

The global trend of humanitarian crisis especially in recent time has been succinctly captured by OXFAM International (2023). when they lamented that around the world, people are being killed, injured and forced from their homes by terrifying conflict and oppression. More than 125 million people around the world have had their lives devastated by conflict or disaster, as a result countless families are being pushed deeper into poverty everyday. In a similar vein, Anderson and Gerber (p7) observe that today's violent conflict often takes place in cities and villages, with civilian population as the preferred targets, the propagation of terror as the premeditated tactics, and the physical elimination or mass displacement of certain categories of populations as the overarching strategy. These conflict is characterizes by breach of human rights and humanitarian law, including mutilation, rape, forced displacement, denial of the rights to food and medicines, diversion of aid, and attacks on medical personnel, and hospitals are no longer inevitable by-products of war.

There is no single universal definition of the term humanitarian crisis, often it is used interchangeably with humanitarian emergency. In it's simplest form it refers to any disaster whether natural or man-made, where international support is required to meet the basic needs of the affected population, including food, water, shelter, protection and other life-sustaining measures. (Anderson and Gerber, p2). In his own opinion Bloxham (2022) refers to humanitarian crisis as "an event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, and security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area" These critical threats include: extensive violence and loss of life; displacement of populations; widespread damage to societies and economies; the need for large-scale humanitarian assistance; the hindrance or prevention of humanitarian by political and or military constraints; and significant security risks for humanitarian relief workers in some areas.

According to UNHCR (2001) humanitarian crisis is a form of complex emergency, where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict, and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and or the ongoing UN country programme. It is manifested by (i) presence of a large number of civilian victims, population who are besieged or displaced, and experiencing human suffering on a major scale; (ii) substantial international assistance is needed and the response goes beyond the mandate or capacity of anyone agency; (iv) delivery of humanitarian assistance is impeded or prevented by parties to the conflict; and (v) relief workers are targeted by parties to the conflict.

Similarly, Encyclopedia Britannica (2023) refers to it as a complex humanitarian emergency, which represents a type of disaster event that is caused by and results in a complicated set of social, medical, and often political circumstances, usually leading to great human suffering and death, and requiring external assistance and aids. These include human-made and natural events such as infectious diseases, limited access to food, clean water, and housing, violence; and failing health infrastructure and absence of immunization.

The Evolution of Armed Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

The spate of violence resulting from the phenomenon of armed banditry in contemporary Nigeria, starts with waves of armed robbery, which the country had witnessed immediately after the Nigerian civil war in early 1970's through 1980's, but that remained even though organized, but the number of people involved was small and major goal is financial gain. But, the new trend of an organized armed banditry with higher number of armed men, conspiring between different bandit's groups raiding villages, setting them on fire, looting the community, raping and killing residents or their forceful kidnapping, has started in Kaduna around 1986 (Odinkalu, 2018).

The current banditry bedeviling northern Nigeria is the culmination of years of deteriorating political, economic and security conditions. Since precolonial times, what is now northwest has faced cattle rustling and highway robbery as a rural region and trans-saharan trading hub. But, as recently as fifteen years ago, criminality in the region was largely non-lethal, and bandits were limited in number. However, as a result of growing tension between farmers and herders as well as proliferation of small arms and light weapons across West African region, exacerbated by the Libyan uprising in 2011, the number of armed gangs has grown substantially (Barnett and Rufai, cited in Abdullahi, 2022,p330).

Historically, armed banditry in form of robbery and rustling especially around Zamfara axis, started as far back as 1891, perpetrated mainly by Asabawa, Tuaregs, Fulani and Gobirawa tribal men from both British and French territories, and the major hotspots were communities around Kwatarkwashi hills, Mada, Chafe and Dansadai, from where rustled livestock and stolen goods were usually taken to Niger Republic and Mali at that point in time. (Rufai, 2021p7). In view of this, Osasona (2023 p736) noted that the first written reference to banditry in the region dates back to more than 120 years, and the term was used in a colonial correspondence to describe a 1901 attacks on a 12,000 camels trade caravan, which resulted in the death of

about 210 traders, and carted away with goods worth £165,000, leading to immeasurable damage to the economy of Sokoto Province as reported by the then Resident Mr McAllister (Rufai, 2021, p8).

However, the contemporary armed banditry ravaging northwest Nigeria, traces to Zamfara state in 2011, when bandit group formed by Kundu and Buharin daji started operating in Dansadau district, in Maru Local Government Area, under the label 'Kungiyar Gayu'. Initially, they operated underground in the forest, and its membership was restricted to Fulani people, mainly through conscription, use of cash and cows, promises for sex and leisure, as well as intimidation of other Fulani people. Later, its real motive manifested in 2012, when cases of cattle rustling persisted in Zamfara state. Some herders joined the group in order to circumvent rustling and harassment from the members. However, the trend transformed into full scale violence from cattle rustling into raiding villages, kidnapping for ransom, Gender and sexual violence and related violence across Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna states. This reaches it's climax in 2018 with spread of many gangs (Rufai, 2021,p19).

Since then, these gangs have multiplied from single cell to over 122 gangs, to the extent that by 2021, there were almost 30,000 armed bandits operating across the six states of the region, and setting up camps in Rugu forest covering Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna states, falgore forest in Kano, Kamuku forest spreading largely across Kaduna, Niger, Kebbi and Katsina states. Others include Kuyanbana, Sububu and Burwaye forests. From there they engage in cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, raiding, extortion and illicit taxations of communities (Nextier.Policy Weekly, 2023, p2, Rufai 2021 & Ojo etal, 2023, p10). In 2013, these bandits gangs have expanded in their membership, multiplied in numbers and grew in strength, power and connection. In 2016, they have become heterogenous and also transnational with infiltration of members mostly Tuaregs with link to sahelian rebels, from Niger Republic, Mali, and Chad. This trend resulted in the transformation of the gangs with new membership recruitment, training in modern guerilla warfare, possessing more sophisticated weapons smuggled, and large number of poverty-stricken youth including women and girls are being used as informants and armed suppliers, as well as providing intelligence for pecuniary gains (Rufai, 2021, p19).

The tempo at which the armed bandits have been operating with impunity and the failure of the government at all levels to protect the lives and properties in the affected communities led to the emergence of ethnic vigilante group known as Yan Sakai, in an attempt to defend Hausa rural communities from bandits who are mostly of Fulani origin. Hence, their target were mainly Fulani town dwellers suspected of banditry due to their affiliation with Fulani herders operating in the forest (Ejiofor cited in Nextier.Policy Weekly, 2023 p2). In the mode of their operations Yan Sakai adopted various strategies and sanctions to tackle armed banditry, the prominent include arbitrary arrests, torture, indiscriminate confiscation of cattles, burning down of Fulani settlements (riga)., and extrajudicial killings in which individuals alleged to be cattle rustlers/bandits were arrested and publicly executed in places like market square. This mainly targeted people of Fulani ethnic group (Ejiofor 2022 and Madueke 2023). Hence, in reaction to what they perceived as violence and injustice against their ethnic group, some Fulani resorted to arming themselves and protect their communities and retaliate against killings of their kinsmen by Yan Sakai (Madueke, 2023, p3).

Consequently, the Fulani pastoralists formed their own forest-based vigilantes known as 'Yan bindiga', an ethnic militia group, they took up arms to defend Fulani people, protect their cattles as well as avenge justice

meted against them by Yan Sakai. This marked the beginning of internecine violence between the Hausa and Fulani communities in Zamfara state of the northwest (Ejiofor, 2023, p3). The scenario was such that each turn against another. This tragedy manifested vividly in April 2021, when at least 20 Fulani traders were killed in Dansadau district of Maru Local Government Area, in a reprisal attack, following the killing of 3 people, including a member of the Yan Sakai by suspected Fulani bandits. In view of this worrisome development, Zamfara and other northwestern states proscribed Yan Sakai. Similarly, in November 2021 the federal government also proscribed all the various armed ethnic militia groups operating in the region including 'Yan bindiga'. However, they have continued operating as unflinching resolve by communities to defend themselves against banditry, which the government has not been able to contain (Ejiofor, 2023, p3). Another factor that leads to the escalation of armed banditry is the activities of non-state security operatives namely the Yan Banga and Yan Sakai. The former are the Vigilantes Group of Nigeria, they attacked, maimed and even engaged in extra judicial killings of person accused of banditry without recourse to justice, and most of the time the victims are Fulani pastoralists. While, the latter are self-help groups. They are alleged to have committed more atrocities than the Vigilantes Groups. They used to storm Shinkafi market and gruesomely killed suspected bandits by cutting human beings into pieces in the market square and burnt them into ashes without fear or mercy. This act of barbaric execution generated reaction and condemnation from the entire communities, leading to automatic escalation of the violence of armed banditry (Rufai, 2021, p16).

In recent times, the mode of bandits' raids are increasingly daring enough that in the last few months, they have allegedly downed an Air Force Jet, attacked the Military Officers Training School, Struck a prestige commuter rail service running between the capital, Abuja and the City of Kaduna, and kidnapped students for ransom from schools and colleges many times that education is now in peril (Idayat 2021). In view of this, Assessment Capacities Project Report (ACAP)(cited in Abdullahi, 2022, p332) noted that for the past nine years, bandits' groups in northwestern Nigeria, have grown in tactics and style of operations, murdering people at random, displacing population and damaging agricultural livelihoods of the affected impacted villages. In addition, Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2020) argues that previously bandits attacks had been mostly concentrated in rural areas, but now they have now acquired manpower and sophisticated weapons, and are venturing further away from their hideouts in the remotes village, into urban communities such as local government headquarters and federal highways to get larger ransoms especially in Zamfara and Sokoto states.

Ojewale and Sadiq (2023) revealed a new strategy of using women as arms traffickers. They reported that in October 2021, a 30 years old woman who specializes in supplying arms and ammunitions to bandits in Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Katsina and Niger states was arrested with 991 rounds of AK 47 ammunition. She was intercepted on her way from Dabagi village, Sokoto state to make supply for a notorious bandit kingpin terrorizing Zamfara and neighbouring states.

Majority of the bandits are of Fulani extraction and are in most cases driven by profit and personal enrichment rather than by ideological, political or sectional interests. Hence, they tend to be indiscriminate in their operations, they plunder different communities of faith and ethnicity across the region with the same level of of brutality. They attack Fulani pastoralists and destroyed their hamlets, rustled cattles as they raided and destroyed and plundered many Hausa villages and towns (Osasona, 2023, p739-740). And many gang

members do not even speak Fulani language. In essence, their violence is fundamentally and purely a criminal activity driven by economic gains (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021). There are no specific accurate number available of numbers of bandits operating in northwest. It was estimated that there are 30,000 bandits in Northwest Nigeria, spread across scores of groups ranging in size from 10 to over 1000 fighters (Ojewale and Sadiq, 2023). In addition, it was reported that bandits in Nigeria are stockpiling arms, and according to Zamfara state Government, one armoury alone was storing over 500 AK 47 rifles (Ojewale and Sadiq, 2023). According to the Chairman of Zamfara state Council of Chiefs and the Emir of Anka Alhaji Attahiru Ahmad, (2021) alerted the Service Chiefs that there are more than 30,000 bandits with sophisticated weapons in Zamfara state (in Tribuneonline, March 9, 2021). In addition, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi disclosed that there are about 100,000 bandits operating in northwest alone (cited in Folarin, 2021). These are alleged to have acquired over 100,000 arms and ammunitions which include AK 47 and AK 49 rifles, G3 magazines, anti-aircraft guns and rocket propelled grande (RPG), mostly smuggle through Nigeria-Niger border. In addition, some of the bandits' camp such as that of Turji, Shehu Rekep and Halilu have grown in sophistication of using drones and CCTV cameras for surveillance and intelligence gathering.(Olugbemi, 2021). In addition, Osasona (2023, p739) revealed that some of these bandits are well resourced, have a large network of informants and patrons within the larger society, and familiar with complex geography and region. They also organizationally operate independently, they do not have formalized structures and identities, and are organized around personalities. But they tend cooperate in protecting their turf and fight for their common cause and existence in their forest bases especially from vigilantes and security forces.

The Dynamic and Trend of Armed Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

Multiplicity of factors have combined to cause banditry particularly in Zamfara state and affected environment: these include ungoverned spaces comprising of large expanse of forests and porous international borders with Niger Republic, the forest of Mashema in northern part of Zamfara bordering the nearby Niger Republic, and to the south bordering Birnin Gwari leading to Kaduna State, and this area has been discovered as part of the bases used by bandits to stockpile weapons. There is also case of growing illegal gold mining and poverty among over 4.17 million people in the state (Nextier.Policy Weekly, 2023, p2).

Having originated from Zamfara state, an organized gang violence operating from ungovernable forests have proliferated, engaging in cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery, including of miners and traders in the largely unregulated gold mining sector, as well as pillage of communities, has since spread to five other nearby states namely Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Niger, the last of which is in the north central Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2020, pi). Thus, in 2011, northwest Nigeria experienced a surge in bandits attacks between the nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary Hausa farming communities. The major driving force are: environmental and ecological changes which caused land and water to become valuable commodities sparking fierce and often violent competition over these resources. Over the past decade banditry has evolved from a communal rivalry into lethal militia groups. In addition, weak governance, youth unemployment, poverty and inequality combined and left people with depleted options for livelihood. Thus, banditry has become an appealing method of income (Brenner, 2021).

According to Odinkalu (2018) mismanagement of natural resources exploitation in both the North and South energised the transition from urban to rural banditry. He further noted that southern Kaduna has always been rich in gemstones, including diamond, sapphire, quartz, ruby temaline and aquamarine. In the early 1980's, this set off a mad rush of artisanal gemstone rustlers who would invade communities in Jema'a. The rustlers came from as far Mali, Senegal and Sudan in search of shiny gemstone that the locals called 'devil stones'. Consequently, cases of eliminating by kidnapping, sudden disappearance of dealers and diggers and a whole range of other blood-chilling tales. The barons, agents and diggers become fanatically... fully armed with automatic weapons. In a similar vein, these methods have been evident in the descent from artisanal mining to organised banditry in Birnin Gwari and Zamfara three decades later (Odinkalu, 2018). In a similar vein, Rufai (2021,p13) also argued that one of the explanatory factor for the rise of armed banditry is the issue of illicit mining , which is characterized by intense cut-throat competition over huge gold deposit mostly exploit by Chinese, Russians and South Africans in collaboration with local artisanal miners. These foreigners are accused of supplying arms to the locals against each other especially rival groups. In line with that negative development, sometimes, helicopters are often seen in areas around the major mining sites, such as Dansadau, Dangulbi and Bagega exchanging gold with weapons resulting usually in violence and bloodshed. In addition, those foreign miners in collaboration with some traditional rulers who involved in illicit mining, pay money as protection levy to the armed groups in return for protection, or in an effort to displace a particular communities within mining areas, in order to facilitate continuity of exploitation of gold resources (Rufai, 2021, p13-15).

Also, there is a case of porous borders. It has been discovered that there are about 1,499 illegal routes across different Nigerian borders, which criminals use to smuggle small arms and light weapons, and herdsmen of Nigerian origin and theirs Malian, Chadian and Nigerian counterparts the same routes to smuggled and circulate weapons often on camels, horses, donkeys and cows in the guise of legitimate goods.(Rufai, 2021, p9). In particular, the former minister of defence General Mansur Dan-Ali attributes banditry to the problem of drug abuse, unemployment and governance challenges among others, which contribute to the deplorable security situation in Zamfara state (cited in Odinkalu, 2018). In addition, Brenner (2021) identified the ineffective and under-staff security forces charge with arduous task of penetrating and managing and controlling vast areas of unregulated forests characterized by rough terrains, stretching over under-policed international borders that allows for easy concealment and offers hideout for bandits and free assess to arms for their heinous operations.

Morover, WANEP Report (2020, p3-4) attributes the escalation of armed banditry in northwest region of Nigeria.to number of factors which include: ecological change and climate induced-pressure, youth unemployment, illicit artisanal mining, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, inequality and poverty, weak governance, weak security governance across the states in the region, large unregulated and poor government-controlled forest areas, some of which are situated within under-policed porous border that aids cross-border criminal activities, between Nigeria and it's neighbours. In addition, there were cases of alleged connivance between the traditional rulers and bandits kingpins, through the latter provide protection and intelligence support to the former, in exchange for financial gratifications. In line with this, in April 2019, the Nigerian military arrested two traditional rulers in Zamfara state on the allegation of collaborating with bandits to undermine the efforts of the government to end banditry in the state, and also four others were

suspended by the government of the state. In a more terrifying situation, a committee set up by the then Governor Bello Matawalle in July 2019 revealed that five traditional rulers (Emirs), 33 district heads and several village heads were found complicit in the wave of armed banditry, particularly between the period of June 2011 to May 2019 (WANEP Report (2020, p4).

According to Ogbonnaya (2020) Collaboration between politically connected Nigerians and Chinese Corporations in illegal gold minings drives rural banditry and violent local conflicts in some parts of Nigeria. This includes northwest, North Central and to some extent southwest region. These take place in two major ways: firstly, about 80% of mining in northwest is carried out illegally and on artisanal basis, and those funding the mining fight over control of the mining fields and they are protected by politicians and hence operate with impunity. Secondly, those who sponsor illegal mining also fund banditry and cattle rustling in mining communities, in order to incite violence and displace people, to create opportunities for illegal miners to operate and smuggle gold to foreign countries especially Dubai, through Niger/Togo borders (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Sheikh Abubakar Gumi (in Folarin, punch.com, June 21, 2021) observed with reference to kidnap of Islamic pupils of Teginia Islamic School , Niger state, that this action actually proves to the nation that bandits are not really indoctrinated, they neither target religion nor are they ideologues, they are not even educated formally or informally, they are just looking for money going about with cattle and suddenly they found lucrative way of finding it.

Rufai (Interview with Olugbemi, in Punchonline, 19th September, 2021) maintain that there are two major reasons that give rise to wave of armed banditry in northwest Nigeria. Firstly, the phenomenon as originated from Zamfara state, is traceable to politicians, who sponsored and armed youth as political thugs to achieve their political ambition in 2011 general elections. But, were later abandoned and hence resorted to drug abuse and criminal activities ranging from cattle rustling, stealing, armed robbery, and later transformed into armed gangs attacking villages on motorbikes donated by politicians during election campaign (Rufai, 2021, p11). Secondly, is perceived injustice meted on Fulani people, from different angles. They have been left unattended with no provision for welfare or allocations in annual budget at both local, state or national levels. In addition, they have been continuously harassed by the police, jailed by courts and decimated by the army. Also, grazing routes, grazing reserves, wells and water points have been taken over by politicians and military elites.

According to National Bureau of Statistics (2022, pxiv) report on multidimensional poverty 133 million Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, which indicates that poor health, water, food, security, lack of education, poor housing, poor nutrition, unemployment, living in environmentally hazardous areas, poor sanitation among others. The report further indicates that 65% representing 86.5 million people of this proportion of all the poor people in Nigeria are in the north. The prevalence of poverty from the figures above in northwest Nigeria have been revealed as follows: Kaduna (73.9%), Kano (66.3%), Katsina (72.7%), Kebbi (82.2%), Niger (69.1%), Sokoto (90.5%) & Zamfara (78.0%). (NBS: National Poverty Map by States, 2023). Specifically, the report reveals that poverty levels across the states vary significantly with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low level 27% in Ondo state to a high level of 91% in Sokoto state.

In addition, across the geopolitical zones Northwest and Northeast have highest figure of 90% of poor children (NBS: National Poverty Map by States & Zones, 2023, pxiv).

Prevalence of Poverty According to Region in Nigeria 2021/2022 in Proportion to National Population Figures

Area	MPI	Incidence 100%	Intensity 100%	Proportion % of Population	No of Poor People (million)
National	0.257	62.9	40.9	100	132.92
North Central	0.272	66.3	41.0	14.4	20.19
North East	0.324	76.5	42.4	12.7	20.47
North West	0.324	75.8	42.7	28.4	45.49
South East	0.183	49.0	37.3	10.5	10.85
South/South	0.250	62.6	39.8	14.8	19.66
South West	0.151	40.0	37.7	19.2	16.27

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (Calculations Using MPI's 2021/2022)

The Anatomy of Armed Banditry and Humanitarian Crisis in Northeast Nigeria

Bandits have been increasingly menacing the northwest region of Nigeria, since 2020, they have reportedly been involved in over 350 violent events linked to over 1500 fatalities, and displacement of over 450,000 people (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021). In demonstrations of this, between 2011-2019 bandits killed at least 6319 people, kidnapped 3672, burnt down more than 500 villages, and displaced over 700,000 rural dwellers. In addition, in 2021 alone bandits attacked more than 20 different schools in the region, kidnapped 1436 students and killed 16 people (Osasona, 2023, p744-745).

The humanitarian consequences of armed bandits attacks resulted in severe disruption of means of livelihood and economic activities, especially agriculture, the distribution of essential services for people across the northwest region. It has been reported that since 2011 nearly 200,000 people have fled bandits violence and remained internally displaced within the region, while, approximately 77,000 Nigerian have fled to neighbouring countries. And majority of them do not receive organised assistance and are in desperate need of basic necessities (Brenner, 2021). The surging violence of armed banditry is driving displacement into neighbouring Niger' Maradi region, which now hosts nearly 100,000 displaced people, including 77,000 Nigerian refugees". (Hamrouni, 2021). In a similar vein, a Joint Evaluation Report by UN High Commissioner

for Refugees and National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Person (cited Ojo, 2023, p19) claimed that 210,354 people from 171 communities had been displaced in the northwest. Out of this figures Zamfara state accounted for 144,996, Sokoto state 35,941, and 29,417 in Katsina state. In fact, as of March 2020, an estimated over 35, 000 refugees have crossed the border into Maradi in Niger Republic.

The report from West African Network of Peace building (WANEP) (2020,p2) revealed that from January to December 2019, armed bandits were responsible for more than 1000 civilian deaths in northwest (cited in Campbell, 2020). Similarly, a committee set up to investigate the menace of armed banditry, headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former Inspector General of Police, in Zamfara state, disclosed that between June 2011 and May, 2019, 4,983 women were widowed; 20,050 children were orphaned; and more than 190,340 people displaced as a result of armed banditry. In addition, Human Rights Watch Report (2023) revealed that the same Committee also disclosed that within the same period over 3 billions Naira (US6.8 million) was paid to bandits as ransom for 3,672 people abducted. In a similar vein, in Katsina state over 2000 people have also been killed, while 500 communities were destroyed and over 33,000 people were displaced within the same period.

Further, the report reveals that over 10,000 cattle were lost, while 2,688 hectares of farmlands and 10,000 houses were destroyed within 2011 and mid 2018, in Zamfara state. Also, recorded were the loss of 147,800 vehicles and motorcycles between June 2011 to May 2019. In addition, in November 2019, there an estimated 4000 people who were displaced in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state alone. In essence, the severity of the danger was so overwhelming across the region to the extent that in just one year that was between January to December 2019 over 1058 fatalities had been reported in the region, precisely Niger, Kebbi and Katsina (WANEP,2020, p2). In addition, a resident of Janbako town while describing their experience, accounts on how the bandits had taken them by surprise, while asleep and attacked the community silently in every direction, looting shops and carting away food items and other commodities and forcefully abducted unspecified number of residents mostly women and children (Channeltv.com, 2021).

In another development, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project (cited in Ojewale and Sadiq, 2023) bandits attacks have been increasing for over a decade in northwest Nigeria, rising by 731% between 2018 to 2022, that was from 124 to1,031 incidents). Similarly, there were approximately 13,485 banditry related deaths between 2010 - 2023 (Ojewale and Sadiq, 2023). Further, Rufai (2021,p6) disclosed with reference to Zamfara state in particular that, armed bandits have killed over 12,000 people and stole about 250,000 livestock from 2011-2021, destroyed about 120 villages, while, over 50,000 people were either internally displaced or made refugees in the neighbouring Niger republic.

As a result of sporadic and incessant attacks by armed bandits, especially on schools, this has a profound effect on students and education in northwest Nigeria. And the enormity of the problem was to the extent that in Zamfara and Sokoto states public schools could not present any candidate for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) for the May/June 2022 Session. (Alabi, cited in Rosenje, etal, 2022, p96). In addition, there were cases of rampant students kidnapping. For instance on May 11, 2021 Federal School of Mechanization, Alaka, in Inabi Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, was attacked and 39 students kidnapped, and only 27 were later released upon payment of ransom to the tune of N500 Million on May 5th, 2021(Olufemi cited in Rosenje, etal, 2022, p97). In a similar vein, Olugbo (cited in Rosenje, etal,

2022, p97) revealed that in a more pathetic incident 300 students at Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, were abducted on 11th December, 2020. In a more general sense, ACAP report (cited in Abdullahi, 2022, p 336) reported that between March 2020- June 2021, over 1400 students and staff have been kidnapped in several school abductions in Kankara and Mahuta (Katsina State), Kagara and Tegin (Niger State), Jangebe and Maradun in Zamfara state, Mando, Afaka and Kasarami in Kaduna State, and Birnin Tauri in Kebbi State. Consequently, this created panic and an atmosphere of fear thereby negatively affected school enrollment, and heightens school dropout and exacerbated students' performance (Rosenje etal, 2022).

Between January 2021 and December 2022, Zamfara State has experienced 1,434 deaths arising from 145 different incidents of armed banditry. This is the highest number of death arising from banditry in the entire northwest within the period (Nextier.Policy Weekly, 2023, p1). Similarly, in 2021, over 3600 people were kidnapped, 8000 killed and 200,000 were displaced in Zamfara state alone, while the entire region recorded over 1000 cases of kidnapping for ransom.(Ojo etal, 2023, p18-19).

The armed banditry has affected agriculture which employ almost 80% of the population in northwest. Over 13,000 hectares of farmlands have either been destroyed or rendered inaccessible in Zamfara state (International Crisis Group, cited in Abdullahi, 2022, p336). In a similar vein, Ojo etal (2023,p20) disclosed that more than 5,884 farmlands covering more than 58,330 hectares have been abandoned by farmers in Katsina state due to armed banditry. In addition, the State Emergency Management Group (cited in Abdullahi, 2022, p336) reported that about 21,316 hectares of farmlands remained uncultivated across five local government areas of Sokoto state, as 80,000 scared farmers stayed away. Furthermore, about 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep's were rustled between 2011- 2019 in Zamfara state alone. Conversely, this impoverished farmers and herders leading to possible food shortage and hunger.(Abdullahi, 2022, p336,). The insecurity has triggered a food emergency across the northwest, with over 450,000 people fleeing farms and rural markets, and this portends a disaster of food insecurity in the region and the country at large (Idayat, 2021).

The erstwhile minister, Minister of mines and steel development, Alhaji Abubakar Bawa Bari had revealed that Nigeria lost money to the tune of 353 billions Naira from the activities of gold miners and smugglers between 2016 and 2018. And, this has resulted in land degradation, water pollution and health risk. Thus, in 2010 and 2013 respectively, Zamfara state had recorded a case of an outbreak of lead poisoning epidemic due to illicit mining activities resulting in the death of about 734 children below the ages of 5 years (WANEP Report, 2020, p7).

In a similar vein, trade and commercial activities were equally affected by the activities of armed bandits, a number of local markets that are famous due to their popularity as strategic location as hub for food stuff such as maize, millet, guinea corn and beans, these include: Illela; Dandume; Mai Dabino; and Kankara in Katsina state, and Bardoki and Shinkafi in Zamfara state, have all been shut down due to incessant attacks by bandits as a result of their proximity to forest reserve. Consequently, commercial activities in those areas have either been slowed down or rather grounded, while revenue generation has drastically declined and supply halted or slowed, indicating possible food supply shortage and famine in the region in particular, and the country at large (WANEP Report, 2020, p7). In general, National Bureau of Statistics (cited in Ojo, 2023 p20) suggest that 26.95% of Nigeria's GDP has been affected by the distruption of agricultural related activities.

Like their counterparts farmers, pastoralists are not spared, as they have also suffered armed bandits' violence and cattle rustling. Between June 2017 and February 2018 about 1000 Fulani herders were murdered and many cattle stolen across Nigeria with northwest as hotspot (Ojo, 2023, p20).

Another tragic event that reveals the extent of armed bandits audacity was the daring attack with heavy blast followed by sporadic shooting on the passenger train on its way from Kaduna to Abuja on Monday night of March 29, 2022, leading to the death of seven people, while several other missing with many abducted.(Muhammad, 2022).

Religious men are also victims of armed violence. In this respect, a report by the Kaduna state chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Reverend Joseph Hayab, presented to the state Commissioner of Police CP Musa Garba, indicated that in four years, the churches have been severely attacked by bandits and other armed criminal elements in the story, leading to the lost of 23 pastors, and the shutting down of over 200 churches, while over 215 Christians were abducted by the bandits in Birnin Gwari forest (Isaac, 2023).

Indeed the enormity of the atrocities perpetrated by armed banditry in northwest Nigeria has worsened beyond imaginations, such that can be summarize in the table below:

S/No	Period	Place (Area)	Incidence
1	Saturday March 26, 2022_12:30 pm	Kaduna International Airport, Kaduna State	Bandits prevented planes from taking up to Lagos
2	Sunday March 27, 2022	St Mary's Catholic, Church Sarkin Pawa, Munya LGA, Niger state	A Reverend Father and 44 villagers abducted
3	Thursday March 31, 2022	Unguar Bulus and Unguar Gimbiya, Kaduna	Raid and attack that killed and injured many
4	Sunday March 27, 2022	Hayin Kanwa and other nine villages in Giwa LGA, Kaduna state	Within the spate of 3 days over 50 people killed
5	Tuesday 29th & Wednesday 30th March, 2022	Unguar Barde village along Kaduna-Abuja highway	2 farmers and 7 travellers abducted on board Venue links

6	Thursday March 31, 2022	Kaduna-Abuja highway	Bandits in large number blocked the road and firing into the air, forcing motorists emergency turn-back
7	Friday April 1, 2022	Four villages in Anka LGA, Zamfara state	Gruesome murder of 17 villagers in broad-day light
8	April 4, 2022	Tsafe Town Headquarters, Tsafe LGA, Zamfara state	Bandits in military uniform invaded and killed 4 person including the son of the State Commissioner for security and home affairs
9	April 7, 2022	Rumachi- Madalla communities, Shiroro LGA, Niger state	Bandits freely operated and killed 3 person while several others injured
10	Monday April 11, 2022	Correctional service farm Kujama town, Chikun LGA, Kaduna state	One person killed and many cattle and sheeps rustled
11	Tuesday April 12, 2022	Anguwar Maiwa and Kanwa village, Giwa LGA, Kaduna state	Armed bandits killed 23 people
12	April 2022	Jabiri Qrts, Funtua LGA, Katsina state	A housewife and 3 of her stepchildren between the age 6-12 years abducted
13	April 2022	Zamfara College of Health Technology, Tsafe LGA	5 female students abducted from their hostel located outside the school campus

Source: Daily Trust (2022) Timeline: how bandits carried out 16 deadly attacks in two weeks, www.dailytrust.com 24/09/2023. Friday 15th April, 2022 14:16:37 WAT.

Armed group have invaded several villages, farms, correctional centres, dormitories among others, and kidnapped for ransom in northwest and northcentral regions of Nigeria, within two weeks. Further, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (in AlJazeera.com, 2022) revealed that bandits were responsible for the death of more 2600 civilians in 2021, many more than those attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP in the same period. Similarly, on June 5, 2023 large number of bandits on motorcycles from Tsauna and Kuyan bana killed 36 people in separate attacks against four villages in Sokoto state, for refusal to pay them protection money (France24.com, June 6, 2023). In addition, on Wednesday night March 16, 2023 bandits ambushed

and killed a Major of the Nigerian Army and 7 other security operatives including 4 vigilantes, in Munya LGA of Niger state and vandalized 2 patrol vehicles, belonging to Joint Task Force. In a similar vein, on August 14, 2023, 13 soldiers were killed by bandits, and in an attempt to evacuate the deceased a military MI-171 helicopter belonging to Nigerian Airforce on casualty evacuation mission crashed near Chukuba village in Shiroro LGA, Niger state, according to military source. In contrast, the bandits claimed to have gunned it down (Dipo, Nwezeh and Aborishade, 2023).

Amnesty International Report (2018, p16) indicates that attacks and reprisal attacks between farmers and herders communities in northern part of Nigeria, over access to resources, water, land and pasture, resulted in atleast 3,641 people between January 2016 and October 2018, 406 injured, 5000 houses burnt down and 182,530 people displaced. In a more broader submission, The UN estimates that 279,000 people were displaced in Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina by the end of 2020, and that almost 2.6 million people across the three states are facing food insecurity in 2021, as over 50,000 hectares of agricultural land were abandoned in 2020, in Katsina state (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Despite the prevalence of poverty especially among rural dwellers and the continuous demands for ransom by armed bandits, many families are forced to sell their properties and even acquire debts in order to free their kidnapped victims. In addition, they also imposed taxes and or protection levy on communities to pay, and this invariably impoverished them, thereby heightening the already existing poverty crisis in the region (International Crisis Group, 2021).

As a result of the negative trend above, it has been discovered that in the northwest region there is complex humanitarian challenges due to the number of communities affected by armed banditry. This arises from irregular and or zero food distribution, inappropriate shelters, poor medical services and facilities which are evident in some internally displaced persons' camps in the host states (WANEP Report, 2020, p5). In a similar vein, Medecins Sans Frontiers (2021) maintain that as the violence spirals, kidnappings, killings, armed robbery and sexual violence have also multiplied, as women and sometimes even men are abducted by armed bandits and subjected them to violation for a few before being returned to their communities. These activities has resulted in several reported cases of sexual and gender based violence in particular rape, force marriages, women and girls forced labour, abduction and sexual slavery of female children who are abducted mostly on their way back home while collecting firewood from bush, or during village raid (WANEP Report, 2020, p6). In a similar vein, it has also been disclosed that sometimes bandits would ask a resident to take his daughter or wife to their camp and raped, and no one dare to stop them (Shuhu cited in Hannatu, 2022, p32). Further, Ojo (2023, p21) revealed that women and girls have been sexually abused either as sex slaves or as subject of forced labour, and where the rape victims are impregnated by their abductors, they are left with trauma and limited consolation, as their communities often anathematized them.

Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) (2021) argued that the rising insecurity in Nigeria' s northwestern state of Zamfara state has spawned a humanitarian crisis, in an alarming rise of preventable illnesses associated with a lack of food, drinking water, sheltered and vaccinations, and there is urgent need for humanitarian response for people in the region. The group further revealed that its team in Anka, Zurmi local government area, Zamfara as one of the state worst hit by the violence, treated 10,300 children in the first four months of 2021 for ailments including severe malnutrition, measles, malaria, watery diarrhoea and respiratory infection,

more than 54% higher than in the same period last year, and also from January to April 2021, the team had received over 100 victims of sexual violence with high risk of sexually transmitted infections.

Despite that intervention, the crisis seems to worsened, hence in 2022 Medecins Sans Frontieres and Doctors Without Borders (2022) disclosed that since January 2022, their teams working in collaboration with the Nigerian health authorities have between January and August 2022 treated close to 100,000 children with acute malnutrition in 34 outpatient facilities, and admitted about 17,000 children requiring hospital care in 10 inpatient centres in Kano, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto and Kebbi states. This indicates an of 64% from January to August in 2022. The most worrisome issue is that not many of the displaced people have no access to the humanitarian relief material or assistance as Zubaida Baba Ibrahim (Research Survey, 2023, cited in Humananglemedia.com,2023) reveals that there are over 450,000 people been displaced in Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto states. And, 98% of the displaced and non-displaced families in those affected states in northwestern region are facing adverse forms of humanitarian crises due to conflict, climate change and poverty. However, only 10% of them received assistance. This leaves a large number of the affected population still in dire needs.

In a similar vein, Displacement Tracker Matrix (DTM) (cited in Humangle.com, 2022) in the region, over 969,757 IDP's were registered as of March 2022, with Zamfara accounting for over 300,000 people at the time, with only 24% of them in camps/camp like settings, and many are in harsh conditions of hunger, starvation and diseases. Hence, the need for international organisations and INGO's to intensify their humanitarian efforts in the region. Likewise, in a more general sense UNICEF (2022) estimated that there are about 8.8 million people, including 5.4 million children and 3.4 million adults are affected by conflict in northeast and armed violence in northwest are under an alarming condition of food insecurity and malnutrition compound by epidemic outbreaks such as cholera, measles and yellow fever. Also, in the northwest region, children face the threat of attacks by armed bandits and abduction, nearly 360,000 people have been internally displaced, 89% in host communities. Around 1.7 million are projected to be food insecure, complicating existing high malnutrition and deprivation. Only 35% of the population have access to basic water supply and sanitation facilities. In host communities and and the camps, 41% have access to less than 15 litres of water per day, 71% have unimproved water facilities, 99% have latrines that are either unhygienic or unusable, exposing them to water borne diseases and cholera outbreak.(UNICEF, 2022). Further, the report indicates that nearly 2 million children require access to school due to disruption and destruction of school facilities in the northeast and northwest. Around 2 million children require protection from child marriage, family separation, physical and sexual violence, psychological distress, and use and recruitment by non-state armed groups (UNICEF, 2022).

The State Response to the Menace of Armed Banditry in Nigeria

In responding to the menace of armed banditry farmers turned into vigilantes (Yan Sakai), but they have been indiscriminate in their retaliatory actions, targeting almost all herders communities, regardless of culpability. In turn, the pastoralists formed their own forest-based and better armed self-defence (Yan bindiga). However, overtime it becomes indistinguishable from the original bandits (Idayat, 2021).

In line with this development, Zamfara State Government introduced in 2016 a peace initiative comprising Disarmaments, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes, that seemed to work, known as 'cash for guns scheme'. That was laudable as initially it produced positive results that succeeded in convincing several herdsmen and bandits to surrender arms to the Zamfara state government in return for Amnesty, while large weapons withdrawal and destruction programme occurred in 2018, leading to destruction of 6000 manufactured guns, and the surrender of 500 arms and ammunitions by Yan Sakai in December 2019, while over 525 kidnap victims were also released within the same period (WANEP, 2020, p8-9). But, it fell apart two years later starting in 2018, with the death of notorious warlord Buharin Daji the lynchpin of the deal. In a similar vein, in 2020 the newly elected Governor Bello Matawalle slightly modified the scheme and offered cows in return of guns, in order to avoid monetizing the violence. Through disarmament programme for Yan Sakai, while, the government pledged to construct rural grazing areas with settlements, dams and veterinary services for pastoralists. In spite of all these efforts, the attacks continued, forcing the Government to made a reverse of its policies in September 2020, and cancelled further dialogue with bandits (Idayat, 2021). Consequently, new military offensive was relaunched the same month September 2020. This was reinforced with a telecommunications blackout, and a ban on the sale of fuel in jerry cans to blunt the bandits' mobility, but this only pushed them into a neighbouring states.

The failure of the peace initiative was informed by peace accord itself being badly flawed and amateuringly executed. Also it was not documented with clear terms and conditions or rather a legal framework for its implementation. In addition, it also side-lined the farmers, who believed that the interests of the aggressors were prioritized over the rights of the victims (farmers and vigilantes). Similarly, there were cases of spread of various bandits gangs, estimated to be atleast over 80 major gangs operating across region. And the crux of the matter is absence of chain of command that unite them. Hence, almost each operate independently. Finally, the case of over-estimation of the powers of warlords to effectively control their lieutenants to retire from the life of relative abundance and easy money making deals (Idayat, 2021).

Initially since the escalation of armed bandits violence particularly in 2018, the Nigerian security forces have utilized variety of tactics to combat banditry. Firstly, the federal government embraced an aggressive approach by deploying civil police and military operations under the operations coded as 'Puff Adder', 'Diran Mikiya', 'Sharan Daji', 'Hadarin Daji', 'Thunder Strike', and 'Exercise Harbin Kunama', to the affected states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger and Sokoto. In addition, other measure adopted was banning the use of motorcycles within the hinterland and forests in the region (WANEP, 2020, p9). While, the security measures recorded significant success by pushing back attacks, destroyed bandits' hideouts, killed and arrested hundreds of bandits, yet, the attacks still have continued. Thus, in 2019, a peace deal was secured between the armed bandits and governors of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states under the terms encompassing disarmament, releasing of kidnapped civilians victims, and amnesty/pardoning for the bandits. In addition, Nigerian governments at both federal and state levels, have often been paying ransom to bandits to secure the release of kidnapped victims, even though they always denied that. This always provides incentives for bandits to continue their malign activities. This saw elements of violence respite and the decrease in number of fatalities. However, it failed, as such renewed attacks picked up again in 2020. (Brenner, 2021 & Campbell, 2020).

In a similar vein, International Crisis Group (2020,pii) observed that the Nigeria's federal/state governments responded violently through military and police operations, by prescribing harsher punishments for armed attacks, but the results were still disappointing. This was largely due to the fact that the security presence on the ground remains too thin and poorly resourced, to subdue the armed groups or to protect communities across the vast territory. At the same time, military operations against armed groups in the region have dispersed some of them to other regions, deepening insecurity nationwide.

Amnesty International Report (2018, p38) identifies several areas of failures in government response, including addressing impunity, inadequate relief materials and rehabilitation support, as well as serious failures in security forces responses to attacks on residents. One of the greatest challenge which has been confronting the security forces in their in the northwest Nigeria, is the fact that they are over-stretched by number of various operations and engagements resulting from insecurity challenges bedevilling the country, simultaneously. For instance, it has discovered that in Niger state there are only 4000 policemen to protect 24 million people. This translates into a ratio of 1:6000, that is one policeman per 6000 people. Similarly, in Zamfara state 5000 policemen fighting 30,000 bandits. In addition, the humanitarian response especially by federal government has been insufficient in providing IDP's with food, water, emergency shelters or sanitary facilities, and even in the federal government humanitarian response plan of 2021, there were no provision for northwest region,(International Crisis Group, 2021).

Conclusion

Armed banditry has persisted and terrorized communities, killed many and caused massive displacements of thousands, and exacerbated challenges of socio-economic development and threatened democratic governance, and acute humanitarian crisis. Various multilateral diplomatic and peace measures through amnesty efforts between the government and several armed factions have had some success, but these will not prove durable, as the violence persists, and unless more non-state actors are convinced to lay down their arms, the possibility of ending the violence and achieving sustainable peace in the region, seems extremely difficult. Consequently, the violence is pushing the region to the brime of a major humanitarian crisis, and the Nigerian authorities failure to stem the violence is costing people's lives and livelihoods, and without immediate action particularly from international environment, many more lives may be lost.

Recommendations

- ❖ There should be an integrative Peace building approach to tackle the root causes of the actual problems that goes beyond mere amnesty deal, and ensuring sustainable peace
- ❖ Social Justice
- ❖ Poverty eradication project and scheme vocational trainings
- ❖ Forest reserve revival
- ❖ Reparations and restitutions especially to vulnerable victims
- ❖ Yan Sakai should be included in the peace deal integrative peace Accord

- ❖ Yan Sakai be co-opted into security forces and reconstituted similar to Civilian Joint Tasks Force with clear roles and rules of engagement, trained and equipped with all necessary logistics, with good salary packages, and the control of security forces to whom they shall receive orders and also accountable to.
- ❖ Human security must be guaranteed
- ❖ International approach to tackle criminal activities through collaborative endeavours.
- ❖ Massive empowerment programmes especially among youths both males and females that aim at boosting the people and economy of the region.
- ❖ Government should intensify its efforts in developing well organised plans to reflect the humanitarian crisis in the northwest region in the national budget.
- ❖ Government should declare the state of emergency on the humanitarian crisis in the northwest region.

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