

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING & EARLY RESPONSE NETWORK

WARN

Policy Brief

NIGERIA 2019

Nigeria

Addressing Armed Banditry in the North-West Region of Nigeria:

Exploring the Potentials of a Multi-Dimensional
Conflict Management Approach



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Exploring the Potentials of a Multi-Dimensional Conflict Management Approach

Introduction

The pervasive armed banditry and its associated threats to human security in the North-West region of Nigeria, particularly, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Niger States, have become a subject of national security and public concern. The multifaceted layers of criminality involved, and recurrent nature of the armed banditry call for effective mechanisms to mitigate the threat it poses to peace and security in the affected States.

In July 2019, the North-Western State Governors began negotiating with a number of armed bandits operating in the region to curb the menace and further boost internal security in the affected States. Despite its recorded successes evident in the drastic decline in attacks, release of kidnapped victims and weapons recovery, the renewed attacks by bandits in Zamfara, Katsina and Niger States between November and December 2019¹, posed a threat to the peace agreements negotiated by the State Governors. Data generated from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) indicates that armed banditry recorded a death toll of over 1058 people in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Niger States between January and December, 2019. Also, the report of the committee set up to find solutions to banditry in Zamfara State,

supervised by the erstwhile Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar, reported a total of 6,319 deaths including women and children between June 2011 and May 2019 in the State². Additionally, an estimated 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children orphaned, and 190,340 others internally displaced between June 2011 and May 2019 in Zamfara State. In Katsina State, over 2,000 people have been killed, 500 communities destroyed and over 33,000 people displaced³.

Further reports also revealed that over 10,000 cattle were lost, while 2,688 hectares of farmlands and 10,000 houses destroyed within 2011 and mid-2018⁴ in Zamfara State. Also, the State recorded the loss of 147,800 vehicles and motorcycles between June 2011 to May 2019. In November 2019⁵, an estimated 4,000 people were also internally displaced in Shiroro LGA of Niger State alone⁶.

The chart below highlights the statistics of fatalities associated with banditry, recorded in the month of January to December 2019. As indicated in the chart, the month of August to November 2019 recorded a downward trend in fatalities and violence due to the ongoing peace and reconciliation initiatives in the affected States. Amid the peace processes, December 2019 recorded an increase in

¹Source: WANEP NEWS (www.wanep.org/news/)

²<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/10/13/5-emirs-33-district-heads-top-military-officers-complicit-in-zamfara-banditry/>

³<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/09/18/ending-banditry-kidnapping-in-katsina-through-dialogue/>

⁴<https://salkida.com/special-report-no-security-strategy-despite-mass-killings-in-zamfara-ahmad-salkida/>

⁵<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/10/13/5-emirs-33-district-heads-top-military-officers-complicit-in-zamfara-banditry/>

⁶<https://guardian.ng/news/thousands-displaced-by-bandit-attacks/>

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

fatalities with 38 deaths in Niger, Kebbi and Katsina States. Niger State recorded the highest fatality of 34 people with 2 deaths each in Kebbi and Katsina States respectively⁷.

The resilience of armed bandits' groups operating in the affected States in the face of the dominant military approach to quell the violent activities of the bandits makes the need for multi-approach that includes dialogue, coordinated community policing and civil-military support structure as imperative tools to assuage the threats. The combined approach creates an opportunity for conflict reduction, resolution and extended conversations on stabilising peace and security in the States as well as in the country. An inclusive conflict management system encourages local commitment to the process in addressing the threats at the short and medium term. The peace initiatives developed by the State Governments have the potential to reduce the escalating threats to human security and restore public confidence in Government's ability to protect lives and property in the affected States.

However, it requires a robust engagement with key stakeholders in the peacebuilding process to ensure sustainable peace and security in the North West region of Nigeria.

This policy brief analyses the trends and dynamics of armed banditry in Nigeria's North West region, its implications for human security as well as impact of peace negotiations. It further provides recommendations for response and mitigation to enhance sustainable peace and security.

1. Trends and Dynamics of Armed Banditry in the North-West Region of Nigeria

Understanding armed banditry in Nigeria's North West region requires examination of the historical, socio-economic and governance contexts, as well as the conflict dynamics resulting from the interplay of farmer-herder relations pertaining to access to land resources. While ecological changes and climate-induced pressures have increased conflicts in the agro-pastoral sector, the phenomenon also has linkages to banditry and governance challenges. Factors that drive banditry in the region such as cattle rustling, illicit artisanal gold mining, proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), youth unemployment, inequality and poverty, indicates a weak governance and security capacities across the States.

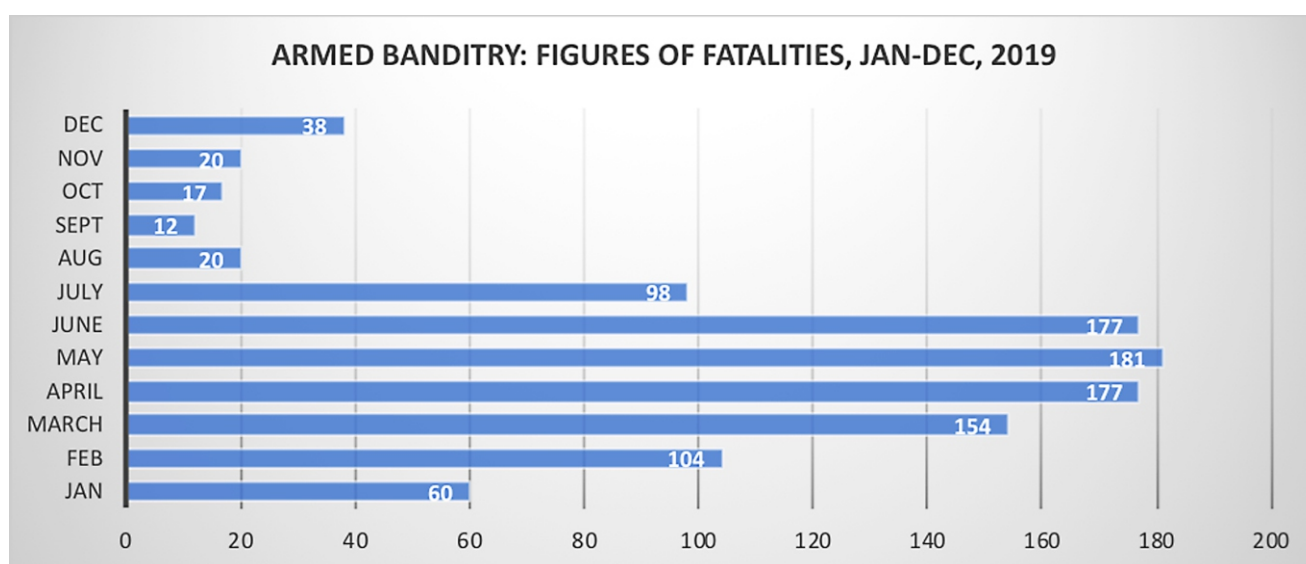


FIG 1: ARMED BANDITRY IN NIGERIA: FIGURES OF FATALITIES (JANUARY-DECEMBER 2019)⁸

⁷Source: WANEP NEWS (www.wanep.org/news/)

⁸Source: www.wanep.org/news

The situation is further complicated by the existence of large unregulated and poor government-controlled forest areas in the region, some of which are situated within under-policed border areas between Nigeria and neighbouring countries. The porosity of these borders aid cross-border criminality.

For instance, illicit SALWs from post-Gadhafi Libya and other parts of the Maghreb and the Sahel region⁹ find their way to the region through the porous borders exploited by criminal syndicates. Availability of such arms coupled with poor regulation of the mining sector aids bandit attacks in States like Zamfara. The activities of illegal gold mining in Zamfara State is viewed as a major factor in sustaining bandit-related attacks and killings in the State. Bandits are known to have vanquished communities and taken over potential mining spots which they exploit themselves¹⁰.

In other communities, they attack mining sites, killing the miners and stealing their precious stones, money and mining tools. Over 45 illegal gold miners were killed on November 8, 2016 in Bindim community, Maru LGA of Zamfara State as bandits numbering about fifty, invaded the mining site in search of gold, other precious stones and money¹¹. The illegally mined gold are sometimes transported through the largely unsecured borders into neighbouring countries such as Niger, where it is traded for money, weapons and ammunitions¹². This realization has led the Federal Government suspending all forms of mining in Zamfara State since April 2019, to curb the significant threat of armed banditry.

Furthermore, weak regulation of pastoral activities has led to infiltration by livestock bandits, leading to an increase in cattle rustling in the North West. The sudden intensification of cattle rustling in States like Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara, particularly since 2010, is due to a number of interconnected factors. These include the conflicts between herders and farmers, commercialization of cattle rustling, availability of SALWs, and the emergence of livestock bandits. Bandits are also linked to local and

transnational organized crime networks and markets for the sale of stolen cattle. Many of the rustled cattle have been disposed in many markets of major Nigerian cities, including Maiduguri (Borno State)¹³ and Agege (Lagos State)¹⁴ through the criminal intermediaries.

Additional challenges arise from the alleged involvement of local vigilante groups (Yan Sakai) in indiscriminate killings of suspected bandits in previous years, which has been attributed to the surge in violence.

2. Implication for Human Security

a. Community Security

Armed banditry, facilitated the emergence of a complex informal security sector in the region, including the growth of armed local vigilante groups established to protect communities against bandits. Many of these groups lack adequate security training and often compete against one another. They have been implicated in acts of criminality including human rights abuses, armed robbery, extortion and appropriation of livestock and other properties from both bandits and their victims, which led a public commentator to label their activities as 'legalised armed banditry'¹⁵.

Also, accusations have been leveled against some traditional rulers for providing protection and intelligence support to bandits in exchange for financial gratifications¹⁶. In April 2019, the Nigerian Military arrested two traditional rulers in Zamfara accusing them of collaborating with bandits to undermine the effort of the Government to end banditry in the State¹⁷. Four others were also suspended by the Zamfara State Government¹⁸. An investigative committee set up by the Zamfara State Governor, Bello Matawalle in July 2019 revealed that five traditional rulers (Emirs), 33 district heads and several village heads were complicit in the wave of banditry that spanned from June 2011 to May 2019¹⁹.

⁹https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20121031%20Libya%20Weapons%20Update_final.pdf

¹⁰<https://thenationonlineng.net/zamfara-the-gold-armada/>

¹¹<https://guardian.ng/opinion/bloody-gold-in-zamfara-threat-to-stability-or-development-opportunity/>

¹²<https://thenationonlineng.net/zamfara-the-gold-armada/>

¹³Ahmadu, H. (2019). Insight into the dynamics and menace of cattle rustling: A case study of Lake Chad Basin Area in Northern Nigeria. *World Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(1): 18-33.

¹⁴<https://punchng.com/police-arrest-lagos-cattle-sellers-for-funding-bandits-in-zamfara/>

¹⁵Rufai, M.A. 2018. Vigilante groups and rural banditry in Zamfara State: Excesses and contradictions. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Inventions* 7(6): 69.

¹⁶<https://guardian.ng/news/traditional-rulers-behind-zamfara-killings-says-fg/>

¹⁷<https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/army-arrests-2-zamfara-traditional-rulers-for-working-with-bandits/ktxtptxk>

¹⁸<https://punchng.com/zamfara-suspends-four-traditional-rulers-over-banditry-allegations/>

¹⁹<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/10/13/5-emirs-33-district-heads-top-military-officers-complicit-in-zamfara-banditry/>

Illegal activities perpetrated by these non-state actors contributed to heightened insecurity in many communities of the North-West region.

b. Nexus between Banditry and Violent Extremism

Although, the causal factors for banditry and terrorism differ, both phenomenon locally thrived on exploiting the fragile or weak State capacity evident in human rights abuses, inequality, poor service provision and unemployment. While banditry, predominantly in the North-West contrasts the predominance of violent extremism in the North-East, both constitute a common thread of the overlapping nature and characteristics of organized crime as well as its mirrored impact on peace and human security in the affected States²⁰. Beyond this, it further poses significant challenges to focused strategies to counter Violent Extremist which increasingly requires broader initiatives to address organised crime. For instance, cattle rustling attributed to bandits is also a strategy applied by Boko Haram to support their operations. In addition, robbery and kidnapping constitute a dominant criminal enterprise that are similar in the operations of bandits and extremist groups²¹.

Another commonality is the tactical use of difficult and often inaccessible operational terrains by State security such as the use of Sambisa forest by Boko Haram and the reported use of Falgore, Kamara, Kunduma, Sububu, Kamuku and Kiyanbana forests by bandits. It offers opportunity for quick retreat and buffer for their attacks within the axis of their operations. In the light of this, the exigencies of banditry, insurgency and counter-insurgency have transformed the forests areas into highly militarized and securitized zones²², stalling socio-economic development in the affected States.

c. Social Dislocation and Internal Displacements

One of the most visible impacts of armed banditry in the North West involves internal displacement of community residents. According to a 2019 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian Government, over 200,000 persons were internally displaced in several communities of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto States between January-August 2019. Majority of these IDPs were women, children and the elderly taking refuge in neighbouring Republic of Niger, Cameroun and Chad²³. Reports obtained from the Zamfara State Government revealed that banditry led to an estimated 22,000 widows and 44, 000 orphans in Zamfara State since 2011²⁴.

Provision of humanitarian assistance for the displaced persons and communities in the North-West was a complex humanitarian challenge due to the enormity of communities affected. Factors arising from irregular and/or zero food distribution, inappropriate shelters, poor medical services and facilities, among others, were evident in some internally displaced camps in the host States²⁵. A survey conducted in some assessed locations in Zamfara State have revealed that 70% of the displaced population expressed irregular food distribution at the IDP camps²⁶. Nevertheless, the interventions of local and international agencies in the provision of relief materials and health care delivery further complemented Government efforts²⁷ to displaced persons.

As affected States continue to record a decline in violent attacks, as shown in the graph above, an estimated 25,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) out of the 37,000 IDPs in Zamfara State had reintegrated to the communities as at August 2019. According to the Zamfara State Emergency Management Agency (ZEMA), the remaining 12,000 IDPS were in host communities in Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto and some parts of Niger Republic²⁸. A challenge for

²⁰<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-can-be-done-fight-rural-banditry-northern-nigeria>

²¹Okoli, A.C & Ioryer, P. (2014): Terrorism and humanitarian crisis in Nigeria: Insights from Boko Haram Insurgency: Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, I (1), 39-50.

²²Okoli, Al Chukwuma and Fidelis Ochim 2016. Forestlands and national security in Nigeria: A Threat-Import analysis. International Journal of Political and Administrative Studies, International Institute of Academic Research and Development (IIARD), 2 (2), pp. 43-53.

²³<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-key-message-update-september-2019>

²⁴<https://www.blueprint.ng/22000-widows-44000-orphans-now-in-zamfara-marafa/>

²⁵https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/Nigeria%20%20North%20Central%20and%20North%20West%20Zones%20Displacement%20Report%201%20%28August%202019%29_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=6515

²⁶Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S.

²⁷<https://punchng.com/nema-donates-eight-trucks-of-relief-materials-to-zamfara-victims/>

²⁸<https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/25000-idps-return-home-in-zamfara/lxlz84e>

these outstanding IDPs is how to return to their communities having lost their properties and livelihood from violent attacks and fears of reoccurrence.

d. The Gender Dimensions

The criminal activities perpetuated by bandits in the North West heightened the vulnerability of women and girls in the region. Some women in the affected communities were faced with early widowhood or death of their children, while some children were orphaned and forced to flee their villages for safety. This remains a critical human security concern as they also suffer varied forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Several cases of rape by bandits were reported in Katsina²⁹ and Niger State³⁰.

There were reports of SGBV amongst the displaced³¹. In a field assessment conducted in Zamfara State, using 'Focus Group Discussion' (FGD), 'community members and leaders had highlighted high incidence of SGBV including rape and forced marriage specifically targeted at women and young girls due to the presence and activities of bandits in rural areas³². Further reports have revealed that the highest risk faced by children in the affected communities is abduction, as majority of the children are abducted for ransom while female children are abducted for sex and others for child labour³³. This mostly occurred when collecting firewood, on the way to the market or during village attacks³⁴.

Despite being victims of violence, women were also perpetrators. They disguise as food vendors to provide bandits with information and are also suppliers/carriers of weapons, drugs and other basic needs for the bandits³⁵. In May 2019, the Katsina State Police Command arrested four women serving as informants and cooking for bandits in the State³⁶.

The peace dialogue initiated by State Governors in the North-West region however yielded positive results, as kidnapped women and children were released by the bandits in Katsina³⁷ and Zamfara States³⁸. In a report issued by the Zamfara State Commissioner of Security and Home Affairs, the peace and reconciliation initiative led to the release of 525 hostages including women and children³⁹.

e. Impact on Education

Education deprivation in the North-West region has been exacerbated by armed banditry due to the mass displacements in affected communities. However, the escalation of banditry contributed to a high number of out-of-school children in the region. Out of the 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria, 30 percent are in the North-West (Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano) and Niger States in the North Central region⁴⁰. Besides, insecurity in the communities had a negative impact on young boys and girls, as school activities in vulnerable areas were disrupted. The few existing schools were unable to operate properly for fear of kidnap of students or attacks and killing by bandits⁴¹. Parents prevented their children from attending schools due to insecurity on major roads. This in turn increased the job turnover of teachers in these communities.

A failed attack by bandits in schools was recorded on May 1, 2019, at the Government Girls Secondary School in Zuru LGA of Zamfara State⁴². Also, a 'threat note' to shut down a Government Day Secondary School at Talata Mafara LGA of Zamfara State had further created tension as students and teachers stayed away from the school⁴³. This situation further exposes children to the risk of exploitation and violence.

²⁹ <http://saharareporters.com/2019/09/02/buharis-katsina-our-women-daughters-raped-held-captive-gangsters-says-sheikh-sabiu-jibia>

³⁰ <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/10-bandits-gangrape-woman-slaughter-man-in-niger-village.html>

³¹ INGO Forum information share from INGO – UN agencies involved in Zamfara and Sokoto – 24 May 2019

³² Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S)

³⁶ <https://punchng.com/police-arrest-bandits-girlfriends-informants-in-katsina/>

³⁷ <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/thisday/20190916/281934544653031>

³⁸ <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/zamfara-govt-houses-over-100-rescued-kidnap-victims/ffcq345>

³⁹ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/370609-525-kidnap-victims-regain-freedom-in-zamfara.html>

⁴⁰ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/348897-39-of-children-in-north-west-except-kaduna-are-out-of-school-unicef.html>

⁴¹ http://jedsnet.com/journals/jeds/Vol_7_No_2_June_2019/11.pdf

⁴² <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/05/03/insecurity-worsens-as-bandits-attack-zamfara-school-abduct-students-teachers/>

⁴³ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/360584-panic-in-zamfara-school-after-militants-threaten-attack.html>

f. Effects on Livelihoods and Food Security

The insecurity in the North-West region also impacted negatively on the exploitation of environmental resources (e.g. gold mining), thus affecting the livelihood and development potentials in the affected States. The presence of lucrative gold deposits in Zamfara State attracted artisanal mining activities, as bandits and families depended on it for livelihood sustenance. Nevertheless, the gold is smuggled and traded in the global market constituting a loss revenue for the Nigeria economy. The erstwhile Minister of Mines and Steel Development, Alhaji Abubakar Bawa Bwari, had revealed that between 2016 and 2018, Nigeria lost 353 billion naira from the illicit activities of gold miners and smugglers⁴⁴. Though artisanal mining has been linked to economic benefits including informal employment, the poor standards of extraction resulted in land degradation, pollution of water sources and health risk. In 2010 and 2013, the State recorded an outbreak of 'lead poisoning' epidemic due to illicit mining activities resulting in a death toll of 734 children below the ages of 5 years old⁴⁵.

Given the fact that farming is the mainstay of the local economies, the disruption in farming due to bandit attacks affect agricultural productivity with serious implications for food security. Majority of the farming communities were forced to abandon their farms especially areas in proximity to the forest areas, as bandits exploited these locations to attack communities. Few farmers who stayed behind were subjected to taxation by the bandits before accessing their farms⁴⁶. About 30% of agricultural land in Kaduna State was abandoned by affected communities, while farming activities in Zamfara and Katsina States were restricted to few areas thus resulting in a decline in food production by 60%⁴⁷. In Kebbi State, over 350 rice farmers were affected with farmlands abandoned as a result of bandit attacks⁴⁸.

However, the dwindling income of local farmers and other vulnerable groups especially women, also affect their capacity to support children's education and household income.

g. Wider Economic Costs

The flow of illicit firearms in communities of North-West region is also a cause for security concern. Apart from fatalities recorded, bandits' attacks on communities increased social risks, discouraged investment and triggered economic crises for individuals and communities. The conflict is causing a spill over effect on other neighbouring communities and local government areas of Niger State in the North-Central region, hindering inter-communal and inter-state trade.

The insecurity has a significant impact on other economic activities in the region, as a number of major local markets such as Illela, Dandume, Maidabino, Kankara (Katsina State) and Bardoki, Shinkafi (Zamfara State) markets have been shut down due to incessant attacks⁴⁹. The strategic nature of the trading locations made them attractive to major merchants from across other regions of the country for foodstuff including maize, millet, guinea corn and beans. However, the proximity of these markets to the forest reserves made them vulnerable to attacks. This had an adverse effect on trading activities, as revenue generation and market sales/supplies in the markets declined. A revenue officer in Katsina State had revealed that 'trailers of foodstuff at the market reduced from eight (8) trailers weekly to half a truck in two months', while the revenue earning reduced from 500,000 naira to less than 100,000 naira⁵⁰.

According to the 2019 report on food insecurity and market by Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), Shinkafi market, a major cross border town in Zamfara State, functioned between 30 to 40 percent within the reviewed period, while Dandume market in Katsina State functioned lower by 15 to 25 percent relative to normal trading projections⁵¹ as shown in the map below. With the ongoing peace initiatives and negotiated peace deals with bandits, economic and farming activities have gradually resumed with communities and markets relatively secured for displaced returnees.

⁴⁴<https://punchng.com/nigeria-loses-n353bn-to-illegal-gold-mining-in-three-years-iy-bayelsa-kick/>

⁴⁵<http://allafrica.com/stories/201310080145.html>

⁴⁶<https://punchng.com/bandits-tax-us-before-allowing-us-access-to-our-farms-nwest-farmers/>

⁴⁷Interview with WANEP field monitor in Zamfara State (September 2019)

⁴⁸<https://punchng.com/bandits-tax-us-before-allowing-us-access-to-our-farms-nwest-farmers/>

⁴⁹<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/bandits-shoot-once-bubbling-kankara-market-in-its-heart.html>; <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/363963-many-killed-in-fresh-attack-in-zamfara.html>; <https://punchng.com/11-killed-in-fresh-bandit-attacks-on-katsina-communities/>.

⁵⁰<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/bandits-shoot-once-bubbling-kankara-market-in-its-heart.html>

⁵¹Source: FEWS NET (<https://fewsn.net/west-africa/nigeria/food-security-outlook/june-2019>)

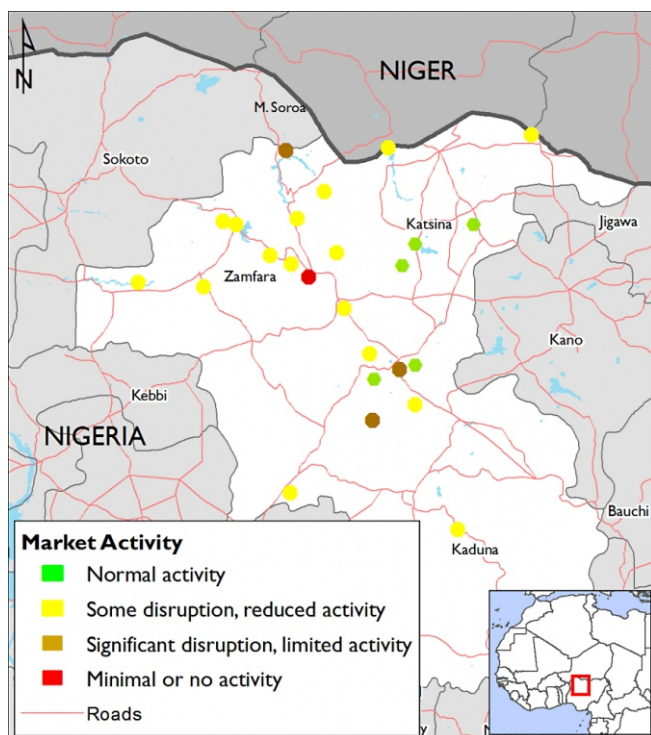


FIG 2: Market functioning in North-West Nigeria by FEWS-NET⁵²

3. Conflict Management Response Options to Address Armed Banditry in the North-West Region

Integrative response approaches that require a combination of conflict management mechanisms such as consultation of actors and communities affected, dialogue, community policing, amnesty, reconciliation and security reforms by the respective State Governments is key to the mitigation of banditry in the North-West. For instance, the peace initiatives through the amnesty program launched in 2016 by the Katsina State Government as well as the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) effort by Zamfara State Government are laudable efforts. However, these lacked strong security and alternative conflict management strategies which would have ensured the stability of security beyond the amnesty and the DDR process. The initial positive results from the peace initiative succeeded

in convincing several herdsmen and bandits to surrender arms to the State Government in return for amnesty while large weapons withdrawal and destruction program occurred in Zamfara State in 2018 with 6,000 manufactured guns destroyed⁵³. However, the momentum was not sustained as armed banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping, culpable homicide and other related crimes resumed in the same year (2018) with a higher level of intensity.

The modest success recorded had convinced the affected State Governments to re-examine their strategies of mitigating this threat that requires multi stakeholder consultations and complemented by inclusive security initiatives. The Governments of Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina States in July 2019 established dialogue/amnesty committee to determine appropriate roadmap to address banditry in their respective States. As part of a negotiated agreement, the affected State Governments have embarked on the release of reformed bandits in their custody and also to provide social amenities, rehabilitate and reintegrate them to their communities⁵⁴ in exchange for the submission of their weapons and release of captives.

The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including, security agencies, traditional, religious leaders, Hausa/Fulani community, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN), Farmers Associations and local vigilante groups have tended to give the process more credibility, with seeming commitment of top political leadership towards inclusive processes⁵⁵. The Governor of Katsina State, Aminu Bello Masari, had reiterated that the 'reintegration' of repentant bandits would involve the participation of Nigerian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) to assist in re-establishing and abolishing artificial barriers that creates the threat of banditry and heighten violent conflicts between local parties in affected communities⁵⁶. The participation of relevant stakeholders, especially peace building experts and civil society organisations would further erase all perceived political issues in the reform process and make the process transparent. This will create an enabling

⁵²Source: FEWS NET (<https://fewsn.net/west-africa/nigeria/food-security-outlook/june-2019>)

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) is a leading provider of early warning and analysis on food insecurity. Created by USAID in 1985 to help decision-makers plan for humanitarian crises.

⁵³Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S.

⁵⁴<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/09/18/ending-banditry-kidnapping-in-katsina-through-dialogue/>;

⁵⁵Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S.

⁵⁶<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/10/08/two-months-after-sokoto-zamfara-katsina-count-gains-of-amnesty-for-bandits/>

environment to sustain the peace agreements in the region. Nevertheless, several groups are yet to be fully involved in the ongoing consultations with grievances and perceptions varying among different stakeholders⁵⁷. Again, the political dynamics in the region is still fragile with deep rooted suspicions within communities and stakeholders⁵⁸.



FIG 3: Arms/ammunition surrendered by bandits to Zamfara State Government⁵⁹.

The ongoing peace and reconciliatory interventions have resulted in the reduction of attacks and open armed confrontations, recovery of weapons, return of seized cows by local vigilante and bandits⁶⁰, release of abducted persons and members of bandit groups⁶¹. As of December 2019, 525 kidnap victims have regained their freedom in Zamfara State following the peace and reconciliation initiative⁶² which also saw the surrendering of over 218 firearms and ammunitions⁶³.

Also, in Zamfara State, members of the Vigilante group 'Yansakai' in December 2019, surrendered 500 arms and ammunition to the State Governor, as part of efforts to accept the peace process⁶⁴. Between November and December 2019, hundreds of captives held by the Government and bandits have also regained their freedom. In Sokoto State, over 100 firearms have been retrieved⁶⁵.

Apart from the State-level consultations, community leaders in Zamfara State had also facilitated dialogues between conflicting parties⁶⁶, which contributed to the peaceful coexistence at the communal level.

Moreover, the successes of reform process have been attributed to Inclusivity, credibility, transparency, public participation, appropriate and clear rules of procedures and an implementation plan⁶⁷. The critical question however relates to sustainability of the peace process and to ensure all relevant parties are involved in implementing the agreements. The renewed attack by armed bandits in Zamfara, Katsina and Niger States in November/December 2019 further undermined the peace agreements reached between the State Government and representatives of the bandits. Despite the setbacks suffered in the peace processes, the peace deal is still ongoing as members of the negotiating groups pledge to abide by the terms of agreement.⁶⁸

4. Resilient and Mitigating Factors

a. Police-Military Interventions

The Federal Government's counter banditry interventions in the North-West region was based on the deployment of Police and Military operations to the troubled States under several operational codenames such as 'Operations Puff Adder', 'Diran Mikiya', 'Sharan Daji', 'Hadarin Daji', 'Thunder Strike' and 'Exercise Harbin Kunama III'. Nonetheless, the security response had largely elicited mixed results. While the security forces have successfully pushed back bandit attacks, destroyed several hideouts with hundreds of bandits killed or arrested⁶⁹, bandit-related killings and kidnapping have continued in States such as Zamfara, Katsina⁷⁰, and Niger State. Many of the

⁵⁷ Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyars, A.S).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/2000-repentant-bandits-surrender-weapons-to-zamfara-govt/xn94bnm>

⁶⁰ <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/weekly-trust/20191123/281539407800927>

⁶¹ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/09/18/ending-banditry-kidnapping-in-katsina-through-dialogue/>; <https://guardian.ng/news/bandits-release-15-more-kidnapped-victims-in-katsina-state/>

⁶² <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/370609-525-kidnap-victims-regain-freedom-in-zamfara.html>

⁶³ Data from WANE NEWS (www.wanep.org/news)

<https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/2000-repentant-bandits-surrender-weapons-to-zamfara-govt/xn94bnm>

⁶⁴ <https://punchng.com/yansakai-surrenders-500-weapons-to-zamfara-gov/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/police-arrest-immigration-officer-for-supplying-ammunition-to-bandits.html>

⁶⁶ Focus Group Discussion conducted at Birnin Magaji and Anka Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Zamfara State by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes

⁶⁷ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2015/10/national-dialogues-tool-conflict-transformation>

⁶⁸ <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/weekly-trust/20191123/281539407800927>

⁶⁹ <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/01/30/nigeria-military-kills-21-bandits-zamfara-katsina/>

⁷⁰ <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/nigeria-%E2%80%94-94-banditry-attacks-zamfara-flash-report-19-november-2019>

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/364942-zamfara-apc-denies-allegations-yari-behind-recent-bandit-attacks.html>

impacted communities remain deserted, with some of the displaced unable to return home due to fear of a resurgence in attacks and a perception of unguaranteed safety in view of the capacity challenges faced by security agencies in fighting armed bandits.

Other non-militarised responses have accompanied the Government's anti-banditry operations in the region. In May 2019, the Nigerian Army banned the use of motorcycles within the hinterland and forests of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Kebbi, Kano and Niger States⁷¹. Also, the Federal Government suspended all mining activities in Zamfara State to enable it deal particularly with illicit gold mining, considered to be at the heart of the wanton killings in Zamfara State. Beginning from 2018, establishment of cattle colonies and development of a National Livestock Transformation Plan were proposed as long-term solutions to cattle rustling and incessant clashes between farmers and herders. Though the Government argued that the policy would address cattle rustling, douse agro-pastoral conflicts and improve agricultural productivity, its implementation has been hampered by ethno-religious and politically tensed objections and criticisms from some quarters of the country who have questioned the usefulness and effectiveness of the policy.

b. Traditional Institutions/Peacebuilding Interventions including CSOs intervention

In expanding the peace initiatives, the affected State Governments solicited the support of traditional institutions, community watch groups, Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and other grassroots structures to complement its effort. This is in recognition of the roles of critical non-state actors to peace and development, community policing, including intelligence gathering and conflict resolution. Non-Governmental Organisations and other peace constituencies⁷² including Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) and Pastoral Resolve, amongst others, have been actively involved in conflict prevention, community reconciliation and resilience building in some of the affected communities in the North West.

For example, Pastoral Resolve (PARE) had implemented a mediation and enlightenment project to ease tensions in Birnin Magaji LGA of Zamfara State⁷³. Humanitarian interventions by Nigerian Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, National and State Emergency Management Agencies was also relevant in the stabilizing human security in the affected communities. Communities had also leveraged on youths to set up community watch groups to complement the groups established by the State Government to secure some communities⁷⁴.

Nonetheless, consolidating the peace process would involve sustainable platforms for dialogue, improved community policing and multi-stakeholder consultations. This will lead to strengthening the conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding at the community, State and national levels.

5. Scenarios

In view of the foregoing analysis, the following scenarios are envisaged from the peace process instituted by State Governors in the North-West to end armed banditry in the region.

a. Best Case Scenario

The North-West Governors widely consult and strengthen the conflict management framework for the region. Security agencies and communities work together to institute effective community policing, early warning and intelligence gathering that reduces the frequency of attacks by bandits. State and relevant non-state actors roll out capacity building and dispute resolution mechanisms that mitigates the disputes between farmers and pastoralists in affected States. The amnesty program is reengineered with transparent DDR and livelihood support programs. Armed bandits and criminal gangs willingly accept to reform and submit to the conflict management roadmap. All kidnapped persons are released. The incidences of Illicit mining, cattle rustling, agro-pastoral clashes and arms proliferation significantly reduces. Governments in affected States initiate rehabilitation programs for displaced persons which includes grants and loans to devastated communities to rebuild their livelihood. (Desirable but less likely).

⁷¹<https://punchng.com/banditry-army-bans-motorcycles-in-zamfara-kano-katsina-niger-others/>

⁷²Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), a joint report by Pastoral Resolve, Search For Common Ground and Terre Des Hommes in October 2019 (edited by Momale, S.B; Nawaj, S; and Dupeyras, A.S.

⁷³The study by the Centre for Democratic Development, Research and Training (CEDDERT) was funded by DFID Enable Project in 2015 - <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2022%20Issue11/Version-12/12211126172.pdf>

⁷⁴Ibid.

b. Realistic Case Scenario

The dialogue and amnesty initiative are partially successful. Some bandits accept the Government's peace/amnesty offer, disarm and reconcile with their communities. The spate of killings, kidnapping and livestock theft is reduced significantly. Security deployment is stepped up against armed criminal groups and their collaborators. However, low to medium banditry continues along the forest areas straddling Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara and other States in the region. State governments in the region engage in a region-wide peace and reconciliation initiative to stem the level of inter-state banditry and kidnapping (Likely).

c. Worst Case Scenario

The level of banditry escalates. The dialogue/amnesty is inadequately implemented and loses public trust and credibility. Cattle rustling, illegal mining, kidnapping and cross-border criminality leads to higher fatalities and Internally Displaced Persons. There is an increase in cases of Sexual and Gender Based Violence. The State Governments in the region call for a State of Emergency in many affected communities. Banditry spreads beyond the North West. Socioeconomic activities in the region are hindered, with many markets shut down. Security agencies struggle to contain the rising insecurity. (Undesirable but likely).

6. Recommendations/Options for Response

ECOWAS:

- ECOWAS should implement the recommendations arising from the Ministerial meeting of 2018 on transhumance which will complement ongoing National efforts at addressing herder-farmer conflicts as well as cross-border banditry.

FEDERAL/STATE GOVERNMENTS:

- The Federal, States and Local Governments, through their relevant agencies, should strengthen partnership with traditional authorities, faith-based institutions, women and youth groups, civil society organisations

and the media to enhance existing community-based peace infrastructures and conflict early warning systems. These should be integrated into the national/State security architecture to respond and mitigate the effects of structural causes of violent conflicts and the varied threats to human security in the region. It should be supported with the provision of improved technology to track, monitor and curb the influx of organized crime in the region.

- Specific steps should also be taken by the State Governments in the North-West region to develop and implement land and agro-based policy programmes and projects that consciously integrate the interests of pastoralists, farmers and other land users.
- To maximize the utility of dialogue and sustain peace and security, the negotiation processes facilitated by the State Governors, Nigerian Police Force, Civil Society Organisations, Traditional and Religious leaders, amongst others, must be strengthened and sustained to address the root causes of conflict in the States.

SECURITY AGENCIES:

- The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) with support from local community watch groups and State Governments in the North-West region should strengthen community policing to combat threats of banditry including tracking and regulating the local production of small arms in the region.

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS (including the Media)

- Civil Society Organisations, in partnership with traditional/religious leaders, representatives of farmers/herders group, media, community leaders and other relevant interest-based groups should be constructively engaged to give legitimacy to the ongoing peace dialogue process and ensure that various competing interests are properly addressed.

Conclusion

Armed banditry remains a major security challenge that has created instability, hampered socio-economic development and undermined democratic governance in the North-West region. Given the observable shortcomings of the militarised responses to armed banditry, dialogue serves as a complement within a broader conflict management mechanism to address the threats.

The promise of conflict reduction, peace and stability through this initiative will serve as a reference point that can be applied to similar context in other regions of the Country. In light of this, the peace dialogue initiated by the affected States Governments are a step in the right direction in mitigating the threat of banditry in the North-West region of Nigeria.

Nigeria

Addressing Armed Banditry in the North-West Region of Nigeria:

Exploring the Potentials of a Multi-Dimensional
Conflict Management Approach

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