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Original Research

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO CURBING ARMED BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE NORTHWEST NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT
The focus of this paper is on the menace of armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom causing great unease among the people in the frontline local governments in the states of Northwest Nigeria namely: Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Kebbi. If solutions are found to these menaces, citizens in the affected communities would be free to move to their farms, markets, schools and to sleep with their eyes closed. The paper adopts descriptive survey of qualitative data. Findings reveal that a lot of efforts both kinetic and non-kinetic were made by both states and federal governments, yet the problem continued without any reduction in intensity. The paper therefore proffered several practical solutions to curve the menace of armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom in the North-West Nigeria, such as temporary ban on importation of motorcycles which is one of the key logistic that aid mobility for bandit operations as well as spare parts.

Keywords: Armed banditry, Kidnapping, Kidnapping for ransom, Peace, Security

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria is facing tremendous security challenges ranging from armed robbery, insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, farmer-herder conflict, porous borders, ritual killings, murder among others. Banditry and kidnapping for ransom were hitherto not pronounced in the North West Nigeria. However, in recent past the phenomenon has taken a great toll in the North west and some parts of North central Nigeria, comprising Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna and Niger states. Kidnapping for ransom has recently been a profitable venture and an attraction for youth in Nigeria, this phenomenon has greatly devastated the states and the federal government, the concerned frontline states as well as the general population. The bandits take advantage of the "Rugu forest" using it as a safe haven.

The methodology and sophistry of the bandits are aided by the use of motorcycles, that provide them with the necessary mobility. They troop out of their hideouts, three persons on a motorcycle and heavily armed to launch attacks on innocent citizens mostly at night and run back most times unchallenged. The bandits also enjoy unhindered information from informers who are mostly people living in the affected communities. The informers provide the bandits with information about the presence of security personnel as well as potential victims for kidnapping for a fee. The situation is most worrisome in the frontline states of Zamfara, and Katsina. There is hardly any day that would pass without incident of kidnapping and killings of innocent citizens especially farmers and travellers on highways, leaving behind orphans and widows.

Farmers are forced to abandon their farms in these states that are largely agrarian thereby aggravating issues of food security. Farmers are kidnapped and made to pay ransom and, in some cases, they are forced to pay taxes to the bandits at the on -set of the cropping season and during harvest.

Inspite of deployment of both kinetic and non-kinetic efforts to curb this menace, the challenge had continued unabated. Peace agreement was part of the non- kinetic approach adopted by both Katsina and Zamfara states to curve the menace of banditry in the respective states. However, in each case the bandit's leaderships were found to have violated the peace agreements, leading to for example, the former Governor of Katsina state, Rt Hon Aminu Masari calling on citizens of the state to defend themselves with the weapons available to them. The current Governor of the state Dr Umar Radda also made the same call on citizens of the state to arm and defend themselves. Yet, it is within the jurisdiction of Government to provide security to the citizens. Such statement coming from political leaders, therefore suggest clearly a state of helplessness and hopefulness.

It is against this backdrop that, this paper seeks to:

i. Identify the reasons why banditry and kidnapping for ransom persist inspite of all the efforts of both states and federal governments
ii. Examine the extents of banditry and kidnapping for ransom
iii. Explore practical solutions to curb the spate of banditry and kidnapping for ransom in the North-west Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Banditry

Banditry is described by Kokli (2019:1) as an armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder, motivated by the quest for economic accumulation and the victims are individuals and communities with material valuables.

According to Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016:93-105) banditry means occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rape or killed… and thrives within the 'social ecology' of the rural sector characterized by gross governance deficits.

Tahir and Bernard (2021:2) classified banditry based on the underlying 'intent' and 'motive'. The classification includes: social banditry, rural and urban banditry or frontier vs country side banditry, mercenary or autonomous, organised banditry, petty banditry, roving banditry, stationary bandit and maritime banditry. In all these classifications, the common denominator is the intent or motive of the bandit to unleashed mayhem on innocent citizens.

According to Uche and Iwuamadi (2018:71-82)

> Banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims, a development that has been brought to the front burner of national security.

In this paper banditry is classified to include urban bandits, rural bandits, roving bandits etc that use sophisticated weapons to intimidate, and generally unleash violence and sometime

kill innocent citizens in agrarian communities and highways and their actions are motivated by the quest for economic gain

Kidnapping

Uzoma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014:131-142) sees kidnapping as an act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom. This definition suggests that certain ingredients must be observed before an act is considered a kidnapping. First, there must be forceful movement of the victim from one place to the other. There is also no discrimination as to who is kidnapped, children, aged, women and men could always be victims. The kidnappers indulged into drugs at least to give some temporary courage to carry out their activities hence they react violently against any form of resistance resulting into killing their abductees.

Peace

Merriam's Webster's dictionary defines peace in several ways. Peace as a state of tranquillity or quiet, such as freedom from civil disturbance as well as a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom. Peace is also seen as harmony in personal relations. Peace is also defined by Merriam's webster's dictionary as a pact or agreement to end hostilities between those who have been at war or in a state of enmity. This definition aptly defines the situation in the Northwest Nigeria as it relates to the activities of bandits in the region. The meaning of peace is so simple, because when there is no clash but harmony between people who were hitherto friends and brothers like the case of Fulani and Hausas in the Northwest Nigeria, for example, then we can say there is peace in the region. So, curving or elimination of banditry, kidnapping, killings are steps towards achieving a state of Peace. Peace agreement between armed bandits and government, especially if it is achieved is also peace. According to studies of international relations, peace is the elimination of war in the state, however, Dijkema and d'Heres, (2007), citing Johan Galtung who completely changed the concept of peace, noted that peace has two types thus: positive peace and negative peace.

Positive peace is difficult to achieve because it involves human attitude, annexation of governing system, and governing institutions for the progress of the societies and for the inclusion of diverse groups of people for making one nation. So positive peace like Lao Tzu said in his poem, can only be achieved by the inner peace i.e., peace is achieved only when the heart is in peace. On the other hand, negative peace is easy to achieve by the state and the people, because negative peace is the absence of violence, extremism and war. The situation the people of the Northwest found themselves therefore can be describe as negative peace, because of the extreme violence of bandits in the region. However, the situation of negative peace is essential in a way, because it is a first step towards positive peace by bringing practical short term-, medium- and long-term solutions in curving banditry and kidnapping for ransom, ultimately leading to peace and security of the people of the Northwest and Nigeria in general.

Security

According to Waldron, (2010: 128):

The term security can be used to refer to a wide range of a phenomena, and so a unified conception of security may look impossible to arrive at. We routinely speak of different entities

being secure or insecure (individuals, money, jobs) and we usually mean to denote different states of being by doing so (individuals are thought to be insecure when they are threatened with violence, while jobs are insecure if they are likely to disappear in the near future.
According to Booth, (1991: 319):

> Security means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing of people as individuals and groups from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints, together with poverty, poor education, political oppression and so on…

Waldron, (2010: 117) argue that, "security is nothing more than safety", pointing out that, a stand would need to be taken regarding what level of safety is sufficient to trigger a security concern. Waldron further noted:

> One might simply hold that the relationship between security and safety is one of identity: one is secure to the extent that one is safe, and one is safe to the extent that there is a low probability of being physically harmed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are many theories that could be used to explain the spate of armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom and how it can be curved. Some of the theories are Routine activity theory (RAT), Frustration aggression theory, Relational vengeance theory, Relative deprivation theory etc. However, this paper benefit from the frustration -aggression theory. Scholars such as Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, John Dollard, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears were the early Scholars that proposed the theory in 1939. The theory was further developed by Neal Miller in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1969.

The main assumption of the theory according to Dollard, Doob, Mowrer, Miller and Sears (1939) and Fererabend and Feirauben (1972) is that, aggression is always a result of frustration and that frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Dollars et al, (1939) describe frustration as an interruption of an intended response to a behavioural task, which can interfere with the completion of the task.

In the cause of time, the frustration- aggression theory experienced some form of modifications due to criticisms from scholars. For example, Miller (1941) argued that it is not always very clear that, frustration always leads to aggression or aggression always leads to frustration. Miller's intervention further developed the theory by pointing out that, frustration produce instigation leading to several different responses such as instigation to some form of aggression. Berkewitz (1989) also contributed in modifying the theory attributing aggression to personal benefit to the aggressor, noting that, aggression can be driven by inherent personal benefits to the aggressor, rather than by past wrongdoings. Fererabend & Feirauben (1972) on the other hand claimed that, aggression is caused by frustration resulting from an individual's inability to achieve their goals. Banditry according to Adegoke, (2019) is the result of aggressive behaviour that is caused by issues or factors such as poverty and unemployment. Other factors also include desire to get rich quick syndrome. Banditry in Nigeria therefore is largely due to economic difficulties, leading to cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom among

others. The theory is germane in explaining the challenges of banditry in Nigeria, suggesting that, banditry in Nigeria is caused by the desire of criminal elements in the banditry prone communities to acquire wealth in order to get out of poverty. This explain why kidnapping for ransom constitutes an important strategy for bandits and they are so desperate that, failure to pay ransom or even delay in payments of ransom by relatives of the victims sometimes leads to killing the victims.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was adopted in this paper involving gathering information from Internet resource, Newspapers, Academic papers, and Journals. The information extracted from the secondary sources were reviewed using contents analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is abundant literature dealing with the state of insecurity in Nigeria ranging from Insurgency, Armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, Armed robbery, Farmer- herder conflict, Ethno- religious conflicts etc. However, the focus of this paper is essentially on armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom. The following are identified as some of the drivers of insecurity caused by armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom in North-West Nigeria, the extents as well as and the incidents of attacks and kidnapping for ransom as postulated by scholars such as Egbejule (2022), Mohammed (2021), Aghogho Udi (2024).

Drivers of Armed Banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria

Several reasons have been given as the possible drivers of banditry and kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. These drivers include inter- alia: Youth un employment, illiteracy/ poverty, politicisation of security, Fulani / vigilante conflict, lack of effective military containment strategy, weak security Infrastructure, Get- rich- quick syndrome, informer activities, traditional rulers and security operatives' involvement, suppliers of food, petrol, cigar, motorcycle spare parts / mechanics and hard drugs, Porous borders, Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), Inadequate police / Military presence in the rural areas, Illegal mining activities.

Unemployment

The level of exclusion, deprivation arising from unemployment of teaming youths and hardship are some of the reasons why the North West states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Kebbi in Nigeria are considered poor and backward. Oladejo, 2021, WANEP, 2021, Akinyetun et al, 2022: 68 corroborated the assertion thus:

> A few of the poorest states within the nation are found within the North west region (e.g, Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara and katsina states). The level of exclusion, deprivation, and hardship concentrated in this region could be a recipe for calamity. It exposes the youths to criminal exercises and makes them profoundly vulnerable to enrolment by bandit gangs.

High unemployment rates, particularly among the youth in the North- West region have created fertile ground for all manner of crimes especially banditry and kidnapping. Kidnapping

for ransom has become more of criminal enterprise particularly in the banditry affected states. The prevalence of banditry and kidnapping in the North-West shows how deeply the crisis of unemployment has become in the region. The effects of this crisis therefore account for the security challenge that bedevilled the frontline banditry infested states of North-West causing great difficulties, making it difficult for farmers to go to their farms for fear of abduction.

Illiteracy/Poverty

Illiteracy rates are highest in Northern Nigeria, with a 2018 Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report showing the North east zone having a 50.5 % male and 31. 8 % female illiteracy rate, and the North west zone having 59 % male and 29 % female literacy rates. This is exacerbated by factors like the long running insurgency and banditry which disrupts education and leads to high number of out- of – school children. UNICEF 2024 report on Nigeria's out- of- school children noted that, the North west has highest number with a total of 8, 044,800 out- of- school children and followed by North east with 5,064,400 and South- east has the least with 240,200 out- of -school children. From the above statistics one can easily see the possible nexus between a low literacy rate and high poverty rate. In a Punch online newspaper of 11th June 2024 article titled Literacy rate determines financial power Azuka Onwuka noted that, Nigeria has the highest number of out- of- school children as well as the highest number of poor people in the world. The National Bureau of statistics 2022 report classified 133 million Nigerians out of 220 million national population as multi- dimensionally poor, with 86 million in the North and 47 million in the South. Marking World Hunger Day in 2024, the T200 Foundation unveiled Nigeria's hunger report which showed Nigeria having Global Hunger index score of 27.9 with states in the North also having higher poverty scores. Yobe state has the highest 44.2 and followed by Sokoto with 42.1 and then followed by Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina and Jigawa in the North West Nigeria. From the above narrative and statistics, it is clear that North west Nigeria shows a high level of poverty and low level of literacy, which make the region highly vulnerable. The youth in such state of poverty and illiteracy can easily be recruited by bandits as foot soldiers and informers that aid banditry and kidnapping in the North west Nigeria.

Politicization of Security

Insecurity especially in the Northwest Nigeria has been politicised further destabilising the region and making the region clearly an epic centre of armed banditry in Nigeria. Corroborating this assertion, Premium times on line newspaper of 1st October 2024 reported Bello Turji a notorious bandit in Zamfara state attributing politization of security to the political manoeuvrings of the current governor of the state Dauda Lawal Dare and former governor of the state and the current minister of state for defence Bello Matawalle. These are two leading politicians in the state.

Ineffective Military Containment Strategy

Lack of effective military containment strategy create difficulties for the security forces to stop the expansion of the enemy. The security forces are having problem of adaptability. This is corroborated by Kabiru Adamu in a punch on line newspaper of 20th October 2024, captioned Nigeria's security agencies ill- equipped to tackle modern threats. Kabiru noted that, the

criminals are always evolving and adapting to their environment, but unfortunately the Nigeria's security operatives are not keeping pace.

The manner in which banditry and kidnapping are persisting in the front- line states of North-West Nigeria is making it difficult to claim that government current security strategy is succeeding. Kabiru Adamu corroborate this assertion noting that:

> … the government has not clearly outlined or communicated any specific plan they are following. If you look at the federal government, there seem to be no clear direction in their approach and the same applies to many state governments. The strategy is at best unclear.

At the moment there seem to be no mechanism also to measure any campaign or measures currently in place. The general complains from within and outside the security establishments is lack of adequate equipment and welfare.

Weak Security Infrastructure

Weak security infrastructure is an enabler to bandit's operations and it constitutes a very serious challenge to the fight against banditry and kidnapping for ransom in the affected states in Northwest region. Mr Kabiru Adamu in an interview with Punch Newspaper reporter on 20th October 2024 made revealing statements when he states that: Weak security infrastructure including ineffective law enforcement and inadequate security measures allow criminals to continue kidnapping. As long as the deterrent elements remains weak and they can collect and spend ransom without restrictions these crimes will persist

Weak security system also includes lack of coordination among security agencies. In the same Punch Newspaper on line report of 20th October 2024, Mr Kabiru Adamu a security expert and MD Beacon security and intelligence limited state as follows: One of the biggest issues is lack of coordination among security agencies while there have been some recent improvements, it's still far from adequate. In some cases, there have even been reports of security agencies working against each other, which makes success difficult to achieve.

Get- rich- quick Syndrome

Get- rich- quick syndrome constitute a big challenge to the society. The desire to get quick money without working for it especially by the youth had been identified as one of the factors of kidnapping. Dodo (2010) is in support of the assertion that, get- rich- quick and moral decadence are causative factors of kidnapping. Inyang, (2009) further buttressed the decadence of Nigerian society in the manner people acquire questionable wealth and yet the society respect them, recognise them and reward them with traditional titles. The society does not question how individuals that are known to come from a poor background but suddenly acquire wealth through corruption and start living in affluence. The life style of such individuals in the society may influence younger elements to emulating them by embarking on all manner of crimes such as kidnapping.

Lack of Effective Community Engagement

Effective community engagement is lacking in the way the menace of banditry and kidnapping is being addressed in the affected Northwest States. Mr Kabiru Adamu, a security expert in a

Punch Newspaper online of 20th October, 2024 provided reasons in support of the assertion, noting that, community engagement is almost non-existent, largely because there is no grant strategy without a clear plan. The Involvement of communities in the security provision process is therefore important for a successful fight against banditry.

Informer Activity

Informer activity is a very serious enabler of banditry and kidnapping in the North west Nigeria. The bandits rely on the information they receive from informers to launch attacks on individuals and villages. The bandits also exploit the socio – economic vulnerability of the rural people especially the teaming unemployed youth, recruiting them as informers that provide the bandits with timely and strategic information on victims as well as movements of troops. Such information had greatly affected negatively the operational successes of the military and had also made it possible for kidnapping of people of different status. The benefits that accrue to the informers is so attractive so that even people that ought to protect the citizens are now involved. Report involving a retired Engineer and later a traditional ruler in Runka village of Katsina state arrested for being an informer to the bandits in his locality is in the public domain.

Traditional Rulers and Security Operative's Involvement

Some unscrupulous traditional rulers as well as security operatives are found to collaborate and aid bandits to unleash mayhem on the people. Information about those that ought to protect the communities and the people are available in substantial data linking some unscrupulous traditional rulers, security operatives and other residents. In Zamfara state personnel of the Nigeria security and civil defence corps (NSCDC) named Maikano sarkin Tasha, an Assistant superintendent by rank was arrested by the Nigeria police in possession of ammunition and drugs for delivery to bandits. In this connection the statement of Commissioner of police Zamfara state command CP Dalijan support the assertion thus:

> … NSCDC officer identified as ASC11 Maikano sarkin Tasha was caught with a large cache of ammunition including AK-47 rounds of anti- aircraft bullets as well as illegal drugs such as cannabis. Maikano had previously been arrested two years ago but was released, this time around, Maikano would not evade justice. Channel Television, online report, 27th September, 2024.

Similarly, in a report by channels TV online, the Zamfara state police command reported the arrest of collaborators who supply drugs and ammunition to bandits in the Northwest state of Zamfara. The Commissioner of Police in charge of the police command CP Dalijan Confirmed as follows:

> … arrested Mamuda Sani Makakari, a fake doctor, who was found in possession of 441 live rounds of ammunition. Investigation revealed that Makakari had been providing medical services to the bandits without any formal medical training. He was apprehended alongside several women and children carrying live ammunition to be delivered to bandits in Anka local government area.

(CP Dalijan on Channels TV on line)

In a similar report by Solomon Odeniyi captioned Ribadu berates policemen, soldiers selling weapons to criminals and published in the Punch on-line Newspaper of 17th October 2024 cited the Nigeria's National Security Adviser (NSA) Nuhu Ribadu thus:

> …We have to find a way of putting a stop to this. We must if we want to recover our country and live-in peace and stability. The worst human being is a policeman or a soldier who will take arms from his own formations and sale them or hide out for the bad people to come and kill his own colleagues.

These pronouncements from the nation's security high command confirm clearly the extent of the involvement of security personnel in facilitating the movement of weapons to terrorists, bandits and other violent non- state actors enabling the bandit's operational successes

Suppliers of Basic Daily Needs to Bandits

Suppliers of basic daily needs to bandits play an important role in their operational successes. The suppliers are members of the local communities. They supply to the bandits, items such as food, petrol, cigar, alcohol, hard drugs among other things. The bandits operate in a smaller, loosely connected groups called "Daba" in Hausa meaning Camp and residing in the forest, known as Rugu Forest that cut across Katsina, Zamfara and Kaduna states. Bandits are human beings and they need food to survive, they also smoke cigarrate and use hard drugs to create fake confidence to enable them carry out their nefarious activities, while petrol help them to power the motor cycles which is their major means of mobility giving the terrain of their hideouts. Without such supplies it will be almost impossible for bandits to successfully operate. In connection to petrol suppliers to the bandits, the NSDC operatives were reported in Channel Television news on the 19th may, 2025 to have intercepted 1,571 Litres of premium motor spirit known as petrol illegally transported in jerrycans to banditry prone areas in Zamfara state. Corroborating this report, the public relations officer of the NSDC command Umar Muhammad noted that:

> Today, we bring before you four suspects apprehended for illegal dealings in premium motor spirit (PMS) in large quantities, violating the National and State executive orders of petroleum products sales to retailers in jerrycans.

Permeable and Ineffective Border Control

Nigeria's vast land border covers 4,047 kms while the marine borders covers 853 kms. The vast nature of the borders coupled with hundreds of ungoverned spaces enables the bandits to move freely across the borders and making also border control quite ineffective. In a debriefing session with Immigration operatives during border formations visit in 2014, Parradang the former Comptroller General of Immigration corroborated the assertion when he mentioned that, there are over 1,400 ungoverned spaces in form of illegal routes along the land border corridors in Nigeria. making it difficult to control the borders and secure the spaces. Access to weapons by the bandits due to trafficking of SALW through the Porous borders therefore remains an enabler. According to Kabiru Adamu in his interview with Punch on line Newspaper of 20th October 2024, "Nigeria has done little to reduce the availability of weapons

and ammunition to criminals. It is important to differentiate between the two- without ammunition, weapons are useless, yet they still have access to both, which enables their activities". Border porosity remain a critical enabler to the activities and movement of armed groups across the borders. In this connection, Ojewale (2024) argued that, Nigeria's border with Niger, which spans 1,497km, is poorly policed by the Nigerian customs and immigration services. The porosity of these frontiers deepens the spread of armed groups into Nigeria from central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). This coincided with the post Ghaddafi era, when arms started pouring out of Libya into the corridors of the Sahel destabilising the entire region.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

Proliferation of SALW enable bandits to acquire these weapons and they use them to unleash terror on innocent citizens in the communities , the Nigeria National security adviser Nuhu Ribadu on the occasion of the destruction of illicit weapons by the National Centre for the control of small arms and light weapons noted that: "The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons remains a major threat to our national security, exacerbating issues such as insurgency, banditry and other violent crimes". (Punch online newspaper, 17th October, 2024)

Inadequate Police/ Military Presence in Rural areas

The presence of police and military forces are grossly inadequate in the rural communities where bandit attacks are rampant. According to Hassan (2021 :7):

> There is lack of enough police personnel in the rural areas, especially in the norther region. Nigeria is additionally under policed, so farmers turned to vigilantes- known as yan sakai- for assurance. But the yan sakai have been unpredictable in their retaliatory savagery. Although the bandits do enrol from among the pastoralists, the vigilante's reaction has been to target all herder communities, notwithstanding the culpability.

The inadequate police and military presence in the front-line states where banditry is rampant is further compounded by the inadequacy of a national police that is ineffective and lack motivation.

Anyadike (2018) argued that there are few (however ineffectively prepared and unmotivated) policemen in Nigeria as against the colossal populace which makes the country communities for the most part undeserving of police consideration. Or maybe, the state governments have turned to vigilantes to form up for the setback, giving them chasing rifles and motor bikes to stand up to banditry. Be that as it may, due to late and conflicting instalment of remittances, a few vigilantes themselves got to the bandits.

Illegal Mining Activities

There is now a clear linkage between illegal mining and banditry in Nigeria. According to Okoli, (2019), even the federal government has perceived the clear linkage between banditry and illegal mining and suspended all forms of mining in Zamfara state in early April 2019. Illegal mining of gold activities in the Nigeria's Northwest and other regions is linked to Some Nigerians in high positions of authority and their collaborators who not only deprived Nigeria of legitimate earnings, but also drive rural banditry and violent local conflicts. Corroborating

the assertion Ogbonnaya (2020) made sterling revelations as part of his key findings in a report of a project funded by the European Union (EU) titled illegal mining and rural banditry in Northwest Nigeria. Responses, Successes and Challenges thus:

> Illegal miners front for politically connected individuals who collaborate with foreign nationals and corporations to smuggle and sell gold via neighbouring countries and noted further that, in the Northwestern Nigeria illegal mining combined with rural banditry leads to criminality and violent local conflicts.

Extents and Incidents of Banditry Attacks, Kidnapping for Ransom and Killings in Northwest Nigeria.

Banditry Attacks

In research conducted and reported by SBM Intelligence online revealed that, between July 2023 and June 2024 at least 7,568 individuals were abducted in 1,130 incidents across Nigeria. The states of Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina in the Northwest Nigeria reported the highest numbers of both incidence and victims. Zamfara state experience 132 incidents with 1,639 victims, Kaduna state had 113 incidences involving 1, 113 victims and Katsina state recorded119 incidences with 887 victims. These states according to SBM intelligence report also recorded the highest number of civilian deaths. Over the past years, kidnapping has become increasingly lethal, resulting in 1, 056 deaths across 1, 130 reported incidents. On the average every attempted kidnapping now results in a fatality.

Some residents of Zamfara state in the Northwest Nigeria painted a dire picture of the level of insecurity in the state. In an online tg news of 12 th September 2024 Gambo Sa'adu Moriki a retired army sergeant and now an Imam in Moriki town in Zamfara state painted a dire picture of the situation as follows:

> Bello Turji's operational base "Zurmi" county is the operational headquarters of terror kingpin Turji and Moriki is his hideout. Turji has completely captured the people of my town, bringing in Fulani militants from Niger and Mali to wreak havoc.

Gambo further stated in anger that, the terrorist's atrocities know no bounds, ranging from brutal killings to kidnappings and theft. "We hear that, they are also engage in illegal mining of Gold". In the same report by tg online news, another resident Abubakar Mai anguwa lamented on the spate of kidnapping in his community thus:

> At times our girls and young wives are kidnapped by the bandits loyal to Bello Turji (a notorious bandit kingpin in the Northwest Nigeria) and there is nothing we can do. This is the situation we found ourselves…

Kidnapping of school children and students of tertiary institutions in the North west has been a recurring decimal. According to Egbejule, (2022): on numerous occasions bandits have abducted school children in different parts of Northern region of Nigeria, especially in Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Kebbi and Yobe states. A more elaborate revelation was made in Daily Trust of January, 6, 2021, Punch, June, 11, 2021, The Nation, June,19, 2021 on incidents of kidnappings in the Northwest, Nigeria as follows:

> … The Northwest Region has witnessed at least six kidnappings of school children and university students between December 2020 to June 2021. For example, over 300 students were abducted by bandits on December 6, 2020 from Government science secondary school Kankara, Katsina state and over 80 Islamic school (Islamiyya) students were abducted by bandits on December 19, 2020 from Dandume village in Katsina state. About 317 school girls were kidnapped on January, 15, 2021 from Jangebe, Zamfara state. 39 students were abducted by bandits on march, 15, 2021 from the federal college of forestry mechanization in Mando, Kaduna state. 19 students of Green field university in Kaduna state were abducted by bandits on April, 23, 2021, one student was killed and eight people including lecturers and students were abducted by bandits on June, 10, 2021. From Nuhu Bamalli polytechnic in Zaria, Kaduna state, 102 students were abducted by bandits on June, 17, 2021. From Government secondary school Birnin Yawuri, Kebbi state.

An analysis of geopolitical zones by SBM 2024 report reveals that, Women are more often targeted for kidnapping than men. In the kidnapping incidents from 2022 to 2024, Northern Nigeria has seen a sharp escalation. In 2024 alone the number of incidents in the North has exceeded the combined totals of previous two years, indicating a rapidly deteriorating and increasingly unmanageable situation.

Kidnapping for Ransom

Kidnappers increasingly target people, they start with high ransom demands of unimaginable amount of money, but eventually lower their demands of what members of victim's family can afford. Quite often ransom paid reflect the status of family and the capacity of victim's family to absorb the shock rather than the negotiating skills. Members of the victim's family are likely to pay more if they panic. Corroborating this narration Egbejule (2022): assert that, people kidnapped for ransom include members of all social classes, from politicians and their families to Imams, clergymen, security guards and farmers. Similar revelation was made by Mohammed (2021): when he states that:

> Kidnapping of people for ransom is becoming a lucrative business in North west region, especially among the many unemployed youths. Many residents complained that the armed banditry groups storm their communities during the day time steal cattle or kidnap people. The bandits have realised that kidnapping of ordinary villagers is not as profitable as kidnapping people travelling on transportation routes or schools…

Kidnapping in the Northwest is affecting economic activities especially in the agriculture sector of the economy. Farmers in the states of Northwest Nigeria are forced to pay tax at the beginning of farming season and period of harvest and many farmers lost their lives mostly when there is resistance. In Zamfara state for example, according to the report of Truth

Nigeria an online Newspaper of 12, September, 2024, Bello Turji a notorious bandit kingpin who command more than 1,000 bandits has held sway for too long, every farming season, residents are forced to pay a crippling ransom in crops and surrender their men to work on Turji's farm for free. In the same vein Abubakar Mai anguwa, the head of the sub head of Moriki village in Zamfara state affirmed that, "At the beginning of every farming season, we are asked to pay Bello Turji about $ 13,000 in the form of crops". Mai anguwa's assertion is further buttressed in a documentary of the China global television network (CGTN), Africa live thus, … farmers in the bandits dominated states of Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Zamfara and Jigawa have to pay bandit leaders twice a year just to till their own land during planting and harvesting seasons.

S.B Morgen a security research firm provided a sterling statistic on ransom payments in Nigeria thus:

> … $ 22.5 billion in bandit related ransom, extortions and thefts were paid in Nigeria between 2020 and 2023. Aggregated estimates for crimes including cattle rustling, kidnapping and rent taking from farmers is approximately $ 500 m to $ 1.2 billion annually.

Also, according to a report by S B Morgen in 2024, Abubakar Mai anguwa noted that, in addition to surrendering men to work for Bello Turji on his farm, ''we also send him our harvest in November or December every year since 2022". On the 5, September, 2023, the international centre for investigative reporting (The ICIR) online citing S B Morgen, revealed that:

> Between July 2022 and June 2023, $ 387,179 translating to 302 million Naira was paid as ransom to kidnappers in Nigeria, representing Six percent of the total 5 Billion Naira (6, 410, 256 as of 30, June, 2023) the kidnappers requested within the period.

According to Aghogho Udi (2024) in a Naira matric online Newspaper report of 1, September, 2024 captioned Nigerians paid 1.04 billion Naira as ransom to kidnappers in one year. S B Morgen report titled "Grim Reaping", 1.048 billion Naira was paid to kidnappers as ransom between July 2023 and June 2024 representing 9.5 % of the total 10.99 Billion Naira demanded by the kidnappers. In another report of bandit's imposition of levies on farmers in the Northwest, Daily trust of 24, November, 2023, titled "Kaduna farmers in dilemma as bandits impose levies before harvest" noted that: Villagers in some communities in Kaduna state, especially in local governments of Igabi, Giwa and Birnin Gwari are facing challenges and bandits continue to intimidate and harass them, forcing many of them to abandon their farm lands.

The report further revealed that, the communities such as kidandan, galadimawa, kerawa, Sabon layi, Sabon Birni, and Ruma had to pay between 70, 000 Naira to 100,000 Naira to bandits for permission to harvest. Non-compliance led to severe consequences, including abduction, murder or confiscation of their produce.

On deteriorating incidents of banditry in the Northwest state of Katsina, the leadership online Newspaper of 8, October, 2024 in a report titled "Bandits openly provide Bank account details for Ransom payments", the Member House of representatives, representing Faskari/Kankara/abuwa federal constituency, Honourable Shehu Dalhatu made the disclosure while moving a motion of urgent public importance on the need for government intervention

against escalating bandit attacks in his constituency. According to Honourable Shehu Dalhatu evidence of such ransom demands was readily available, including on personal devices, further proving the gravity of the situation. The law maker noted with concern that, "the situation has deteriorated to the point where bandits now openly provide bank account details for ransom payments to be made for kidnapped victims"

Efforts of the States and Federal Governments in Curbing Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom.

Non-Kinetic Efforts in Curbing Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom

Filling Station Control

As part of measures to address the lingering security challenges of mass kidnapping for ransom and cattle rustling in the Northwest state of Zamfara, the then Governor of the state Bello Matawalle established a task force in line with an executive order provision he signed in August 2021. Measures taken for the purpose of Petroleum motor spirit (PMS) stations include the following:

a. The sale of petroleum products by filling stations within the control of village head is banned
b. Filling stations shall not sell petroleum products in jerrycans or any other container to any customer
c. No filling station shall sale more than five litres to motor cyclists and 40 litres to any vehicle
d. A special taskforce is hereby established to ensure full compliance with this order while mobile courts are hereby established to deal with violators

Peace Agreement and Disarmament

Peace agreement and disarmament between leaders of bandit groups was once a strategy adopted by front line states of Zamfara and Katsina states in order to bring an end to the spate of banditry and kidnapping in the states. The agreement was frustrated by the bandits. However, in a recent peace deal between Adamu Aleiru one of the bandit kingpin in the North west zone claimed that, the last peace deal in Faskari local government of Katsina state was frustrated by government refusal to release his brother that was arrested by security operatives. Available evidence indicates that, it is unlikely that peace deal between the government and leaders of bandit groups or between bandits and the local community leaders in the Northwest zone can be a workable strategy. Recent incidence of attacks and abduction of 55 worshippers from a mosque in Gidan Turbe village, in Tsafe local government area and Godai village, in Bukkuyum local government area of Zamfara State was reported in the Daily trust of 16th September 2025 amidst peace deal in Katsina and Zamfara states.

Closure of Markets / Sales of Livestock

In Zamfara state the Executive order signed by the then Governor of the state Bello Matawalle in August 2021 in order to control security challenges in the state took far reaching measures including Suspension of all weekly markets' activities within Zamfara state. According to the commissioner for information Alhaji Ibrahim Dosara:

> The state government has closed down, yargaya market of Tudun wada area in Gusau, Kauran Namoda- Jibiya junction, Lambar Bakura junction, Colony- Rini junction and Mayar-Anka junction. (Punch, Newspaper, August, 2021)

Similar measures aimed at addressing worsening security situation in the state was banning of sales of petrol in jerrycans and filling stations in the state were directed to sale fuel worth 10,000 Naira only to a vehicle and security operatives were directed to keep vigil of vehicles and motorcycles coming for repeat purchase

Kinetic Efforts by the Nigerian Military

Internal security provision is primarily the mandate of the Nigeria police Force (NPF) with other security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies like the Nigerian financial intelligence unit (NFIU), The independent corrupt practices and other related offences commission (ICPC), The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corp (NSCDC) working together to provide solution to address unconventional threat posed by armed banditry in the Northwest region of Nigeria. However, according to Enweremadu (2019, 327- 350)

> The inability of these law enforcement institutions to adequately address the insecurity impasse occasioned by armed banditry in the Northwest region has led to the active deployment and participation of the Nigerian Military in internal security operations (ISOs) towards restoring peace and security

In its efforts therefore to confront and ultimately defeat banditry that threatened the peace and security of citizens in the banditry infested states in the Northwest Nigeria against the "inability" of the internal and border security operatives, the Nigerian Military had deployed a number of kinetic measures involving direct military action. These include operations such as "Operation Hadarin Daji" (OPHD) which loosely translates to "disruption" in the Hausa language In 2019, Operation Sahel Sanity also in 2019 covering Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara and Sokoto states with the Nigerian Army (NA) and Nigerian Airforce (NAF) as the military components of the ISO Covering Kano, Kebbi, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara, and Sokoto states as its area of responsibilities (AOR) Utilising Nigerian Army and Airforce as the components of the ISO. Others are operation Thunder Strike in 2018, covering Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states, then operation Harbin Kunama in 2015, Covering Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states. This operation ended in 2019. Operation Sharan Daji also Commenced operations in 2015 covering Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states. The operation also ended in 2019. In addition to the Federal government/ Military Kinetic efforts the government of the affected frontline Northwest States of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kaduna have made tremendous efforts in curbing banditry using Non-kinetic approaches such as Creation of vigilante groups, Creation of avenues for peace agreement with the bandits, Filling station control, Closure of weekly markets, yet, the situation continued unabated. The inadequacies are found clearly in the literature reviewed in this paper. The literature shows clearly the inadequacies in the containment strategy of security forces, lack of adequate police and military presence in the affected rural communities, connivance and compromise by some unscrupulous traditional rulers and security personnel, Informer activity, (who are members of

the affected communities), Illegal Mining activities, Proliferation of SALW, Permeable and Ineffective border control, Activities of suppliers of essential daily needs to bandits.

The Quantum of money involved in kidnapping business paid as ransom from available records and statistics clearly make kidnapping lucrative and therefore very attractive especially amongst the bandits themselves and their collaborators that continue to benefit from the conflict. The bandits who were hitherto not exposed to stupendous wealth may not easily give up and therefore sacrifice such monetary benefits on the altar of Peace agreement. Unless there is a radical departure in the way the entire issue of banditry and kidnapping is handled in the Northwest Nigeria, there may be no end to the menace at sights. Practical solutions are therefore envisaged at this point of Nigeria's security quagmire.

Practical Solutions to Curb the Menace of Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom

Since all efforts by both the federal and state governments could not bring an end to the menace of banditry and kidnapping for ransom in the North- west region, it becomes pertinent to recommend some practical solutions in order to address the persistent security challenges that hinders peaceful coexistence of communities and impact national security. This paper therefore recommends short- term, Medium -term and long-term measures as well as the strategies to implement the recommendations thus:

Short term Measures

1. The National Assembly in collaboration with the Executive should make laws
    a) banning the importation of both motorcycles and spare parts for 2 years
    b) Direct all persons that owns a motorcycle in the frontline states in the Northwest and frontline local governments in North central state of Niger to report to the nearby police station to register and surrender the motorcycles within two weeks and await further directives
    c) Federal Government should make available funds to immediately pay all registered motorcycles after proper valuation of the motorcycles by a committee of eminent personalities comprising representatives of the Nigerian Bar association, Representatives of traders' association, Representatives of civil society organisations, Security operatives, Religious bodies, community leaders and other eminent elders in the affected communities
    d) The National Assembly in collaboration with the Executive to make law that will allow the committee after due payments of the surrendered motor cycles to get all the motor cycles burnt simultaneously across all designated police stations on the same day and at the same time
    e) At the end of the exercise, the general public must have been fully aware of the consequences of still keeping motor cycles in their possession, as any person found in possession of motorcycle at the expiration of the exercise becomes an enemy of the state and would be treated as such.
    f) National Assembly should make laws prescribing capital punishment on all persons found to be involved in:

i. Banditry and kidnapping

ii. Aiding and abetting banditry activities whether as informer, supplier of essential items such as drugs, petrol, cigarrate, food and food items, motor cycles, spare parts, Mechanics, drugs, medical services among others.

iii. Shoot at site persons found to be riding motorcycles in the frontline local governments of the banditry affected states after the period of the exercise.

iv. Federal government should engage the international community and opposition political parties to show understanding and avoid the argument of human rights violation in relation to the activities of enemies of state. The bandits are the worst violators of human rights. They kill innocent citizens and deny them the right to life, personal liberty, freedom and general security and wellbeing.

Medium -term Measures

i. Political leaders and Military High command should consider the hiring of Military contractors to wipe out banditry once and for all. This is important because the menace is a reality and has been with us. Citizens in the local communities of the banditry infested states see, feel, leave with banditry and thousands were killed by bandits. So, the challenge is real. Wiping off the menace completely would enable the federal government to as a long-term measure address socio- economic issues in the communities.

ii. Federal government should continue to diplomatically persuade the three Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger Republic) especially its neighbour Niger Republic to return to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for strategic National security interests, and also because united west Africa will guarantee an effective control of trans-border organized crimes e.g, SALW, Banditry etc.

Long- term Measures

I. Government should focus on Intelligence driven border management and control of SALW and influx of bandits through the borders by:
   a. Investing in modern surveillance tools for border control.
   b. Fund adequately Agencies with border security mandate such as, The Nigeria Immigration, (NIS), Nigeria Customs (NCS), National drugs law enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Department of State Service (DSS).
   c. Train personnel of agencies with border security mandate

II. Federal government should embark on Identification and intensify effective control of drugs trafficking routes using modern technology and training of personnel.

III. Federal government should embark on massive investment in projects and programmes as a long- term measure in order to address socio-economic challenges such as Youth unemployment, poverty, illiteracy among others. The implementation strategies for this recommendation are:
   a. Create 200 thousand job opportunities across 20 security, law enforcement, military and other strategic Institutions as both short term and long-term measures in order to address socio-economic challenges that aid criminality in frontline states in particular and Nigeria in general.
   b. Breakdown of job opportunities across 20 Government institutions:
   200,000 Jobs x 20 agencies = 4,000,000 Jobs

4,000,000 jobs divide by 774 LGA = 5,168 jobs per LGA in one year.
5,168 jobs x 5years (long term) = 25,840 jobs per LGA in 5years.

Proposed job opportunities distribution in Four (4) Banditry affected North West states of Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina States

- Kebbi state with 21 LGA's x 5,168 jobs will have 108,528 job opportunities in 1year. (5,168 per LGA)
  108,528 Jobs x 5 years = 542,640 jobs in 5 years
- Sokoto state with 16 LGA's x 5,168 jobs will have 82,688 job opportunities in 1year. (5,168 per LGA).
  82,688 jobs x 5years = 413,440 jobs in 5 years

- Zamfara state with 14 LGA'S X 5,168 will have 72,352 job opportunities in 1years. (5,168 per LGA).
  72,352jobs x 5 years = 361,760 jobs in 5 years

- Katsina state with 34 LGA's X 5,168 will have 175,712 job opportunities in 1year. (5,168 per LGA).
  175,712 jobs x 5 years = 878,560 jobs in 5 years

Based on the above distributions it is clear that this recommendation would go a long way in addressing Youth unemployment and frustrate the recruitment drive of the bandits in the front-line local governments in the affected states in the Northwest Nigeria. This is because the youth will not be available for recruitment.

IV. There should be a national consensus in the fight against corruption. The governments at all levels and the followers should agree to a genuine fight. This is because without corruption there will be no compromise from those that ought to protect the people.
V. Federal and State governments should embark on massive programmes that will boost agriculture in order to increase employment opportunities in the informal sector for Nigerian youths who are vulnerable to recruitment as bandits/kidnapers and informers.

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