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Socio-Cultural Impact of Herdsmen and Armed Banditry Attacks in Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this paper is to access the socio cultural impact of herdsmen and armed banditary attacks in Abraka, Delta state, Nigeria using appropriate standard structured questionnaires to harvest data from community. Data obtained show that 1% affirmed that attacks had occurred, among those affected, 76% experienced 1–3 attacks, 9% 4–6 attacks, and 15% more than 6 attacks, with 90% indicating that most incidents occurred during 2018–2019. Socio-economically, only 3% and 6% of respondents rated the effect on business as very high and high respectively, whereas 60% reported a very low impact. Most (80%) estimated financial losses in the range of 10,000–999,000 naira over five years, and only 7% reported the loss of a family member. Property losses were notably high for farm assets (46%) and animals (29%). Although 98% noted that security agents did respond, 72% experienced response times exceeding one hour. Ninety-nine percent of respondents recommended deploying more government security agents. These findings highlight the need for enhanced security and revised land-use policies to mitigate long-term socio-economic disruptions.

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In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a significant escalation in violent confrontations involving herdsmen and armed bandits. Historically, herdsmen have played a crucial role in the pastoral economy, migrating across vast regions in search of grazing lands. However, rapid population growth, intensified competition over dwindling natural resources, and shifting land-use patterns have transformed these interactions into violent conflicts. What was once a localized issue in the northern regions has now spilled over into the Niger Delta, profoundly affecting communities such as Abraka in Delta State (Onyido, 2017; Obi and Adebayo, 2019). The escalation of these conflicts has disrupted local economic activities and altered longstanding socio-cultural dynamics. Recent reports highlight that herdsmen and armed banditry attacks have led to substantial economic losses—from the destruction of farms and properties to reduced agricultural output and displacement of community members (Reuters, 2022). Moreover, the pervasive insecurity has forced residents to adopt ad hoc self-defense measures or form vigilante groups, thereby deepening the mistrust between communities and local authorities (BBC News, 2021). This cycle of violence not only affects physical security but also undermines community cohesion and the integrity of traditional social structures. Underlying these violent incidents are complex factors that include competition over land, weak governance, and the erosion of traditional

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conflict resolution mechanisms. Rapid urban expansion and population pressures have increased the stakes for both farming and grazing, often leading to clashes over land rights and resource allocation (Okafor, 2020). In addition, the gradual breakdown of customary dispute-resolution practices has left communities with few alternatives for peaceful negotiation, thereby exacerbating tensions and fostering further violence. Such disturbances in social order have far-reaching implications, as they alter community identity and disrupt the fabric of social interactions that once maintained stability and mutual trust (Onyido, 2017). Beyond the immediate physical and economic consequences, the socio-cultural impacts of these attacks are profound. The psychological trauma associated with repeated violent encounters, loss of loved ones, and destruction of communal assets contributes to long-term community disintegration. Many residents now express a diminished sense of security and a growing skepticism toward the ability of public institutions to protect them. This erosion of trust can hinder community development and stifle efforts toward collective resilience, as informal security networks—though sometimes necessary—may further fragment social unity (Obi and Adebayo, 2019).

Given this multifaceted crisis, the objective of this paper is to access the soci cultural impact of herdsmen and armed bandictary attacks in Abraka, Delta statement, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of Study Area: Abraka is a town located in the Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, situated in the heart of the Niger Delta region. Geographically, Abraka lies along the Ethiope River, which not only shapes its landscape but also underpins the town's traditional economic activities such as agriculture, fishing, and trade. The region experiences a tropical climate, characterized by high humidity, heavy rainfall, and consistently warm temperatures throughout the year—conditions that are ideal for the cultivation of diverse crops and support a vibrant fishing industry. Historically, Abraka is predominantly inhabited by the Urhobo ethnic group, whose rich cultural heritage is reflected in the town's traditional festivals, local crafts, and community-based customs. The socio-cultural fabric of Abraka has long been interwoven with indigenous practices and communal bonds that facilitate conflict resolution and social cohesion. However, in recent years, the town has witnessed significant disruptions due to escalating conflicts between herdsmen and armed bandits. These violent incursions have not only led to physical and economic losses but have also strained the traditional social structures that once ensured stability in the community (BBC News, 2021). Adding another dimension to its socio-economic landscape, Abraka hosts the main campus of the University of Delta State, which has fostered an academic and youthful environment in the town. While the presence of a higher educational institution has brought development opportunities and increased literacy levels, it has also highlighted contrasting realities.

On one hand, the university acts as a catalyst for local economic growth and innovation; on the other, the persistent security challenges—including sporadic attacks by herdsmen and armed banditry—continue to disrupt community life, dampening the prospects for long-term socio-cultural and economic development (Reuters, 2022).

Research Design: The research design adopted in this study is a descriptive survey design. This design was selected to assess and interpret the socio-cultural impact of herdsmen and armed banditry attacks in Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design is appropriate because it enables the collection of quantitative data that describe existing conditions, prevailing practices, and community attitudes towards these security challenges. It also facilitates the exploration of the socio-economic and cultural consequences of the recurring violent incidents in the study area.

Population of the Study and Sampling Technique: The population of this study comprises residents of Abraka including household heads, business proprietors, and community leaders—who are directly affected by herdsmen and armed banditry attacks. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that various demographic segments (e.g., age groups, gender, occupation, and educational background) are adequately represented in the study. For this research, a total of 200 respondents were selected from different residential and commercial areas in Abraka.

Instrument Used for Data Collection: The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered in person and divided into five sections:

Section A: Demographic Information (age, gender, marital status, education, and occupation)
Section B: Awareness and Perception of Herdsmen and Armed Banditry Activities (e.g., prior

knowledge, frequency of sightings, and relationship with herdsmen)
Section C: Security Threats and Frequency of Attacks (e.g., presence of weapons, reporting behavior, and attack frequency)
Section D: Socio-Cultural and Economic Impacts (e.g., effects on business, estimated financial loss, and personal losses)
Section E: Mitigation Measures and Recommendations (e.g., community responses, security agent involvement, and suggestions for improving security)

The questionnaire was administered on the spot by the researcher, ensuring that respondents understood the questions and were encouraged to answer truthfully.

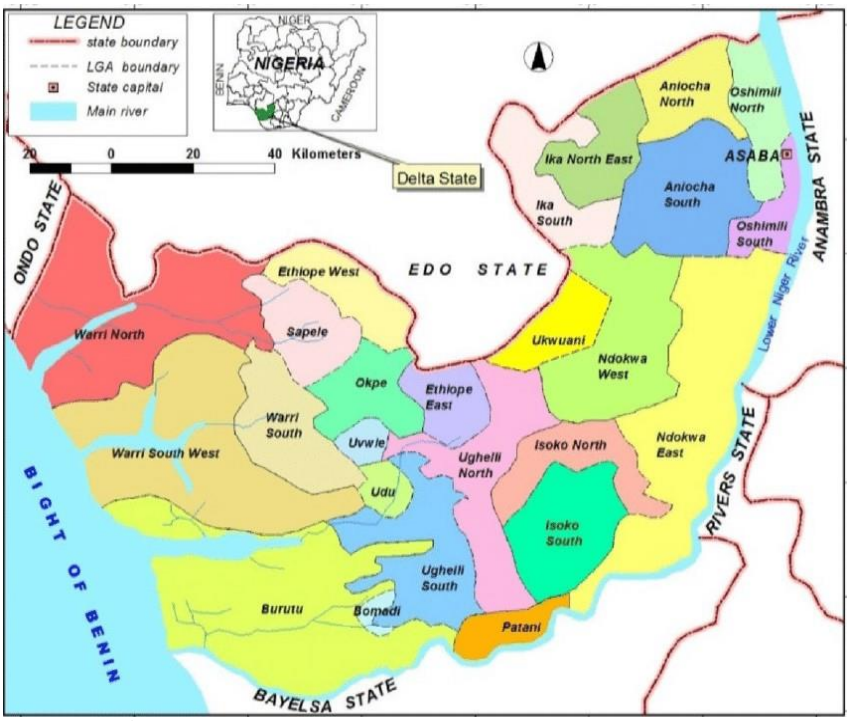


Fig 1: Map of Delta state showing Abraka community in Ethiope East Local Governmnent Area

Validity of Instrument: To ensure the validity of the instrument, each questionnaire item was cross-matched with the research objectives and questions. The draft questionnaire was reviewed by the project supervisor and local subject matter experts to assess its clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Necessary corrections and refinements were made based on their feedback before the final version was administered in the field.

Method of Data Collection: Data were collected through on-site administration of the questionnaire in various locations within Abraka, Delta State. Prior to data collection, the researcher introduced himself to the respondents, explained the purpose and significance of the study, and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses. Respondents were encouraged to answer the simple, straightforward questions honestly. ensuring that all selected respondents had sufficient time to complete the questionnaire.

Method of data analysis: The data collected were analyzed using the simple percentage method of data analysis. The simple percentage was used for easy understanding and clarity. It was used to analyze the demographic data and the responses in the section B of the questionnaire. Adopting the simple formula below:

$$\%x = \frac{R}{N} \times \frac{100}{1} \quad (1)$$

R = Number of respondents; N = Total number of respondents; X = Total responses of respondents to questions

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, highlighting distinct trends in age,

gender, marital status, education, and occupation. The age distribution shows that 15% of participants were between 18 and 25 years, while the majority—47%—fell within the 26–45 years category, and 38% were aged 46 and above, indicating a predominantly mature population. Gender-wise, males constituted 57% of respondents, slightly outnumbering females (43%). Marital status data reveal that 81% were married, suggesting a prevalence of stable household structures in the community. In terms of education, a significant 73% of respondents had attained university education, 26% completed secondary school, and only 1% had primary education. This high level of formal education likely shapes perceptions and responses to community issues. Regarding primary occupation, business activities dominated, engaging 62% of respondents, followed by 30% in civil service, while 7% were students and 1% engaged in farming. However, farming became more prominent as a secondary occupation, with 49% of respondents involved, compared to 18% in business and 33% without secondary employment. This pattern suggests that while business serves as the primary source of livelihood, farming plays a vital supplementary role in income generation and sustenance. The data further provide compelling insights into the community's longstanding experience with herdsmen. Notably, all respondents reported having seen and heard of herdsmen in their community, emphasizing their continuous and well-established presence.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 200)

Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	15%
	26–45	47%
	46 and above	38%
Gender	Male	57%
	Female	43%
Marital Status	Single	19%
	Married	81%
Education	Primary	1%
	Secondary School	26%
	University	73%
Occupation	Farming	1%
	Business	62%
	Civil Service	30%
	Student	7%
Secondary Occupation	Business	18%
	Farming	49%
	Non	33%

Additionally, 100% indicated that herdsmen have resided in the area for over a decade, underscoring the entrenched nature of their interactions with the local population. This prolonged presence reflects historical patterns of migration, land use, and resource competition, shaping socio-cultural dynamics over time rather than being a recent development. Table 2 highlights the unanimous awareness and prolonged experience of respondents with herdsmen in their community. The survey revealed that 100% of respondents had heard of herdsmen and personally seen them in their locality. Furthermore, all respondents confirmed that herdsmen have occupied their community for more than 10 years, with none reporting a shorter duration.

Regarding the nature of interactions, only 5% of respondents described the relationship as "Very Cordial," while 15% considered it "Cordial." In contrast, a dominant 80% characterized the relationship as "Not Cordial," indicating a prevailing atmosphere of tension or conflict. This overwhelming sentiment suggests that, despite the long-term presence of herdsmen, interactions with the community have remained largely strained. Recurring issues such as land disputes, security concerns, and cultural differences likely contribute to this friction. These findings align with broader research on herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria, where prolonged exposure to herdsmen is often linked to persistent socio-economic and cultural tensions (Onyido, 2017; Obi and Adebayo, 2019). The negative perceptions reflected in the survey indicate that, rather than fostering mutual understanding, sustained interactions have deepened distrust. Such ongoing conflict has significant implications for community cohesion, local economic stability, and overall development.

Table 3 provides critical insights into the security situation as perceived by respondents. A unanimous 100% of respondents confirmed having seen herdsmen armed with cutlasses or guns, indicating that armed individuals are a constant presence in the community. However, despite this widespread awareness, only 10% of respondents reported these sightings to security agents, while 90% refrained from doing so. This suggests a significant lack of confidence in security forces or the presence of deterrents—whether social, political, or economic—that discourages reporting. Similar patterns have been observed in regions where fear of retaliation or perceived inaction by authorities leads to underreporting of security concerns (Obi and Adebayo, 2019; BBC News, 2021). Regarding incidents of attacks, only 1% of respondents acknowledged that herdsmen had attacked their community, while 99% denied experiencing such violence. This may imply that although armed herdsmen are frequently seen, direct confrontations are rare. Alternatively, it could indicate underreporting due to fear, normalization of violence, or reluctance to disclose incidents. Among those who reported attacks, 76% stated that attacks occurred 1–3

times, 9% reported 4–6 incidents, and 15% experienced more than 6 attacks. While the overall incidence of attacks appears low, the fact that some individuals have faced multiple attacks suggests that exposure to violence varies significantly within the community. The period of highest reported attacks is particularly notable. A substantial 90% of respondents identified 2018–2019 as the peak period for herdsmen-related violence, compared to only 7% for 2016–2017 and 3% for 2020–2021. This sharp increase in incidents during 2018–2019 may be linked to heightened competition over land and resources or shifts in local security dynamics (Reuters, 2022). These findings underscore a complex security landscape where the mere presence of armed individuals fosters fear and tension, even if direct attacks remain relatively infrequent.

Table 2: Awareness and Perception of Herdsmen and Armed Banditry Activities

Question	Response Options	Frequency
Have you heard of herdsmen before?	Yes / No / No idea	100 / 0 / 0
Have you seen herdsmen in your community?	Yes / No / No idea	100 / 0 / 0
How long have herdsmen occupied your community?	0–5 Years / 5–10 Years / >10 Years	0 / 0 / 100
How would you describe the relationship with herdsmen?	Very Cordial / Cordial / Not Cordial	5 / 15 / 80

Table 3: Security Threats and Frequency of Attacks

Question	Response Options	Frequency
Have you seen herdsmen with cutlasses or guns?	Yes / No / No idea	100 / 0 / 0
If yes, did you report them to security agents?	Yes / No / No idea	10 / 90 / 0
Have there been any herdsmen attacks in your community?	Yes / No / No idea	1 / 99 / 0
If an attack occurred, how many times did it occur?	1–3 attacks / 4–6 attacks / 6+ attacks	76 / 9 / 15
Which period recorded the most attacks?	2016–2017 / 2018–2019 / 2020–2021	7 / 90 / 3

Table 4 presents the socio-cultural and economic impacts of herdsmen and armed banditry attacks as reported by respondents**.** Regarding business operations, only a small percentage of respondents rated the impact as "Very High" (3%) or "High" (6%), while 11% perceived it as "Low." The majority (60%) reported a "Very Low" effect, suggesting that, for most, business activities remained largely unaffected (Obi and Adebayo, 2019; Reuters, 2022). In terms of financial losses over the period 2016–2021, only 4% of respondents reported losses exceeding 5 million naira, while 6% estimated their losses between 1 million and 4.9 million naira. The majority (80%) reported losses within the lower range (10,000–999,000 naira), and 10% indicated no financial loss at all (Reuters, 2022).

Regarding personal losses, only 7% of respondents reported the death of a family member due to attacks, while 93% had not experienced such a loss. None expressed uncertainty about this outcome (BBC News, 2021). However, property losses presented a more concerning trend. Minimal losses were recorded for houses and shops (1% each), but substantial losses were reported in other areas: 46% of respondents experienced farm property losses, 29% lost animals, 17% reported damage to cars, and 60% suffered losses of other personal belongings (Obi and Adebayo, 2019). These findings suggest that while the direct impact on daily business operations appears minimal for most respondents, the broader economic burden—especially in agriculture—is significant. The relatively low incidence of reported personal losses may not fully capture the extent of socio-economic disruptions, as property and financial losses could have long-term consequences for community resilience and livelihoods (Reuters, 2022; BBC News, 2021).

Table 4: Socio-Cultural and Economic Effects of Attacks

Indicator	Categories/Scale	Frequency/Mean
Effect on business	Very high / High / Low / Very low	3/6/11/60
Estimated loss over 5 years (2016–2021)	>5–10M naira / 1M–4.9M naira / 10,000–999,000 naira/Non	4/6/80/10
Loss of a family member due to attack	Yes / No / No idea	7/93/0
Loss of properties (House, Shops, Farm, Animals, Cars, Other)	Provide frequency per item (or mean losses per category)	1/1/46/29/17/60

Table 5 provides key insights into community perceptions and responses to security measures during herdsmen and armed banditry attacks. Only 23% of respondents indicated that their community responded through self-defense vigilante actions, while a substantial 75% resorted to reporting incidents to security agents. A small proportion (2%) remained uncertain about the community's response. An overwhelming 98% of respondents confirmed that security agents responded to attacks, with only 1% indicating no response and another 1% being unsure. This suggests that, despite existing challenges, there

is some level of intervention by official security forces. However, response times varied significantly. Only 1% of respondents reported that security agents arrived in under 30 minutes, while 26% experienced response times between 30 minutes and 1 hour. A significant majority (72%) reported that response times exceeded 1 hour, which may negatively impact community confidence in security effectiveness. Despite these delays, nearly all respondents (99%) acknowledged the physical presence of security forces in the community, while only 1% suggested otherwise. Interestingly, 91% of respondents stated that they feel secure while working in their community, whereas 9% did not. None expressed uncertainty, indicating that most residents maintain a general sense of security despite occasional reservations regarding response times.

Community recommendations for improving security were divided. While 20% of respondents suggested that stopping open grazing would enhance security, 40% advocated for dialogue with herdsmen, and another 40% recommended ending the allocation of grazing lands. However, there was near-unanimous agreement (99%) on the need for the deployment of additional government security agents, reinforcing the community's strong desire for increased official protection. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of both timely security interventions and proactive strategies in areas experiencing recurring violence (Obi and Adebayo, 2019; Reuters, 2022; BBC News, 2021). The diversity of recommendations highlights the complexity of underlying issues related to land use, inter-group relations, and socio-economic tensions. While strengthening security measures remains crucial, resolving these conflicts will likely require a multi-faceted approach that combines security reinforcement with policy interventions aimed at long-term stability and coexistence.

Table 5: Existing Mitigation Measures and Recommendations

Question	Response Options	Frequency
How has the community responded to attacks?	Self-defense vigilante / Report to security agents / No idea	23 / 75 / 2
Was there a response from security agents during the attack?	Yes / No / No idea	98 / 1 / 1
What was the average fastest response time?	<30 mins / 30 mins–1 hour / >1 hour	1 / 26 / 72
Are security agents currently present in the community?	Yes / No / No idea	99 / 1 / 0
Do you currently feel secure from attacks while working?	Yes / No / No idea	91 / 9 / 0
What is your suggestion for improving security?	Stop open grazing/Dialogue with herders/stop allocating grazing lands	20 / 40 / 40
Do you suggest deployment of more government security agents?	Yes / No / No idea	99 / 1 / 0

Conclusion: The study reveals that Abraka has experienced a prolonged presence of herdsmen, with respondents unanimously confirming their awareness and direct observation of these groups over an extended period. While reports of direct violent attacks remain low and business operations are largely unaffected, underlying tensions persist. The community exhibits a low level of trust in the security apparatus due to delayed response times and low reporting rates. Although security agents are physically present, their intervention is often untimely, contributing to a sense of vulnerability among some residents. Furthermore, the economic impact is unevenly distributed, with losses primarily affecting agricultural assets such as farm property and livestock. These findings highlight a complex security landscape where visible threats exist despite a low incidence of overt violence, with long-term socio-cultural and economic repercussions that warrant urgent attention.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest (if none).

Data Availability Statement: Data is available upon request from the first author or corresponding author or any of the other authors

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