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Arms Proliferation and Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: Implications for National Security

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Key words:*Arms proliferation**Bandits**Banditry**Insecurity**National security**Northwest***ABSTRACT**

Arms Proliferation and banditry have become a harsh reality in northwest geopolitical zones, it has come in different forms, manifesting as insurgency, kidnapping, suicide attacks, self-suicide bombing, corruption, armed robbery and the like and poses a serious threat not only to the Internal Security of the Zone but to the National Security in view of its implications. The level at which arms proliferation and banditry thrive within the zone needs to be given its rightful attention by both the Federal and the State governments. It has led to general and complex social violence and insecurity in the zone for almost a decade. There occurs, destruction of lives and properties, displacement of people from their communities; and a growing numbers of widows; widowers and orphan children, mostly in camps where IDPs reside following armed bandits' continued attacks on both farming and pastoral communities across different areas of the zone. It was based on this background that, this study was carried out in order to assess the impact of arms proliferation and banditry on the national Security of Nigeria. The study adopted Frustration-aggression Theory as its analytical framework. Moreover, the study adopted secondary source of data as the main sources of data collection while content analysis was used in analyzing the data generated. The study revealed the factors responsible for arms proliferation and banditry in the northwest, viz; Struggle for political power, massive unemployment and Poverty, excessive militarization, Injustice by traditional fathers, Drug abuse, Vulnerability, Disperse settlement, Huge financial benefits, Proliferation of fire arms, Poor nature of security at the border. The study recommends, among other things, adoption of Conflict Resolution Mechanism and Amnesty as well as Socio-economic policies that would lead to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected communities in the zone.

Introduction

Over the last four decades, Nigeria's North West has witnessed waves of violence including sectarian clashes, Islamist militancy and electoral violence. From 1980 to 2010, it saw numerous Christian-Muslim and intra-Muslim riots. In southern Kaduna state, long contest between the Hausa and Fulani, on one hand, and several smaller ethnic groups, on the other, over political offices, economic resources and the fruits of government spending has resulted in recurrent violence, often with significant fatalities (Human Rights Watch, 2006). More recently, starting in 2011 and accelerating since 2014, the North West has also suffered a surge of violence between pastoralists and allied armed groups frequently called "bandits", on one hand, and farmers supported by community and state-sponsored vigilantes, on the other. The situation has been further aggravated by the proliferation of deadly criminal gangs, thriving in a region awash with arms and which state security forces struggle to control. Largely occurring in rural areas, the violence has spread from its epicentre in Zamfara state to Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto states in the North West and into Niger state in North Central Nigeria.

The recent events in Northwest Nigeria have revealed the sordid situation the country has found herself as a result of proliferation of arms. In all the states of the geo-political zone, the diffusion of small arms and light weapons has played a decisive role in the escalation and intensification of arms banditry. The ease with which these arms are available, leads to easy escalation of festering security challenge. These small arms have played a major role in exacerbating arms and armed banditry. This phenomenon threatens the peace and security of not only the zone but also Nigeria which is necessary for sustainable socio-economic development. As of today, the greatest security concern facing the geo-political zone is the impunity with which these bandits carry out their activities across the geopolitical zone. The proliferation of light weapons and criminal activities in which they are used, the wide availability, accumulation and illicit flows of such weapons in the zone tend to escalate security challenge; undermine peace agreements; intensify violence and impact on crime; impede economic and social development; and

hinder the development of social stability, democracy and good governance not only in northwest but also the entire country.

Nigeria's North West, one of the country's six geopolitical zones, comprises seven of the country's 36 states. These are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. It covers an area of 216,065 sq km or 25.75 per cent of the country's total land mass. Its major ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani, who historically share strong cultural ties and are very much intermixed, with other smaller groups especially in Kaduna state. The region's estimated population of 33 million (based on figures from the 2006 census) is predominantly Muslim (Sunni). According to the National Census (2006), the states' populations were: Kano (9,383,682), Kaduna (6,066,562), Katsina (5,792,578), Jigawa (4,348,649), Sokoto (3,696,999), Zamfara (3,259,846) and Kebbi (3,238,628). Most of the populations (about 80 per cent) are farmers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists or small-scale entrepreneurs.

The region has substantial solid mineral deposits, including gold exploited by artisanal miners in open pit mines. Despite its economic potential, the North West has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria. The National Bureau of Statistics, (2019) stated that while the region has a long and proud history of Islamic and Arabic scholarship, apathy toward, and inadequate investment in, formal education over the decades have contributed to a literacy rate of 29.7 per cent. Also the National Bureau of Statistics (2019) states that the all seven states in the zone had poverty levels above the national average of 40.1 per cent, led by Sokoto (87.7 per cent), Jigawa (87 per cent) and Zamfara (74 per cent). UNICEF (2019) states that the zone currently have the highest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. Akali Omeni (2015) and Hannah Hoechner (2018) are of the view that on top of those who do not attend school at all, millions of children are in the poorly resourced and ill-supervised Quranic school system, or *almajiranci*, which produces cohorts of unskilled youth.. The region's geography and climatic conditions pose serious challenges for federal and state authorities.

Much of the North West is savannah, but the region is also interspersed with vast forests, some of which are home to thousands of mostly Fulani herders (also known as pastoralists). Once under the watch of forestry authorities, these forests gradually became hideouts for criminals including cattle rustlers, highway robbers, kidnappers and cannabis growers. According to International Crisis Group (2019) in Kaduna state, locals now refer to the Kamuku forest as “Sambisa”, suggesting it has become as dangerous as the Borno state woodlands where Boko Haram established its stronghold. The region also shares about two thirds of Nigeria’s 1,497km international boundary with Niger Republic, which is weakly regulated. Historical and cultural ties between communities on both sides and regional protocols on freedom of movement have created opportunities for smugglers and criminals. Numerous illegal crossings, coupled with pervasive corruption among border officials, enable the traffic of illicit merchandise such as firearms.

Conceptual Review

Small arms: These include, but not limited to revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, submachine guns, and light machine guns.

Light weapons: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of calibers of less than 100mm. (Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, UN document A/52/298, 27 August 1997).

Banditry

A bandit is a robber or outlaw belonging to a gang, who uses weapons to steal or rob from the people and typically operating in an isolated or lawless area of a country. Banditry is a term used to refer to acts of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down (Collins, 2000). Banditry consists of the organization of armed bands for the purpose of attacking state or social institutions or enterprises or individual persons. Participation in such bands and in the attacks committed by them is equally regarded as banditry (Collins, 2000). Historically, banditry has existed and operated in different parts of the world

since the 19th century when bandits riding mostly on horse backs move from their hideouts to attack villages and then retreated back to their hideouts. In Nigeria, banditry came as a result of nearly four decades of unresolved conflicts between settled cultivators and nomadic herding communities that wander on the high plains of northern Nigeria particularly the North West geo-political zone in states such as Zamfara, Kastina, Kaduna, Sookoto. Banditry in northwest geo-political zone started since 2009 and increased in 2011 especially after the general elections (Anka, 2017). In fact, Zamfara state has been the epicenter of banditry in Nigeria, where most of the bandits’ leaders were based and from Zamfara state forests they would move riding on motor cycles to other states such as Katsina, to operate and return to their forest dens (Farouq and Chukwu, 2020). Therefore by the year 2010, banditry had started in Katsina State primarily in the seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) that shared boundary with Zamfara state. Banditry involved acts of robbery and violence on the people particularly rural dwellers who mainly engaged in farming, cattle rearing and other food production activities.

National Security

There are divergent approaches to conceptualizing security which is the antithesis of insecurity. Security need was the basis of the social contract between the people and the state, in which people willingly surrendered their rights to an organ (government) who oversees the survival of all. In this light security embodies the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors, or structural socio-political and economic conditions (Stan, 2004). Samaddar (2005) defines national security as: ‘a physical situation and a psychological condition where citizens have full freedom and opportunity to develop their potentials in their designed fashion; and, in the most fruitful manner without resistance’. According to McNamara (2005), national security is: ‘Part of the government policy which aims at generating favourable national and international strategic environment for the protection, promotion and proliferation of national values against existing or potential threats’. He sees development as an important aspect of national security; hence, he states that in modernizing society:

“Security means development”. Security is not military hardware though it may include it.

Security is not military force though it involves it. Security is not military activity though it may encompass it. Security is development and without development there can be no security”. Lippman (2009) defines national security to mean: “When a nation is secure to the extent that it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war. Obasanjo (2009) defines national security as the: “Aggregation of the security interests of the individuals, political entities, human associations and ethnic groups, which make up the nation. The security interest includes safety of life and property, economic, psychological and mental well-being and the freedom to pursue the attainment of legitimate objectives without hindrance”. National security stands as the only instrument in the possession of the government and state to thwart any threat to its existence and threats to humanity within its entity. The main purpose of national security is to counter both the internal (domestic) and external (international) behaviours that might threaten the survival of the state and its citizenry. 'Human security' is much broader than national security, which tends to focus on the security of the state in military terms, and the protection of the state from external aggression. Human security shares the conceptual space of the people-centric approach to human development pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP1994).

Central to the idea of human security, as espoused by the Human Development Report on Human Security, are two important concerns: freedom from fear intended to indicate freedom from violence, and freedom from want, which is intended to indicate freedom from poverty. In this conception of human security, human beings become the 'vital core', with a 'fundamental set of functions related to survival, livelihood and dignity' as the irreducible minimum. The multidimensional nature of human security is underlined by the recognition given to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. The number of central issues is greatly expanded, to include the welfare of citizens, larger issues of development, and redistribution of wealth among the different strata of society. There is

also concern given to issues of governance, the realization of social citizenship for subaltern social groups and classes, and respect for group identity and self-determination of minority groups. The key assumption is that a nation cannot be secure if it fails to address issues of governance, unemployment, and corruption, all of which can subvert the rule of law and can undermine the welfare of the citizenry, even if the state has the most modernized army or the most sophisticated police force. The crisis of human security in Nigeria has its roots in high levels of corruption and an entrenched culture of impunity; these are coupled with an absence of efforts on the part of government at all levels to implement pro poor policies, and to effect redistribution of wealth(UNDP1994).

Theoretical Assumptions

Arms proliferation and banditry are manifestations of unresolved conflicts and inability of the government to overcome the challenges are reflections that the root causes of the conflicts are not identified and therefore the correct mechanism could not be adopted to manage or resolve it. Scholars have propounded several theoretical models to explain the prevalence of Arms proliferation and banditry one of such theories is Frustration-Aggression. The Frustration-aggression theory is associated with works of John Dollard et al (1939) the core assumption of which is that “aggression is always a consequence of frustration” (1939). The authors argued that individuals are motivated to achieve life ambitions and fulfill destiny, but when these expectations are thwarted, frustration sets in. In their line of thought, the occurrence of aggressive behaviour presupposes “the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression”. It is pertinent to note here that the existence of frustration does not always lead to aggression, given that frustration may have other consequences other than aggression.

However, this argument may have failed to differentiate between instigation to aggression and the real incidence of aggression, but this study acknowledges that frustration generates inquiries to various types of consequences, which may include instigation to certain kinds of aggression (Berkowitz 1989). Aggression may develop as a consequence of having been exposed to an extremely frustrating condition sufficient to provoke the experience of

hopelessness (Amaraegbu, 2011). On this theory, the New Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD) pointed out eloquently that: "Nigeria presents a remarkable paradox of an enormously wealthy country both in potential and real terms, serving as home to the third largest concentration of poor people in the world. The country, although with the substantial revenue it makes from its oil wells annually has failed to provide the basic services for its people" (NEPAD 2008). Adekanye (2007) provided three set of factors that largely explain the processes that metamorphoses into conflict situations that can as well lead to domestic terrorism and these are the structural background conditions, precipitating and triggers factors. Cunningham (2003) observes that: "Men prefer a situation of stability in respect of values, behaviour and their environmental conditions. When people experience a difference between what they perceive and what they desire (frustration), they seek to reduce this dissonance by reducing this gap through (Aggression) actions filtering information or altering perceptions" (Cunningham 2003) Frustration-Aggression is therefore experienced whenever there is a discrepancy between preferred value and actual value states. Such a situation has the tendency to produce hatred, anxiety, fear and the desire to hurt or eliminate the source- hence the resort to arms and banditry. The discrepancies could manifest within economic, social, cultural, political and religious spheres as these issues form the micro level of analysis that could be regarded as the structural background conditions operating at the individual level (Alao, Alao and Atere 2012). It needs to be acknowledged that not in all instances of frustration-aggression or everybody that experiences it as well as deprived individuals or groups may choose to engage in arms proliferation and banditry.

Some people may suffer in silence and adopt constitutional means to address their grievances. Galtung (1969) in addition to the theories hypothesize the presence of significant socio-economic indicators that can serve as breeding grounds for banditry, but they do not answer the question of why some people or groups in the same structurally disadvantaged situations choose banditry and others do not. Hence, the bandits, insurgency and other groups within the Northwest could therefore be located largely in the real or perceived

discrepancy between the preferred way of life and the actual state of living that influences the frustration-aggression. Therefore the rising incidence of banditry can be attributed to the problem of small arms and light weapons (SALW) that have found their way into the hands of non-state actors, part of the wider challenge of human and national security confronting Nigeria.

Methodology

Traditional qualitative research method of the social sciences was adopted. This method includes gathering data from secondary sources and review of relevant literature like scholarly articles, government reports, and publications of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were analysed using content analysis.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapon (SALW) in Nigeria: Historical Perspective

Gun possession by civilians in Nigeria is not new and predates colonialism. Guns were introduced by the Europeans prior to colonialism during legitimate and illegitimate (slave) trade between them and Africans. Subsequently, guns and other arms, ammunition and weapons were used by Europeans to realize their imperial ambitions when they used force to suppress Africa's resistance to European incursion, conquest and colonialism (Adejo, 2005). The Gunboat Diplomacy was popularly employed by the British to compel African chiefs to enter into various treaties with them. There was establishment of West African Frontier Force (WAFF) used by the British to execute the British-Afro War of (1901-1902), and other forms of resistance in Nigeria, West Africa, and indeed Africa. The role of Royal Niger Company (RNC) later United African Company (UAC) backed by British Government in using force to suppress dissenting communities is imperative (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

These arms or guns possibly found their ways to the hands of Africans during the period of colonialism subsequently used in traditions and hunting in the rural community. In no time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during funerals, burials, ceremonies and customary festivals among the natives. They also became symbols of individual and ethnic grandeur, and for

detering aggressors and invaders. Today, guns are no longer just ornaments of prestige, or just for hunting, safari and expedition. Guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive of ownership. They have become more weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld (Chuma-Okoro, 2011). Ostensibly, the 1959 Firearms Act was enacted to check the increasing rate of proliferation in Nigeria towards independence. The failure of the Nigerian government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the civil war (1967-1970) exacerbated the proliferation of guns and illicit arms trafficking. As at 2002, the number of SALW in Nigeria was estimated by various reports and studies, at between 1 and 3 million including arms in lawful possession of members of armed forces, the police and those (mostly) in the hands of civilians. The 80% of SALW in civilian possession were illegally acquired because of the strict regulations (Ojodu 2007). The rate of accumulation of SALW is increasing and becoming endemic as various forms of violence and casualties are in the recent times recorded in the Northwest Nigeria. Thus, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria has a destabilizing effect. There is lack of capacity and strong legal or effective institutional frameworks to regulate SALW and combat the phenomenon of SALW proliferation in Nigeria, particularly Northwest Nigeria (Chuma-Okoro, 2011).

Causes of Arms Proliferation and Banditry

More fundamentally, the Nigerian state is yet to deal with the demand factors of SALW proliferation preferring to dwell on the symptoms rather than the root causes. The demand factors are the root causes of SALW proliferation, because if there is no demand there will be no supply. Nigeria is the source, transit and destination of SALW, and therefore the demand factors include

Struggle for political power

According to Agu and Ifedi (2021) the political class in their struggle or contest for political power has sacrificed everything in the name of politics including suppressing class consciousness and promoting ethno-religious consciousness. The promotion of ethnic and religious consciousness at the expense of class consciousness has resulted to the increasing demand of SALW for executing ethno-

religious violence, election and political violence, communal wars, sectarian violence, etc. One stimulant for the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is elections such that in 2003 elections, locally fabricated and imported pistols, and a range of assault rifles were used by political thugs. In one of the states in Nigeria, the police recovered 54 guns in 2002, 16 in possession of politicians and another eight from politically motivated murders. In August 2003, the police arrested the son of a prominent senator whom the police believed to have been behind the importation of sophisticated arms used by armed robbers and feuding ethnic groups. The police themselves are frequently involved in what is called "gunpowder politics". In 2003, a governor encouraged the production of pistols by a gang for a political campaign. Also, in 2003 elections political agents visited a number of university campuses and recruited students into their thugs arming them with various weapons (Vines, 2005).

Mass unemployment and poverty

In Nigeria today, unemployment is soaring very high because critical infrastructure like roads, constant power and water supply needed to create jobs is not put in place by the government despite promises made to fix them. With the high rate of youth unemployment, all manner of crimes such as the activities of Boko Haram, kidnapping, banditry, and other vices are committed. "There is a serious economic violence on the people, that is why those with violent intentions can easily employ them. National Bureau for Statistics (2019) puts the unemployment rate of the zone to be far above the national average. Unemployment has been rising alongside the increasing incidence of poverty. The unemployed and ignorant youths have been a willing tool in this intense struggle for state power. So it is actually a product and a combination of many years of political leadership failure tilting the Nigerian state towards the status of a failed state. A state that is not able to deal with matters or issues of political corruption, poverty, mass unemployment and economic hardship leading to increasing demand for SALW (Okafor, Okeke and Aniche, 2012).

Excessive militarization

There is indeed excess politicization, state-sponsored violence and state proliferation of SALW leading to political violence, electoral violence and other forms

of violence. For example, virtually all the law enforcement or security agencies are allowed to carry arms with exemption of few that are even lobbying to be allowed to carry weapons, thus militarizing the society more. Many years of military rule contributed to the excessive militarization of the Nigerian society and intensive political contest for the soul of the Nigerian state resulting to the rising demand factors for SALW. As an indication of this militarization of the Nigerian society, the oil companies are allowed to operate private security outfits. Private security outfits, bodyguards, vigilante and thugs have proliferated over the years (Nte, 2011). Other factors include failure of political leadership, maladministration in-governance, bad leadership, poor governance, state violence, among others. In fact, the Nigerian state has not been able to deal with these demand factors, because dealing with it means dealing with itself or starting by reforming itself. Thus, we conclude that the inability of the Nigerian state to deal with the demand factors of SALW heightens proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and banditry in Nigeria, particularly the northwest part of the country.

Northwest and security challenge

Over the last four decades, Nigeria's North West has witnessed waves of violence including sectarian clashes, Islamist militancy and electoral violence. According to International Crisis Group (2010) from 1980 to 2010, it saw numerous Christian-Muslim and intra-Muslim riots. Between 2011 and 2015, Kaduna and Kano states suffered many Boko Haram bombings and shootings, most notably the 20 January 2012 attacks in Kano city that killed about 185 people. According to Crisis Group (2011) after the then opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the far northern Katsina state, lost the presidential election to the incumbent, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the Niger Delta, protests in fourteen northern states – including all seven north-western states – escalated into ethnic and sectarian riots that left over 1,000 people dead and 74,000 displaced.

According to Human Rights Watch, (2006) southern Kaduna state, a decades-long contest between the Hausa and Fulani, on one hand, and several smaller ethnic groups, on the other, over political offices, economic resources and the fruits of government

spending has resulted in recurrent violence, often with significant fatalities. More recently, starting in 2011 and accelerating since 2014, the North West has also suffered a surge of violence between pastoralists and allied armed groups frequently called “bandits”, on one hand, and farmers supported by community and state-sponsored vigilantes, on the other. The situation has been further aggravated by the proliferation of deadly criminal gangs, thriving in a region awash with arms and which state security forces struggle to control. This incidence largely occurring in rural areas, the violence has spread from its epicentre in Zamfara state to Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto states in the North West and into Niger state in North Central geo-political zone of Nigeria. Also New Telegraph, 12 October(2019) stated that although accurate fatality records are unavailable, but several reports point to at least 8,000 people killed from 2011 to the present, 6,319 people were killed by banditry, 3,672 kidnapped, and 3,587 houses burnt in Zamfara state alone. While more than 1,100 people were killed in 2018 in the six states, over 2,200 were killed in 2019, and more than 1,600 fatalities were recorded between January – June 2020 (Council Relations 07/2020. By September 2019, such attacks had internally displaced over 160,000 people and produced more than 41,000 refugees (WFP 09/2019; UNHCR 09/2019). Displacement numbers now stand at over 247,000 IDPs and some 60,000 refugees (UNHCR 05/2020: Furthermore, Anka, (2017) posits that the 2011 general election in Nigeria brought about the emergence of these security threats that have crippled social and economic life in some states in northwest including Zamfara, Kastina, Kaduna, Kebi and Tsafe forest.

Implications of Arms Proliferation and Banditry in the Northwest on National Security:

Violence in north-western Nigeria has claimed thousands of lives over the last decade. Reliable figures for fatalities across the entire region are hard to come by, given that much of the violence has occurred in remote rural communities and therefore has never been reported by either the mass media or security agencies. The implications include:

Humanitarian and Social Implication

From 2011 to 2019, at least 8,000 people were killed, mostly in Zamfara state, with the bulk of the casualties occurring over the last five years. Hundreds remain missing or unaccounted for. The crisis has also triggered a humanitarian challenge. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. In September 2019, a joint assessment mission by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, citing local government authorities' estimates, reported 210,354 persons displaced from 171 towns and villages in the North West (UNHCR 2019). Of these, 144,996 were in Zamfara state, 35,941 in Sokoto and 29,417 in Katsina. About 60,000 of the displaced have also fled over the border to Niger Republic where the same insecurity along border areas has resulted in 19,000 Nigeriens internally displaced (UNHCR 2020). On 22 February 2020, the government of Niger State (which shares borders with Zamfara, Kebbi and Kaduna states), reported that violence had displaced 10,000 people from communities in ten of the state's 25 local government areas (*Vanguard*, 24 February 2020). More recently, in March, the National Emergency Management Agency reported 105,463 people displaced in Sokoto state (Daily Trust, 16 March 2020). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) living conditions are appalling, characterised by irregular and inadequate food distribution, crude shelters, and poor health and sanitation services. As there is no officially recognised IDP camp in Zamfara and Katsina states, many internally displaced are in makeshift camps or scattered in towns and villages away from home, which obscures the scale of displacement. The IDPs' plight is compounded by the near absence of humanitarian actors from affected areas, largely due to significant underestimation of the violence's scale and impact, but also because insecurity limits access for needs assessment in certain places. In 2019, three organisations – Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes – supported by the French embassy in Abuja, conducted a multi-sectoral needs assessment for Zamfara state, but there has been no comprehensive assessment for the entire region.⁸¹ With many humanitarian organisations already overstretched by the demands in Nigeria's North East, the overall humanitarian response in the North West remains patchy and grossly inadequate.

The crisis has had gender-differentiated effects on the area's population. Thousands of men and boys have been kidnapped or killed, as well as robbed of their cattle or possessions, leaving thousands of women as both widows and sole remaining breadwinners. (*Punch*, 6 May 2019). But women and girls have also been targeted for attacks, which frequently involve gender-based violence. Many have been kidnapped and raped, sexually assaulted during raids or forced into "marriage", especially to members of the herder-allied armed groups whose attacks on farming villages are partly motivated by communal vendettas (Crisis Group 2019). Some of the women raped in captivity suffer doubly: even if they survive and are released or escape, they are often rejected by their husbands. If women are impregnated by their abductors, the babies they deliver are similarly shunned by their communities (PM News, 25 April 2019). The violence has also exacted a severe toll on children. In Zamfara state, the government reports that over 16,000 children have been orphaned as a result of violence in the last decade. Other estimates by some political leaders in the state point higher, with one putting the number as high as 44,000. As the violence has disrupted schooling in many areas, it has also swelled the already high number of out-of-school children in the region and thus the number of child street beggars in many towns and cities.

The provision of social services and public amenities by federal and state governments has been adversely affected. State government funds that would have been committed to providing social services have instead been diverted to responding to the security challenge (Crisis Group 2019). Even where governments have built hospitals and schools, many remain unused or under-used as the local population has been displaced or residents avoid using them for fear of attacks. In April 2019, the Zamfara state government reported that most of the "over 2,000 kilometres of roads, thousands of classrooms and 716 health centres" constructed between 2012 and 2019 could not be used "due to insecurity".

Displacement

More than 309,000 people have been displaced by the northwest banditry crisis as of 30 June 2020. Zamfara state accommodates about 69,000 IDPs, Kaduna

71,000, Katsina 61,000, Sokoto 45,000, and Niger 3,000 (UNHCR05/2020). About 60,000 people displaced from Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara have crossed the border to Maradi, in the Republic of Niger. More than 30,000 of the refugees arrived in Niger between May and June 2020 alone (UNHCR 26/06/2020) While Katsina and Niger states have formal IDP camps (Faskari, Dandle, Dandume, and Batsari for Katsina, and Gwada and Central School Camp for Niger), most IDPs informally organise themselves by seeking shelter in football fields, and primary and secondary school buildings (UmmuAmeena Alyateem Foundation 29/06/2020). Some of the IDP locations thus remain unknown or not recognised as such by local authorities. The public buildings used by IDPs as temporary shelters. Many other IDPs are moving to urban centres to live within extended families and host communities, making it difficult to verify their exact locations, numbers or needs. Rapid displacement because of conflict also disrupts people's livelihood activities. As a coping mechanism, displaced people have taken to begging on the streets and engaging in menial jobs to survive. Fear and mistrust among IDPs have spread in camps as it is believed that informants and spies from banditry groups may have infiltrated IDP settlements, and are relaying vital security plans of the military to the bandits (HumAngle 28/06/2020). Accordingly, it was further discovered that several communities and villages have been destroyed and over 15,000 cattle were rustled (Kiruwa, 2017; Daniya, 2017; Tukur, 2017). In other words, socio-economic activities in these states, local government areas and communities have been paralysed.

Protection

Over 30.6 million people living in the six affected states face increased protection concerns due to the continued escalation of the crisis. Since 2016, almost daily attacks by bandits have been recorded in Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto prompting the Nigeria government to institute various security operations in the northwest. There are risks of getting kidnapped specifically for ransom (BBC 05/07/2020). Women and girls are susceptible to kidnap, sexual violence, and abuse, including rape. As banditry attacks have continued, the affected population has expressed a lack of trust towards the army and police and their ability to prevent these from happening. Residents and survivors in affected states have complained that

response from the police and army was slow and sometimes non-existent when they are attacked. Affected communities started relying on local vigilantes for protection as a result. In certain cases, people arm themselves to resist attacks. Government's focus on fighting Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast may also be hindering its response to insecurity in the northwest. Bassey & Ubi, (2016) noted that there are more cases of cattle being stolen even in broad daylight. Before the year 2010, armed banditry used to be overlooked and under-reported mostly handled by the locals. However, the year 2010 ushered in a set of criminal gangs who specialized in armed banditry and so a new style of banditry emerged which involved not only rustling the cattle but killing the owners and scaring people away from their communities (Dauda, 2014, Rufai, 2016).

Livelihoods and Food Security

Large-scale farming and animal husbandry are the main economic activities in the northwest, with trading as an alternative source of income. Most farmers cultivate yams (in Niger state), legumes, beans, millet, tomatoes, and rice (in Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto). Targeted attacks on farmers have made cultivation and harvest impossible. Bandits have warned farmers to stay away from their farms, and about 26 farmers who ignored this order were killed in Batsari LGA of Katsina state (BBC 07/07/2020). Farmers have been kidnapped for ransom, while bandits in Shiroro LGA have demanded payments of up to \$1,100 before farmers can access their farmlands (HumAngle 22/06/2020). Cattle rustling have also hampered animal husbandry in these areas. Violence and forced displacement had left affected communities unable to rely on own-produced cereals for subsistence and commercial farming, highlighting the risk of food insecurity for displaced and non-displaced populations. About 70% of the 309,000 IDPs in the northwest have insufficient food, with global acute malnutrition rates among children reported to be as high as 18% and 31% in Sokoto and Zamfara states respectively (WFP 09/2019). In Sokoto state, the State Emergency Management Agency reports that as of October 2019, some 21,316 hectares of farmland across five local government areas remained uncultivated, as 80,000 intimidated farmers stayed away.⁹³ Huge numbers of livestock have similarly been lost: from 2011 to 2019, about

141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were rustled in Zamfara state, for example (Daily Trust, 9 October 2019). These disruptions have impoverished farmers and herders alike, created food shortages in some communities, and aggravated malnutrition particularly among children. In April 2020, Niger state Governor Abubakar Sani Bello warned: “We are heading toward famine and starvation” (Leadership, 29 April 2020).

WASH and Healthcare

Both formal and informal IDP camps need safe water sources, sanitary and hygiene items. About 65% of IDPs in Katsina and 53% of IDPs in Sokoto do not have access to safe drinking water (WFP 09/2019). Overcrowded latrine use, non-availability of toilet infrastructure and open defecation are also prevalent in the IDP camps as most were created for fewer numbers of people. All of these aggravate the risk of diarrhea and cholera outbreaks in the camps. As water and hygiene infrastructure are insufficient for the numbers of IDPs, and with overcrowded camps, it is impossible to observe social distancing, enforce mask-wearing or guarantee washing of hands as required for the prevention of COVID-19 spread. Most displaced people either do not believe that the virus exists or believe that banditry remains a bigger and closer threat to life. Across the six states 1,948 Covid-19 cases and 70 deaths are recorded as at 8 July (NCDC 08/07/2020).

Economic Implication

In many parts of north-western Nigeria, the violence has deeply unsettled the economy. Agriculture, on which about 80 per cent of the population depends on for livelihoods, has been particularly hard hit have been abandoning their fields for fear of attack or kidnapping. In Zamfara state, over 13,000 hectares of farmland have been either destroyed or rendered inaccessible as a result of attacks by herder-allied armed groups and criminal gangs (PM News April 2019). As a result of insurgency, foreign direct investment (FDI) has declined. It has dropped by 21.3% in 2012 from \$8.9 billion in 2011 to \$7 billion in 2012, (World Investment Report, 2013). According to the African Union, security, peace, stability and good governance have been regarded as prerequisites for the achievement of any meaningful socio-economic development of any nation. It has been argued that there is a strong link between

adequate security and development generally (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013; Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Although peace and stability have been the core aim and objective of government of most nations in the world over however, the past decades, security challenges have continued to remain a major setback to achieving meaningful socio-economic development in most of the states in the zone and in Nigeria. Insecurity does not only pose threats to the lives and properties of citizens, discourages local businesses, scares away foreign investment and portrays a bad image of the country (Ekene, 2015).

Security challenges posed by these threats have become a national phenomenon that needs to be tackled as a matter of seriousness to create an enabling environment for socio-economic development. For over a decade, Northwest has continued to witness a tremendous setback in its socio-economic development fuelled by the continuous resurgence of different kinds of security threats particularly armed banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime, Boko Haram insurgency among others (Nkewede, 2015; Epron, 2018). However, despite government efforts to bring to an end the bewildering situation by spending over 462 million on national security over the past five years, the security situation remains Northwest's major challenge to socio-economic development (Olufemi, 2015). When able youths of the zone are killing themselves through fighting, it then extends to killing of state security officials, kidnapping and ransom seeking, (Rotimi et al, 2013, Ikelegbe, 2001). As a result of banditry of the future workforce may shrunk and gradually die out, thereby creating a vacuum in the economic fortune of the zone, which at the same time pose threat to the going concern of the economic activity of a nation. This in the long run may lead to child slavery as those to take up the future economic challenges may have gradually been reduced and may not be able to champion the economic demands (Rotimi et al, 2013). An insurgent impedes growth and also erodes the already established economic value systems in the zone. This devastating effect of continuous arms proliferation and banditry in Northwest has gone so bad and it is worrisome as several but unsuccessful measures have been put in place to halt the menace, (Odita & Akan, 2014).

Commerce has been similarly disrupted.

Thousands of shops and other businesses in north-west Nigeria are in ruins or have shut down due to direct attacks and kidnappings of businessmen, which have fed rising fears of insecurity. Significant private property has been lost: as of April 2019, Zamfara state reported “more than 10,000 houses, shops and silos” destroyed. With road travel hazardous, local traders are afraid to transport farm produce to markets. Investor confidence has also plunged. The National Trade Fair hosted by the Niger State’s government recorded a very poor turnout, a situation that the president of the state’s Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture, Abdulkadir Hassan, attributed to would-be participants’ fears of bandit attacks and kidnapping (Punch, 17 May 2019). The disposable income of relatively wealthy families in the area has also declined: in Zamfara, the number of people who can afford to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina plummeted from an average of about 4,500 in previous years to 1,500 in 2019 (PM News, 18 July 2019).

Impact on Overall National Security

Over the past few years, arms proliferation and banditry have created widespread insecurity across not only in northwest geo-political zone but also other regions in Nigeria, increased tensions between various ethnic communities, interrupted development activities, frightened off investors, inflamed religious tensions and upset the nation’s social cohesion (Eme and Ibieta, 2012) and this has generated concern among the Nigerian citizens. Herders fleeing violence in the three most affected states (Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina) are migrating south, straining resources in the country’s north-central- Benue and Niger states and southeast and south-south regions. While the south-south and southeast regions have been experiencing the migration of Fulani cattle herders for decades, the uptick appears to be exacerbating tensions in the south east, south west and Niger Delta. These regions are reporting increasing herder-farmer friction, often degenerating into deadly violence. Some criminal gangs fleeing security operations in the North West have also moved to the north-central, south-south and southeast middle and southern states, posing additional security problems for affected communities and the governing authorities. The

violence in the North West is further stretching already over-burdened security forces.

The military’s long-running counter-insurgency operations against jihadists in the North East have dragged on, partly due to inadequate personnel and resources. The continued military engagement in countering bandit and other violence in the North West will further drain resources needed to the development of not only the zone but other zones of the country. An additional emerging risk is the tendency of state governments affected by the spillover from the North West to create local vigilante or paramilitary groups. In the South West geopolitical zone, following widespread protests over deadly incidents between Fulani herders and local farmers, along with kidnappings increasingly involving criminals from the North West, governors of all six states – Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun and Osun – established the Western Nigeria Security Network, also referred to as Operation Amotekun, on 9 January 2020, to protect their communities. Also in the southeast the state governors met and agreed to set up a regional security outfit to be known as “Ebube Agu”. This development could set a precedent for the emergence of ethno-regional security arrangements elsewhere in the country, which, while boosting security locally, could also erode national cohesion if it becomes a trend. Armed Proliferation, banditry and cattle rustling have also added to the growing insecurity especially in more recent times in Nigeria's history.

Conclusion

Arms proliferation and banditry has become a major problem in northwest. Armed banditry remains a major security challenge that has created instability, hampered socio-economic development and undermined democratic governance not only in the North-West region but also in the entire country. This menace has been on the increase in frequency since 2011, leading to violent conflict between the Fulanis and their allies from within and outside the country on one side and the farmers on the other. The outcome of this conflict has claimed thousands of lives and caused destruction of properties worth billions of naira in the zone. It could be argued that there is no state in the zone that has not witnessed the impact of armed banditry. This paper argued that the persistence of the attacks, the rate of kidnappings and

the new wave of cattle rustling has raised the level of insecurity in the geo-political zone and affected national security negatively.

The North-West Governors should widely consult and strengthen the conflict management framework for the zone. Security agencies and communities should also work together to institute effective community policing, early warning and intelligence gathering that reduces the frequency of attacks by bandits should be pursued with vigour. State and relevant non-state actors should roll out capacity building and dispute resolution mechanisms that mitigate the disputes between farmers and pastoralists in affected States. The amnesty programme should be reengineered with transparent DDR and livelihood support programmes. Armed bandits and criminal gangs who willingly accept to reform and submit to the conflict management roadmap should be welcomed by the authorities. There is need to ensure that all kidnapped persons are released. There is also need to make sure that the incidences of illicit mining, cattle rustling, agro-pastoral clashes and arms proliferation is significantly reduced to the barest minimum. Governments in affected States should initiate rehabilitation programmes for displaced persons introduce grants and loans to devastated communities to rebuild their livelihood.

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