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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BANDITRY AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN NIGER STATE

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Abstract
This study investigated the perceived causes of banditry and its impact on the availability and utilization of agricultural resources in Niger State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a well-structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample size of 300. The results revealed that limited educational opportunities (M = 3.17), unemployment and poverty (M = 3.04), corruption (M = 3.00), drug abuse and alcohol (M = 3.09), farmers/herders clashes (M = 3.09), and bad governance (M = 3.06) are the major drivers of banditry. The majority of respondents strongly agreed with these factors, indicating a general consensus on their contribution to rising insecurity. The findings showed that banditry significantly disrupts agricultural activities by reducing farmers' access to farmlands (M = 3.08), increasing the cost of agricultural inputs (M = 2.95), causing the abandonment of farmlands (M = 2.99), and discouraging active farming due to fear of attacks (M = 3.01). Banditry also leads to the destruction of agricultural facilities (M = 3.02) and disrupts the marketing and sale of farm produce (M = 3.02). Farmers have adopted various coping strategies, including reducing farming activities (M = 3.01), paying protection fees (M = 3.09), forming community security groups (M = 3.43), increasing vigilance (M = 3.47), relocating families (M = 3.42), and abandoning farming for alternative livelihoods (M = 3.53). Government interventions such as increased military presence (M = 3.59), the use of vigilante groups (M = 3.47), training programs (M = 3.18), low-interest loans (M = 3.13), cooperative empowerment (M = 3.25), and the rebuilding of agricultural facilities (M = 3.19) were also acknowledged. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive security measures and targeted agricultural support to mitigate the effects of banditry and restore agricultural productivity and end attacks by armed groups targeting agricultural resources in the region.

Keywords: Banditry, Agricultural Resources, Utilization, Niger State, Security, Livelihoods.

I. Introduction

The agricultural sector constitutes the key to achieving a number of critical public policy goals in Nigeria. These goals include poverty reduction, employment generation, economic diversification and national food security, Oluwemimo, (2012). Niger State being the state with the largest land mass in the country is a key player in the realization of these goals. In addition, to a very thriving livestock and inland fisheries, the state plays a significant role in the production of both staple and cash crops such as rice, sorghum, millet, beans and groundnut. These agricultural activities not only support food security at the regional and national levels but also serve as the primary livelihood for a significant proportion of the state's rural dwellers. However, recent developments particularly the frequent attacks by bandits against the small-

scale farmers in the predominantly agricultural areas of the state which has resulted in the loss of lives and farmlands have become a major threat to efforts to boost agricultural production.

From Mashegu to Mariga and Rafi, Kontagora, Munya and Shiroro Local Government Areas in the State, attacks by bandits have adversely affected agricultural activities. This has resulted in an increased reduction in farm activities, a major development that has heightened the fear of hunger and increased poverty. Banditry evince in these agrarian communities through criminal acts such as abduction for ransom, looting and burning of farm produce, destruction of tools and machineries, theft of livestock, sexual assault and gruesome killing of farmers in these areas through the use of light and sophisticated firearms. Already most farmers in these bandit dominated areas in the state have abandoned their farms for fear of being attacked by the bandits. Besides, for most of the farmers in remote and environmentally fragile locations, several farmers have been displaced and disposed of their farms by these armed groups. Agricultural experts are unanimous in their predictions that this growing crisis will negatively impact the availability and utilization of agricultural resources thus eroding the gains that may have been recorded in the agricultural sector. Already six out of the 25 local government areas in Niger State, namely Rafi, Mariga, Mashegu, Kontagora, Munya and Shiroro mostly affected by the distressing activities of these armed groups have sad stories to tell.

The effects of unpredictable but sustained attacks in the affected areas have led to farmer's reluctance to return back to their farms. Consequent of these unwholesome banditry activities is the hike in the prices of essential commodities and food products, making them unaffordable for the low income earners. Shortage of products coupled with persistent increase in the prices of staple products have unsettled the citizens and dampened the country's efforts to reduce and if possible eliminate poverty in the land. This phenomenon of armed banditry except otherwise checked will continue to mitigate agricultural production and food security in the state.

Statement of Problem

Banditry has become a significant threat to agricultural production and food security in Niger State. The sustained attacks by these armed groups undermine both the availability and utilization of agricultural resources, thereby jeopardizing the livelihoods of farmers and their families. Large scale theft of farm tools and equipment, destruction of storage facilities and displacement of producers have disrupted production routines and reduced the output of staple food and cash crops in the state. Furthermore, the climate of fear and uncertainty prevents farmers from accessing their lands, employing labour or making informed decisions related to agricultural investment. This ugly trend has negatively contributed to food scarcity, price hikes, growing poverty among the rural population while also threatening the overall stability and economic development of Niger State. Without appropriate measures the impacts of banditry may continue to undermine agricultural production and food stability in the state. The essence of this study therefore is to examine the factors fuelling this unhealthy phenomenon and to suggest ways of addressing these challenges.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the impacts of banditry on the availability and utilization of agricultural resources in Niger State. Specifically, the study is designed to:

1. Identify the causes of armed banditry in Niger State.
2. Examine the impacts on availability of agricultural resources.
3. Examine the impacts on the utilization of agricultural resources.
4. Identify the survival strategies by farmers.
5. Determine measures adopted by government to revive agricultural activities.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of armed banditry in Niger State?
2. What are the impacts on availability of agricultural resources?
3. What are the impacts on utilization of agricultural resources?
4. What are the possible survival strategies by farmers?
5. What are the approaches adopted by government to revive agricultural activities?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that guided this study is the relative deprivation theory. The major assumptions of the theory are that a person's or group's satisfaction is not related to their objective circumstances but rather to other persons or groups. Relative deprivation theory postulates that unfavourable comparisons can generate feelings of deprivations that motivate outgroup hostility, (Grant and Brown, 1995). The poor are led to violence due to their relative deprivation and needs (Odumosu and Awojobi, 2014). Gaining a thorough insight of the motivations behind banditry attacks is fundamental in safeguarding agricultural resources and producers from being targeted by armed groups. However, existing studies attribute the emergence and persistence of banditry to factors such as unemployment, illiteracy, bad governance, injustice and inequality and poverty.

II. Material And Methods

Research Design

The descriptive survey research was adopted for this study. It enables one to describe in a systematic manner, the characteristics, feature or facts about a given population.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Niger State situated in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Niger State shares its borders with Republic of Benin to West, Zamfara State to the North,Kebbi to the North-West, Kogi to the South, Kwara to the South-West, Kaduna to the North-East, and Federal Capital Territory to the South-East.

The state comprises 25 Local Government Areas grouped into three (3) administrative zones: A, B, C with each zone having 8, 9 and 8 Local Government Areas respectively.

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Niger State covers an area about 76,469,903km2 representing about 9.3% of the total land area of the country. By 2006 census, the state's population is 3,950,249. The major ethnic groups are Nupes, Hausa, Gbagyi. The major economic activity is agriculture: Farming, Fishing and Livestock Production. Niger State experiences distinct dry and wet seasons with annual rainfall varying from 1,100mm in the Northern parts to 1,600mm in the Southern parts. The rainy season last for about 150 days in the Northern parts to about 120 days in the Southern parts of the State. Source: Niger State Bureau of Statistic, 2024.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is made up of farmers, agricultural input suppliers, local traders, extension agents and residents in the six (6) local government areas most affected by banditry activities.

Sample of the Study

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. First stage is selection of six local governments most affected by banditry. Second stage is a random selection of four communities from each of the selected local government areas. Third stage is purposive sampling of farmers, traders, extension agents and residents with characteristics and experiences that align with the study. A total of 300 respondents was selected to ensure adequate representation and reliable data

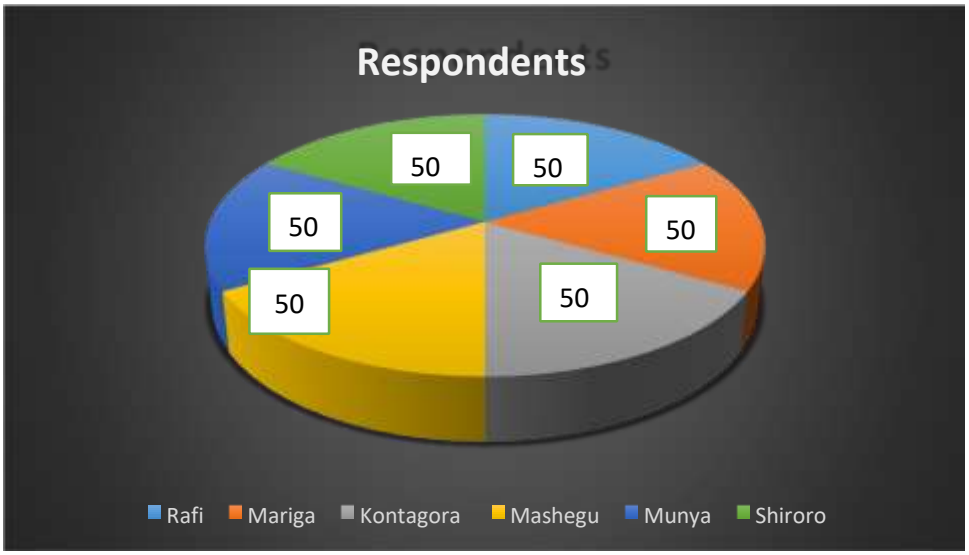

Fig. 1 Pie chart showing the sample size

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument that was adopted is questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was titled impacts of banditry on the availability and utilization of agricultural resources. The questionnaire was divided into sections A and B. each section patterned to reflect an aspect of the research question of the study. The response mode for research questions is four (4) points likert rating scale: strongly agree (4 points scale), agree (3 points scale), disagree (2 points scale), strongly disagree (1-point scale) while key informant

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question guide was also constructed in order to guide the researcher on the questions to ask the key informants

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

A copy of the developed questionnaire was given to experts in the Abdulsalam Institute for Peace and Security Studies for Validation. Method of Data Collection: Questionnaire and KII was adopted for collection of data. A guide on the subject matter was developed to guide the researchers in framing questions for potential informants. The six locations were visited to administer the questionnaire and conduct KII on the respondents or the study. Method of data analysis: Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation. The mean cut off point for decision making was set at 2.50; any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered significant. The KII was content analyzed**.**

III. Result

Research question one: What are the causes of banditry in Niger state?

Table 1 presents the responses of participants regarding the perceived causes of banditry in their community. The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The Table revealed a Limited educational opportunities had the highest mean score (M = 3.17), indicating that most respondents strongly agree that lack of education is a major contributor to banditry. Unemployment and poverty (M = 3.04), corruption (M = 3.00), drug abuse and alcohol (M = 3.09), farmers/herders clash (M = 3.09), and bad governance (M = 3.06) were also significantly acknowledged as causes. Across all items, most respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, suggesting a general consensus that these factors play critical roles in the rise of banditry. The relatively low standard deviation values indicate that there was little variation in the respondents' views.

Table no 1 Causes of Banditry as Observed by Respondents.

	ITEM	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1.	Limited educational opportunities aid involvement in banditry.	78 (26.0)	196 (65.3)	24 (8.0)	2 (0.7)	3.17	0.583
2.	Unemployment and poverty contribute to banditry in our community.	50 (16.7)	229 (76.3)	4 (1.3)	17 (5.7)	3.04	0.638
3.	Corruption contributed to the emergence and spread of banditry.	46 (15.3)	226 (75.3)	10 (3.3)	18 (6.0)	3.00	0.638
4.	Drug abuse and alcohol influence individuals to engage in banditry.	54 (18.0)	224 (74.7)	18 (6.0)	4 (1.3)	3.09	0.534

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5.	Farmers/herders clash is the major cause of banditry.	48 (16.0)	232 (77.3)	19 (6.3)	1 (0.3)	3.09	0.479
6.	Bad governance as issue encouraging the rise of banditry.	49 (16.3)	227 (75.7)	18 (6.0)	6 (2.0)	3.06	0.548

Research Q2: What is the impact of banditry on the availability of agricultural resources?

The analysis of Table 2 reveals that banditry has a profound negative impact on the availability of agricultural resources in the study area. The responses across all items show a very high level of agreement, as most of the respondents either strongly agree (SA) or agree (A) with the listed statements. Item 1: A total of 94.7% of respondents believe that fear of attacks has prevented the delivery of agricultural inputs, indicating that insecurity directly disrupts the agricultural supply chain. Item 2: 95% of respondents agree that unless security improves, the scarcity of agricultural resources will persist, suggesting that long-term food security is at risk if banditry continues. Item 3: 95.7% of respondents acknowledge the destruction of storage facilities, which exacerbates post-harvest losses and limits farmers' capacity to preserve their produce. Item 4: 95.7% of respondents report that farmers are abandoning their lands due to insecurity, which could lead to reduced agricultural output and potential displacement. Item 5: The destruction of essential farm equipment was strongly affirmed by 95% of respondents, underlining the compounded difficulties farmers face in maintaining productivity. Item 6: The overall impact of banditry on agricultural resources was emphasized by 93% of respondents, reinforcing the general sentiment of significant disruption. The mean scores (M) for all items range from 2.98 to 3.03, indicating a consistently high level of agreement, while the standard deviations (SD) are relatively low, demonstrating that responses were closely clustered and there was minimal variation in opinion.

Table no 2 Impact on Availability of Agricultural Resources

	ITEM	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1	Fear of attacks prevents the delivery of agricultural inputs to the community.	15 (5.0)	269 (89.7)	12 (4.0)	4 (1.3)	2.98	0.379
2	Without an improvement in security, the scarcity of agricultural resources will continue to worsen.	11 (3.7)	274 (91.3)	15 (5.0)		2.99	0.295
3	Storage facilities for agricultural produce are destroyed by bandit attacks	21 (7.0)	266 (88.7)	13 (4.3)		3.03	0.336
4	Bandit attacks have forced many farmers to abandon their agricultural lands.	8 (2.7)	279 (93.0)	13 (4.3)		2.98	0.264

5	The destruction of farm equipment (tractors, planters, sprayers) further hampers agricultural production.	24 (8.0)	261 (87.0)	13 (4.3)	2 (0.7)	3.02	0.387
6	Overall, banditry has significantly reduced the availability of agricultural resources in my community.	26 (8.7)	253 (84.3)	16 (5.3)	5 (1.7)	3.00	0.455

Q3. What is the impact of banditry on the utilization of agricultural resources?

The results in Table 3 reveal that banditry has a significant negative effect on the utilization of agricultural resources in the studied communities as it reduces the ability of farmers to access their farmlands. A majority of respondents agreed (79.0%) and strongly agreed (14.3%) that banditry limits farmers' access to their farmlands. This item recorded a high mean score of 3.08 with a standard deviation of 0.453, indicating strong consensus on the issue. Bandit attacks led to a sharp increase in the cost of agricultural inputs. A combined 89.6% of respondents either strongly agreed (10.3%) or agreed (79.3%) that banditry has led to increased costs of farming inputs, while a minority disagreed (5.3%) or strongly disagreed (5.0%). This item had a mean of 2.95 and a standard deviation of 0.596. Bandit attacks led to abandonment of farmlands. The majority of respondents (88.7% agreed, 5.0% strongly agreed) confirmed that bandit attacks forced them to abandon their farmlands. The mean score was 2.99 with a low standard deviation of 0.337, showing that this was a widely shared experience. Fear of attacks by bandits discourages agricultural production. A significant proportion of respondents (11.0% strongly agreed, 82.3% agreed) indicated that fear of bandit attacks discourages them from agricultural engagement. The mean score of 3.01 and a standard deviation of 0.527 reflect strong agreement on this point. Damage to agricultural facilities by bandits impacts food production. A combined 93.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that banditry-related destruction of agricultural facilities negatively impacts food production. This item recorded a mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 0.388. Banditry disrupts the marketing and selling of agricultural produce. Most respondents (9.0% strongly agreed, 84.0% agreed) noted that banditry disrupts agricultural marketing and sales, limiting farmers' access to markets. The mean score was 3.02 with a standard deviation of 0.413.

Table no 3 Impact on Utilization of Agricultural Resources

	ITEM	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1	Banditry reduces the ability of farmers to access their farmlands.	43 (14.3)	237 (79.0)	20 (6.7)		3.08	0.453
2	Bandit attacks led to sharp increase in the cost of agricultural inputs.	31 (10.3)	238 (79.3)	16 (5.3)	15 (5.0)	2.95	0.596

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3	Bandit attacks led to abandonment of my farmlands.	15 (5.0)	266 (88.7)	19 (6.3)		2.99	0.337
4	Fear of attacks by bandits discourages agricultural production	33 (11.0)	247 (82.3)	10 (3.3)	10 (3.3)	3.01	0.527
5	Damage to agricultural facilities by bandit's impacts food production	25 (8.3)	255 (85.0)	20 (6.7)		3.02	0.388
6	Banditry disrupts the marketing and selling of agricultural produce	27 (9.0)	252 (84.0)	20 (6.7)	1 (1.0)	3.02	0.413

Q4. What are the survival strategies adopted by farmers?

Table 4 revealed that farmers reduce their agricultural activities to avoid danger. A majority of respondents (84.7% agreed, 8.3% strongly agreed) confirmed that they deliberately reduce farming activities to minimize exposure to attacks. This item recorded a mean score of 3.01 with a standard deviation of 0.405, indicating a strong agreement among the participants. Some farmers pay ransom or protection fees to avoid attacks. About 91.0% of respondents either strongly agreed (19.3%) or agreed (71.7%) that farmers sometimes resort to paying ransoms or protection fees to secure their safety. This strategy had a mean of 3.09 and a standard deviation of 0.572, suggesting it is a fairly common, though distressing, coping mechanism. Farmers form community groups for collective security. The formation of community security groups emerged as a popular strategy, with 58.0% strongly agreeing and 30.3% agreeing to its effectiveness. The mean score for this item was 3.43 with a standard deviation of 0.775, indicating a high level of acceptance and reliance on community-based defense systems. Vigilance by community members helps keep their farms safe. The majority of respondents (71.3% strongly agreed, 12.5% agreed) acknowledged that community vigilance contributes to farm safety. The mean score of 3.47 with a relatively higher standard deviation of 0.941 reflects that while this strategy is widely adopted, the perceived effectiveness may vary among individuals. Some farmers move their families to less vulnerable areas. A significant proportion of respondents (62.7% strongly agreed, 23.3% agreed) reported relocating their families to safer locations as a survival strategy.

The mean score of 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.890 indicates that this is a commonly adopted but personally costly approach. Farmers abandon farming and take to other businesses to earn a living. The most widely adopted strategy appears to be the complete abandonment of farming in favor of alternative livelihoods, with 61.7% strongly agreeing and 31.0% agreeing to this response. The mean score of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.661 highlight the severity of the situation, as many farmers are compelled to leave the agricultural sector altogether.

Table no 4: Survival Strategies of Farmers against banditry

	ITEM	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**

1	Farmers reduce their agricultural activities to avoid danger.	25 (8.3)	254 (84.7)	20 (6.7)	1 (0.3)	3.01	0.405
2	Some farmers pay ransom or protection fees to avoid attacks.	58 (19.3)	215 (71.7)	22 (7.3)	5 (1.7)	3.09	0.572
3	Farmers form community groups for collective security.	174 (58.0)	91 (30.3)	26 (8.7)	9 (3.0)	3.43	0.775
4	Vigilance by community members help keep their farms safe	214 (71.3)	37 (12.5)	26 (8.7)	23 (7.7)	3.47	0.941
5	Some farmers move their families to less vulnerable areas.	188 (62.7)	70 (23.3)	22 (7.3)	20 (6.7)	3.42	0.890
6	Farmers abandon farming and take to other businesses to earn a living.	185 (61.7)	93 (31.0)	19 (6.3)	3 (1.0)	3.53	0.661

Q5. What are the measures adopted by government to revive agricultural activities?

Table 5 showed increased military presence to protect agricultural settlements. A large majority of Respondents (72.3% strongly agreed, 15.7% agreed) affirmed that the government has increased military presence in affected areas to safeguard farmers and their settlements. This measure recorded the highest mean score of 3.59 with a standard deviation of 0.723, indicating strong agreement and perceived visibility of this intervention. Use of vigilante groups to reduce the menace of banditry in some locations. Most respondents (70.3% strongly agreed, 9.7% agreed) acknowledged that the government, in collaboration with communities, employs vigilante groups to address banditry.

This strategy had a mean score of 3.47 and a standard deviation of 0.879, reflecting broad support for Local security initiatives. Organization of training programs on agricultural resiliency and safety. About 62.0% of respondents strongly agreed that the government provides training on agricultural resiliency and safety, while a smaller portion (11.0% agreed, 17.0% strongly disagreed) expressed less favorable views, possibly due to limited access to such programs. The mean score of 3.18 and a higher standard deviation of 1.171 suggest mixed experiences with this initiative. Provision of low-interest loans to enable farmers to restart operations. Government provision of financial support was affirmed by 61.7% of respondents who strongly agreed, while a notable 20.3% strongly disagreed, indicating that some farmers may not have benefited directly from this measure. The mean score was 3.13 with a standard deviation of 1.226, pointing to significant variability in access to and awareness of these loan schemes. Empowerment of farmers through cooperative societies and other platforms. Approximately 58.7% of respondents strongly agreed that the government has supported farmers through cooperatives and empowerment programs, with 21.7% agreeing. The mean score of 3.25 and a standard deviation of 1.064 show a generally positive perception of these empowerment efforts, although not universally experienced. Government

assistance in rebuilding destroyed agricultural facilities. A total of 62.0% of respondents strongly agreed that the government assists in reconstructing destroyed agricultural infrastructure. However, 16.7% strongly disagreed, suggesting that the support may not be evenly distributed. The mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 1.165 reflect a moderate level of satisfaction with this measure.

Table no 5 Measures Adopted By Government to Revive Agricultural Activities

	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD
1	Increased military presence to protect agricultural settlements	217 (72.3)	47 (15.7)	33 (11.0)	3 (1.0)	3.59	0.723
2	Use of vigilante to reduce the menace of banditry in some locations.	211 (70.3)	29 (9.7)	51 (17.0)	9 (3.0)	3.47	0.879
3	Organizes training programs on agricultural resiliency and safety	186 (62.0)	33 (11.0)	30 (10.0)	51 (17.0)	3.18	1.171
4	Offers of low-interest loans to enable farmers to restart operations.	185 (61.7)	29 (9.7)	25 (8.3)	61 (20.3)	3.13	1.226
5	Empowerment of farmers through cooperative societies etc.	176 (58.7)	65 (21.7)	18 (6.0)	41 (13.7)	3.25	1.064
6	The government assists in rebuilding destroyed agricultural facilities	186 (62.0)	34 (11.3)	30 (10.0)	50 (16.7)	3.19	1.165

IV. Discussion

The findings from the study revealed that several factors significantly contribute to the rising cases of banditry in the study area. These factors, as observed by the respondents, include limited educational opportunities, unemployment and poverty, corruption, drug abuse, farmers/herders clashes, and bad governance. The highest mean score (M = 3.17) was recorded for the statement that limited educational opportunities aid involvement in banditry. This suggests that a lack of access to formal education is perceived as a major driver of banditry. Education is a vital tool for social and economic empowerment, and its absence can push individuals towards criminal activities as an alternative means of survival (Adeleke, 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This finding aligns with the views of scholars who argued that illiteracy and educational deprivation contribute to the growth of insecurity and violence, particularly in rural and underdeveloped communities (Adamu & Rasheed, 2020). Unemployment and poverty also ranked high with a mean of 3.04, indicating that economic hardship remains a core factor fuelling banditry. When people lack stable source of income and access to basic needs, they may be lured into criminal activities such as banditry as a survival strategy. This supports the position of previous studies that identified unemployment as a catalyst for youth involvement in violent crimes (Ibrahim, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Corruption was another significant cause, with a mean of 3.00. Respondents believe that

corruption among leaders and security agencies contributes to the spread of banditry. Corruption can weaken the justice system and reduce the effectiveness of security responses, allowing criminal groups to thrive. This corroborates existing literature that links systemic corruption to insecurity and poor governance outcomes (Ogundiya, 2010; Adebayo, 2013).

The role of drug abuse and alcohol in promoting banditry was also acknowledged (M = 3.09). Substance abuse can impair judgment and increase the likelihood of engaging in violent behavior. This finding is consistent with studies that show a positive correlation between drug abuse and criminal activities (Ogunleye & Adebayo, 2017; UNODC, 2021). Farmers/herders clashes were identified as a major cause of banditry, with a mean of 3.09. Long-standing conflicts over land use and access to grazing areas have often escalated into violence, providing fertile ground for banditry and armed groups (Abbass, 2012; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). These clashes not only disrupt social harmony but also create security vacums that are exploited by criminal elements. Finally, bad governance (M = 3.06) was also highlighted as a key factor. Respondents believe that poor leadership, inadequate policies, and failure to address the root causes of insecurity contribute to the persistence of banditry. This finding supports the notion that good governance and accountable leadership are essential in curbing insecurity (Akinola, 2018; Rotberg, 2004).

Similarly, in support of the findings, majority of the key informants interviewed agreed that limited educational opportunities and unemployment have created fertile ground for banditry. One of the key informant noted that youths readily embrace banditry since they do not have any stable source of income. Infact some of the unemployed youths indulge in kidnapping for ransom as a means of redistributing wealth to themselves. All the key informants interviewed stated that crushing poverty prevailing in the land significantly contributed to the rise and spread of banditry. Besides some of the key informants attributed the unending struggle for land access for grazing and farming between the cattle herders and farmers as a primary cause of banditry in their area. The key informants likewise noted that bad governance contributed to the rise of banditry. They noted that a situation where government has not been up and doing in securing lives and properties of the citizens and the sociopolitical environment is laden with administrative injustice and corruption, the only option left for some is to engage in rebellion against the established authority.

The findings also reveal a significant negative impact of banditry on the availability of agricultural resources within the affected communities. Across all the measured items, the majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the presented statements, indicating a consistent perception of the disruptive effects of banditry. Fear of attacks has been a major deterrent to the delivery of agricultural inputs to the communities (M = 2.98, SD = 0.379). This disruption limits farmers' access to critical inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and machinery, ultimately hampering agricultural productivity (FAO, 2021). Additionally, there is widespread agreement that without significant improvement in security, the scarcity of agricultural resources will persist. This perception emphasizes the urgent need for security interventions as a prerequisite for restoring agricultural activities in the region (World Bank, 2020).

Bandit attacks have led to the destruction of storage facilities for agricultural produce (M = 3.03, SD = 0.336), increasing post-harvest losses and exacerbating food scarcity. Farmers have also been forced to abandon their farmlands (M=2.98, SD = 0.264), reducing cultivated land and contributing to food insecurity (Ibrahim, 2020). The destruction of essential farm equipment was acknowledged as another challenge (M= 3.02, SD = 0.387), which further limits the mechanization of farming. The overall perception (M = 3.00, SD = 0.455) indicates that banditry has significantly reduced the availability of agricultural resources.

The key informants stated that majority of the small-holders are afraid to return back to the farm. Besides, the farmlands are located very far from their place of residence and they cannot take the risk of going to cultivate their land for fear of either being killed or kidnapped by bandits. One of the key informants in Munya noted that both livestock and harvested produced are forcefully taken away and storage barns are burnt with fire. Leaving the farmers without food and even seeds for planting. The results also show that the utilization of agricultural resources is severely impacted. Farmers' access to farmlands have been significantly reduced due to the persistent threat of banditry (M = 3.08, SD = 0.453). The increased cost of agricultural inputs due to disrupted supply chains was also highlighted (M = 2.95, SD = 0.596). The abandonment of farmlands (M = 2.99, SD = 0.337) and feardriven reduction in farming activities (M=3.01, SD = 0.527) further threaten food security (FAO, 2021). Damage to agricultural facilities (M=3.02, SD= 0.388) and disruption in the marketing and selling of agricultural produce (M = 3.02, SD = 0.413) limit the profitability and sustainability of farming. The study also reveals that military intervention is the most widely acknowledged strategy to address banditry, with a mean score of 3.59 (SD = 0.723).

The use of vigilante groups also received strong support (M = 3.47, SD = 0.879), reflecting the importance of local community security structures (Akinola, 2018). Government training programs (M = 3.18, SD = 1.171), provision of low-interest loans (M = 3.13, SD = 1.226), empowerment through cooperatives (M = 3.25, SD = 1.064), and the rebuilding of agricultural facilities (M = 3.19, SD = 1.165) were also identified as critical responses, although the level of accessibility and effectiveness varies. In support of the above, the key informants reported that most of the farmers can no longer access their fields to either plant or even harvest their produce. They noted that both food and production assets have been lost due to attacks and displacement. This ugly trend has led to increase in the prices of farm inputs thus drastically reducing the number of farmers, since they lack the means to make the purchases. The key informants also reported that fear of losing their farm products to armed groups have made many of them to abandon farming and diverted their attention to seek for alternative business to earn a living in order to sustain themselves and their families.

The informants observed that the challenge of some of the farmers who are still willing to continue farming is compounded by their inability to access inputs life fertilizer and plant protection chemicals. The dealers of these inputs are not willing to risk their lives and money to market their goods in bandit dominated areas. The findings however, reveal that farmers in the study area have developed various survival

strategies to cope with the persistent threat of banditry. The responses provide insight into the adaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms employed to sustain their livelihoods amid insecurity. The reduction of agricultural activities emerged as a common strategy, with a high mean score of 3.01. This suggests that most farmers have scaled down their operations to minimize exposure to attacks. Such a response, though understandable from a safety perspective, has long-term implications for food security and the economic well-being of the affected communities. Another notable strategy is the payment of ransom or protection fees to bandits or local vigilantes, with a mean of 3.09. This is a disturbing trend, indicating that some farmers are compelled to negotiate their safety, which not only drains their financial resources but also indirectly sustains criminal activities. Community-based security measures are also prominent.

Farmers reported forming community groups for collective security (M = 3.43) and engaging in vigilance activities (M = 3.47) as effective means of safeguarding their farms. These strategies reflect the resilience and solidarity within farming communities, where joint efforts are seen as critical in deterring attacks. The relatively high mean scores here indicate that communal responses are among the most relied upon survival mechanisms. The relocation of families to safer areas is another significant strategy (M = 3.42), demonstrating the severe level of threat that prompts farmers to prioritize the safety of their households, even if it means enduring the emotional and economic costs associated with displacement. Perhaps the most alarming finding is that some farmers abandon agriculture entirely, turning to other businesses to survive (M = 3.53). This strategy recorded the highest mean score, underlining the profound impact of banditry on the agricultural sector. When farmers leave farming altogether, it not only reduces food production but also exacerbates rural poverty and can contribute to urban overcrowding as people migrate in search of alternative livelihoods.

Information from the key informants indicated that banditry has evolved into an organized crime, characterized by mass abductions, village raids and extortions. Farming communities are forced to pay heavy ransoms and levies and protection taxes to armed bandits. They noted that imposed levies, range in millions with bandit kingpins issuing threats to attack homes and farms if their financial demands are not met. Some of the farmers have been forced to sell their farm produce to raise ransom or levy imposed on them by bandits. Besides the key informants noted that the problem is worsened by some people in the affected communities who are also benefiting from the levies and ransoms paid by the people. To survive the incessant attacks by bandits some of the farmers have fled to IDP camps since the camps are perceived to be relatively safe compared to their villages.

The findings from Table 5 reveal a range of interventions employed by the government to mitigate the adverse effects of banditry and restore agricultural activities in the affected areas. The most widely acknowledged measure is the increased military presence to protect agricultural settlements, with a mean score of 3.59 and a relatively low standard deviation (0.723), indicating strong consensus among respondents. This suggests that farmers perceive military deployment as a significant and effective strategy in securing farming communities and enabling agricultural operations to resume with reduced

fear of attacks. Closely following this is the use of vigilante groups to curb banditry, which recorded a mean of 3.47. Although slightly lower than military interventions, this strategy appears to be an important grassroots approach to community protection, particularly in remote locations where formal security forces may have limited reach. However, the standard deviation (0.879) shows a slightly wider variation in perception, possibly reflecting mixed outcomes of vigilante effectiveness in some regions. The organization of training programs on agricultural resiliency and safety garnered a mean of 3.18, indicating moderate agreement among respondents. Despite being a positive step, the relatively higher standard deviation (1.171) suggests that not all farmers have equal access to these programs, or that the effectiveness of the training varies across different communities.

Similarly, the offer of low-interest loans to help farmers restart operations achieved a mean score of 3.13, showing a moderate level of approval. The high standard deviation (1.226) indicates considerable variation in responses, which may point to disparities in access, awareness, or timeliness of these financial interventions. The empowerment of farmers through cooperative societies was also recognized as a meaningful initiative, with a mean of 3.25 and a standard deviation of 1.064. This suggests that cooperative societies are playing a valuable role in supporting farmers, although their impact may not be uniformly felt across all respondents. Lastly, government assistance in rebuilding destroyed agricultural facilities recorded a mean of 3.19. This intervention appears to be moderately appreciated by farmers, but again, the relatively high standard deviation (1.165) indicates unequal implementation or varying degrees of benefit across different areas.

In agreement with the findings above, key informants interviewed noted government actually intervened by involving the military but that lack of consistent security presence to deter bandit attacks is the issue. Besides, their presence is usually concentrated at local government headquarters or they are stationed at major road junctions leading into towns and the villages while where these small holder farmers reside are often many kilometers away. Beside a key informant noted that the military's inadequate manpower is a major factor contributing to their inability to provide adequate security. The military only come and go but the bandits remain with the people constantly. In addition to this, Niger State being the state with the largest land mass has many ungoverned spaces, creating opportunity for banditry and other criminal activities. However, some of the key informants observed that all the talk about government distributing seeds or fertilizer or providing money for their rehabilitation did not reach them in their villages

Conclusion

The study revealed that banditry in the study area is driven by multiple interrelated factors, with limited educational opportunities, unemployment and poverty, corruption, drug abuse, farmers/herders clashes, and bad governance emerging as the most significant contributors. Among these, limited access to education was identified as the most critical factor, suggesting that educational deprivation plays a substantial role in the rise of insecurity. Unemployment and poverty also featured prominently, indicating that economic hardship continues to push individuals toward criminal activities as a means of survival.

Corruption within the leadership and security agencies further exacerbates the situation by weakening governance structures and limiting effective responses to insecurity.

Additionally, the findings highlight the destructive impact of banditry on agricultural resources and activities in the affected communities. Banditry has severely disrupted the supply of agricultural inputs, led to the destruction of storage facilities and farm equipment, increased the cost of farming inputs, and reduced farmers' ability to access their farmlands. The cumulative effect of these disruptions has significantly constrained both the availability and utilization of agricultural resources, contributing to widespread food insecurity and economic instability in the region.

The study also identified some of the strategies employed to combat banditry, including military intervention, the use of community vigilante groups, government training programs, provision of low-interest loans, farmer empowerment through cooperatives, and reconstruction of damaged agricultural infrastructure. However, the effectiveness of these measures varies across communities, indicating the need for more coordinated and sustainable interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Expand Access to Education: Government and relevant stakeholders should prioritize educational development by establishing more schools, providing adult education programs, and offering vocational training, particularly in rural areas. Educational empowerment will reduce the vulnerability of youths to recruitment into criminal activities.
2. Create Employment Opportunities: Targeted job creation strategies, especially in the agricultural and small-scale industrial sectors, should be implemented to address the high levels of unemployment and poverty that fuel banditry.
3. Implement Drug Control Programs: Government agencies and non-governmental organizations should intensify public awareness campaigns and rehabilitation programs to address the growing issue of drug abuse, which contributes to violent behavior and criminal tendencies.
4. Resolve Farmers/Herders Clashes: Proactive conflict resolution mechanisms, such as establishing grazing reserves, promoting community dialogue, and enforcing land-use policies, should be pursued to mitigate the recurring clashes between farmers and herders.
5. Promote Good Governance: Political leaders should demonstrate greater commitment to the welfare and security of citizens by adopting policies that address the root causes of insecurity and by promoting inclusive governance at all levels.
6. Improve Rural Security: While military intervention is essential, the government should also support and regulate community-based vigilante groups to complement formal security efforts. Local security outfits should be trained and monitored to ensure professionalism and respect for human rights.

7. Support Agricultural Recovery: The government should intensify efforts to rebuild destroyed agricultural facilities, subsidize agricultural inputs, and enhance access to low-interest loans to revitalize farming activities in affected areas.
8. Strengthen Farmer Cooperatives: Empowering farmers through cooperative societies can improve their access to inputs, credit facilities, and markets. This strategy should be expanded and properly coordinated to ensure inclusiveness.
9. Enhance Training and Capacity Building: Government and development partners should organize more targeted training programs on agricultural resilience, farm safety, and modern farming techniques to help farmers adapt to the prevailing security challenges.

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