

AGRICULTURE UNDER SIEGE: ARMED BANDITRY AND THE CRISIS OF FOOD SECURITY IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Armed banditry has emerged as a major threat to agricultural production and food security in Northwestern Nigeria. This study investigates its impact on the region's agrarian economy using a content analysis approach that integrates data from scholarly sources, security reports, and humanitarian assessments. Findings indicate that banditry fueled by socio-economic deprivation, weak governance, environmental stress, and the proliferation of small arms has disrupted farming through land abandonment, cattle rustling, crop destruction, and extortion of rural communities. These disruptions have undermined food security dimensions of availability, accessibility, and stability, leading to declining agricultural output, soaring food prices, and increasing malnutrition. The study concludes that armed banditry transcends criminality, constituting a structural threat to livelihood and regional stability. It recommends integrated responses that strengthen rural security, promote youth economic inclusion, and support sustainable agricultural recovery.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, Food Security, Agricultural Production, Displacement, Governance

1.1 Introduction

Armed banditry has become a global security challenge, not only peculiar to Africa but also present in developed countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, and China, where considerable cases of violent attacks and organized crimes are reported (Arnold, 2020). The consequences of this phenomenon are far-reaching and often worse than imagined. According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2024), armed banditry ranks among the top four deadliest forms of terrorism worldwide, posing a major threat not only to peace and stability but also to food security. Indeed, armed conflict is now widely recognized as one of the primary drivers of acute food insecurity, particularly in crisis-prone regions such as Syria, Sudan, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and Nigeria, where millions of households face hunger and malnutrition.

The 2024 Global Report on Food Crises indicates that armed conflict, including armed banditry, has pushed approximately 135 million people across 20 countries into severe food insecurity, a significant rise from 117.1 million recorded the previous year (Food Security Information Network [FSGN], 2024). Similarly, the World Food Programme (WFP, 2024) reports that about 65% of the world's acutely food-insecure population resides in fragile and conflict-affected states. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) also formally acknowledged the nexus

between armed violence and hunger in 2018 through Resolution 2417, which sought to break the vicious cycle of conflict and food insecurity, while condemning the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

The African continent has remained at the epicenter of armed banditry. Recent statistics suggest that Africa accounts for 40% of global attacks and 50% of deaths linked to armed groups, with over 49,000 fatalities recorded in 2021 alone (GTI, 2024). For more than a decade, countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire have been plagued by escalating violence in the form of kidnappings, cattle rustling, insurgencies, vandalism, rape, terrorist attacks, and armed robbery (Saheed, 2019). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular is one of the most food-insecure regions in the world, and armed conflict is a significant predictor of this condition. A 2019 study estimated that one in three people in SSA suffers from malnutrition (Fraval et al., 2019), while the World Bank (2024) reported that the proportion of people experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity in the region rose from 51.5% to 59.5%, with some countries exceeding 80%. The humanitarian crisis in East and Central Africa highlights how conflict and banditry exacerbate hunger, displacement, and livelihood collapse (Muriuki, Hudson, & Fuad, 2023).

In Nigeria, armed banditry has evolved into one of the gravest national security challenges, particularly in the North-West and parts of the North-Central region, including Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, and Sokoto states. Unlike the Boko Haram insurgency which is driven by extremist ideology, banditry in Nigeria is largely motivated by economic gain, manifesting through mass kidnappings, cattle rustling, village raids, arson, and extortion. Reports indicate that banditry now claims more lives than Boko Haram, rendering vast rural communities unsafe and disrupting agricultural activities which are central to Nigeria's food security (Mohammed, 2022). Between 2011 and 2020, Nigerians reportedly paid over \$18 million (₦6.9 billion) in ransom to bandits, highlighting the lucrativeness of kidnapping and its destabilizing effects on rural economies (Bashir & Mustapha, 2022).

The growing menace of armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria has direct and devastating consequences for both agricultural production and food security in the region. Increasingly, farmers are abandoning their farmlands due to persistent fear of attacks, resulting in a sharp decline in crop cultivation and harvests. Rural markets have been disrupted or destroyed, while livestock populations continue to diminish as a result of widespread cattle rustling. Consequently, food availability, accessibility, and affordability in Northwestern Nigeria are under severe threat. The persistence of armed banditry not only undermines regional stability and economic growth but also aggravates hunger, malnutrition, and poverty, pushing millions of households into deeper vulnerability. Against this backdrop, examining the impact of armed banditry on agricultural production and food security in Northwestern Nigeria becomes imperative for both academic inquiry and policy intervention.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Concept of Armed Banditry

Armed banditry has become a major subject of contemporary academic discourse, frequently used interchangeably with terms such as terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, and cattle rustling (Mirza, Barbara, & Mirela, 2022). Like many social science concepts, it lacks a universally accepted definition, as scholars interpret it differently depending on context. Historically, in nineteenth-century Europe, Asia, and the Americas, bandits were often perceived as freedom fighters or defenders of the poor against elite oppression (Warto, 2018; Daniel, 2020). In some societies, they were seen as avengers or “breadwinners,” while in others, they were notorious for looting, arson, rape, and social disorder.

Etymologically, the word “bandit” derives from the Italian *bandito*, meaning a banned or outlawed person, first appearing in English usage in the sixteenth century. Traditionally, banditry referred to outlawed groups marauding roads and rural areas, often using violence to dispossess victims (White, 1981; New English Dictionary, 2019). In Nigeria, banditry is not new; records show its existence in Katsina as far back as 1891, where traditional rulers were accused of colluding with bandits in cattle rustling and robbery (Rufai, 2021; IOM, 2023). During the colonial period, incidents such as the massacre of over 200 traders along the Katsina-Kano route illustrate its deep historical roots.

Contemporary banditry in Nigeria re-emerged around 2011 with groups such as *Kungiyar Gayu* and notorious leaders like Buharin Daji. Initially focused on cattle rustling and robbery, these groups expanded into kidnapping, village raids, and transnational operations involving actors from Niger, Mali, and Chad (Arnold, 2020). Modern bandits operate from ungoverned spaces such as forests and mountains, using sophisticated weapons including assault rifles, while engaging in killings, arson, rape, and mass abductions.

Scholars variously define banditry as the use of force or threat of force to seize property or achieve objectives (Tamuno, 2019; Domenack, 2019). Slatta (2018) emphasizes its violent and unpredictable nature, while Shalangwa (2019) views it as semi-organized armed raids. Earlier notions of “social bandits” as heroes of the oppressed (White, 1981; Rife, 2011) contrast sharply with modern realities, where bandits are criminal enterprises, insurgents, or warlords undermining governance and food security (Bunker & Sullivan, 2015; Williams, 2019).

Overall, the concept of armed banditry has evolved from localized acts of resistance into complex, violent, and transnational criminal networks. Its expansion in Nigeria and across Africa reflects broader socio-economic and governance crises, making it a critical factor in contemporary insecurity and food system disruption.

Concept of Food Security

The concept of food security is central to human survival and development. According to the World Bank (1986), food security refers to access by all people, at all times, to sufficient food for an active and healthy life. The FAO (2004) expands this definition, emphasizing availability, access, utilization, and stability, while also recognizing cultural acceptability as a critical dimension. Thus, food security is achieved only when food is not only produced in adequate quantity and quality but is also physically and economically accessible, nutritionally adequate, and sustainable across time (Folorunso, Gama & Ademiluyi, 2018).

Food security operates at multiple levels: international, national, regional, and household. National food security refers to the overall sufficiency and accessibility of food within a country, while household food security pertains to whether families can access safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate diets. Importantly, security at one level does not automatically imply security at another (Abu & Soom, 2016). Yusufu (2020) identifies four pillars of food security: availability (sufficient production and distribution), accessibility (economic and physical means of obtaining food), utilization (effective consumption ensuring nutritional adequacy), and stability (reliability of supply over time).

In Nigeria, food security has been severely threatened by the persistent menace of armed banditry, especially since the return to democratic rule in 1999, and most acutely during the period 2015–2023. Banditry has resulted in mass displacement, disruption of agricultural activities, destruction of markets, and heightened food prices. FAO (2016, 2021) reports that widespread violence has drastically reduced agricultural productivity, eroded household food stocks, and forced the adoption of extreme coping mechanisms. A Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment (2017) indicated drastic declines in the production of staple crops such as maize (49%), millet (40%), cowpea (32%), groundnut (31%), sorghum (30%), and rice (12%), largely due to farmers abandoning their fields out of fear, displacement, or forced taxation by bandits.

The humanitarian consequences are dire: over 4.7 million Nigerians are estimated to require food assistance, with 400,000 children at imminent risk of starvation (Mo-Ibrahim Foundation, 2016). FAO (2021) further notes that 2.8 million people are already in severe food insecurity. The crisis underscores how armed banditry undermines the four pillars of food security, aggravating poverty, hunger, and instability in Nigeria.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The effect of armed banditry on food security in Northwestern Nigeria can be meaningfully explained through two complementary theoretical perspectives: the Failed State Theory and the Political Economy Theory. These frameworks provide analytical lenses through which to understand the nexus between insecurity, governance collapse, resource competition, and the erosion of agrarian livelihoods.

Failed State Theory

The Failed State Theory, articulated by Robert I. Rotberg (2002), builds upon earlier discourses on governance, sovereignty, and state legitimacy. The theory posits that a state is deemed “failed” when it loses the monopoly of legitimate force, becomes incapable of maintaining territorial control, and fails to deliver essential public goods such as security, justice, and welfare. According to Rotberg, the essence of the state lies in its ability to guarantee order, protect citizens, and facilitate social and economic development. When this capacity weakens, non-state actors such as militias, insurgents, or criminal groups emerge to fill the vacuum, often through coercion, violence, and the extraction of illicit rents.

In the context of Northwestern Nigeria, the persistence of armed banditry illustrates the critical features of state failure. The Nigerian state has struggled to enforce its authority in vast rural areas due to weak policing, poor intelligence coordination, porous borders, and endemic corruption. This governance vacuum has enabled bandit groups to establish quasi-administrative control over local populations. In many communities, bandits impose informal taxation systems, dictate market activities, and collect levies from farmers seeking access to their own farmlands functions that ordinarily belong to the state. The erosion of state legitimacy is further evident in the declining trust between rural populations and security agencies, as communities increasingly rely on vigilante groups or traditional rulers for protection.

Hence, the Failed State Theory aptly captures the structural breakdown that allows banditry to flourish. It frames the problem not simply as criminality, but as a manifestation of governance collapse and institutional fragility. This theoretical lens helps explain why government interventions such as military operations or amnesty programs often yield limited success: they address symptoms of insecurity without repairing the underlying dysfunction of state authority and rural governance.

Political Economy Theory

The Political Economy Theory, rooted in the classical works of Adam Smith and Karl Marx, and further elaborated by Mosley, Harrigan, and Toye (1995), offers a complementary perspective by linking economic structures, power relations, and political incentives to patterns of violence and

food insecurity. The theory posits that conflict often arises from the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, and that economic deprivation and social inequality can drive individuals toward violence as a means of survival or accumulation.

Applied to the Northwestern Nigerian context, the Political Economy Theory interprets banditry as an outcome of enduring poverty, high youth unemployment, and unequal access to productive assets such as land, water, and livestock. These conditions foster a shadow economy where violence becomes commodified. Bandit groups operate as informal economic actors, engaging in cattle rustling, ransom-taking, crop theft, and illegal levies; all of which mimic a parallel system of taxation that exploits the vulnerability of rural producers. In this sense, banditry represents not only social disorder but also a distorted form of political and economic organization where power and profit are derived through coercion rather than production.

This theory also elucidates how armed banditry undermines the four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. By displacing farmers, destroying farmlands, and obstructing food supply chains, banditry constrains production and raises transaction costs, resulting in inflated food prices and increased hunger. The economic logic of survival among bandits, coupled with structural poverty among farmers, perpetuates a vicious cycle of violence and scarcity.

Therefore, the Political Economy Theory provides a dynamic framework for understanding how socio-economic marginalization and resource competition fuel armed banditry, transforming it into a self-sustaining economic system that deepens food insecurity and rural impoverishment.

Integrative Theoretical Insight

When combined, the Failed State Theory and Political Economy Theory reveal the dual dimensions of the banditry-food insecurity nexus. The Failed State Theory explains why banditry persists due to governance failure and the collapse of state authority while the Political Economy Theory explains how banditry operates as an informal system of economic extraction that destabilizes rural production. Together, they highlight that addressing banditry and food insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria requires both institutional restoration (rebuilding state capacity and legitimacy) and economic transformation (reducing poverty, unemployment, and inequality).

1.4 Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence on the nexus between armed banditry and food security in Northwestern Nigeria has attracted increasing scholarly attention. For instance, Peter and Yakubu (2023) examined the effects of armed banditry on food security in North-West Nigeria using both primary and secondary data sources. Their findings revealed that years of governance failure

have created opportunities for non-state actors to unleash terror, thereby undermining food production. The study concluded that addressing the foundational causes of banditry through economic stimulation and technology-driven intelligence gathering remains critical. Similarly, Audu and Adamu (2023), focusing on Katsina State, combined survey and documentary methods to show that disruptions in farming activities caused by armed banditry significantly undermine food security pillars such as availability, accessibility, sustainability, and utilization. They recommended tackling unemployment and poverty while strengthening security presence in flashpoints of attacks.

Other scholars extend this debate beyond agriculture to broader socio-economic and developmental outcomes. Jummai (2022), through content analysis, emphasized how Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies disrupt education and hinder the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in North-East Nigeria. Closely related, Bashir and Mustapha (2022) demonstrated how armed banditry and kidnapping negatively affect multiple socio-economic dimensions, including food security, employment, education, and health in Katsina State. Their study highlighted the need for tighter border controls and proactive security measures. In a similar vein, Musharafa and Adeniyi (2022) argued that unemployment, poverty, arms proliferation, and ungoverned spaces escalate banditry, thereby undermining food production and development in North-West Nigeria.

Further, Ahmad and Jamilu (2022) revealed that armed banditry worsens insecurity in Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara States, with proliferation of arms, porous borders, and socio-economic inequalities as the main drivers. Ishaya (2021) similarly noted that negligence and weak government response exacerbate banditry, leading to socio-economic decline, poverty, and food insecurity. Expanding on this, Nwambuko and Iloh (2021) linked insecurity including armed banditry, farmer-herder clashes, and terrorism to the obstruction of SDGs in Nigeria, stressing the urgent need for a peaceful environment to achieve development.

Other studies specifically emphasize governance and border security. Udosen and Uko (2021) identified porous borders, smuggling, and trafficking as catalysts for armed banditry, recommending sustainable social security systems to reduce poverty and crime. Arnold (2020) framed banditry as a direct negation of national security, concluding that the rise in banditry inversely affects citizens' safety and food access. Bello and Maikudi (2020), in their study of "Operation Yaki" in Kaduna State, found that joint security efforts reduced crime, though they stressed the need for sustained government investment in logistics and manpower. Similarly, Akinola and Faruk (2020) suggested amnesty programs, vocational training, and government allowances for repentant bandits as a strategy to mitigate insecurity in Sokoto State.

Several studies also assessed banditry's socio-political and developmental impacts. Dansabo (2020) emphasized the role of community and government response in Sokoto State, recommending collaborative approaches to address cattle rustling and kidnapping. Joseph and

Bassey (2019) and Saheed (2019) both linked insecurity, armed banditry, and corruption to Nigeria's underdevelopment, advocating for dialogue, information-sharing, and inclusive policies. Nadama (2019), focusing on Zamfara State, concluded that a coordinated preventive approach combining security, legislative, judicial, and governance reforms is essential to address banditry sustainably.

Overall, these empirical studies converge on the idea that armed banditry not only disrupts agricultural productivity but also worsens poverty, unemployment, and malnutrition, thereby undermining food security in Nigeria. However, while some emphasize structural governance failure, others highlight socio-economic drivers such as poverty and resource competition. Collectively, the literature underscores that tackling banditry requires both improved governance and socio-economic interventions to secure Nigeria's food systems.

1.5 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the impact of armed banditry on agricultural production and food security in Northwestern Nigeria. The method involved systematically reviewing and interpreting secondary data from credible sources such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), Food Security Information Network (FSIN), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Global Terrorism Index (GTI), and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), as well as scholarly articles and government reports published between 2010 and 2024. Only documents directly addressing the nexus between insecurity, banditry, agriculture, and food security were selected. The analysis followed the stages of qualitative content analysis as outlined by Krippendorff (2018), which included familiarization with the data, coding, thematic categorization, and interpretation. Major themes such as the drivers and manifestations of banditry, its effects on agricultural production, and its implications for food availability, accessibility, and stability were identified and triangulated with statistical data from FAO and the Cadre Harmonisé (2023–2024) to enhance reliability. All data were cross-verified for consistency, and ethical standards were maintained through the use of publicly available materials duly acknowledged. This methodological approach provided a robust foundation for understanding the socio-economic and governance dynamics through which armed banditry undermines food systems and rural livelihoods in Northwestern Nigeria.

1.6 Presentation of Findings

Socio-Economic Drivers of Banditry and their Security Impact on Northwestern Nigeria

Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria emerges as a complex socio-economic and political phenomenon shaped by structural failures, environmental pressures, and governance deficits. Drawing from both Failed State Theory and Political Economy Perspective, the findings reveal

that weak state institutions, coupled with economic deprivation and resource competition, have fostered a conducive environment for armed banditry to thrive.

According to Ahmadu (2019), climate change, poor governance of rural areas, and inadequate security presence constitute major precursors to the crisis. The Failed State Theory provides a useful lens here, as it conceptualizes how the erosion of state authority over vast rural territories results in power vacuums filled by non-state actors. In many Northwestern communities, the state has failed to provide essential services such as security, education, and justice, leaving local populations vulnerable to exploitation and coercion by armed groups.

Environmental pressures, particularly desertification and land degradation, have intensified the struggle over natural resources between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders (Egwu, 1998; Wolf, 1969). The movement of pastoralists southward in search of grazing land has exacerbated conflicts, transforming initially localized disputes into organized banditry characterized by cattle rustling, kidnappings, and extortion (Mustapha, 2019). From the Political Economy Perspective, this escalation reflects the commodification of violence, where economic motives such as ransom collection and cattle theft intersect with governance failures to sustain a criminal enterprise.

Furthermore, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) from the Sahel region, particularly following the collapse of Libya under Ghadaffi (Gaye, 2018; Adetula, 2015), has increased the operational capacity of bandit groups. Porous borders and poorly monitored forested areas, as noted by Mohammed (2011) and Whelan (2006), enable the illicit movement of weapons and combatants, highlighting the inadequacy of border governance mechanisms.

The findings also point to socio-economic deprivation and youth unemployment as critical enablers of banditry. According to Adagba, Ugwu, and Eme (2012), pervasive poverty and limited livelihood options compel many young men to join criminal networks as a survival strategy. The Political Economy lens underscores this as a rational adaptation to structural inequality, where participation in banditry provides an informal livelihood in an environment of economic exclusion. Weak institutional responses, coupled with corruption and collusion among security personnel (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013), further perpetuate the cycle of insecurity. Thus, from both theoretical standpoints, the socio-economic drivers of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria stem from state fragility, economic marginalization, and the monetization of violence, all of which reinforce one another to sustain insecurity and social breakdown.

Effect of Armed Banditry on Agricultural Production

Armed banditry has profoundly disrupted agricultural production in Northwestern Nigeria through displacement, destruction of farmlands, and widespread livestock theft. These disruptions are not isolated incidents but part of broader socio-economic processes shaped by

insecurity and governance collapse. Empirical evidence indicates that rural displacement has reduced the agricultural labor force, as many able-bodied farmers flee their communities to avoid attacks (UNICEF, 2023). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2024) reports that agricultural output in Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto States declined by over 35% between 2019 and 2023 due to insecurity-related disruptions. Similarly, Cadre Harmonisé (2023) data estimate that over 4.2 million people in Northwestern Nigeria face acute food insecurity, primarily linked to violence and displacement.

Banditry has also reshaped rural economies through informal taxation and extortion. As reported by SB Morgan Intelligence (2024), in many communities across Zamfara State, farmers are compelled to pay “harvest taxes” to access their farmlands, a phenomenon that demonstrates the de facto authority of bandit leaders in areas where state presence is weak. This aligns with the Failed State Theory, as it reflects the transfer of fiscal and coercive power from the state to non-state actors. Moreover, insecurity along trade and transport routes has severely restricted market access. Increased risks have inflated transportation and food distribution costs, contributing to food price surges across urban centers (Beetseh, Abubakar, & Nongo, 2021). The Political Economy Perspective explains this as a distortion of market dynamics caused by insecurity, where violence becomes an economic variable that shapes production, pricing, and distribution.

Impact of Banditry on Food Availability and Accessibility

Findings show that the cumulative effect of banditry-induced displacement and taxation is the widespread decline in food availability and accessibility. Attacks on farmlands and grain silos (Beetseh et al., 2021), as well as cattle rustling (Ladan, 2020), have severely reduced food supplies. Displaced households in Sokoto and Katsina States report dependence on humanitarian aid and unstable food donations (Mohammed, 2017). According to FAO (2024), the reduction in crop cultivation area in affected states has led to a 28% decline in cereal production. This scarcity inflates market prices, pushing staple foods such as maize, millet, and sorghum beyond the reach of poor households. From a Political Economy standpoint, insecurity acts as both a production and consumption constraint, impoverishing farmers while simultaneously inflating the cost of survival for consumers. The crisis also has nutrition and health implications, as households substitute protein-rich meals with cheaper carbohydrate-based diets. UNICEF (2023) identifies Northwestern Nigeria as one of the regions with the highest prevalence of child malnutrition, underscoring the humanitarian dimension of the banditry crisis.

Broader Socio-Economic and Human Security Implications

The study finds that the socio-economic implications of banditry extend far beyond agriculture, encompassing poverty deepening, educational decline, gendered violence, and erosion of state legitimacy. As Baiyewu (2019) and Ojo et al. (2023) observe, frequent attacks, kidnappings, and displacement have expanded the poverty gap and intensified social fragmentation. The Failed

State Theory is particularly relevant here: the inability of the Nigerian state to enforce law and order, protect citizens, and deliver justice has eroded public trust in state institutions. This vacuum has fostered informal governance by bandit leaders, vigilante groups, and ethnic militias, thereby entrenching cycles of violence. Gender-based impacts are also severe. Women and girls face abductions, forced marriages, and sexual violence (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014), while the death or abduction of male family members increases the feminization of poverty. The resulting humanitarian crisis reflected in the swelling population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) exemplifies how insecurity undermines both human security and national development.

Synthesis

From the findings, it is evident that armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria is not merely a security problem but a symptom of systemic governance and economic failures. The Failed State Theory explains the institutional collapse that allows banditry to flourish, while the Political Economy Perspective elucidates how socio-economic deprivation and economic incentives sustain the cycle of violence. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how poverty, environmental degradation, and weak governance converge to produce chronic insecurity, food crises, and social dislocation across Northwestern Nigeria.

Conclusion

Armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria constitutes a major developmental and humanitarian challenge, undermining food security, rural livelihoods, and the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. The study reveals that the phenomenon is driven by a complex interaction of climate change-induced resource scarcity, youth unemployment, governance failure, widespread poverty, and the proliferation of illicit arms. These conditions collectively produce a cycle of violence, displacement, and agricultural collapse, resulting in food shortages, inflation, and malnutrition particularly among women, children, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the Failed State Theory, which posits that weak institutions and loss of state control foster insecurity and non-state violence. Likewise, the Political Economy Perspective elucidates how economic deprivation, inequitable resource distribution, and corruption perpetuate insecurity and reduce the effectiveness of government interventions.

Recommendations

The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Nigeria Police Force, should strengthen rural security operations by expanding and adequately funding the Agro-Ranger program. This unit should be deployed to protect farmers, farmlands, and local markets from bandit attacks. Integrating community-based intelligence networks and early warning systems will also enhance rapid response to security threats in remote areas. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, in partnership

with FAO, WFP, and relevant state ministries, should implement targeted agricultural recovery programs for displaced and affected farmers. These should include provision of subsidized farm inputs, access to agricultural insurance, and rehabilitation of damaged farmlands. Strengthening rural storage and transport infrastructure will help stabilize food availability and reduce post-harvest losses in conflict-affected zones. The Federal Ministry of Environment and the National Council on Climate Change should integrate climate adaptation measures such as climate-smart agriculture, afforestation, and sustainable water management into national food security policies. This will address the root environmental stressors (drought, desertification, and resource scarcity) that intensify competition for land and water, thereby reducing one of the key structural drivers of banditry.

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