

Armed Banditry and Regional Security: Imperatives of Non-Kinetic Response for Stability of North-West

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Abstract: *The Nigeria nation-state is currently experiencing a new wave of terrorism resonating in menace of armed banditry in the North-West region of the federation. Its intensity, spread and fatalities overwhelms amid ground offensives and airstrikes from Nigeria military. Hence, this unpleasant development therefore elicits the need for alternative plausible non-military options towards restoring security and peace in the region. Hence, this underscored the essence of non-kinetic measures to stem the tides of bandits and criminal gangs in North-West. The methodology of this discourse is a descriptive design where secondary sources of data collection and non-participant observational method were used. The data and observed events were content-analyzed. The findings revealed frightening incidences of banditry as security personnel grapple with myriad of institutional, geographic, political and societal constraints. The deaths, destruction, humanitarian and socio-economic effects were enormous as the state governments deployed non-kinetic measures to complement efforts of the security personnel, however, these measures were also fraught with political, administrative and logistic lapses. Thus, this discourse recommends for a regional amnesty program, state youth empowerment and rehabilitation program, security reforms as among the fundamentals of non-kinetic response to armed banditry in North West region of Nigeria federation.*

Keywords : Armed Banditry, Security, North West and Non-Kinetic Response.

Introduction

Nigeria is an African largest economy with reference to its demographic attribute and potentials of human and material resources. African most populace country is also strategic member of international community in credence to its regional status in the continent and global alliances with the West and United Nations. Hence, it has remarkably over the decades demonstrated exceptional leadership in economy, military and resourceful human capital in regional and sub-regional development drive, partnerships and security. However, these virtues of national prestige are plummeted by failures of political leadership which have over the years breeds penury that adversely intensified centrifugal tendencies of disunity and rebellion against Nigeria state. In a similar sense, Nwaneri (2021) writes that 61 years after independence it is still unfilled dream leaving many to wonder if Nigeria's independence is not freedom mismanaged. With an area of over 923, 773 square kilometers, the largest single geographical unit along the West Coast of Africa, Nigeria has the most envious economic prolife on African continent. The nation is leading producer of crude oil and gas in Africa and 6th in the world. But the country remains a land of poverty and violence despite her huge potentials. This many believe was made possible, mainly by ineffective leadership, unbridled corruption and ethnicism. Another sad tale of the Nigeria story is poverty amidst plenty. About 150 million out of the country's estimated 200 million population live in relative poverty conditions as successive governments merely engaged in glorifying poverty alleviation programmes. This has been worsen by rising insecurity across the country. The Boko Haram insurgency ravaging the North-East, banditry in the North-West, farmers/herders clashes in the North-Central, secessionists agitations in the South East and South-West as well as militancy in the South-South, leaves no doubt that it is not yet uhuru for Nigeria. The crises have claimed several lives and property as well as brought economic activities in some of the affected geo-political zones to a halt.

Subsequently, it is remarked that national security ambience in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is characteristically volatile. It is exposed to sundry political, ecological, territorial and socio-economic threats that have militated against the corporate existence and survival of the country. The volatility of national security in Nigeria is palpably demonstrated by the prevalence of various dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria today point to a pattern of spatial distribution of conflicts and criminality across different geo-political zones (Okoli, 2014; Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014; Okoli and Agada, 2014; Ayokhai and Peter, 2015 Ayokhai and Peter, 2016, cited in Okoli and Ayokhai, 2017:228). Invariably, the crisis of national security is the most daunting challenges of national development in Nigeria today. It is unpleasant scenario that seem to have overwhelmed government and security agencies in reference to its intensity and spread. Hence, its adverse effects permeate every strata of national life and undermine prospects of growth and development. Recently, Nyam (2022) reports that Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila at an event in London lamented that the current security challenges in Nigeria are a threat to the foundation of the country's nationhood and portends great danger for Africa and the world if it persist.

The North represents the hotbed of insecurity in Nigeria. Boko-Haram terrorism in North-East, Fulani herdsmen killings in North-Central and armed banditry in the North-West not only constitute serious national security threat but have remained unabated and intensely claimed thousands of lives, displacement of millions and destruction of infrastructures worth billions of dollars. To illustrate the alarming height and cradle of chaotic security crises in the North, Otokpa (2021) revealed that the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar on the occasion of 4th quarterly meeting of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council, (NIREC) with theme, "NIREC, Security Agencies and Peace in Nigeria" said that people are killed on daily basis in the North especially the North-Western part of the country. He said, "if I continue talking about the insecurity in the North, we will not leave this room; some days ago, we are witness to the media report on how people were killed in a bus in Sokoto though the figure is not correct but even one life is important. There is no single day that passes without people being killed in the North, especially the North-West". To this extent, North-West has currently assumed the status of most volatile region in the North, with reference to abductions, killings and livestock rustling. Invariably, Kuna and Jibrin (2016) documents that the North-western region of Nigeria encompasses seven states namely Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi. Five of these states, which are Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi have been mostly affected by the scourge of banditry. Of these five states, Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara have been the most critical hot spots. It is however, pertinent to note that the incidences of banditry are not limited to northwestern Nigeria. In fact, it is also prevalent in some parts of north-central region, in states like Niger, Nasarawa, Benue and Plateau which are equally regarded as hotbeds.

However, many countries around the globe presently are facing insecurity and as such insecurity can be considered as global phenomenon. Nigeria as a country is not an exemption to this happening where some states in the North West like Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara are plagued with subsequent attacks by armed bandits who have killed a lot of peoples and damaging property worth millions of naira (Yahaya, and Bello, 2020: 231). Banditry is fast becoming alarming in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to the extent that it poses a serious security threat not only to the Northwest region but to Nigeria at large. The level at which bandits operate within the landscape of Nigeria's northwest has led to spree of kidnapping, maiming of people, loss of lives, population displacements, loss of cattle, disruption of socio-economic activities in general, and equally brought about an atmosphere of uncertainty, a situation that has become worrisome to the government and the citizenry (Olapeju and Adeniyi, 2020:141).

The pervasive banditry and its associated threats to security, which have enveloped the Northwest region of Nigeria, particularly, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Niger States, have become a worrisome national security issue of public concern (Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2018: 19). Reports revealed the flourishing of bandit groups, whose members were seen displaying automatic weapons, terrorizing herders "settlements, farms, villages and the highways with the mission of killing people, kidnapping and pillaging cows" (Olaniyan, 2019:111). It was also reported that between October, 2013 and March, 2014, 7,000 cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and traditional herders in Northern Nigeria (Bashir, 2014; Tauna, 2016:45) while about 330 attacks were made by bandits and 1,460 deaths were recorded between January and July, 2019 (Abdullahi, 2019:51). In most cases, the bandits killed and maimed the people and raped the women before dispossessing them of their cows (Akowe and Kayode, 2014: 34) while in some instances, they also kidnapped girls or women in the process (Adeniyi, 2015; 72 and Yusuf, 2015:120). Consequently, it is unfortunate to indicate that public schools across states of North-West have in the recent time come under intense abductions by the armed bandits. As Madubuegwu, *e tal* (2021), revealed that the North-West since December 2020 till date remained the vortex of banditry and abduction of school children as seen in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states and isolated incidences in Niger state in the North Central region.

Basically, security agencies including the military were deployed to combat these terrorists as bandits through arrest, ground offensives and airstrikes. In this regard, Jimoh(2021) revealed that the Katsina state police command claimed that its personnel recovered 179 sophisticated weapons from suspected bandits, 244 suspected cattle rustlers arrested, where 230 were charged to court and 14 were still under investigation from suspected bandits and kidnappers. The military authority has also cl, 1, 243 domestic animals were recovered and 215 kidnapped victims were also free aimed that its personnel in Kaduna and Zamfara have been able to counter the offensive of the bandits by persistent bombing of hideout-forest spots. These measures underscored the importance of kinetic approach to the onslaught of banditry.

However, the recent incidences of terror attacks at Kaduna international airport and Abuja-Kaduna train station in March 2022, which left scores of people killed, injured and abducted indeed showed that armed banditry is a current frightening height of terrorism in Nigeria amid security measures through ground offensives and airstrikes. These unpleasant situations therefore elicit the need to take a critical look on non-kinetic responses and process beyond "the show of force" towards mitigating the inferno of armed conflict of banditry in North-West Nigeria. Hence, this assertion obviously underscored the importance of this discourse. Thus, this discourse is streamlined in this introduction, conceptual explication, crisis of armed banditry in North West, appraisal of non-kinetic responses to armed banditry in North West, conclusion and recommendation.

Conceptual Explication

Accordingly, Olapeju and Oluwatobi (2019) assert that banditry is a derivative of the term bandit meaning an unlawful armed group terrorizing people and confiscating their properties. It is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups who use small and light weapons to carry out attacks against people. In this regard, banditry could mean a set-up criminal activity deliberately designed and carried out for personal gains. In a similar sense, banditry is defined as occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person with the intent to rob rape or kill. Banditry is a crime against persons. It has been a common genre of crime, as well as cause of violence in contemporary societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011 cited in Ahmed, 2019:2). In a restrictive sense Egwu (2016) described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches. In the same vein, Uche and Iwuamadi, (2018) conceived banditry as reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims, a development that has been brought to the front burner of national security. In a broad sense, Shalangwa (2013) regards banditry as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organized groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals. Such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified, detected and arrested. From scholarly submissions banditry stem the word, "bandits" which implied gang of criminals who steal and kill for inordinate gains.

In a different perspective, Olapeju and Oluwatobi (2019) argued that since the term banditry is connected to rural, it implies a group of rural outlawed involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorizing and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable items or properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. Furthermore, Abdullahi, (2019), stressed that these bandits operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people. In clarifying sense, Conklin (1992) also indicated that armed banditry may create a problem when one tries to delineate the difference between it and armed robbery. This is because in each situation there is the use of force and weapons of offence and defense. The basic aim is that of dispossessing their victims of their possessions, in the course of which injury or even death may occur. Robbery is a proto-type of the kind of crime most feared by the public. It usually involves theft with violence or threat of violence by a person, with whom the victim has had no previous contact, and it is usually unprovoked and unpredictable. Hence, Slatta (2017), remarked that banditry is a crime of taking or attempting to take something of value by force or by putting fear in the victim. The lives and actions of the bandits on the other hand are often shrouded in mystery and legend and usually involve violent acts, by common criminals who may be termed, ignoble robbers for whom theft is simply an expedient means to an end.

Armed banditry is indeed a national security issue in Nigeria. It is a phenomena which has undermined regional security and development of North West. To this extent, it is therefore pertinent to define the term, security which is fundamental for stability of the region. Basically, the term, security is replete with diverse definitions. Accordingly, Igbuzor (2011) stressed that security as emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-economic objectives of a country. Similarly, Asmau and Abdulrasheed, (2020) defined security as condition of being secured and free from fear of physical, psychological abuse, violence, persecution, or death and from want such as food, health and good job. Also, Omede (2012) defined security as a dynamic condition which involves the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interests.

In a different perspective, Nwanegbo and Odigbo, (2013) defined security as stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighborhood and by people around. Also, Olabanji and Ese, (2014) defined security as emotional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group which can offer one protection. This description of the foregoing structured the concept of security into four dimensions. These dimensions can be woven together to give a composite definition of security as the protection against all forms of harm whether physical, economic or psychological.

However, it is contended that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise. It therefore demands safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption (Igbuzor, 2011: 56). Hence, security embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and the resources of individuals, groups, businesses and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrence (Ogunleye, e tal 2013). From these perspectives, the concept of national security becomes pertinent.

Accordingly, Abdulyakeen (2020), defined national security as the defense of a country against internal and external threat to national unity, cohesion, peace, aspirations, goals, etc. In a similar view, Anyadike (2013), described national security as encompassing a broad range of activities which impinge on non-military or economic security of the nation and the values supported by the society. In this regard, national security is the requirement to maintain the survival of a country through the use of economic, diplomacy and political power. It is the cherished value associated with the physical safety of individuals, groups or nation-states together with a

similar safety of other cherished values. It denotes freedom from threats, anxiety and danger. This is ensured through security agencies (Nweke and Nwachukwu, 2014: 45). Therefore, insecurity constitutes serious threats to lives and properties, hinders business activities and discourages domestic and foreign investors, all of which retard a country's socio-economic development. And, the unabated armed banditry is a serious threat to stability and development of North West as it becomes important to examine scholarly views of regional security.

Thus, regional security is the condition of peace, freedom and stability of a region, district or geographical unit in a nation-state or country (Ndubuisi, 2019:125). It implies regional safety and freedom from external aggression or internal rebellion. As regards this discourse, armed banditry has enormously eroded security essence of North West region. Although, there has been efforts to stem the tides of armed banditry in Nigeria which are mainly military responses, however, the importance of non-military approach can be explored. To this extent, non-military approach embellishes in non-kinetic responses obvious in non-military measures deployed to mitigate banditry and ensure stability of states in North West region.

Crisis of Armed Banditry in North West

Armed banditry in North-West is one of the most daunting national challenges of recent time. It is a strident security threat which seem to have overwhelmed the government and security agencies in view of influx of thousands of bandits across the rural communities of Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto states where there are sustained onslaught against unarmed rural dwellers. In this vein, Negedu (2021) reports that on Sunday, 27th September, 2021 forty-two people were killed by bandits in Southern Kaduna. The killing began when bandits attacked Madamai and Abun communities in Kaura local government area of the state where 34 people lost their lives and 7 sustained life-threatening injuries. Again 8 were reportedly killed in Kacecere community of Zangon Kataf local government area. Bandits burnt down several homes during the operation in Madami, Abun and Kacecere communities. Subsequently, Nafu (2021) documents that in November, 2021, bandits rape women, kidnap 6 and loot community for failing to pay 3 million naria levy. On Sunday night, bandits attacked Kwarin Mai Saje community in Tsafe local government area of Zamfara state for refusing to pay 3 million naria levy that they imposed on the community. In the course of the attack, a source said that bandits rapped several women, looted valuables and kidnapped 6 people. The hoodlums were said to have earlier imposed levies on 13 communities in Zamfara state excluding Kwarin Mai Saje community. One of the gangs under the commander of kingpin, Aleru had reportedly dragged Kwarin Mai Saje into its own illegal tax net a few weeks back. The criminal gang were later provoked to attack the community as residents could only raise the sum of 600 hundred thousand instead of 3 million demanded which consequently led to the killings, looting, burning of houses and rape of women.

In Sokoto state, in late days of December, 2021, bandits invaded two local government areas killing 15 persons and leaving many others injured. Sokoto has been a den of bandits with hundred of locals killed by dare-devil carting away cows, kidnapping many people for ransom. Recently, bandits killed over 100 people on a single attack at a market in Sokoto while in some places they imposed taxes on locals and installed village heads (Abdullahi, 2021:6). It is also a sad commentary in Katsina as bandits overrun 10 local government areas killing and abducting rural indigenes. It was this frightening situation that made the Katsina state government to conclude arrangement to assist communities to defend themselves against bandits and criminal gangs (Negedu, 2021: 27). An indication that security measures have woefully failed to ameliorate the intense situation.

It was in view of these institutional failures, Nzeshi and Oyesina (2021) indicated that two state governors in the North-West geopolitical zones, Bello Mattawale of Zamfara state and Bello Masari of Katsina state, have repeatedly and openly asked people of their states to defend themselves against bandits ravaging their communities. Before this, even the Minister of Defense, Major-Gen Bashir Magashi (rtd) have canvassed the same position when he blamed victims of Boko Haram attacks for not putting up any resistance. Hence, Magashi who spoke on the heels of the persistent attacks and abduction of people by bandits said that citizens should not act cowardly by feeling any time the bandits attacked a community. In this sense of national anxiety and disillusionment, the National Assembly through the Senate called for proscription of bandits as "terrorists". Chukwu (2021) recalled that in September 29, 2021, the Senate called on President Muhammadu Buhari to as a matter of urgency declare bandits as terrorists and wage total war against them wherever they are operating in Nigeria. The apex legislative assembly also urged President Buhari to give orders to the military to eliminate the terrorists by bombing their hideouts across the country. The Senate further asked the President to immediately declare all known leadership of the bandits wanted and track them wherever they were for arrest and prosecution.

Expectedly, the federal government on 5th December, 2022 officially declared bandits as terrorists. This was contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria official Gazette, Vol 108 released by the Attorney General of the Federation. The Gazette issued by the federal government further read in part, "Notice is hereby given that by the order of the federal High court, Abuja in suit No. FHC /AbJ/CS/1370/2021 dated November 25th 2021 as per the schedule of this notice, the activities of Yah Bindiga Group, Yan Ta' a dda Group and other similar groups are declared to be terrorism and illegal in any part of Nigeria, especially in the North-West and North-Central regions of Nigeria and are proscribed, pursuant to section 1 and 2 of the terrorism (prevention) Act, 2011. Consequently, the general public is hereby warned that any person or group of persons participating in any manner whatsoever in

any form of activities involving it concerning the prosecution of the collective intentions or otherwise of the groups referred to in paragraph 1 of this Notice will be violating the provisions of acts of Terrorism (prevention) Act, 2011 and liable to prosecution". Furthermore, certain fanatic efforts were made by state governments to expose the vulnerability of these armed criminals. Hence, the Kaduna state government shut down telecom service, ban the use of motorcycles (okada), tricycles (keke) and directed all commercial vehicles to be painted in yellow and black. Also the same measures were also taken in Zamfara state. But, these measures have not yielded desired gains as the bandits raids in communities persist intensely with less resistance from security men and local vigilantes (Umaru, et al, 2021:132). Again, despite effort by both the Federal and State Governments to curtail this ugly situation through the use of cohesive measures, the killings and brutality continue to take new dimension as the bandits continue to come with some new strategies of perpetrating their heinous acts. It was difficult for the security agencies to fight along the forest as the bandits understand the terrain more than the security agencies. Former Zamfara State Commissioner of Police Akila Usman Gwary once told NTA News that, security agencies in Zamfara state especially police and army are finding it difficult to fight the armed bandits along Dansadau-Birnin-Gwari forest because, there is no access road in trying to reach out to these villages whenever there is report of attack and communication by even the security agencies operating along the forest was virtually impossible (NTA Correspondent, 2018 cited in Yahaya, and Bello, 2020:110).

Invariably, Yahaya and Bello's narrative revealed that perhaps several factors may have endemically continue to exacerbate armed banditry in the North-West region of Nigeria. Similarly, Gaye (2018) remarked that several factors have been adduced as the driving forces of banditry in Nigeria and most especially in the northwest region of the country. Drivers of banditry in northwestern Nigeria consist in some socio-existential conditions that characterize the interior as well as the frontiers of the region. Prominent among these conditions are the scarcely governed spaces- the hinterlands, forestlands and borderlines of the region. The northwestern hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed rural settlements, separated by rangelands and farmlands that are susceptible to violent contestations. They are also interspersed by diverse forested landscapes, some of which are dotted by wetlands, rocks and caves. Apart from being separated from each other, they are equally far separated from the centers of governance at the local and state levels. The forestlands of the region are vast, rugged and hazardous. Most importantly, they are grossly under-policed to the point that makes them conducive for all forms of jungle criminality. In view of this, violent crimes, such as banditry, have festered and thrived in such forested areas. Most attacks occur in remote villages, close to forested regions in the north-west where there is little security presence (Gaye, 2018). In a similar sense, Olaniyan and Yahaya, (2016) also stressed that banditry occurs in large swathes of forest reserves that are generally out of the reach of the Nigerian security operatives. Most of the bandit activities take place in state-owned reserves such as the Kamuku, Kiyambana, and Fagore forests in Northern Nigeria. These forests offer perfect locations as hide outs for the criminals to evade arrest from security forces. The reluctance of the Nigerian security operatives to enter these forest areas seems to be largely due to inefficiency, connivance of the local people, lack of sophisticated equipment and poor motivation of the Nigerian security forces.

Beyond the topography of North-West region, Yahaya and Bello (2021) also indicated that many linked armed banditry in states of the North to long term human conflict between Fulani herders and farmers due to struggle for ownership of farmland and grazing reserves. On the other hand, some researchers view it as a direct effect of reaction against socio-political and economic marginalization of Fulani by their Hausa counterparts. It is presumed that majority of those involved in this heinous act are Fulani who stay in the forested areas and who rear cattle. However, it is pertinent to know that in some cases other people who have the knowledge on cattle rearing are directly involved. For instance, it is worth mentioning that armed banditry which is always linked with cattle rustling and kidnapping in Zamfara state is perpetrated by mostly Nigerians, and quite a number of their foreign collaborators mobilized from Niger Republic, Chad, Mali, Libya and Burkina Faso. The bandits have receivers or buyers of the rustled animals who encourage them to a large extent, to commit this heinous crime. In most cases, the bandits find their way through the thick forests bordering the state to the neighbouring country where the rustled cattle are slaughtered and sold as beef. The large teeming Fulani youths populations in the state are unemployed, so armed banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling seem to be lucrative despite the risks involved. The problem of unemployment is further worsened when cattle rearers lose their herds to bandits. This situation makes many of them to become bandits/cattle rustlers and kidnappers in order to make up for their loss.

More illustratively, Adegoke, (2019) noted that another factor that promotes banditry in Nigeria is the high level of unemployment rate. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2019 puts Nigeria's unemployment rate at 23.1%, of which youth unemployment is 55.4%. Equally, the poverty index in the Northwest is 77.7%. These figures have continued to drastically increase yearly as Nigerian institutions keep graduating batches of youths with the prior impression of getting better jobs and opportunities after graduation (NBS, 2012; Rosenje and Moliki, 2016). Furthermore, Kilishi, et al (2014 as cited in Abdulkabir, 2017) canvassed that the rising wave of crime in Nigeria has been blamed on the increasing level of unemployment. Thus, the idle youths tend to engage in illegal activities in order to meet up with contemporary trends. Suffice to say that the youths easily get enticed to riches as a result of the prevailing "get rich quick syndrome" that pervade the country. Hence, they tend to do whatever it takes to get rich quick. Therefore, the Nigeria's high rate of unemployment, especially the increasing rate of youth's unemployment is what majorly prompts the jobless youths in the country to resort to violent crime like banditry (Adagba, et al, 2012:89; Epron, 2019:22).

Moreover, poverty as well as failed governance contributed erroneously to the rising wave of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria. Adeolu (2018) noted that the failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address the challenges of poverty bedeviling the nation has made life burdensome and only the fittest survive. Similarly, Adebayo (2018) noted that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country's population, estimated to be living on less than \$1.90 a day. Alao, et al (2015) linked banditry, terrorism and other criminal acts to poverty. Although not all forms of criminal acts could be linked to poverty, it has been contended that economic deprivation influences people to resort to illegal means of meeting their daily needs. It was discovered that because of the attractive benefits accruing from banditry activity, most people, especially the youths tend to join the bandit gangs in the Northwest of Nigeria (Epron, 2014; 12; Adegoke, 2019: 32).

Significantly, Achumba, et al (2013), noted that there is no gain saying the fact that weak security system complements the alarming rate of banditry in the northwest region of Nigeria. This could have possibly been caused by the inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training. This is in addition to poor attitudinal and behavioural disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring. Even when these exist, some personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and are easily prejudiced by their personal interest to serve their people, rather than the nation. Again, Offem and Ichoku (2015), also remarked that instead of being national watch dogs and defending national interest and values, and protecting people from being harmed by criminals, they soon become saboteurs of government efforts, by supporting and fuelling insecurity through either leaking vital security information or conniving with criminals to acquire weapons or to escape the long arm of the law.

Another driving factor of banditry in northwestern Nigeria is the issue of arms proliferation. There has been an incremental influx of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) into Nigeria from the Sahel since the fall of Ghadaffi's regime in Libya (Gaye, 2018:23). These arms and weapons end up in the hands of non-state actors like terrorists, militants and bandits, who use them to terrorize individuals and communities. In September 2018, military troops in joint operations with personnel of the Department of State Service (DSS) arrested two suspected illicit arms dealers along Funtua-Gusau road with 1,479 rounds of 7.62mm (special) ammunition, on their way to deliver (Olapeju and Adeniyi, 2020:5).

These conditions notwithstanding showed that armed banditry thrive in events of societal and institutional failures which with enormous adverse effects on the regional security and development of the North West. To this extent, it is therefore pertinent to review the effects of armed banditry in North-West. Basically, effects of armed banditry in North-West are streamlined in security and development of the region. In this regard, Ahmadu, (2019), assert that the loss of many human lives and the displacement of the different classes of populations have resulted from banditry. In these modern types of abuse, women and children continue to bear the brunt. The illegal activities carried out by bandits in the North West have increased the insecurity of the region's women and children. Some women were faced with early widowhood or the death of their children in the affected communities, while some children were orphaned and forced to leave their villages for safety. This remains a crucial issue for human security, as numerous types of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) still occur. In Katsina and the Niger State, several cases of rape by bandits have been recorded. Similarly, UN report (2019) revealed that community members and leaders have highlighted a high incidence rape and forced marriage that explicitly targeted at women and young girls due to the presence and activities of bandits in rural areas, in a field evaluation conducted in Zamfara State using 'Focus Group Discussion' (FGD). Further studies have shown that kidnapping is the greatest risk faced by children in the affected states, as most children are kidnapped for ransom, while female children are kidnapped for sex and others for child labor (MSNA, 2019). This often happened on the way to the market or during village attacks while gathering firewood. Females were also perpetrators, despite being victims of abuse. They disguise themselves as food vendors to provide information to bandits and are also suppliers/carriers of guns, narcotics and other fundamental bandit needs. In May 2019, four women working as informants and cooking for bandits in the state were arrested by the Katsina State Police Command. In addition, Abdulkadir (2020), indicated that "wars" and conflicts frequently leave women in circumstances where they can barely make ends meet. If they occur when attempting to make it across the border or in a refugee camp, they have little or no tools at all to fight these acts of aggression.

Furthermore, Abdulyakeen (2020) revealed that effects of this crises is not restricted to loss of lives and animals alone as several number of houses were destroyed in more than one hundred communities or to some extent burnt completely using local fire gadgets. As recalled by Mande (2017), in my own village of Badarawa when the attackers came they met us observing early morning prayers and instead of moving straight to taking away the available cattle if that was the intention they went straight to the mosque and open fire to any person sighted. They killed thirty two people instantly in the mosque and later burnt twenty nine houses and dozens of local food stores. In another account, Tukur (2017) noted that, the act of banditry and a cattle rustling in Zamfara has rendered more than three hundred households homeless causing unnecessary force migration among the victims. In Dansadau axis since 2011 when this tragedy befall the people of the area, the bandits burnt more than two hundred houses after attacking the communities with several numbers of heartless murder and cases of rape. Just like the killing it was difficult for any researcher to account for the number of structures destroyed as a result of armed banditry and cattle rustling in Zamfara. In this vein, Lawal (2017) argued, while analyzing the consequences of the acts of armed banditry and cattle rustling in Zamfara, it is imperative to say

that, apart from the brutal murder of the people and multiple number of rape cases recorded, loss of houses and properties constitutes the greater parts of the economic crises the people of Zamfara would ever forget. As at December 2015 there are over three thousand refugees from these communities and majority of them migrated to safer places due to the destruction of their living structures. The conflict has since 2011 created a big enmity between Fulani herders, farmers and other parts of the communities in Zamfara. This enmity has been one of the push factor that influence the exits of the Fulani in greater number to an alternative places. The movement is characterized by many problems ranging from reprisal attacks before living or re-arranging for counter attacks targeting members of vigilante groups in specific. Subsequently, Labbo (2014) argued, that the primary motive of attacking Yargaladima community by the suspected bandits was to destroy the ongoing plan by the members of vigilante in the community to attacking them. But instead the consequences ended in destroying the whole community and killed over two hundred people including women and children. Not only in Yargaladima the attack at Dumburum in Zurmi, Badarawa in Shinkafi, Kizara in Tsafe and Dangulbi in Maru local government areas are all linked to an insinuation of reprisal attack well arranged by members of the Fulani herders. Subsequently, Yahaya and Bello (2021) maintained that these acts of cattle rustling and armed banditry has caused a lot of hardship and state of fear among the residents of the states. The miscreants who take advantage of the terrain of some of these areas rustled hundreds of thousands of cattle and other valuables as well as killed scores of people. As argued by Bello (2017), communities like Kwokeye, Bingi, Kizara, Mashema, Maji, Fanda, Haki, Matankari, YarKatsina and many communities in Maru, Anka, Gusau, Chafe, BirninMagaji and Zurmi Local Governments in Zamfara state were grossly affected. Apart from cattle rustling sometimes women faced constant intimidation and harassment including cases of rape and assault while children are forced to embark on unprepared migration due to the fear of the unknown. Shehu (2017), also indicated that these bandits sexually harassed our women. Some time they would ask a resident to take his daughter or wife to their camp to rape and no one dares to stop them. From 2011 to date no accurate statistics could be provided as to the number of people killed through this act of armed banditry. As Tukur (2017), notes that people are killed in communities that are not even known to the security agencies and because of the nature of our community settlements, not all cases are reported especially those that involved Fulani herders. Bello (2017) makes an attempt to highlight some flash points that are termed as victims of this banditry.

Furthermore, armed banditry has adversely affected sources of livelihoods, Abdulyakeen (2020) documents that climate of instability has been created by violence and warfare in north-western Nigeria. Violence by bandits has plagued communities living in the northwest of Nigeria's Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina states. Approximately 21 million people living in these states have been subjected to bandit insecurity. The banditry violence started as a farmer/herder conflict in 2011 and escalated between 2017 and 2018 to include cattle rustling, abduction for ransom, sexual violence and killings, unrelated to the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. Around 35 out of 92 local government areas in the 4 states have been affected by the conflict. Further intensifying the presence and actions of armed groups in the northwest has been the discovery of gold mines and the activities of illicit miners vying for the control of gold deposits. By March 2020, there were over 210,000 people internally displaced. By the beginning of March 2020, over 35,000 refugees had crossed the communal borders to Maradi in the Niger Republic. These refugees are located in Madaou, Dan DajiMakaou, Garin Kaka and GuidanRoundji, in the Tahoua region (Abdulkadir, 2020:2). Violence has had knock-on security consequences elsewhere in the country. In the three most affected states (Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina), herders fleeing conflict are moving south, straining resources in the Middle Belt and southern regions of the nation. While the influx of Fulani cattle herders has been going on in the more southern regions for decades, the uptick seems to intensify tensions in the south-east, south-west and Niger Delta. Increasing herder- farmer frictions are reported in these regions, often degenerating into lethal violence. In the North West, several criminal groups fleeing police operations have also relocated to the central and southern states, creating additional security problems for the affected communities and the governing authorities (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019:34).

Beside fatalities and deaths, armed banditry also posed serious threat to living and health conditions of the north westerners, for instance, water contamination and health risks. For instance, Zamfara state announced an outbreak of 'lead poisoning' disease in 2010 and 2013 due to illegal mining operations, resulting in a death toll of 734 children less than 5 years of age. In view of the fact that agriculture is the backbone of local economies, agricultural disruption due to bandit attacks affects agricultural productivity, with significant repercussions for food security. Most farming communities have been forced to abandon their farms, especially in areas close to forest areas, as bandits have taken advantage of these locations to attack communities. Few farmers who remained behind were subject to bandit taxation before gaining access to their farms. Approximately 30% of the agricultural land in Kaduna State was abandoned by the affected communities, while agricultural activities in Zamfara and Katsina States were limited to a few areas, resulting in a 60% decrease in food output (Rufai, 2018). In Kebbi State, as a result of bandit attacks, over 350 rice farmers were affected by farmland abandonment. The diminishing income of local farmers and other vulnerable groups, especially women, also affects their ability to support education for children and household income. Violence in the North West continues to spread, with security forces already over- burdened. The long-running counter-insurgency operations by the military against jihadists in the North East have dragged on, partially because of insufficient manpower and equipment (Ahmadu, 2019 and Rufai, 2018).

Succinctly, the report of International Crisis Group (2020) revealed the humanitarian and social effects of armed banditry in North East. 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. As earlier indicated, however, 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, 77 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. The government of the Nigerian state of Niger (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. More recently, in March, the National Emergency Management Agency reported 105,463 people displaced in Sokoto state. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) living conditions are appalling, characterized by irregular and inadequate food distribution, crude shelters, and poor health and sanitation services. As there is no officially recognized 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 organizations – 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. With many humanitarian organizations already overstretched by the demands in Nigeria's North East, the overall humanitarian response in the North West remains patchy and grossly inadequate.

Sadly, Yahaya and Bello (2021) embellished the education effects of armed banditry in the North West. The acts of banditry and cattle rustling has also limited the chances of many children from accessing basic primary and secondary education as majority of educational structures are either damaged, destroyed or abandoned by people due to constant harassment and fear from both side of the parties. Maru (2014) argued, in Yargaladima alone, more than four hundred children were forced out of their school due to either loss of bread winner or in ability to raise the monthly five hundred naira for the payment of the community hired teachers. From the site of the Fulani and their chances of accessing western education through Nomadic Education programmes, the story is worse than any one may anticipate. Accordingly, Kiruwa (2017) analysis has shown that, over sixty- two nomadic schools and their structures have been badly damaged to such an extent accessing education by the children of Fulani nomads using the facilities are virtually not possible. Cases of rape and unending harassment of women is also another negative dimension of the conflict. Badaru (2017) argued that almost two-third of the communities attacked along the Dansadau forest by the armed bandits since 2014 recorded cases of rape. They chased away everybody and rape women at their own will while some even ask them to follow them to their camps. This has caused a lot of friction among communities as women opted for migration than staying united with their family due to the fear of the bandits.

Beyond humanitarian impact of armed banditry as seen in death, health, livelihood, health and education, scholarly analysis and report findings also showed its devastating effects on economy of the North West. In this regard, it was reported that violence has profoundly disturbed the economy in many parts of north-western Nigeria. Agriculture, which is the livelihoods for about 80% of the population, has been especially hard hit. Farmers in the affected areas have been leaving their fields for many years for fear of attack or kidnapping. In Zamfara state, as a result of attacks by herder-allied armed groups and criminal gangs, over 13,000 hectares of farmland have been either destroyed or made inaccessible (SSG, 2019). The State Emergency Management Agency estimates in Sokoto state that as of October 2019, some 21,316 hectares of farmland remained uncultivated across five local government areas, as 80,000 intimidated farmers stayed away (Daily Trust, 2019). Similarly, huge numbers of livestock were lost: from 2011 to 2019, for example, about 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were rustled in Zamfara state. In some communities, these disturbances have impoverished farmers and herders alike, produced food shortages, and exacerbated malnutrition, particularly among children. In April 2020, Governor Abubakar Bello of the State of Niger warned: "We are heading towards famine and starvation" (Leadership, 2020). In a broad perspective, the report of International Crisis Group (2020) documents that 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 for livelihoods, has been particularly hard hit. For several years, farmers in the affected areas have been abandoning their fields for fear of attack or kidnapping 91 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. 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. Huge numbers of live- stock have similarly been lost: from 2011 to 2019, about 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were rustled in Zamfara state, for example. 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". Commerce has been similarly disrupted. Thousands of shops and other businesses in north-western Nigeria are in ruins or have shut down due to direct attacks and kidnappings of businessmen, which have created 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. In May 2019, the National Trade Fair hosted by the state of Niger'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. 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.

As grave and frightening the situation may look, it therefore elicits a fundamental question, what have been the efforts of the government to mitigate this armed inferno?

In this vein, Abdulyakeen (2020) documents that Nigeria's federal and state governments initially responded to the violence primarily through military and police operations, and by prescribing harsher punishments for armed attacks, but results were disappointing. President Muhammadu Buhari repeatedly charged troops with eliminating armed elements destabilizing the North West, deploying soldiers and police along with air assets to the region over the course of several consecutive operations. But the state security presence on the ground remains too small and poorly resourced to subdue the armed groups or protect communities across the vast territory. At the same time, military operations against armed groups in the region have dispersed some of them to other regions, deepening insecurity in the country.

Subsequently, the federal government's attempts to contain armed groups in the North West have largely depended on the security forces. Since 2016, the federal police have launched several "anti-banditry" operations, focusing on herder-allied armed groups and roving criminal gangs. The Nigerian security forces also responded to this issue by increasing the deployment of the military and police to the troubled zones. These deployment were under several code names such as "Operation Puff Adder," "DiranMikiya," "SharanDaji," "HadarinDaji," "Thunder Strike", and "Exercise Harbin Kunama 111." But these operations have produced mixed results. While the security forces have successfully pushed back bandit attacks, destroyed several hideouts, and killed or arrested hundreds of bandits, attacks have continued. Starting in 2016, the army has also expanded troop presence in the region, converting the Falgore forest in Kano state into a permanent training ground, establishing three new forward operating bases in that forest and in the Kafanchan and Kachia local government areas of Kaduna state, and launching five operations under "anti-banditry" mandates. The air force, which has become increasingly involved since 2017, has also deployed new units (including special forces personnel) and, since 2018, conducted numerous aerial operations targeting forest encampments of herder-allied armed groups and criminal groups (Marafa, 2019:7, Maru, 2019: 23). However, Yusuf (2015), remarked that critical assessment of the Nigerian government's response to the security threat has been rather slow and generally reactive.

It is also instructive to note that certain non-kinetic efforts were made by state governments to expose the vulnerability of these armed criminals. Hence, the Kaduna state government shutdown telecom service, ban the use of motorcycles (okada), tricycles (keke) and directed all commercial vehicles to be painted in yellow and black. Also the same measures were also taken in Zamfara state. But, these measures have not yielded desired gains as the bandits raids in communities persist intensely with less resistance from security men and local vigilantes (Umaru, et al, 2021:132). Again, despite effort by both the Federal and State Governments to curtail this ugly situation through the use of cohesive measures, the killings and brutality continue to take new dimension as the bandits continue to come with some new strategies of perpetrating their heinous acts. It was difficult for the security agencies to fight along the forest as the bandits understand the terrain more than the security agencies. Former Zamfara State Commissioner of Police, Akila Usman Gwary once told NTA News that, security agencies in Zamfara state especially police and army are finding it difficult to fight the armed bandits along Dansadau-Birnin-Gwari forest because, there is no access road in trying to reach out to these villages whenever there is report of attack and communication by even the security agencies operating along the forest was virtually impossible (NTA Correspondent, 2018 cited in Yahaya, and Bello, 2020:110).

This development heighten the frustration of the government and security personnel amid obvious strategic efforts as these criminal gangs proliferate in thousands and command structures occasioned with resurgence of offensives against communities in Zamfara, Kaduna and Sokoto states in the months of January to May, 2022. It was the intensity of these unpleasant situations that made President Buhari to exclaimed that "banditry in North-West has overwhelmed me!". This comment was made on the occasion of his official visit to Kaduna state in January, 2022. Even during the official visit, bandits were busy killing, rapping and sacking communities in the state with little or no resistance from the security agencies. Most recently was the burning of commuter buses along Kaduna-Abuja express road in late weeks of May, 2022 and killing of 40 worshippers at St. Francis Catholic Church Owo in Ondo state on 5th June 2022 indeed diminishes the kinetic efforts of Nigeria military and other security agencies. This unpleasant development therefore resonate the need to re-examine efforts and failures of non-kinetic process towards mitigating the underlying cause of armed banditry in North West.

Appraisal of Non-Kinetic Responses to Armed Banditry in North West

In search for plausible solution to tackle the menace of armed banditry across communities in Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto states, renowned Islamic Sheikh Ahmad Gumi has said that the resort to military force by the federal government against bandits and herdsmen in Zamfara state and by extension, other troubled spots in the North will be counter-productive and as such cannot yield the most positive results. Gumi further said that military action against the bandits would only worsen the security situation and urged federal government to dialogue with them in order to address the security challenges. He pointed out that most of these bandits were peaceful herders who only turned into bandits when their cattle were rustled in 2015. Gumi therefore advocated that this armed conflict can only be resolved by active engagement with the agitators (Ugah, 2021:2).

Tangaza, (2014) also noted that the Kaduna initiative, termed the “El-Rufai Model,” represents a proactive and pre-emptive approach by the use of information and communication technology (ICT). However, it remains a proposal, and nobody knows when it will be implemented. In addition, in order to alternatively manage the crisis situation, the idea of peace deal and amnesty was initiated between Zamfara state government and the leadership of these bandits in 2016. The state government, having reviewed the impacts of the cohesive measures especially the use of Military and Mobile Police, came to the conclusion that, the operation has not yielded the much desired result in spite of huge amount of funds expended. Hence, the state government opted for negotiations with the armed bandits with a view to surrendering their weapons to the state government as the best option for ensuring sustainable peace.

Subsequently, the government agreed to their demands and emphasized that, for the amnesty deal to be perfected; the bandits must surrender their arms and should promise not to invade any community while the peace deal lasted. The government also proposed some strategic measures of integrating the bandits back to their communities by providing soft grant for them to commence business as well as bringing some of them closer to the government (Anka, 2017: 87; Mustapha, 2019:5). Nevertheless, Elazeh (2016), stressed that various state actions have reduced the incidence of bandit attacks and cattle rustling for some times. On several occasions, thousands of cattle have been recovered and returned to owners. For example, as of 7 March, 2016 the joint patrol team put in place by the Katsina government had recovered 12,000 cattle within a few days of operation. In addition, a number of bandits have been arrested and prosecuted. The security forces have also been able to invade some of the rustlers’ hideouts, with the aid of the military forces (Godwin 2016: 17; Olaniyan and Yahaya, 2016: 23).

However, Yahaya and Bello (2020) observed that the peace deal has however been described as failure especially with the resurgence of the fresh killings in some communities along Shinkafi, Tsafe, Dansadau and Maradun with multiple number of death and loss of properties. The new violence is described as the most tragic in the history of the state with brutal murders and sexual intimidation among women and children. In trying to give an account of their tragedy, the victims considered the nature of the operation by the armed bandits as the most inhuman maltreatment against humanity. As captured by Shehu (2017), bandits are sexually harassing our women. Sometimes they would ask a resident to take his daughter or wife to their camp to rape. No one dares to stop this. This ugly development emerged at a time when people believed that, the peace deal entered in to between the state government and the bandits would serve as panacea to the crises. But why has the peace deal failed? This is attributed to many factors among which include, absence of the political will from the side of the government to implement the agreement it has entered with the bandits, non-implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction measures to bring succor to the victims of this conflicts as well as the re-arrest of some members of the bandits by Department of the State Security Services (SSS) after they have signed the peace deal with the state. As argued by Shehu (2017), the peace pact was jeopardized after a close associate of BuharinDaji called Dogon Bangaje was intercepted arrested and detained by the DSS.

Furthermore, integrative response approaches that require a combination of conflict management mechanisms such as consultation of actors and communities affected, dialogue, community policing, amnesty, reconciliation and security reforms by the respective state Governments is key to the mitigation of banditry in the North-West. For instance, the peace initiatives through the amnesty program launched in 2016 by the Katsina State Government as well as the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) effort by Zamfara State Government are laudable efforts. However, these lacked strong security and alternative conflict management strategies which would have ensured the stability of security beyond the amnesty and the DDR process. The initial positive results from the peace initiative succeeded in convincing several herdsmen and bandits to surrender arms to the State Government in return for amnesty while large weapons withdrawal and destruction program occurred in Zamfara State in 2018 with 6,000 manufactured guns destroyed. However, the momentum was not sustained as armed banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping, culpable homicide and other related crimes resumed in the same year, 2018 with a higher level of intensity (Report of WARN, 2019:12 cited in Madubuegwu, 2021). Also, the telecommunication security measure adopted by Zamfara and Kaduna state governments has come under strident criticisms. For instance, Yusuf Haruna, retired chief superintendent of police, CSP and security expert in recent

interview, lamented “Now, in Zamfara State, they now adopted the system of cutting off all the means of communication. Again, I wonder, because in all the books I have read, I have not seen where keeping people in incommunicado has proffered solution to a high crime like terrorism in any part of the world. Yes, you might think that you want to cut off the bandits from communicating with the source of getting food, the source of water, and other things, but at the same time, once you cut off these terrorists, you would have dispossessed yourself of the natural intelligence that you would have gotten from people. May be, people who were present when they were planning, or who saw the criminals passing by, or a farmer who has a telephone who could also call the police or relations about what he had seen; how do they pass message? So, you have also cut off even the security agencies from getting timely information, or what we call actionable information. Security agencies themselves are being cut off from communicating with each other...how will the security agencies share information? They have to go and converge in one place? I mean the world has grown beyond that. You have to pull somebody from location where he’s a protection officer to come and receive briefing only for you to go back and discover that the entire people he’s supposed to protect have been wiped out. So, my fear now is that the real vulnerable citizens who are at the suburbs, and the communities, majority of them might be killed before these telephone lines are reopened because the bandits have their targets and plans”(Adekunbi,2021:26 cited in Madubuegwu, 2021).

The case study narratives obviously showed limitations that trailed non-kinetic strategy amid success achieved in fanatic effort to promote peace and security of the region. Hence, there is still optimism in the viability of non-kinetic approach despite obvious failures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Armed banditry is obviously a strident national security threat which has not only overwhelmed governments of North-West region but wide spreading in torrential scale and intensity to other regions of Nigeria federation. In conclusive sense, the introduction established the thrust of the discourse as conceptual explication extensively dissect key concepts in attempt to establish empirical affinities which is significantly illustrated in scholarly and observational narratives of crisis of armed banditry in North West. Thus, appraisal of non-kinetic responses illuminates gains and limitations of non-use of force measures in combating bandits in states of North West region.

This discourse further reechoes the fact that dialogue, community policing, amnesty, reconciliation and security reforms are expedient measures beyond the use of force in strategic response to crisis and challenges of armed banditry in North West region. This discourse therefore recommends a regional amnesty program (a proto-type of Niger Delta amnesty program) with broad plausible objectives, specific targets and institutional framework. The North West political leaders particularly, Executive Governors of Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi states should provide leadership for this regional blue-print in collaboration with the federal government and relevant security agencies. It is advocated that the political elite should display reasonable level of enthusiasm, political will and sincerity for it to work.

Secondly, the disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation of the repentant bandits should be effectively engineered by constructive engagement with the leadership structures of these bandit groups. The executive state governors of these states should also provide viable leadership to drive these processes. The rehabilitation program should be effectively executed and sustained through adequate funding and logistics for re-integration of these surrendered bandits back to the society with intense advocacy and engagement with community stakeholders for acceptance.

Subsequently, the governments of these crisis-infested states should embark on massive youth empowerment program to engage youths in meaningful enterprises for self-reliance. Hence, efforts should be deployed to establish and decentralize empowerment initiatives at the level of local government areas. This measure should also be complemented by adequacy of basic public utility service such as water, energy, affordable medic care etc.

These efforts are anticipated to ameliorate hardship of people because poverty subjects youths to criminalities and banditry.

Regional Social Rehabilitation program for IDPs should also be launched to holistically respond to the plights and expectations of north-westerners living in camps within and outside Nigeria borders. The governments of states of North West in collaboration with federal government and United Nations Humanitarian Agencies should focus attention on peculiar needs of women, children and other vulnerable persons in these camps. These efforts is anticipated to improve social welfare condition of IDPs and militate against desperation to engage in criminalities for purpose of surviving the odds.

Also, there is need for security reforms. The non-kinetic response exigently requires right orientation and professional conduct of security personnel for the actualization of its targets. This has become imperative in view of failures of security measures of intelligence gathering and community policing. Again, motivational incentives (prompt payment of salaries and allowances) of these security personnel will also bolster morale and optimal performance.

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