

Influence of Banditry on Food Security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria

¹Okwo Chinyere R., ¹OjomuAdeniyi Andrew, ²IbekweNnamdi Franklyn, ³Okoruwa Jane Idiaghe, ⁴Adiagwai, Fidelia&⁵Oke Ajayi Gabriel

¹Department of Agricultural Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

²Department of Agricultural Education, Enugu State College of Education, Enugu.³Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Benin City.

⁴Department of Science, The West African Examination Council, Ijaiye Road, Ogba, Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria

⁵Fine and Applied Arts Department, Umar Sulieman College of Education Gashua, Yobe State.

¹andyjide1@gmail.com

Abstract

The study was on influence of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. Banditry is a serious problem being faced by farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State. Bandits and their satanic activities over the years have paralyzed farming activities in the area and majority of the people in this area are farmers by practice. The menace by banditry has made most farmers to abandon their farmlands. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 farmers. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and interview scheduled. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation with the aid of SPSS. The results showed that all the respondents agreed that the attacks of banditry against farmers identified by this study are true which include chasing of farmers out of their farms by bandits, kidnapping of farmers for ransom, killing of farmers and stealing of farmers' crops and other belongings among others. The study also revealed the effects these attacks are having on food security as well as efforts made by government in tackling the banditry problems. It was recommended among others that government should intensify efforts in protecting farmers while in farm by sending some Agro-rangers and joint military and police into the farm areas, government should ensure that bush burning is prohibited as this will prevent bandits from burning farmers' farms with crops which can be achieved by prosecuting anyone found putting fire in the bush and government should identify families of farmers who have lost their lives due to banditry attacks and give them financial aids.

Keywords: Banditry, Food Security, Influence, Farmers, Farmlands.

Introduction

Banditry is all about violent attacks on people or community with the use of physical weapons to dispossess them of their belongings. Dayo and Amina (2015) see banditry as groups of people who indulge in criminal activities such as cattle-rustling, robbery, rape, murder and kidnapping. Isah (2019) views banditry as violent acts carried out by people without following the rule of law or where there is breakdown of law, while

Collins (2000) described banditry as the act of participating in any violent attack against individuals or an institution with the use of fire arms.

According to Aregbesola (2020), banditry has posed serious threat to security in East and Central Africa as well as the Trans-Saharan trade routes from Niger Republic down to Libya, Chad and some parts of Southern Africa. Abdullahi (2019) corroborated this by reporting that the

presence of bandits and their activities have caused a rise in security challenge and has become a threat to regional integration in West Africa. Abdullahi also reported that some of the bandits came from Niger Republic and Mali, on invitation to carry out attacks in some countries of the sub-region; who move through the porous West African borders with heavy arms to give support and assistance to their counterparts for reprisal attacks.

According to Anka (2017), banditry in Nigeria started due to unresolved conflicts between crop farmers and nomadic herders who move round the high plains of northern Nigeria such as the North-West zone in states like Zamfara. Farouq and Chukwu (2020) corroborated this by reporting that Zamfara State serves as the heart of banditry in Nigeria, where the leaders of these bandits based and move with motor cycles to other neighbouring states for operational attacks on communities and farmers. Farouq and Chukwu (2020) reported how banditry started in Katsina State in the year 2010 by attacking seven local government areas which include Jibia, Safana, Kankara, Batsari, Danmusa, Faskari and Sabua. Awwal (2020) reported that banditry started around 2017 in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State and increased in the year 2020 especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Banditry and its devilish activities have severally been reported in Benin City, Edo State, particularly in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of the state where farming is the major occupation of several people. Okwo, Ojomu, Nwoke and Ekenta (2020) in a study carried out in Edo South which include Ovia North-East Local Government Area reported the activities and attacks of banditry such as Fulani Herders on farmers to include destruction of farmers' crops by cattle, contamination of drinking water by cattle, sexual harassment of women working on the farm by herders, theft of crops and farmers' belongings by herders, assaults on farmers as well as killings of farmers by herders who usually go about with arms.

Since banditry involves robbery, kidnapping and other violent attacks on human beings particularly those in the rural areas whose major source of livelihood is agricultural production, such attacks are bound to have serious negative effects on food production which in turn greatly affects food security.

Food security as defined during World Food Summit in the year 2018 by Food Agricultural Organization (2018) is attained when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life. FAO (2018) simply summarized that food security is the availability of food in terms of production, processing, marketing, distribution and consumption. World Health Organization during the World Food Summit in 1996 corroborated this definition of FAO by defining food security as when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food for both active and healthy lives. WHO further emphasized that food security is based on three pillars which are having sufficient quantity of food consistently, having sufficient resources to purchase food that is appropriate with required nutrients and having knowledge of basic nutrition and cure, as well as adequate water and sanitation.

According to Federal Ministry of Agriculture (2020), the United Nations has observed in September 2020 that several attacks carried out by bandits will worsen food insecurity in Nigeria by the year 2021. The Federal Government in Nigeria has realized the threat being posed by banditry to farmers and their communities especially in the northern parts of the country. In addressing this serious threat, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Interior in April 2017 initiated the formation of a special unit of Agro-Rangers Corps whose major assignment is to protect farmers and other farming investments across the country (The Sun, 2017). Oyeleke (2020) corroborated this report by stating that President

Buhari in his speech on June 12 Democracy Day announced the deployment of 5000 Agro-rangers Corps to provide security and protection to farmers all over the country.

According to Suleiman IgudaLadan and BilkisuUsmanMatawalli (2020), any form of violent attacks on rural areas and dwellers whose major occupation is farming is bound to impact greatly on food security. It is obvious that food security will be affected in Edo South of Edo State, Nigeria inclusive of Ovia North-East if the problem of banditry is not quickly arrested. This paper therefore examined the influence of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate the influence of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, it:

1. Investigated attacks by banditry on farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.
2. Assessed the influence of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.
3. Investigated Government efforts in tackling banditry to improve food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the attacks by banditry on farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?
2. What are the influences of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?
3. What are the efforts made by the government in tackling banditry to improve food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. Ovia North-East Local Government Area is found in Edo State, South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The headquarters of the local government area is Okada and the LGA is made up of several communities where farming is their major occupations such as Odighi, Odiguetue, Uyere, Igbekhue, Osasimwonba, Uvgbojobo, Uniaro, Utekon, Ogua, Iwu among others. The LGA occupies a total area of 2301 square kilometers with an average temperature of 28 degrees centigrade (Manpower.com). The farmers in the LGA are known for the production of palm oil, plantain, banana, cassava, maize among other crops. This area was chosen for this study as a result of several reports and news on radio, television and the social media concerning the area about banditry and its several attacks on farmers in the study area; a situation which prompted the researchers to investigate the levels of attacks on farmers and the effects on food security in the area and in the country at large if the findings are generalized.

A sample size of 100 was used for the study which was obtained using a simple random sampling technique. 100 farmers were selected from 10 communities (10 farmers from each community) which were randomly selected from the study area. Data for the study were collected using an interview scheduled with structured questionnaire administered to 100 farmers in the study area which was titled "Banditry Attacks on Farmers Questionnaire (BAFQ)". The questionnaire had a 4-point response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire was face validated by three experts from the University of Benin, Benin City. Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. The selected farmers have been farming for at least five years and some had even

experienced banditry attacks in the course of their farming activities. The farmers were interviewed by the researchers at homes, group meetings and some in their various farms. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis

using mean and standard deviation to answer the specific objectives. The decision rule for the objectives was based on mean value of greater or equal 2.50 as Agreed and less than 2.50 as Disagreed for each item.

Results

The results of the descriptive analyses were presented in Tables as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the attacks by bandits on farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?

Table 1

Mean Ratings of respondents on the attacks by bandits on farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria (N=100).

S/N	Attacks by Bandits on Farmers	X	SD	Decision
1.	Bandits chased farmers from their farms	3.47	0.611	Agreed
2.	Bandits kidnapped farmers in their farms	3.28	0.668	Agreed
3.	Bandits killed farmers in their farms and on the farm roads	3.52	0.673	Agreed
4.	Bandits burned farmers’ farms with fire	3.23	0.723	Agreed
5.	Bandits such as herdsmen uprooted farmers’ cassava for their cattle to eat	3.25	0.672	Agreed
6.	Bandits such as herdsmen cut down farmers’ plantain for their cattle to eat	3.10	0.798	Agreed
7.	Bandits such as herdsmen cut down farmers’ yam tubers in barns for cattle to eat	3.05	0.757	Agreed
8.	Bandits burnt down farmers’ huts and other belongings	3.17	0.829	Agreed
9.	Bandits carried farmers’ food stuff from them	3.16	0.801	Agreed
10.	Bandits collected phones from farmers and their workers	2.84	0.873	Agreed
11.	Bandits raped women in their farms and on their way to farms	3.18	0.903	Agreed
12.	Bandits burnt farmers’ yam barns	3.04	0.777	Agreed

Key: X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents.

Table 1 above revealed that all the items on attacks by bandits on farmers in the study area had their mean scores ranging from 2.84-3.52, which are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicated that all the 12 items are attacks carried out by bandits against farmers in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.611-0.903 indicating that the respondents were not too far from the mean as they are close to one another in their responses.

Research Question 2

What are the influences of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?

Table 2

Mean ratings of respondents on the influences of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria (N=100).

S/N	Influence of Banditry on Food Security	X	SD	Decision
1.	Farmers are unable to harvest their crops from the farm	3.39	0.764	Agreed
2.	Farmers abandoned their farms for fear of being attacked	3.61	0.709	Agreed
3.	Women are afraid of going to farm for fear of being raped	3.50	0.759	Agreed
4.	Loss of farmers who are bread winners of their families	3.44	0.729	Agreed
5.	Difficulty in getting hired labour to work on the farm for fear of being attacked	3.38	0.632	Agreed
6.	Shortage of food supply due to theft of crops by bandits	3.50	0.732	Agreed
7.	Shortage of food supply due to abandonment of farms by many farmers	3.56	0.672	Agreed
8.	Decrease in the income of farmers and crop sellers	3.40	0.711	Agreed
9.	Closure of markets in farming communities due to Banditry	3.09	0.767	Agreed
10.	Low patronage for those selling farm inputs and tools such as cutlass, hoe, seedlings, fertilizers, etc.	3.06	0.679	Agreed
11.	Increase in the cost of food items that are available	3.51	0.785	Agreed

Key: X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents.

Table 2 above showed that all the items on the influence of banditry on food security in the study area had their mean scores ranging from 3.06-3.61, which are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicated that all the 11 items greatly influenced food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The standard deviation values ranged from 0.632-0.785 indicating that the respondents were not too far from the mean as they are close to one another in their various responses.

Research Question 3

What are the efforts made by the government in tackling banditry to improve food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria?

Table 3

Mean ratings of respondents on the efforts made by the government in tackling banditry to improve food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria (N=100).

S/N	Government Efforts in Tackling Banditry	X	SD	Decision
1.	Federal government sent some Agro-rangers corps to the farm zone to provide security for farmers	2.14	1.045	Disagreed
2.	Government sent joint police and military operations to the forests of the LGA	2.11	1.034	Disagreed
3.	Government sent security officials to the farm zone to hear from farmers about the security challenges in the area	2.27	1.062	Disagreed
4.	Government employed and equipped vigilante groups to fight insecurity in the area	2.69	1.042	Agreed
5.	There were joint police and vigilante operations in the area against banditry	2.57	1.075	Agreed

Key: X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, N = Number of Respondents.

Table 3 above revealed that three out of the five items on government efforts in tackling banditry to improve food security in the study area had their mean scores as 2.14, 2.11 and 2.27 which are below the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicated that the three items have not been carried out by the government in Ovia North-East Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria in tackling banditry in order to improve food security. While the remaining two items had their mean as 2.69 and 2.57, showing that the items have been carried out by the government in tackling banditry to improve food security in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study according to Table 1 showed that all the items identified in the study are attacks carried out by bandits against farmers in the study area. These attacks include chasing of farmers out of their farms by bandits, kidnapping of farmers for ransom, killing of farmers and stealing of farmers’ crops and other belongings among others. This finding is in consonant with the findings of Suleiman and Bilkisu (2020) who reported some activities of banditry against farmers to include killing of farmers, kidnapping and chasing of farmers out of their farmlands by bandits. Erezi (2020) and Aminu (2020) in their separate studies also corroborated this finding where the activities of bandits against farmers were identified to include killing of farmers by shooting sporadically,

which lead to the death of farmers who happened to be the breadwinners of their families.

Table 2 identified 11 effects of banditry on food security. These effects include inability of farmers to go to their farms, abandonment of farms by farmers, loss of farmers who are bread winners of their families, shortage of food supply due to theft of crops by bandits and due to farm abandonment, decrease in farmers’ income and closure of markets in farming communities among others. The study conducted by Suleiman and Bilkisu (2020) supported the findings of this study where their findings showed that there is reduction in the number of farmers due to banditry, abandonment of farmlands by farmers, impoverishment of farmers and reduction in the quantity of crops due to bandits’ activities.

Findings of the study in Table 3 showed that out of the five items on government efforts in tackling banditry in the study area in order to improve food security, the study identified two efforts by the government in tackling banditry which include employment and equipping of vigilante groups and joint police and vigilante groups operations to fight banditry in the study area. The study also discovered that government has not sent Agro-rangers into the farm zone to provide security for the farmers and that government has failed to send joint military and police to the forest to tackle banditry, neither has government bothered to send security officials to the farm areas to hear from farmers about the challenges they are facing with bandits.

Conclusions

In Ovia North-East and in other parts of Nigeria, banditry has greatly and negatively influenced food security one of which includes abandonment of farms by farmers for fear of being attacked and being killed by bandits. The attacks against farmers in the study area as identified by this study pose great danger to food security as many farmers are not allowed access to their farms, a situation that has made many farmers to become idle while farmlands are lying wasted without anyone to cultivate them. The implications of the influence of banditry on food security is that it reduces the number of practicing farmers as a result of their killings by bandits, impoverishment of farmers as they can no longer cultivate crops to sell for income generation as well as theft of their crops by bandits, kidnapping of farmers for ransom which also further impoverish farmers, destruction of farmers' crops by cattle which reduces the quantity and quality of crops being produced. These showed the negative influence of banditry on food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. Government has made concerted efforts in tackling banditry in the study area, but the situation is getting worsen by the day as kidnapping, killing and chasing of farmers from

their farms by bandits has become a regular occurrence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to ensure that activities of banditry are brought to an end in order to improve food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria.

1. Government should intensify efforts in protecting farmers while in farm by sending some Agro-rangers and joint military and police into the farm areas.
2. Government should ensure that bush burning is prohibited as this will prevent bandits from burning farmers' farms with crops. This can be achieved by prosecuting anyone found putting fire in the bush.
3. Government should identify families of farmers who have lost their lives due to banditry attacks and give them financial aids.
4. Government should employ and equip vigilante groups with weapons to enable them tackle the problems of banditry.

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