

INTER-STATE BOUNDARY SECURITY CHALLENGES AND BANDITRY: THE SOKOTO WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

In recent times, Nigeria has been enmeshed in long-standing and deep-rooted security challenges and banditry that relate to mishandling of forests and inter-state boundaries. The rising insecurity lingered higher in the ungoverned forest areas of Northern part of the country, particularly with the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, cattle rustling, kidnapping and banditry in the North-West. In most cases, the stringent measures taken by some states or national governments or agencies in curbing the menace of the banditry and other security challenges have had serious spill-over effect on the communities sharing common boundaries with the ungoverned forest areas of those states. The study therefore examines the security challenges and banditry faced by communities along the ungoverned forest areas. Specifically, a case study of the experiences of communities in Sokoto West Senatorial District along Sokoto – Zamfara boundaries were highlighted. Thus, through the use of in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and some documentary sources, the study established that bandits behavioral and environmental situational factors caused and heightened security challenges and banditry in the area. The environmental factors included forests locations such as Dutsen Kura, Tafkin Aja, Dusten Gwauro, and Tafkin Kaiwa bandits' nests. The study also uncovered some opportunity-reduction measures taken by the affected communities such as massive clearance and cultivation of the forest suburb thereby converting them into farmlands for mitigating the effect of banditry and security challenges. Conclusion and recommendations of the study emphasis the relevance of banditry target hardening, target removal and variety or forms of surveillance techniques measures combined with community policing, military and other security agencies efforts for addressing the long-standing and deep-rooted banditry and security challenges in the inter-state boundaries of Northwest, Nigeria.

Key Words: Banditry, Border, Environment, North-West, Security, Situations

Introduction

Over a decade, North-Western Nigeria has been an operating ground for kidnappings, mass abductions, cattle rustling and banditry as a result of maraud region's ungoverned forests and porosity of inter-state boundaries. The seven North-Western states of Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano Katsina, Kebbe, Sokoto and Zamfara have all experienced one form of myriad bandits' attacks or the other. The rise of banditry and other security challenges in the region could be attributed to number of reasons. Some these reasons include: spread of small arms across the region; the pastoralists' culture and tradition moving with their folks from place to another; and the collapse of the political order as a result of the neglect or rejection of the prevailing norms of the democratic governance. More so, the environmental friendly ungoverned forest areas of the region have contributed to the successful impact of these reasons.

The Northern Nigeria is said to have covered approximately 60 percent of Nigeria's land area. In turn, the ungoverned forest of North-West is estimated to officially account for one third of the total land area of the region. The forest reserves are bestowed with plants, animals, streams, river tributaries that traverse boundaries of rural and communities, towns and local governments of different states, with no clear line of demarcations which separate the communities. These gave bandits advantage of operating in a most sophisticated network of kidnapping, mass abductions and cattle rustling within and beyond the region. The most common features of banditry operations in the region have been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of properties and in addition it has direct relationship with cattle rustling. In most cases, the bandits apply force with aids of small arms and light weapons during operations, this pattern is what makes bandit always nearer to herdsmen and explains the dynamic operating pattern of the banditry criminality. However, in the study area of boundaries shared between Sokoto and Zamfara States, the bandits have been in control of *Gundumi* (Isa), *Tureta*, *Tafki-Jabo* and *Dogon Daji* (Tambuwal) forest reserves in Sokoto State and *Bakura*, *Malamawa* (Bukkuyyum), Gummi forest reserves in Zamfara State. They succeeded in controlling the areas because the forests are unmanned, unpoliced and poorly managed by the government but left only to the mercy of host local communities who are mostly alienated and felt less concerned. The main issues are therefore identification of the causes of banditry and other security challenges in the areas as well as potential locations as hide out and as sources of water, food, markets and information that bandits had taken advantage for their operations. Equally, the study examines efforts taken by both local communities and government/security agencies as proactive and reactive measures in addressing the challenges of banditry in the region. The study highlights introduction, objectives of the study, methodology, conceptual issues and theoretical reviews, genesis, causes and dimensions of Banditry and security Challenges in Sokoto West Senatorial District, community-based actions and measures, and conclusion as well as recommendations.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the role of community-based proactive measures in addressing banditry and other security challenges in the commonly shared border areas between Sokoto and Zamfara States, in the Western Senatorial District Sokoto State. However, the following are specific objectives of the study:

1. To investigate underlying factors and potential forest locations that bandits took advantage in their operations of the region;
2. to identify and examine community-based proactive and reactive security measures in handling banditry activities in the region; and
3. to suggest constructive strategies that will serve as guide for responding to future occurrence of the menace of insecurity in the North-West, Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper used both primary and secondary method of data collection. For the primary sources, interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were adopted as instrument for retrieving information from official state security agencies, Vigilante groups and hunters, community leaders as well as citizens within the affected communities. In the Sampling, three communities of three local government areas (LGA) were selected within Sokoto West Senatorial district – these are Tafki in Tambuwal LGA, Yandu in Shagari LGA and Kuruwa in Tureta LGA. The boundary areas of these selected communities of Sokoto State correspond to that of three local governments from Zamfara State – Gummi, Bukkuyum and Bakura LGAs. However, a total of 21 interviews were conducted, seven each at Tafki, Yandu and Kuruwa. The researcher with aid of research assistants, with consent of the respondents recorded voices with smart phones and took written supplementary notes from the interviewees. Informed oral consent was obtained from the interviewees prior to the interviews. The interviews were conducted in private. Data were audio recorded in Hausa Language during the conduct and interactions with the interviewees and transcribed in English Language. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were conducted with security agencies, Vigilante groups and hunters, community leaders as well as citizens within the selected communities. Three (3) groups of FGD were facilitated, one each in Tafki, Yandu and Kuruwa Community, with 15 participants in each community; in all there were 45 participants in the FGDs. The researcher with aid of research assistants, with informed oral consent of the participants facilitated the discussions, recorded voices with smart phone and took written supplementary notes. Moreover, the use of various textbooks, professional journals, magazines, newspapers, internet materials, office records, and papers presented at seminars and conferences and other available written material are to be used for conceptual and theoretical reviews as well as qualitative judgement.

For data analysis, the information gathered was analyzed with the use Framework Analysis (FWA) technique. The Data collected and recorded in Hausa Language were transcribed and translated into English Language. The FWA was used in organizing and managing of data through the help of summarization process where tables and charts that illustrate components, structures, dimensions, consequences and measures, consisting of rows and columns. this has helped in understanding of forest locations, underlying factors of community vulnerability and viable options of community security measures in handling banditry activities.

Conceptual Issues

A number of literatures have been documented on the concepts of North-West, banditry and cross-border security challenges in Nigeria. According to Yaqub (2011), the concept of North-West is not a recent etymological idea in the history of Nigeria. The concept was first used between 1967 and 1976 in reference to North-Western-State with headquarter at Sokoto. However, the current usage of the concept was recommended by the 1994-1995 Constitutional Conference of Nigeria in which the North-Western Zone is one of the six geo-political zones of the country. It comprises seven states of Northern Nigeria such as Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara. Therefore, North-Western border in this research would be a case study of communities along borderlines of Sokoto and Zamfara States. In this context, the border frontier for consideration are the forest areas controlled, within the scope of Sokoto West Senatorial District, by the bandits in *Kuruwa-Tureta*, *Yandu-Shagari* *Tafki-Jabo* forest fringes of Sokoto-Zamfara border areas.

According to Rufa'i (2021: 3), armed banditry was an organized cross-border crime, which historically in North-western border of Nigeria involved Asebenawa, Tuaregs, Fulani and Gobirawa from both British and French territories as the major culprits. The difficult nature of terrain of the area had made their activities untraceable whereby considerable part of the rustled livestock and stolen goods were usually taken to Niger Republic and Mali (Rufa'i, 2021: 4). In general, Cross-border crimes in West Africa have been in existence since the colonial period and were manifested in the form of individuals or groups of traders and businessmen and women smuggling goods across the borders. In addition to transnational syndicates who engaged in the

trafficking of drugs, arms and human beings, among other things across the boundaries of the region (Addo, 2006 cited in Rufa'i, 2021:).

Onuoha (2013) document on how the porous borders has made the trend of armed banditry to surface and resurface in the post-colonial period, thereby taking a new dimension especially beginning with the outbreak of intra-state conflicts of Liberia in 1989. Therefore, constant civil wars and insecurity across the West African sub-region have provided a pool of mercenaries for recruitment into rural and urban conflict in Nigeria (Aning, 2004). Onuoha (2013) argued that anecdotal evidence discovered about 1,497 illegal routes across different Nigerian borders which criminals use in the smuggling of Small and Light Arms Weapons. Thus, these had made herdsmen of Nigerian origin and their Malian, Chadian and Nigerian counterparts used the same routes to circulate weapons for banditry activities and other criminalities.

The infiltration of these foreign elements has made possible not only spread of weapons but also recruitment and training of bandits and fighters in modern guerrilla strategies and tactics. In addition to cattle rustling, kidnapping and abduction for ransom were adopted as a new strategy for banditry activities. Therefore, the new strategy of the violence included not only cattle rustling and kidnapping but also raiding of villages and other related Gender and Sexual Based Violence across Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna States. With these developments, large numbers of poverty-stricken youth across villages were used as informants supplying intelligence for awesome rewards (Rufa'i, 2021: 16 -17). In fact, most of the affected areas in Sokoto share boundaries with Zamfara. This explains why banditry and other security challenges radiate around state borderlines of the two States.

Scholars have also documented a number of theories and school of thoughts as factors and reasons for the rise of the banditry and other criminality challenges in Nigeria. For instance, Haidara (2014) attributed cause of banditry and security challenges to bad leadership especially in Zamfara State. According to him, politicians in Zamfara State sponsored and armed some youth as political thugs to achieve their ambition in 2011; after the 2011 elections, the youth were abandoned and this made them engaged into drug abuse, cattle stealing, robbery and later transformed into armed gangs attacking villages on motorbikes. Kura (2021: 255) believed that social grievance arising from the perceived deep rooted injustice against the pastoral communities has been one of the factors that gave edge to development of banditry in the area. Other factors include the struggle amongst the miners each with the aim of getting an upper hand in the competition of the mineral resource; activities of non- state security operatives like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (Yan-Banga and Yan-sa-kai) thereby pushing the armed groups out of towns and villages to the highly ungoverned spaces; and arms procurement and inter-gang rivalry among the groups of bandits (Rufa'i (2021: 10).

A report showed that between January 2013 to March 2022 Northwest recorded about 909 incidents of bandit where 5 incidents were recorded in Jigawa, 342 in Kaduna, 208 Katsina, 14 Kebbi, 54 Sokoto and 275 in Zamfara state respectively. However, numerous reasons were identified as causes of armed bandit in northwest of Nigeria and can be categories as follow: firstly, background causes or existing conditions which include poverty, ungoverned space, poor border management. Secondly immediate causes which are climate change, resource control, informal security, injustice, ethno communal factor, religious intolerance, criminalities and drug abuse. Thirdly crisis enabler such as state complicity, foreign powers, traditional rulers, weapon supplies, food supplies, informant and bandit negotiators (John, S.O, Samuel, O and Aina, F. 2023).

The word border or cross-border has different contextual perspectives and usages. Border, boundary and frontier are term used by various scholars as interchangeable to convey an idea of limit or restrict even though the term may be slightly different in connotation (Usman and Abubakar, 2021). Danfulani (2014) pointed out that there are administrative, economic, socio-cultural, national, international, regional, military and sub-regional borders. Asiwaju (2006) described the synergy between the 'border under world' and 'upper world players' as posing a great threat to the realization of victory over transnational organized crimes. Asiwaju (2006) maintained that the border under world constitutes perpetrators of criminal activities. It is worthy to note that Nigerian geo-political international borderlines are artificial and colonial.

They were stretched without any geographical or cultural considerations or homogeneity. Consequently, the arbitrary fragmentation and national exclusiveness, most of the times, creates anachronistic and a dangerous situations thereby denying the borderline communities a full scale functional security.

This research therefore broadens the concept 'border' to include towns and villages along highly ungoverned spaces of inter-state boundaries with the rationale of handling the current security challenges within the standpoint of meeting the utmost peaceful co-existence of these inter-state border communities and the country in general. It is hope that this will help in the transformation of communities and national attitudes as well as institutions to the institutionalization of cross-border groups' community-based efforts in handling banditry and other security challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The paper used Situational Action Theory as framework of analysis. Situations include environmental cues that may provoke or prompt individuals to action (Wortley, 1997: 66). Therefore, situations in which crimes such as banditry occur are thus the focus of study as they provide concrete clues to both the behaviour of the bandits and the environment in which they operate. Specifically, opportunities that allow the bandits to successfully complete the crime would be highlighted for possible measures to be taken. The illuminating approach is situational crime prevention (SCP) which signifies "opportunity reduction." The approach is commonly concerned with analysis of the opportunity structure of crimes (Clarke, 1997). In the approach, researcher begins with the situation or situations in which the crime occurs and it is always found that general settings can be broken down into increasingly small component parts. The ways in which this is accomplished may depend on the facilities or access to information available.

Thus, opportunity explained a variety of crimes including banditry. The general applicability of "opportunity" and the situational environment are built into the origins of SCP. The SCP framework outlined the following components as essential ideas to the opportunity analysis:

1. Offender-based opportunities, such as lifestyle, experience, age, and sex
2. Patterns of daily activity (clearly a precursor to routine activity theory)
3. The abundance of products that are available for theft (e.g., cars or items displayed in retail stores) or that may cause injury (e.g., guns).
4. Environments where there is reduced security, such as dark streets and public places that lack surveillance or supervision, such as buses, housing estates, or retail stores.

The four types of opportunity were connected to opportunity-reducing techniques (Clarke, 1980) classified into three types: target hardening, target removal, and various forms of surveillance. The types of opportunity and opportunity-reducing techniques are all relevant in the examination of security challenges and banditry in the fringes of Sokoto- Zamfara areas of Sokoto west senatorial District.

The Dawn of Banditry and Security Challenges in Sokoto West Senatorial District

In 2021, stringent measures taken by some governments in the North-Western Nigeria neighbouring Sokoto State Such as Zamfara and Katsina has caused spill-over effect of banditry and security challenges in the parts of Sokoto West senatorial District. Some of these measures included suspension of weekly markets, banning of transportation of animals and sale of fuel in jerry cans and other actions that could help in curtailing banditry activities in the region. The spill-over effect includes illicit spread of arms across the common shared borders of Sokoto and Zamfara State, cattle rustling, maiming and mass killings in communities and market of border areas. The Menace, coupled with the vast and porous nature of the ungoverned forest has conveniently and intermittently allowed the bandit to lunch attacks and mayhem to

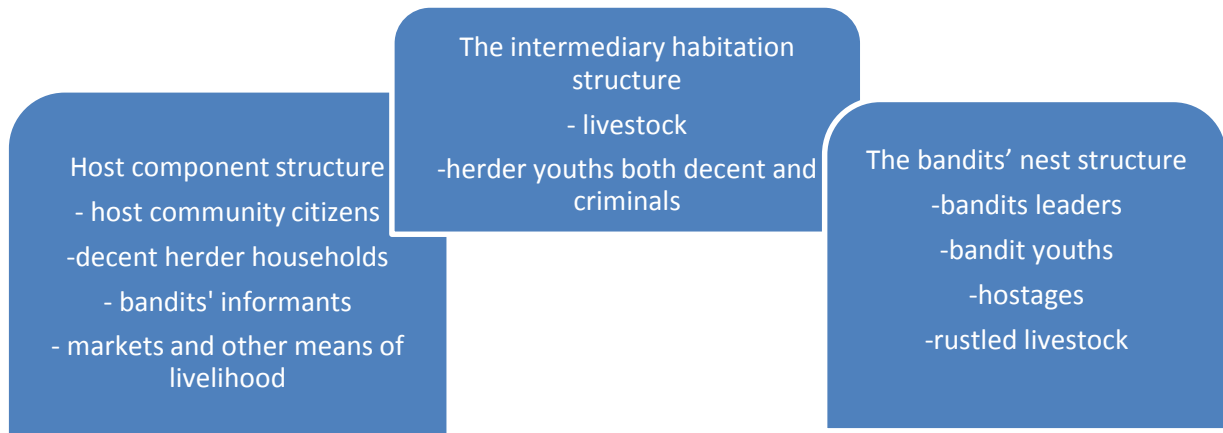
the detriment of the social, economic and political wellbeing of the region. Interviews conducted in 2022 at the sampled areas of Sokoto West Senatorial District confirmed that activities of banditry started simple influx of displaced and visiting herders with their livestock. At initial stage, the visiting herders interacted without any perceived security challenge. However, later, the herders demonstrated attitude of destruction of farm products and snatching of livestock from both farmers and indigenous herders to more advanced level banditry of taking total control of the areas they settled through rustling, kidnapping and setting fire on villages thereby demanding payments of ransom and taxes from sedentary communities of both farmers and herders.

Interview conducted in the sampled areas confirmed that banditry started as a result of influx of visiting herders. When visiting herders first came to an area they bought crop residuals and gave their animals. As visiting herders increased in number they stopped payment of crop residuals and just grazed without compensating the farmers. Thereafter, youths among the visiting herders started some criminal activities within the *ruggas* (settling places of herders with their animals) by forcefully snatching goats or sheep from a herder child and sold it at market for the purpose of buying motorcycle to be used for entertainment in the ceremonies at herder homes. This was the genesis of cattle rustling and banditry in the region. The yearning for possession of motorcycle and subsequent introduction of drug abuse among the youths of herders made rustling a business venture. With possession advanced arms, the youth settled at the forest locations and raid towns and villages as well as rustled away cattle that were kept for farming purpose and other domestic services. So when the cattle of towns and village finished they shifted kidnapping people for ransom.

Strategic Locations and Structure of Bandits' Habitation at Fringes of Sokoto – Zamfara areas of Sokoto West Senatorial District

Narratives of the interviews conducted and perceptions and discussions from the FGD in the sampled areas of Sokoto west Senatorial District confirmed the existence of a three-level structure of Bandits' habitation at the areas used for their operations. The structures included host village or community structure where decently displaced and visiting herders' household reside for livelihood and other day to day activities; the intermediary habitation structure, a location of forest outer edge where livestock are being hosted and tended and herder youths both decent and criminal are found at this location; and the bandits' nest structure, a tick forest location hosting leaders of bandits, armed bandits' youth, kidnap victims and rustled livestock. Figure 1 below presents the three-level habitation structure of bandits in the boundary areas of Sokoto- Zamfara at Sokoto West Senatorial District fringes.

Figure 1: Three-level Habitation Structure of Banditry at the Fringes of Sokoto – Zamfara, Sokoto West Senatorial District



Source: IBR Survey, 2022

It could be argued that situation or situations in which the crime occurs stand to be broken down into small component parts for getting the concrete clues of banditry operations in the area. Figure 1 above presents three-level environmental structure of bandits' operations in the study area, which illustrates the component parts of levels in three boxes. Box one represents a situational environment described as host component structure comprising citizens of the host community or village, visiting or displaced individuals of herder households, bandits' informants, markets and other sources of livelihood. The second box is the intermediary habitation structure which houses livestock, the livestock boys and other herder youths both decent and criminal elements who serve as sources of information, food, fuel and other means of livelihood to the bandits' nest. The third box is the bandits' nest where bandits' leaders and youths resides control kidnap victims and some cases rustled cattle with the aid of advance arms and drugs. Table 1 below gives details of the environment of operation of bandits illustrating cases of host villages and forest areas that stand as bandit nest – *Tafki* (host village) to *Dutsen Kura* bandits (nest) in Tambuwal LGA; *Yandu* as host bandits at *Dajin Yandu* (nest) in Shagari LGA; *Kuruwa* (host) as source of information and other livelihood to bandits at *Tafkin Kaiwa/Dutsen Gwauro*.

Table 1: Some Villages and Forest Locations Affected by Banditry Activities in Sokoto West Senatorial District in 2022

LGA	Forest Location	Affected Villages	Natural Resource Infrastructures
Tambuwal	Dutsen Kura Tafkin Aja	Jabo Tafki Modu, yole, chakai Gesalodi, guma, guraye, balare Yangwal	Mountain ranges Forest reserve Grazing areas Water points
Shagari	Dajin Yandu	Yandu, Yanyandu, Aske Dodo, Lungu, Tungar Barke	Water points Grazing areas Farmlands
Tureta	Dajin Tureta Dutsen Gauro/Tafkin Kaiwa	Tureta, Kuruwar Kawara, Kuruwar Birni, Kuruwar Dantayawa Gidan Kare salau, ruwanjema, gyado, ruwan rana, gasa kula	Mountain ranges International Cattle routes Forest reserve Grazing areas Water points

Source: IBR Survey, 2022

Dimensions and Consequences of Banditry Sokoto West Senatorial District of Sokoto State

Interviews conducted and FGDs’ documented dimension that explained the peak periods of the banditry, which usually coincided with end of rainy season or harvest time. The dimension also described bandits’ actions and activities that affected livelihood of sedentary citizens. The dimensions equally describe the consequences of the banditry and other security challenges in the area. The consequences range from simple trend of displacements of human person and livestock as well as shortage of food, to the extreme trend of stoppage of markets and livelihood of the communities (See Figure 2 below for details about dimensions and consequences of the banditry in the three selected communities).

Figure 2: Summary of Dimensions and Consequences of Banditry in some Selected Communities of Sokoto West Senatorial District of Sokoto State

Villages	Activities	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tafki • Yandu • Kuruwa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grazing on farm' crops • setting of fire on farm products and residential quarters of farmers • rustling of animals • hostages and kidnapping • corporate destructions of Farmers' crops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • displacements of both individuals and animals • shortage of food • spread of diseases • lost of babies and pregnancies by women • payment of ransom • restriction of farming • payment of ransom and taxes for farming rights • displacements • lost of animals • stoppage market and business • decrease in farming activities

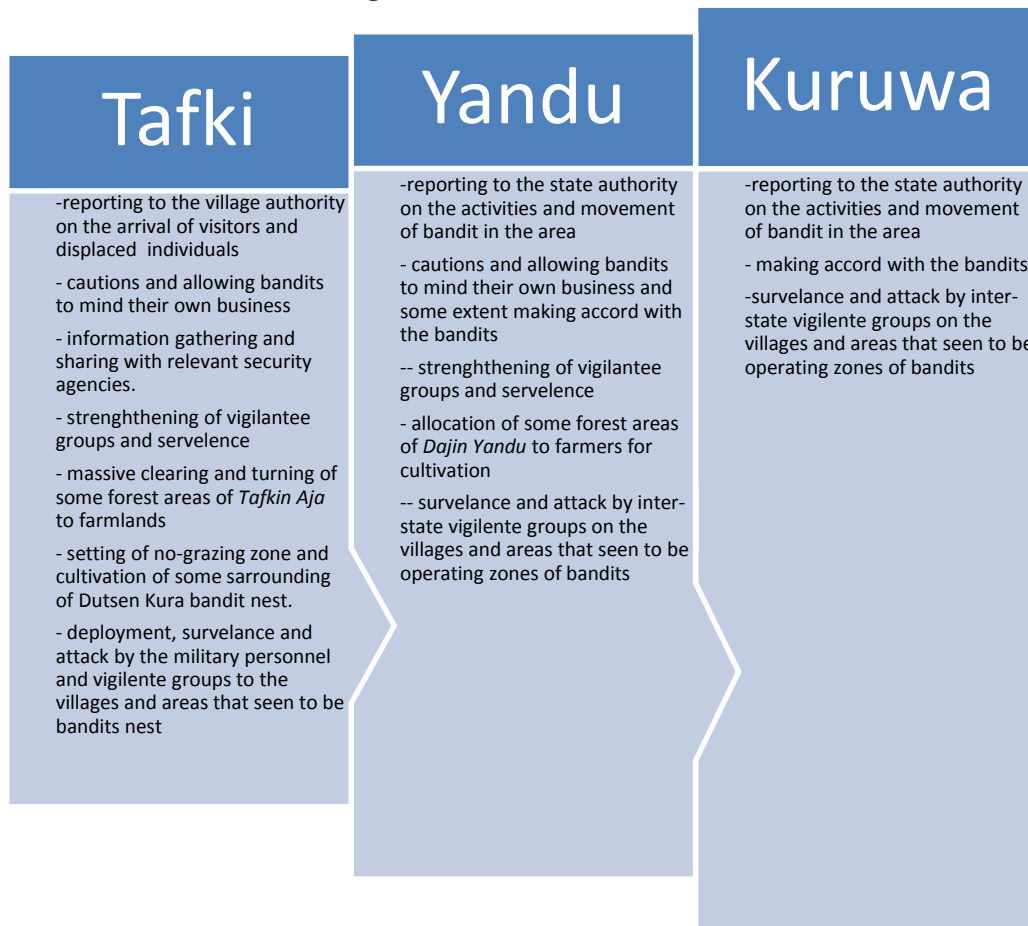
Source: IBR 2022

Community-based Proactive and Reactive Measures of Banditry in Sokoto West Senatorial District of Sokoto State

Survey conducted in the three communities of Tafki, Yandu and Kuruwa confirmed that each community has its own unique but common experiences of banditry activities and consequences. According to SCP approach opportunity-reducing techniques are classified into three types: target hardening, target removal, and various forms of surveillance. The components of pro-active and reactive measures that explain opportunity-reducing techniques taken to lessen the effects of the banditry in the communities included those taken by Individuals, village authorities, vigilante groups and other youth associations as well as security

agencies at both state and national levels put their utmost efforts in that regards. Figure 3 below describe the measures taken by the selected communities in reducing banditry crime in Sokoto West Senatorial District.

Figure 3: Components of Community-based Measures against Banditry Activities in Sokoto West Senatorial District, Sokoto State Nigeria



Conclusion

At the onset, the study set out some objectives to be achieved; these include investigation of underlying factors and potential forest locations that bandits took advantage in their operations of the region and identification of community-based proactive and reactive security measures in reducing banditry activities in the region. The paper confirmed that banditry started as a result of influx of visiting herders and heightened with accessibility of advanced weapons and drugs among youths of herders and compounded with the effort of formation of vigilante groups to repel the attacks against communities and village. The paper also established the existence of a three-level structure of Bandits' habitation at the areas used for their operations. The structures included host village, the intermediary and bandit nest habitations; the latter was found to be a tick forest location hosting leaders of bandits, armed bandits' youth, kidnap victims and rustled livestock. Based on the findings, the paper concluded that there are opportunities that allowed the bandits to successfully operate and complete their banditry crime in the area of study. Some of these opportunities which entails environmental situations included bandit nests of *Dutsen Kura*, *Tafkin Aja*, *Tafkin Kaiwa* and *Dutsen Gwauro* and a number of remote forest areas that bandits had taken advantage in the control of the

fringes of Sokoto-Zamfara inter-State boundary of Sokoto West Senatorial District. Thus, as opportunity-reduction measures, the communities in addition to vigilante activities, they embarked massive clearing of the forest areas thereby converting them into farmlands for as means of bandits' target hardening and removal as well as forms of surveillance to the banditry activities in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the suggestions recorded from the interviews and FGDs in the three communities of Tafki, Yandun Daji and Kuruwa, the paper suggests that opportunity-reduction measures of banditry target hardening, target removal and variety or forms of surveillance techniques to the banditry activities in the area should be strengthened and more efforts should be put on the study of both behavioural and environmental situations of bandits by state and national governments for finding a lasting solution to the banditry activities in northwest and Nigeria in general.

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Interviews

Transcripts of Interviews conducted between 2nd May and 3rd June, 2023 at the selected areas of Tafki/Jabo (Tambuwal LGA), Yandu (Shagari LGA), Tureta (Tureta LGA) Sokoto State.

Transcripts of Focus Group Discussion conducted between 2nd May and 3rd June, 2023 at the selected areas of Tafki/Jabo (Tambuwal LGA), Yandu (Shagari LGA), Kuruwa (Tureta LGA) Sokoto State.