



Banditry and Food Security in Kaduna State:

A Study of Birnin Gwari, Kajuru and Kubau Local Government Areas of Kaduna State

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Abstract

This study examines the nexus between armed banditry and food security in Kaduna State, Nigeria, with a focused analysis of three affected local government areas: Kajuru, Birnin Gwari, and Kubau. Drawing on the frameworks of Routine Activity Theory and the Human Security concept, the study interrogates the multidimensional pathways through which banditry undermines food production, distribution, access, and consumption in the selected local government areas. Employing a qualitative research design anchored on secondary data sources, the paper finds that the persistent activities of armed bandits have resulted in mass displacement of farming communities, destruction of farmlands, rustling of livestock, disruption of rural markets, and blockage of food supply routes, collectively producing acute food insecurity across the three local government areas. The study establishes that Birnin Gwari, and Kajuru, which historically constitute significant agricultural zones in Kaduna State, have witnessed extraordinary levels of community sacking, farmland abandonment, and food price inflation directly attributable to banditry. It further reveals that state and federal government responses, including military operations and humanitarian interventions, have achieved limited success due to the adaptive operational strategies of armed bandits and the structural vulnerabilities of affected communities. The paper concludes with policy recommendations centred on integrated security governance, rural livelihood restoration, and community-based early warning systems as necessary conditions for restoring food security in the affected areas.

Keywords: Banditry, Food Security, Agricultural Disruption, Livelihood Vulnerability



1. INTRODUCTION

Security is a fundamental prerequisite for economic development, social cohesion, and sustainable governance in any society. When security deteriorates, especially in agrarian communities, the consequences extend beyond the immediate loss of lives and property; they reverberate throughout the food system, threatening the livelihoods of millions and deepening cycles of poverty and vulnerability. In no part of Nigeria is this connection more starkly illustrated than in the Northwestern states, where armed banditry has emerged as the predominant security crisis of the twenty-first century. Kaduna State, occupying a strategic geopolitical position as a bridge between the Northwest and North-Central zones, has been among the hardest hit, recording the highest number of armed bandit attacks in the entire Northwest region between 2013 and 2022 (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023).

What began as farmer-herder disputes and cattle rustling in Zamfara State around 2011 has metastasised into a complex, multi-actor security emergency characterised by mass kidnappings, village sacking, murder, rape, and the systematic occupation of agricultural lands by armed non-state actors. These developments have not merely destabilised communities; they have structurally dismantled the food production systems upon which rural populations depend. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) view food security as existing when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2022). By every dimension of this description that is availability, access, utilisation, and stability, banditry has produced devastating food insecurity in affected communities of Kaduna State.

Three local government areas (Kajuru, Birnin Gwari, and Kubau) have emerged as emblematic flashpoints within Kaduna State, illustrating the catastrophic intersection of armed violence and food insecurity. Birnin Gwari, the largest local government area in Nigeria by land mass and a major agricultural zone endowed with the vast Kamuku forest, has seen approximately 60 villages rendered ghost communities by bandit attacks as of 2021, with farmers forcibly expelled from their ancestral lands (Daily Trust, 2022). Kajuru, a diverse agrarian community in southern Kaduna, recorded 144 banditry-related deaths in 2020 alone the second highest in the entire state while at least 28 communities were subsequently displaced (Vanguard, 2021; Southern Kaduna Peoples Union [SOKAPU], 2022). Kubau, situated in northern Kaduna,



became a secondary theatre of bandit activity as dislodged groups migrated from surrounding states, establishing new operational strongholds in the Kubau hills (Vanguard, 2021).

Despite the gravity of this crisis, academic scholarship on the specific food security implications of banditry within Kaduna State, and in particular within these three local government areas, remains limited. Most existing studies focus on Zamfara, Katsina, or the broader Northwest region, leaving the Kaduna dimension underexplored. This paper seeks to address that gap by systematically examining the relationship between banditry and food security in Kajuru, Birnin Gwari, and Kubau, drawing on established theoretical frameworks, empirical data from secondary sources, and the growing body of field-based research on conflict and food systems in Northern Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The impacts of banditry in Kaduna State cut across various aspects of food security, aggravating existing vulnerabilities and hindering efforts for sustainable development. Banditry disrupts agricultural activities by instilling fear among farmers in Birnin-Gwari, Kajuru, and Kubau LGAs of Kaduna State resulting in decreased cultivation and harvests. Farmers had abandon their lands or be unable to tend to their crops due to the risk of violence or extortion by bandits, leading to reduced food production and scarcity in household and local markets. For instance, in May 2019, Kajuru, a village in Kaduna State was attacked by bandits leaving 101 persons dead. Similarly, 55 persons were killed within the same period in an attack carried out by armed bandits on residents of Randagi community of Birnin-Gwari LGA of the State. In the same vein, armed bandits attacked Anchau village of Kubau LGA of the State leaving 67 persons dead (Ladan & Matawalli, 2020). It is against this backdrop that this study delved into the multifaceted nature of the problem, exploring the root causes of the menace created by banditry in Kaduna State including factors such as food security, and governance gaps.

1.3 Review of Literature

Banditry and Food Security in Kaduna State

The presence of armed groups engaging in banditry has had a profound impact on agricultural productivity in Kaduna State. The state is a predominantly rural area where agriculture is the backbone of the economy. However, the activities of these armed groups have posed a



substantial threat to the livelihoods of farmers and the overall agricultural sector. One of the primary ways in which banditry has affected agricultural productivity in the State is through the displacement of farmers from their farmlands. Armed groups have frequently attacked rural communities, forcing farmers to flee their homes and abandon their farms (Adamu & Rasheed, 2021). This displacement has disrupted farming activities and led to a remarkable reduction in cultivated land area. According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as of December 2021, over 190,000 people had been displaced in Kaduna State due to banditry (OCHA, 2021). Besides, the presence of armed groups often referred to as "bandits," has instilled fear and insecurity among farmers, deterring them from venturing out to their farmlands. Many farmers have been targeted for kidnapping or faced threats of violence, leading them to prioritize their safety over agricultural activities (Adesoji & Hamed, 2020). This climate of fear has resulted in a major decrease in the labor force available for farming, further impacting agricultural productivity.

Banditry has also disrupted the supply chain and distribution of agricultural inputs and produce. Farmers have faced difficulties in accessing markets to purchase seeds, fertilizers, and other essential inputs due to the threat of attacks along transportation routes (Adamu & Rasheed, 2021). The pervasive threat of banditry engenders a sense of insecurity and fear among rural communities in Birnin Gwari, Kajuru and Kubau LGA's of Kaduna State, undermining their confidence in pursuing agricultural ventures.

Banditry-induced Disruptions and Food Accessibility, Availability, and Utilization in Kaduna State

The escalation of banditry has led to widespread displacement, with thousands of individuals fleeing their homes and communities in search of safety (Adamu, 2021). Displaced populations often find themselves in temporary settlements or camps with limited access to food, water, and other essential resources, worsening their vulnerability to food insecurity (Abdullahi & Ibrahim, 2021).

The psychological trauma inflicted by banditry cannot be overlooked in the context of food accessibility. The constant fear and stress experienced by communities under siege have detrimental effects on their mental well-being, which in turn impact on their ability to engage in productive agricultural activities or seek alternative means of obtaining food (Adamu &



Okoli, 2020). Also, the coping mechanisms employed by affected households, such as selling off assets or reducing food intake, often perpetuate a vicious cycle of poverty and malnutrition. Banditry has as well posed a substantial challenges to humanitarian aid organizations and government agencies attempting to deliver food assistance and other essential services to affected communities in Kaduna State (Adewuyi, Okuneye & Adisa, 2021). The threat of violence and kidnapping has made it increasingly difficult for aid workers to access remote areas, hampering their ability to assess the extent of food insecurity and provide timely assistance. Besides, the diversion of resources towards security measures has often come at the expense of funding for food aid and agricultural support programs.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks: Routine Activity Theory (RAT) and the Human Security concept. Routine Activity Theory, originally formulated by Cohen and Felson (1979) and widely applied in criminological analyses of conflict-induced crime in Nigeria, posits that criminal activity is most likely to occur when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. In the context of banditry in Kajuru, Birnin Gwari, and Kubau, this framework provides explanatory tool. Armed bandits constitute the motivated offenders, driven by a cocktail of relative deprivation, structural marginalisation, and the lure of economic gains from kidnapping ransoms and livestock rustling. Farming communities and their agricultural assets represent the suitable targets, while the absence or inadequacy of security forces and community protection mechanisms constitutes the lack of capable guardianship (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023; Aina et al., 2023).

The Routine Activity Theory is particularly appropriate for the study of banditry in these three LGAs because it helps explain why farmers remain exposed despite being aware of the dangers, their farming activities requires going to distant fields at fixed seasonal intervals which create predictable routines that bandits exploit. The application of this theory to Kaduna's three LGAs illuminates both the drivers of the crisis and the structural reforms required to disrupt bandit operations.

The Human Security framework, popularised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its seminal 1994 Human Development Report, provides the normative and



analytical backdrop for understanding why banditry constitutes a threat not merely to physical safety but to the holistic well-being of communities. Human security encompasses seven dimensions: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Armed banditry in the study areas violates virtually all of these dimensions simultaneously. Most critically for this study, the destruction of food production systems, displacement of farming communities, and disruption of food supply chains constitute direct assaults on food security as articulated in the human security framework. The Human Security concept also emphasises the individual and community as the ultimate referents of security, in contrast to state-centric approaches, a distinction of particular relevance given the evident inadequacy of state security provision in protecting rural communities in Kaduna State (Abdullahi, 2019).

Together, Routine Activity Theory and the Human Security framework provide a deep analytical framework for interrogating both the conditions that enable banditry to flourish in agricultural communities and the multi-dimensional human costs that result. The synthesis of these frameworks also allows for a normatively grounded policy analysis that centres the rights and needs of affected communities rather than merely the operational imperatives of the security sector.

Case Studies: Birnin Gwari, Kajuru and Kubau

Birnin Gwari Local Government Area presents the most extensively documented case of banditry-induced food insecurity in Kaduna State. With a land mass that makes it the largest LGA in Nigeria, Birnin Gwari is endowed with fertile agricultural lands and the Kamuku National Park forest reserve, historically making it a significant producer of food crops and a hub of pastoral economy. By 2021, the Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressives Union (BEPU) confirmed that approximately 60 villages had been sacked by bandits in the LGA, with their chairperson stating that no human being resided in those communities anymore populations that had been largely composed of farmers, forcibly expelled by bandits (Daily Trust, 2022). The Kaduna State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) data for 2022 further indicated that 16 additional communities were displaced in Birnin Gwari within that year alone, making it the single most affected LGA in the state in terms of community displacement for that period. The agricultural consequences of this level of displacement are severe: the wholesale abandonment of cultivated lands in Birnin Gwari has removed a major source of food supply



for both local and regional food markets, contributing to food price inflation and nutritional vulnerability across the state.

Kajuru Local Government Area, situated in the southern Kaduna, presents a distinct but equally severe case study. Unlike Birnin Gwari, which is primarily characterised by Hausa and Fulani farming and pastoral communities, Kajuru's demography is notably diverse, encompassing indigenous communities including the Adara, Gbagyi, and other groups, alongside Hausa and Fulani settlers. This ethnic diversity, combined with long-standing land disputes and a history of farmer-herder conflict, has created a complex security environment in which banditry intersects with ethno-communal violence in ways that are difficult to disentangle.

By March 2022, SOKAPU documented 28 communities as displaced in Kajuru LGA, including Kihoro-Libere, Bakin Kogi, Umiko, Magunguna, and Idazo. Given that these are predominantly farming communities, their displacement has eliminated entire agricultural production units from the local food system, creating both immediate food shortages and longer-term structural vulnerabilities.

Kubau Local Government Area represents a somewhat different trajectory in the banditry crisis, one shaped in significant part by spillover dynamics from adjacent states and LGAs. This geographic displacement of bandit groups as a consequence of military operations under Operation Hadarin Daji created a new epicentre of insecurity in Kubau that had not previously experienced banditry at scale. The Kubau case thus illustrates a critical policy challenge identified by Aina et al. (2023): military clearing operations that lack accompanying civil administration and economic restoration create a "whack-a-mole" dynamic in which bandit groups simply relocate to new areas, spreading the food security crisis geographically rather than resolving it.

1.5 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, using a descriptive and analytical approach that draws on secondary data sources. Secondary data methodology is not merely expedient but represents the epistemologically appropriate approach for capturing the complex, multi-actor dynamics of banditry and food insecurity in conflict zones. The secondary data sources consulted for this study include peer-reviewed academic journal articles drawn from databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate; reports and briefing notes from



international organisations including the FAO and OCHA; government data from the Kaduna State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), the Kaduna State Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs, and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS); investigative reporting from credible Nigerian newspapers including Daily Trust, Vanguard, and the Nigerian Tribune.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis, in which data from the various sources were coded around the key themes of: the scale and nature of banditry in the three LGAs; the specific food security impacts of banditry across the four dimensions of availability, access, utilisation, and stability; the socioeconomic consequences for affected communities; and the nature and effectiveness of government and humanitarian responses. The comparative case study framework was used to draw out both shared patterns and specific differences among the three LGAs, enabling a deep analysis that avoids the overgeneralisations that can occur when the Northwest Nigeria security crisis is treated as a monolithic phenomenon.

1.6 Discussion of Findings

Displacement and Farmland Abandonment

The most fundamental food security impact of armed banditry in the three LGAs is the mass displacement of farming populations, which directly eliminates agricultural production capacity. The scale of this displacement is staggering as documented by Daily Trust (2022), at least 143 villages across seven LGAs in Kaduna State had been sacked by 2020, with Birnin Gwari accounting for 60 of those villages by far the largest share. SOKAPU data for March 2022 added 28 communities in Kajuru to the tally. For Kubau, the displacement dynamic followed a different timeline, intensifying from 2021 onward as dislodged bandit groups established new operational presence in the LGA's hilly terrain. Across all three LGAs, the displaced populations were primarily smallholder farmers whose entire economic existence was tied to their ability to cultivate specific plots of land.

The Springer publication by Oyewole and Ojo (2022) provides important analytical context for understanding why farmland abandonment represents a particularly severe form of food insecurity. Unlike other forms of economic disruption, the abandonment of farmland does not merely reduce current food production; it creates a self-reinforcing cycle of impoverishment in which the absence of farming income prevents displaced households from investing in future



agricultural restoration even when security conditions temporarily improve. Seeds, fertilisers, and equipment are abandoned or destroyed during displacement. Perennial crops are left to wither.

In the specific context of Birnin Gwari, the testimony collected by Ojo, Oyewole, and their colleagues (2023) from displaced farmers at the Unguwar Mai Alewa IDP camp in Birnin Gwari LGA in April 2023 reveals the devastating personal dimension of farmland abandonment. Farmers interviewed at the camp described losing not only the current agricultural season's harvest but also seed stocks, livestock, and the physical infrastructure of their farms.

Livestock Rustling and Livelihoods

Livestock rustling is one of the oldest and most economically devastating manifestations of banditry in the study areas. In the integrated farming systems of Birnin Gwari, Kajuru, and Kubau, cattle, goats, sheep, and other livestock represent not only a source of food through milk, meat, and eggs but also the primary store of wealth for both farming and pastoral households, serving as collateral for credit, a medium of exchange in rural markets, and a safety net in times of crop failure. Gadzama et al. (2018) documented in their Birnin Gwari study that bandit operations in the Kamuku forest corridor specifically targeted livestock markets and cattle routes, with bandits using stolen cattle as both a commodity for sale and a bargaining chip in ransom negotiations. This double function of rustled livestock as criminal capital and as hostage makes it particularly difficult for affected communities to recover through ordinary market mechanisms. Once livestock are stolen, the household must simultaneously absorb the loss of animal protein from its diet, the loss of a critical economic asset, and the trauma of having family members killed or abducted during the rustling raid. The compounding nature of these losses makes livestock-rustling communities uniquely vulnerable to food insecurity.

In Kajuru, where multi-ethnic farming and pastoral communities had historically maintained complex livestock management systems, the combined effects of direct rustling and the flight of pastoral communities from the LGA have dramatically reduced the cattle population, with cascading effects on the availability of dairy products and meat in local markets.

Market Disruption and Food Prices

Food markets serve as the primary mechanism through which agricultural production is



converted into household food security in rural Nigeria. Even households that do not produce sufficient food for their own needs can access adequate nutrition through market exchange, provided that markets function effectively and food prices remain within reach. The systematic disruption of rural markets by armed bandits in Birnin Gwari, Kajuru, and Kubau has therefore had food security implications extending far beyond the directly affected farming households, impacting all rural households that depend on market exchange for their food needs.

Armed bandits in the study areas have employed multiple strategies to disrupt food markets. The blocking of roads and trade routes through ambushes, as well as on secondary rural roads connecting villages to weekly markets. Oyewole & Ojo (2022) asserts that bandit attacks on Kaduna State road corridors, including specifically the blocking of transport vehicles and the abduction of traders, have significantly reduced the frequency and volume of market activity in affected areas. This supply disruption has driven food price inflation that makes staple foods unaffordable for the poorest households, including many displaced families living in IDP camps on the outskirts of larger settlements.

State Responses and Their Limitations

Both the Kaduna State Government and the Federal Government of Nigeria have pursued multiple strategies in response to the banditry crisis, ranging from kinetic military operations to dialogue-based peace initiatives. The most significant military response has been Operation Hadarin Daji (OPHD), launched by the Joint Task Force Northwest, which subsumed the earlier Operation Sahel Sanity in February 2021 and has conducted sustained counter-banditry operations across the six Northwest states, including Kaduna. Aina, Ojo, and Oyewole (2023) credit OPHD with significant tactical achievements, including the dismantling of bandit camps, the rescue of kidnap victims, and the disruption of bandit supply networks. However, they also document critical strategic limitations, including the failure to establish sustainable civilian governance in cleared areas and the tendency of bandit groups to relocate rather than disband when subjected to military pressure.

The relocation of dislodged bandits to Kubau hills as documented by Senator Kwari (Vanguard, 2021) is a direct consequence of these strategic limitations and illustrates the food security cost of operationally incomplete counter-banditry campaigns. When military operations displace bandit groups without destroying their operational capacity, they effectively create new conflict



zones in previously secure areas, extending the geographic reach of food insecurity rather than containing it.

Humanitarian responses to banditry-induced food insecurity have been constrained by access limitations in the most affected areas. The SEMA documented significant difficulties in reaching many displaced communities for needs assessments, acknowledging that its figure of 52 communities sacked between 2021 and 2022 reflected only those to which humanitarian assessment teams could safely travel with many more communities likely affected but unreachable (Daily Trust, 2022). This access constraint means that the most food-insecure populations those in communities closest to bandit operational areas are paradoxically the least served by humanitarian food assistance programmes.

1.7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined the nexus between armed banditry and food security in Kaduna State, with a focused comparative analysis of Birnin Gwari, Kajuru and Kubau local government areas. The findings confirm that banditry has generated a multi-dimensional food security crisis in the three LGAs through four interconnected pathways: the displacement of farming communities and consequent farmland abandonment; the large-scale rustling of livestock; the systematic disruption of rural food markets; and the creation of access constraints that prevent both farmers and humanitarian actors from reaching affected communities. Across all four dimensions of food security that is availability, access, utilisation, and stability, the activities of armed bandits have produced devastating and in many cases irreversible damage to the agricultural systems upon which rural populations in the three LGAs depend.

The study's theoretical framework, drawing on Routine Activity Theory and the Human Security concept, has illuminated both the structural conditions that enable banditry to target agricultural communities with impunity including chronic governance vacuums, inadequate security provision, and the predictable routines of farming activities in open, poorly guarded landscapes and the human costs that result from this targeting. The Human Security framework, in particular, highlights the inadequacy of purely kinetic state responses that address physical security without simultaneously restoring the food, economic, and community security dimensions that have been dismantled by bandit operations. Government responses, including military operations under OPHD and limited humanitarian interventions, have achieved



important but insufficient results, constrained by strategic limitations that allow displaced bandit groups to reconstitute in new areas and by access challenges that leave the most vulnerable populations outside the reach of assistance.

The comparative analysis reveals significant differences among the three LGAs in the pathways and intensity of food insecurity. Birnin Gwari's food security crisis is primarily driven by the catastrophic scale of community displacement approximately 60 villages sacked enabled by the Kamuku forest sanctuary that provides bandits with operational depth and protection from security forces. Kajuru's crisis is complicated by the intersection of banditry with ethno-communal conflict, creating a more complex security environment in which the perpetrators of violence are more diverse and the possibilities for negotiated security arrangements more limited. Kubau's crisis reflects the perverse consequences of spatially incomplete counter-banditry operations, which have created a new food insecurity frontier in an LGA that had not previously been a primary banditry zone. Each LGA therefore requires a tailored response strategy rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are advanced. First, the Federal and Kaduna State Governments should adopt an integrated food security restoration framework that accompanies all counter-banditry military operations, ensuring that cleared areas receive immediate civil administration support, market rehabilitation, and livelihood assistance rather than merely temporary security presence. Second, specialised agricultural emergency programmes should be designed for the most severely affected LGAs, providing returning farmers with seed capital, equipment, and technical assistance to restore food production capacity particularly in Birnin Gwari and Kajuru, where the scale of displacement has created a critical shortage of agricultural labour and inputs. Third, community-based early warning systems linked to state security architecture should be established in Kubau and other areas at risk of becoming secondary theatres of banditry, enabling rapid response before criminal groups can consolidate their operational presence. Fourth, humanitarian access corridors should be negotiated and maintained in the three LGAs, ensuring that food insecure populations in displacement camps and host communities receive consistent, adequate food assistance without interruption. Fifth, long-term structural interventions addressing the socioeconomic drivers of banditry including youth unemployment, inadequate education infrastructure, and the absence of economic alternatives to criminal violence should be incorporated into the state's security strategy as indispensable complements to kinetic



operations. Such structural interventions are essential to prevent the intergenerational reproduction of banditry as a survival strategy in communities where legitimate economic pathways have been systematically destroyed by decades of conflict.

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