

Influence of Banditry on Agricultural Activities and Livelihood of Farmers in Bassa Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria

Onwunali, M. R. O.

Department of Agricultural Education
Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Oparandudu, G. O.

Department of Agricultural Education
Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Ajiji, V. I.

Department of Agricultural Education
Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effect of banditry on agricultural activities in Bassa Local Government Area, Plateau State using 120 farmers in Jere and Buhit Districts. Five villages were randomly and purposefully selected based on bandit operations. Closed structured questionnaire was used to determine socioeconomic characteristics, types, ways and effects of operations on farmers, and farmers escape strategies. Data were subjected to descriptive statistics and mathematical technique (confrontation index) while mean bench mark of 3.0 determined significant level. Results showed that, 59.17 % male, married (56.67%) and within the ages 35 to 44 (29.16%) years dominated farming activities. The farmers had primary education (37.50%) with 11-15 (26.67%) years of farming experiences on 1 acre to 2 hectares, using average household size of 4-6 persons. Fulani herdsmen (4.6%) and Boko Haram (4.38%) were prominent, mostly through kidnapping (4.66%), rampant killing of farmers (4.37) and cattle rustling (4.28). Consequently, high food insecurity (4.56%), lost of people's jobs, conflicts, life dependency on provider and inflation were imperative. However, farmers organized vigilante group (4.56%) and engaged security guards to protect farms, homes and villages with local weapons and charms. Results also showed that migration for safety and branding of livestock for identification against theft were among the strategies adopted to survive. It is therefore suggested that, farmers in the interim should intensify effort towards acquiring sophisticated weapons for vigilante and security guards while government at all levels and other stockholders work out permanent solution to end banditry in Bassa for sustainable livelihood.

Keywords: Livelihood, farmers, bandits, food security, insecurity, crime

INTRODUCTION

Banditry is an organized crime committed by robbers or outlaws, using threats and violence [1], or desperate lawless marauders without definite residence, destination or structure but roam

about forest and mountains [2]. They operate from forest and constitute insecurity particularly in rural environments. The concept of banditry does not have a generally accepted definition, but has been elucidated by several authors to be associated with negative social, economical and political economies [3, 4, 6,]. A person or group that participates in banditry is/are known as bandit and or gang of bandits. Globally, banditry is not a new concept. However, the origin and evolution in Nigeria is controversial evidenced by different reports. For instance, [7] reported that conflicts and competition on over grazing arable land and water resources between the Hausa farmers and Fulani herders were responsible for armed banditry activities in Northern Nigeria. Borne out of the fact that, youths of the 'bandit' Fulani herdsmen and farmers vigilante were each armed with AK-47 rifles, local small arms and light weapons *inter alia* for protection [8, 9], culminating into armed banditry. In Nigeria, [10] reported that banditry became popular in 2014, beginning with cattle rustling to massive killing of the rich, poor, women and even school children. Reports have also associated the evolution to government insensitive to environmental degradation, increased population, poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy, greed, corruption, inadequate security, poor border management, drug abuse, poor governance among others [11-13]. Globally and of course in Africa, banditry have posed negative security challenges [14]. Presently, the situation in Nigeria is worrisome as it has infiltrated into almost all the Geo-political zones particularly in the North [13]. Resulting to incessant attacks, kidnapping, maiming and disfiguring of people, killing, rape, cattle rustling, destruction and burning of houses and properties, looting of farm produce, just to mention but a few [15]. Based on [16] report, banditry is driven by personal enrichment and not political, ideology or sectional interest as farming and herding cannot easily empower the criminals enough out of chronic poverty, access to resource and settle the existing conflicts. Much as government remains insensitive to conflict resolution, rural policing and conspiracy against Nigerian state, banditry will continue to be lucrative venture. Consequently, farmers are forced to migrate homes for safety [16]. The displacement and disruption of farming activities subsequently led to food scarcity and increased prices of food as not much is produced, hence posed threat to food and regional security [17-19] as well as provides enabling platform for spread of fundamentalism [20].

Statement of the Problem

The major threat to the agricultural sector in Nigeria is insecurity induced by Hausa farmers and Fulani herdsmen that resulted to banditry, which now is endemic to almost all the states in northern Nigeria. Consequently, the terrorist and banditry activities have stampeded agricultural activities and farming systems. In most areas, farming communities are displaced without access to cultivation and market due to incessant attacks, so serious that farmers are forced to pay tax to bandits to enable access to farming and harvesting activities. In other areas, farmers abandoned farms, villages and migrate for safety. In view of the foregoing, the study seeks to establish the effect of banditry on farming and livelihood of farmers in Bassa LGA, a vulnerable place in Plateau State.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study was to:

1. Examine the socioeconomic characteristics of farmers,
2. determine types or form of existing banditry,
3. assess the ways of operation of the bandits,
4. evaluate the effect of operations on farming activities and food security,

5. assess the farmers strategies to overcome attacks.

Research Question

1. What are the forms and operation of banditry?
2. How does banditry attacks affect farming activities?
3. What is farmers strategy of survival?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

Bassa Local Government Area is situated in the North of Plateau State, bordering Kaduna and Bauchi States with headquarters in Bassa town, located at latitude 9°56'00" N and longitude 8°44'00" E (<http://www.plateaustate.gov.ng>). It has an area of 1,743 km² and population of 186, 559 based on 2016 census. Administratively, the LGA is divided into Kakkek, Buhit, Miango, Kislika, Mafara, Kwall, Amo, Buji and Jere districts. The inhabitants are mostly crop farmers, however field observation revealed seasonal migration men to neighbouring Barkin Ladi or Jos South for mining (Tin) during off season.

Experimental Procedure

The study was conducted in two significant districts, namely Jere and Buhit based on frequent report and attack of the bandits. Three (Zabolo, Angwan Lami and Angwan Makama) and two (Jebbu Bassa and Angwan Ganye) villages were purposefully selected. A total of 120 validated with reliability of 0.88 closed structured questionnaires were evenly and randomly distributed to the farmers, with the help of coordinated research assistants during the off-season of 2022. The instrument comprised of socioeconomic characteristics of farmers, type and way of bandit operation, effect of banditry and farmers' strategies to coup with banditti's attacks.

Data Analysis

Data on socioeconomic characteristics of the farmers were subjected to descriptive statistics while ways and types of banditti of operations, effects of banditry and farmers survival strategies were analyzed with mathematical techniques, using confrontation index (CI) amended from [21]. A 5-point rating scale of Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Undecided, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed were adopted and assigned corresponding weighted values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. Such mathematical techniques were called type and way of operations, effect and strategy confrontation indexes using the following formula:

$$TCI = [T_{SA}5] + [T_A4] + [T_U3] + [T_{DX}2] + [T_{SDX}1]$$

Where TCI = Types of bandit confrontation index,

T_{SA} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly agreed

T_A = Number of farmers that ticked agreed

T_U = Number of farmers that ticked undecided

T_{SD} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly disagreed

$$WCI = [W_{SA}5] + [W_A4] + [W_{UX}3] + [W_{DX}2] + [W_{SDX}1]$$

Where WCI = Ways of bandit operation confrontation index,

W_{SA} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly agreed

W_A = Number of farmers that ticked agreed
 W_U = Number of farmers that ticked undecided
 W_D = Number of farmers that ticked disagreed
 W_{SD} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly disagreed

$$ECI = [E_{SA}5] + [E_A4] + [E_U3] + [E_D2] + [E_{SD}1]$$

Where ECI = Effect of bandit on farming activity confrontation index,
 E_{SA} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly agreed
 E_A = Number of farmers that ticked agreed
 E_U = Number of farmers that ticked undecided
 E_D = Number of farmers that ticked disagreed
 E_{SD} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly disagreed

$$SCI = [S_{SA}5] + [S_A4] + [S_U3] + [S_D2] + [S_{SD}1]$$

Where SCI = Strategy confrontation index,
 S_{SA} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly agreed
 S_A = Number of farmers that ticked agreed
 S_U = Number of farmers that ticked undecided
 S_D = Number of farmers that ticked disagreed
 S_{SD} = Number of farmers that ticked strongly disagreed

The range of all the CI varied from 1-600. The means were obtained by dividing each confrontation index with total number of the selected farmers, while mean decision bench mark of ≥ 3.0 determined acceptance or rejection of items.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Farmers

Results (Table 1) showed that 59.17% of male farmers within the age range of 35-44 (29.16%), are married (56.67%) and dominated farming activities. Majority were predominantly farmers (36.67%) with primary education (37.5%), however, with 11-15 years (26.67%) of farming experience. Such farmers were peasants and subsistence as only 33% cultivated 1-2 hectare of land with family size of 4-6 persons per household (25.83%). Results conformed with [22] who reported that farming is dominated by males within the ages of 31-50 years, indicating that farmers in the areas are young [23, 24], hence energetic enough, and ready for any available energy demanding activity for good out put. The low level of education may be due to lack proximity to secondary and high institution, culture and poor financial disposition, which over the years has demoralized indigen's interest and attitude to education, resulting to concentration on farming. Contrarily, [23, 25] reported educated farmers in Imo and Abia States and Kachia, Kaduna State, respectively, associated with closeness and availability of educational institutions. Similarly, [22, 26] also reported educated farmers with minimum of secondary school in Bakori and Kaura in Katsina and Kaduna States, respectively, due to cosmopolitan nature of such places, a condition difficult in rural Bassa. The relatively high farming experience by the energetic young men and woman in Bassa, indicated that such people engaged into farming activities early life [27, 28] and as such, the disruption of banditry signaled negative impact on their agricultural activity.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of farmers in Bassa Local Government Area, Plateau State, 2023, N=120

S/No	Characteristics	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1.	Sex: Male	71	59.17
	Female	49	40.83
2.	Age: 18-24	16	13.33
	25-34	29	24.17
	35-44	35	29.16
	45-54	29	24.17
	> 55	11	9.17
3.	Marital Status: Single	32	26.67
	Married	68	56.67
	Separation/Divorce	20	16.66
4.	Occupation: Civil Servant	15	12.50
	Self-Employed	27	22.50
	Student	10	8.33
	Farmers	44	36.67
	Farmers/Civil Servant	24	20.00
5.	Education: Non-Formal	16	13.33
	Primary	45	37.50
	Secondary	40	33.33
	Tertiary	19	15.83
6.	Experience: 1-5	23	19.17
	6-10	25	20.83
	11-15	32	26.67
	16-20	22	18.33
	> 20	18	15.00
7.	Farm Size: 1-5 acre	30	25.00
	6-9 acre	34	28.00
	1-2 ha ⁻¹	40	33.00
	3-5ha ⁻¹	9	8.00
	75ha ⁻¹	7	6.00
8.	Family Size: 1-3	23	19.17
	4-6	31	25.83
	7-9	27	22.50
	10-13	20	16.67
	14-16	12	10.00
	> 16	7	5.83

Types of Banditry in Bassa

Results in Table 2 revealed four significant types of banditry in Bassa LGA with confrontation indexes of 497 to 552 corresponding to mean range of 4.14 to 4.60, indicating that Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, Unknown Gunmen, Criminals were in operation, kidnapping, extorting, disfiguring and killing farmers. However, the presence of Fulani herdsmen (4.60) followed by kidnappers (4.48) dominated their operations preventing farm activities. Boko Haram (4.38), unknown gunmen (4.30) and criminals 4.14 also infiltrated in disguise, possibly why is difficult to differentiate activities of banditry and terrorism. [29] reported that banditry and other forms of conflicts is of great concern and have constituted a worrisome concern in Nigeria studies.

Table 2: Types of Banditry operating in Bassa Local Government Area, N=120

Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	CI	$\bar{x}$
Boko Haram	325	184	12	5	0	526	4.38
Fulani Herdsmen	395	140	15	2	0	552	4.60
Unknown Gunmen	300	168	36	12	0	516	4.30
Theft/Criminals	245	192	45	14	1	497	4.14
Kidnapping	320	208	6	2	1	537	4.48

Strongly agreed = SA, Agreed = A, Undecided = U, Disagreed = D, Strongly disagreed = SD, $\bar{x}$ = item means, Confrontation index = CI

Ways of Banditry Operations

Table 3 showed five significant ways of operation by the bandits. Generally, CI of their operation were very high ranging from 455 to 559 in range of 1-600 corresponding to means of 3.79 to 4.66. However, the most frequent and dangerous operation was kidnapping (4.66) followed by rampant killing of the farmers (4.37) particularly the male while females were rapped to death. Other operation includes cattle rustling, burning of farms and scaring of farmers during growing seasons. [13] also reported market raids, armed robbery and looting of farms as associated forms of banditry. These activities tend to negatively affect crop production since farmers were scared. Earlier, [30] reported that cattle rustling and banditry negatively impacted on size and accessibility of the farms holding, crop production activities and marketing. Similarly, [31] also reported that Boko Haram terrorists necessitated insecurity of food resources creating anxiety, fears, displacement, deprivations, frustrations, aggression, killing and destruction of means of subsistence.

Table 3: Ways of Banditry Operations in Bassa Local Government Area, Plateau State, N=120

Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	CI	$\bar{x}$
Kidnapping	425	120	12	2	0	559	4.66
Cattle Rustling	260	212	33	8	0	513	4.28
Rampant Killing of Farmers / Rape	325	164	24	10	1	524	4.37
Buring and Encroachment by Fulani	195	204	57	16	3	475	3.96
Scaring of farmers out of farms	215	160	42	30	8	455	3.79

Strongly agreed = SA, Agreed = A, Undecided = U, Disagreed = D, Strongly disagreed = SD, $\bar{x}$ = item means, Confrontation index = CI

Effect of Banditry on Farming

Results (Table 4) Showed CI of 462-547 in indexes of 1-600 corresponding to mean range of 3.85 to 4.56. The implication is food insecurity, loss of job, conflicts, high dependence and inflation on farm produce were detrimental to farmers in Bassa. [32] reported that major causes of food insecurity are the conflicts between cattle rustling and bandits, which jointly affected the availability and affordability of food. According to [29] many farmers were displaced and restricted from farms due to fear of attack, resulting to serious food shortage and nutritional crisis. It is therefore obvious that insurgent activities crippled food production and increased prices of food in Bassa. [13] reported that disruption of farming activities due to armed bandit had serious implications on food security particularly in food availability, accessibility, sustainability and utilization.

Table 4: Effect of Banditry on Farming Activities of the Farmers, 2023, N=120

Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	CI	$\bar{x}$
Food Security	365	168	12	2	0	547	4.56
Lost of Job	235	224	39	8	0	506	4.22
Conflicts/Tension & Crime	245	224	27	8	2	506	4.22
High dependency on the provider	185	172	81	24	1	462	3.85
Inflation on farm produce	245	220	21	12	3	501	4.18

Strongly agreed = SA, Agreed = A, Undecided = U, Disagreed = D, Strongly disagreed = SD, $\bar{x}$ = item means, Confrontation index = CI

Strategies of Managing Banditry

Results in table 5 identified five conventional and significant strategies used by farmers to mitigate the attacks. Such measures gave high range of CI (434-547) within 1-600 corresponding to means of 3.62-4.56, indicating that the strategies were effective in the management of banditry in Bassa. However, with high level of fear due to inefficiency, collaboration with hoodlums and lack of commensurate arms to face the enemies [33]. The best strategy was use of vigilante group (4.56), but field observation showed that although the vigilante group were on top of the security, in most cases they were overpowered due to use of obsolete armed equipment, such as den-gun, knife, bow and arrow and bars while the bandits used sophisticated weapons like AK 47 riffles.

Other significant strategies were employment of security guards (487:4.06) followed by migration to safe places when the attacks become severe (448: 3.73). The farmers also acquire some weapons and charms for emergency and sometimes brand their livestock for identification in case of theft. In Zamfara State, [34] also reported use of vigilante and engagement of security guard as the best means of escaping the attack of bandits.

Table 5: Strategies used by Farmers to Overcome Attack, 2023, N=120

Description	SA	A	U	D	SD	CI	$\bar{x}$
Organization of Vigilante Group	385	144	15	2	1	547	4.56
Employment of Security Guard	220	208	42	14	3	487	4.06
Acquiring weapons and charms	180	156	54	36	9	435	3.63
Migration to safe areas	195	164	45	38	6	448	3.73
Branding of livestock	155	144	90	44	1	434	3.62

Strongly agreed = SA, agreed = A, Undecided = U, disagreed = D, strongly disagreed = SD, $\bar{x}$ = item means, Confrontation index = CI

CONCLUSION

Banditry has evidently crippled agricultural activities of Bassa farmers and have subjected inhabitants to hunger, poverty and homeless. Such activity remains a threat to social, economic and political structure of the people as vices like kidnapping and subsequent demand for ransom, killing and confiscation of farms is alien to the people and have come to stay.

Therefore, efforts towards consolidation of strong vigilante and security outfit to protect farmers and to terminate the bandits are imperative for sustainable farming and food security in Bassa Local Government Area.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on findings, the study recommended the following:

- i. Since terrors are better equipped with sophisticated weapons, there is a need for wealthy individuals, village heads and the Local Government authority to provide commensurate arms or even more to enable the vigilante and security guard withstand attacks.
- ii. The injury inflicted by the terrors affects and cuts across all, there is need for proper village organization through good village heads for surveillance and detection of hideouts.
- iii. The responsibility of every government in a democratic setting is to protect life and properties, therefore there is a need for government at all levels, NGOs, and concerned stakeholders to provide enough security that will restore farmers confidence and eradicate in its totality the menace constituted by bandits.

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