

SCOURGE OF RURAL BANDITRY AND FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA'S NORTH-WEST: THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

¹Dr.Olusegun Kazeem Lekan, ²James Mutiat Temitayo & ³Jafaru Abdu Gambarawa

¹Department of Business Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Federal
University Dutsinma, Katsina, P.M.B.5001, Katsina State.

²Department of Business Administration, College of Applied & Social Sciences,
Lagos State

University of Science and Technology, Ikorodu, Lagos, P.M.B. 21606, Ikeja, Lagos
State.

³Directorate of Academic Planning, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Dutsinma
Road, Katsina, P.M.B. 2218, Katsina State.

¹kolusegun@fudutsinma.edu.ng ²mutiatjames2021@gmail.com ³

jabdugambarawa@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author: kolusegun@fudutsinma.edu.ng, 0803 511 8202

Abstract

A considerable amount of research attentions on rural banditry-food security nexus have heavily underlined that rural banditry is a major threat to food security. Despite prior evidence and contributions, scourge of rural banditry is still very much pervasive particularly in the Nigeria's north-west region. Plethora of studies lack economic implications and distinct recommendations capable of producing sustainable solutions to the scourge of banditry and food crisis in Nigeria. Consequently, the current study provides an anecdotal analysis of rural banditry-food security effect with a view to offer economic implications and clear-cut recommendations capable of generating lasting and sustainable solutions to forestall scourge of banditry and food crisis in Nigeria's north-west region. Relying on exegesis of relevant secondary sources, the paper posits that rural banditry disrupts agricultural activities, creates food crisis and distorts economic activities of the rural dwellers in the study area. Therefore, this study recommends that government at all levels should declare war against bandits. The security forces together with the collaboration of vigilantes must confront the bandits, continuously hit hard their hideout, and crush them with their sponsors recklessly. Besides, death penalty should be meted out on any perpetrators and accomplices of banditry found guilty regardless of their economic and socio-political status while payment of kidnap ransom should be discouraged, and possibly criminalized, so as to discourage quest kidnapping. Above all, governments should pursue national food policy which seeks to assure all citizens access to food supply that is reasonably priced, relatively safe, adequate in quantity, and nutritious to meet dietary needs for an active and healthy life. When this is achieved, scourge of rural banditry and food crisis will become extinct in Nigeria's north-west.

Keywords: Rural banditry, food security, scourge, economic implications, sustainable solutions.

1. Introduction

Banditry is one of the most pervasive and intractable violent crimes against humanity in Nigeria in recent times. Hardly a day passes without gory tales of reckless massacre of innocent peasants in their farmlands, cattle rustling, kidnapping, rape, torching of entire villages, and looting of valuables in and around the country especially in the north-western region. Under President Muhammadu Buhari, over 3,478 people were killed while 2,256 others were abducted by bandit-terrorists in seven months across the country from December 2021 to June 15, 2022 (The Punch, 2022). According to Council on Foreign Relations (2020), more than 1,100 people were killed by bandits in 2018 in Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Kebbi, over 2,200 were killed in 2019, and more than 1,600 fatalities were recorded between January and June 2020. By September 2019, such attacks had internally displaced over 160,000 people and produced more than 41,000 refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees World Food Programme, 2019). Displacement numbers now stand at over 247,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and some 60,000 refugees in 2020. Available data from Wisconsin-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2021) show that bandits killed over 2,600 civilians in 2021, an increase of over 250% from 2020.

The insurgents are becoming more daring in their approach taking the war not only to farms but also to schools, markets, airports, highways, railways, doorsteps of the military and various police stations in their fortified formations. In August 2021, a bus was ambushed between Zamfara and Sokoto states highways and all passengers were set ablaze in revenge to harsh military operations carried out on the bandits. Towards late May 2022, several people were reportedly kidnapped by bandits who attacked travellers and set buses ablaze along the Kaduna-Birnin-Gwari Road in Kaduna State (CHANNELS TV, 2022). More often than not, the operatives of the DSS were taken like little prey on the street. Divisional police officers, military and other paramilitary officers were abducted and ransoms are paid to bandits to secure their release (Vanguard, 2022). The bandit-terrorists also led an assault against the Abuja-Kaduna train, derailed it and broke into the first-class coaches occupied by members of the governing class and their families, killing some and kidnapping others. Meanwhile, these outlaws have wreaked havoc on the Abuja-Kaduna expressway for years; they attack, kill and kidnap victims at will (Felix, 2022).

Banditry has taken center stage terrorizing villages and disrupting agricultural activities. These disruptions have truncated agricultural supply creating food crisis leading to inflated prices of agricultural produce and significantly hurt income-generating activities in the region (Daphne, 2022). Many farmers have been kidnapped for ransom, and some have been killed on their farmlands. In some instances, bandits have struck deals with farmers, allowing them to pay levies to continue farming on their lands. Consequently, many farmers have been forced to flee their farms while some farmers have become unemployed and can no longer care for their families, and in some cases they have resorted to criminality, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity.

In an attempt to contain the menace of banditry, the Nigeria Federal Government has declared them “terrorists” and to be dealt with in like manner by imposing harsher penalties under The Terrorism Prevention Act. In this regard, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) consisting of local groups of volunteers has worked with Nigerian security forces in the fight against the bandits. Additional measures the government have adopted to curtail the impact of banditry include a ban on the sale of gas in jerry cans, limited interstate movement for livestock, market closure, ban of motorcycle riding, and telecommunication shutdown (FEWS NET, 2022). None of these measures has generated a lasting and sustainable positive effect to forestall the scourge of banditry in Nigeria.

On the other hand, several scholarly studies have unveiled that banditry is a major threat to food security (Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduche, & Dariya, 2018; Jaafar, 2018; Kuna & Ibrahim, 2016; Mashi, 2017; Lawal & Kyarem, 2021; Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Sardauna, 2020; Shehu, Victor, & Binta, 2017). Earlier studies found that unprecedented rise in the insurgence of armed banditry has displaced farming communities, hindered cultivation, leading to unprecedented spike in food insecurity and hikes in food prices items. Consequently, these findings suggest provision of more sophisticated detection equipment in the rural areas for early detection of arrival and settlement of bandits in the forestlands, 24 hours surveillance patrol along Nigeria-Niger Republic borders to check the influx of foreign nomads who smuggle dangerous weapons to Nigeria, and provision of more sophisticated arms and ammunition to the security forces to eliminate the bandits in order to enhance human and food security. However, interestingly, earlier suggestions have neither been able to achieved significant results in curtail the monster of banditry to the barest minimum nor enhance food security in the Nigeria’s north-west region. Plethora of studies lack economic implications and clear-cut recommendations capable of producing sustainable solutions to the scourge of banditry and food crisis in Nigeria. This is the motivation behind the present study. Therefore, the current study seeks to provide an anecdotal analysis of banditry-food security nexus in Nigeria and proffer explicit and distinct recommendations that can guarantee lasting solutions to the problems.

2. Rural Banditry Scourge In Nigeria’s North-West

The concept of banditry is plethora in nature. Several attempts have been made by several scholars to conceptualize banditry from different perspectives. In the view of Isah (2009), the term banditry refers to acts of robbery, conspiracy and violence where the rule of law was not duly followed. A bandit is a robber or outlaw belonging to a gang, who uses weapons to steal or rob from the people and typically operating in an isolated or lawless area of a country (Collins, 2000). Egwu (2016) described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches. In the same vein, Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) refers banditry to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill. While the term “Bandits” from the archival documents refers to all those who refused to abide by the law of the state, went around armed and in bands and had the support of the local

population. They were involved in damage to enclosed property and in rustling of livestock belonging to various villages, in demolishing the walls enclosing fields, cattle and resources once belonging to the corporate village communities (Rossetti, 1982).

However, where the term banditry is connected to rural, it implies a group of rural outlawed involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorising and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable items or properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people (Abdullahi, 2019).

In Nigeria's north-west, the criminal groups have jeopardized the livelihood of several million people living in Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, engaging in criminal activities including village raids, sexual violence, kidnapping for ransom, killing, and large-scale cattle rustling. These murderous tales of banditry scourge have become common headlines of every newspaper in the recent time. For instance: bandits attacked and abducted in April, 2021 many students in Greenfield University in Kaduna, 14 abductees were freed after 40 days in captivity but 5 others were later killed; armed bandits in June, 2021 abducted 2 staff and 30 students of Government College (FGC) Yauri in Kebbi State; in the early hour of July 5, 2021, bandits invaded Bethel Baptist High School in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State and kidnapped 121 students of the school; armed bandits in December, 2021 ambushed a vehicle of 40 passengers travelling from Sabon Birni Local Government in Sokoto State and burnt them alive; suspected bandits in December 2021 attacked villages in Giwa Local Government Area of Kaduna State killing 38 persons (Premium Times: January 8, 2022).

Similarly, In Zamfara, bandits attacked Bawan Daji village of Anka LGA of Zamfara State and killed over 30 people March 31, 2018; 16 killed, 40 abducted in Kawaye village in Bagega community of Anka LGA of Zamfara State on the 1st of March, 2019; 25 killed in bandit attacks in Klahu, Tsage and Geeri villages in Rabah LGA of Sokoto State on the 9th of June, 2019; 11 killed in bandit attacks on Kankara and Danmusa LGA of Katsina State July 4, 2019; four villagers were killed in banditry attacks in Tsayu village of Jibiya LGA of Katsina State August 19, 2019 (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2020). Bandits kill 31 persons in attacks at Babban Rafi Village in Gummi LGA and Makosa Village in Zurmi LGA of Zamfara State (The Punch: January 17, 2020); bandits kill 50 people in villages in Igabi and Giwa LGA of Kaduna State (Nigerian Tribune: March 2, 2020); bandits kill 10 in two attacks on 3 villages of Jema'a and Kaura LGA of Kaduna State (The Nation: July, 26, 2020); bandits abduct 16 family members at Udawa farming community of Kaduna State; bandits invade Police Station in Tangaza LGA of Sokoto State, killed DPO and 1 Inspector and abducted 2 women September 18, 2020 (Vanguard: September 13, 2020).

3. Food Security

Diverse food security definitions abound in the literature. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, food security exists 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, 1996). World Bank (1986) defined food security as a condition in which all have access to sufficient food to live healthy and productive lives. The FAO (1996) food security definition later became the widely accepted definition which incorporated three pillars of food security. These are food availability, food accessibility, and food utilization. This means that a nation whose food production level is unable to satisfy these three criteria is said to be food insecure. Supporting this assertion, Maxwell and Frankenberger (1992) stated that a country and its people are food secured when their food system operates in such a way as to remove the fear that there will not be enough to eat. He further stressed that food security requires that the poor and vulnerable have secure access to the food they want.

A country is food-secure when majority of its population have access to food of adequate quantity and quality consistent with decent existence at all times (Reutlinger, 1985). What is implied in this definition is that food must be available to the people to an extent that will meet some acceptable level of nutritional standards in terms of a calorie, protein and minerals which the body needs; the possession of the means by the people to acquire (i.e. access) and reasonable continuity and consistency in its supply (Davies, 2009). In other words, food security can be taken to mean access by all people at all times to sufficient food for an active and health life. The World Food Summit plan of Action (1996) states that food insecurity occurs when people experience a large reduction in their sources of food and are unable to make up the difference through new strategies; the prevalence of malnutrition is abnormally high for most time of the year and this cannot be accounted for by either health or care factors; a large proportion of the population or group is using marginal or unsuitable strategies; and people are using —coping strategies that are damaging to their livelihoods in the longer term or incur some other unacceptable cost, such as acting illegally or immorally.

The concept of food security has expanded beyond the strict biological requirements of sustenance for survival. Food security does include consuming at a level adequate for physical and mental health and also includes the right to cultural preferences. It also includes obtaining the food in appropriate proportion (Robertson, 1990). Food security therefore involves interconnected domains, with questions of agriculture, society, environment, employment and income, marketing, health and nutrition, and public policy (Pottier, 1999). The FAO (1996) food security definition is adopted for this study as it reveals the multi-dimensional nature of the food security concept.

4. Rural Banditry-Food Security

Within the last decade, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the link between rural banditry and food security. Research evidence suggests that scourge of rural banditry has negatively affected food security. For instance, Lawal and Kyarem (2021)

examined the impact of banditry on food security in Katsina State. A mixture of purposive and random sampling techniques was adopted in the selection of the sample for the study. Findings from the study revealed that the banditry crisis has a significant negative impact on food security. Therefore, the study recommended that government should bring all relevant stakeholders in the affected areas together for dialogue and resolution of conflict for improved food security.

Mohammed, Umar, Olaleye, Pelemo, Ahmad, Mohammed and Umar (2021) assessed the effects of banditry on income and livelihoods of yam farmers/marketers in shiroro local government area of Niger state, Nigeria. The activities of bandits over the years have paralyzed economic activities since majority of the populace derived their livelihood from farming. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 197 yam marketers. Data were collected by structured questionnaire/interview scheduled and analyzed by multiple regression. The results revealed that banditry constituted a major challenge to the yam farmers. Hence, it was recommended that yam marketers should diversify into other income generating activities in order to improve their livelihood status and government should collaborate with village heads for provision of security for yam marketers.

Shehu, et al (2017) analyzed the menace of cattle rustling in north-west Nigeria. Descriptive statistics was incorporated with the aid of a structured questionnaire distributed to the seven (7) sampled local government areas of the state where scourge of banditry (cattle rustling, killing and kidnapping) was pervasive. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the menace of cattle rustling lead to the theft of livestock, loss of lives and properties as well as distortion in economic activities of the rural dwellers in the state.

Ladan and Matawalli (2020) studied the impacts of banditry on food security in Katsina state, Nigeria. Focus group discussion method is adopted in two groups of five persons each from the LGAs that are affected by banditry which are Jibia, Batsari, Safana, Faskari, and Dandume. The result showed that banditry has negatively affected food security in Katsina State. These negative impacts include killing and kidnapping of farmers, chasing of farmers out of their farmlands, seizing of farmlands, theft of cattle, burning and raiding of grain silos, and blocking of local trade routes. To this end, the study recommended that decisive measures should be adopted to tackle banditry for improved food security.

Gadzama et al. (2018) appraised rural banditry, causes and its effect on rural economy in Kamuku Forest in Birnin-Gwari local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria. The study used well-structured questionnaire to collect data from 300 randomly selected respondents. The findings showed that the presence of Kamuku Forest make rural bandits have safe haven to engage in cattle rustling, looting of farms produce, kidnapping, raping and armed robbery in the study area. Consequently, it was suggested that all concerned stakeholders should work together to bring to an end the menace of banditry.

Owolabi, Oladimeji, Ojeleye and Omokore (2016) used logistic regression analysis to determine the effects of farmers-pastoralists conflicts on food security in two local government areas of Kaduna state, Nigeria. The study obtained data through a well-structured

questionnaire. Result from data analysis indicates that age, marital status and the size of farmland of farmer play an influential role in the conflicts between the pastoralists and farmers. Findings also suggest a positive and significant effect of conflicts on food security.

In the same vein, several studies (Jaafar, 2018; Kuna & Ibrahim, 2016; Mashi, 2017; Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Sardauna, 2020) have affirmed that increasing incidence of rural banditry has affected both human and food security negatively because it endangers the lives of people in the rural, disrupts agricultural activities and truncates agricultural produce. As a result, the scholars suggest that Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) should deploy agro-rangers corps to the states to provide security to enable farmers carryout their activities without fear of attacks, more sophisticated arms and ammunition should be provided for the security forces to eliminate the bandits, and the influx of criminal bandits who used to disguise as nomadic pastoralists into Nigeria should be strictly controlled in order to enhance human safety sand food security.

Despite the contributions of the earlier studies and war against bandit-terrorists, scourge of rural banditry was very much pervasive particularly in the north-west region. So far, however, there have not been any contributions on economic implications and clear-cut recommendations with effective implementation. Recommendations generated from rural banditry-food security literature are not explicit to allow for sustainable solution. Consequently, the current study seeks to provide a more comprehensive investigation into the banditry-food security nexus in Nigeria with a view to offer economic implications and clear-cut recommendations capable of generating lasting and sustainable solutions to forestall scourge of banditry and food crisis in Nigeria's north-west region.

5. Economic Implications Of Food Crisis

Nigeria's agricultural sector is a significant part of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Between July and September 2021, the agriculture contributed to almost 30% of the total GDP, an increase by about 6% point compared to the previous quarter, and providing employment for about 70 percent of the labour force (NBS, 2021). Agriculture is a key activity for Nigeria's economy after oil. Nevertheless, scourges of rural banditry have stifled agricultural productivity affecting the sector's contribution to the country's GDP as well as increased food imports due to population rise hence declining levels of food sufficiency. For instance, food production growth rates are estimated to be 1.36 percent in the third quarter Of 2021, which lags behind the growth rate of food demand at 6.5 percent (NBS, 2021).

Low food production and rapid increases in population shifted Nigeria from being self-sufficient in food production in the 1960s to being heavily dependent on food imports in the recent years. In four years (2016-2019), Nigeria's cumulative agricultural import stood at ₦3.35 trillion, four times higher than the agricultural export of ₦803 billion within the same period. The consequence of import-export imbalance is evident in the Nigeria's agricultural trade deficit widened by ₦689.7 billion in 2019 compared to ₦549.3 billion in 2018 (AfCFTA, 2020). Study by Nyangito (2011) has shown that cheap food imports reduce the market for already stifled domestic food products and leave many farmers and workers in

agricultural related industries without a source of income. This means that even if low-cost food supplies are plentiful, many people will be unable to purchase them. This is particularly so when the imports dampen domestic producers prices thereby reducing incentives to produce.

Growing dependence on food imports depreciates the naira value and makes Nigeria vulnerable to fluctuating food prices. The spike in nation food prices caused inflation to rise from 9.62 percent in November of 2011 to 20.6 percent in June of 2022, and the share of household income spent on food for the same period increased from 45 percent in 2008 to 101 percent in 2022 (Business Day, 2022; Trading Economics, 2022). Soaring food prices disproportionately hurt the poor. This is especially true where people spend a majority of their income on food and rely on a specific food product. The net effect of high food prices is a rise in the number of the poor. The World Bank (2021) estimates that several million of Nigerians have fallen into poverty as a result of higher food Prices.

Food price inflation may induce some lower-income consumers to avert other critical purchasing decisions such as routine healthy care visits, prescriptions, or insurance coverage in order to feed their families. Persistent rising of food price without immediate control may induce central bank of Nigeria to raise interest rates, hurting those who borrow money or depend on income from investments adversely impacted by rising interest rates. Where the consequences of food price inflation and other food related economic variables are left unaddressed economic stability must eventually be undermined or worsen.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

That scourge of rural banditry is a major threat to food security is not in doubt. This has been affirmed and established in the literature. Consequently, the current study concludes that rural banditry disrupts agricultural activities, creates food crisis and distorts economic activities of the rural dwellers in the study area. Therefore, this study provides the following explicit recommendations to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders. If the suggestions are considered and implemented as they should, may help mitigate scourge of rural banditry and government will be able to alleviate food supply deficits and stabilize escalating uncertainty around food prices in Nigeria.

- i. All arms and levels of governments must declare war against bandits. Both the federal and state governments must be ready to fund the security forces with logistics and adequate sophisticated arms and ammunition to confront and crush the bandit-terrorists and their sponsors headlong. The securities forces must strategically coordinate all out offensive against the terrorists and simultaneously launch military operations in all the troubled states in order to put a final end to the scourge of banditry.
- ii. Furthermore, the military should carpet-bomb and hit hard the forests which are providing refuge for the terrorists. The assaults must continue until the dare-devils could no longer feel safe or use the forest as bases and hideout. Although, there may

be collateral damage, but it is better to wipe out the bandit-terrorists and get people back to the communities so that agriculture and rural economies can pick up again.

- iii. This paper also suggests community policing, state police and a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) approach to policing to supplement the operations of security agencies. No amount of military deployment can check the activities of the bandits without the locals' involvement through the vigilantes. It is essential to engage highly motivated local vigilantes and community watch groups who better understand the terrain with guarantee to fully support their families should they be killed in action. Such policing must deal with the region's peculiar circumstances of diverse borderlines, forestlands and the Northwest's hinterlands where bandits and terrorists operate. This requires a tactical synergy between grassroots vigilantes and the state security operatives.
- iv. The criminal elements are being assisted by sponsors, collaborators and a network of informants in many of our communities. The Department of State Security and traditional institution must be ready and proactive to mobilize their networks to expose these sponsors, collaborators and informants and support the security forces with intelligence gathering. Death penalty should be meted out on any perpetrators and accomplices of banditry found guilty irrespective of their socio-political status.
- v. It is recommended that there should be both aerial and ground surveillance patrol along all Nigeria borders and the suspected bandit's hideouts in the forest to check the influx of foreign nomads who are mostly suspected of smuggling dangerous weapons, such as rifle, pistol, machine gun and ammunitions to Nigeria through porous borders. This would assist greatly for early detection of arrival and settlement of bandits in the forestlands.
- vi. Recommended, among others, that neighboring countries of Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroon bordering with Nigeria should collectively monitor and secure borders to checkmate movement of bandits who usually travelled along the porous borders with rustled livestock, arms and ammunitions escaping from the scene of crimes to a more safer places in order to dispose up the rustled livestock and acquire additional arms and ammunitions for the continuation of their nefarious acts.
- vii. Governments at all levels should come up with credible re-orientation programmes to inculcate ethical values, the need to co-exist irrespective of religious or ethnic inclinations and reverence for life in the people. It must be added that a lot more needs to be done in respect of societal values in order to moderate the prevailing materialist consciousness and predilection that pervade the Nigerian society.
- viii. Nigerian government should *come up with poverty alleviation and employment opportunities programmes directed towards addressing high incidence of poverty and banditry among youths in the rural communities.*
- ix. Globally, countries like US and UK rule out ransom payments to kidnappers, arguing that such payments fuel the appetite for additional kidnapping operations. The best way to stop abductions is to remove the incentive. Hence, payment of kidnap ransom

should be discouraged, and possibly criminalized, so as to discourage quest kidnapping.

- x. It is also worth noting, that in recent time, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) have stressed that bandits carry their heinous acts while high under the influence of narcotics. The agency has maintained that insecurity can be successful tamed through collaborative efforts. Consequently, this paper recommends that suppliers, vendors and traffickers of hard drug and intoxicants must be dealt with decisively. Likewise, parents, religious and community leaders have a role to play in the fight against illicit drugs/substance pervading most households within our neighborhoods. This should be considered a fight for all and not only for the Government.
- xi. Government should pursue national food policy which seeks to assure all citizens access to food supply that is reasonably priced, relatively safe, adequate in quantity, and nutritious. This could be achieved either by trade liberation or by subsidies for agricultural products and food items. Local governments should increase the number of marketplaces in densely populated communities to make access to food items easier and to reduce the burden of costs associated with transportation to markets. Besides, protection of arable lands and all resources on and under the ground must be enhanced to guarantee sustainable agricultural production. Above all, food security status should be an annual assessment exercise by the relevant institution to help prepare for mitigation, preparedness, and intervention on factors most likely to make households food- insecure.
- xii. It is the candid submission of this paper that conscientious implementation of these measures would go a long way in addressing the scourge of rural banditry and food crisis in Nigeria's north-west.

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