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IMPACT OF BANDITRY ON LOCAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN BENUE SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF NIGERIA: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Farmers are displaced from their lands, markets are deserted, and supply chains are disrupted, leading to food insecurity and loss of income. This study examined the Impact of Banditry on Economic Sustainability in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria. The study area includes Ado, Agatu, Apa, Ogbadibo and Okpokwu LGAs. The estimated population of the selected LGA for this study is 1,015,400 inhabitants. The sample size of 400 was carefully selected using Random sampling techniques. The study revealed that poverty, unemployment, political marginalization, land disputes especially herder-farmer conflicts, and the proliferation of small arms are the major drivers of banditry in Benue South. Also, the study found that trade and farming is adversely affected as many farmers abandon their farms while traders abandon their shops or reduces operations due to insecurity. Finally, the study revealed that community cohesion is weakened, which further limits the potential for collective economic recovery and resilience. The study concluded that banditry in Benue South Senatorial District is driven by a combination of economic hardship, political neglect, and social fragmentation. Based on the findings, the study recommended that government should adopt comprehensive, multidimensional strategies that address these root causes. Government at all levels should prioritize poverty alleviation and job creation by implementing rural economic development programs, particularly those that empower youths and women through vocational training, access to credit, and support for agro-processing and small-scale enterprises.

Keywords: Banditry, Economic activities, Socio-economic

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Introduction

Banditry has emerged as a pressing security threat in Nigeria, especially in agrarian communities where farmers and traders form the backbone of local economies. Benue South Senatorial District, known for its agricultural productivity and vibrant trade, has experienced increasing incidents of banditry, leading to the destruction of lives, displacement of communities, and disruption of economic activities. These attacks, often involving armed groups, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and looting, have significantly affected the socio-economic wellbeing of residents (Okoli & Ugwu, 2022). The persistence of such criminal activities undermines economic sustainability by reducing productivity, discouraging investment, and eroding livelihoods. Understanding the roots and consequences of banditry is essential for formulating effective strategies to mitigate its impact.

Banditry has economic implications beyond direct financial losses. For example, businesses affected by theft or organized crime might incur substantial indirect costs, including increased insurance premiums, reduced property values, and loss of customer trust (Smith, 2019). Furthermore, the increased cost of law enforcement and security to combat these activities diverts public resources from other critical areas, creating a negative multiplier effect on the economy (National Retail Federation, 2021). Notably, organized theft has escalated into a significant problem within the retail sector, with industry leaders highlighting its impact on both profit margins and employee safety (Johnson & Anderson, 2021).

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During the Wild West era in the 19th century, the United States had its share of banditry, which disrupts both local and national economies by affecting key sectors, such as retail, finance, and logistics, impacting economic sustainability through losses, increased security costs, and undermining investor confidence (Ellis, 2020). In Europe, Asia and other developed climes, cyber-banditry, or cybercrime, poses a modernized threat to economic sustainability; especially given its reliance on technology and digital infrastructure. Cybercriminals often employ ransomware attacks, data breaches, and financial fraud, leading to losses in the billions of dollars annually (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2020).

In pre-colonial Africa, banditry was often linked to inter-group conflicts and trade route robberies. The lack of centralized governance in many regions created opportunities for bandit groups to flourish, especially along major trade routes like the Trans-Saharan and East African caravan routes. These groups targeted traders, often seeking to exploit the wealth flowing through these corridors (Keita, 1998).

During the colonial era, banditry increased in response to the disruption of traditional governance systems and the imposition of colonial economic policies. Many individuals, displaced by colonial land reforms or forced labour policies, turned to banditry as a means of survival. In regions in Africa, such groups often framed their actions as resistance against colonial authorities, blurring the lines between banditry and political rebellion (Brennan, 2008).

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In Nigeria, banditry has become a significant security threat, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Armed groups engage in cattle rustling, kidnapping, and attacks on villages. Scholars argue that the lack of effective governance and security provision in rural areas has enabled such groups to operate with relative impunity (Hassan, 2020). During the pre-colonial period, what is now Benue State was characterise by communal farming practices and trade. Banditry at this time was limited but primarily linked to conflicts between neighboring communities over land and resources. The introduction of colonial rule disrupted traditional governance structures and introduced new systems of taxation and land tenure, which created economic dislocations. These changes laid the groundwork for future security challenges, including banditry.

The origin of banditry in the Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria can be traced to a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors that have evolved over time. Historically, the region has been characterised by a predominantly agrarian economy, where farming and livestock rearing constitute the primary sources of livelihood for the majority of the population. However, the increasing competition for land and natural resources exacerbated by rapid population growth and the adverse effects of climate change has heightened tensions among various socio-economic groups, particularly between the business community, farmers, and nomadic herders. These tensions escalated significantly in the 2000s and reached a critical point between 2014 and 2016, during which

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time Fulani militias launched coordinated attacks on several communities including Agatu Local Government Area. According to official estimates and civil society reports, the Agatu attacks in early 2016 alone resulted in the deaths of over 300 individuals, with some sources estimating up to 500 fatalities and the displacement of more than 7,000 residents (International Crisis Group, 2017; Premium Times, 2016). Between 2013 and 2017, local government records and humanitarian assessments report that approximately 6,000 lives were lost in Agatu as a result of sustained conflict, with nearly 2,000 of these deaths occurring in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps (Aondofa, 2021). Moreover, the economic consequences of these conflicts have been profound, with the Agatu attacks alone causing property losses estimated at ₦65 billion (approximately $204 million), and broader regional instability leading to an estimated $13.7 billion in lost annual revenue across affected Middle Belt states (International Crisis Group, 2017). In this context, the persistent insecurity and lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms have contributed to the transformation of localized resource disputes into organized criminality, with banditry emerging as both a mechanism of economic survival and a manifestation of the breakdown of traditional security and governance structures (Adeleke, 2020).

Statement of the problem

The prevalence of banditry in Benue South has reached alarming levels, posing grave consequences for economic sustainability. Farmers are displaced from their lands, markets are deserted, and supply chains are disrupted, leading to food insecurity and loss of income. Despite efforts by security agencies, the attacks persist, revealing deep-rooted socio-political and economic factors fueling the crisis (Adewumi & Adeniran, 2023). Moreover, there is a dearth of empirical studies focusing specifically on the localized impact of banditry in Benue South on economic actor such as farming and trading. This gap in knowledge hinders targeted policy intervention and sustainable development planning. The study, therefore, seeks to explore the root causes, socio-economic impacts, and sustainability challenges of banditry within this region.

The economic ramifications of banditry are profound as rural economies are being destroyed, local investments are shrinking, and poverty levels are rising. The Benue South population, which is predominantly made up of small-scale farmers and traders, are being pushed further into economic hardship as their means of livelihood are continually threatened due to the persistent activities of bandits. Benue South is known for agricultural business which involves supplies of farm products to neighboring states across the country but due to banditry, these activities are negatively impacted. Despite efforts by the government and security agencies to reduce or eradicate the activities of bandits in Benue South, the menace of banditry persists, raising questions about the long-term economic viability of the region. As such, this study seeks to investigate the specific impacts of banditry on the economic sustainability of Benue South especially as it affects farmers and traders and explore possible measures to address these challenges.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of banditry on economic sustainability in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

i. Examine the underlying causes of banditry in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria as it affects farming and trade;
ii. Assess the socio-economic impact of banditry on local economic activities in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria as it affects farming and trade;

Literature Review

The conceptual review for this study is based on the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, The framework illustrates the hypothesized relationships between these variables and provides the foundation for the empirical analysis conducted in this research, aimed at examining the courses and effect of banditry in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria among farmers and traders.

Concept of Banditry

Banditry is an act of robbery and violence committed by groups of criminals, often in rural or lawless areas. It involves organized crime, where armed groups engage in activities such as looting, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and attacking villages or travelers. Banditry is often associated with regions experiencing weak law enforcement, political instability, or economic hardship. Banditry has been defined in contemporary contexts by various authors as a form of organized criminal activity involving armed violence, often targeting individuals, communities, or institutions for economic gain, political motives, or survival.

Mohammed and Abdullahi (2023) define banditry as encompassing armed robbery, sexual assault, and raiding, often with the intent of generating economic benefits or political leverage. It is marked by acts such as kidnappings, destruction of villages, and cattle rustling, making it a severe humanitarian concern. Osasona (2023) frames banditry as a form of organized crime deeply embedded in the illicit economy. This perspective emphasizes its adaptive and flexible nature, where groups are led by independent "bandit lords" and operate through opportunistic networks rather than hierarchical structures. The Nigerian National Security Strategy (2021) differentiates banditry from terrorism and violent extremism, associating it more with economic drivers, such as poverty and unemployment, particularly in regions like northern Nigeria. Here, banditry often arises from governance failures, including poor policing and unresolved communal conflicts.

Agene and Edache (2023) define banditry as a spectrum of violent criminal activities, including robbery, kidnapping, and cattle rustling, predominantly in rural and peri-urban areas. They argue that banditry is driven by economic desperation, weak institutional presence, and the proliferation of small arms in fragile states. Udo and Oyedepo (2022) describe banditry as organized criminal activity where perpetrators exploit governance voids, focusing on high-reward, low-risk operations such as raiding villages and abducting individuals for ransom. They highlight that the socioeconomic impact of banditry extends beyond immediate victims to disrupt entire communities and economies. Okonkwo (2022) frames banditry as a response to socio-economic inequalities and environmental pressures, such as resource scarcity. Okonkwo's definition emphasizes that while banditry is primarily economically motivated, its roots often lie in unresolved socio-political grievances. Aliyu and Gidado (2023) identify banditry as a critical security issue characterised by its fluid organization and localized impact. They note that bandit groups often evolve from other criminal networks, complicating efforts to address them through conventional law enforcement mechanisms.

Okoro (2022) viewed banditry as a blend of socio-economic and criminal behaviors driven by the search for resources or political motives, often occurring in rural or semi-rural settings where state authority is minimal. Adamu and Hassan (2023) view banditry as organized violent activities involving theft, extortion, and abduction, primarily in regions with poor governance and inadequate policing. It thrives on socio-economic inequalities and weak institutional structures. Ijewere and Okechukwu (2023) conceptualize banditry as both a socio-political and economic problem, where perpetrators are driven by grievances, resource competition, or financial incentives.

Banditry has been defined in contemporary contexts by various authors as a form of organized criminal activity involving armed violence, often targeting individuals, communities, or institutions for economic gain, political motives, or survival. Boukhars and Pilgram (2023) describe banditry as a symptom of rural distress, where individuals or groups resort to armed robbery and attacks in ungoverned or weakly governed areas, often fueled by systemic neglect and insecurity. Odalonu and Egbogu (2022) conceptualize banditry as part of broader national security threats, involving the deliberate use of violence to disrupt social and economic activities, often targeting vulnerable populations and infrastructural networks in Nigeria. Okoro (2022) frames banditry in Nigeria within a security and developmental context, highlighting its role in exacerbating insecurity and hampering national growth due to its impact on agriculture, education, and commerce. Invariably banditry may be defined as opportunistic violent attacks that exploit weak law enforcement and governance, where bandits use small arms to terrorize, kill, steal resources, and abduct for ransom, knowing that law enforcement mechanism is weak. Banditry is presently driven by economic gain, political motives, or survival.

Concept of Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability has been defined by various authors with an emphasis on balancing economic growth with environmental and social considerations to ensure long-term viability. According to Master Class (2022), it involves decision-making principles and practices aimed at achieving growth without environmentally harmful trade-offs. This approach prioritizes sustainable resource use, reduction of waste, and investments in renewable energy to preserve the planet's resources for future generations. Additionally, Clement et al. (2014) define economic sustainability as organizing economic activities in an efficient and equitable manner to support employment and well-being for both current and future generations. This underscores the need for economic systems that can maintain environmental integrity while meeting human needs.

According to D'Amato et al. (2017), economic sustainability is defined as the capacity of an economy to support a defined level of economic production indefinitely. This definition emphasizes that sustainable economic practices must ensure the longevity of economic activities while minimizing negative impacts on the environment. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD, 2021) defines economic sustainability as the ability of an economy to generate wealth while ensuring that the benefits are distributed equitably across society. This definition highlights the importance of inclusivity, suggesting that economic systems should work towards reducing disparities and enhancing quality of life for all individuals.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the impact of banditry on economic sustainability in Benue south senatorial district of Benue State, a theoretical review is essential in order to set the foundation of grasping the study problem from a theoretical lens. This study draws on the theoretical foundations that align with its objectives, offering a comprehensive approach to the subject matter. The failed state theory will be used for this study. The theory gives theoretical insights into combating banditry.

Failed State Theory

Helman and Ratner (1993) proposed the failed state idea, which was popularized by Rotberg (2002). The primary premise of this theory is that the state, which has the constitutional responsibility of safeguarding and delivering welfare to its population, has failed to do so due to weak institutions and poor leadership. According to Rotberg (2002, p.12), failed nations have a rise in criminal and political violence, a loss of border control, increased ethnic-, religious-, linguistic-, and cultural conflicts, and a loss of control over natural resources. Also, they are characterised with weak institutions, deteriorating or insufficient infrastructure, the inability to collect taxes without undue force, a health-care system that has disintegrated, and so forth. Infant mortality is rising, life expectancy is reducing, regular schooling possibilities are dwindling, and GDP per capita is falling. A government operating in the abovementioned circumstances is typically subjected to growing challenges on its core legitimacy. All of the failing state's symptoms are causally linked. As the state's capability

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deteriorates, rulers increasingly operate only for their personal profit. As people feel increasingly alienated and excluded, key interest groups' commitment to the state dwindles. As a result, the social compact that ties citizens and central structures is forfeited," as Rotberg (2002) puts it, citizens seek alternate forms of identity and pledge their loyalty to community warlords and ethnic leaders, fueling internal anarchy (Rotberg, 2002).

Causes of banditry in Benue South, Nigeria

Banditry in Benue South Senatorial District of Nigeria has become an alarming societal issue, driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. The underlying causes of this crime reflect systemic challenges, ranging from economic deprivation to political corruption, social inequality, and cultural erosion. Understanding these causes requires an in-depth exploration of their intricacies to inform effective policy interventions. This sub-section discusses and lays bare some of these causal factors.

Horner (2007) highlight that economic gain is a primary motivation behind many cases of banditry, hostage-taking, particularly kidnapping for ransom. Poverty and unemployment exacerbate this phenomenon, as individuals in economically marginalized communities often resort to crime as a survival strategy. The widening disparity between rich and poor further fuels resentment and desperation, particularly as global media and the internet expose the lavish lifestyles of the wealthy (Catlin Group, 2012). Olajuyigbe et al. (2016) argue that urbanization and the escalating poverty rate in developing countries, including Nigeria, contribute significantly to the rise of criminal activities such as banditry. With unemployment estimated at 13.7% (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023), many unemployed graduates and able-bodied youths are drawn into criminal enterprises.

Unemployment, particularly among the youth, is a critical factor that drives individuals toward banditry. Inyang (2009) describes unemployment as a psychological trigger for negative attitudes toward society, with many young individuals attributing their failure to systemic neglect. This frustration, combined with societal pressure to meet financial responsibilities, often leads to involvement in criminal activities, including banditry. Moreover, as Odoma and Akor (2019) note, the lack of viable employment opportunities has normalized criminal behaviour, making banditry a lucrative and widespread venture.

The role of political patronage in fostering banditry cannot be overstated. Politicians often engage idle youths as thugs during election campaigns, only to abandon them afterward. These armed and trained individuals, left without financial support or legitimate opportunities, often turn to bandits to sustain themselves (Ene, 2018). The parallels between Nigeria’s current situation and the post-civil war era are striking. Just as discharged soldiers from the 1970s Nigerian Civil War turned to armed robbery due to lack of reintegration support, politically patronized thugs today resort to banditry, kidnapping and other criminal ventures, leveraging their skills and access to weapons to engage in criminal activities (Ene, 2018).

Socio-Economic impact of Banditry on Local Economic Activities

The socio-economic impact of banditry on local economic activities in Benue South, Nigeria, especially as it affects farming and trade, is profound and multifaceted. Banditry is characterised by armed robbery, kidnapping, and extortion, has severely disrupted the agricultural and commercial activities that are vital to the livelihoods of local communities. The prevalence of these violent crimes has led to significant economic destabilization, particularly affecting small-scale and subsistence farmers who form the backbone of the region's agricultural sector (Tsavhemba, 2021). The immediate effects of banditry include the abandonment of farms, as farmers are often forced to flee their fields due to threats to their safety. This abandonment results in reduced agricultural output, which not only diminishes household incomes but also exacerbates food insecurity within the region (Usu, 2024).

Moreover, banditry has led to the disruption of commercial activities, as markets become less accessible and safe for both vendors and consumers. The fear of kidnapping and extortion has driven many traders away from rural markets, leading to a decline in trade and economic interactions within these communities (Usu, 2024). This disruption is compounded by the out-right migration of rural populations seeking safer environments,

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which further depletes the local labour force and diminishes economic activities (Usu, 2024). The socio-economic implications extend beyond immediate financial losses. Increased expenditures on personal security measures have become a necessity for many households, diverting funds away from productive investments in agriculture and other entrepreneurial activities (Tsavhemba, 2021). Additionally, the psychological impact of living under constant threat contributes to a climate of fear that stifles economic innovation and growth. The persistent nature of banditry continues to pose significant challenges to economic stability and development in Benue South (Usu, 2024).

Challenges posed by Banditry on Economic Sustainability in Benue South

The challenges posed by banditry on economic sustainability in Benue South, Nigeria, are multifaceted and deeply detrimental to the region's socio-economic fabric. Banditry is characterised by violent criminal activities such as kidnapping, extortion, and armed robbery, has significant implications for local economies, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is the primary livelihood. This decline in food production not only affects local consumption but also reduces the availability of agricultural products in markets, leading to increased prices and inflation, which disproportionately impacts low-income households (Tsavhemba, 2021). The fear of violence has also deterred farmers and businesses from engaging in their usual farming and trading activities, further exacerbating the decline in agricultural productivity and businesses (Usu, 2024).

Additionally, banditry has severely affected local trade and commerce. Markets, which are vital for economic exchange, have become unsafe, leading to reduced participation from both vendors and consumers. The resultant decline in market activities stifles economic interactions and diminishes income opportunities for traders and small business owners (Tsavhemba, 2021). This disruption not only affects the immediate economic landscape but also undermines the potential for economic diversification and growth in the region. The pervasive fear and anxiety associated with violence create an environment of mistrust among community members, hindering cooperation and collective economic initiatives. This atmosphere stifles entrepreneurial activities, as potential investors are discouraged by the risks associated with operating in an insecure environment (Usu, 2024). Consequently, the lack of investment further limits economic opportunities and growth.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the persistent threat and occurrence of banditry disrupt the normal functioning of economic systems by undermining agricultural productivity, discouraging investment, impairing trade, and displacing communities from their sources of livelihood. Such disruptions compromise not only short-term economic output but also the capacity for long-term

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development, as they erode the physical and institutional structures upon which sustained economic engagement depends.

It is concluded that persistent insecurity fundamentally undermines the structural and functional capacity of the economy to sustain long-term development. Banditry disrupts productive activities, erodes public and private investments, displaces labour, and damages essential infrastructure, all of which are critical components for maintaining a resilient and self-sustaining economy. The implication is that without addressing the prevalence of banditry, efforts toward economic sustainability will remain fragile, as the conditions necessary for consistent growth, resource regeneration, and intergenerational welfare are persistently compromised.

Recommendations

i. The study recommended that targeted economic development initiatives such as skill acquisitions be prioritized as part of a broader security and peace building agenda.

ii. Government agencies, development partners, and local stakeholders should intensify efforts to stimulate local economies through the provision of access to credit, infrastructural support, and the creation of employment opportunities tailored to the unique needs of the region.

iii. Government and development actors must strengthen the capacity of security institutions to prevent and respond to banditry, and also

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the incorporation of community-based security frameworks that engage local stakeholders in peace building efforts, while simultaneously implementing measures that rebuild local economies and restore public confidence.

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