

Rural Banditry and the Crisis of Peace-Building in Northern Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Rural banditry along with its associated crimes of cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom and students abductions has recently become a major concern in Northern Nigeria. This ugly phenomenon poses serious threat to national security as people are being attacked, robbed or even killed, properties being looted while villages, farmlands, markets and schools are also being raided across some major towns and cities in the North. Governments at different levels introduced distinct policies and strategies in addressing the mayhem, yet the situation has exacerbated with serious consequences. It was based on this background the study set out to understand the root causes of rural banditry as well as the reasons why despite government's efforts at curtailing this insecurity and other atrocities perpetrated by these bandits, the problem still persists and continues to worsen. The study adopted descriptive and historical methods while data was generated from the documentary sources that were analyzed qualitatively. The paper used the predatory theory of government as its theoretical frame-work for analysis. The study revealed that rural banditry in the North is even more violent and militarized, hence, the task of achieving peace building is an immense one as the government is either unwilling or unable to face the challenge while the groups are insatiable for more wealth. The paper thus, recommends among other things; the practice of good governance, commitment of all in addressing the root causes of banditry and the adoption of the appropriate socio-economic policies towards uplifting the living standard of the people in order to attain the desired peace in the region.

Keywords: Crisis, Rural Banditry, Peace Building, Northern Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigeria has been suffering from the acts of terrorist groups; Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, political violence and other forms of criminalities which thrive to complicate the problems of poverty, unemployment and insecurity not only to the disadvantaged groups of the population but even to the elites and government in power [1,2,3,4]. This creates a complex situation of insecurity which seems difficult for the government to find a lasting solution because various groups and interests exploit the situation improving or redefining their economy, political strength, power position and or even creates an expanded network of clients at all cost [5,6]. Although Nigeria has been seized by various forms of insecurity; ranging from militancy in the Niger-Delta region, the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, ethno-religious crises across the major cities of the North, and now the widespread phenomenon of rural banditry

especially in most parts of the North-Western and North-Central regions of the country, the issue of rural banditry has always been accentuating as neither the federal government nor state governments' effort seem to have provided a genuine solution to resolve it [7,8,9]. Despite both human and material resources deployed to curb it, all efforts are grossly becoming abortive leading people to lose confidence in government and demonstrate their hysteria for the security of their personal life and properties across the country [10,11,12]. These harmful effects of rural banditry adversely affects different social groups particularly those communities in the rural areas who are becoming more vulnerable due to the lack of effective government control or its total absence in those areas [13,14,15]. The bandits in their incessant attacks have no regards for any social category; they attack men, women, children, marketers, passersby,

schools to mention a few. In fact, some state governors (such as those of Kano, Katsina and Zamfara) have negotiated and signed peace-accords with a number of armed bandits operating in their various states in order to resolve the problems and enhance more security [16,17]. Despite some recorded successes manifested in the reduction in the rate of attacks at the time, release of kidnap victims, retrieval of many rustled cattle and recovery of weapons, yet, the phenomenon continued spreading and deteriorating daily across the region [18]. This continues to pose serious security threats to various agreements reached between these rural bandits and various state governments with renewed attacks, cattle rustling, kidnap of people and demand for ransom, thereby leading to further deterioration of the general security situation. For instance, between November, 2019 and May, 2020, rural banditry resulted in the death of 1,058 people, rustling of over 10,000 cattle, destruction of 2,688 hectares of farmlands and 10,000 houses respectively, loss of 147,800 vehicles and motorcycles as well as displacement of hundreds thousands of persons [19,20]. Rural banditry has now reached its climax with widespread abductions for

THEORETICAL FRAME-WORK

The study adopts [5] predatory theory of government. The theory was propounded by scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm, Howard Becker and Olson Mancur among others [4,7]. For this theory, a predatory government is composed of individuals whose primary aim is all about furthering their own interest instead of the notion of collective goods of all in the state. Government exists to provide public goods to its citizens and any failure to do so will lead to economic and social crises which may result in insecurity, underdevelopment and social mistrust among different social groupings. Predatory theory of the state emphasized the role of government policy in promoting or impeding development, mutual relations and social security in a state [6,8,9]. The theory's major tenets is the belief in the direct relationship

oftentimes resulting in wanton killings. The bandits now operate with impunity and as a result, about 70,000 people have fled North-West region to Niger Republic since April, 2019 with over 30,000 unreported deaths [21,22,23]. All these pointers to the complexities and crisis of governance associated with the Nigeria state system to effectively address the prevailing problems in the country such as rural banditry and its socio-economic implications [24,25,26]. The present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari pledged at inception to focus on three key issues in the country in the area of fighting insecurity, corruption, together with the revamping of Nigeria's battered economy as the only solution to addressing the nation's problems. On the contrary, however, the government seems unenthusiastic and the national elites hijacked and appear to be frustrating any peace-building efforts thereby preventing local institutions from properly connecting with other segments of the society. Albeit government's efforts to resolve the problem of rural banditry through security deployment and surveillance, the situation seem to be deteriorating, a problem that degenerated "from crisis of nomadism to state crisis" [27,28].

between endogenous government policy and the prospects of people in the society in relation to economic development, social security and maintenance of law and order because, where the political system is controlled by a group of elite whose primary aim is to satisfy their own personal interest, there will be prevalence of social insecurity such as banditry. As a result, bandits break any law enforced by a predatory government which people have no sympathy as they assume to benefit from any affront against the autocrats hence, banditry becomes a mechanism for checks and balance on state power and provides a system of rules and accompanying enforcement where government fails to do so [9]. Even though, the theory acknowledges that banditry poses a lot of implications, harm and costs to the society because bandits

are violent, ruthless and indiscriminating in their exploitation but, [20] averred that banditry unintentionally increases welfare of citizens by opposing unpopular laws and mitigating harms arising from dysfunctional and predatory government. In other words, bandits tend to seize the opportunity of the vacuum created by dysfunctional governments and fill the gap. The incidence of bad policy is puzzling because even self-serving regimes would have an incentive to promote development if they could extract enough of the resulting wealth. However, policies which promote economic development, while generating prosperity, may simultaneously alter the distribution of political power in a way

LITERATURE REVIEW ON RURAL BANDITRY

Banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or markets raids through the use of force or threat of it to intimidate and or coerce people in order to rob, rape or kill (Okoli and Egwu, 2019). Thus, banditry is a highly organized, coordinated and syndicated network of actors in perpetrating their criminal activities across places and communities for the sake of looting peoples properties mostly in the country side or in the rural areas with incidences of stealing, cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery and

PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL BANDITRY AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN NIGERIA

The prevalent occurrences of rural banditry in the country are perceived to be motivated by armed bandit gangs as ultimate consequences of the growing number of ungoverned spaces where effective government control was very rare and ineffective, hence, deteriorating human conditions due to growing economic collapse and decaying infrastructural facilities. This endangered

“The key assumption is that a nation cannot be secured if it fails to address issues of governance, unemployment and corruption, all of which can subvert the rule of law and undermine the welfare of the citizenry, even if the state has the most modernized army or the most sophisticated police force”.

Thus, in Nigeria, in spite of the abundant human and material resources with an increase in the GDP from \$1,555 to \$2,688 (The Economist, April 2, 2014), there is

that adversely affects groups initially in control of the political system. If the future gainers of power cannot make credible commitments, it may be better for those who control power to retain it rather than to promote development. By this, the government becomes a “stationary bandits” because policies that promote economic development and good institutions are inconsistent with the maintenance of status quo, hence, it gives elites an incentive to be predatory as society is highly mobilized politically [6,9]. This is why under autocracy, a state with abundant resources is likely to be poorer under a predatory rule and always grapple with social crisis such as banditry.

village raids as a result of gross deficit in governance [11]. This creates more complex issues in the political economy of the nation in the aspect of national security, food security, state-society relations and the endemic problems of inter-group relations especially in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria. This is further compounded by the power vacuum created between state authorities and rural population, which criminal elements, desperate politicians and or religious fanatics exploit to perpetrate their heinous acts [14].

human security as a result of persistent fear and frustrations from violence, want, and poverty. This, with its accompanying protracted insecurity is what motivated criminal gangs for economic opportunities as affected communities often experience the looting of their wealth and payment of ransom for kidnapping using scorched-earth tactics, hence Egwu, 2015 asserts:

still persistent recognition for the widespread of abject poverty, food insecurity, health and environmental challenges usually due to deficit in

governance. Ungoverned spaces enhance banditry with relative freedom to carry out their acts and prey on the powerless citizens along rural roads and communities in the forest where social life is very difficult. Because of the vicious and destructive nature of banditry, it becomes a gargantuan task before the state due to their capacity to strain government capacity by overwhelming security apparatus and legal system through sheer audacity and violence to challenge the legitimacy of the state [9].

Another perspective to rural banditry is the competition for the pastoral lands arising from the changing climatic conditions [5,8,9,14]. Intense competition for available rural resources due to exponential population growth is another source of banditry in Nigeria. Possession of large flock of cattle to rear around pastoral lands and their eventual encroachment into farmlands turn into conflicts with farmers, where farmers effort to seek for redress ultimately fails. This is because most humid zones see Fulanis through migratory drift as a new source of pressure and conflicts hence, grazing routes are either blocked and cultivated or they don't even exist at all even though, the 1965 grazing reserves law was established but in most states were only existing on paper [13]. Thus, rural banditry exhibited the crisis and the politics of identity relations between the pastoralist and the crop farmers during the trans human migration in search for good pastoral lands on the one hand, and the perceived social injustice and political marginalization of Nigeria state system by the herdsmen on the other hand hence, herdsmen became dangerously armed and fierce with crop farmers and other rural dwellers with impunity [11,16].

[6] argued that rural banditry and its associated crimes in Nigeria, could be linked to the government's quest for diversifying the nation's economy into

the non-oil sector as occasioned in the introduction of the elements of mechanized agriculture that allowed for the rapid multiplication of cattle, demand for more grazing lands outside the traditional settlements in addition to increasing farming due to an increase in the human population in the face of collapsing economy. This is sought for more access to land and it uses for food security and as such, the need to expand land, encroached cattle grazing routes and to meet the basic means of living in the face of dwindling economy. Furthermore, the monopoly control of government over land, and its subsequent politicization of ownership have become a defining criteria for political participation and access to public offices as well as economic resources thereby differentiating between the 'native and settlers' [13]. This means people go into banditry as a result of structural deprivation and frustration from the alienation in the distribution of resources and their inability to satisfy their desired means of livelihood.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the prevalence of unbearable social conditions in the society such as growing poverty, hunger, social distress and the general breakdown of law and order largely resulted into the flagrant violations of social values. Therefore, banditry is attached to social breakdown and the subsequent brigandage within the state. As such, the most important thing in rural banditry and other security challenges is particularly rooted in the state's inability to deliver which may not only make many to lose hope and confidence but, to also withdraw their loyalty and support for the government [13,16]. This weakens state legitimacy in the face of public social distrust on the political system due to the inability of government to deliver public goods which are monopolized for the neopatrimonial interest of leaders and their cronies.

CONCEPTUALIZING PEACE-BUILDING AND THE CRISIS OF ACHIEVING IT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RURAL BANDITRY

The former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 'Agenda for Peace'

defines peace-building as "actions to identify and support structures which

tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflicts" [13]. This allows people to resuscitate from conflict in order to be able to make positive contribution not only to their society but, also to the global stability and economic growth.

Peace-building is a long term and comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of any conflict in society aimed at ensuring peace and development. Peace-building becomes a "set of initiatives by diverse actors in government and civil society to address the root causes of violence and protect civilians before, during and after violent conflicts" [11]. Thus, peace-building is a situation in which violent conflicts are put at low level with high prospect for developmental initiatives while efforts and intervention aim at addressing the root causes of any conflict by examining the structural, relational and cultural issues surrounding individual and group relation especially to economic and political power relations in the society. The overall aims and objectives of peace-building is ultimately about dealing with economic despair, social injustice and political oppression as the most important sources of violence plaguing the system [8].

The interpretation and method for peace-building is guided by the underlining sources, parties and interests involved which are what conditioned the prospects of achieving peace or otherwise due to their psychological attachment to the causes as well as real or imagined implications of the conflicts. To achieve peace-building, four issues are very critical; integrated strategies, reconstruction and institution building, sustainable development and the coordination of all relevant actors into the conflicts. This is because, most governments give preference to liberal peace that focus on democratic values, good governance and market liberalization most of which favours foreign powers who exert a great deal of influence over local communities especially in other countries through their

national governments. By early 1990s, liberalism became the dominant ideology in the world and ushered in the new wave of democratization, democracy and capitalist economy which were quickly exported to other regions of the world with the ultimate goal of creating peaceful and democratic societies [15].

This approach is usually wrecked with some associated problems of power relations between 'expert's intervention agencies' and the local population who are rendered as mere passive recipient societies due to unequal power relations. Peace-building through such intervention came in different forms; peacekeeping missions (based on cease fires), the big-bang with its rapid democratization and marketization based on institutional transformation and value change particularly in relation to governance and state building processes where the interveners remain in the state until when the task of resolving conflicts is adequately completed [19]. Peace-building through such intervention is conditioned to be too coercive with unrealistic policies and exhibiting neo-colonial tendencies as a result of institutional, state-centric, ideological and technocratic red-tapism because of maneuvers on what mandate, resources, time-frame and the mode of operations.

However, there is peace-building from below, involving internal dynamics in the mobilization and utilization of the societal human and material resources in the process of peace-building thereby taking into cognizance those individuals and groups or actors into the conflicts. Because, to achieve sustainable peace according to this school, politics and political processes must come into play through the establishment of structures, institutions and secular cultures in which people are allowed to participate based on the liberal values of tolerance, bargaining and negotiation in resolving any societal issue. As such, people at the grassroots must be considered while government serves as a coordinating institution without the use of coercive force especially when the conflicts did not

threaten the interest of the ruling elites. But, where people at the grassroots are not incorporated into the process of peace-building, individuals and groups are unto themselves in the struggle for their interest and survival to the extent that "Mobs riot, students demonstrate, workers strike and soldiers organize coups" [11] hence, it aims at getting the foot soldiers who are the most active participants into the conflict in the spirit of going to address root causes of the conflict.

From the foregoing, there is complexity on how rural bandits are to be dismantled by government either voluntarily or through military enforcement in order to break their forces and weaken their organizational structures. The risk of this government enforced peace-building is in the tendency of creating security vacuum especially when peace-building process trigger fragmentation among the bandits hence, the return to violence by unsatisfied splinter groups [13]. This will be worsened with the feeling of unfairness and imbalance between the polarized pragmatist and radical groups who feel that their grievances will be addressed and their governance or reform claims are implemented. Arms management is another tricky issue area in the process of peace-building as bandits may see disarmament as defeat or surrender to the government and in the event of failure of any peace accord, they are bound to suffer a power parity. In this manner, bandits may put weapons beyond use rather than surrendering them hence, the fears of being targeted by either state element or rival group as a result of lack of confidence measures by the state. Thus, given the complex environmental situations of socio-economic problems, state weaknesses and general breakdown of social networks, reintegrating bandits for sustainable peace-building becomes a herculean task [17]. This is compounded by the feeling of resentment among the

"Establishing a system of election and supporting legislative and judicial bodies, is the primary action for democratic transition, which is complemented encouraging a strong civil society. Socio-economic transition aspires for the promotion of a thriving market economy in the stable space

fraction of the society who might envy unfair opportunities and privileges given to the bandits through negotiated peace agreement.

Peace-building is tied to the question of conflicts settlement and conflict resolution because the underlying cause (s) must be addressed to the extent that, it prevents any possibility for re-occurrence as all outstanding grievances are fairly dealt with. In the settlement, adversaries are coerced to accept a pre-planned solution enforced on them, by powerful third party leading to volatile social relations among rivals which could be overturned at any time. For this, conflict resolution provides durable, long term and self-supporting solutions to any form of conflicts by resolving all underlining causes of conflicts and establishing new and satisfactory relationships between the previously antagonistic parties [9].

From the above, peace-building involves two major dimensions; a state building and society building, the dichotomy that gives preference to capacity of state institutions, processes and security focusing on state legitimacy (building the state), while society building looks at the societal ability to be self-sufficient and self-regulating based on the generally accepted norms and practices, aimed at supporting the communities because of the state weaknesses.

State-building considers the effectiveness of the state and its institutions as the basic requisite for peace because, when state institutions are weak or collapsed, insecurity becomes prevalent and conflicts are imminent, as such, to guarantee peace, is to improve the capacity of the state institutions and to prevent the state from collapsing. This is achieved through democratic and socio-economic aspect of state formal and informal institutions that works well. As observes [8] that:

resulting through the previous actions. These target actions take place in the political spheres of the state”.

While society building emphasizes on bringing about self-sustaining peace through appropriate traditional and social context of people to political order, justice and ethics, peace-building aims at social peace process based on the restoration of broken relationships, the development of a sense of community and shared responsibility for the future

[13]. This deter the monopoly of state in collaboration with external actors to coerce local people to only ‘negative peace’ as socio-cultural residues to conflict may not be addressed. This dimension is thus, centered on people at the grassroots as everyday politics allows for relative equity unlike in the high politics monopolized by elite interest.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The prevalence of rural banditry and the crisis of peace-building particularly in northern Nigeria has shattered any optimism of Nigerians to get life easy and more abundant from the polity because of how rotten government and its institutions seem to be. Political leaders show some element of lackadaisical attitude towards ensuring peace-building and or are procrastinating measures against bandits and this gives some kind of warped sense of justice among people leading to the attachment of stereotyped sentiments into any sensitive issue affecting the body polity. This is in addition to the frustration of people due to poor economic performance in terms of public goods by the government leading to the massive flow of poor peasants and other poor migrants into the urban labour markets which lower wages that intensify exploitation and make life more difficult. With this, most Nigerians become disenchanted with the deteriorating socio-economic conditions leading to dashed hopes hence, the proliferation of rural banditry and general insecurity in the

nation. Thus, a weak state that cannot deliver for public good is prone to conflicts and insecurity as a result of lack of government presence in the ungoverned territories leading to the problems of social trust between citizens and state. Peace-building is usually a post-conflict process after violent hostilities end which is now followed by signing a ceasefire agreement by the warring parties. However, in modern day, peace-building is expected to precede all stages of conflicts; a stabilization, transitional and consolidation arrangements, which are the dynamic processes of conflict-to-peace transition that involve various actions by different stakeholders at different times. At present, no one is sure of what serious efforts government is making towards ensuring sustainable peace-building thereby resolving the crisis of rural banditry as those states or areas that were not affected are becoming victims hence, the phenomenon is spreading into those other areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome the problem of rural banditry and achieve any sustainable peace-building, there must be favorable economic conditions of the rural dwellers (especially the Fulanis) as guaranteed by the state which will help in keeping the social problems in check and will simultaneously help to prevent any outbreak of violent banditry.

1. The state must be strong to deliver for public goods to ensure everyone feels the impacts of

government in his life through the equitable distribution of resources across the nation.

2. The state security outfits must be overhauled to checkmate all forms of institutional weaknesses and deficiencies such as corruption in the fight against banditry in addition to the use of appropriate punishment against anyone associated with banditry.

3. The socio-economic living condition of the rural dwellers particularly the Fulanis who are believed to be the perpetrators of banditry must be re-examined with

government policies such the implementation of functional nomadic schools and other educational policies

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