

Effect of Rural Banditry on Food Security and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

This research investigates how rural banditry hinders sustainable food security and poverty reductions in Nigeria. The Food and Agricultural Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the National Bureau of Statistics, the United Nations Development Programme, scholarly journals, and field surveys were the sources from which the data were gathered. Three hundred questionnaires were administered to farmers in six states via Plateau, Nassarawa, Kaduna, Benue, Oyo and Niger, in addition to a focused group discussion with selected farmers in each of the study areas. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings show that unemployment, poverty, poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient security measures and lack of effective institutional coordination, create a network of individuals who support or engage in banditry; farmers experienced disruptions in farming activities, psychological distresses and loss of livestock. Among the socio-economic impacts of banditry include: loss of income and economic opportunities, displacement and migration of the rural population, reduced productivity and infrastructural degradation. These led to food shortages, hikes in food prices, malnutrition and increased poverty level in Nigeria. This study emphasizes the urgent need by the federal and state governments to tackle the problems of unemployment and poverty; develop infrastructure; increase security expenditure; and implement targeted rural development policies. These solutions will curb rural banditry, ensure food security and reduce poverty in Nigeria.

Keywords: Rural Banditry, food security, poverty reduction, food production, development policies, farmers.

1. Introduction

Nigeria has an enormous agricultural potential. The total geographical area of the country is 932,768 square kilometres with an estimated human population of over 201 million (NBS, 2020). It has various topographical regions that support different kinds of farming activities (Agriculture, 2023) and make it possible to produce a wide range of agricultural products (Ojeka, Effiong and Eko, 2016). About 80 percent of Nigerians live in rural areas and most rural dwellers engage in farming and related occupations for livelihood (Nwankpa, 2017; Fasoyiro and Taiwo, 2012). Hence, agriculture remains the major source of livelihood in Nigeria. More than 70 percent of Nigerians who engage in farming are small holders producing for subsistence (FAO, 2021). Yet, majority of the Nigerian citizens are food insecure and chronically poor. A survey conducted in 2022 on the Global Food Security Index (GFSI), considering food affordability, availability, quality and safety, and sustainability and adaptation across 113 countries-both developing and developed countries, reveal that Nigeria ranks 107th out of 113 countries in the index and 25th out of 28 Sub-Saharan African countries, with an overall GFSI score of 42 (Economic Impact, 2022). The share of the population suffering from moderate to severe food

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insecurity in Nigeria increased from 58.5 percent to 69.7 percent between 2019 and 2022 (Sasu, 2023). Of the estimated 17 million food insecure people in Nigeria in January 2023, 3 million were in the Northeastern states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe), while 2.9 million people are critically food insecure in the Northwestern region around Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto. Children are the most vulnerable to food security (UNICEF, 2023). FAO, Nigeria projected an additional 26.5 million Nigerians to be food insecure in 2024 (Kouacou, 2023). A substantial percentage of the Nigerian population are poor in spite of its oil wealth and huge agricultural potentials (Nwankpa, 2017; Otekunrin, Otekunrin and Ayinde, 2019). Highlights of the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index Survey show that, with a National MPI of 0.257, 63 percent of Nigerians, or 133 million people, live in multidimensional poverty. 72 percent of people live in rural areas and 42 percent in urban areas, respectively, with multidimensional poverty being higher in rural areas (NBS, 2022).

A recent report by World Bank (April, 2023) in its Macro Poverty Outlook for Nigeria, projects that about 13 million Nigerians would fall below the national poverty line by 2025 owing to the country's population growth surpassing efforts to reduce poverty among the countrymen (Leadership News, 2023). The poverty ranking among the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria reveal that Northwest (71.4 percent) and Northeast (69.1 percent) are the two zones with high poverty levels in the country while the South west (49.8 percent) has the least poverty level. Nigeria with life expectancy of 53, was among the 20 countries with the lowest life expectancy ranking in 2021 (Statista, 2024). In the 2021 United Nations Human Developments (UNDP) Index Report, Nigeria ranked 163rd out of 191 countries with HDI value of 0.535 points (UNDP, 2022). In 2023, Nigeria had a score of 28.3 in the Global Hunger Index and ranks 109th out of the 125 countries with sufficient data to calculate 2023 GHI scores, where countries that scored 20.0-34.9 are considered to have serious hunger. With the score of 28.3, Nigeria is the 16th most hungry country in the world (Vanguard, 2024). Many scholars and International bodies have blamed the poor socio-economic performance of Nigeria on the continuous decline of agricultural yields over the past two decades as a result of the rising incidence of banditry and other forms of violence particularly in the rural areas (Fadeyi and Adamu, 2023; Yusuf and Adamu, 2021; Ogbomah, 2023; Unicef, 2023; UNDP 2022; Olaoye and Ojo, 2023; Umaru, 2020; Otekunrin, Otekunrin and Ayinde, 2019, and so on). Rural banditry, a phenomenon which started from the Northwest geographical region, has extended to other regions of Nigeria and is more prevalent in the Northcentral region- the middle belt of the country (Fadeyi and Adamu, 2023; Olaoye and Ojo, 2023; Umaru, 2020).

The rising incidence of armed banditry in Nigeria includes kidnapping, maiming, killings, population displacements, cattle rustling and disruption of socio-economic activities (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina, 2023). Ojo, (2020) identified the root cause of banditry in Nigeria to include poverty, climate change, youth unemployment, bad governance, corruption and the lack of adequate security protection for vulnerable communities. Rural banditry has displaced many economically active population in agriculture and other occupations in rural areas, undermined stability in rural communities, aggravated food inaccessibility and increased poverty level in most communities in Nigeria (Unicef, 2023). Nigerian banditry has grown to such a degree that most regions have given the threat its indigenous name. "Kwanta-Kwanta" is the term for armed bandits in northern Nigeria. Armed bandits are referred to as "Oji egbe ezu osi" in the South East and "Okan-ologun

bandit" in the South Western region of Nigeria. In light of this, this study looks at how rural armed banditry affects Nigeria's efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable food security.

2. Theoretical Framework

The framework of analysis for this research is based on Situational Action Theory (SAT) and Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). SAT is a theory of crime that was created by Per-Olof H. Wikstrom in 2004. It combines elements of the behavioural, sociological, criminological, and ecological sciences to try and explain what motivates people to commit crimes. According to this idea, a person's morals and the circumstances at hand drive criminal behaviour (Wikstrom, 2004, 2019). The four main components of the situational stance put forth by SAT are the person (psychological make-up, experience, etc.), the setting (the environment to which an individual is exposed), the situation (the decisions made as a result of interactions with the setting), and the action (the person's conduct).

According to the theory of situational action, banditry is a situational crime that is made necessary by the interaction of the person, setting, circumstance, and action. Due to the interplay between an individual's experience and the prevalent economic realities, such as unemployment and poverty, rural banditry in Nigeria is therefore maintained (environment or setting). It is characterised by illicit mining and livestock rustling (activity), and it is aided by a feeble security system amid expansive, under-governed spaces (Accord, 2022). The claim that "In an atmosphere that essentially supports crime, the illicit pursuit of financial gain has been the driving force behind the phenomena of armed banditry in Nigeria" is corroborated by Yusuf and Abdulrahman (2021).

They added that the dire economic circumstances, which make it exceedingly difficult for most Nigerian households to consume three square meals a day, have made the problem worse. Ronald Victor Clarke created the Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) theory in 1980 as a way to carefully control the situational elements that lead to crime in order to lessen the likelihood of crime occurring in an action setting (Clarke, 1980; 2005). SCP is pertinent to the fight against rural banditry in Nigeria because of its situational prevention methods, which consist of:

- Increasing anti-crime efforts;
- Increasing the risk of offenders when committing a crime
- Reducing the rewards that motivate crime.
- Reducing crime provocation and opportunities in the environment and;
- Removing excuses that justify criminal behaviour.

The present study has selected to utilize both the SAT and SCP frameworks due to their significance in offering valuable perspectives on the incidence of armed banditry in rural Nigeria and feasible remedies for this threat.

3. Methodology

Both secondary and survey methodologies were employed in this investigation. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Food and Agricultural Organisation

(FAO), academic journals, online peer-reviewed publications, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank were the sources of secondary data. Survey instruments included focused group discussions (FDG) and questionnaires. Nigeria's three geopolitical zones—North Central, North West, and South West—were used to choose six states. Four states were chosen from the North Central area: Plateau, Nassarawa, Niger, and Benue. To represent the North West and North East areas, Kaduna state was chosen from the North West. However, the South West, South East, and South-South zones were also represented by Oyo State in the South West. Three hundred farmers total—fifty from each of the six states—were included in the sample. The study used a purposeful random sampling technique to make sure the sample accurately reflected the nation's food supply, which has been severely threatened by rural banditry. Many academics, including Kuna and Ibrahim (2016), Mustapha, (2023), Audu, (2021), Ikpanor and Gbamwuam (2015), Ahin and Gbamwuam, (2022), Adeniyi, (2018), and Agriculture, (2023), corroborate this. In addition, Focused Group Discussions (FGD) were held with farmers in each of the six states to obtain more detailed information than could be obtained from a questionnaire.

3.1 Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

The computer program SPSS version 24 was used to analyze the data gathered from the fieldwork. Tables containing the data were shown and analyzed using frequency and percentage in descriptive statistics. For the inferential statistics, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Forms of Rural Banditry Attacks in Rural Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Kidnapping/Abduction	119	39.7
Village/Market Raids	17	5.7
Cattle Rustling	34	11.3
Looting of farm produce	64	21.3
Armed robbery	13	4.3
Killing of people	37	12.4
Assaults on women & Girls	16	5.3
Total	300	100

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

Table 1 displays information gathered from interviewees regarding Nigerian rural banditry. With a score of 39.7%, the results indicate that the most significant type of rural banditry in Nigeria is kidnapping or robbing victims for ransom. The stealing of agricultural products (21.3%), murdering of individuals (12.4%), and stealing of animals (11.3%) come next. The following other types of banditry attacks were noted: armed robberies (4.3%), assaults on women and girls (5.3%), and raids on villages and markets (5.7%). These results are consistent with the argument made by Ojo, Oyewole, and Aina (2023) that kidnapping, killings, and cattle rustling are among the crimes that contribute to the rising rate of armed banditry in Nigeria.

Once more, Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduechie, and Dariya (2018) discovered that frequent banditry incidents in the North-West states of Nigeria involve the robbery of cattle and the looting of farm supplies. This conclusion implies that Nigeria's prospects for food security are threatened by rural armed banditry.

Table 2: Causes of Banditry Attack in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployment	62	20.7
Conflict over resources	10	3.3
Poverty	52	17.4
Inadequate security measures	40	13.3
Poor institutional coordination	30	10
Bad governance	37	12.3
Proliferation of small arms & Light weapon	16	5.3
Poor infrastructure	33	11
Desperate desire to get rich	8	2.7
Weak law enforcement	7	2.3
High level of illiteracy & ignorance	5	1.7
Total	300	100

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

Data collected from respondents regarding the reasons behind armed banditry in Nigeria's rural areas is shown in Table 2. The findings indicate that the main factors contributing to rural banditry in Nigeria are low institutional coordination (10.0%), inadequate security measures (13.3%), bad governance (12.3%), unemployment (20.7%), poverty (17.4%), and poor infrastructure (11.0%). This research is being done in conjunction with related investigations by Olaoye & Ojo (2023) and Yusufu & Abdulrahman (2021). The spread of small arms and light weapons (5.3%), disputes over resources (3.3%), the frantic desire to get wealthy (2.7%), lax law enforcement (2.3%), and a high degree of illiteracy and ignorance (1.7%) are other factors contributing to rural armed banditry in Nigeria. More understanding of the reasons behind Nigeria's rural banditry was gained from the focus group discussions (FGD) held with a subset of the study areas' farmers. Nearly all of the tribes recognized the international community and political players as "ghost influences" on Nigerian rural banditry.

Table 3i: Effect of Rural Banditry in Agricultural Production and Food Security in Nigeria

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Disruption of farming activities	106	35.3
Reduction in food production	106	35.3
Loss of livestock	14	4.7
Loss of agricultural infrastructure	12	4.0
Fear and psychological distress due to uncertainty	17	5.7
Increase in food price	23	7.7
Displacement & abandonment of farmlands of rural communities	7	2.3
Disruption of supply chains	15	5.0
Total	300	100

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

The information gathered from the respondents regarding the impact of rural banditry on Nigerian agriculture and food production is shown in Table 3i. The findings indicate that the main consequences in Nigeria are lower food production (35.3%) and interruption of farming activities (35.3%). The implication is that farming activities do not receive the required resources and/or attention (particularly human and time resources) needed for adequate agricultural production. This negatively affects crop yields, livestock production and food supply chains, resulting in reduced food production and hikes in food prices. Other impacts include increase in food prices (7.7%), psychological distress from fear and uncertainty (5.7%), supply chain disruptions (5.0%), livestock losses (4.7%), agricultural infrastructure losses (4.0%), and rural community relocation and farmland abandonment (2.3%). These results are consistent with those of related studies conducted by Unicef (2023), which contended that rural banditry has increased poverty in most Nigerian communities, undermined community stability, displaced a large number of economically active people from agriculture and other rural occupations, and made food inaccessible. Members of the FGDs, who backed this outcome as well, bemoaned how Nigerian agriculture has been badly harmed and devastated by rural banditry.

Table 3ii: Agricultural Practices Mostly Affected by Disruptions in Farming Activities

Variables	Yes		No	
	Frequency (300)	Percent	Frequency (300)	Percent
Crop cultivation and planting	248	82.7	52	17.3
Irrigation and water management	177	59.0	123	41.0
Weeding, Fertilizer & pesticide application	286	95.3	14	4.7
Harvesting	230	76.7	70	23.3
Sales of farm produce	86	28.7	214	71.3
Livestock management (Feeding, breeding & health management)	192	64.7	106	35.3

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

The results of the data collected from the respondents on the agricultural practices mostly affected by disruptions in farming activities are presented on Table 3(ii). The results show that the specific agricultural practices affected, include Crop cultivation and Planting (82.7%); Irrigation and Water Management (59%); Weeding, Fertilizer and Pesticide Application (95.3%); Sales of farm produce (28.7%); and Livestock Management (64.7%). This implies that disruption of farm activities affects virtually all agricultural practices. The result of the Focused Group Discussion conducted, supported this result as most of the farmers interviewed lament that bandit attacks are rampant and not restricted to any farming practices season.

Interview with farmers under the Focused Group Discussion also revealed that the major food crops produced in Nigeria include Sorghum (guinea corn), Millet, Rice, Beans (various species), Maize, Potatoes (sweet and irish), Cassava, Tomatoes and Groundnut (peanut).

Table 4i: Impact of Armed Banditry in Nigeria's Rural Areas on Food Security

Variables	Frequency (300)	Percentage
a. Supply of farm produce		
Adequate	49	16.3
Inadequate	235	78.3
Stable	16	5.4
b. Availability of food		
Poor	130	43.3
Fair	128	42.7
Good	42	14.0
c. Sustainable expansion of food products		
Adequate	25	8.3
Inadequate	251	83.7
Stable	24	8.0
d. Accessibility to a variety of foods		
Adequate	17	5.7
Inadequate	262	87.3
Fair	21	7.0
e. Food Consumption		
High	72	24.0
Low	133	44.3
Moderate	95	31.7
f. Food Prices		
High	247	82.3
Low	24	8.0
Moderate	29	9.7
g. Income from farm produce		
High	03	1.0
Low	175	58.3
Moderate	122	40.7
h. Malnutrition		
High	167	55.7
Low	46	15.3
Moderate	87	29.0

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

Table 4ii: Impact of Armed Banditry in Nigeria's Rural Areas on Food Security. (ANOVA)

S/N	Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	
a	Supply of farm produce.	Between Groups	10.768	8	1.795	17.394	.000
		Within Groups	30.229	293	.103		
		Total	40.997	299			
b	Availability of food.	Between Groups	54.619	6	9.103	29.129	.000
		Within Groups	91.568	293	.313		
		Total	146.187	299			

c	Sustainable expansion of Food products	Between Groups	15.795	6	2.632	23.231	000
		Within Groups	33.202	293	.113		
		Total	48.997	299			
d	Accessibility of variety of foods	Between Groups	9.787	6	1.631	76.473	000
		Within Groups	6.250	293	.021		
		Total	16.037	299			
e	Food consumption	Between Groups	31.952	6	5.325	11.591	000
		Within Groups	134.618	293	.459		
		Total	166.570	299			
f	Food prices	Between Groups	34.497	6	5.749	4.890	000
		Within Groups	344.500	293	1.176		
		Total	378.997	299			
g	Income from farm produce.	Between Groups	15.931	6	2.655	13.652	000
		Within Groups	56.986	293	.194		
		Total	72.917	299			
h	Malnutrition	Between Groups	26.676	6	4.446	33.409	.000
		Within Groups	38.991	293	.133		
		Total	65.667	299			

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

Note: A one-way ANOVA compares means across three or more groups. However, its limitations are that it assumes equal variances, normality, and independence of observations.

Data collected from respondents about the impact of rural banditry on Nigeria's chances for food security is displayed in Tables 4(i) and ii). According to Table 4i(a), 235 respondents (78.3%) stated that bandit assaults were the reason for the insufficient supply of farm produce, 16.3% said that the supply was sufficient, and 5.2% responded that it was steady. Forty-three point three percent (Table 4i(b) indicated that the availability of food was poor, 42.7 percent claimed that it was fair while 14.0 percent indicated that the availability of food was good. Table 4i(c) measures the sustainable expansion of food products in Nigeria as an index of food security. Out of the 300 respondents, 251 (83.7 percent) revealed that rural banditry has caused a sustainable expansion of food products in Nigeria to be inadequate, 8.3 percent maintained that it was adequate while 8.0 percent claimed that a sustainable expansion of food products in Nigeria is stable. Regarding accessibility to a variety of foods (table 4i(d)), 262 (87.3 percent) of respondents indicated inadequate accessibility to food by Nigerians, 21 percent revealed that accessibility to food in the country is fair while 5.7 percent indicated adequate access to food by Nigerians. The number of respondents who agreed that food consumption in Nigeria is low (table 4i(e)) is 133 (44.3 percent). While 31.7 percent considered food consumption to be moderate, the remaining 24.0 percent claimed that food consumption in Nigeria is high. Findings on the status of food prices (table 4i(f) indicate that 82.3 percent of the respondents agreed that rural banditry has caused an enormous increase in food prices in Nigeria. 8.0 percent and 9.7 percent respectively believe that food prices are still low and moderate irrespective of the rural banditry. The majority of the respondents (58.3 percent) indicated that income from farm produce (table 4i(g)) was low because of armed banditry while 1.0 percent and 40.7 percent respectively indicated that it was high and moderate. Once more, the majority of respondents (55.7%) concurred that Nigeria's rate of malnutrition had increased as a

result of rural banditry (table 4i(h)). In spite of rural armed banditry in Nigeria, only 15.3% of respondents stated that the degree of malnutrition is low, while 29.0% stated that it is still moderate. The implication of the results presented in table 4i(a-h) is that rural banditry in Nigeria has grossly undermined the attainment of food security in the country. Using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to draw inferential statistics from our data on the various indices/measures of food security used, we arrived at table 4ii. From Table 4ii(a), the 'f' value of supply of farm produce is high (17,394) with the probability value tending towards zero. The 'f' value of the availability of food in Table 4ii(b) is 29,129. The 'F' value of sustainable expansion of food products in Table 4iii (c) is 23,231. For the accessibility of a variety of food in Table 4ii (d), the 'f' value is 76,473 with probability also tending towards zero. The 'f' value of food consumption in Table 4ii(e) is 11,591. In Table 4ii (f), the 'f' value of food prices is 4,890, the 'f' value of income from farm produce in Table 4ii(g) is 13,65, while the 'f' value of malnutrition in table 4ii(h) is 33,409. All these 'f' values of indicators from tables 4ii (a-h) are significant at one percent each which indicates that rural banditry affects all the measures of food security. Thus, it can be concluded that rural armed banditry affects food security in Nigeria. These results are consistent with a related study by Ogbomah (2023), which discovered that the nation's food security is seriously threatened by the persistent attacks on farmers, which have forced the majority of them to abandon their farms. To support this finding, a member of the Focused Group Discussion in Kaduna had this to say *"The effect of banditry and insecurity in Northern Nigeria affects every angle of human life there. Specifically, it increased poverty as the majority of Northerners are farmers, and reduced food production, which increased hunger in the zone and in Nigeria generally. Comparing the price of 50kg of rice sold about 8 years ago at ₦7500 - ₦8000 to the current price of ₦78,000 - ₦92,000, the hike in price may be mistaken with the exchange rate effect. Exchange rate could only be part of the problem, but the major reason for high prices of food in Nigeria is banditry and insecurity which force farmers out of their farmlands"*.

Table 5: Effects of Rural Banditry on Standard of living and welfare of Nigerian Rural Community (Socio-Economic Impact)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Loss of income and economic opportunities	102	34.0
Displacement and migration of the rural population	44	14.7
Reduced Productivity	82	27.3
Decline in Human Capital Development (Disruption of Education)	25	8.3
Reduction in the availability and provision of essential services (Infrastructure degradation)	47	15.7
Total	300	100

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

Table 5 displays data gathered about how rural banditry affects people's socioeconomic conditions. The results indicate that, with a percentage score of 34.0 percent, loss of income and economic possibilities is the largest adverse impact of rural banditry on the welfare and standard of living of the rural population in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the findings of a related study by Kitabu (2022), which showed that the threat of banditry has impacted rural residents' means of subsistence. It has also affected numerous markets in the impacted areas, leading many store owners to close their

doors because they are frequently the targets of these bandits. Additional detrimental impacts of rural banditry on Nigerians' socioeconomic well-being include decreased production (23.7 percent), infrastructure deterioration (15.7%), rural population movement and displacement (14.7%), and a decline in the development of human capital (8.3%). The results of this investigation are consistent with those of related investigations carried out by Kitabu (2022) and UNICEF (2023). According to Unicef (2023), rural banditry in Nigeria has caused many people who were economically engaged in agriculture and other rural jobs to be relocated, undermining community stability, aggravating food insecurity, and raising poverty rates in the majority of Nigerian communities. Additionally, Kitabu (2022) disclosed that a great number of students in Niger State had given up on their study entirely due to dread of death. Further research across more regions and demographics is however required to validate and generalize this finding for the entire rural population in Nigeria.

Table 6: Solutions to the Problem of Rural Banditry in Nigeria

Solution	Frequency	Percentage
Employment generation and poverty reduction	61	20.3
Investment in rural development	39	13.0
Increased and integrated security measures	85	28.5
Good governance	20	6.7
Management of tiny and lightweight weaponry in use	35	11.7
Stiffer penalty for perpetration of armed banditry	22	7.3
Infrastructure development	38	12.7
Total	300	100

Basis: Field Investigation, 2024

The information obtained from respondents regarding potential remedies to Nigeria's rural armed banditry problem is displayed in Table 6. Based on the results, the respondents (28.3%) think that implementing more comprehensive security measures in rural regions would be the most effective and urgent way to combat armed banditry in Nigeria's rural areas. The government's conscious and intentional efforts to significantly reduce poverty and enhance the socio-economic well-being of its citizens (20.3%) in addition to offering employment opportunities to our hordes of unemployed and underemployed youth, are critical in mitigating the threat of rural banditry in Nigeria. These results were supported by the FGD as well as similar studies such as Yusufu and Abdulrahman (2021) and Ladan (2019) stated that lowering the expense of governance and working with the business sector can accomplish this. The respondents also identified infrastructural development (12.7%), investment in rural development (14.0%), Management of tiny and lightweight weaponry in use (11.7%), harsher penalties for armed banditry (7.3%), and good governance (6.7%) as additional significant solutions. However, future research could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. It is also important to note that investigating innovative approaches such as community-led initiatives and technological interventions could serve as alternative strategies. There may also be need to access the long-term impact of interventions on food security and poverty reduction using longitudinal studies. However, the FGD stated that "if government officials are committed, focused, and determined, there is nothing they cannot do to stop

rural banditry." The irony is that, despite visiting certain rural communities throughout their campaigns, politicians don't seem to make any improvements.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

If Nigeria is to meet one of the main objectives of sustainable development and enhance the welfare of its people, then sustainable food security and poverty reduction are imperative rather than optional.

Sustainable food security will ensure availability, accessibility, and the right quality of food for most Nigerians. This study has revealed that none of these has been achieved. The study revealed that farming activities have been greatly disrupted leading to decreased food production, a hike in food prices, malnutrition, and increased poverty levels in the country. Apart from the macro-economic variables affecting food production and food security, this study has revealed that rural banditry has grossly undermined agricultural sustainability in Nigeria. This study also shows that kidnapping and abduction of people, raids on villages or markets, cattle rustling, farm produce looting, murdering of individuals, and assault are all examples of rural banditry in Nigeria. According to this study, unemployment, poverty, weak governance, inadequate security measures, and poor infrastructure are some of the main reasons of rural banditry. This study has shown that government is the major stakeholder in curbing rural banditry to boost food production in Nigeria. In addition to ensuring adequate farming infrastructure in the major food baskets of the country, this study recommends that government should also put policies that will eradicate rural banditry such as tackling the problem of unemployment and poverty, increasing security expenditure and implementing targeted rural development policies. Nigerian government should put in place appropriate policies and strategies (such as adequate security measures, targeted infrastructural development) that will improve the performance of agricultural productivity. This will help to eliminate disruptions in farming activities and practices and improve the income of the rural population who are predominantly agrarian. The agricultural growth policy will have a twofold impact; boosting farmers' income while also driving rapid development in non-agricultural sectors in both rural and urban areas.

This will mitigate income inequality and poverty in Nigeria. To achieve sustainable food security and poverty reduction, the Nigerian government should among other things strengthen institutions like the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, to coordinate implementation and monitoring of targeted strategies especially policies or interventions that support the Sustainable Development Goals. This is essential because the global food system is interconnected. Food sufficiency in Nigeria will boost global food availability, and regional disruptions can trigger global food shortages and price hikes. By aligning local efforts with global sustainable development goals, Nigeria can tap into international expertise, resources, and collaboration to tackle rural banditry and other macro-economic challenges hindering food security and poverty reduction.

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