

# **ARMED BANDIT OPERATION IN RAFI LOCAL GOVERNMENT, NIGER STATE: IMPLICATIONS ON HUMAN AND FOOD SECURITY**

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## **Abstract**

Incessant attacks of law abiding citizens by bandits have become a serious security challenge in Niger State and Rafi Local Government in particular. The research is on criminal armed bandit operation in Rafi Local Government, Niger State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey method; samples of 100 respondents were selected from the most affected districts of local government where banditry activities thrive. Questionnaire was used as major instrument of data collection; in-depth interviews were also conducted to elicit further information from respondents. The routine activity theory was adopted to explain the issue under investigation. Findings suggested that kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, collection of farmlands amongst others were major activities and nature of the phenomenon while the loss of lives, farmlands, psychological depression amongst others were discovered to be the major effects bandits activities in the study area. The study recommends the provision of more sophisticated detection equipment in the rural areas for early detection of arrival and settlement of bandits in the forestlands among other recommendations

**Keywords:** Threats, armed banditry, human, food security

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is currently facing a lot of security threats as there are reasonable evidence to show that violent extremists groups and armed bandits are now having field day in unprovoked destruction of lives and properties of innocent Nigerian citizens. The frequency with which they attack communities has become a very worrisome development to every Nigerian, particularly those living in the northern parts of the country. Onah (2010) subscribes to the view that the frequency of attacks may be attributed to the ease with which these bandits move in and out of rural communities without any form of resistance. According to Asiwaju

(2004), many rural communities in Nigeria have been identified with bad roads, absence of health facilities and educational institutions, and have also become sites for poorly managed forest reserve that are now providing cover as hideouts for rural bandits. This is an indication of strategic neglect to rural communities in terms of socioeconomic developments.

According to Bagu and Smith (2017), organized research on banditry is still at its nascent stage. Though, Kunna and Jibrin (2016) and Centre for Democracy and Development (2015), revealed that there have been some scholarly works on the subject matter. They unanimously contended that armed bandit activities have in the recent times become most prevalent in some parts of the North- West and Central region, with states like Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue becoming more affected by the phenomenon.

The increasing incidences of armed bandit have negative effect on both human and food security in Niger State. In an attempt to further discuss how to curtail the threats of banditry, (Gadzama, Oduebe and Dariya, 2018) opined that human security goes beyond the concept of mere physical security in the traditional sense of being. However, Ewans (2007) saw modern concept of human security as that which tries to identify the inherent weaknesses of the traditional security pattern which fundamentally focuses on the security of the state instead of the protection of the individuals and communities. Hence, he believed that security in modern times should be more redirected towards the protection of lives and properties of individuals and communities rather than concentrating more on state functionaries, their families and allies, and by extension what they define as critical infrastructures.

Jafar, (2018) sees human security as the absence of insecurity and threats. To be secured and free from both fear of physical, psychological abuses, violence, persecution or death from want of food, good health and job. They concluded that human security should therefore deal with the capacity to identify threats, to avoid them when possible, and to mitigate their effects when they occur.

Food security on the other hand is simply seen as access to basic nutrition and food supply at all times needed for man's survival needs. The United Nations (2014) defined food security as the opportunity for all people, at all times, to have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needed for an active and healthy life.

Armed banditry in the view of Okpaleke (2014), has to do with armed violence perpetrated by criminal opportunists and syndicates along the country's border lines and rural interiors. This suggest that acts of criminality by armed bandits are targeted at human lives or property; armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and allied violence. For McGregor (2014), the list of criminalities of armed bandits also include village market raids, rape of women, arson and outright killings, these actions have also

always involved the use of force, threats and intimidation. Furthermore, Okpaleke (2014), maintained that there are different perspectives of armed bandit activities, which according to him; some are motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while others are motivated only by the quest to rob, assault or even liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political, ideological or religious considerations.

Aside the conflicting and contending views and perspectives, armed bandits' activities in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. Ja'afar (2018) reported that there were records of instances of rural banditry in colonial Nigeria, as far back as the 1930's. According to him, in those days, wayfarers and merchants travelling on the local shallow feeder roads were sometimes faced with ambush by bandits who were basically targeting goods carried on donkeys, camels and ox carts. Such bandits at that time forcefully took away goods and disappeared into the bush, or at some other times, the bandits raided villages and carted away valuable properties and produce. So this criminality according to him has existed in pre-colonial times.

#### **Statement of Research Problem**

There has been growing concern in some parts north western and north central states of Nigeria over security challenge as a result of activities of armed bandits. The frequency with which they attack communities has become a very worrisome development to every Nigerian; especially those living in the most volatile areas. Certain social, economic, political as well as environmental existential conditions have been reasons why armed banditry has successfully strived in Nigeria, North-West, North Central, Niger State and Rafi Local Government in particular. Some among these conditions have been identified to be both the interiors and borderline ecological challenges. Gaye (2018) maintained that prominent among these conditions are the scarcely governed hinterlands and forestlands. According to him, the North West and North Central regions of the Nigerian hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed normal settlements, which have been separated by rangelands and farmlands with extreme gaps for settlements; these have served as hideouts which are rarely discovered.

Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) buttressed further that the forestlands are vast, rugged and hazardous, and are highly under-policed to the point that it makes them conducive for all forms of jungle criminality. Equally, Okoli and Ugwu (2019), revealed that, in addition to the under-governed rural territorial spheres highlighted above, banditry also strive because of the material incentive of the poorly regulated mining, trans-human and illicit arms and artisanal activities taking place in these forests, as bandits occasionally attack mining sites in order to steal gold and cash. Okoli (2017) further pointed out that, sometimes the lethality of the attacks are merely reprisals, designed to shut down communities, which have in the past challenged or resisted the bandits' onslaught through vigilantism. The views of the above writers portrayed that the rugged open stretched forests provide sufficient avenues for all manners of banditry activities, violent crimes like cattle rustling, kidnappings, arsons, maiming and killings in the affected areas. In the view of Ikoh (2021) as long as the benefits (income generation)

associated with it outweigh the cost, rural banditry may soon extend to urban banditry; kidnapping and cattle rustling will continue. The criminal gangs armed with sophisticated rifles have found crime beneficial, and are looking for available soft targets to victimize, whenever occasion demands (Ikoh, 2021).

Niger State with the largest landmass distribution in the country is viewed by this study as one of the states affected by rural banditry, with an overstretched forest hinterland mass of 76,363 square-kilometers, as against the populous Lagos state with only 4,000 square kilometers of land mass, followed by Kaduna and Zamfara states with 46,053 and 39,762 square-kilometres respectively. Consequently, Rafi local government area which is the target of the research has a very large landmass with the significant number of wards and the same ecological structures in the forest regions as those mentioned earlier. Therefore, bandits move in and out from the Birnin-Gwari, Zamfara and Katsina forests into the stretch of the Rafi local government area lay ambush, capture and kill innocent farmers and abduct same without control and by extension many towns and villages of Kagara, Kuserki, Pandogari, Tegini and many communities in Shiroro, Wushishi and Mariga local government areas of Niger State.

Against this backdrop, this study investigated criminal armed bandit operation in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State

### **Research questions**

This work examines Criminal armed bandit operation in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State. The study provided answers to the following questions raised:

- (i) What are the effects of banditry on human security in Rafi Local Government Area
- (ii) What are the effect of armed banditry on food security in Rafi local government Area
- (iii) What are solutions to the growing challenge of banditry in Rafi Local Government Area

### **Objectives of the study**

The broad objective this paper is to examine Criminal armed bandit operation in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State

- (i) To find out the effects of banditry on human security in Rafi Local Government Area
- (ii) Find out the effect of armed banditry on food security in Rafi local Government Area
- (iii) To proffer solutions to the growing challenge of banditry in Rafi Local Government Area

### **Literature Review**

Biological and psychological theories of crime and deviance blamed nature and other internal happenings as the etiologies of deviance and crime, but the Sociological

theories put more emphasis on social environment (society). They argued that both deviance and crime are a social problem in which their causes are found in the very nature of every society. In the view of Durkhiem (1897), anomie (normlessness) is what breeds crime and deviance. Merton (1938) also built on Durkhiem concepts of anomie to come up with theory of social structure and anomie. Merton explain why crime and deviance occurs in society and argues that social environment influences people's behaviours and person's behavior shapes his attitudes towards culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means of achieving those goals. In an attempt to achieve these goals, people use different ways either by conforming to or by deviating from such cultural expectations. People who aspire for the culturally prescribed goals but are denied the opportunities to realize those goals will experience what he termed "social strains". It is because of these strains in finding access to legitimate means that some members of society turn to deviant acts. Those occupying disadvantage position create other techniques of becoming materially successfully. So, to him society creates deviance. In his view, as long as individuals accept the socially approved means for obtaining those goals all behaviours are conforming, but when the goals or means are rejected, non-conforming behaviours results.

Sutherland (1939) developed differential association theory to explain deviance and crime. He argued that deviance is learned through interactions with other people. This theory holds that deviant tend to form social bands with other non-conforming individuals or group from whom they learn deviant sub-cultural norms and values. Individuals learn not only how to perform deviant acts but also how to define these activities. Differential association theory might suggest that crime results from those whose role molds are criminals and thus who associate with people whose behaviour is different or abnormal.

Smith and Basu (2017) argue that most of the bandits are gangs of criminals, often result from farming and herding communities who left their domains and have internalized new values and habits of robbing people on the high ways and rustling cattle for personal gains and both farming and herdsman communities are the victims of criminality. Centre for democracy and development (CDD, 2015) reported that bandits have increased advances their criminal activities from high way robbery and rustling to include looting, laying seige on local markets and killing unarmed innocent Nigerians.

Equally, Humanitarian (2018) reveals that some bandits have so advanced to the extent of kidnapping foreign miners and demand for payment of ransom before their release. McGregor (2004) noted that rural banditry also include, market raids, rape of women, ransom collection from families of the victims and outright killing. Opkaleke (2014) opined that there are different perspectives of rural banditry, to him, some are motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while others are motivated by the quest to robe, assault or even liquidate a person or group of persons based on political, ideological, religious or tribal consideration. Basu (2017) submits that gang of criminals

often fought from farming and herding communities have taken advantage of the growing insecurity of the country to launch attacks on villages to loot, engage in high way robbery and cattle rustling and killings for personal gains. For Ejuwu (2016) rural banditry has moved from its rudimentary face to a more complex and complicated pattern of criminality

Asiwaju (2004), argues that many rural communities are known for bad roads, absence of health facilities and educational institutions, and so many are left without presence of adequate security. Many have become sites for poorly managed forests reserves are now hideout for rural criminal bandits. Kunn and Jubrin (2016) CDD (2015) have contended that rural banditry has become reasonably most prevalent in some part of North central region, with states like Niger, Nassarawa, Plateu and Benue becoming more affected and also some states in the North west with Zamfara, Kaduna, Kebbi and Sokoto as becoming more affected by the phenomenon in the recent days.

In the view of Ja'afar (2018), there were records of instances of rural banditry in colonial Nigeria. For him, in those days, wayfarers and merchants traveling on local feeder roads were sometimes faced with ambush by criminal bandits who were targeting goods carried on donkeys, camels, and ox carts. Such bandits at that time forcefully took away foods and disappeared into bush, or at some other times, the bandits raided villages and carted away valuable properties and produce. According to him, criminality has existed in pre-colonial times. Arguing in the same vein, the Humanitarian (2018), reported that the first case of banditry was documented around 1901, and incidence was said to have occurred somewhere between western Hausa land and the border of Niger Republic. In this same The said incidence, over 12,000 camels, loaded with assaulted grains were attacked and 210 merchants were killed.

On that note, Okoli and Ochim (2016), conclude that the near non-action of states functionaries in relation to security and territorial governance has grossly demonstrated a pathological ground for its incapacity to govern its citizens. This is because social control agencies at all levels have exhibited a woeful lethargy in dealing with national security challenges. They maintain that these agencies have persistently failed to muster requisite professional political will and commitment to tackle the situation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are various theories that explain the causes of crime and deviance behaviours. However, for the purpose of this study Merton's Structural-Strain and Routine Activity Theories were adopted as the theoretical framework

### **Structural Strain Theory**

Structural-Strain theory was developed by Robert K. Merton (1947) to explain why deviant behaviour occurs in society. One of the assumptions of the theory is that social environment influences people's behaviours. The theory further argues that a person's behavior shapes his attitudes towards culturally defined goals and the institutionalized

means of achieving those goals.

In an attempt to achieve these goals, people use different ways either by conforming to or by deviating from such cultural expectations. People who aspire for the culturally prescribed goals but are denied the opportunities to realize those goals will experience what he termed “social strains”. It is because of these strains in finding access to legitimate means that some members of society turns to deviant acts. Those occupying disadvantage position create other techniques of becoming materially successfully. In his view, as long as individuals accept the socially approved means for obtaining those goals all behaviours are conforming, but when the goals or means are rejected, non-conforming behaviours results. **Armed banditry and kidnapping** in this context can be regarded as 'innovation' because members of groups seem to accept the cultural goals of the society but reject the institutional means of achieving them. In addition, to the availability or otherwise of legitimate means of achieving desired goals, availability of potential offenders, suitable targets and absence of capable guards are also an important factors in the explanation of crime and deviance.

### **Routine Activity Theory**

The main exponents of the theory are Cohen and Felson (1979). The Routine Activity Theory is a recent approach to the explanation of crime. It falls within the social-structural perspective. The assumptions of the theory attempt to explain predatory criminal activities. The theory has three main postulations: (i) where there is a motivated potential offender(s), (ii) suitable or attractive target(s) and (iii) the absence of capable guard(s) crime is likely to take place. Therefore, adopting this theory(s) to armed banditry in Rafi Local Government of Niger State, the presence of motivated potential offender(s) in an agriculturally and herding-based communities which are under-policed are likely targets for bandit activities. The Humanitarian (2018) supports this assertion when it opines that ecology of such communities brings about not only motivation but temptation alike for criminal indulgence. Consequently, bandits who are predators in these communities are likely to have sustained field day engaging in all manners of criminal escapades including lootings, robberies, maiming, rapping, kidnappings and outright killings without any form of resistance.

### **Methodology**

The research design for the study is a descriptive survey method which was used to describe criminal armed bandit operation in Rafi Local Government, Niger State. Structured questionnaire and key-informants interview (KII) were used as instrument for collection of data. A key informant interview was conducted to elicit deeper information where the questionnaires could not explore in details. A sample of 60 respondents was purposively drawn from the three most affected districts of Kusherki, Teginia and Yakila respectively. The justification for the above was the accessibility of respondents who were direct victims of banditry. While secondary data was sourced from journals, books, newspapers and online-peer reviewed works. Descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS package was used to analyze the quantitative data while qualitative data

were analyzed using thematic/content analysis accordingly.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

**Table 1 Implications of Attack on Human Security**

<b>Feelings</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Deaths	79	72.5	72.5	72.5
	Hospitalizations	10	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Loss of property	20	18.3	18.3	18.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022.

Table 1 indicated a devastating effects of the attacks by bandits, 79 (72.5%) maintained that the attacks have always resulted in deaths, 10 (9.2%) hospitalization due to the traumatic shock, While 20 (18.3%) of the respondents revealed that it led to loss of property.

**Table 2 Implications of Attack on Food Security**

<b>Effects</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Loss of businesses	6	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Loss of farmlands	7	6.4	6.4	6.4
	Loss of financial resources	10	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Loss of stored grains	15	13.7	13.7	13.7
	Loss of animals	15	13.7	13.7	13.7
	Closure of markets	50	46	46	46
	All of the above	6	5.5	5.5	5.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>109</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2022.

Table 2 above, indicated that banditry activities has negative affects food security with closure of markets having 50 (46%), loss of businesses 6 (5.5%), loss of animals 15 (13.7%), loss of financial resources 10 (9.2%), loss of stored grains 15 (13.7%) and the loss of farm land with 7 (6.4%) respectively.

### **Analysis of Key Informants Interview**

In order to elicit more information on banditry from the respondents, key informant interviews were also conducted with some respondents. Below were some of the responses received and transcribed.

Responses on the general consequences of armed banditry activities on human security, a respondent from Kuserki revealed that:

“It is surprising and seriously shocking that after more 60 years of my existence in my community, I will wake up one day to witness the burning of my family farmland and crops, the shooting and killing of my family members. It is really traumatizing, I wept bitterly without anything to do”.

Respondent from Tegina revealed that;

“Our lazy and unemployed youths have now found new businesses they see as lucrative, collaborating with bandits, they know the spies of the bandits in the community and often go there to give information about who is keeping money at home, the bandits will just ride on bikes in number in broad day light and come straight to your house to demand for the money and even direct you kept the money to bring it out or they kill you. They will collect the money and yet kidnap women and young girls and still demand for ransom. This is uncalled for; we are not secure anymore in our ancestral communities as many have migrated to towns for safety of their lives”.

In the same vein, a respondent from Yakila pointed out that:

“Honestly, we are suffering attacks by bandits, many lives were lost, animals were rustled, food items stolen and in some cases burnt. We can't harvest what we produced in our farms because of fear”.

When further prompted to find out whether they have received any support from the government so far, he noted that:

“Which government? The same government whose security officers even know the routes used by the bandits, let me tell you, some of them even have the telephone numbers of the bandits, which is why when the bandits strike, you don't see any security personnel around. We are now leaving in fear, afraid of our lives and having shortage of cash and food crops to survive”.

Another interviewee confirmed that;

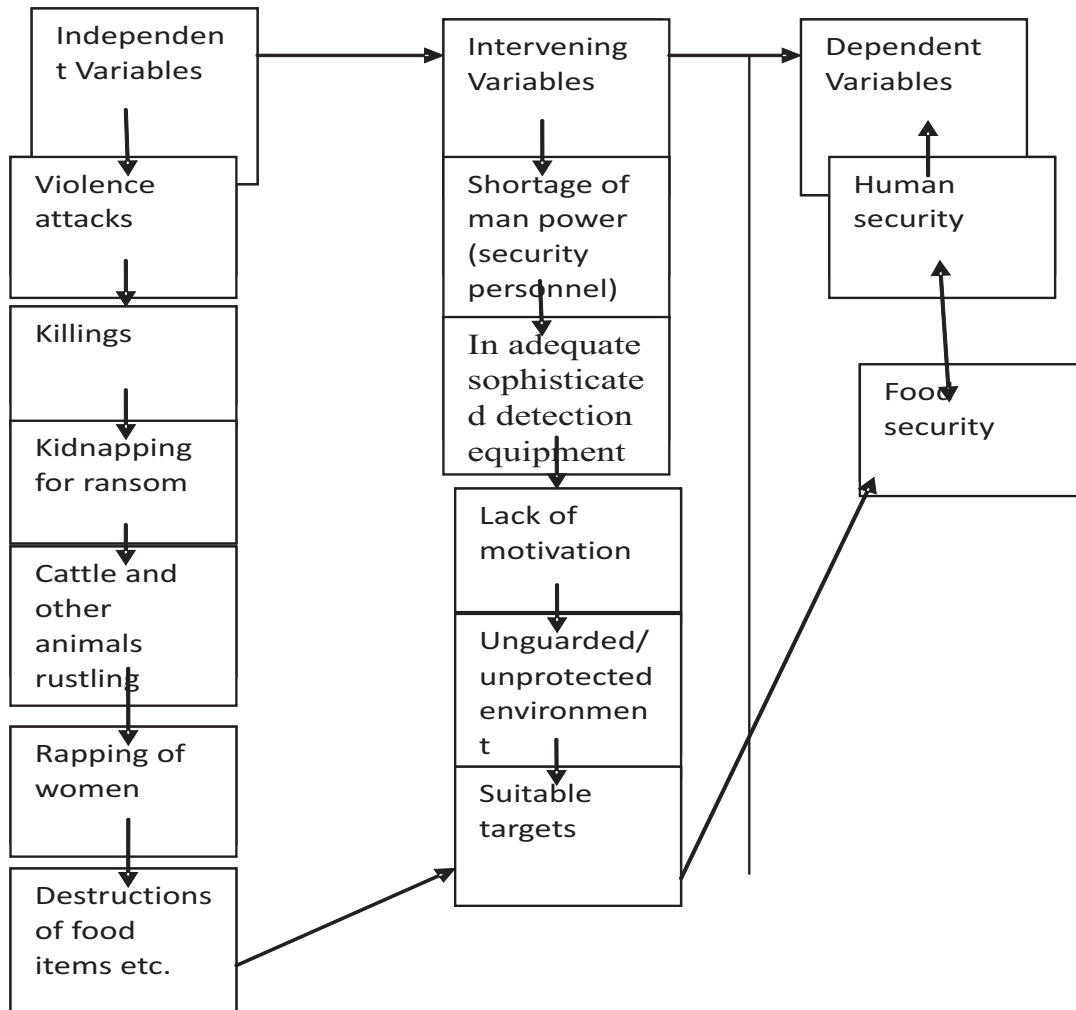
“Do you know that if we want to go to the farms to harvest our farm produce, we now have to go to the informants with money to inform them to kindly tell the bandits that we are hungry and need to go to our farms to harvest food and cash crops? This is how serious the situation has become”.

Some respondents however were more concerned with government's intervention. For instance, a respondent from Kuserki appealed that:

"Kindly go back and tell the government to provide new places for us, we don't know where to go, our great grandfathers were born here, our farmlands are here. We are not educated and cannot do government jobs in the city; please help us convey our situations to the government".

From the above submissions, it can deduced that, the phenomenon of armed banditry has reached a point that if nothing urgent is done by government through protection of lives and properties, the situation of anarchy may take place as citizens and indeed residents of Niger state and Rafi local government in particular are likely to resort to self-help of any form in defense of their lives and properties

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: Armed Bandit Operation and its Implications on Human and Food Security**



### **Discussion on Findings**

The findings of the study have suggested that the phenomenon of criminal armed bandit operations have devastating effects on human security, these effects include among others: loss of lives with the highest percentage, to hospitalization and psychological trauma due to shocks. The findings has also been able to revealed that banditry has devastating effects on food security, loss of cattle and other animals, food items as well as closure of markets which have multiplier effects on animal husbandry which has often been the source of livelihood for the people has been seriously affected. Others include the loss of farm lands and financial resources etc.

Consequently, the activities of armed bandits have negatively affected production of crops for both local consumption and exports. The loss of lives and fears expressed by the respondents have added to the general challenges of banditry on human security.

This therefore suggest that, if people are killed on daily basis and those alive cannot freely go to the markets, how do they sell their farm produce? If they cannot go to their farms, how do they produce and harvest, consume or even process the products for export or guaranteeing market value for cash crops and those meant for domestic consumption? It is also important to note that, when people are living in perpetual fear of attacks to outright killings by bandits, this may have the tendency of affecting human security generally.

The above findings supports the works of Okoli (2017) when he pointed out that; "sometimes the lethality of the attacks are reprisals designed to show down communities which have hitherto challenged or resisted the bandits' onslaught through vigilantism. Equally, findings of the study corroborate the views of Okoli and Ochim (2016) who pointed out that the near non-action of states functionaries in relation to security and territorial governance has grossly demonstrated a pathological ground for its incapacity to govern its citizens. This can be said to be true as social control agencies at all levels have demonstrated failure in dealing with national security challenges. Thus, they maintain that these agencies have persistently failed to muster requisite professional political will and commitment to tackle the situation.

All the above findings are also in tandem with the adopted theories for this research, which are the Structural-Strain Theory and Routine Activity Theory. This is so, because the activities of bandits who have become motivated potential offenders because of their strained conditions as well find suitable targets in under-policed and unguarded forest farming and herding communities.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study have established that the effects of criminal armed bandit activities on human and food security are so severe. Equally, findings revealed that it results to loss of lives, injuries leading to shock and living in horrific fears. Others are: destruction of farm lands, loss of animals, amongst other experiences. These therefore,

have severe consequences on not only food and human security but have negative effects on social, economic, political as well as general set back on the development of the country. This is because development cannot be achieved where there is absence of peace and general insecurity. As such there is the need for very urgent action to be taken in order to curb the excesses of banditry in the Rafi local government area and the entire Niger State.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, below are some of the recommendations:

- (i) Government at all levels must take immediate steps to stop the wanton killing of innocent citizens by providing sophisticated detection equipment in the forestlands to detect incursion into the communities by bandits.
- (ii) All the security agencies should be provided with modern adequate sophisticated arms and ammunition to be able to confront the bandits in order to enable people go to their farms without intimidation, this will enhance the production of food supply and hence, the challenge of food security can be better addressed.
- (iii) Furthermore, proactive measures are required by our security personnel in arresting and prosecuting criminal bandits in order to reaffirm its position as principal provider of security to the people. This will solve the problem of human security and thus, create more confidence by the people.
- (iv) There is need for collaborative efforts by communities through organizing community vigilante groups with the necessary ammunition in order to protect themselves to complement government efforts.
- (v) Community members should see the task of criminal acts such as armed banditry as not only the responsibilities of the law enforcement agencies, but all citizens. They should give security personnel the necessary support thereby providing them with relevant information that will lead to the proactive measures taken by the appropriate agencies in addressing these ills.

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