

## **Criminal Armed Herdsmen Operation in Southern Kaduna, Nigeria: Implications On Human and Food Security**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The research focuses on the implications of armed herdsmen operations on human and food security in the Southern Kaduna region of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The research design for the study is a descriptive survey method; a sample of 90 respondents was drawn from the three most affected local government areas where armed herdsmen operation strives in the region. The questionnaire was used as a major instrument for the collection of primary data; in-depth interviews were also conducted by the researcher to elicit further information from respondents. Secondary data was sourced from books, journals, newspapers and online peer-reviewed materials. The routine activity theory was adopted to explain armed herdsmen activities in Southern Kaduna. Findings suggest that deaths, hospitalizations, burning of houses amongst many others were major implications on human security while burning of farmlands, kidnappings on the farm and closure of markets were amongst major implications of food security in the region. The study recommends the provision of more sophisticated detection equipment in the rural areas for early detection of arrival and settlement of armed herdsmen in the forestlands, provision of more sophisticated detection equipment and arms and ammunition to the security forces to eliminate the attacking herdsmen. The study also recommends compensation for the affected communities through government distribution of grains from the strategic reserves and re-establishment of farmlands and construction of new residential structures for the affected people.*

**KEYWORDS:** criminal, armed herdsmen, human, food security.

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## INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that armed violence has negative implications for food security. In communities where violence is prevalence, farming activities and the commercial distribution of agricultural produce are disrupted, leading to the unavailability of food to portions of the population. In Nigeria, Southern Kaduna is one of the regions most devastated by violence perpetrated by armed herdsmen. While the security situation has received a lot of scholarly attention, how it contributes to food insecurity has not been adequately analysed. Hence, the gap in this research work is lack of sufficient existing research as regards how insecurity due to armed herdsmen attacks affects food security. This gap has theoretical implications for our understanding of the underlying causes of food security as well as our capacity to formulate effective policy towards tackling the problem. This article sets out the address this gap. It critically examines the relationship between the violent activities of armed herdsmen and food security in Zango-kataf, Kachia and Kaura local governments of Southern Kaduna.

Different research works have come up with reasons why herdsmen easily carry out such attacks. For example, 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. Arising from the strategic neglect of rural communities in terms of socio-economic developments, Asiwaju (2004), held that many rural communities have been turned into areas of concentration for 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 criminal bandits.

Bagu and Smith (2017) noted that though organized research on armed killer herdsmen activities is still at its nascent stage. However, Kunn and Jibrin (2016) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (2015), noted that there have been some scholarly works on the subject matter. They unanimously contended that rural banditry has become reasonably most prevalent in some parts of the North-Central region, with states like Kaduna Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue becoming more affected by the phenomenon for sometimes now. Bewul et al, (2022) noted that the use of crime mapping can help tackle Nigeria's growing criminal activities like armed violence.

The increasing incidences of armed violence have affected both human and food security in Niger State. Ewans (2007) was however of a different view, he saw the modern concept of human security as that which tries to identify the inherent weaknesses of the traditional security system. 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. Okpaleke (2014) in an attempt to define armed herdsmen activities as a deliberate use of armed violence perpetrated by criminal opportunists and syndicates along the country's borderlines and rural interiors. According to this writer, rural banditry activities 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. Okpaleke (2014) however further maintained that one perspective of herdsmen

activities in the rural areas is motivated by the imperative of material accumulation and financial empowerment for further procurement of arms.

In this direction, Ja'afar (2018) is of the view that there were records of instances of rural banditry in colonial Nigeria, as far back as the 1930s. According to him, in those days, wayfarers and merchants travelling on the local shallow feeder roads were sometimes faced with an ambush by criminal bandits who were targeting goods carried on donkeys, camels and ox carts. The Humanitarian (2018), also stated that the first case of armed killer herdsmen was documented around 1901, and the incidence was said to have occurred somewhere between Western Hausaland and the border of the Republic of Niger. In the said incident, it was recorded that over 12,000 strong camels, laden with assorted grains were attacked and 210 merchants were killed. But the disturbing development is captured more by Egwu (2016) when he stated that rural banditry has moved from its rudimentary phase to a more complex and complicated pattern of criminality. Little wonder Bagu and Smith (2017) submitted that "gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities have taken advantage of the growing insecurity in the country to launch their attacks on villages and communities to loot, engage in highway robberies, cattle rustling and killings for personal gains".

Kaduna State is viewed by this researcher as one of the states that have recently been faced with increasing incidences of banditry, with an overstretched forest hinterland mass of 46,053 square kilometres. Adeniyi (2018) explained further that, even though Lagos State is known to be super populous, its landmass is only 4,000 square kilometres compared to states like Kaduna with 39,762 square kilometres, Kaduna State according to Adeniyi (2018) has the same ecological foundation adorned by hills, extended wet forests, mountains and caves which unfortunately have become new bandit recruiting centres and potential hideouts after attacks.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

Certain socio-existential conditions have been opined to be sufficient reasons why armed herdsmen killings have successfully thrived in Nigeria. Some of these characteristic conditions have been identified to be both the interiors and borderline ecological challenges. Gaye (2018) maintained that prominent among these conditions is 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.

According to Okoh and Ugwu (2019), these 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. The above scholars were also of the view that the rugged open stretched forests provide sufficient avenues for all manners of violent crimes like cattle rustling, kidnappings, arsons, maiming and killings.

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Adeniyi (2018), posits that, in addition to the under-governed rural territorial spheres highlighted above, banditry also thrive 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 to steal gold and cash. Okoli (2017) further elucidated on the above, he pointed out that, sometimes the lethality of the attacks are merely reprisals, designed to showdown communities, which have hitherto challenged or resisted the herdsmen onslaught through vigilantism. Consequently, these armed herdsmen move in and out from the Birnin-Gwari forests into the stretch Zango-kataf through to Kachia and extended landmass up to the forest hills of Kaura local government of the Kaduna State which has become notorious for camping armed herdsmen.

The precarious security situation in the Southern Kaduna region has reached an alarming rate. Beyond the conflicting and contending definitions, dimensions, and perspectives of armed herdsmen and brigands in Nigeria, it has been noted that the phenomenon is not a new one (Musa et al, 2022). One Simon Akhaine, a journalist with the Guardian Newspapers reported on August 1st, 2020 that “life is beginning to be meaningless, and cruel for residents of Gidan-masara village of Zango-kataf, the journalist quoted one Mrs Naomi Boka who had this to say: *“I never knew I would wake up someday to be chased away from my ancestral home by Fulani whom we have lived with for decades. According to the same Guardian Newspaper, one Mallam Musa of Kaura village also had this to”* say: *“the attackers invaded our village and started shooting and burning down our houses at exactly 11:20 pm, unknown to me, my wife, my brother’s wife, my stepmother and three siblings were burnt by the attackers who also burnt down my cousin’s house and slaughtered my cousin’s wife and her baby”*.

Yet in another development, the Friday Tribune of 14th August 2020, reported that the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) has deployed special military operations to Southern Kaduna to curb the recent attacks and isolated killings in the region, but killings have continued unabated. It was also reported by the same newspaper on p.2 of 14th August (2020) that Major –General Enenche that the military is leaving no stone unturned by putting up measures to stem the tide of killings in the Southern Kaduna regions of the State, but killings are increasing on daily basis. The President of the Southern Kaduna People’s Union (SOKAPU) Hon. Jonathan Asake was quoted to have told the Guardian correspondent in an interview he granted on Saturday, August 1st (2020) that persistent attacks and killings have been going on amidst a 24-hour curfew imposed by the State Government, he lamented that the State Government’s tactics lack credibility. The Chairman of the vigilante group in Kasuwan masara who was interviewed confirmed that the gunmen invaded the community on no fewer than 52 motorcycles, carrying sophisticated weapons killing, kidnapping and burning down houses.

The researcher, therefore, set for the study the following objectives:

(i) To find out the implications of armed herdsmen killings on human security in the three most affected local government areas of the Kaduna State and (ii) To examine the implication of herdsmen killings on food security in the three local government areas of the state. Consequently, the following research questions served as the guide for the study (i) what are the implications of

armed herdsmen's killings on human security in your local government area? (ii) What are the implications of armed herdsmen killings on food security in your local government area?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Agricultural and development experts are unanimous in their forecasts that the gains recorded in the agricultural sector of the economy, especially in the area of food production, may suffer a serious impediment as a result of the negative effects of terrorist activities on farmers in Nasarawa and neighboring States (Sabo, 2022). Smith and Bagu (2017) are concerned with this new development in armed herdsmen activities, when they maintained that, most of the bandits are gangs of criminals, often youth from farming and herding communities who have left their domains and have internalized new values and habits of robbing people on the highways and rustling cattle for personal gains, and both the farming and herdsmen communities are also victims of this criminality. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2015) supports the above assertion, when it reported that the bandits have increased their penchant for criminality from highway robbery and rustling to include looting, laying seize on local markets and killing unarmed innocent Nigerians.

The Humanitarian (2018) opines that some armed herdsmen have gone to the extent of kidnapping foreign miners and demanding payments of appropriate ransoms before their releases. Viewing the dangers associated with the above, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016); Okoli and Lenshie (2018), averred that the Federal Government of Nigeria in a bid to curtail illegal mining and armed herdsmen directed the suspension of all forms of mining activities in Zamfara State in the early weeks of April 2019. Ewans (2007) advocated that there should be concerted efforts to shift attention from the normal State centred approach to security and surveillance to a people-oriented approach to security, he was of the view that the rural people best know the routes used by the bandits into their communities, in other words, they should be allowed to play pivotal roles in actualizing their security, necessary state laws should therefore be put in place to allow them access effective security equipment needed to safeguard their lives and properties. As Krauye (2004); Axworthy (2004); Fukuda-pan and Messineo (2012), puts it, sovereignty and security of life are the direct responsibility of government, to which its civil populace depends on to protect their populations against insecurity.

A document from, the West Africa Network of Peace Building (WANEP, 2019) reported that 1,000 civilian deaths were recorded from January to December 2019, all from the North West region through the activities of bandits in the region. With this alarming development, the same source maintained that a committee was set up headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former Inspector General of Police to negotiate with bandits in Zamfara State between June 2011 and May 2019, the committee discovered that 4,983 women were widowed; 25,000 children were orphaned, and more than 190,000 people were displaced as a result of armed banditry in the State.

However, John Campbell in his blog recorded in a broadcast on July 23rd, 2020 on the programme, Africa in Transition and Nigeria on the brink", suggested that though the army introduced several

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military operations in the country to quash banditry, operations like the “Operation Puff Adder”, “DiranMikya”, SharanDaji”, “HudarinDaji”, “Thunder Strike”, “Exercise Harbin Kunama III”, they have only created mixed feelings in the minds of Nigerians. The operations only succeeded in pushing back the bandits and destroying some of their hideouts while some were killed, but Campbell maintained that however according to Campbell, attacks have continued without any sign of stoppage. Campbell further submits that, it was in the light of these challenges that the Governors of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara, agreed on a peace deal with the armed herdsmen in 2019. But accordingly, the agreements did not last. This is because only recently, on the 24th of August, 2020, the Nigerian Tribune Newspaper published a document written by Lanre Adewole, a journalist, suggesting that 1,126 persons were killed, 380 were abducted in the seven northern states as declared by Amnesty International, through its Country Director in Nigeria, Mr Osai Ojigho.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Routine Activity Theory, which is a recent approach to the explanation of crime falls within the social-structural perspective. The main exponents of the theory are Cohen and Felson (1979). The theory attempts to explain predatory criminal activities. Its three main postulations are: (i) where there are a motivated potential offender, (ii) suitable or attractive targets and (iii) the absence of capable guards, crime is likely to take place. Adopting this theory to armed herdsmen activities in the Southern Kaduna region, the researcher may wish to submit that the presence of motivated potential offenders in under-policed agricultural and herding-based communities are likely to become suitable targets for killer herdsmen activities.

The Humanitarian (2018) supports this assertion when it opines that the ecology of such communities brings about not only motivation but temptation alike for criminal indulgence. Consequently, armed herdsmen who have already become 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 descriptive which described the implications of armed herdsmen activities in the Southern Kaduna region of Kaduna State, Nigeria. A triangulation technique, which combined the use of quantitative data where the questionnaires were used to obtain primary data and in-depth interviews to obtain qualitative data became very necessary to receive firsthand information from respondents. The open and closed-ended questionnaires were used as instruments for the collection of primary data from respondents, while secondary data was sourced from journals, books, newspapers and online-peer reviewed works. A sample size of 30 respondents was drawn from the three local governments each, namely Zango-kataf, Kachia and Kaura respectively. The justification for the above was the accessibility of respondents who were direct victims of killer herdsmen.

The in-depth interviews were also conducted by the researcher to further elicit deeper information that the questionnaires could not explore in detail. The SPSS package was used to analyze the collated data accordingly.

## Presentation and Analysis of Data

### *Descriptive Statistics*

**Table 1 Implications of herdsmen activities on human security in Southern Kaduna Region**

Feelings	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Deaths	69	77.5	77.5	77.5
Hospitalizations	5	5.6	5.6	83.1
Loss of property	15	16.8	16.8	98.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2021.

Table 1 above indicates the devastating implications of armed herdsmen activities on human security. 69 (77.5%) of the respondents maintained that the attacks have always resulted in deaths, 5 (5.6%) resulted in hospitalization due to shock, while 15 (16.8%) of them submitted that it led to loss of property.

**Table 2 Implications of herdsmen activities on Food Security**

Effects	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Loss of businesses	7	7.9	8.0	8.0
Loss of farmlands	1	1.1	1.1	9.1
Loss of financial resources	2	2.2	2.3	11.4
Loss of stored grains	1	1.1	1.1	12.5
Loss of animals	2	2.2	2.3	14.8
Closure of markets	74	83.1	84.1	98.9
All of the above	1	1.1	1.1	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>98.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Missing System	1	1.1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

**Source:** Field Survey, 2021.

On table 2 above, respondents indicated that armed herdsmen has affected food security with closure of markets having 74 (83.1%), loss of businesses 7 (11.1%), loss of animals 2 (2.3%), loss of financial resources 2 (2.2%), loss of stored grains 1 (1.1%) and finally, loss of farm land with 1 (1.1%).

### **In-depth Interview Analysis**

In a bid to elicit further information on the activities of armed herdsmen from the respondents, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with some respondents. The following were some of the responses received and transcribed.

When questioned about the general implications of armed herdsmen killings on human security, in his local government area. Respondent (1) had this to say

*“I never knew that after 58 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 on the farm and the raping of my three innocent daughters in my presence, and I wept bitterly without anything to do”.*

Respondents 2 and 3 were from the Zango-Kataf and Kaura local government areas of Kaduna State and had these to say on their personal safety and human security;

*“In my village in Zango-Kataf Local Government Area, an area which has been known over the years as major cattle market, armed herdsmen have rustled over 1000 cattle heads and headed to their forest settlement, and no one dares to go near there, now we are witnessing shortages in our meat consumption and a large chunk of our sources of livelihood and cattle trading has been affected”.*

When further prompted to find out whether they have received any support from the government so far, respondent 3 from Kaura local government area had this to say;

*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, they also. We are now leaving in fear, afraid of our lives and having shortage of our cash and food crops to survive”.*

Respondent 4, from Kachia local government area interjected,

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

Respondent 5 and 6 from Zango-kataf and Kachia local government areas however were more concerned with government's intervention. Respondent 6 had this to say



*“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”.*

Generally, if nothing drastically is done by government through protection of lives and properties, the situation of hunger may lead to further deaths and may compel our people to resort self-help of any form in defense of their existence.

## **DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS**

Findings have suggested that the phenomenon has created severe implications on human security, these effects range from loss of lives with the highest percentage to hospitalization and horror due to shocks. The study has also been able to suggest that the killings by these armed herdsmen have caused untold implications on food security. Loss of cattle and other animals has also greater implications on animal husbandry which has often been the source of livelihood for the respondents. The closure of businesses and markets are other implications on food security.

In all, these incidences are capable of reducing the production of crops for both local production and exports. The loss of lives, hospitalizations and horrific fears, expressed by the respondents has added to the general challenges of killer herdsmen activities on human security.

The above finding on the implications of armed herdsmen activities in Southern Kaduna has successfully provided answers to objective one (1) of the study, which sought to examine the implications of armed herdsmen activities on human security. It is also pertinent to note here that, the fact that people constantly live in perpetual fear of attacks to outright killings amongst many others, may tend to affect human security.

On the other hand, if people are killed on daily basis and those alive cannot freely go to the markets and sell their farm produce, how will they survive? If they cannot go to their farms, how do they harvest, consume or even process the products for export or guarantee market value for cash crops and those meant for domestic consumption? The crisis of food security will arise.

The above findings have sufficiently answered objective two (2) of the study, which sought to find out the implications of armed herdsmen activities on food security. These findings have been supported by Okoli (2017) when he pointed out that; “sometimes the lethality of the attacks are reprisals designed to shutdown communities which have hitherto challenged or resisted the bandits’ onslaught through vigilantism.

It is worthy of note here that the findings of this research are in tandem with the adopted theoretical framework for this research, which is the routine activity theory. This is so because the activities of armed herdsmen who have already become motivated potential offenders find within the communities in Southern Kaduna suitable targets that are unguarded and under-policed.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have considered the implications of armed herdsmen activities on human and food security. In all, it has been able to establish that some respondents have been killed, while others have faced hospitalizations due to shock and living in horrific fears. Others are loss of lives, destruction of farmlands, and loss of animals, amongst other experiences of the respondents in this study.

Something very drastic needs to be done to curb the excesses of herdsmen activities in the affected local government areas of Kaduna State. This is because the researchers kept wondering why these armed herdsmen have continued to launch attacks on innocent people of Southern Kaduna unchecked and without being sufficiently engaged in reprisals by the Nigerian army. Nigeria as a Nation has often been referred to as the giant of Africa due to its population and successes in military operations in the liberation of other African countries and the provision of its army in peacekeeping missions. Why then has the precarious security situation not changed for the better up to the time of this research?

## Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that government takes immediate steps to stop the wanton killings of innocent Nigerians through the provision of very sophisticated detection equipment to security agencies in the forestlands to detect incursion into the communities by armed herdsmen.

It is also recommended that Nigerians in the affected local governments be compensated from the government's strategic food reserves, reconstruction of houses and farmlands should also be considered by the government as a worthy cause. This will rebuild the people's confidence in governance and the challenges of human and food security would have been addressed.

## Future Research

In the course of this research, a lot of questions were answered as mentioned in discussion of findings. Yet, there were still grey areas in some aspects. These areas left some questions lingering hence, the researchers left them for future research. Despite the giant military strength that Nigeria have, despite the military support Nigeria has offered to other African Countries in form of peace missions, why has the criminal herdsmen attacks failed to be tackled. Why has the criminal herdsmen attacks continued to have negative effects on both human and food security?

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