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Rural Banditry and Food Security in Oyo State (2019-2023)

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ABSTRACT

Banditry is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, as many nations especially in Africa continue to battle with its surge in recent years. In Nigeria, media platforms are daily abashed with the evils perpetrated by the bandits across the states claiming several lives, destroying billions worth of property, generating humanitarian crisis with negative implications on food security. Adopting broken windows as a theoretical framework, the paper interrogated the trends and reasons for rural banditry and its deleterious effects on food security in Oyo state. The paper employed desk research method using secondary sources data. It argued that rural banditry has intensified affecting food security with recent attacks concentrated on farmers in the state. It further argued that farmers have lost their lives to attacks, kidnapped for ransom, had their farmlands looted and plundered leading to reduction in low agricultural investment and poor crop production, invariably increasing prices of food products. The paper concluded that the menace of rural banditry has indeed caused affected food accessibility, availability, sustainability and utilization in the State. It therefore recommended that government should employ the use of utter force to clampdown on bandits in their hideouts and also introduce advanced surveillance technologies to monitor activities in the ungoverned forest and reserves.

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Introduction

The fact that rural bandits have become one of the most destructive and ruthless violent group in Nigeria needs no refuting, media platforms are daily colored with the evils of these groups all over the nation. The heinous deeds of bandits in Nigeria appear to have escalated and assumed a more precarious phase with the use of arms and weapons such as short pistols, assault rifles and air gun. The horrific crime of banditry which is recurring at alarming rate now constitutes a more serious security threat to Nigeria's peaceful coexistence and sovereignty (Eromo, 2022; Shanka, 2022; Yusufu & Abdulrahman, 2021).

Banditry has claimed several lives, led to displacements, destroyed properties, crashed economic and business activities, created a sense of fear and uncertainty in many communities. Bandits have grown so bold that they ravage communities in broad light on bikes without fear of security forces (Ladan & Matawalli, 2020). Vitalis and Vitus (2022) claimed that 12,354 persons have died between 2006 and 2021, out of a total of 17,646 fatalities of rural banditry incidences recorded in the seven north-western states, with the death of about 1,126 inhabitants from January to June 2020. Approximately 21 million residents of these states have experienced banditry attacks. Banditry is creating one of the worse humanitarian crises due to widespread violent raids on people in vulnerable villages (Usman & Hapsat 2022). Bandits unleashing of violence on communities have become more lucrative with the levying of villagers and kidnapping. Bandits are making a fortune from ransoms collected from victims of kidnap, as there are about 4000 recorded kidnap incidences and 5 billion naira paid in ransom in 2023 alone. Bandits have become wealthy warlords who would continue to use violence to uphold their stance as they cannot afford to lose out on the economic benefits enjoy from their act of terror (Ben, 2023).

Kuna and Ibrahim (2016) canvassed that the activity of rural bandits which was a huge concern in the northern States has spread down to the south especially the south-western States. In actuality, Ondo, Ogun, Osun and especially Oyo States are fast becoming real hotspots for rural banditry. These bandits are in the forest and communities in their huge numbers, killing, destroying, and kidnapping for ransom. The region which is known for its relative peace is threatened by bandit attacks. Oyo State have been home to more vicious attacks by bandits on police stations, prisons, community leaders and palaces, farmlands among others which is more disquieting (Akinselure, 2021).

The consequential effect of the menace is not limited to the destruction noted earlier; recent concerns have been established over food security. Accessibility and availability of food are impacted by banditry. Bandits have intensified attacks on farmers and farmlands, many of them have been killed, maimed or lost their farmlands to these bandits; those alive cannot go to their farms due to fear of been attacked while on the farm. Onfema and Onwe (2023) argued that states with large hectares of lands for farming activities have lost their huge farmlands to the hands of bandits who terrorise the communities. This act has significantly contributed to food insecurity in the nation. In addition, the decrease in food output has driven up the cost of staple foods. The food security of the nation has worsened as the President declared a state of emergency on food insecurity (Mary, 2023). Food inflation in Nigeria increased to 23% in September 2022, and reached up to 29.9% in January 2024 forcing millions of people into a position of food insecurity (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Tarryn, 2023). According to Global Hunger Index (2023), Nigeria ranked 109th out of 125 nations studied with high level of severe hunger having a score of 28.3.

The efforts of government and other stakeholders in curbing this distressing menace through military operations and dialogue to prevent food insecurity have been unsuccessful so far due to their carefree posture (Defence Headquarters, 2020). Quite a few studies such as Khadijah (2022), Eromo (2022), Ladan and Matawalli (2020) have been carried out on how rural banditry have had agricultural effects on Nigeria's food security, which have majorly focused on northern states in Nigeria, and a few studies such as Olaoye and Ojo (2023) in the Southern states, however,

the notoriety of rural bandits in recent times has called for the need to revisit and revalidate existing studies in light of the upsurge for concerns on food security caused by rural banditry. It is as a result of recent banditry incidences, this paper examined banditry as it affects food security in Oyo State. The paper investigated the trends and reasons of rural banditry with its attendant effect on food security in Oyo State.

Conceptualising Rural Banditry

Banditry has become a common phenomenon in contemporary times especially in Africa. Bandits are an armed group that operates illegally; they make use of weapons to attack individuals and terrorise them while stealing their possessions. Banditry is a kind of organised crime that outlaws generally engages, which involves the use or threat of violence. A bandit is a person who engages in and typically commits crimes, either alone or in groups, like robbery, murder, and extortion (Adamu & Muhammad, 2021). According to Udemezue and Kanu (2019), banditry is referring to robbing and violence against people who are victims by members of a group particularly armed with the aim of subduing and looting the victim.

Bandits move from town to town and even between countries, wreaking havoc, destroying homes and farms, robbing people, and committing horrible crimes like kidnapping, rape, murder, arson, and so forth (Okoro, 2021). Banditry is a premeditated criminal action planned and executed for one's own benefit. As a result, armed bandits are simply organised crime groups that terrorise and steal the valuables of tourists and locals, including money, goods, cattle, camels, and sheep (Abdulahi, 2019). Bandits are a type of non-state armed group that terrorises the populaces by taking advantage of social grievances against the state and among communities and ethnic groupings. They frequently show that they are able to identify the weak and exert pressure on the government to comply with their requests (James & Muritala, 2021).

Rural banditry could be seen as bunch of outlaws that engage in criminal operations in rural communities including cattle rustling, raiding villages, and kidnappings in an attempt to amass fortune in an antiquated manner. Therefore, rural bandits are gangs that intimidate and evict locals, or travellers of their valuables, including money and other belongings. Rural banditry therefore refers only to the attacks by outlaws and criminals in rural areas (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Ejiiofor (2022) conceived rural banditry as activities by criminal groups that operate in local communities in quest for economic fortune rather than reasons. Ojo, Oyewole and Folahanmi (2023) contended that rural banditry is a type of organised crime carried out by syndicates that target citizens for intimidation, eviction, murder, and property destruction.

The primary driving force behind banditry in an area plagued by poverty and unfavourable socioeconomic consequences is the seductive promise of economic benefits. The vast millions of money that can be extracted as ransom from rural villages and road users have been realised by bandits. As a result, they have made effective use of the money to grow and expand their extremely profitable illegal businesses. Beyond stealing, extortion, and wanton violence, there is no obvious ideological basis for banditry (Adamu & Muhammad, 2021). Bandits typically reside in areas that are either completely or largely ungoverned, with little or no government presence. These consist of isolated localities and forest enclaves, which

are exploited as hiding spots for attack planning and execution. An atmosphere like this gives bandit's chances to gain an operational edge. Because of this, bandits frequently operate in rural areas, carrying out their illicit activities such as kidnappings, cattle rustlings, looting, and attacks in, out of, and against settlements and communities. As a result, their operational control centres on border and rural communities as well as sparsely populated areas near important roads (Abdulrasheed, 2021; Ogbonnaya, 2020). Rural banditry as used in this study refers to an unruly group of several rural criminals that engage in cattle rustling, armed robberies, kidnapping for ransom, looting and attacks on farmers and other member of communities.

Conceptualising Food Security

Without any iota of doubt, food remains the most basic requirement for human survival. Food security is flexible concept as with several definitions demonstrating the contextually dependent aspects. It was first used about years ago in the era of global food crises in 1970 (Peng & Berry, 2019). It describes a condition in which there is access to enough healthy and safe food expected to meet the dietary requirements to enjoy and live healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2002). For Olaoye (2014), people's regular access socially, physically, and financially to safe food required for a healthy living is food security. The availability of food for consumption by individuals, families, communities, or households without posing a serious financial risk is measured by food security.

The United State Department of Agriculture (2002) conceived food security as the accessibility of food in a nation and equal capability of citizens to afford it. It is the availability of food regardless social class, gender or locality. People who have food security do not live in deprivation, fear of malnourishment or lose purchasing power due to high cost of food prices. World Bank (1986) held that food security is the condition where there is sufficient food necessary for fit and fruitful living. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (2002) identified fundamental element of food security; food availability, access, utilization, and stability. Food availability involves tangible presence of food; a condition of adequate access and means to get food in vital for well-being. The ability for household to choose what food to buy, how to prepare it, consume and allocate it is utilisation; and stability is achieved when household supply is regular throughout the year and over an extended period of time (FAO, 2002). However, when these conditions are non-existent, lacking or not fully met, there is the tendency to be insecure with food.

Food insecurity is a condition of limited availability of nutrition to meet up people's nutritional requirement. When people are missing in any of the four pillars, there is food insecurity (Henry, 2017). It is experienced as not knowing how and when food will be available in the future; not having right kind and quantity of food to sustain a healthy lifestyle, or having to utilise methods that are socially undesirable in order to obtain food (National Research Council, 2006). Globally, according to the FOA (2023) report, a total of 2.4 billion people in 2022 alone experienced food insecurity, with nearly 1.1 billion people (46%) in Asia, 37% in Africa (868 million), 17% (338million) in other parts of the world.

Food security in this study is believed to be a situation in which people have enough healthy and safe meal that satisfies the nutritional requirements to live a healthy life.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the broken windows theory as its theoretical underpinning. The theory which was propounded by Wilson and Kelling (1980) was popularised by Rudy Giuliani and William Bratton. The assumption of the theory is that if broken windows are ignored or not fixed, criminals would eventually smash the windows that are still in place. The broken window is an analogy to describe the implications of the behavioural norms break down, people start to disobey the rules that keep a community orderly which can make it fall apart. The theory argues that failure to address smaller crimes would eventually intensify into larger crimes which would be too difficult for the nation's security architecture to effectively curtail. Every criminal act, regardless of how small it appears, if not addressed right from the beginning, would inevitably deteriorate to bigger and more complicated crimes. However, in a society where problems are addressed as soon as they arise, people would learn to respond positively and socially in a way that fosters order and sanity (Jeffery, 1993; Wilson & Kelling, 1980).

The broken window theory links crime to disorder and disregard for existing law, making informal social control system to be weak, causing development of criminal activity. The failure to clampdown on disorderliness, breach of law and unrest its early stage which can be magnified and become a serious threat to the community in no time. The broken windows theory advocates against zero tolerance for anti-social behavior which can cause damages in society. In spite of the fact that theory is useful in explaining the negligence of little crimes can cause problems, it overgeneralizes the motives for crime by accentuating outward manifestations of disorder. Also, it neglected social and economic concerns that make individuals to be vulnerable to criminal behavior, such as unemployment, poverty, lack of education and poverty (Lab, 2010; Braga & Weisburd, 2010; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006).

The theory is employed to anchor the paper because of its utility in explaining the menace of rural banditry as it offers insight into the nature, causes and effects of criminality in rural areas in Oyo state. The increase in crime and instability in rural communities can be traced to failure to adequately prosecute small crimes such as theft of properties, forceful land seizures, cattle rustling, and other unregulated activities leading to more violent crimes like as murder, kidnapping, rape and armed robbery. The glaring lack of public security in rural areas leaves residents vulnerable and turns them into safe havens for seasoned criminals. The menace has now become a destructive threat to food security as farmers are now the targets of bandits in the southwest, Oyo state to be precise. They have become fearless and ruthless parading themselves in military camouflage carrying out vicious killings of farmers, destroying farms and even go as far as kidnapping them for heavy ransom. The menace has become so difficult for the government to resolve and has now become a bone stuck in the neck of Oyo State and Nigeria.

Rural Banditry: The Nigerian Experience

Banditry is not an uncanny and recent occurrence in Nigeria, as it has been existent since time immemorial outlawed warlords raid communities for food and other material possession for themselves and also gives to the poor to win their support. Jafar (2018) described how travellers and merchants plying trade routes were frequently ambushed by outlaws. Possessions and merchandise transported on the

backs animals were the targets of the outlaws who would seize them by force and escape into the forest. Arguing further, he noted that bandits would sporadically raid villages and settlements with the intention of causing wanton devastation of property and purposeful slaughter. In these kinds of raids, the bandits would demolish almost everything that got in their way, such as farm products and jewels.

Ellis (2017) cited in Timipia et al (2023) advanced that banditry existed in ancient times, it became popular after General Gowon military regime's failure to effectively handle demobilization after civil war. Demobilized combatants became outlaws since they returned home from war with nothing to do. Banditry assumed the form of armed robberies as the weapon used by these combatants were not totally recovered and was used for robberies in different communities across the nation. She argued that despite government executions of armed robbers in the light of its terrible occurrences all over the nation by these combatants, it only intensified over the decades as other syndicates got claiming they were advocating for the downtrodden such as Anini the robin-hood. By early 1990s, outlawry has become a huge menace as commercial kidnappings, associated violence and killings characterised the nation (Odinkalu, 2018).

Literature abounds with different perspectives of the historical trend of contemporary banditry in Nigeria; certain scholars believed that banditry evolved from the complicated rapport between farmers and herders while others are of the opinion that economic opportunities, wealth accumulation and benefits attached to crime is the reason for the rise of banditry in recent times in Nigeria (Ahmadu 2019; Gambari, 2018). The use of heavy weapons and arms have tragically magnified the dimensions of banditry not just to robberies of people on the highway but involved kidnapping for heavy ransom, village and community raids, gruesome killing of innocent victim's security personnel, cattle rustling and looting of farmlands. Bandits operate now more in broad daylight on bikes raiding communities, levying community members, issuing out death threats on communities that fail to meet up with the levies while government that is supposed to protect lives and properties remains helpless in addressing the menace (Onwunali, Oparandudu & Ajiji, 2023).

The studies of Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) (2024) claimed that 2,600 civilian deaths were linked to bandits especially in the northwest in 2021. The northwest and northeast recorded 662 and 246 kidnapping-related events between 2019 and 2023. During this time, kidnapping replaced cattle rustling as the primary source of income for bandits. Since cattle rustling were less profitable as herders moved to safer areas and the stock of cattle decreased, bandits were forced to look for other sources of funding (Yusuf, 2022).

Rural Banditry in Oyo State: A brief overview

Banditry in Oyo State is more disconcerting as it remains one of the most attacked by bandits in the southwest. Oyekola, Adewuyi and Ajibade (2023) argued that Oyo State had an almost instantaneous increase in insecurity following the EndSARS protest in 2020, as criminals took advantage of the situation as it happened in some others States of the nation. Residents of the State were the regular targets of looting by thugs, with reports of kidnappings, murders, and attacks against residents of Ibarapa land and Oke Ogun axis. The State have been persistently targeted by bandits especially residents of Oke-Ogun and Ibarapa axis which took the intervention of Sunday Igboho, an activist in the area, who fought back the attacks

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in 2021. Despite this, attacks in the State intensified on daily basis as some communities like Tapa and Ayete in Ibarapa, Oyo State were deserted for the fear of being attacked (Adejumo, 2021).

Akinselure (2021) identified that Oyo state has been in the spotlight of rural bandits razing communities and destroying their properties. The governor of the State, Seyi Makinde on February 5th, 2024 cried out to the chairmen of local government areas to use everything in their capability to flush and fish out bandits from every nook and cranny of the State. Banditry has gained more momentum in the state by attacking police stations, palaces and even correctional facilities (Akinselure, 2021). The nature and pattern of bandit attacks in Oyo State is not different from the occurrences in northwest, Nigeria. These bandits found their ways into the forests reserves and local settlements of Oyo State from the north. They are known to mostly look uneducated, rough and ruthless and sometimes dress in military camouflage during their operations to deceive innocent villagers (Musliudeen, 2022; Oyo Insights, 2019). The nature and trend of attacks noticed in Oyo State first were attacks on villagers, commuters and residents. The bandits raided and looted houses in rural communities killing anyone at will. On the June 6, 2021, the bandits attacked Igangan community attacking the Baale palace and killed over 11 people and raped defenceless women during their raids on villagers in communities across Oyo State (Adejumo, 2021). Overtime, they became fearless attacking security officers, markets and farms, carting away cattle, goats, sheep and poultry birds. In a bid to expand their economic opportunities and looting enterprise, bandits embarked on kidnappings raking in several millions of naira as ransom (Atoyebi, 2021). The peace and security once enjoyed in the State has been snapped away by bandits who now attack anywhere and anytime (Abdulrahman, 2022). Corroborating bandits' attacks in the State is table 1 showing the recent occurrences and level of casualties.

Table 1: *Bandits Attacks in Oyo State from 2019 to 2023*

S/N	Date of Attack	Nature of Attack	Place of Attack	Fatalities	Sources
1.	October 18, 2023	Bandits attacked villagers	Apalokun village, Iwerele, Iwajowa	8	Vanguard News
2.	November 6, 2023	Bandits attacked villagers	Kujifi, Kosobo,	4	Vanguard News
3.	November 14, 2023	Bandits attacked vigilantes	Sepeteri, Saki	3	All News Nigeria
4.	August 2, 2022	Bandits abducted and killed student of LAUTECH	Ogbomoso-Ilorin Expressway, Igbon	3	People Gazette
5.	October 29, 2022	Bandits attacked and kidnapped commuters	Lagos-Ibadan Expressway	1 killed, several persons were abducted	Daily Trust

6.	December 29, 2022	Bandits kidnapped a resident and attacked security officers	Igangan Community	2	Vanguard News
7.	March, 2 2021	Bandits attack rural settlement	Idigba Olomi, Ogbomosho	5	Punch News
8.	March 3, 2021	Bandits attacked security operative	Ofiki road, Aba Agudugu, Atisbo.	4	Chronicles Nigeria
9.	April 26. 2021	Bandits attacked hotel and kidnapped workers and guest	Ajaawa, Ogo Oluwa	8	Premium Times
10.	June 7, 2021	Bandits invaded the community at night	Igangan community	11	Premium Times
11.	June 13, 2021	Bandits kidnapped Bishop of Anglican Diocese and others	Oyo/Ogbomoso expressway	3	Vanguard News
12.	July 19, 2021	Bandits attacked security officers	Igbo Ora	4	Oriental News Nigeria
13.	June 1, 2020	Barakat Bello was raped and machete by bandits	Ibadan, Oyo state	1	Daily Post
14.	June 2, 2020	Bandits attacked villagers	Ikereku, Pade, and Olanla villages	3	Vanguard News
15.	November 21, 2019	Bandits attack commissioner for lands	Ibadan, Oyo	2	Oyo Insight

Source: Author's Compilation

Reasons for Rural Banditry in Oyo State

Existence of Ungoverned Spaces

One remote reason for rural banditry in Oyo State is the existence of ungoverned forests and reserves. Many of the forest and reserves in Oyo State are largely ungoverned having little or no presence of the government. Forest reserves such as the one opposite Agodi gardens have become infested and occupied by bandits.

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Forests believed to be evils and neglected due to ancient cultural practices have become safe places where bandits live and plan their raids on communities. Kidnapped victims are kept in the forests till ransom are paid and are set free. Lack of government presence to exercise sovereign control over the areas has largely contributed to reign of rural banditry (Oludayo, 2021).

Inadequate and Ill equipped security Networks

Inadequate and ill-equipped security network makes rural banditry to thrive in Oyo state. The security force in Oyo state is inadequate and mostly not well equipped to tackle the menace of banditry in the State. Bandits are well equipped with sophisticated weapons compared to what the security agents have. Many at times when attacks are reported, the security force fails to get to the scene timely due to poor logistics. They are also heavily outnumbered and overwhelmed by the security challenges happening simultaneously across the State. In fact, the security force especially the police and Amotekun are also targets of bandits to loot their weapons (Oluwole, 2020).

Traditional Rulers conspiracy

Further, the traditional rulers have been alleged to look the other way in addressing rural banditry in communities in the state due to selfish economic gains. Just like the trend in North-East, where traditional rulers work in partnership with bandits to afflict the people (Chuwang, 2023), similarly in some part of the Oyo State, traditional rulers have been alleged to help bandits to easily carry out their terror. Bandits' attacks in Oyo state especially in Ibarapa, Igangan and Ibariba were caused by untroubled attitude and conspiracy by the traditional rulers.

Intercultural Marriage among the Indigenes and Fulani

Another reason that prompts rural banditry in Oyo state is the intercultural marriage between the indigenes and non-natives, particularly the Fulani. As Olafusi (2020) claimed, intercultural marriage among the indigenes and the Fulani is enabled bandit attacks in Oyo State. Arguing further, he perceived that inter-marriage has created opportunity for the non-natives to infiltrate many parts of the State. For instance, in Kish, an agrarian community in Oyo state, inter-marriage between the indigenes and Fulanis have existed for a long time and the place has become a stronghold to them. The nooks and crannies of the communities are known by the non-indigenes who became members of the communities through marriage and still constitute a security threat.

Closeness of Rural Communities to International Borders

Porosity of borders makes attacks easy in many of the communities in Oyo state. The State is bounded by Kwara State to the north, Osun State to the east, Ogun State to the south and importantly Benin Republic to its west. Saki shares an international boundary with Benin Republic and has been a passage for illegal migrants for several decades and now bandits explore this to infiltrate the State. As pointed out by Bidemi (2020), Oyo State Governor, Seyi Makinde acknowledged that Saki border has been used by bandits to cross and wreak havoc on the rural communities. The closeness of the borders to several rural communities especially those that shared with Kwara State are used by bandits to cross from the north, and that shared with Republic of Benin are used by bandits all the way from Mali to Oyo State

(Bidemi, 2020). The borders are poorly policed making it easy for entry and exit to the State.

Government untimely policy response also contributes to the spread of the menace in the state in the first place. If the government has met the menace with brutal force or other strict measures at its early stage, it would not have spread to become a huge security concern as it is presently. Bandits have established their authority in some of the local forests and state government is unable to dislodge them. It has become a difficult task to overwhelm bandits and flush them out of the forests and reserves they hide and launch their attacks.

Attendant Effects of Rural Banditry on Food Security in Oyo State

The attendant effects of rural banditry are devastating; it has led to the loss of lives of several farmers over the years. Farmers mostly males who are heads of family and the food producers of the State are slaughtered and killed like chickens even right on the farms. The families of these farmers are left without bread winners leading to loss of source of livelihood, while local food production declines in the State. Many of the families find it difficult to feed and survive leading to abject poverty (Omogbolagun, 2020). Akintunde, Adeyemi and Adelana (2023) stated that in 2020 and 2022, respectively, there were cases of 97 fatalities as a result of banditry in Oyo state. Farmers were also kidnapped on their farmlands and released only after ransoms have been paid in full by their family members, often, the victims were still killed even after payment. To corroborate the level of devastation caused by the reign of rural bandits, Table 2 shows the recent attacks on farmers across communities in Oyo State.

Table 2: Occurrences of Attacks on Farmers by Bandits in Oyo State from 2019 to 2023

S/N	Date of Attack	Nature of Attack	Place of Attack	Fatalities	Sources
1	January 3, 2023	Bandits killed farmers on their farm	Igangan community	3	Punch News
2	October 17, 2023	Bandits hacked farmers to death	Iwajowa, Oyo State	3	New Nigeria News
3	November 13, 2023	Bandits attacked farmers on their farm	Oke Ogun, Oyo state	3	Vanguard News
4	April 21, 2022	Bandits hacked farmer and security to death	Living farms, Fiditi	2	Vanguard News
5	May 2, 2022	Bandits killed farmer and son	Araromi village, Igboora	2	This Day Live
6	May 4, 2022	Farmer was attacked on his farm	Araromi village, Igboora	1	Punch News
7	June 22, 2022	Bandits attacked and injured farmers on their farms	Oke Ogun	30	Vanguard

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8	October 11, 2022	Bandits attack	Iseyin, Oyo State	4	Premium Times
9	March 5, 2021	Bandits killed farmers on their farm	Fiditi, Afijio LGA	2	This Day Live
10	March 8, 2021	Bandits abducted farmers	Sanyo and Alabameji villages, Soka area	3	Vanguard News
11	March 27, 2021	Bandits attacked a farmer and his managers	Igangan community	3	Premuim News
12	April 16, 2021	Bandits machete farmer to death	Oke Orogun village, Saki	1	Punch News
13	April 16, 2021	Bandits killed farmers	Orita Merin, Konko village	2	Vanguard News
14	June 6-8, 2021	Bandits attack	Igangan community	20	Vanguard News
15	June 20, 2020	Bandits attacked and killed farmers	Oke Ogun	30	Punch News
16	August 26, 2020	Bandits attack	Igbo-dudu in Lanlate	2	Premium Times
17	August 24, 2020	Bandits attacked a farm	Ikoyi-Ile in Orire Local Government area	4	Tribune Online

Source: Author's Compilation

Another negative effect rural banditry is plundering and destruction of farmlands. While bandits attack farmers on their farm, more often than not, they leave the farms destroyed. They loot every produce and rustle every animal as spoils of raids, farms are razed or burnt down completely leaving farmers with nothing (Ayantoye, 2024). Omogbolagun, (2020) noted that farmer's inability to go their farms for fear allows more plundering on them as whatever is planted is stolen.

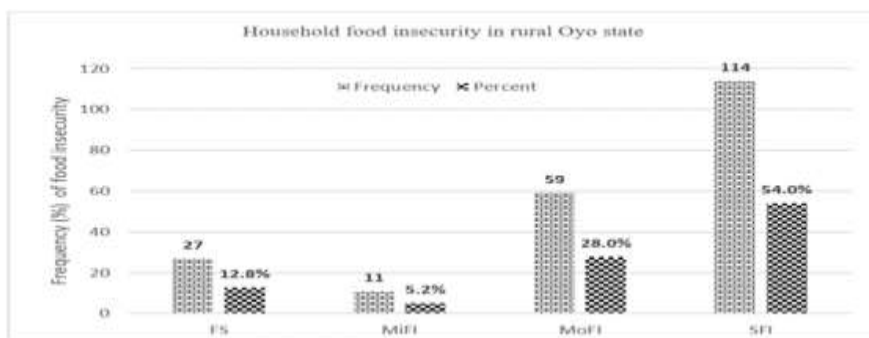
Rural banditry has posed a challenge to food security in Oyo state in the area of low agricultural investments. Many agricultural investors have withdrawn their investments from the state as farms are destroyed, farmers are killed and kidnapped, and farms are not viable for investments anymore. It has become difficult and risky to cultivate farmlands in Oyo state as the tendencies are high that the farms would be razed and destroyed by bandits especially if there are no security officers in their large numbers to guard them. This fear of bandits has chased away investors from the state as they look elsewhere to invest for better profit. Since income from farm produce is low, it is only reasonable to not invest till rural banditry is curbed (Olaoye & Ojo, 2023).

The Food and Agriculture Organisation four pillars of food security which are food availability, accessibility, sustainability and utilisation, gave apt insight to the level of food insecurity prevalent in the State. The death and inability of farmers to cultivate their farms and low agricultural investments showed a sharp decline in crop production in Oyo state. Many farmers have lost their lives while the rest cannot step on their farms for fear of being killed. Those courageous enough are made to

pay taxes to cultivate their farms; crop production has dropped, economic activities reduced. In communities such as Igangan and Ibarapa where there are no irrigation systems in place to water the crops, they only depend on rainfall and as such bandits do not even allow them step on their farms to monitor and harvest their crops, thereby leading to decrease in crop outputs (Omogbolagun, 2020). The decrease in production invariably led to the shortage of food available for the people of Oyo state. This was possible due to the criminal activities of rural bandits, which scare farmers away from cultivation and harvesting (Olaoye & John, 2023).

Furthermore, since crops availability has been poor and inadequate, the quantity of food products accessible would definitely be poor too. Oyo state is faced with food production decline and unavailability which has contributed to rise in price of food items. Though coupled with some other factors such as increase in cost of transport due to hike in the prices of petrol; rural banditry however remained a major factor to skyrocketing prices of food items in Oyo state as farmers are forced to shift the burden of losses caused by rural bandits to the consumers. Reduction in the quantity of food available directly means reduction in quantity of food to be accessed. Due to this, sustainable expansion is largely inadequate, accessibility and affordability is poor, it is only explainable that food consumption dropped leading to malnutrition and hunger in Oyo State with 93.2% in urban slums and 68.3% in rural slums (Tinuola et al., 2023). This only meant that people of Oyo State suffer from food unavailability, inaccessibility, poor sustainability and utilisation. This is consistent with the studies of Olutosin *et al* (2021) that indicated the variations in levels of deepening food insecurity in rural Oyo State. It showed that 87.2% of the population are facing food insecurity as represented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Household Food Insecurity in Rural Oyo State



Source: Olutosin *et al* (2021)

It is impossible to overstate the contribution of agricultural resources to a nation in bringing about economic affluence, job possibilities, revenue earnings from exports, and the eradication of poverty. It is noteworthy that small-scale farmers account for 99% of Nigeria's principal agricultural outputs. Most Nigerians engage in agriculture as their primary socio-economic activity, particularly people living in the rural parts (Kralovec, 2020). The effects of banditry activities on food security are not far-fetched, as attacks on the farmers, who are the major food producers, have ripple effects on food security in terms of handiness, ease of access, affordability and sustenance by the people.

Assessment of the Efforts of Stakeholders to curb Rural Banditry on Farmers in Oyo State

Government have not been totally silent about the issue of banditry in the state, though, their responses have not been ineffective. One of the approaches adopted by the government was the services of local militia to fight against banditry. In January 2020, Oyo state launched the Amotekun security network alongside other southwestern states to deal with the issues of insecurity most especially banditry. Early 2021, about 200 operatives were deployed to tackle the menace by ridding forest, enclaves and other areas where bandits might use as safe havens especially in Oke Ogun, Igangan and Sepeteri (Vanguard, 2021). The Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and local vigilantes were similarly engaged in fighting against bandits. Nonetheless, the Ametokun, OPC and local vigilantes, though proactive, have not been strong enough to curb the menace. Many times, security officers have been victims of attacks with several members killed, maimed or kidnapped by bandits.

The State government also introduced the no revenue collection on farm produce earlier this year to help address the rise in prices of food items. The government of Oyo State ensured that the food harvest exported out of Oyo state will attract necessary revenue but will be subsidised by 50% while those sold in the State will attract no levies. Also, the government further subsidised land clearance for farmers and other investors in agriculture in Oyo State (Adebayo, 2024). In addition, the lawmakers in the state earlier this year argued for surveillance be employed to help monitor forests and other less governed areas that bandits use as launch pads for their attacks on innocent villagers (*The Sun*, 2024).

The local farmers have recent times devised a better mechanism to dislodge bandits especially those that maraud around as herdsmen. The introduction of traditional charms and voodoo is being used to frustrate these bandits as they have been alleged to die strangely on contact with farmlands in Oyo state. Many farmers especially in Ibarapa, Igangan and Oke Ogun axis have continued to use this means to drive away bandits from their farmlands. Adebayo (2022) canvassed that hunters and farmers in Ibariba community and beyond have resorted to the use of bees and poisonous snakes to fight bandits as they move into their farms and villages.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Oyo state is fast becoming a hotbed for bandit attacks, owing to the pattern at which they are having a filled day. The lives of farmers and residents are not safe, agricultural investments have taken a down turn, crop production declining at a disheartening rate causing rise in prices of food products, hunger crises and invariably food insecurity in Oyo State. The study concludes that if the menace is not timely addressed and curbed with stricter security measures, the state would be overwhelmed and descend into a bigger haven for bandits and other criminals contending and challenging government authority.

The study therefore recommends that the State government involves the use of utter force, employing the service of the military which would increase fire power alongside the Amotekun and local vigilantes to overwhelm the bandits with attacks on all forest reserves and hideout in the state. Also, the government should employ the use of advanced surveillance technologies to monitor the activities of bandits in areas that have no government presence in the state and aid timely response to

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attacks by bandits. In order for farmers to be able to cultivate their farmlands without fear of attacks, security personnel should be adequately placed in strategic junctions and areas, and also carry out regular patrols to quickly respond to calls for help by farmers.

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