



Implications of Armed Banditry for Education in Nigeria's North West Region

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Alumni Note

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Introduction

A country's development depends on its citizens' access to quality education, which is a catalyst for social and economic transformation. An educated populace is beneficial to a country, and ideally education improves national security and development by instilling the desirable attributes of honesty, sincerity, productivity, inventiveness and patriotism among a country's citizens. At a more practical level, it also empowers people with lifelong skills and knowledge. This is why governments allocate a significant portion of their budgets to the educational sector in order to enhance citizens' educational levels. A favourable environment for learning and the provision of adequate resources are necessary for the attainment of educational goals. While attendance at schools is dependent on the readiness of the child, encouragement from parents, the provision of school materials and proximity to a school, the onus lies on governments to provide education.¹

Nigeria has been experiencing insecurity and instability due to terrorism, kidnapping and armed banditry. The persistent banditry in Nigeria's North West region has undermined the nation's economic activities and social development and has challenged the government's primary constitutional responsibility of securing lives and property. The spate of banditry attacks on schools and the resultant mass abduction of students are a source of concern to the future of education in the North West region, and Nigeria as a whole. Students, pupils and their teachers have witnessed several forms of attacks, ranging from kidnapping to killing, rape and other criminal activities. Teachers, students and pupils have been murdered or injured and buildings razed in some of these attacks, resulting in displacement and unrest. Families no longer feel safe sending their children to school and the closure of most schools as a result of the banditry is impacting negatively on education in the North West. Thus, the deteriorating security situation in Nigeria has affected the educational sector and is therefore a cause of serious concern.

Generally, the North West has suffered low enrolment rates due to the prevalence in the region of Islamic education, because most parents are yet

¹ P. Oladunjoye et al., "Effects of Boko Haram on School Attendance in Northern Nigeria", *British Journal of Education*, Vol.1(2), 2013.

to embrace Western education. Only 61% of 6-11 year-olds attend primary school regularly, while only 35.6% of 3-5 year-olds receive early childhood education.² Various reasons, including economic hurdles and sociocultural norms and practices, contribute to education deprivation in northern Nigeria and discourage participation in formal school, especially for girls. Female primary school net attendance rates in the North East and North West regions are 47.7% and 47.3%, respectively, implying that more than half of the overall population of girls are not in school.³

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the level of education in the North West has been generally poor even before the upsurge of attacks on schools. The persistent threat posed by bandits and religious extremists in recent times has further hampered efforts at improving education in the region. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to discuss the implications of banditry for education in Nigeria's North West, with a view to proffering strategies aimed at improving education in the region.

Overview of banditry in Nigeria's North West region

Nigeria's North West region encompasses seven states: Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kaduna, Zamfara, Jigawa and Sokoto, five of which (Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi and Sokoto) have been most affected by the scourge of rural banditry. Of these five states, Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara have been the most critical hotspots. The region "has a long history of banditry, with the first recorded case occurring somewhere between 'western Hausa land' and the Niger border in 1901, when a 12,000 strong camel train 'laden with assorted grains' was attacked and 210 merchants killed".⁴

In recent times the discovery of gold in the region and the activities of illegal miners competing for the control of gold reserves have further intensified the

² *Premium Times*, "39% of Children in North-west Except Kaduna, Are out of School – UNICEF", 27 August 2019, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/348897-39-of-children-in-north-west-except-kaduna-are-out-of-school-unicef.html>.

³ National Population Commission (Nigeria) and RTI International, "Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS)", Washington, DC, US Agency for International Development, 2015.

⁴ *New Humanitarian*, "Zamfara: Nigeria's Wild Northwest", 13 September 2018, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2018/09/13/zamfara-nigeria-s-wild-northwest>.

existence and activities of armed groups in the North West. Their strategies include attacking, abducting, killing, and robbing villagers and travellers; cattle rustling; kidnapping for ransom; and sexual violence. Banditry has been conducted by criminals on a large scale, with heavy human and economic costs that negatively impact on the North West. The violence has also hindered agricultural activities and heightened the risk of acute food insecurity. Livelihoods have been disrupted, and fear and insecurity among the populace have also increased. Bandits have become so bold that they notify villages ahead of attacks and impose illegal tolls on farmers seeking to gain access to their farmlands.

Since the infamous Chibok schoolgirls incident in 2014 there has been a recurring pattern of targeted attacks by bandits and terrorists on vulnerable school children. The first such incident took place in December 2020, when gunmen attacked the Government Boys Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina state, and abducted over 300 students.⁵ Subsequently, similar incidents occurred at the Federal Government College in Birnin Yauri, Kebbi state; the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara state; the Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic in Zaria, Kaduna state; the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Kaduna state; the Greenfield University in Kaduna state; and the Zamfara College of Agriculture and Animal Science in Bakura Local Government Area, to mention only a few. So far, over 1,680 school children were kidnapped between 2014 and August 2023. Over 180 of those children were killed, while 90 were injured in 70 attacks. Additionally, an estimated 60 school staff were kidnapped, 14 of whom were killed, and 25 school buildings destroyed.⁶

A major concern is how organised groups of individuals frequently travelling in motorcycle convoys are able to successfully move such a large number of students without encountering any form of interruption and resistance from the security agencies responsible for ensuring security in the geographical region in question. In all these cases, the students and teachers are helpless

⁵ D. Peterside, "School Kidnappings and Its Implications for Posterity", *Premium Times*, 21 June 2021, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/469027-school-kidnappings-and-its-implications-for-posterity-by-dakuku-peterside.html>.

⁶ I. Hassan-Wuyo, "Over 1,680 Nigerian Schoolchildren Kidnapped since Chibok Incident", *Vanguard*, 18 August 2023, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/08/over-1680-nigerian-schoolchildren-kidnapped-since-chibok-incident-sci/>.

and left at the mercy of the bandits, and are only released after the payment of huge ransoms, usually in millions of naira. Sadly, some of the victims whose parents could not afford the ransoms are killed by the bandits.

It is worth noting, however, that banditry is not limited to North West alone. In fact, it is also reasonably prevalent in parts of North Central region, with states like Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau and Benue being veritable hotbeds.⁷ The focus of this paper, however, is on North West.

Implications of banditry for education in Nigeria's North West region

Banditry has had a crippling effect on education in the region and is a threat to the future of education not only in the North West, but in Nigeria as a whole. The attacks on schools are a violation of children's rights to education, life and liberty, and have created fear in not only the students, but their parents as well, who would rather have their children remain under their watch at home than allow them to go to schools when they are not sure of their safety. This has led to low school enrolments, which in turn has severe implications for intergenerational human capacity development.

The traumatic experiences endured by children either as direct victims or witnesses of these attacks have enduring and profound effects that can severely deter their engagement with formal education. Such traumatic events have significant implications for the educational landscape over an extended timeframe. Safeguarding the lives of children and their fundamental right to education emerges as a paramount imperative in this context.

Additionally, uneducated children are in the long run a source of threat to the security of the country, because without a proper education they are readily available for recruitment by criminal elements. Available statistics indicate that the Nigerian population will reach 300 million in the next 15 years, with young people constituting a high percentage. "This figure should be a blessing if the people are educated and armed with the relevant skills needed to

⁷ M.J. Kuna and J. Ibrahim (eds), *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*, Abuja, Centre for Democracy and Development, 2016.

compete in the technology driven world. If however, a large proportion of this population misses out on education, it will be a lost opportunity and a recipe for disaster.”⁸

The attacks on schools have led to many school closures in the region. For instance, Kaduna state government reportedly shut down 13 schools in July 2021 after the abduction of 150 students from Bethel High School. Also, the Zamfara state government announced the closure of all schools in the state after the abduction of over 200 girls from the school in Jangebe and 75 students from the Government Secondary School in Kaya. The governor of Kano state also ordered the closure of ten schools located on the outskirts of the state and five health training institutions in the state. In Yobe state, the government ordered all boarding school students to go home except SS3 students (the equivalent of Grade 12 students). Katsina state also closed all its boarding schools after the Kankara abduction in December 2020, and Sokoto state shut down 16 boarding schools along its borders.⁹

Even worse, the bandits have converted some of the primary schools in remote rural communities of Zamfara state into hideouts after teachers and students had abandoned the schools as a result of the bandits' activities. For example, on one occasion the headmaster of a primary school in the state's Birnin Magaji Local Government Area was confronted by armed men who asked him to close lessons for the day because they intended to sleep in the classrooms. The headmaster, out of fear for his life, immediately closed the school and asked all the pupils to go home.¹⁰ Apart from this, there are schools with insufficient teaching staff complements because many teachers have rejected postings to rural schools due to the risks associated with going to such places to teach. As a result, the teachers that are still willing to work there are overstretched.

Furthermore, the closure of schools has derailed the academic progress of the students and has an extremely negative impact on education, leading to

⁸ Peterside, 2021.

⁹ E. Akinkuotu, "Seven Northern States Shut Schools over Rising Banditry, Abductions", *Punch*, 2 March 2021, <https://punchng.com/seven-northern-states-shut-schools-over-rising-banditry-abductions/>.

¹⁰ Sahara Reporters, "Bandits Convert Classrooms in Nigerian Schools to Hideouts, Chase away Teachers", 8 September 2021, <http://saharareporters.com/2021/09/08/bandits-convert-classrooms-nigerian-schools-hideouts-chase-away-teachers>.

the regression of learning among children, who are prone to easily forget what they have learnt at school when they stay at home for too long. It has also disrupted the academic calendar, thereby extending the length of time students have to study.

Conclusion

This paper set out to critically evaluate banditry and its implications for education in Nigeria's North West region, with the aim of articulating strategies to improve the education system in Nigeria. The study established that the prevalent insecurity has had a crippling effect on education in the region and in Nigeria as a whole. The closure of schools by some state governments is seen as an immediate measure in response to the banditry, but it is not a permanent and productive solution. Thus, both state and national governments need to put measures in place to safeguard schools and avoid the occurrence of situations that lead to insecurity.

Recommendations

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria should address the underlying factors that lead to banditry such as poverty and unemployment by providing opportunities and development programmes to engage the youth.
2. The government should increase the presence of security forces in schools in remote areas and equip them with the tools and skills necessary to deter attacks. The installation of CCTV cameras and alarm systems in schools should also be encouraged. Political will is also needed to ensure that the perpetrators of banditry face justice and are held accountable for their actions.
3. There is the need to foster community-based intelligence networks and encourage local communities to work with security agencies in gathering and sharing information on potential threats, as well as to build trust between security agencies and local communities.

4. Deliberate efforts should be made to provide psychosocial support to students who have experienced trauma due to abductions and attacks. Teachers and other school staff should be trained in trauma care.

5. Awareness-raising campaigns in communities are needed to educate the populace about the importance of education. Incentives should also be introduced to encourage enrolment in schools.