

# POLICY BRIEF

## ADDRESSING RURAL BANDITRY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA



## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF RURAL BANDITRY**

Rural banditry and other forms of conflict have recently come to constitute a subject of great concern in Nigeria. Studies and other media reports indicate that, in the first quarter of 2014 alone, 262 persons lost their lives in 15 separate attacks in Benue State; and over the past 2 months sporadic clashes has continued. In one instance, bandits brazenly attacked the state Governors' convoy. Similarly, 16 separate attacks were reported in Plateau and Kaduna States in the same period. They led to the loss of 139 lives, with scores of people injured. Zamfara State seems to be the epicenter of rural banditry in Nigeria. In early April 2015, over 120 people were massacred in Yar Galadima village, Zamfara State, by bandits who have, for at least the last ten years, been terrorizing rural communities, as well as highway commuters.

They have been robbing people on highway, rustling cattle, looting, laying siege on rural markets and

killing innocent people. Just this June, gunmen attacked and killed 48 people in Kizara village of Chafe Local Government Area (LGA), Zamfara State. The neighbouring states of Sokoto, Kebbi and Kaduna have not been immune to these attacks either. For example, a March 2014 attack on Angwan Sakwai of Kaura LGA, Kaduna State led to the death of 57 people, with several others injured. In the Northeastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe, as well as in the remaining central states of Kogi, Kwara and Nassarawa, there also have been regular reports of banditry and violence. Actually, in 2013, a local militia ambushed and killed 46 police officers in the village of Alakyo in Nassarawa state. Some other reports also indicate occurrences of such attacks in Delta, Enugu, and Ebonyi states.

This Policy Brief is the outcome of a collaborative study by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and Pastoral Resolve

(PARE), with the sponsorship of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP). Conducted by University and Civil Society based researchers, the study sought to: first, identify and document the root causes, dynamics and implications of the frequent acts of rural banditry and other forms of violence in Northern Nigeria; and second, make policy recommendations on how such a serious security challenge can be addressed. More comprehensively than has been attempted so far, the study examined the complex interface between broad ecological, demographic and historical factors on the one hand, and the specific local dynamics in selected states across the North, on the other hand.

The result has been a more nuanced narrative of rural banditry and conflict as demonstrated in the study's 12 papers. While they all focused on the broad issue of rural banditry and other forms of conflict, each has, in addition, narrower, more specific concerns.

These ranged from theoretical and conceptual issues to more specific studies of banditry and conflicts in Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa and Zamfara States. Conducted in about a ten-month period, the study was flagged off in September 2014 with a Methodology Workshop hosted by NSRP.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### General Findings

The root causes of rural banditry and conflicts require an understanding of the social contexts, history, development and dynamics of the often conflictual, but also symbiotic relationship between two production systems – agricultural and pastoral – that not only depend on a land and its related resources, but are also fundamentally different in important respects. This relationship has been progressively complicated by shifting demographics of both human and livestock populations; evolving social practices related to the use and management of land and livestock resources, the impact of changing ecological and environmental forces that have progressively affected rainfall patterns, availability of foliage and increasing rate of desertification; the expansion of non-agricultural uses of land such as the growth of urban areas and the construction of roads; the collapse of formal and informal channels of conflict resolution

between both groups, the expansion of criminal

entrepreneurs for whom rustling is big business; the well documented extortionate practices of security agencies, which in some cases propel revenge attacks; as well as by migratory movements, in particular transhumance within and outside Northern Nigeria, and in other parts of the country and in West Africa in general.

Perhaps no set of factors are implicated in the phenomenon of rural banditry more than the impact of environmental/ecological changes and the declining capacity of the State to maintain security. In addressing ecology and environment issues, it is important to emphasize a number of salient features that have constituted both Push and Pull factors for transhumance migration across the country, a movement that has often been seen as a catalyst to conflicts and other forms of banditry. This is hardly surprising, for with over 90% of Nigeria's livestock holding

located in the country's northern parts, ecological and other forms of climate change propel migrations from the northern-most, drier region to the middle and southern-most regions, and then back again during the rainy season. This migration has historically taken place largely through two corridors: a Northwest corridor running from Niger and Benin Republics through Sokoto, Zamfara, Bornu, Katsina, Niger and Kwara States, terminating in South-western Nigeria; a second runs from the North-east beginning from Niger, Chad and Cameroun Republics through Bornu, Yobe, Adamawa, Jigawa, Kano, Plateau and Nasarawa States, terminating in the Niger-Benue Basin. <sup>1</sup>Given the demographic changes, desertification, loss of foliage, expanded food production, drying-up of water points, to mention but a few; the pressure on land and the use of land-related resources becomes a key conflict trigger.

With respect to the State, the

effective control over rural areas is a serious cause for concern, and appears implicated in the recurrence of rural banditry and other forms of social conflicts. For all practical purposes, the State is nonetheless able to impose effective control in urban areas, however tenuous it may be. Such a policy philosophy that lays the emphasis on urban areas is not new, and has its origins in the way the colonial State imposed its rule across Nigeria and other colonized societies. But, this approach to policing became even more glaring since the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the imposition of neo-liberal economic programmes that sought to rollback the State from the provision of critical social services. Rolling back the state had serious implications, not only in terms of the State's ability to impose control, but also in its capacity to project itself as an institution that has "legitimate monopoly over the means of violence."

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<sup>1</sup>Sultan's Report

The rise in private security organizations, the expansion of vigilante groups, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), the collapse of informal channels of conflict resolution and of securing communities; all became significant channels for citizens to protect or defend

themselves in the face of the State's declining capacity to impose effective control. In effect, various contenders to its power—bandits inclusive—continuously tested the limits of the State in actions such as cattle rustling and other forms of violence.

## Specific Findings:

The most salient and compelling finding across the study can be categorized into seven broad themes. These include:-

### *1. Changing Demographic, Ecological and Climate Conditions, and their Impact on Agricultural and Pastoral Production Systems*

Changing ecological and climatic conditions, especially in the Northeastern part of the country, together with major demographic shifts in the human and livestock population, over the past several decades have significantly affected both the agricultural and pastoral production systems. The

phenomenon of desertification, declining water points and foliage, shrinking arable land and population movements have all dramatically affected the means of livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of farmers and pastoralists. This has created additional stress in the delicate relationship between both groups that as the competition over land, pasture and water becomes more acute.<sup>2</sup>

Policy needs to seriously address the interplay between ecological and environmental factors on the one hand, and agricultural and

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<sup>2</sup>Roger Blanch

pastoral production practices on the other, through multiple measures directed at each of these factors: coordinated and sustained programmes for arresting and reversing desertification; enhancing agricultural and pastoral production through a deliberate and conscious effort of modernization; protecting designated routes for livestock movements; creating conducive and culturally acceptable conditions for sedentarisation through the enhancement of pastoral production, in consultation with pastoral communities.

## *II. The Role of Land, Land-Use Rights and Alienation of Land in Rural Banditry and Conflicts*

Expansion in both human and livestock populations has brought additional pressure to bear on land and land-use practices. In addition, expansion in the non-agricultural uses of land such as the expansion of urban areas constitutes another serious pressure on land. These pressures have adversely affected both farmers and pastoralists alike,

and seem to also be major catalysts of rural conflicts and banditry. By closing off cattle routes, neglecting grazing reserves and acquiring large expanses of land, such pressures have further intensified competition for land-based resources, deepening existing and creating additional avenues of conflict between farmers and pastoralists.

The need for more coordinated and integrated land-use practices that take the changing needs of both agricultural and pastoralist production systems is urgently needed. Such practices should take into consideration the symbiotic relationship between both production systems and their significance to their practitioners in particular, and to the country in general. Addressing the issue will require multiple strategies, including the modernization of both production systems.

### *III. State Capacity and the Provision of Security*

Most of the case studies, particularly those from Benue, Plateau and Nassarawa have drawn attention to both the role of state security agencies in these recurrent conflicts, as well as in the incidents of banditry. While it has been acknowledged that security agencies are trying to cope under very difficult conditions, there is a need to begin focusing more closely on the nature and security needs of both farmers and pastoralists, as well as on what will be required by security agencies to effectively address these conflicts and cases of rural banditry. First, the security agencies, especially in the rural areas, are understaffed and poorly equipped to address the challenges confronting them. Second, with the weakening or collapse of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, the burden on security services to address conflicts that were dealt with informally in a recent past rose dramatically. Third, there are

credible reports of the complicity of some of the security agents in some of the conflicts. More specifically, such a role has been more noticeable in the North Central Zone. In Benue, Plateau and Nassarawa states however, responses by law enforcement to pastoralists' complaints of intimidation and attacks by their farming neighbours often fell on deaf ears, even as their families and livestock are being destroyed. Similarly, instances have also been reported where farmers have accused security agencies of siding with pastoralists, and of intimidation and extortion. Fourth, with the proliferation of SALWs, contexts like these are likely to push either or both groups into taking steps to secure themselves, if they feel that the State is either not able or willing to cater for their security needs. And finally, the sprouting of vigilante and other informal or private security organizations has complicated the situation further in the way these outfits intervene; and often usurp the powers of formal security

agencies.

These issues need to be addressed seriously and comprehensively. It is important to consider staffing and equipping security forces; reviving informal conflict resolution channels; monitoring and controlling the spread of SALWs; as well as ensuring that the security services operate impartially and be there for everyone. This is the only way to prevent the sense of exclusion others feel, which pushes them to personally attend to their security needs.

#### *IV. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs)*

The proliferation of SALWs is one of the most serious factors in the expansion and intensity of rural banditry and conflicts. In 2014 alone, reports indicate that large quantities of SALW swere smuggled in and out of the hands of non-state actors. The concentration of such arms in the hands of non-state actors poses serious threats to security, and does much to fuel rural conflicts and banditry. The

proliferation of SALWs in the central states of Plateau, Nassarawa, Kaduna and Benue is partly linked to the growing privatization of violence, which seems to have led to situations where non-state actors such as vigilantes and other private security outfits secure and use weapons illegally.

#### *V. Rise in Criminality and Insecurity in Rural Areas*

One of the effects of the proliferation of SALWs is the expansion of criminal activities. Such weapons are increasingly common in highway robberies, community conflicts, as well as in the activities of bandits. This has clearly emerged in the brutal acts of banditry by criminal gangs in Zamfara, Benue and Plateau States. These practices are gradually manifesting in the emergence of a criminal economy where raids are organized for commercial purposes, especially against livestock. It is indeed clear that banditry, and cattle rustling in particular, can neither be profitable nor sustained for any length of time,

except if there is a ready market for the rustled livestock.

The activities of such groups need to be brought firmly under control by devising mechanisms for effectively monitoring, apprehending and prosecuting them.

#### *VI. Weakening or Collapse of Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms*

The overburdening of the formal security sector and its diminished ability to effectively address rural banditry and other forms of criminal violence is on a par with the weakening or collapse of informal conflict resolution mechanisms. Community leaders such as *Ardo'en* that were traditional peace brokers are no longer able to effectively control a radicalized youth in their communities. These now also respond to their attackers by arming themselves.

#### *VII. International Dimension*

It is very clear from the study that rural banditry and conflict have an international dimension. The seasonal movements of transhumance, the impact of environment and ecology, demographic changes, as well as domestic agricultural and livestock development policies have implications beyond national boundaries; not just with our immediate neighbors, but also with countries as far as the Central African Republic. In formulating policies to address banditry, attention needs to be given to these elements.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*I. Changing Demographic, Ecological and Climatic Conditions*

### **a) Gazetting of Grazing Reserves:**

The Federal and State governments should survey, demarcate and gazette existing Grazing Reserves. They should at the same time plan for newer Reserves across Northern Nigeria.

Such reserves should be functional with all the necessary structures in the original plan. In that regard, the passage of the bill “to Provide for the Establishment of the National Grazing Reserve[...] Commission for the Preservation and Control of National Grazing Reserves and Stock Routes...” by the National Assembly becomes imperative.

### **b) Revitalization of Grazing Routes/Reserves and Development of Ranches:**

The Federal Government of Nigeria in conjunction with the relevant state governments should undertake urgent revitalization of the country's moribund grazing reserves/routes; and establish a new model of grazing reserves in all the states of Northern Nigeria (North-Eastern,

North-West, and North Central).

### **c) Ranch Development:**

The State Government should also create modern ranches to be operated on a Private-Public Partnership (PPP) basis with a view to mainstreaming sustainable pastoralism in Nigeria.

### **d) Integrated Agricultural and Livestock Development:**

Develop a comprehensive agricultural and livestock planning; a development and policy implementation framework capable of incorporating contemporary production technologies, in both agriculture and pastoralism. Similarly, a comprehensive Agricultural and Livestock Extension Services Programme (ALEPS) should be developed at the LGA and State levels for boosting agricultural and pastoralist productions.

### **e) Monitoring and Control of Livestock Movement:**

Review existing and develop new mechanisms for the monitoring and control of livestock movement

across the country, including registering and branding of cattle across the country; certifying and registering cattle traders; registering and monitoring all cattle markets; reviewing and standardizing livestock transportation policies; as well as restructuring, upgrading and regulating abattoirs and slaughterhouses throughout the country.

## *II. Land, Land-Use Rights and Alienation of Land*

**a) Modernization of Agricultural and Pastoral Production Systems:** Government should explore ways of modernizing agriculture and pastoralism by injecting capital and encouraging investments. Mechanized agriculture and ranch management techniques would be significant elements of such initiatives.

**b) Encourage More Understanding in the Use of Natural Resources:** Farmers and pastoralists need to understand the symbiosis between the two production systems and recognize the complementarities between them.

**c) Mitigation of the Impact of Climate and Environmental Changes:** It is important that the impact of climate change and environmental decline be recognized; also, deliberate government efforts aimed at mitigating climate change should be encouraged. In this regard, one important issue to address is to salvage the Lake Chad Basin resources and restore its support in providing livelihoods for millions of people who have depended on such resources for many years now. In addition, an aggressive fight against desert encroachment and land reclamation policies need to be instituted, especially for states in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the country.

*III. State Capacity and the Provision of Security*

**a. Strengthening the Operational Readiness of Security Agencies:**

Operational readiness of security agencies such as the police should be strengthened through increased staffing, equipment and training to enable them to professionally, efficiently and promptly investigate and prosecute criminals without fear or favour.

**b. Focus on Security Needs of Farming and Pastoral Communities in the Hinterland:**

the Police needs to develop new strategies for responding to the special security needs of isolated farming and pastoralist communities, deep in the rural areas. In that regard, active community involvement in policy may be considered.

**c. Changing Perceptions and Stereotypes:** The perception among a number of security agents that pastoralists are criminals needs to be changed.

**d. Development of Early Warning and Response Mechanisms:**

An early warning and response mechanism needs to be developed to track incidents and potential threats that could arise, either between farmers and pastoralists, or between either of these groups and other unknown groups.

**e. Prosecution of Offenders and Recovery of Rustled Cattle:**

Although it is important to make concerted efforts to contain cattle rustling in the long run, short term policy and strategic interventions must seek to increase the level of rescues and recovering of stolen cattle. Communities and pastoralists in areas such as Wase would be reassured when some of their stolen cattle are recovered. Also important, is the need to match recovery rates with rates of arrests and prosecution of offenders to guide against the increasing culture of impunity. When individual offenders are punished, it is less likely that victims would ascribe the

responsibilities for the crimes on the communities of the perpetrators, thus lessening the likelihood of reprisal attacks.

**f. Victim Support Mechanisms:** Resettlement of displaced persons, especially women and children should be integral part of all policies. In addition, other forms of support for lost property should continue to be given to victims, particularly the resettlement of communities that may have been destroyed.

#### *IV. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs)*

**a) Mechanisms for Regular Monitoring, Mopping and Control of SALWs:** Government should redouble efforts in monitoring, mopping up and controlling SALWs across the country. To this effect, greater attention should be placed on our borders, especially illegal entry points across states that have international borders.

**b) Intensify Efforts at the Registration of Personal Arms:** A greater and more intensive drive to control personal arms should be mounted.

#### *V. Weakening or Collapse of Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms*

**a) Reviving and Supporting Community Based Conflict Management Mechanisms:** Government should take a lead in bringing together various sections of the rural community: farmers, pastoralists and their associations; local vigilantes; cattle breeders and farmers' associations—such as MACBAN (Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria); and All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), community leaderships such as *Ardo'en*, and security agencies to begin to identify, monitor, discuss and manage potential threats before they become open conflicts.

## VI. *International Dimension*

### a) **T r a n s - b o r d e r**

**Engagement:** Government should actively engage neighbouring countries on the trans-border movement of humans and goods, within the limits of the ECOWAS Protocols with a view to checking illegitimate movements.

### b) **Sensitivity to Regional**

**Dimension of the Conflict:** The pastoralist-farmer conflict has a regional dimension that can only be effectively addressed within a regional framework. The key question is that a regional attempt at addressing banditry is unlikely to succeed unless states themselves commit first to policies that take historical contexts into consideration. We need to understand the extent to which Pastoral Codes in most of Francophone West Africa have been able to create more conducive environments for resource management between the dominant groups of people that eke out a living on land.

### c) **Domestication of Relevant**

**ECOWAS Protocols:** While ECOWAS has a number of instruments that could constitute a basis for an effective management of land and livestock resources (Transhumance Protocol of 1998; the Regulations of Transhumance Between ECOWAS member-States, 2003; and the ECOWAS Strategic Plan for the Development and Transformation of the Livestock Sector), these need to be complemented by more specific national policies, which are responsive to historical contexts and cultural practices.

This brief is based on a study conducted by Centre for Democracy and Development, Pastoral Resolve(PARE) and Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP)

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