



Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

BRIEFING REPORT



FORCED LABOUR: AN EMERGING FEATURE OF CONFLICT IN NIGERIA'S NORTH-WEST

Yusuf Anka

November 2022





ABOUT THE CDD

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 and subsequently registered in Lagos – Nigeria in 1999 as an independent, not-for-profit, research, training, advocacy and capacity building organization. The Centre was established to mobilize global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to the democratization and development processes in West Africa, and also to provide alternatives and best practices to the sustenance of democracy and development in the region. CDD envisions a West Africa that is democratically governed, economically integrated – promoting human security and people-centered development. The mission of the center is to be the prime catalyst and facilitator for strategic analysis and capacity building for sustainable democracy and development in the West African sub-region.



FORCED LABOUR: AN EMERGING FEATURE OF CONFLICT IN NIGERIA'S NORTH-WEST

Forced labour, in Northern Nigeria, can be traced to the colonial era in the country. Men, and sometimes women, were compelled to farm and cultivate cash crops in order to construct roads, offices, hospitals and mine materials for the British colonial officers. Between 1900 and 1960, colonizers and mining companies, such as Jantar Company and the Gold and Base Metals Mining Company (G.M.M.M) forced communities to work in northern mining regions. These areas are in Rugu, in present-day Katsina State, as well as Anka and Maru Local Governments in present-day Zamfara State. The labourers worked under the supervision of the native police and Dogarai (palace guards). Those who deserted or tried to escape received punishments - 20 to 30 cane strokes and a small monetary fine - and, in some cases, faced a brief period of confinement.

During the British colonial period in Nigeria, labourers were conscripted from the local districts that shared borders with the mine area or agricultural production site to ensure affordable and required manpower. Colonisers passed these practices and a culture of forced labour, on to the native authorities, who then claimed it was customary to enlist people to fight in battles, fix roads, construct and dig town walls, dig trenches, and work on the rulers' agricultural estates. Subsequently, in the 1940s, emirs typically sent requests to each district during the rainy season, asking them to send people - as many as 60 - to help them cultivate cotton, groundnuts, maize, and other crops on their farms. They typically worked for 4 to 6 hours before being dismissed without pay. Among the consequences for not finishing the task in the allotted time were cane strokes or being assigned additional heaps to cultivate/harvest.

But over time, this practice has evolved into a cerebral one, in which only dignitaries and important members of society benefit from mass labour (Aikin - Gayya). It became a way of showing respect or returning a favour to significant individuals like emirs, other traditional leaders, Sarkin Noma, and, increasingly, politicians. When an important person owns a farm, communities organise men and children to work on it on the weekends. Most of the time, a town crier is in charge of making the announcement, or people hear about it at mosques or weekly markets. It is seen by most communities as an effort to show respect for the individual's service and to reward their stature. The majority of this work is done during the clearing and harvesting periods, which are the hardest and most important parts of the farming season.

But with bandits now in control of vast swathes of rural North-West Nigeria, dynamics are evolving to provide them with the benefits of forced, and often unpaid, labour. The bandit groups initially forced residents to pay levies to access farms, plant, and harvest them. For instance, in February 2022, N40.7 million was paid to a bandit leader, Lawali Damina, in Maru LGA, Zamfara, as a protection levy. But because of the instability's effects on the economy, it is getting harder and harder for communities to get enough money to pay levies. This reality, and the growing desire of the bandits to own their own farms, has led to a change in



tactics. In exchange for security, since June 2022, communities are increasingly compelled to work on bandit-controlled farms. This new form of forced labour is notably prevalent in the Anka, Maru, Bukkuyum, and Tsafe LGAs of Zamfara and Zuru, Wasagu LGAs of Kebbi. For example, Shadari, a bandit leader who operates from the old mining town of Sunke in Zamfara’s Anka LGA, mobilised 12 communities to work on his farmland in June 2022. Many other bandit groups have relocated here during the rainy season because of the fertile farmlands in that part of the state. In some cases, people stay weeks in bandit camps before returning, but for those who live in close proximity to these bandit-run communities, residents come and go on a daily basis. There, they clear the farmlands, till the soil, plant, and are expected to harvest for the groups when the time comes in October and November. Increasingly, communities now offer this labour before the bandits even compel them to.

But, in some instances, bandits have refused the labour of certain communities because of their perceived intention to subjugate and take over their areas in an abuse manner. A resident of Duhuwa community, in Anka LGA of Zamfara State, explained that their community was willing to deploy all men and women to farmlands under Shadari’s control in exchange for peace, but the bandits refused. Other bandits are quick to punish communities who are unwilling to undertake forced labour. In Anka LGA, Halilu Buzu, a bandit, dominates the vast areas of Tangaram. In one incident in August, when Halilu requested a community in Tangaram to work for him and residents failed to show up, bandits loyal to his camp were sent to attack members of the community.

Table of actors and areas of subjugation
May 2022 - till date

Name of Bandit	Affected Communities	Areas of Control	Local Government	State
Shadari	Sunke	Sunke Forest	Anka	Zamfara
Halilu Buzu	Tangaram	Tangaram Forest	Anka	Zamfara
Dogo Gudale	Gando	Gando Forest, Akawo Forest	Bukkuyum	Zamfara
Gajere	Dankurmi	Dansadau Forest	Maru	Zamfara
Dogo Gide	Dandalla	Kuyanbana Forest	Maru	Zamfara
Dogo Gudale	Zuru	Gando Forest	Zuru	Kebbi
Dogo Gide	Bena	Kuyanbana Forest, Maru Zamfara	Bena	Kebbi
Ado Aleru	Munhaye	Munhaye Village, Yankuzo Village	Tsafe	Zamfara
Dangote	Jibia	Jibiya Forest	Jibia	Katsina

When the farming season ends, it is unclear what the bandits will do next. However, their use of forced labor adds to the ethnic overtones of the crisis, as Hausa communities continue to draw parallels between the current situation and the alleged earlier subjugation of their communities by the Fulani. In addition to making ethnic tensions worse, their actions have caused people to leave towns and villages near agricultural areas. Many of the people in Zamfara’s Anka, Birnin Magaji, Bukkuyum, and Maru Local Government Areas (LGAs) have moved to other places because they are afraid of being taken by bandits to their farms. It is a real worry that the communal mode of production, which had been the main way for rural and even semi-urban families in the area to make a living, could fall apart. This will have a long-term effect on agriculture, which is the main source of income in the area. The fact that local markets in Bagega and Anka are being disrupted is a sign of this worrying trend.



Forced labour contributes to a thriving bandit economy in which bandits continue to gain power as they seize control of the two most important economic sectors: farming and herding. This gives them more legitimacy because communities will depend on them for food and security. And as their resources grow, so too will their arsenal and fighting capabilities.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yusuf Anka is an intern at the Centre for Democracy and Development.

His work has focused extensively on security and its application to development policies in north-western Nigeria. He has extensive field experience, having served as a consultant with the International Crisis Group. He was a special correspondent with HumAngle Media and a field producer with BBC Africa, where he produced the widely viewed 'The Bandit Warlords of Zamfara' for BBC Africa.

He has an LLB from Ahmadu Bello University and is pursuing an LLM in International Humanitarian Law from Nile University, Abuja



© 2022 Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa). All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Centre for Democracy and Development. Please direct inquiries to:

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa)
Research Department
16, A7 Street Mount Pleasant Estate (CITEC)
Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Abuja
research@cddwestafrica.org
cddabv@cddwestafrica.org


CDDwestafrica.org


This publication can be requested or downloaded at no cost at
westafricaninsights.org


Cover Image: Tim Mossholder on Unsplash




Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

 16 A7 Street, CITEC Mount Pleasant Estate, Jabi
Airport Road, Mborra District, Abuja, FCT

 cddwestafrica.org

 research@cddwestafrica.org

 [@cddwestafrica](https://twitter.com/cddwestafrica)