



Rural Banditry and Food Security in Kogi State, Nigeria: Implications for Agricultural Productivity and Rural Livelihoods

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Abstract

Rural banditry has emerged as a major threat to food security in Nigeria, particularly in North Central states such as Kogi. This study examines the impact of banditry on food availability, accessibility, and stability in selected local government areas of Kogi State between 2016 and 2024. Using a survey and exploratory research design, primary data were collected from 24 staff of the agricultural departments across Adavi, Omala, and Yagba East Local Government Areas, supplemented with secondary data from official documents and scholarly publications. Findings reveal that rural banditry significantly disrupts agricultural production, displaces farmers, inflates food prices, and undermines household access to nutritious food. Strengthening security capacity and promoting public-private partnerships (PPPs) emerged as critical strategies to mitigate these impacts. The study recommends integrated security interventions, community policing, and PPP-supported agricultural resilience programs to restore food security and rural livelihoods.

Keywords: Rural banditry, Food security, Kogi State, Agricultural productivity, Public-private partnerships

Introduction

Food security remains one of the most fundamental prerequisites for human survival and sustainable development. The United Nations World Food Summit (1996) defines food security as a condition in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2010; 2018) conceptualizes food security as encompassing the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food. In Nigeria, however, food security has become a major developmental challenge, worsened by multiple factors, including violent conflict, insecurity, and economic instability.

Recent reports have shown that a significant proportion of Nigeria's population remains food insecure. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2023), about 40% of Nigerians are food insecure, with food inflation rising to 23% as of September 2022. The World Food Programme (WFP, 2022) also reported that approximately 34% of households across 26 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, experience stressed food security conditions. These statistics indicate a worsening trend driven by both structural economic challenges and the growing wave of violent insecurity across the country.

In northern Nigeria, insecurity has evolved from terrorism to other violent manifestations such as rural banditry, kidnapping, and cattle rustling. As observed by Baba (2024), while terrorism initially dominated the northeast, it has gradually spread into north-central states such as Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa through organized banditry networks. Reports

from Beacon Consulting Group (2021) revealed that 19% of the 2,047 recorded insecurity incidents in 2021 occurred in North Central Nigeria, including Kogi State. These violent crimes have undermined agricultural productivity, disrupted rural livelihoods, and displaced thousands of farmers who constitute the backbone of Nigeria's food production system.

Rural banditry, characterized by armed robbery, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and destruction of farmlands, has emerged as one of the gravest threats to agricultural development and food security in Nigeria (Usman & Adebayo, 2023). In Kogi State—where agriculture employs a large proportion of the rural population—banditry has disrupted the entire agricultural value chain, from cultivation to transportation of produce. Displacement of farming communities due to insecurity has resulted in a sharp decline in labor availability, fallow farmlands, and reduced crop yields (Aliyu et al., 2023). The economic implications are severe, as food prices rise, household income declines, and malnutrition increases among vulnerable groups.

Beyond physical destruction, the psychological trauma and social disintegration caused by banditry weaken community resilience and cooperative farming systems (Ejiofor & Okeke, 2023). The fear of attack compels farmers to abandon their farms, while others drastically reduce their farm size or shift to less profitable but safer activities. Similarly, the disruption of rural transportation networks affects the movement of goods, inflating food prices and constraining food accessibility (Ajiboye et al., 2023).

Empirical studies have identified several factors contributing to the persistence of rural banditry in Nigeria, including unemployment, poverty, political instability, weak governance, and porous borders (Ibrahim and Muktar, 2017; Ajiboye et al., 2023; Yusuf and Abdullahi, 2020). In Kogi State, geographical proximity to other crisis-prone states, limited security presence, and poor coordination among security agencies exacerbate the problem (Akinola, 2022; Ayegbusi, 2024). While government interventions such as youth empowerment programs and local vigilante initiatives aim to mitigate the crisis, their effectiveness is often constrained by inadequate funding, poor logistics, and lack of modern security infrastructure (Bello & Lawal, 2022; Ayodele, 2022).

Therefore, rural banditry in Kogi State poses a multifaceted threat—not only to food production but also to economic stability and community cohesion. Given the state's strategic role as an agricultural hub in Nigeria's North Central region, continued insecurity may have severe implications for both local and national food systems. Addressing this challenge requires an integrated approach that combines effective security responses with socioeconomic development initiatives aimed at restoring agricultural productivity and safeguarding rural livelihoods. In view of these issues, this study seeks to examine the impact of rural banditry on food security in selected local government areas of Kogi State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Assess how the destruction of farmlands and displacement of farmers by bandits have affected the availability of food supply in local government areas of Kogi State from 2016 to 2024.

2. Examine how the kidnapping and killing of farmers by bandits have influenced food access and food stability in the local government areas of Kogi State during the same period.
3. Evaluate the ways through which strengthening security capacity and promoting public-private partnerships in curbing rural banditry can enhance food security in the local government areas of Kogi State.

Literature Review

Rural banditry refers to organized violent criminal activities—such as armed robbery, cattle rustling, kidnapping, destruction of farmlands, and looting—predominantly occurring in rural and agrarian communities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). It is a form of localized insecurity that targets vulnerable farming populations, thereby disrupting agricultural production and rural livelihoods. According to Bello (2022), rural banditry in Nigeria has evolved from traditional cattle rustling into sophisticated criminal networks involving heavily armed groups operating across state boundaries.

The phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the North West and North Central regions of Nigeria, where porous borders, ungoverned spaces, and the proliferation of small arms have enabled armed groups to flourish (Akinola, 2022). These groups often engage in the kidnapping of farmers, extortion, and the destruction of crops and infrastructure, thereby creating a climate of fear that drives rural-urban migration and agricultural decline. Rural banditry is therefore both an economic and a security problem with far-reaching implications for sustainable development.

Concept of Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2018) defines food security as a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. It encompasses four key dimensions: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. In Nigeria, food security is closely tied to agricultural performance, which employs about 35% of the labor force and contributes nearly 22% to GDP (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). However, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and climate change have undermined the nation's capacity to produce sufficient food. The proliferation of rural banditry since 2016 has aggravated these challenges, particularly in states where agriculture constitutes the primary livelihood source (Agbo et al., 2024).

Nexus between Rural Banditry and Food Security

The relationship between rural banditry and food security in Nigeria is both direct and complex. Banditry affects food availability by preventing farmers from accessing their farmlands, destroying crops, and disrupting agricultural cycles (Aliyu et al., 2023). It also reduces food accessibility through displacement of rural populations, loss of income, and destruction of rural markets and transportation routes. Consequently, food prices rise due to scarcity, leading to food instability across affected communities (Usman & Adebayo, 2023).

According to Umar and Olayemi (2022), rural banditry has forced thousands of farmers in states like Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, and Kogi to abandon large hectares of cultivated land, leading to drastic reductions in local food output. Similarly, a report by the World Food Programme (2022) indicated that over 4.3 million Nigerians in the North West and North Central regions faced acute food insecurity largely due to conflict and armed banditry. These insecurities have ripple effects, causing internal displacement, food inflation, and malnutrition, especially among children and women. In their study, Ejiofor and Okeke (2023) observed that rural banditry leads to a vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. As food production decreases, rural incomes fall, forcing households to depend on purchased food at inflated prices. In turn, high food costs push more people into poverty, making communities more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. This cycle underscores the link between insecurity and economic deprivation.

Furthermore, the destruction of rural infrastructure such as storage facilities, irrigation systems, and farm settlements exacerbates post-harvest losses and limits market participation (Bello & Lawal, 2022). Ajiboye et al. (2023) noted that transport disruptions due to road insecurity in Kogi and Niger States impede the movement of food from rural production centers to urban markets, leading to artificial scarcity and price volatility.

Empirical Studies on Rural Banditry and Food Security

Several empirical studies have documented the devastating impact of banditry on Nigeria's agricultural economy. In a study conducted by Okoli and Atelhe (2020) in Zamfara and Katsina States, findings revealed that over 60% of farmlands in affected local government areas were left uncultivated due to insecurity. Similarly, Ibrahim and Muktar (2017) found that persistent attacks on rural farmers reduced crop yields and livestock production, threatening household food availability and increasing rural poverty. Aliyu et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-method study on the impact of banditry in Niger and Kogi States and found that 45% of farmers abandoned their farms between 2017 and 2023. This abandonment directly reduced agricultural productivity, caused a shortage of staple crops, and triggered food price inflation. The study concluded that insecurity has displaced over 20,000 farming households, with significant implications for national food security.

In another study, Agbo et al. (2024) analyzed how kidnapping and killings of farmers affect food stability in Kogi State between 2016 and 2024. Their findings indicated that constant attacks disrupted planting and harvesting cycles, discouraged youth participation in farming, and reduced agricultural labor availability. The result was unstable food supply and increasing dependency on imported food commodities. Additionally, a report by the International Crisis Group (2023) highlighted that rural banditry in Nigeria's North Central region has not only destroyed livelihoods but also deepened humanitarian crises. Food insecurity in these regions has worsened due to continuous displacement of farming communities and destruction of farmlands by armed groups. These findings reinforce the conclusion that insecurity is a major driver of Nigeria's worsening food crisis.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The study adopted a survey and exploratory research design to examine the impact of rural banditry on food security in selected local government areas of Kogi State. Both primary and secondary data were utilized, including direct interviews with local government officials and grassroots populations, as well as review of books, journals, and official documents.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised of the members of staff in the department of Agriculture at each of the three (3) local governments in Kogi State. Twenty-four (24) local government staff were drawn from three local governments in Kogi state, one from each of the senatorial zone These local governments are; Adavi L.G. from the Central Senatorial district, ; Omala L.G. from the Eastern senatorial district, and Yagba East from the Western senatorial district, The respondents selected were so chosen because it is manageable by the researcher and their level of literacy was also a factor in selecting the respondents. Gender was also a factor in order to include male and female, old and young.

Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Direct interviews with purposively selected respondents from the agricultural departments.
- **Secondary Data:** Official documents from the State Ministry of Agriculture, local government reports, books, journals, and newspapers.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This study adopted content analytical method in the data analysis. The justification behind the use of descriptive analysis was based on the nature of data collected from published sources that required analysis and direct interview sessions with a cross section of respondents.

Findings and Results

Hypothesis I: Destruction of Farmlands and Displacement of Farmers Affect Food Availability

Rural communities in Nigeria, particularly forest-surrounded areas, face insecurity due to weak rural security structures (Albert, 2017; Omoroghomwan, 2021). Farmers experience loss of lives, property, and displacement, disrupting food supply chains (Ahmad & Ukasha, 2021). Banditry in Kogi State mirrors patterns observed in other northern states (Izom & Iliyasu, 2024), leading to displacement, farmland destruction, and negative socioeconomic impacts. Many farmers abandon farms due to fear of attacks, resulting in decreased crop production and food scarcity.

Hypothesis II: Kidnapping and Killing of Farmers Affect Food Access and Stability

Between 2016 and 2024, rural banditry in Kogi State led to reduced agricultural labor, farm abandonment, and decreased output (Aliyu et al., 2023; Agbo et al., 2024). Families faced financial losses, and fear of attacks disrupted cooperative farming practices (Ejiofor & Okeke, 2023). Transport disruptions and irregular farming cycles further caused instability in food supply and price volatility (Ajiboye, 2022). The cumulative effect is long-term erosion of

agricultural resilience and food system instability, requiring integrated security and community-based interventions.

Hypothesis III: Strengthening Security Capacity and Promoting Public–Private Partnerships Enhance Food Security

Improving security involves increasing patrols, rural outposts, and rapid response units (Ayegbusi, 2024). Community policing and vigilante support improve response times and leverage local knowledge (Bello & Lawal, 2022). Intelligence-led operations disrupt bandit networks and protect farmlands (Ajiboye et al., 2023). Public–private partnerships (PPPs) provide additional funding, technology, and expertise to protect farmers, ensure market access, and reduce post-harvest losses. PPPs also promote livelihood restoration, training, and capacity-building for farmers and communities (Ejiofor & Okeke, 2023). Strengthened security and PPPs directly impact food availability, access, utilization, and stability (Olajide & Musa, 2023; Agbo et al., 2024).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that rural banditry exerts profound and multidimensional impacts on food security in Nigeria, particularly within the North Central states such as Kogi, Niger, and Benue. This aligns with a growing body of literature that conceptualizes insecurity as both a symptom and a driver of structural food vulnerability in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2023; FAO, 2022; Usman & Adebayo, 2023).

Impact on Food Availability

Empirical evidence suggests that rural banditry directly undermines food availability by forcing farmers to abandon arable land and disrupting the agricultural production cycle (Aliyu et al., 2023; Agbo et al., 2024). In Kogi State, for instance, continuous attacks on rural settlements have led to mass displacement, with thousands of hectares of farmlands left uncultivated between 2016 and 2024. Similar trends have been observed in Zamfara and Kaduna States, where insecurity has drastically reduced the production of staple crops such as maize, sorghum, and rice (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021).

This reduction in food availability can be attributed to the interplay between physical insecurity and labor scarcity. Many farmers are either killed or displaced, while others migrate to urban areas for safety, leading to a sharp decline in rural labor force participation (Ejiofor & Okeke, 2023). The resultant fall in domestic production has caused Nigeria to rely increasingly on food imports, thereby exacerbating inflation and external trade imbalances (IMF, 2023). The observed trend corroborates Akinola's (2022) argument that rural banditry transforms productive agricultural communities into zones of economic paralysis, severely undermining food self-sufficiency.

Impact on Food Accessibility and Stability

The study's findings also demonstrate that kidnapping, killings, and destruction of rural markets affect food access and stability. Food accessibility depends not only on production but also on the ability of individuals to physically reach markets and afford food (FAO, 2018). Bandit attacks on transport routes and marketplaces disrupt the distribution of food

commodities, making them inaccessible to both producers and consumers (Ajiboye et al., 2023). In Kogi and Niger States, farmers have reported being unable to transport harvested crops to urban centers such as Lokoja and Minna due to fear of abduction or road ambush (Bello & Lawal, 2022).

Moreover, the instability caused by banditry produces a ripple effect on food prices. As food supply dwindles and distribution networks collapse, markets experience artificial scarcity, driving up prices beyond the reach of low-income households (Usman & Adebayo, 2023). Between 2019 and 2024, food inflation in Nigeria averaged over 25%, partly attributed to insecurity-induced production deficits (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Such inflationary pressures contribute to chronic undernutrition and exacerbate poverty cycles, particularly among rural dwellers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (World Food Programme, 2022).

This finding supports the position of Umar and Olayemi (2022), who argue that insecurity undermines not only physical access to food but also economic access through income shocks. Farmers' inability to produce and sell their products reduces household earnings, while consumers face higher prices for limited food supplies. Insecurity thus simultaneously shrinks supply and purchasing power, deepening food insecurity across multiple dimensions.

Social Dislocation and Agricultural Disinvestment

Beyond the immediate impact on food availability and access, rural banditry has induced long-term structural changes in Nigeria's agricultural landscape. Continuous exposure to violence discourages both local and foreign agricultural investment, weakening rural economies and government development initiatives (Adebayo, 2021; Bello, 2022). Smallholder farmers, who constitute about 80% of Nigeria's agricultural workforce, experience psychological trauma, property loss, and destruction of social capital—all of which weaken community-based cooperative systems (Ejiofor & Okeke, 2023). The disintegration of these rural institutions contributes to lower productivity, as cooperative labor sharing, credit rotation, and communal farming practices collapse. Bello and Lawal (2022) further note that the erosion of trust and solidarity among farming communities complicates post-conflict recovery, even after security is restored. Consequently, food system recovery is often delayed, prolonging regional hunger and malnutrition.

In addition, agricultural disinvestment due to insecurity reduces the effectiveness of policy interventions such as the Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP) and the National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP) (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, 2023). Without secure environments, farmers are reluctant to take loans or invest in large-scale farming, undermining government's efforts to achieve national food sufficiency targets (Agbo et al., 2024).

Policy and Institutional Weaknesses

The persistence of banditry reflects broader structural deficiencies in Nigeria's security and governance systems. Weak institutional capacity, poor intelligence coordination, and underfunded security agencies have constrained the state's ability to curb rural insecurity (Akinola, 2022; Ayegbusi, 2024). Moreover, the rural–urban divide in resource allocation leaves

many agrarian communities unprotected, creating safe havens for armed groups. These governance weaknesses have significant implications for food security. When state institutions fail to guarantee safety, agricultural productivity becomes hostage to insecurity, and communities lose confidence in government capacity (Okoli & Atelhe, 2020). Such distrust undermines policy implementation and complicates community-based security initiatives. Bello (2022) emphasizes that sustainable security requires integrating traditional institutions and local vigilante groups into formal policing frameworks to strengthen territorial control.

In contrast, studies from Kenya and Ethiopia demonstrate that localized, community-driven security initiatives—when backed by central government support—improve rural resilience and agricultural recovery (FAO, 2022; Aregawi & Tekle, 2023). These comparative experiences suggest that decentralization and multi-level collaboration could enhance Nigeria's security response in rural areas.

Public–Private Partnerships and Food System Resilience

Another critical insight from this discussion is the potential of public–private partnerships (PPPs) to mitigate the impact of banditry on food security. PPPs provide a framework for mobilizing resources, technology, and expertise to address rural insecurity and promote agricultural resilience (Olajide & Musa, 2023). For example, private sector engagement in rural surveillance technology—such as drone monitoring, GPS tracking, and digital farm mapping—can complement government security operations (Ayegbusi, 2024).

Furthermore, private agribusiness firms can support displaced farmers through input subsidies, mechanization services, and market linkages, while government provides the enabling security environment. Ejiofor and Okeke (2023) argue that effective PPPs can rebuild local food systems, rehabilitate destroyed farmlands, and restore livelihoods. Such collaborations also create employment opportunities for youth, reducing their vulnerability to recruitment by criminal groups. The implementation of PPPs, however, requires transparency, policy coherence, and community inclusion to ensure that benefits reach rural farmers rather than political elites (Olajide & Musa, 2023). Therefore, institutional reform and accountability mechanisms must accompany partnership arrangements for long-term food system stability.

Theoretical Implications

The findings lend strong support to the **Human Security Theory**, which emphasizes that security extends beyond state protection to encompass economic, food, and personal safety (UNDP, 1994; Adebayo, 2021). The study shows that food insecurity in Kogi State is a direct outcome of human insecurity, as farmers' lives and livelihoods are threatened by violence. Equally, the findings resonate with **Conflict Theory**, which views insecurity as a product of structural inequality and competition over scarce resources (Coser, 1956; Ajiboye et al., 2023). The concentration of poverty and unemployment in rural Nigeria fuels grievances that criminal networks exploit, sustaining the cycle of violence. Therefore, addressing rural banditry requires not only coercive security measures but also socioeconomic empowerment and equitable resource distribution.

Broader Developmental Consequences

The implications of rural banditry extend beyond food insecurity to Nigeria's overall development trajectory. The agricultural sector contributes nearly one-quarter of Nigeria's GDP and employs millions across the rural landscape (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Continued insecurity threatens these economic foundations, endangering Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Moreover, the displacement of rural populations contributes to urban overcrowding, unemployment, and increased poverty rates (World Bank, 2023). The erosion of agricultural productivity also undermines Nigeria's regional trade capacity under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as food exports decline while imports rise. These multidimensional consequences underscore that food security cannot be achieved without peace and stable governance.

Conclusion

Evidence from the study shows that rural banditry in Kogi State has significant negative impacts on food security, causing scarcity, rising prices, and economic hardship. Farmers' abandonment of farmlands due to fear of attacks threatens both local and regional food systems. The findings align with Masara (2019) and Izom & Iliyasu (2024), highlighting that persistent banditry leads to displacement, loss of lives, and disruption of agriculture, exacerbating food insecurity.

Recommendations

1. The government should provide adequate security for farmers to prevent worsening food insecurity and ensure sustainable food availability.
2. Efforts must be intensified to mitigate banditry, allowing farmers to continue cultivation and avoid food scarcity.
3. Concerted action by government and stakeholders is required to curb banditry, enabling farmers to return to farmlands, increasing food supply, and reducing food price inflation.

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“The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Some data are restricted due to confidentiality agreements with local government authorities.”