



ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF BANDITRY AND CIVIL UNREST IN NIGERIA THROUGH ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Nigeria's escalating banditry and civil unrest reflect deep-seated socio-economic challenges that conventional security responses alone have failed to resolve. This paper advances the position that Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) is a critical yet underutilised strategy for addressing the root causes of insecurity in the country. Persistent poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and skills deficits are identified as major drivers of banditry and social instability. This paper argues that targeted adult and non-formal education interventions can mitigate these conditions by equipping adults with functional literacy, vocational competencies, and life skills necessary for economic self-reliance and civic participation. Beyond economic empowerment, adult education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution capacities that strengthen social cohesion and promote peaceful coexistence within communities. Drawing on qualitative evidence from stakeholders including adult learners, educators, and community leaders, the paper demonstrates that adult and non-formal education contributes to reduced vulnerability to criminal activity, enhanced community resilience, and improved prospects for sustainable peace. It therefore contends that addressing insecurity in Nigeria requires a shift from predominantly reactive security measures to preventive, education-driven development strategies.

Keywords: Adult education, Non-formal education, Banditry, Civil unrest, Root causes, Conflict resolution

Introduction

It is disheartening to see the most populous black nation on our planet being troubled by the nefarious activities of bandits and terrorists. Nigeria is the capital of all black nations, blessed with abundant natural resources. The security situation in Nigeria has become increasingly complex and uncertain due to the prevailing threat in recent years posed by various non-state armed groups. These groups have emerged and consolidated coercive power to terrorize the population, engaging in activities such as insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry (Ojewale, 2021). The paper's purpose is to delve into the drivers of banditry and civil unrest in Nigeria, as well as to examine their effects on national integration and security. It acknowledges that numerous factors can explain the emergence of these violent activities, which can be broadly categorized as primary causes or existing conditions (such as poverty, ungoverned spaces, fragile security, and weak border management), immediate causes or triggers (including climate change, resource competition, informal security, jungle justice, ethno-communal factors, religious intolerance, resource curse, criminality, and drug abuse), and crisis enablers causes (such as state complicity, foreign powers, traditional rulers, weapon suppliers, food suppliers, informants, and bandits' negotiators) (Ojo, Oyewole & Aina, 2023). All of these factors have contributed to the recent surge in banditry and civil unrest posing the most prevalent threat to Nigeria's national security.

The ability of Nigerian leaders to manage both human and natural resources has proven to be a challenge. For instance, crude oil has been viewed by many as a resource curse that has generated enormous problems, especially in the Niger-Delta region. Corruption and inequality in the distribution of wealth and lack of formulation and implementation of better policies to create employment and other opportunities have contributed to the emergence of banditry and terrorism in the country. However, the Nigerian government and the citizenry's over-reliance on the military's actions in defeating banditry and terrorism in Nigeria are worth re-examining.

This approach of over-reliance on military action in fighting banditry and terrorism is not the cure for nefarious activists. There is a need to address the root causes of the banditry and terrorist activities in Nigeria: Unemployment and poverty, lack of education, poor socio-amenities, huge gaps between the government and the people, and biasedly fighting against corruption are just a few of the root causes to be addressed in defeating banditry and terrorism in Nigeria.

Contextual Clarifications

Banditry

International Crisis Group (2020) referred to banditry in Nigeria as a form of criminal violence characterized by armed groups or individuals engaging in acts such as kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, and cattle rustling. It has become a significant security challenge in the country, particularly in the northern regions

(International Crisis Group, 2020). The context of banditry in Nigeria is multifaceted and stems from various underlying factors. One of the key drivers is the prevalent issue of poverty and socio-economic marginalization, especially in rural areas. Many of the regions affected by banditry suffer from high levels of poverty and limited access to basic services, education, and employment opportunities. These conditions according to Osaghae (2020); creates an environment where criminal activities like banditry can take root and attract disaffected individuals looking for economic gains.

Another contributing factor to banditry is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Osaghae, 2020). Nigeria has experienced an influx of illegal arms, making it easier for criminal elements to obtain weapons and carry out violent activities. These weapons often flow into the country through porous borders and weak controls, exacerbating the security situation (Campbell, 2011). Furthermore, the historical and cultural context plays a role in the rise of banditry. The herder-farmer conflict is a long-standing issue in Nigeria, with clashes between pastoralists and farmers over resources such as land and water. The competition for resources has escalated, leading to acts of violence and banditry in some cases. Banditry is also intertwined with political dynamics and sometimes has connections to political actors seeking to further their interests or settle scores. In some instances, political elites have been accused of providing support or protection to criminal elements

for personal or political gain (Osaghae, 2020).

The context of banditry in Nigeria is further complicated by the presence of extremist groups like Boko Haram, which have also engaged in acts of banditry alongside their insurgency activities (Campbell, 2011). The nexus between different forms of criminality and extremism has further strained security efforts and compounded the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies.

Meaning of Civil Unrest

Civil unrest refers to a state of public disturbance or turmoil, often characterized by protests, demonstrations, riots, or other forms of collective action that disrupt social order and challenge authority (Alemika, 2019; Omotola, 2020).

Characteristics of Civil Unrest

- i. **Public Protests:** Civil unrest often involves public protests, demonstrations, or marches, which can be peaceful or violent (Alemika, 2019).
- ii. **Collective Action:** Civil unrest involves collective action by groups of individuals who share a common grievance or goal (Omotola, 2020).
- iii. **Challenging Authority:** Civil unrest often challenges authority, whether it be government, institutions, or social norms (Alemika, 2019).

Civil unrest is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address its root causes and impacts. Understanding the

meaning and characteristics of civil unrest is essential for developing effective strategies to prevent and respond to this form of social disturbance.

Root causes of Banditry and Civil Unrest in Nigeria

Nigeria's formation as a colonial state disregarded pre-colonial political systems, sociocultural affinities, and economic relations, resulting in boundaries drawn without much consideration for the interests of the population (Oyewole & Shola, 2022). Unfortunately, the post-colonial state, encompassing federal, state, and local levels of government, has shown a lack of capability to adequately address the welfare and security needs of the people. This failure has led to various forms of resistance and violence, including banditry, terrorism, insurgency, militancy, and piracy across the country (Ogbonnaya, 2020). The emergence of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. Endemic poverty, ungoverned spaces, fragile security, drug abuse, and weak border control are among the internal background causes deeply rooted in the Nigerian socio-political landscape. Additionally, climate-induced migration and resource competition, informal security and jungle justice, ethno-communal and religious influences, state complicity, traditional rulers, weapon suppliers, informants, and bandits' negotiators, and illicit drug trade also contribute to the ongoing challenges.

Addressing the root causes of banditry and civil unrest in Nigeria requires

a comprehensive approach that includes economic development, security reform, social inclusion, and environmental management.

Roles of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Addressing Root Causes of Banditry and Civil Unrest in Nigeria

Adult and non-formal education can play a vital role in mitigating banditry and civil unrest by providing individuals with relevant skills, knowledge, and attitudes. By equipping adults with vocational skills, literacy, and numeracy, they can secure employment or start their own businesses, reducing poverty and unemployment. Moreover, adult education can promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills, enabling individuals to contribute to peaceful and stable communities.

1. Skills Development

Adult and non-formal education can provide individuals with skills and knowledge to secure employment and improve their economic prospects, reducing the likelihood of engaging in banditry (Anyanwu, 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

2. Empowerment

Adult and non-formal Education can empower individuals to participate effectively in society, reducing feelings of marginalization and exclusion that can lead to violent behavior (Freire, 1970; UNESCO, 2019).

3. Promoting Peace and Stability

Adult and non-formal education can promote peace and stability by teaching conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and patriotism, helping to mitigate the root causes of banditry and civil unrest (UNESCO, 2019; Akinyetun et al., 2022).

4. Literacy and Numeracy

Promoting literacy and numeracy skills among adults and out-of-school youth can enhance their economic prospects and reduce poverty, a key driver of banditry (UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2020).

5. Vocational Training

Providing vocational training and skills development programs can equip individuals with employable skills, reducing unemployment and poverty (OECD, 2020; Anyanwu, 2019).

6. Community Engagement

Fostering community engagement and participation in adult and non-formal education programs can promote ownership and sustainability, helping to address the root causes of banditry and civil unrest (Anyanwu, 2019).

7. Social Cohesion

Adult and non-formal education can promote social cohesion by teaching values of tolerance, respect, and understanding, helping to reduce conflicts and violent behavior (UNESCO, 2019).

8. Economic Empowerment

Adult and non-formal education can provide individuals with the skills and knowledge to

access better economic opportunities, reducing poverty and unemployment (OECD, 2020).

By addressing the root causes of banditry and civil unrest, adult and non-formal education can contribute to a reduction in violent behavior and promote peace and stability in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Adult and non-formal education has significant potential to address the root causes of banditry and civil unrest in Nigeria by tackling poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and social exclusion. By equipping adults with functional literacy, vocational skills, and civic values, these educational programmes empower individuals to pursue lawful livelihoods and participate meaningfully in community life. Beyond economic benefits, adult education promotes peace, stability, and social cohesion through the development of conflict resolution skills, tolerance, and responsible citizenship. When communities are actively engaged in learning processes, trust and cooperation among citizens and security institutions are strengthened. However, the effectiveness of adult and non-formal education depends on sustained government commitment, adequate funding, and strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Programmes must also be context-specific, reflecting the cultural, social, and economic realities of local communities. Prioritising adult and non-formal education as part of a broader security and development strategy offers a sustainable pathway toward reducing

insecurity and fostering long-term peace in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, the following are hereby recommended:

i. Funding for adult and non-formal education (ANF) programmes should be increased to provide wider opportunities for skills acquisition, literacy, and lifelong learning aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment.

ii. Community engagement and participation in ANF programmes should be promoted to build trust, cooperation, and collective responsibility among communities, educators, and security agencies.

iii. Context-specific ANF programmes should be developed and tailored to the social, cultural, and economic needs of local communities to enhance relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

iv. Policymakers should integrate adult and non-formal education into broader strategies for mitigating banditry and promoting peace and stability in affected regions.

By investing in adult and non-formal education, Nigeria can take a critical step towards addressing the root causes of banditry and civil unrest, promoting peace, stability, and sustainable development.

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