PERSPECTIVES OF GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES ON RURAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL LIVELIHOOD

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ABSTRACT
This study examined policy measures adopted to address rural insecurity in Nigeria, given the high incidences of farmers-herders conflict, banditry, kidnapping, that have led to the loss of lives, and livelihoods, with millions of families displaced. Rural insecurity threatens the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals that are targeted at addressing hunger and food security and ensuring peace, justice, and strong institutions in Nigeria. Policy measures of the government have not been very successful given the increasing spate of insecurity that has continued to undermine the socio-economic development of rural areas. Hence, this study examined the state of rural insecurity, its drivers and effects on livelihoods, adopted policy measures, the gaps in the measures, and alternatives that could be leveraged toward sustaining lives and livelihoods in rural areas in Nigeria. This study used documentary analysis, with data sourced from publications, journals, the internet, and personal observation. It revealed that porous borders and ungoverned forests contribute to rural insecurity and concluded that adopted policy measures have not been effective, given the dynamics of rural crime. It recommended that the community policing model should be adopted as a better prospect for securing rural lives and livelihoods in Nigeria.
Keywords: Rural insecurity, Government policies, Farmers-herders conflict, Rural banditry, Community policing

INTRODUCTION

Criminal activities in rural communities in Nigeria have been on the increase, with over a million people displaced and those killed running into thousands (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, and the World Bank, 2016; Amnesty International (2018). While the northern part of the country is bedeviled by the attacks of *Boko Haram,* bandits, and herders, increasing spates of farmers' and herders' conflicts are prevalent in the south. Kidnappings for ransom have become commonplace, posing a social concern that puts the lives and livelihood of rural dwellers at the risk of being killed or kidnapped in their quest for a means of livelihood.

In line with the drive toward global peace, justice, food security, and elimination of hunger, the government has over the years adopted several policy measures to address rural insecurity. While some of the measures have contributed positively to the fight against insecurity, the draconian dimension that rural insecurity is taking in recent, calls for a review of these measures, with a focus on approaches that ensure the lives and livelihood of rural dwellers are preserved and sustained.

Although several studies on insecurity have been carried out in Nigeria, most of them have focused on the socio-economic implications of insecurity (Abubakar, Salihu, and Alheri, 2017; Basiru and Osunkoya, 2009; Nwozor, Olarewaju, and Ake, 2019). Studies on government policies on rural insecurity in Nigeria remain a major research gap. Rural insecurity, which was previously occasioned by pockets of conflicts between farmers and herders has escalated to more lives and livelihood-threatening dimensions. With the narrative of religious extremists like the *Boko Haram*, banditry, and kidnappings for ransom that pervades the highways and most rural communities, the need to examine the policy options that have been implemented by the government becomes imperative.

Hence the main objective of the study is to examine the policies that have been adopted by the government to address rural insecurity and suggest alternative policy options that could be leveraged for the sustenance of lives and livelihoods in rural communities for national development. Specifically, the study analyzed rural insecurity, its drivers, and effects on rural livelihoods in Nigeria, policy measures adopted by the government in addressing the insecurity problems, the gaps in such policies, and alternative policy options for national development.

METHODOLOGY

The study used documentary analysis, with data sourced from government publications, the internet, articles, and media sources that addressed the themes of the study. Also, personal observations of trends in rural insecurity and policy options of the government are used for the study.

State of Insecurity in Rural Areas of Nigeria

The constant threat to national security by religious, political, cultural, and social contradictions has resulted in various forms of criminal activities that have seriously affected the livelihood of rural dwellers in Nigeria. The serenity of rural areas enjoyed in the past has changed due to *Boko Haram* attacks, banditry, farmers' and herders' clashes, and communal clashes. These clashes are usually marred with religious and ethnic undertones,

with high incidences of abductions, a situation that has metamorphosed into kidnapping for ransom. A report by Assessment Capacity Project (ACAPS, 2015) revealed that over 1.8 million people have been displaced in Nigerian rural areas due to insecurity. Amnesty International (2020) reported that rural communities in Nigeria are threatened by rampaging gunmen who have killed over 1,000 people between January and August 2020, with most of the victims in the northern part of the country. The spate of killing has remained unabated, spreading to the southern part of the country.

Studies on rural insecurity in Nigeria have focused on perpetrators of the crime such as the *Boko Haram* (Abubakar, *et al*, 2017), Vigilante groups and policing in Nigeria (Basiru and Osunkoya, 2009), terrorism impact on agriculture (Jelilov, Ayinde, Tetik, Celik, *et al*, 2018), and a nexus between insecurity and food challenges (Nwozor, *et al*, 2019), and many similar studies.

Drivers of Rural Insecurity

Rural insecurity in Nigeria has been attributed to several factors, some of which are highlighted below.

1 ***Resource Competition:*** This is exemplified in the competition for land and water resources between farmers and herders. In their quest for pastures and water for their cattle, conflict ensues between farmers and herders, with the herders accused of destruction of crops and contamination of drinking water sources (Blench, 2004; Ofem and Inyang, 2014). The insecurity in the north has also led to a mass exodus of farmers and herders to the south, further increasing the burden on the already scarce resources and contributing to pockets of insecurity in several communities in the south.

2 ***Terrorism:*** The *Boko Haram* insurgent group constitutes a threat to the socio-economic survival of many communities in Northern Nigeria. Norwegian Refugee Committee in the year 2015 reported that over 2.6million people have been displaced by the *Boko Haram* insurgency majority of whom were rural residents (UNHCR, and World Bank, 2016). The porosity of the national borders in most northern states with little or no presence of security personnel enhances the migration of criminals from neighbouring countries into border communities in Nigeria (Ojewale, 2021).

3 ***Banditry:*** Activities of the bandits fuel insecurity in several states in the north. Apart from attacks on communities, a new dimension to banditry involves the kidnapping of individuals and groups, sometimes as large as hundreds of people from communities. Since the kidnap of about 230 girls in Chibok, Borno State in 2014 (BBC, 2014), the kidnapping of students by bandits has been on the rise. In 2020, 344 students were kidnapped in a school in Katsina state, and another 80 students from an Islamic school about the same period (Wahab, 2021). In a similar report, about 140 students were kidnapped from a school in Kaduna state in 2021 (BBC, 2021), and about 136 students were kidnapped from an Islamic school in Niger state in 2021. Between January and August 2021, approximately 111 kidnappings for ransom were recorded in Nigeria (Ojiego, 2021). Most of the cases occurred in Niger, Sokoto, Katsina, and Zamfara state where the activities of the bandits are prevalent (Ojiego, 2021).
Religious centres have also been targeted by these nefarious activities (Bello, 2021; Sabiu, 2021). In Kaduna State, about 100 people were abducted from a worship centre in 2021 (Okhaine, 2021).

4 ***Ethnic, Religious, and Inter-communal Restiveness*:** The agitations over land and political relevance have been a long-standing issue that is contributing to insecurity in several rural communities in the country. For example, the struggles for land, political supremacy, and socioeconomic status in A*guleri-Umuleri* and *UmobaAnam* communities in Anambra State, which started in 1964, and re-occurred in 1999 led to the loss of lives and destruction of properties (Ibeogu, Abah, and Chukwu, 2019). Similarly, insecurity in states like Plateau, Kaduna, Benue, etc., is triggered by ethnic and inter-communal or religious differences.

5 ***Rural Unemployment:*** The high rate of rural unemployment strongly correlates with the growing concerns that insecurity constitutes in the rural areas in Nigeria. The increase in rural unemployment from 4.2% in 2010 to 28% in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2018;2020), is a major contributor to insecurity in rural areas in Nigeria (Balogun, 2021). Frustration due to the lack of employment opportunities was recognized as a major contributor to the political, and ideological unrest that permeates most parts of the country since such youth readily take up arms in exchange for small amounts of money (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019).

Effects of Insecurity on Rural Livelihood

The effects of insecurity on rural livelihood are highlighted. Firstly, insecurity has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives; with a multiplier effect on the livelihoods of rural households. Amnesty International (2018) reported 312 incidents of attacks and reprisal attacks in several states in Nigeria between January 2016 and October 2018, and as a result of these attacks at least 3,641 people may have been killed, 406 injured, 5,000 houses burnt down and 182,530 people displaced.

Secondly, the protracted conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have resulted in the damaging of crops and livestock which could have otherwise improved agricultural productivity in the country (Ofuoku and Isife, 2010; Babagana Ismail, Mohammed, Dilala, *et al,* 2018). These conflicts affect rural and urban food security and increase inflation (Abubakar *et al,* 2017).

Thirdly, a large number of farmers have been displaced from their communities, and the frequent clashes discourage many farmers from going to the farm because of the fear of being killed (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Fourthly, women and girls are exposed to exploitation, trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced labour in the process of fleeing their region for protection (WHO, 2017).

Finally, the educational development of children in rural areas is seriously affected by insecurity, with implications for the attainment of the SDG that is targeted at bridging the inequality gap in the country. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2015) reported that between 2012 and 2014, over 300 schools were destroyed, 194 teachers killed, and 314 school children killed in rural communities in Nigeria due to terrorist attacks. The recent spate of kidnappings of children in their schools will further affect the enrolment rate in schools, thereby reinforcing poor human development in the country.

Government's policy responses to rural insecurity in Nigeria

Growing concerns for the preservation and sustainability of rural lives and livelihood in Nigeria led to the adoption of several policy measures by the government. While some of these measures are implemented at the national level, others are regional or state-specific, depending on the nature and spread of the insecurity concern.

National policy measures

1. ***The Use of Police and Other Security Agencies***

While the police are primarily saddled with the responsibility of ensuring peace and security in communities, the role of the Nigerian police in ensuring rural security is however limited. Firstly, a police force of a little above 300,000 is grossly insufficient to police a population of over 200 million people. This implies one police officer to 677 people, which is lower than the international standard of one police officer to 450 people (Ighobor, 2021). Secondly, most of the police officers in Nigeria are concentrated in urban areas, leaving the rural areas open to insecurity challenges (Balogun, 2021).

2. ***Establishment of other Special Forces***

Special forces of the police and military have also been established to check insecurity by different government regimes in several states (International Crisis Group, 2017). These institutional security structures over the years have made little progress in the rural areas, which are generally bereft of adequate security personnel.

3. ***Establishment of Grazing Reserves***

One of the foremost steps that were taken to curb the farmers' and herders' conflicts over land and water resources in Nigeria is the establishment of 415 grazing reserves in 1965, to create corridors for the passage of migrating herders in search of fodders. However, urbanization and population growth have led to situations where the grazing routes are used for residential or farming purposes. An attempt to reaffirm the National Grazing Reserves through the 2016 National Grazing Reserve Bill was not successful. It was contended by the southern governors as a plot by the government to usurp their authority of land ownership since the Land Use Act (1978) was already in place (Mustapha, 2019).

4. ***Proposed National Livestock Transformation Framework and Cattle Colony***

The National Livestock Transformation Framework was proposed in 2018 to establish cattle colonies across the country, with the colony planned to cover about 5,000 hectares of land (International Crisis Group, 2017; Mustapha, 2019). The proposal also did not get widespread support due to the dichotomous nature that rural insecurity, vis-à-vis national insecurity has taken, as it is seriously polarized along political, ethnic, and religious lines.

Regional/State Policy Measures

1. ***The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast***

The CJTF is a model of community policing that was established to assist the formal security formations to diffuse communal tension, early detection of crime spots, and rapid response to prevent crime and tackle cases of violence in communities (Abdulyakeen, n.d). The CJTF was established in the Northeastern states like Borno, and Adamawa, where their efforts have been commended. For instance, in Adamawa state, the collective efforts of the CJTF led to the killing of about 75 *Boko Haram* members in the state, a success that was possible because of the robust intelligence and early warning system that helped in tracking and monitoring the communities (Abdulyakeen, n.d).

2. ***Amotekun Security in the Southwest***

The growing concerns for kidnapping along rural routes on the southwestern highways and the activities of herders who invade rural communities committing mayhem, and the failure of the formal security agencies to curb the growing trends, led to the formation of the regional security outfit in the southwest. *Amotekun* Corps, which is a Yoruba word for "one that looks like the leopard", was established in 2020, as a joint security outfit by the Southwestern governors to check insecurity in

their states. Adeyemo (2020) reported that as of December 2020, *Amotekun* has arrested and prosecuted over 500 criminals in the last 12 months, with over 250 serving jail terms in Ondo State.

3. Ebube Agu Security in the Southeast

The growing concerns over herdsmen attacks and kidnappings in rural communities in the Southeastern states led to the establishment of *Ebube Agu* in 2020. The governors in the region have also made efforts to ensure that the states' assemblies enact state security laws to give backing to the regional security efforts in the region (Okutu, 2020).

4. Banning of Open Grazing in the Southern States

On July 5, 2021, the seventeen southern states moved to establish legislation against open grazing of cattle before September 1, 2021 (Vanguard, 2021). They proposed the need for the federal government to develop alternative and modern approaches to livestock management as a way of finding a lasting solution to the longstanding conflict between herders and host communities in various parts of the country and the south in particular. The policy option was however criticized by the northern counterparts, who see it as discriminating against the herders, who are from the northern extraction. States like Bayelsa, Rivers, Oyo, Ekiti, Abia, Lagos, and Ondo have passed laws that prohibit open grazing of cattle in the states, while some are at various stages of enacting the laws (Vanguard, 2021).

5. Closure of Markets in Some Northern States

The closure of markets in some northern states was adopted to curtail the access of armed bandits to food and other necessities, with the understanding that when they are deprived of these essentials of life, it will expose them to vulnerabilities and ease of being subdued by the government security forces. The measure was used by states like Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Zanfara, etc. Unfortunately, bandits took advantage of the measure to raid homes and loot foodstuff to stockpile, due to the absence of communication mechanisms for distress calls (Premium Times, 2021a).

6. Shutting Down of Telecommunication Networks

One of the very recent efforts of the government towards addressing the rural insecurity in some northern states is the shutting down of the communication networks to check the activities of bandits. For example, in September 2021, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) shut down the telecommunication networks in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto (Premium Times 2021a; 2021b).

Gaps in Policy Response

The policy options of the government over the years notwithstanding, rural insecurity has remained a major challenge in Nigeria. A look into the policy options of the government reveals a faulty design or implementation of the measures. Some of the gaps observed in some policy options on rural insecurity are listed.

1. The propensity to use excessive force on citizens by the police (Ighobor, 2021) has led to mistrust of the police and created barriers to cooperation in ensuring rural security.
2. The failure to demarcate the grazing routes hinders the access and usage of these reserves by herders (International Crisis Group, 2017; Mustapha, 2019) and exacerbates rural insecurity.
3. The call for cattle colonies in the states failed on ethnic grounds because the government failed to operationalize the policy in line with the Land Use Act (1978).
4. The unsuccessful passage of the National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016 was resisted as a duplication of the Land Use Act of 1978.
5. The porous borders remain major points of entry for international armed groups into the country and the failure to address the porous borders and ungoverned forests in rural areas would continue to undermine efforts aimed at addressing rural security.
6. While the anti-open grazing laws may be laudable, the failure to implement such laws at the national level undermines states' efforts due to the underlying religious and ethnic interpretations that mar their passage in the states where they are presently being implemented.
7. The community policing models that the government initiated in the past, had limited local participation, a top-bottom framework, which is not likely to succeed and, in some cases, such models are ridden with religious, ethnic, and political intentions.
8. The policy measure of closing telecommunication networks in states that are seriously affected by bandits lacks legal justification as it denies citizens access to communication with the outside world, threatens their means of livelihood, and denies them access to distress mechanisms.

Alternatives to addressing Rural Insecurity in Nigeria

1. *People-Driven Community Policing Model:* The community policing model that has been adopted by the government operates a top-bottom approach. A

workable model of community policing should be a bottom-up design approach, with the involvement of the community members from the design to the implementation. This should be seen as a national security concern, rather than the regional or state efforts as are presently practiced.

2. Social Marketing is an essential tool for behavioral change that can be adopted by the government to address the problem of public distrust of security personnel and the various ethnic and religious dissenting views that are contributing to the insecurity in rural areas in the country. Given the new technologies that are driving social engagements globally, the government could leverage their benefits to sensitize the public on issues of national unity, and ethnic and religious tolerance, as there are points of cohesion that amplify the strengths of the nation, compared to the disagreements that divide.
3. Government can also establish peace commissions in various rural communities, with a localized framework that will reduce farmers-herders conflict in rural areas. A one-size-fits-all measure is limited, hence, community customary courts should be revived and empowered to address local problems, as was the case in the past.
4. Government should implement programmes under the Green Wall Initiative, which is aimed at restoring the degraded landscape along the Sahara in Africa. This will help mitigate the negative effect of climate change which has been the push factor for farmers'/herders' migration in search, and competition for scarce resources. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (n.d) noted that the successful implementation of the National Strategic Plan of the National Great Green Wall in Nigeria's Great Green wall corridor, will effectively address issues of farmers and herders clashes and reduce the extreme poverty in the areas.
5. Policies to address social deprivations in rural areas such as rural infrastructural development should be considered, and pro-rural employment policies should be implemented.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, rural insecurity is on the rise, evident in the activities of *Boko Haram*, bandits, farmers/herders' conflict, kidnappings, and ethnic, communal, and religious clashes. The policy measures adopted by the government have not been successful in sustaining peace and security in rural areas. Policy measures that are people-centered and the implementation of policies that address the social deprivations that predispose the rural areas to the vagaries of insecurity are key to addressing rural insecurity in Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommends the following:

1. Community members/associations should form the backbone of how their communities should be guided and included in structures to drive community policing efforts
2. There is a need for social re-orientation of rural dwellers, vis-à-vis the entire population on the need for behavioral change on national unity, irrespective of ethnic background and religious inclination.
3. The government should focus on addressing the social deprivations in the rural areas that contribute to insecurity, especially infrastructural development and the creation of employment opportunities for the rural youth.

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