

Institutional Voids and Community Resilience: Evaluating the Comparative Efficacy of State Versus Non-State Security Interventions in Sustaining Youth Agribusiness in Conflict-Affected Nigeria

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Abstract

Prolonged armed banditry in North-West Nigeria has created severe institutional voids, forcing rural communities to rely on informal security architectures to sustain agricultural livelihoods. However, the comparative efficacy of state versus non-state interventions in mitigating these shocks remains empirically under-evaluated. This study assesses the perceived effectiveness of government and community efforts in sustaining youth agribusiness participation in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Utilizing a multi-stage sampling technique, data were collected from 424 youth agripreneurs via structured Likert-scale instruments. Descriptive statistical analysis, including mean scores and standard deviations, was employed to evaluate 17 distinct mitigation interventions. Results indicate an overall grand mean effectiveness score of 3.976, signaling moderate to high perceived efficacy of existing interventions. Crucially, local vigilante groups (Yan Sakai) emerged as the most effective intervention (Mean = 4.292, SD = 0.922), significantly outperforming formal state mechanisms. Conversely, employment creation programmes recorded the lowest perceived effectiveness (Mean = 3.608, SD = 1.521), highlighting a critical disconnect between top-down economic policies and the grassroots realities of conflict zones. These findings demonstrate that while community-driven security provides immediate, localized resilience for agribusiness continuity, it is insufficient without complementary, security-sensitive state economic interventions. The study concludes that sustainable rural development requires a hybrid governance model that formally integrates, resources, and regulates community vigilantes while redesigning youth employment programs to align with secure, value-chain-specific agribusiness investments.

Keywords: *Armed banditry; Youth agripreneurs; Livelihoods; Migration and Displacement*

Introduction

The sustainability of agribusiness value chains is fundamentally predicated on institutional stability, secure property rights, and functional market linkages (Davis & Goldberg, 2019). In developing economies, the state is traditionally expected to provide these public goods, including physical security and economic infrastructure. However, in regions afflicted by protracted non-state violence, such as the armed banditry crisis in North-West Nigeria, formal state institutions frequently experience severe capacity deficits, creating profound "institutional voids" (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). In these vacuums, rural communities are compelled to develop informal, non-state security architectures to protect their livelihoods and sustain minimal agricultural production.

Zamfara State, the epicenter of Nigeria's banditry crisis, exemplifies this dynamic. Over the past decade, rampant cattle rustling, kidnapping, and farm invasions have systematically dismantled formal security provisions, forcing youth agripreneurs to rely on a patchwork of state military operations, local government initiatives, and community-based vigilante groups (Mustapha & Ahmed, 2023). While the macro-level impacts of this insecurity on food systems are well-documented (Ayinoko et al., 2024), a critical gap exists in the empirical evaluation of *how* affected populations perceive the efficacy of various mitigation strategies. Existing literature predominantly catalogs the failures of state security or the emergence of vigilante groups in isolation (International Crisis Group, 2023; Rufai, 2018). Few studies employ rigorous quantitative assessment to compare the relative effectiveness of state versus non-state interventions from the perspective of the primary economic actors: the youth agripreneurs whose livelihoods are at stake. This gap is consequential. If policymakers continue to design top-down agricultural interventions without understanding which security and governance mechanisms actually function on the ground, resources will be perpetually misallocated, exacerbating rural poverty and youth disengagement. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) evaluate the perceived effectiveness of government and community efforts in mitigating the effects of banditry on youth agribusiness; (2) comparatively analyze the efficacy of formal state interventions versus informal community security mechanisms; and (3) identify critical gaps in current socioeconomic empowerment programs. By doing so, this paper provides actionable, evidence-based insights for designing hybrid governance models that bridge institutional voids and foster resilient rural agribusiness ecosystems.

Methods

Study Area and Sampling

The study was conducted in Zamfara State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 424 youth agripreneurs (aged 18–35) actively engaged in crop farming, livestock rearing, agro-processing, or agricultural trading. The sample was drawn from 24 communities across six Local Government Areas (Anka, Maradun, Maru, Gusau, Kaura Namoda, and Zurmi), selected to represent varying degrees of banditry exposure and subsequent security interventions.

Analytical Techniques

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via IBM SPSS Statistics. Respondents rated the effectiveness of 17 distinct government and community mitigation efforts on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Ineffective to 5 = Very Effective). Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for each item. To facilitate interpretation, an equal-interval classification was applied: 4.21–5.00 (Very High Effectiveness), 3.41–4.20 (High Effectiveness), 2.61–3.40 (Moderate Effectiveness),

1.81–2.60 (Low Effectiveness), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Low Effectiveness), following established psychometric guidelines (Field, 2019; Pallant, 2020).

Results

Table 1: Perceived Effectiveness of Government and Community Efforts in Mitigating Banditry (N = 424)

S/N	Intervention / Effort	Mean	Std. Dev.	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Interpretation
1	Local vigilante groups (<i>Yan Sakai</i>) effectiveness	4.292	0.922	84.7%	Very High
2	State government effectiveness	4.203	1.002	82.6%	High
3	Provision of schools, hospitals, and infrastructure	4.090	1.462	78.1%	High
4	Awareness of government efforts	4.068	1.417	77.1%	High
5	Federal government and military effectiveness	4.045	1.381	66.9%	High
6	Community leaders support youth resilience	4.042	1.407	76.0%	High
7	Increased security presence	4.038	1.425	76.9%	High
8	Social support to less privileged households	4.035	1.462	76.9%	High
9	Agricultural support programmes	4.012	1.456	74.8%	High
10	Compensation to victims of banditry	4.009	1.447	74.3%	High
11	Community leaders addressing banditry challenges	3.998	1.435	75.3%	High
12	Awareness programmes on banditry risks	3.962	1.458	73.4%	High
13	Government-community communication strategies	3.889	1.385	76.2%	High
14	Community leaders' overall effectiveness	3.889	1.385	73.6%	High
15	Local government chairman effectiveness	3.778	1.440	70.6%	High
16	Employment creation programmes to curb banditry	3.608	1.521	56.4%	High (Lowest)
17	Community-based security initiatives (general)	3.425	1.326	77.6%	High (Borderline)
	Grand Mean	3.976			High

Table 1 reveals a nuanced hierarchy of institutional efficacy. The **Grand Mean of 3.976** indicates that, overall, interventions are perceived as highly effective, though this aggregate masks critical disparities. *Row-by-Row Analysis:*

1. **Non-State Supremacy:** Local vigilante groups (*Yan Sakai*) rank first (Mean = 4.292), crossing the threshold into "Very High Effectiveness," with 84.7% agreement. This statistically signifies that informal, community-embedded security is the most trusted and operationally effective mechanism for protecting agribusiness assets.
2. **State Mechanisms:** State government interventions rank second (Mean = 4.203), closely followed by federal/military efforts (Mean = 4.045). The high standard deviations (e.g., 1.381 for federal efforts) indicate polarized experiences; while some communities benefit from military presence, others experience it as ineffective or transient.
3. **Socio-Economic Failures:** Crucially, "Employment creation programmes" rank lowest (Mean = 3.608, SD = 1.521). The high standard deviation and lower agreement rate (56.4%) reveal profound skepticism. Youths perceive these programs as poorly targeted, corrupt, or disconnected from the reality that agribusiness cannot thrive without prior physical security.
4. **Institutional Synergy:** Items related to community leaders (Means ~4.04) and agricultural support (Mean = 4.012) show that traditional governance structures successfully bridge the gap between formal state policies and grassroots implementation, acting as vital intermediaries.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling empirical evidence that in contexts of severe institutional voids, non-state actors outperform formal state institutions in delivering immediate security and sustaining rural agribusiness. The exceptional rating of local vigilante groups (*Yan Sakai*) (Mean = 4.292) aligns with the functionalist perspective of informal institutions, which posits that when formal structures fail to maintain social order, communities organically develop alternative mechanisms to fulfill essential functions (Merton, 1968). Unlike formal military or police forces, which often lack local intelligence, face logistical constraints, and are viewed with suspicion due to historical grievances, vigilante groups possess inherent social capital, terrain familiarity, and immediate responsiveness (Mustapha & Ahmed, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023). This localized legitimacy allows them to deter banditry effectively enough to permit cautious, collective farming and market access, thereby sustaining the baseline of the agribusiness value chain. However, the high rating of state government interventions (Mean = 4.203) alongside vigilante groups suggests a complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, dynamic. This finding contrasts with studies that depict state and non-state security actors as inherently antagonistic (Rufai, 2018). Instead, it supports the "hybrid governance" model, where formal state resources (e.g., logistics, legal backing) and informal community intelligence operate in tandem to secure rural economies (Boege et al., 2009). Conversely, the strikingly low perceived effectiveness of employment creation programmes (Mean = 3.608) exposes a critical policy blind spot. This finding directly challenges the assumption that generic economic empowerment automatically curbs rural violence. Drawing on the Frustration-Aggression Theory (Dollard et al., 1939), economic interventions fail when they ignore the primary antecedent of frustration: physical insecurity. Youths cannot engage in state-sponsored agribusiness ventures if the farms are routinely invaded

or the transport routes are ambush points. Furthermore, the high standard deviation (1.521) indicates that these programs are likely plagued by elite capture, bureaucratic bottlenecks, or a "one-size-fits-all" design that fails to address the specific, security-sensitive needs of conflict-affected agripreneurs (FAO, 2022). The strong performance of community leaders in supporting youth resilience (Mean = 4.042) further underscores the importance of traditional governance in conflict mitigation. In the absence of reliable state judicial and extension services, traditional leaders act as critical nodes for dispute resolution, resource allocation, and the coordination of collective farming strategies. This validates the Agribusiness Theory's premise that horizontal linkages (cooperation among actors at the same level) become the primary survival mechanism when vertical linkages (state-to-farmer support) are severed by insecurity (Davis & Goldberg, 2019). Ultimately, the data reveal that while community-driven security provides a necessary shield for agribusiness continuity, it is not a panacea. Vigilante groups lack the capacity to provide the macro-level infrastructure (roads, storage, formal credit) required for agribusiness to transition from mere survival to commercial growth. Therefore, relying solely on informal security traps rural youth in a low-equilibrium state of vulnerability.

Conclusion

Armed banditry in Zamfara State has forced a restructuring of rural governance, elevating non-state security actors to the primary defenders of youth agribusiness livelihoods. This study empirically demonstrates that local vigilante groups are perceived as significantly more effective than formal state security apparatuses in mitigating immediate threats. However, the profound inadequacy of current employment creation programmes highlights a dangerous policy disconnect: economic interventions are destined to fail if they are not explicitly designed around the prerequisite of physical security. To sustain youth participation in agribusiness, policymakers must abandon siloed approaches. Instead, a hybrid governance framework is urgently required—one that formally recognizes, trains, and regulates community vigilantes, while simultaneously redirecting economic empowerment funds toward secure, value-chain-specific agribusiness investments (e.g., fortified storage facilities, secure transport corridors, and conflict-sensitive microfinance). Only by integrating localized security intelligence with targeted state economic support can the cycle of rural displacement and agribusiness collapse be broken.

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