



HIGHWAY BANDITRY ALONG ZAMFARA-KATSINA ROAD AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESIDENT COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: This position paper provided major highlights of the impact of highway banditry on the people residing along the Zamfara-Katsina highway, precisely Gusau-Funtua road in the North-Western part of Nigeria, taking into account the socio-economic influence of the area under discussion. The paper examined how banditry affected a series of economic activities, especially farming, which is known in the areas, and also conducted inquiries as to why armed banditry continues to transform beyond the time frame anticipated by Nigerians as a result of a series of operations and measures claimed to have been adopted by the Nigerian government. The paper adopted a mixed research methodology of literature review and oral interview with a view to comparing data collected from the field and its relationships with the findings contained in the existing literature.

Keywords: Highway Banditry, Socio-Economic Development, Rural Livelihoods, Zamfara-Katsina Road, Security Challenges in Nigeria.

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Introduction

The Zamfara-Funtua highway, which is, on average, around (88) kilometers, long has been one of the strategically important national roads used by an estimated over three thousand vehicles on a daily basis (Awal 2024). It hosted between ten to twenty thousand passengers on average, including those on private and business trips who use the road to access other states such as Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, Niger, and the Federal Capital Territory, neighboring Niger Republic through Illela border in Sokoto, Magama-Jibiya border in Katsina, as well as Kwangwalam border in Daura, Katsina state (Ahmed 2024). Because of its strategic importance, the road attracted the resolution of the Federal Executive Council under former President Buhari for its dualization from Zaria through Funtua, Gusau, Talatar Mafara to Sokoto.

It is evident that the highway also connects thousands of businessmen to major international markets such as Kasuwar Daji, Kasuwar Dauran, Talatar Mafara, Jangebe, Nasarawar Burkullu,

and Gummi markets in Zamfara state, as well as major markets in Kano, Katsina, and part of the Niger Republic (Ahmed 2024). Not only markets, the agricultural potential of the resident communities connected by this highway remains one of the most important indicators that explain the relevance of the road to the economic development of the North-West region of Nigeria. As argued by (Anka 2023), the road linking Zamfara to Funtua up to Marabar Yakawada and Gangara in Kaduna State has been a source of wealth to an estimated tune of over N50 billion naira per annum emanating from the production of thousands of metric tons of rice, maize, soybeans, as well as cotton and groundnut.

Not only for its agricultural potentials the Gusau-Funtua highway provided better access to major livestock markets which are feeders of a substantial part of the country with livestock such as cattle, sheep, cows, and chickens. (Anka 2023) argued that Talatar Mafara, Gummi, Kasuwar Daji, Dauran, and Jangebe livestock markets remain a very important source of hundreds of trucks loaded with livestock to the southern and eastern parts of the country.



These descriptive developments were largely tempered as a result of the growing spate of armed banditry which became too pronounced since 2011. The road, in the views of (Anka 2023), came under imminent threat of attacks by armed bandits almost on a daily basis. He argued further that over five hundred cases of abductions and kidnappings were recorded along the highway since 2018, stating further that an estimated at least (167) people were killed with an additional (523) injured on that road.

It is evident now that, from January to October 2024, hardly a day passes without one case of attack, abduction, kidnapping, or another. Commuters along that road have become sensitive and exposed to one form of armed banditry activity or another. A lot of potential business people who use Zamfara as a business hub have abandoned the state due to a lack of safety on the Gusau-Funtua highway. Again, businesses almost collapsed along the Zamfara-Katsina axis, especially along this highway, because of consistent armed bandit brutality. The bandits have been placing undue requests for levies or fines on the communities while hundreds of potential farmers were forced out of their farms due to constant harassment and intimidation.

It has also become a popular argument again that the government's approach to addressing this pendulum has become inefficient simply because the tragedy has been increasing at a rate that is above human comprehension. Despite the multiplicity of military and police checkpoints placed to manage the excesses of the armed bandits, nothing much has been achieved in bringing the number of attacks along that highway to the barest minimum. The argument related to the failure of deploy the security agencies along the highway has always been that they don't have the requisite knowledge of the environment, as well as the lack of sophisticated weapons that can match those of bandit criminals. The implications of this development has continued to impact badly on the social, economic, and political development of both the settlers and commuters passing along the road. These consequences continue to tell badly about the image of Zamfara and also the investment hub which the state is known for.

The objectives of this paper are to examine the effects of highway banditry on the socioeconomic development of communities around the Zamfara and Katsina highway. Other objectives include examining the reasons behind the failure of the conventional measures put in place by the government to secure the Gusau-Funtua highway. The paper adopted a mixed research methodology of literature review and field interview with a view to comparing findings and applying them to bringing new facts that can advance the frontiers of knowledge.

Over-view of Armed Banditry in Zamfara

Armed banditry as a social conflict has been in Zamfara state for almost a decade now, precisely by the beginning of the year 2008. Many factors are believed to be the root causes of this social conflict, and in the opinion of (Hassane 2022) as cited by (Anka 2023), banditry was caused by the degradation of pasture due to disrupted rainfall patterns which have compromised herders' livelihoods. With the population increases, farmlands have progressively encroached on grazing areas and transhumance corridors, overstepping the distribution of land by national regulation.

The age-long history of marginalization of Fulani herders by the government through its policies and programmes has further been considered as an additional push factor. As argued by (Maradun 2023), government policies for years had continued to put the Fulani herders in isolation; hence, their years of neglect by the government had pushed them into serious frustration, resulting in their retirement into the forest and aided them to develop criminal wings which are today reaping above public comprehension. Beyond this, the extent of the extortion of these herders by the state authorities, especially the police, lawyers, and local shariah judges, has further made their situation more sympathetic. (Gulubba 2023) argued that for years, police and Shariah court judges have made extortion of the Fulani herdsmen a growing enterprise. A civil case involving a typical Fulani herdsman can cost him years of litigation and prosecution. Lawyers, police, judges, and agents of the emirates will extort money in large sums and continue to frustrate the case to the extent the herdsman will suffer and lose a huge sum of money and a large portion or bulls of his cattle.

Different from these remote factors, the unresolved disputes emanating from the encroachment of grazing reserves, watering places and cattle routes had further added to the frustration of the Fulani herdsmen and set the Fulani herders against the local farmers (Gulubba 2023). The culmination of these frustrations resulted in the rapid psychological transformation of some of these Fulani herders into embarking on acts of criminality. Many of them went into cattle rustling to be able to recover their lost cattle, while others took advantage of their deteriorating relations with the local farmers to transform into bandit criminals (Maradun 2023).

The continued spread of armed bandit activities in Zamfara was aided by a growing amount of support the bandits received from known and unknown actors. As argued by (Rufai 2022), rural banditry and cattle rustling spread their tentacles to different parts of Zamfara State. The transformation of banditry in Zamfara State is tied to the role played by different collaborators.

He added, "The bandits have established a wide range of connections across different local government areas in the state. There is a considerable number of people across different ethnic groups and social status that served as informants for the bandits. Their main role is to provide relevant security information on the conditions of different towns and villages in the state. Part of the vital information is to identify friends and enemies of the bandits and, at the same time, furnish the bandits with every bit of information regarding the security situation of their respective areas."

Banditry has caused serious economic infractions for Zamfara state and the consequences are not restricted to monetary or material perspectives only. A report by the committee set up by the Zamfara state government to review the security situation of the state revealed that "a total of 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children orphaned, and 190,340 people were displaced between 2011 and 2019." The report added that, "over N3 billion naira (USD \$6.8 million) was paid to bandits as ransom for 3,672 people abducted during the period under review."

With the growing transformation in armed bandit activities, the actors become stronger and begin to form powerful networks and continue to recruit more people into the industry of armed banditry. As argued by (Mudi 2023), because of the numerical strengths of

the armed bandits in Zamfara, they succeeded in extending their network beyond the state by spreading their activities of cattle rustling and kidnapping to Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Kaduna states. Estimates have shown that, because of the connection of the armed bandits and the strength of their network, within the last ten years they have perfected over fifteen thousand abductions and received money paid for ransom worth over N10 billion naira across the six most affected states in the Northwest (Maryam 2023).

The menace of armed banditry has also spread beyond the Nigerian borders, hence there have been reported cases of bandits establishing different bases around Niger's borders with Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states. The armed criminals operating from Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina cross the border at night on motorcycles to attack locals before retreating to wooded areas and Babban Rafi forest straddling the two countries. Statistics provided by (Anka & Suleiman 2023) state that "in 2021, Le Souffle de Maradi region recorded (2,735) cases of stolen animals, (91) victims of abductions, and payment of (51) million CFA francs (over 77,5500 Euro) in ransom by hostages' families."

One most painful part of the development with regards to the activities of armed bandits in Zamfara state is that they have succeeded in spreading their criminal influence statewide and established terrible enclaves that constitute a threat to the state authorities. In Zamfara state alone, there are (as of 2021) over (30,000) bandits and close to (100) camps operating in different locations in the state.

Strategic Importance of Zamfara-Funtua Highway

One must not argue to the contrary that the Zamfara-Funtua highway is strategically important to the socio-economic development of not only Zamfara state and Katsina, but Northern Nigeria by extension. (Anka 2023) argued, "Gusau-Funtua The highway has become one of the most economical potential routes which are the major source of food for the nation. The road covers, on average over (100) kilometers linking about (22) communities that are directly along the highway and also over (200) others that are directly and indirectly connected to the road. It has connection with close to three million populations that frequently or from time to time, make use of the road for commercial and private purposes on weekly basis.

In the aspect of agriculture, the communities around the area are productive and potential producers of maize, beans, millet, soya beans and rice. As argued by (Nura 2024), an estimate of over (157,000) metric tons of assorted grains are produced by a population of an average of (26,000) farmers who utilize hundreds of hectares of land for annual agricultural purposes along Gusau-Funtua road. He argued further that, an average of over (2000) direct labor is equally being secured annually through farming and other agricultural purposes, which enhances the source of income for many people from the area. Before the present dilemma, the productivity of the communities residing along the highway under discussion was evidently high.

The highway also connects several prominent markets of international repute; popular among them include Talatar Mafara,

Dauran, Shinkafi, Kasuwar Daji, Gummi and Nasarawar Burkullu cattle markets in Zamfara. It also connects hundreds of farmers to the popular Dan-dume and Giwa grains markets in Katsina and Kaduna state where thousands of metric tons of assorted grains are being disposed to the large markets within the entire North. (Anka 2023) argued that, the volume of livestock being exported to the south and east from the major markets around Zamfara and Katsina linked to the popular Zamfara-Funtua highway is averagely quantified at N1.3 billion per annum as well as another N3.2 billion naira for the assorted grains being sold."

On the aspect of education, the road connect hundreds of students coming from Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto and Kebbi to some prominent Universities such as Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Usmanu Danfodio University Sokoto, Federal University Gusau and Federal University Dutsinma as well as other tertiary colleges such as College of Nursing Zamfara and Sokoto as well as Schools of Basic Remedial Studies Funtua. This is different from other exchange students from across the country that used the highway to access Unity Colleges in Gummi, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto. As argued by (Nura 2024), Estimate of over (20,000) students on exchange and university scholarship make use of the highway on annual basis for the purpose of accessing their schools for educational purpose. The revenue they generated in exchange for the payment of school fees, and expenditure for other utensils is worth over N2 billion naira per annum.

In the area of health care management, the highway is also strategically important since it connects patients and relations from Zamfara to strategic tertiary health care facilities such as Ahmadu Bello Teaching Hospital Zaria, 42 military hospital Kaduna, National eye center

Kaduna, Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Kano as well as Federal Neuro-psychiatric hospital Kaduna among others. Relations from Zamfara who have patients on critical or severe health conditions make use of this highway to facilitate for alternative health care recovery. The cost of medical tourism emanating from the use of Zamfara-Funtua highway is averagely above N2.7 billion naira annually (Anka 2024).

Assessment of the Major Banditry Crises along Zamfara-Funtua Highway

It has been a popular argument that there is no day that passes without recording one case of an armed bandit attack or another. Since 2022, the extent of the tragedy and psychological trauma caused by a series of severe attacks against the innocent populace on the Zamfara-Funtua highway has become more confusing than one can comprehend. As argued by (Anka 2023), Gusau-Funtua highway has become a death trap for most of the innocent population plying the road. From Yandoton Daji to Magazu, Kurcheri, and Yankara, hardly a day passes without one incident of armed bandit attack or another. Prominent personalities, including university professors, security personnel, politicians, students, and businessmen and traditional rulers have become victims of highway banditry along the road under review with little or no hope of the tragedy ending soonest.

Table (1) Showing Major Banditry Incidents along Zamfara-Funtua Highway

S/No	Date	Description of the Incident	Status
1	12/10/2024	Bandits attacked Commandant General of Zamfara Community Protection Guards	Injured
2		Deputy Vice Chancellor of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto was Attacked by bandits	Killed
3		Head of Motor Traffic Division of Zamfara Police Command was attacked by bandits	Killed
4	30/09/2024	Staff of Zamfara office Independent National Electoral Commission INEC Mai Nasara Kaura was attacked by bandits along Kucheri	Abducted
5	30/09/2024	Zamfara former Deputy Malam Ibrahim Wakkala was attacked along Kaucheri-Yankara	Escaped
6		Former Federal House of Reps member from Zamfara Kabiru Yahaya Classics	Injured
7	12/10/2024	Again Bandits blocked Gusau-Funtua highway Kadnapped travellers in Zamfara	Kidnapping
8	12/08/2024	Bandits blocked highway, abducts travellers	Abduction
9		Bandits kidnapped (10) staff of construction firm SETRACO	
10		Bandits attacked police checkpoint along Tazame village Killed six police officers and burnt vehicles and motorcycle facilities	Killing
11		Bandits attack police officers along Tsafe-Gidan Giye killed two members	Killing
12		Bandits attacked FRSC formation abducted staff	Abduction
13		Bandits invaded private hostel of female students of Federal University Gusau along Sabon Gida, Gusau-Funtua highway	Abduction
14		Bandits attacked construction workers	killing
		along Tazame road and killed one private passengers	
15		Bandits killed District Head of Kucheri in Zamfara	Killing

Source as compiled by the authors, 2024.

Despite efforts made by the state governments of Katsina and Zamfara to support the major operations led by various federal government security operatives along the highway, the crises of frequent armed bandit attacks and abductions along the highway under review have not been resolved. As argued by (Galadi 2024), "the crisis of armed bandit attacks along the Zamfara-Funtua highway are confusing, hence a trip of less than eighty kilometers covered by an uncountable number of military checkpoints became virtually impossible. Bandits waylaid their arms against innocent travelers, and the military and other security agencies become helpless in securing the road to the extent that sometimes it is the soldiers that raise the fear on the commuters by asking them to be wary of the excesses of the armed bandits."

Another issue of serious concern is the extent of the corruption that characterized the management of the highway by the security agencies that mounted checkpoints in the name of doing stop and search operations. (Gulubba 2024) argued, "despite the frustrations suffered by innocent travelers, the security forces along that same highway take advantage of their ability to bear arms to be molesting, intimidating, and extorting people for money without doing better to ensure their safety along the highway. Incidences of human rights violations have become clear that some security forces along that highway, instead of easing the difficulties suffered by the travelers, ended up complicating the situation."

Assessment of the Major Impacts

Assessing the impact of armed banditry on the socio-economic development of the people of Zamfara state, especially those residing along the Zamfara- Katsina highway, it is evidently clear that economic activities, especially agriculture, livestock/grazing development, as well as business activities, are almost brought to a standstill with significant but consequential losses on both sides of the divides. But to be more specific, one needs to look at the impact of this banditry tragedy on the following key important areas of human development:

Impact on Investment/Economic Activities

As highlighted at the entry point of this paper, Gusau-Funtua highway is critically significant in linking thousands of people from Zamfara, Katsina, and the rest of the country to various economic activities such as transportation of assorted grains and giving access to major livestock markets in both Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto. It is evidently clear that , with the rising spates of armed bandit attacks along the Zamfara-Funtua highway, the majority of business people that patronizes Zamfara and Katsina major markets had abandoned their businesses and changed to alternative economic routes due to lack of certainty and fear of bandits. As argued by (Nura 2024), "before 2022 precisely, Tsafe Sunday market for instance used to be densely populated with a lot

of business activities, and people from various parts of Nigeria, including the east, south, and west, came to conduct business transactions in Tsafe markets to the extent that the multiplier effects of these business activities had made the market very popular, raising hundreds of millionaires before things changed.” Before now, Zamfara state has had cause to announce the closure of various weekly markets, including Kasuwar Daji, Shinkafi, Dauran, Gadar-Zaima, Jangebe, Nasarawar Burkullu, among others. Apart from the state losing millions of naira from the IGR expected to be realized from these markets, hundreds of business moguls had tactically but deliberately abandoned Zamfara markets for alternative ones probably in the North-East.

Impact on Transportation

Movement of people and goods, especially agricultural farm products, along the Zamfara-Funtua highway has become almost virtually impossible. Apart from the heavy presence of military operatives along the highway who put unnecessary pressure on commuters due to their stop-and-search operations, there are cases of extortion and human rights abuse, as well as compromise from among government agents, especially security forces, which characterized movement along that road very stressing. As argued by (Anka 2024), various cases of armed bandit attacks on innocent commuters have continued to scare people from moving freely for their private and commercial ventures on the Gusau-Funtua highway. (Nura 2024) argued that prominent personalities, including government officials, university academics, and prominent business entrepreneurs, have become the sub-target of these bandits along the highway. He argued further that, between February 2024 to October 2024, an average of (109) cases of highway bandit attacks have been recorded between Sheme-Yankara-Wanzamai-Kucheri-Magazu and Tsafe, in Zamfara and Katsina with close to about a billion naira collected as ransom. The complexity of movement along that highway has necessitated the soldiers operating along that road to announce the closure of the Funtua-Gusau highway whenever it is 7:00 PM, and that decision has subjected hundreds of innocent travelers and business men using the road to sleeping at military checkpoints either at Yanakara or Tsafe railway junction and other abandoned fueling stations at Funtua and Lalan area in Zamfara. Not only that, at various times, the bandits launched attacks on the terminal areas where commuters spend their night and perfect abduction out rightly.

Impacts on Educational Development

The ugly development caused by banditry along the Gusau-Funtua highway resulted in the closure of many government schools, especially in the resident communities along the highway under discussion, due to the fact that bandits either did not allow classes to hold sessions or the security forces deployed to provide security were forced to take over the school facilities as their temporary camps. Nura (2024) argued that there are over twenty primary and secondary schools along the Gusau-Funtua highway that have either closed completely or had their academic activities suspended due to the activities of the armed bandits over the years. Again, teachers and educational administrators are not willing to proceed on posting or transfer to some of these communities along the Gusau-Funtua highway simply because they are unsure of their safety. Mudi (2024) argued that many students crossing through Zamfara to access schools such as Usmanu Danfodio University

Sokoto, Federal University Gusau and the rest had fallen victim to armed bandit attacks, and their abduction had caused their relations to payment of millions of naira as ransom.

Impacts on Access to Health Care Delivery

It is clearly evident that the effects of highway banditry along the Zamfara-Funtua highway are consequential on access to the health care system, especially among the resident communities in the area under discussion. Nura (2024) argued that while most of the health care facilities, especially at the primary level, were forced to shut down as a result of the activities of the armed bandits, health care personnel had deliberately avoided any calls to attend to emergencies, including sustaining antenatal and postnatal emergency care in the areas dominated by the highway under discussion. He argued that, in between Tsafe local government in Zamfara and Sheme village in Faskari local government in Katsina, about fifteen primary health care centers have been avoided by the designated health personnel posted to serve as medical officers in the areas due to the insecurity caused by banditry. In the argument of Anka (2024), close to over 10,000 citizens residing within the locations of Zamfara state border town with Katsina along Yankara might have been denied appropriate medical attention due to the constant fear of attacks by armed bandits among the medical health personnel. In another argument, Anka (2024) argued that most of the victims of armed bandit attacks along the Zamfara-Funtua highway could not get access to first aid support from the facilities along that highway simply because the facilities are non-functional and the human resources are not available.

Impact of Social and Community Network

There is no doubt that armed bandit activities have greater effects on the social network system of the resident communities along the highway under discussion. Apart from the displacement of various communities along the highway, the practice of social activities such as naming ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, and many more could not held as bandits always stormed the venue to perfect their abduction plans and demand for payment of ransom. The communities around this highway under discussion become paralyzed as a significant number of their population, which is over 50,000, has become too scanty as many have fled to safer places outside Zamfara and Katsina.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is evidently clear that the transformation in armed banditry in the North-Western part of Nigeria has exposed the region to a very dynamic social phenomenon that has resulted in a serious social problem, which involves kidnapping for ransom. The Highway banditry, which has become a very complex security challenge, has exposed hundreds of families and households to a state of economic hardship as victims and their families continue to suffer losses at the hands of these criminal bandits who turn the entire banditry act into an entrepreneurship and money-making venture.

The inability of the state actors, especially the security agencies, to manage this social problem has resulted in people believing that in the near future, there may not be a close end to kidnapping as more invisible hands are deeply queuing into the venture with hundreds and thousands of innocent lives becoming victims. The insecurity

on the highway caused by this act of kidnapping has caused serious socio-economic anomalies as highlighted in the inner text of this paper. Unless the government renews its commitment and devises possible options to end this tragedy, this problem will continue to persist.

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