

COPING MECHANISMS AND RESILIENCE STRATEGIES AMONG COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY BANDITRY IN DONGA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

Banditry poses a severe threat to communities in Donga Local Government Area, Taraba State, disrupting livelihoods and security. This study investigates the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies these communities employ to withstand and respond to ongoing bandit attacks. Using Crisis Leadership Theory as a framework, the research objectives were to (i) identify coping mechanisms, (ii) examine resilience strategies, and (iii) explore challenges faced in their implementation. A qualitative design was adopted, involving in-depth interviews with nine purposively selected participants, including traditional leaders, farmers, local officials, and NGO members. Thematic analysis revealed that communities adapt by altering farming patterns, forming neighborhood watch groups, establishing communication networks, and collaborating with local authorities to create rapid response teams. Resilience is fostered through community cohesion, social capital, peace-building initiatives, and partnerships with local organizations. Despite these efforts and some external support, challenges such as limited trust in authorities, scarce resources, and the complexity of banditry hinder full effectiveness. The study underscores the critical role of local leadership and collective action within the Crisis Leadership framework. It recommends enhancing capacity-building, resource support, and trust-building measures to strengthen community resilience and promote sustainable peace in the region.

Keywords: *Banditry, Coping Mechanisms, Resilience, Crisis Leadership Theory, Community Security, Donga LGA, Taraba State*

I. Introduction

Banditry has become a pervasive issue in the world today claiming lives of thousands of innocent people and significantly impacting

communities and their economies activities.

Banditry in Africa is characterized by invasive actions leading to several vices such as kidnapping, wanton killings and so on with the use of sophisticated weapons. A bandit in

traditional African setting is entirely opposite to that of America and Europe who specialize in armed robbery and other related crimes (Curott & Fink, 2008). They freely roam the hinterlands of Africa presenting themselves in different forms and have since been a source of wider political and security problems in a turbulent geopolitical environment with much to be desired, just as is the case in Nigeria.

Banditry is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. It had being in existence since, and in various forms across the country. It is a violent crime which has metamorphosis into a new form of organised crime conducted with sophisticated weapons like AK47 and other dangerous arm. It is now characterised by the use of modern weapons, accompanied by rape, armed robbery, kidnapping activities, cattle rustling, as well as organised attacks on markets, schools, villages and communities. Yusuf and Abdulrahman (2021), Banditry has also assumed some level of violence as a result of the access of bandits to sophisticated weapons of warfare such as AK-47 rifles and other small arms and light weapons that are illegally imported into the country through its porous borders.

Hardly a day passes without gory tales of reckless

massacre of innocent peasants in their farmlands, cattle rustling, kidnapping, rape, torching of entire villages, and looting of valuables in and around the country especially in the north-western region (Olusegun, James & Jafaru, 2022). Bandits and insurgents pose real threat to rural communities in North Central Nigeria as such there is high risk of survival for people living in those communities (Adisa, 2021).The menace has spread across several states, leading to loss of lives, displacement and destruction of property. In affected areas, like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau and Taraba state, banditry has negatively impacted food security, with communities adopting different internal and external interventions to combat the problem. According to Kamar, Yusuf, Abubakar and Bello (2022), bandits and insurgents are involved in the disruption of farming activities through kidnapping for ransom, killing of farmers on their farmland during planting and weeding season and during harvest, thereby destroying food and cash crop production chain. The impact of bandit does not only limit to agricultural sector but also affect the socio-economic of people. Mohammed, Umar, Olaleye, Pelemo, Ahmad, Mohammed and Umar (2021)

found that the activities of bandits over the years have paralyzed economic activities of the populace. Bandit in Nigeria now take their war far beyond what is expected, there is a shift from attacking rural communities and civilian, they now do attack civilian, military and paramilitary. Divisional police officers, military and other paramilitary officers were abducted and ransoms are paid to bandits to secure their release (Vanguard, 2022). However, bandit effect is now beyond what is typically seen in ransom-motivated abductions. The device a new means of compelling the abductees to forcefully undergoes test for HIV and hepatitis. The current bandits were not just a kidnappers but were involve in a much darker trade of illegal harvesting of human organs. Government's efforts to curtail the menace of armed banditry through the use of military operations in extreme cases, and the adoption of negotiation strategy in some cases, have not really yielded the desired results as the situation seems to have gone out of control. In some instance the repented bandits after being pardon by the government and re-integration in to the society, they still went back to the bush and continue to attack the innocent citizen. It is a result of these that some community begin to

develop different strategies to counter-bandit attack and defend themselves since they government effort is not effective. Community-based early warning systems and peace committees have been effective approaches in preventing and addressing communal conflicts.

Armed banditry has emerged as a pervasive threat to the socio-economic fabric of Taraba State, particularly affecting small-scale farming communities (Garba, Kefas, & Moses, 2024).

Donga Local Government Area, located in southern part of Taraba State, has experienced its share of security challenges, including ethno-religious conflict, farmers-herdsmen conflict and banditry. The area's rural setting and porous borders make it vulnerable to attacks, disrupting economic activities and affecting living standards.

The impact of banditry on rural community development in Donga has been significant, with effects on economic activities, food security, and living standards. Communities in Donga local government areas because of the bandit attack and re-attack has organized themselves into vigilante groups in other to confront the bandits and insurgents attacking their communities. Simply because the government has failed. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the

coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by communities affected by banditry in Donga Local Government Area. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice on how to support communities affected by banditry. By understanding the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by communities, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to enhance community resilience and promote peace-building.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of banditry in Donga Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria, has led to significant disruptions in the lives of community members, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and destruction of property. Despite the severity of the situation, there is a dearth of information on the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by affected communities to mitigate the impact of banditry. While existing research provides valuable insights into the causes and consequences of banditry and impact of banditry on food security, there are gaps or lack of research on the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies employed by communities affected by banditry. Specifically, limited focus on community-led initiatives. Most research

focuses on government-led initiatives, with limited attention paid to community-led initiatives. There is a need to investigate the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies among communities affected by banditry in Donga Local Government Area, with a view to identifying effective strategies that can inform policy and practice.

Research objectives

- i. Identify the coping mechanisms used by communities to mitigate the impact of banditry
- ii. Examine the resilience strategies employed by communities to respond to banditry
- iii. Investigate the challenges faced by communities in implementing these strategies

II. Conceptual clarification and Literature Review

Concept of Banditry

There is no universally acceptable definition of the term 'banditry', philosophers, researchers and scholars have viewed banditry from several perspectives. Thus, it is suffice to say that banditry has been conceptualized from different perspectives by different scholars. Garba et al, (2024) see the term banditry to refer to the organizing of armed bands with the intent of assaulting states, local governments, communities,

social institutions, businesses, and individuals.

Banditry is defined as a person or group of people who engage in activities such as kidnapping, murder, robbery, rape, and cattle rustling (Dayo & Amina, 2015). According Collins (2000), armed banditry, is a term used to refer to acts of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down. Similarly, Isah, (2019) aver that banditry is a phrase used to describe robbery, conspiracy, and violence that do not adhere to the rule of law. Armed banditry has been a major source of insecurity in Nigeria, affecting the political economy negatively (Omotola, 2014). Bagu and Smith (2017) are concerned with this new development in banditry when they maintained that, most of the bandits are gangs of criminal, often youth from farming and herding communities who have left their domains and have internalized new values and habits of robbing people on the highways and rustling cattle for personal gains, and both the farming and herdsman communities are also victims of this criminality. Okoli and Ugwu (2019), argued that banditry is motivated by either economic or political motives. That is why the menace keep growing in the past decade.

Coping Mechanisms Used by Communities to

mitigate the impact of Banditry

Communities affected by banditry in Nigeria have employed various coping mechanisms to mitigate its impact. Some of these strategies include: Community policing, this approach involves proactive collaboration between law enforcement and community members to identify and solve crime-related problems. By fostering trust and cooperation, community policing can lead to reduced crime rates and improved security (Dansabo, Dabai & Jabbar, 2024).

Engaging local leaders and influencers to mobilize communities against banditry has proven effective. This strategy tailors interventions to the specific needs of the area, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members. Federal Government's counter banditry interventions in Nigeria was based on the deployment of Police and Military operations to the troubled States under several operational codenames such as 'Operations Puff Adder', 'Diran Mikiya', 'Sharan Daji', 'Hadarin Daji', “Thunder Strike” and “Exercise Harbin Kunama 111”(Madubuegwu & Abah, 2023), they have only created mixed feelings in the minds of Nigerians. The operations only succeeded in pushing back the bandits and destroyed some of

their hideouts while some were killed, but attacks have continued without any sign of stoppage. Thus, it was in the light of these challenges that most of communities comes together to established what is today known as vigilante or ‘yan sa kai’ just to support the police and provide policing to their community.

Establishing systems for reporting suspicious activities can help prevent attacks and improve response times. Most communities in Nigeria adopted this methods of watching their neighbor houses and communities and reporting anything suspicious the see at any time to the appropriate authorities for further investigations and action. This Community based early warning system initiatives promote trust and collaboration between security forces and local populations and thereby reduce the rate of attacks carryout by bandit. .

Families play a crucial role in instilling values and promoting morality to curb banditry. Government agencies and security forces should adopt a zero-dialogue approach, refraining from negotiations with bandits. Because most of the bandit after repenting and when re-integrated into the society they still go back to the bush to continue from where the stop. Thus, dialogue with

bandit is never an option since they have wage war against the federal republic of Nigeria. Bandit should be made to face the wrath of the law.

Prioritizing marginalized communities can foster a sense of belonging and reduce the appeal of joining criminal activities. Programs like the "El-Rufai Model" in Kaduna State reflect proactive and preventive strategies using information and communication technology. Improving equal opportunities and rights for all individuals can mitigate banditry. The Ruga Settlement Program, which provides structured settlements for Fulani herdsman, aims to reduce conflicts between herders and farmers.

These coping mechanisms highlight the importance of community-led initiatives and institutional support in mitigating the impact of banditry.

The Resilience Strategies Employed by Communities to Respond to Banditry

Kamar, et al (2022), argued that resilience is a construct used for explaining the phenomenon that shapes our perception from disorder or breakdown which is associated with interaction within a stressful atmosphere. They further stated that community resilience entails perseverance of

people in a community in the face of multifaceted threats. The people confront the threats facing them headlong in order to survive those risks that tend to frustrate their wellbeing or terminate their lives. Resilience goes beyond the mere ability to overcome challenges; it is about the ability to thrive despite obstacles encounters. Communities affected by banditry in Nigeria have employed various resilience strategies to mitigate its impact. Some of these strategies include:

Community Mobilization: engaging local leaders and influencers to mobilize communities against banditry has proven effective. This approach tailors interventions to the specific needs of the area, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members (ACCORD, 2023). A lot of communities in Nigeria adopted this strategies to improve security situations and compliment government effort, since the presence of the army in the bandit affected areas has not deter the bandit from carrying out their attacks.

Community policing and vigilantism: the idea of safety and security are part of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, therefore community see the need for this by coming together to defend their territory against the bandit

aggression by forming a vigilante group. Community policing increases trust and collaboration between law enforcement and community members, leading to reduced crime rates. Vigilante groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno state, have also been effective in combating banditry (ACCORD, 2023; Danmaigoro, Danbauchi, Audu, & Dorh, 2023).

The Nigerian army were deploy to bandit affected community to curtail their attacks and the army form different operation system in different states as aver by Campbell (2020) on the programme, Africa in Transition and Nigeria on the brink", that though the army introduced several military operations in the country to quash banditry, operations like the "Sharan Daji", "Hadarin Daji", "Diran Mikya", "Exercise Harbin Kunama III", "Thunder Strike", "Operation Puff Adder", but all these have only created a polemic among citizen of Nigeria. The operations were not that successful or effective as bandit continued to attacks communities with impunity without any sign of surrender. Thus, it was in the light of these challenges that most of communities comes together to established what today is known as vigilante or 'yan sa kai' or civilian joint task force just to support the police and provide policing to

their community.

Neighbourhood Watch: establishing neighbourhood watch programs, like the one in Nimbo Community, has helped prevent attacks and improve response times. These programs often involve community members monitoring activities and reporting suspicious behavior. A lot of communities in Nigeria do organized themselves and watch over their communities and their neighbours and report any unsuspicious movement to the appropriate authorities for further actions. This is in consonance with the Reisman and Their (2018), assumption on frequency of probable of bandits and insurgents' attack and the effect on their farming, fishing and cattle herding activities which depended on the symbiotic relationships built in those communities and their neighbors. Communities in Nigeria are mostly far away from each other and from urban centres where the presence of law enforcement personnel is being felt. It is only neighborhood watch groups that could come to their rescue within a short time.

Instilling positive values within families and communities can help prevent banditry. Families play a crucial role in cultivating a sense of responsibility and empathy, which can mitigate

the phenomenon of banditry (Dansabo, et al, 2024).

Providing socio-economic support to affected communities can help reduce the appeal of banditry. This can include initiatives that promote economic stability and social inclusion. Kamar et al (2022) conducted a study on resilience against banditry and insurgency in Niger state, Nigeria (2015 to 2022) where he focused on Rafi, Lapai, Mashegu, Munya and Shiroro Local Government Areas, they found that people from the above local government areas supported people in IDP camps with temporary accommodation in schools, provided healthcare services and do mobilized political office holders to give supply of food and sanitary materials for personal hygiene. Sometimes National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) do provided mattress and food items for the victims of bandit in the IDPs camps. These resilience strategies highlight the importance of community-led initiatives and institutional support in mitigating the impact of banditry.

The Challenges faced by Communities in implementing these Strategies

Communities in Nigeria face several challenges

when implementing strategies to combat banditry. Some of the key challenges include:

Insufficient funding, personnel, and equipment limit the scope and effectiveness of community mobilization efforts. Community policing initiatives, for instance, require adequate resources to establish and maintain neighborhood watch programs and provide necessary training. Where community cannot provide these, its effort will be prove abortive. The local government Chairman cannot sponsor the vigilante and provide them with adequate resources simply because local government in Nigeria has the problem of paucity of funds, as they are not generating much revenue (Kamar et al, 2022). In 2013, the Zamfara state government recruited about 12,500 vigilantes, paid them a monthly allowance of about 2,250 naira and provided them logistical support until the end of 2014 (Kabuiru, 2020). Though this people sacrifices their lives, time and energy just to defend their community but we all know that N 2,250 cannot buy anything reasonable for vigilante members. Vigilante groups in Nigeria play a vital roles as far as security is concern, it is as a result of the positive roles they play that Borno and other state government form what is known today as Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF),

popularly known as (civilian-JTF) to help complement the effort of the military and paramilitary in fight against Boko haram, bandit and insurgency. In fact, insufficient funding, personnel, and equipment is a major challenge to vigilante groups and many communities in Nigeria who experiences bandit attacks.

The absence of strong political will to address banditry hinders community efforts. Government support is crucial for providing security infrastructure, intelligence gathering, and response mechanisms. Kamar et al (2022) stated that Niger State Government officials had met the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on several occasions to provide security cover for communities in the bandit and insurgent ravaged areas, but the response has not been as expected. However, this is a non-challant attitude and lack of political will demonstrated by the Nigerian government in fighting bandit and insurgency in Nigeria.

Banditry is often driven by poverty and unemployment among youths. So communities in Donga pool resources together to assist those who are jobless as to cushion the harshness of poverty and unemployment. Addressing these underlying socio-economic issues is essential for preventing

members of the community from joining banditry.

Nigeria's porous borders facilitate the movement of illicit goods and bandits, making it challenging to control banditry. For instance Donga local government share boarder with Cameroun republic and that makes it more difficult to curtail the movement of the bandit and their goods. In most cases these bandit uses motorcycle and the use footpath in forest to come to villages and launch their attacks.

Building trust between law enforcement and community members is crucial. Community policing strategies that foster collaboration and proactive problem-solving can help reduce crime rates. However when the populace refuse to trust the military and the paramilitary that are deploy to fight banditry then no any positive result shall be obtain. The law enforcement agency cannot be everywhere, thus, the community member are there eyes and ears. They are the ones to be serving them with information against any suspected movement of goods or persons, but where this is lacking meaningful achievement cannot be recoded.

Theoretical frameworks: Crisis Leadership theory

Crisis leadership theory has been developed and

refined by various scholars over time. Notable contributors include researchers like James MacGregor Burns (1978), who laid foundational ideas about leadership, and more specific crisis leadership concepts have been explored by authors like Mitroff (2004) and Boin et al. (2005). Crisis leadership theory focuses on the ways leaders respond to and manage crises, emphasizing the importance of effective decision-making, communication, and adaptability in the face of uncertainty and disruption. It highlights the need for leaders to be proactive, flexible, and responsive to the needs of their followers during times of crisis.

Basic Assumptions:

1. Crises are unpredictable and can have a significant impact on individuals, organizations, and communities.
2. Effective leadership is critical in responding to and managing crises.
3. Leaders must be adaptable and able to make quick decisions in the face of uncertainty.
4. Communication is key in crisis management, and leaders must be able to communicate effectively with their followers.

Application of the Theory to the Study

Crisis leadership theory can be applied in several

ways to explain coping mechanisms and resilience strategies among communities affected by banditry in Donga Local Government Area: the theory can help identify effective community leaders who can mobilize and support their communities in responding to banditry. By understanding how community leaders respond to crises, the study can identify effective coping mechanisms that can be employed by communities to mitigate the impact of banditry. The theory can also inform the development of resilience strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of communities affected by banditry. By applying crisis leadership theory to this study, researchers can gain a better understanding of how communities respond to and manage the crisis of banditry, ultimately informing the development of effective interventions and support systems.

III. Methodology

Research design: this study employed a qualitative research design to explore the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies among communities affected by banditry in Donga Local Government Area. A qualitative approach is suitable for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of community members (Creswell,

2013).

Data Collection Methods: In-depth interviews were used to collect data from community members, leaders, and other stakeholders. This method allows for a detailed understanding of individual experiences and perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection: A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants for the study. This method involves selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Community members, leaders, and other stakeholders who have experienced banditry were selected for the study.

Sample Size: A sample size of nine participants was selected for the study, including one community a farmer, traditional leader, religion leader, trader, local government staff, NGOs members and so on.

Data Analysis Procedures: Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. This method involves identifying, coding, and categorizing themes and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was analyzed using NVivo software. The data was coded using an inductive

approach, where codes emerged from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified based on the codes and patterns that emerged from the data.

IV. Findings

In a bid to elicit information on mechanism adopted by communities affected by banditry. The researcher conducted an in-depth interviews with community members, leaders and stakeholders. The following were some of the responses received and transcribed from the respondents.

When asked about the strategies community used to cope with the impact of banditry.

Respondent (1) Community Member (Farmer, Female, Age 38) had this to say:

"We have had to adapt our farming schedules and routes to avoid areas known for bandit activity. We have also formed neighborhood watch groups to keep an eye on each other's homes and properties. It's not ideal, but it's helped us feel safer."

Respondent (2): Community Leader (Village Head, Male, Age 56) added that:

"We have established a community savings program to help families affected by banditry. We have also organized community meetings to discuss safety concerns and provide support to those who have been impacted. It is been a challenge, a serious one but we are working together

with our people to find ways to cope, but honestly is not easy."

Respondent (3): Stakeholder (NGO: Red Cross Staff in Donga LGA)

"We have provided training and resources to community members on conflict resolution and peace-building. We have also supported the establishment of community watch groups and provided equipment like touch light, whistle, and others necessary apparatus to help them respond to bandit attacks. It is a complex issue, but we are working to empower communities to take control of their safety."

When asked about the resilience strategies employed by communities to respond to banditry

Respondent (1): Community Member (Trader, Male, Age 29)

"We have developed a system of communication to alert each other when bandits are spotted in the area. We have also worked with local authorities to establish a rapid response team to respond to attacks. It's helped us feel more secure and prepared."

Respondent (2): Community Leader (Religious Leader, Female, Age 47)

"We have promoted

community cohesion and social capital by organizing community events and activities. We have also established partnerships with local organizations to provide support and resources to community members. It's helped us build resilience and respond more effectively to banditry."

Respondent (3): Stakeholder (Local Government Official)

"We have supported the development of community-led initiatives to promote peace and stability. We have also provided resources and training to community members to help them respond to banditry and build resilience. It's a long-term process, but we are seeing positive results as the attacks is being reduce this days."

When respondents were asked about the challenges faced by their communities in implementing those strategies

Respondent (1): Community Member (Youth Leader, Male, Age 24)

"The biggest challenge is the lack of trust between community members and local authorities. There is a feeling that the authorities are not doing enough to protect us, so we have to rely on

ourselves. It is a heavy burden, and it is hard to know who to trust, but we are trying our best."

Respondent (2): Community Leader (Ward Councilor, Female, Age 50)

"The biggest challenge is the limited resources available to us. We don't have enough funding or equipment to effectively respond to banditry. We are doing the best we can with what we have, but it's not enough. We need more support from external stakeholders to make a real difference."

Respondent (3): Stakeholder (Aid Organization Program Officer)

"One of the biggest challenges is the complexity of the issue. Banditry is often linked to deeper social and economic issues, so it's hard to address without tackling those underlying problems. We need a more comprehensive approach that involves multiple stakeholders and sectors."

V. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that communities in Donga Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State have employed both coping mechanisms and resilience strategies to manage

the recurrent threat of banditry. This aligns with existing literature on the responses of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected populations across Nigeria. Kamar et al. (2022), for instance, detail how humanitarian responses such as temporary housing in schools, provision of healthcare services, and distribution of food and hygiene items by NEMA and SEMA form essential support systems for affected populations. Similarly, in Donga LGA, community-based responses reflect both a reliance on external assistance and a significant degree of local innovation and agency.

Notably, the adaptation of farming schedules, creation of neighborhood watch groups, and institution of rapid response teams reflect grassroots-level innovation consistent with other community resilience models. These adaptive strategies mirror those seen in other conflict-affected areas, where communal solidarity and informal security structures serve as primary buffers in the absence of formal state protection. The involvement of traditional leaders and youth in forming local security outfits also echoes findings in conflict zones where state security is weak or absent, underscoring the community's agency in self-protection.

Furthermore, the establishment of community savings programs, communication systems for early warnings, and peace-building initiatives show that resilience goes beyond physical protection to include socio-economic and psychological recovery efforts. These findings also reinforce broader themes in the literature that highlight the role of social capital and communal networks in enhancing resilience (e.g., through mutual aid, shared cultural practices, and local partnerships).

Despite these grassroots efforts, the challenges faced by the communities such as limited trust in authorities, insufficient resources, and the complex socio-political dynamics of banditry highlight critical gaps that remain in both policy and practice. This underlines the importance of a multi-sectoral approach, as advocated by several scholars, to build sustainable peace and security in conflict-prone regions.

From the lens of Crisis Leadership Theory, the responses of communities in Donga LGA demonstrate localized leadership dynamics essential during crisis situations. Crisis leadership theory emphasizes the importance of adaptive, inclusive, and responsive leadership during emergencies. In this situation, traditional leaders

and youth emerged as frontline leaders, taking decisive action in the absence or inadequacy of formal governance structures. Their ability to coordinate security measures, foster communal solidarity and initiate resilience strategies reflects the kind of situational leadership envisaged in the theory.

Moreover, the community's ability to maintain cohesion, communicate risks, and adapt socio-economic practices in the face of repeated disruptions exemplifies distributed leadership and collective resilience, two pillars of effective crisis leadership. The study's findings reveal that in situations where formal systems fail, informal leadership rooted in trust and local legitimacy becomes instrumental in sustaining community functionality and morale. This confirms the relevance of Crisis leadership theory in understanding grassroots responses to violence and insecurity, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings like Donga LGA.

VI. Conclusion

This study highlights the adaptive coping mechanisms and resilience strategies adopted by communities in Donga Local Government Area of Taraba State amid persistent banditry attacks. The findings underscore the critical role of local

leadership particularly traditional leaders and youth in spearheading community-driven security and peace-building efforts. These grassroots initiatives, including neighborhood watch groups, altered farming practices, community savings programs, and rapid response teams, illustrate a robust local agency and social capital that sustain communities in the absence of adequate formal protection. While these strategies align with existing literature on conflict-affected populations, the study also reveals significant challenges, notably the lack of trust between communities and local authorities and limited resources, which hinder more effective responses. Viewed through the lens of Crisis Leadership Theory, the community's leadership exemplifies adaptive and distributed crisis management crucial for resilience in fragile contexts. The study thereby reinforces the imperative of strengthening and integrating local leadership with broader multi-sectoral support to address the complex socio-economic roots of banditry and build sustainable peace.

Recommendations

1. Formal support and capacity-building programs should be provided to traditional leaders and youth groups to enhance their crisis leadership

skills, coordination capabilities, and resource management in security and peace-building.

2. Government agencies, NGOs, and development partners should increase funding, equipment, and training support for community-led security and resilience programs, ensuring sustainability and scalability.

3. Addressing banditry requires integrated interventions that combine security measures with socio-economic development, education, and conflict resolution programs to tackle the underlying causes of violence.

4. Strengthening communication networks and early warning mechanisms within communities can enhance preparedness and rapid response to banditry threats.

5. Initiatives to build trust and improve collaboration between community members and local authorities are essential. Regular dialogue platforms and joint community-security meetings could bridge this gap and improve the legitimacy of interventions.

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