

HARNESSING THE POTENTIALS OF ICT-BASED TECHNOLOGIES IN COMBATING THE PREVALENT INSECURITY OF BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING IN NORTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Insecurities of banditry and kidnapping are increasing in Nigeria and it is alarmingly causing havoc to people. The government and security agencies are doing their best but the menace is still causing mayhem on the citizens. Therefore, the peaceful coexistence and progress of north-west is threatened. This paper used online materials such as journals, conferences and books to discuss the effects of insecurities of banditry and kidnap in Nigeria; particularly, the north-west; the paper recommends the deployment ICT-based technologies to assist security agencies in achieving more efficiency and effectiveness in their operations of combating insecurities of banditry and kidnapping.

Keywords: ICT-Based Technology, Combating, Insecurity, Banditry, Kidnapping

Introduction

Nigeria's high level of insecurity in the last couple of years has been exacerbated beyond insurgency to now include banditry and organized kidnapping. This has put the nation at red alert. Painfully, no one appears to be doing much about solutions; instead, everyone has become an expert in defining and classifying the ramifications of our dilemma (Iredia, 2021). National Security refers to a state of absence of everything and anything that could be a threat to peace, progress, development and tranquility within a society (Ajijola, 2010, as cited in Agu & Oyerinde, 2014).

According to The Century Dictionary (2022), insecurity is the state of being unsecured or unsafe; liability to give way, be lost, or become unsafe or fraught with danger; want of secureness or stability; instability; liability to damage or loss: as, the *insecurity* of a staircase or of a foundation. It is the absence of assurance or confidence, especially in regard to peoples' safety, or the security or stability of something. Other ways which insecurity is perceived is the apprehensiveness of change, loss, or damage,

doubt, uncertainty, as a feeling of insecurity pervaded in the community.

It is a fact that North-Western Nigeria have been faced with problems of insecurity, these include basically kidnapping and banditry. In the recent past and up to date, no media in Nigeria carries out its news session without report of kidnap, banditry and other acts of insecurity such as arm robbery, ritual killings, rape and so on. The challenge has made many people homeless and foodless; especially those living in the rural areas. Reports from media outfits indicated that rural communities are made to pay dues to the bandits if they must stay in peace in their settlements, otherwise they face the wrath of bandits. Reports have it that many have gone missing in the hands of kidnappers. In most cases their relations must pay ransom for the victims to be released. In other cases, the victims were killed after the ransoms have been paid.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the combination of two technologies, that is Information Technology and the Communication Technology. The former is the technology responsible for

collection, speedy processing and storage of information that is used for decision making. The latter is the technology responsible for speedy or quick transmission of information from one place to another. According to Adams (2016), essentially, ICT is used as an umbrella term to refer to the use of communication devices (such as radio and cellular devices, satellite devices and channels, computers, amongst others) and utilities (programs) to manage information (acquisition, dissemination, processing, storage and retrieval). ICT-based tools, if properly utilized can bring an end to insecurities caused by bandits and kidnappers in the North-West and Nigeria as a whole. This paper seeks to discuss how ICT tools can be harnessed to combat insecurity such as banditry and kidnapping in North-western part of Nigeria.

Prevalence Banditry and Kidnapping in North-Western Nigeria

According to Rufa'I (2021), the contemporary rural insecurity, otherwise known as rural banditry started in Zamfara around 2011, as a farmer-herder conflict or insignificant rural unrest, transforming into full-blown conflict, engulfing most parts of the Northwest. Multiple factors/actors account for the transformation of this conflict. Traditional rulers, politicians, security agencies, gold miners are among the notable actors in the conflict. Very recently, the act of banditry gave birth to kidnapping and have spanned outside the boundaries of Zamfara State to other neighbouring states such as Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, and to other parts of the North-Central particularly Niger and Kaduna.

According to International Crisis Group (2021), "the emergence of criminal gangs, whom Nigerian government and mass media call Bandits, has aggravated an already precarious security situation". Report from International Crisis Group in 2020, indicated that amid a boom in the trade of small arms and light weapons in the North-West, organized gangs operating from ungoverned forests have proliferated, engaging in cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom and armed

robbery, including of miners and traders in the largely unregulated gold mining sector, as well as pillage of communities. Having originated in Zamfara state, gang violence has since spread to five other nearby states, namely Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Niger, the last of which is in North Central Nigeria.

These gangs of bandits and kidnappers are basically associated with mass killing of innocent people, cattle rustling, kidnapping, gender based and sexual violence (GBSV) and other related human rights abuses. At the beginning they lived in the woods and mountainous areas, from where they unleashed terror on the rural and urban areas in the states. Some of the bandits have become very daring to the extent of operating from their respective villages, (Rufa'I, 2021). Reports showed that at least 200 people in Nigeria's North-western Zamfara state have been killed and buried after a wave of vicious attacks by gangs of gunmen over several days, (BBCNews, 9th January 2021).

According to International Crisis Group (2020), Nigeria's North-West is suffering deadly conflict involving many armed organizations, including herder-allied groups, criminal gangs and bandits. The violence has killed over 8,000 people since 2011, and displaced over 200,000, some into neighboring Niger. Despite several security operations and dialogue efforts, a durable peace remains elusive. Estimates put the number of bandits at about 30,000, spread across scores of gangs ranging in size from 10 fighters to over a thousand, (Ojewale and Balogun, 2022).

Effects of Banditry and Kidnaping activities in the North-Western Nigeria

Insecurity in North-Western part of the country has fully matured to full blown activities that are summarized by the state officials as banditry and kidnapping. Within these activities are found the reports of cases of cattle rustication, rape, torture, human right violation, murder, massacre etc. In some cases, rural settlements are taxed and levied huge sums of money and food items

by the bandits. According to Ojewale and Balogun (2022), in September 2021, Bandits placed a levy of twenty million naira equivalent to US\$50,000 on five villages in Zamfara State to avoid attacks.

Effect on Socio-Economy

Study by Epron (2019), showed that the backwardness in Nigeria's socio-economic development has been attributed to several factors such as corruption, bad governance, poor policy implementation, insurgency and host of others. He added that in recent times, a new set of emerging insecurity threats such as kidnapping, banditry, header-farmer conflicts and cybercrime are other factors threatening the Nigeria's socio-economic development by posing threats to lives and property, crippling local businesses and scaring away foreign investors.

According to Mohammed, et'al (2021), the activities on bandits over the years have paralyzed economic activities since majority of the populace derived their livelihood from farming. The menace posed by banditry has affected rural populace income and livelihood thereby making them sojourning in the neighboring Local Government Areas. The activities of bandits and kidnappers have pose challenges to food insecurity and displaced many from rural settlement.

Effects on Education

The incessant attacks on students in schools and kidnapping and abduction of students have caused a setback on the Nigeria's educational system as many are unable to attend school because of the dread of bandits. According to Akinbi (2015), in recent times, Nigeria has experienced a significant setback in its educational sector, fueled by the revival of several security challenges, which include armed banditry, kidnapping and insurgency among others posing a substantial threat to the country's national security.

According to Premium Times of September 11, 2021, a report by Save the Children International confirmed that over

1000 students have been abducted from Nigerian schools in 2021. The group added that increasing cases of attacks on schools between 2020 and 2021 have led to many schools being shut down, thereby putting the education system of the country at "extreme risk". Premium Times reported cases of attacks by gunmen on schools in Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger and Kaduna states, during which hundreds of students were abducted for ransom.

An attack on education is an attack on the nation's growing generation. Many children will become drop outs and may never return to school to complete their education. This will in-turn affect the socio-economic development of the country. The number of out-of-school children in Nigeria before the effects of the conflict, humanitarian crisis and COVID-19 pandemic were figured out according to UNICEF to be 10.5 million. With the total closure of some schools in the North-Western states, the number of out of school children will increase.

Harnessing ICTs in Combating Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-Western Nigeria

The ICT stands for Information and Communication Technology and is defined as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store and manage information" (Blurton, 1999). ICTs are tools that handle information; produce, keep and disseminate information. ICT comprises of radio, TV, telephone, etc., which are regarded as old tools while the new ones include computers, smart phones, satellites, Internet, wireless technology etc. when teachers are digitally compliant and have the skills to integrate ICT, it will widen the scope of thinking capabilities of students, provide creative and individualized options for students to express their understanding and skill; leaving the students better prepared to deal with ongoing technological change in the society.

Technology is one of the crucial aspect that cannot be ignored in this digital era, especially when it comes to combating

insecurity, a lot of tools can be deployed to tackle and improve vigilance of all the organizational activities. Basically, ICT can be a great tool in detection and identification of citizens, their interaction and communication, movement, education and so on (Shatimah, Adamu, Modu 2016).

ICT-Based Technologies That Can Be Used to Combat Insecurity

Oludare, et al (2015) outlined the following as some of the ways that ICT-based technologies can assist security agencies in achieving more efficiency and effectiveness in their operations and combating insecurities.

1. **Surveillance:** Surveillance is a system of keeping a close watch on the behaviors or activities of persons, groups, organizations and institutions suspected of doing something illegal or capable of causing a breach of security by government's security agencies. This could be done electronically with closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras or interception of electronically transmitted information (such as internet traffic or phone calls) or by means of low-technology methods such as human intelligence agents and postal interception. Other means include: social network analysis, biometric surveillance, data mining and profiling, corporate surveillance, satellite imagery, radio-frequency identification and geo-location devices to mount surveillance on suspected targets.

2. **Intelligence Gathering:** Intelligence gathering helps security agencies to keep tabs on the activities of suspected groups, organizations or persons likely to breach the peace. Today, such ICT tools as the internet, mobile telephony system, social media networks and the media have become veritable platforms for intelligence gathering efforts of our security agencies, so long as they observe the ethics of using these technologies for intelligence gathering purposes.

3. **Communication:** Intercepting communication between terrors and terror groups and enhancing intelligence sharing and other collaborative measures between

security agencies is now absolutely possible through ICT tools. We now have electronic devices and gadgets with in-built unique identification numbers that makes them electronically traceable regardless of location. So it's no longer impossible to track communication devices or gadgets used by criminal gangs or groups.

4. **Financing:** ICT is a vital tool for tracking, tracing and investigating suspected financial transactions channeled to criminal activities. With the recent introduction of cashless society, transactions will be done on electronic platforms where suspicious cash movements can be identified and questioned. This would go a long way in curbing the financing of activities that constitute a threat to national security because no terrorist group or gang can operate without funding.

5. **Identification:** In developed countries of the world, birth and death registration, in addition to unifying various identification initiatives, plays significant roles in national security, especially when combined with DNA, facial recognition and finger printing technologies which operate on platforms provided by ICT. That is why it is easier in those countries to easily track down criminals.

6. **Establishment of Integrated Ballistics Information Systems (IBIS):** This is a computer system that enables the police to store forensic information on bullets and fired cartridge cases, and make super-fast automated comparisons against evidence collected at crime scenes and from confiscated firearms.

7. **Use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS):** GIS is a computer system used for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on earth's surface. It integrates five key components, hardware, software, data, people, and methods. A functional GIS can go a long way in curbing the menace of insecurity if properly utilized; if fully utilized, no hiding place for bandits and kidnappers.

Conclusion

The increasing challenge of insecurities in Nigeria should of great

concern to everyone and every effort must be employed to combat and curb this security challenges. Banditry and kidnapping is already prevalent in the North-West in particular and Nigeria in general. Modern ICT tools can play a vital role in consolidating on security in the North-west. It is possible to detect potential security threats and share information speedily. The use of ICT tools such as Emergency Communication Systems, GPS-enabled devices, Social Networking Tools, emergency operation centers (EOCs), Intelligent Monitoring systems, Data Mining and Database Tracking systems and Information Sharing will greatly improve the ability of the security agencies to combat insecurities of banditry and kidnapping in the north-west and Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

To this end, the paper recommends that:

1. Government should put emphasis on the provision and adequate utilization of functional ICT tools in tackling insecurities

of banditry and kidnapping in the north-west and Nigeria as a whole.

2. Information is power and some of the channels of communication using ICT tools are computer, internet, mobile phone, close circuit television (CCTV), surveillance cameras, social network, biometry surveillance, data mining, satellite imagery, and IP devices. With these tools in place, all the locations and activities of bandits and kidnappers will not be secret and the law enforcement agencies can take advantage of it to strategize and combat insecurities.

3. Another powerful ICT tool that cannot be under mined is the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) commonly referred to as Drone. It is an aircraft without a pilot on board, rather, they are controlled from a remote area or fly independently. They are very good at gathering information from areas where it is too risky for humans to go. Drones could be sent to gather information and as well combat the bandits and kidnappers by identifying and possibly eliminating them.

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