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BANDITRY, FORCED MIGRATION AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Banditry has forced many people to flee their ancestral homes for safety and security. They often migrate to urban centres, where they engage in hawking, street begging, and forced labour. Thus, forced migration has created an unprecedented social crisis. Consequently, forced migrants are found in open spaces, under bridges, motor parks, and other public buildings. With the aid of primary and secondary sources of data, this article using Zamfara State forced migrants as a case study, interrogates the socio-economic and cultural effects of forced migration. It argues that forced migration has triggered unprecedented unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, diseases, and crimes. Furthermore, stigmatisation against forced migration has created social and psychological trauma for the victims of forced migration and prevents some of them from reintegrating back into their communities. As a solution, the article recommends that governments and other relevant stakeholders must protect the rights of the forced migrants and intensify the fight against rural banditry to ensure the security of the migrants who are willing to return to their ancestral lands.

Keywords: Banditry, Forced Migration, Humanitarian Crises, Displacement,

Introduction

Globally, forced migration has been a source of concern for national governments, supra-national institutions, civil society organizations, international organizations for migration and other stakeholders (Adamson, Chung, & Hollifield, 2024). In the past few decades, it has caused an unprecedented population displacement with grave consequences, particularly on developing countries. Available records on forced migration suggest that there has been a significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to armed conflicts, with the figure rising from 21 million in 2000 to 41 million in 2020 (Targba, 2022). By the end of 2022, 108.4 million people worldwide had been forcefully displaced due to persecution, conflict, armed violence, human rights violations, and events that gravely disrupted public order. This indicates a 19 million increase from the end of 2021. According to UNHCR figures on forced displacement, this is the biggest increase between years ever recorded (UNHCR, 2022).

In West and Central Africa alone, there are over 7.6 million forced migrants. Côte d'Ivoire ranks first with 2.2 million migrants, followed by Nigeria (1.2 million) and Burkina Faso (709,000). According to the reports, West Africa is home to more than five million refugees and IDPs (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023: Migration Data Portal, 2023).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is currently experiencing an upsurge in the forced migration crisis. The country currently has more than 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 1.7 million returnees who were formerly refugees in neighbouring countries, and 74,000 refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, more than 300,000 Nigerian refugees in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon are currently awaiting repatriation (Obani, & Odalonu, 2023).

The nefarious activities of bandits in Nigeria has led to a significant number of people being forced to leave their homes, which has had severe implications for the security, social, political, and humanitarian situations in Nigeria. By November 2021, around two million out of the region's total of over three million internally displaced persons (IDPs) had successfully gone back to their original locations, as reported by the International Organisation for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM. DTM, 2021; Nweke, & Enyosiobi, 2023).

Meanwhile, Boko Haram insurgency, ethno-religious violence, climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, illiteracy, insurrection, banditry, cattle rustling, farmer-herders conflict and armed robbery have been adjudged to be the main drivers of forced migration (**Fatima, 2022;** Nwosu, Eteng, Ekpechu, Nnam, Ukah, Eyisi, & Orakwe, 2022; Vincent, 2023).

However, in recent times, no factor fuelled forced migration in the North West other than banditry. Rural banditry-induced forced migration has fuelled mass internal displacement, poverty, diseases, forced organ harvesting, child trafficking, child abuse, and sexual exploitation, (Salleh, Ahmad, & Jamil, 2018: Kamta, Schilling, & Scheffran, 2021; Bello, & Danasabe, 2022; Osayemwenre, Olayemiomolola, & Faith, 2023).

The DTM assessments revealed a total of 1,190,293 internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing in 191,688 households across the eight states in north-central and north-west Nigeria. This figure represents a 9% increase, equivalent to 102,418 individuals, compared to the previous round of assessments conducted in October 2022, which identified 1,087,875 IDPs. (IOM, DTM, 2023).

In the North West for instance, Katsina had the second-highest number of IDPs (252,268), followed by Zamfara State with a total of 156,416 IDPs. The report attributed the high figure to the state's escalating insecurity. The statistics demonstrated the state's need for humanitarian assistance and social protection (Mukhtar, Che Rose, & Lam, 2020; Premium Times, Nigeria, 2021; IOM, DTM, 2023).

Consequently, relying on primary and secondary sources of data, this article examines the socio-economic and cultural consequences of forced migration on the victims, particularly the aged, women and children. On the other hand, it also interrogates the effect of forced migration on the people and the economy of Zamfara State.

What does the literature say about Nigeria's forced migration?

Nigeria has an estimated population of approximately 218 million individuals (National Population Commission, 2022). The country ranks among the world's leading producers of crude oil but is ironically declared the poverty headquarters of the world with 53.5 per cent of its population living on less than $1.90 per day (UNDP 2020; Izuakor, 2022).

Nigeria ranks as the sixth most populous nation globally. Nigeria, with a population of over 206 million individuals, is expected to become the third most populous nation globally by 2050, as it continues to expand at an annual pace of 2.6%. 25% of the African population is comprised of Nigerians, while Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) makes up 63% of the GDP of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Forced displacement

has no doubt, disrupted the economies of the broader West African sub-region and has adverse effects on peace, security, development and prosperity throughout Africa (Fatima, 2022).

Nigeria has experienced severe devastation due to tumultuous wars, primarily stemming from the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, banditry and kidnapping in the north-west, and farmer-herder conflict in the north-central regions of the country (Izuakor, 2022). Millions of people have been forcefully displaced, agricultural output and livelihoods have been severely damaged, key services have been disrupted, and food insecurity and the spread of illnesses like cholera have occurred due to attacks and instability, primarily in the north-eastern region (Kamta, Schilling, & Scheffran, 2020).

In 2022, the United Nations *Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)* reported that there were 8.4 million individuals in the northeast region who required humanitarian assistance. Among them, 2.2 million were IDPs, 1.5 million were returnees who lacked access to necessities and essential services, and 3.9 million were members of communities affected by the presence of IDPs. Additionally, approximately one million people were inaccessible to humanitarian workers. Similarly, OCHA has observed that war and insecurity in northeastern Nigeria have posed significant challenges and risks to humanitarian operations (Targba, 2022).

The forced migration problems in north-central and north-west Nigeria stem from the conflict and aggression between farmers and herders, driven by their rivalry for natural resources, the growth of the population and human settlements, environmental deterioration, and climate change. The human security situation in the north-central and northwest regions of Nigeria has been exacerbated by conflicts arising from cattle theft, heightened competition over land use, and other complex aspects of poverty and kidnapping. The persistence of the conflict can be attributed to inadequate conflict resolution processes and the perception of bias and inaction from authorities, which have prolonged the duration of the war (IOM 2022).

The Nigeria National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCRMIDP) has initiated the development of urban areas specifically designed for accommodating IDPs in Nigeria. Among the 3.2 million IDPs, only 84,803 individuals have completed the registration process, and a mere 17,334 are prepared to go back to their original homes (Suleiman, 2022).

Contextualizing Nigeria's Banditry Crises and the Government's Response

Banditry has been the greatest security threat facing Nigeria's fourth republic. It can be traced back to the poor management of herder-farmer conflicts between predominantly Hausa farmers and Fulani pastoralists (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021). The poor handling of a mere clash between the two dominant ethnic groups in the north evolved into full-blown banditry in the year 2011 (Eneyo, Saturday, & Boma, 2023).

Scholars have argued that, beyond the farmer-herder conflict factor, the spread of banditry is a product of many socio-economic, political, and culturally induced factors. Climate change has led to an environmental decline, which is partly responsible for the scarcity of water and arable land. It has also increased intense competition for scarce resources among various ethnic groups and communities (Ojewale, Osasona, & Shamsudeen, 2024).

Other scholars such as argue that unemployment, pervasive poverty, illiteracy, and weak local government administration have allowed a steady stream of desperate people to turn to criminal activity to earn a living. The high level of poverty in the country can be linked to the

rising level of unemployment among Nigerians. The National Bureau of Statistics reported in 2021 that unemployment in Nigeria was about 33.3 per cent and still rising (Rosenje, Soluade, Olatoye, Peju-Rosenje, & Adeniyi, 2022).

Poverty has continued to widen the huge gap between the rich and the poor, while corruption has hindered the success of the fight against banditry and terrorism in Nigeria. Similarly, obsolete equipment and unequipped police and military personnel have been the twin factors militating the fight against banditry in Nigeria (Aina, Ojo, & Oyewole, 2023).

Ungoverned spaces across the northern region have allowed for concealment and the formation of bandits's camps deep in the forest. These 'ungoverned spaces' are said to have offered multiple benefits to terrorist groups, including the provision of ' safe havens' where terrorists can plan, train, indoctrinate, and secure access to weapons and equipment. It also enables them to engage in illegal smuggling to generate income; hence, the concept of 'ungoverned spaces' continues to pervade discussion of security threats and terrorism (Ejiofor, 2022).

The fundamental cause of terrorism, banditry and illicit commodity infiltrations across Nigerian borders is the country's porous border. Nigeria has approximately 4,500 kilometres of international land borders with Niger, Cameroun, Chad, and the Benin Republics. This is in addition to 774 kilometres of coastline, both of which are mainly unmanned by security personnel. Nigeria's porous borders allow large-scale weapons smuggling and enable criminal gangs' access to heavy weapons, increasing the deadliness of attacks, which has affected lives and the loss of property worth billions of dollars (Okoro, 2022; Obikaeze, Efanodor-Obeten, & Inah, 2023).

Underequipped local and federal forces, coupled with the harsh terrain, make offensive actions in the forest dangerous and susceptible to ambushes and attacks. The continued government's inability to effectively deal with the problem of poor training, and sophisticated weapons such as fighter jets, attack helicopters, and drones has allowed the banditry to spread and grow in ferocity (Usman & Singh, 2021).

Consequently, bandits ride into villages on motorcycles to loot and kidnap the inhabitants for ransom. Those who resist abduction and payment of ransom are killed. The huge amount of money paid to the bandits as ransom and community protection levies have made banditry a lucrative venture in northwest Nigeria. Between 2011 and 2020 alone, Nigerians paid at least 18 billion naira to bandits as ransom to free family members and friends (Afegbua & Oladimeji, 2023).

To curtail the spread of banditry, the Nigerian government deploys both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. The kinetic approach entails reliance on military action as an onslaught on the bandits. It entails a direct military onslaught against bandits, their informants, and sponsors. In this context, Nigerian security forces launched multiple military operations, such as *Harbin Kunama, Sharan Daji, Puff Adar, Hadarin Daji, Dokaji, Karamin Goro,* and a host of others (Mustapha, 2021).

The persistence of banditry led to the introduction of a non-kinetic approach. This approach entails the deployment of non-military solutions such as amnesty, media campaigns aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people, strengthening of the traditional justice system, deradicalization of the repentant bandits, and victim support funds to help the victims of the banditry start a living (Egonu, Adibe, Nnamani, Nwaogaidu, & Oranye, 2023).

However, available records have shown that both the kinetic and non-kinetic approaches have only emboldened Nigeria's armed bandits, particularly, in the Northwest. This has become evident in the atrocious activities of these groups across local communities. As of October 2021, over 12,000 people have been killed, with over 1,000,000 displaced as a result. Consequently, the country has been overtaken by a massive escalation of banditry. This is evident in the massive massacre, extortion, rape, robbery, and destruction of farmlands by the bandits across the north (Folahanmi, John, & Samuel, 2023).

In the northwest of Nigeria alone, no fewer than 1,087,875 people are said to have been internally displaced as a result of surges of banditry, including cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom (Edwin, 2023). Out of this number, Zamfara alone has 34,000 heads of households and over 180,000 women and children who are forced migrants (Premium Times 2021). This has created huge humanitarian crises for the state, as evident in street begging, gender-based violence, out-of-school children, child prostitution, slavery, and children and women trafficking, among others. Hence, the main purpose of this article is to interrogate the consequences of forced migration within the context of banditry.

Forced Migration in North West Nigeria

In the Nigeria's North West, Katsina State accommodated the highest proportion of IDPs in the region of Nigeria. About 252,268 internally displaced persons (IDPs), which accounted for 21 per cent of the overall IDP population, were identified in the State of Katsina. This signifies a surge of 28,795 persons, which corresponds to an 11 per cent increase. The number of IDPs in Funtua Local Government Area (LGA), which has the highest number of displaced persons in the state, rose by 4,489 people, bringing the total to 36,197 IDPs, accounting for 14 per cent of the state's IDP population. Funtua Local Government Area experienced a rise in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the influx of people from adjacent LGAs (Sabuwa, Faskari, Kankara, Batsari, and Dandume) and states (Zamfara and Kaduna). This increase might be attributed to the ongoing attacks by bandits and incidents of kidnapping (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

Zamfara currently accommodates the third highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the northwest region of Nigeria. This amounts to 156,416 individuals, which is equivalent to 13% of the total IDP population. This figure has decreased by 14%, or 22,649 persons. The observed decline in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was mostly attributed to the inability of DTM enumerators to reach some areas in the Local Government Area (LGA) of Maradun due to security concerns (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

In addition, as a result of a significant increase in abduction and criminal activities, numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs) relocated to different areas to find protection. Anka LGA had the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) with 29,168 individuals, which accounts for 19% of the total IDP population. Gusau LGA followed with 21,605 individuals, making up 14% of the IDPs, and Talata Mafara LGA had 14,341 individuals, accounting for 9% of the IDPs (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

The state of Kaduna hosted 108,370 IDPs, which is 9% of the total IDP population. This is an increase of 14% or 15,518 individuals since Round 10 of assessments. Chikun LGA in Kaduna had the biggest concentration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the state, with 19,401 individuals, which accounted for 18 per cent of all IDPs in Kaduna. Lere Local Government Area (LGA) had a total of 16,012 individuals, which accounted for 15 per cent of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the state. Kaduna North had 10,639 individuals, making up 10 per cent of the IDPs in the state. The overflow of the river Kaduna resulted in a

significant rise in displacement in Kaduna North LGA (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

In Sokoto State, about 65,393 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were detected, accounting for five per cent of the overall IDP population. This is a 19 per cent increase, equivalent to 12,543 individuals, since the previous assessment in Round 10. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sokoto increased significantly in the following local government areas (LGAs): Goronyo, with 11,164 individuals or 17% of the total IDPs, experienced an increase of 3,712 individuals or 50%. Wurno, with 8,688 individuals or 13% of the IDPs, saw an increase of 4,363 individuals, almost doubling the previous number. Tambuwal, with 5,001 individuals or 9% of the total displaced persons, experienced an increase of 1,333 individuals or 36% (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

Kano accommodated 27,058 internally displaced persons (IDPs), which accounts for two per cent of the overall IDP population. This is a 33% increase, equivalent to 8,839 individuals, since the previous assessment in Round 10. Albasu LGA in Kano State had the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with 7,499 individuals, accounting for 28% of the total IDPs in Kano. Tarauni LGA followed with 1,941 individuals, making up 7% of the IDPs in the state (IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023).

The above data on internal displacement in the northwest shows that of the seven states in North West Nigeria, Zamfara occupies the third position. Moving around the state capital and other major towns, one could easily notice the mass movement of forced migrants, including women and children begging for food and other necessities of life. More worrisome is the fact that there is no official IDP camp throughout the states. Others, who for one reason or another could not beg, venture into various crimes to make ends meet. Women and under-aged girls found a space in prostitution to help themselves and their families.

Methodology and Theoretical Context

This article relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. From the secondary sources, information was collected through books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, and documentaries. From the primary sources data was collected through key informant interviews (KII). For the interview, 45 respondents were selected purposefully from the three senatorial zones of the state. These include the victims, traditional rulers, academics on peace and security studies, personnel of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), security agencies, members of civil society (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They were selected for roles in the banditry, expertise and knowledge. For ethical considerations, the names, of the respondents were anonymized, while the location, designation and dates of the interviews

Theoretically, the push and pull theory of migration is used as a theoretical framework to guide this study. In the 1960s, the American scholar E.S. Lee proposed a systematic theory of population migration, namely 'Push-Pull theory and explains how push and pull variables alter the movement of people between one place and another (origin and destination). Pulls and pushes are complementary; for instance, the absence of opportunities such as employment in sending regions or nations is a common push factor, whereas the availability of jobs in receiving regions or nations is a pull factor Garelli, & Tazzioli, 2021).

In the context of this study, pervasive banditry beveling most of the rural communities is a push factor, while safety and security in other places serve as a pull factor. In other words, push factors are defined as the conditions or situations that compel the residents of troubled spots in Zamfara communities to forcefully migrate to safer destinations such as the state local government headquarters and the state capital (Gusau) among others.

Thematic method, using Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step approach was used to analyse the data raw data collected from the fieldwork. In the beginning, all of the data gathered from the in-depth interview was meticulously examined, translated, recorded, and transcribed. During the second step, the data was tallied and displayed, regardless of whether or not it was relevant to the objectives of the study. Thereafter, the data was methodically arranged using a descriptive coding approach. This enables the study to generate descriptive codes, deconstruct the data, and pinpoint the main themes and supporting topics. To find patterns and fascinating details in the data that was produced during the in-depth interview, the study constructed a few themes and sub-themes in the third stage while keeping in mind the main research objectives and hypotheses. Finally, the study modified the initial themes and sub-themes generated to arrive at some useful policy recommendations and make some conclusions.

The nexus between Banditry and Forced Migration Crises in Zamfara State

This section relies mainly on the primary data collected from key stakeholders and secondary data to support the primary data to analyze the correlation between banditry and forced migration crises in Zamfara State.

Scholars have described banditry and forced migration as two sides of the same coin. It has forced millions of people to relocate from their hometowns to other destinations in search of peace and security (Rosenje, Soluade, Olatoye, Peju-Rosenje, & Adeniyi, 2022). This relocation comes with a lot of consequences for both the migrants and the government. on the side of the migrants, it has created displacement, diseases, unemployment, poverty and trauma to mention a few. On the other hand, it has caused the government huge budgetary allocations and spending to deal with the problem.

Forced migrants have left their ancestral homes and lost their means of livelihood such as farmlands and livestock scattered in neighboring towns and cities where there is relative peace and security. Often, the women and children engage in street begging, some of the young girls engage in sex for food, while the men engage in other menial jobs just to earn a living.

On arrival at their destination, one of the basic challenges forced migrants encounter are shelter, food and medicine.

An in-depth interview with a female forced migrant in Gusau revealed that:

> Finding safe and decent accommodation is the major problem that forced migrants frequently encounter. The majority of the forced migrants live in overcrowded uncompleted buildings without toilets, water, and electricity. Unhygienic accommodation has resulted in subpar living circumstances and heightened susceptibility to different illnesses and deaths among forced migrants. Due to congestion, poor hygiene and lack of access to basic medical supplies, many, particularly, women and children have died of common preventable illnesses such as diarrhoea and meningitis (Interview with a female migrant in Gusau, December 2023).

Another migrant corroborated the above position by adding that;

> Even in Gusau, the state's capital, it is difficult for forced migrants and their children to access necessities such as water and healthcare services. Lacks of access to these basic services have been made worse by poverty and over-stretching of resources in host communities (Interview with one of the forced migrants in Maru town, April 2023).

Furthermore, the majority of the forced migrant children dropped out of school. Their daily routine was limited to movement from one street to another in search of food, and clothes or begging for money to cater for their needs. When they are sick, they lack access to health facilities for proper diagnoses and treatments.

> In most of the communities in Zamfara State, forced migrants have taken over the primary and secondary school buildings in host communities forcing the children of the host communities to drop out of school ((Interview with one of the military commanders in Gusau, July 2023).

In addition to forced migrants taking over schools, students have been one of the soft targets of the bandits. Government Girls Day Comprehensive Secondary School in Moriki, Government Day Secondary School Kaya in Maradun, and Government Girls Day Secondary School in Jangebe have all been attacked by the bandits leading to the indefinite closure of all boarding schools by the government in September 2021. Subsequently, a Civil Society Organization (CSO) on Safe Schools reported that 168 schools were closed in Zamfara State. The Safe Schools Technical Team stressed that addressing insecurity in the red zones—where banditry is common—would be necessary before the reopening of the schools. In January 2022, certain schools were permitted to resume classes; however, schools located in the red zone have remained closed ever since (NNNG, 2023).

Consequently, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) reports that Zamfara state is one of the 22 states in the country with a high level of out-of-school children. There were 422,214 out-of-school children in Zamfara in 2020; however, by 2022, that number had increased to 883,953 (Muhammad, 2023). The increase is likely a result of banditry accessioned by the closure of schools.

Unemployment is another effect of forced migration. The forced migrants who have relocated to other towns having lost their original occupation (farming) were unable to find jobs in their new locations where skills may be required.

According to one of the senior academics on migration and security;

> Forced migration disrupts livelihoods, as those who are forced to relocate may have trouble finding jobs. In addition, the majority of the forced migrants are farmers who do not have other skills required to work in the cities. They are therefore rendered jobless, ramming around the streets and seeking non-existing jobs. This hopeless situation has increased their poverty and reliance on humanitarian aid from the government and other donor agencies (Interview with a seasoned scholar on migration and security, Federal University Gusau, June 2023).

Furthermore, when farmers are forcibly relocated, farmlands are frequently abandoned and agricultural output suffers leading to food insecurity. According to agricultural economists;

> Forced migration has negatively impacted food production in Zamfara State, as farmers abandoned thousands of hectares of land. It has also led to the loss of farmers' livelihoods. Thus, forced migrants frequently experience food shortages, hunger and malnutrition. Again, as host communities accommodate forced migrants, competition for scarce available resources, such as arable land, water, and food supply intensified (Interview with Agricultural Economist, Federal University Gusau, May 2023).

A traditional ruler of one of the affected communities in Zamfara State stressed that;

> The influx of forced migrants in communities has increased the population of the host communities. This implies the demand for more food to feed the growing population amid inaccessible land. Thus, forced migration is majorly responsible for the

> unprecedented increase in the prices of food across the state. This implies that host communities are likely to incur more living expenses while the displaced people would find it difficult to afford necessities (Interview with a traditional ruler of one of the affected communities in Talata Mafara, May 2023).

In the long run, Large-scale population displacement may have long-term negative economic effects on the impacted areas, making it more difficult for the state to recover and establish sustainable food security systems (George, & Adelaja, 2022; Abu, & Blake, 2024).

Available reports suggest that forced migration has promoted gender-based violence (GBV) and sexually transmitted infections. As women and young girls move around motor parks, shops, and other private and public buildings, some people exploit using food and cash for sexual benefits. Young girls who are in dire need of food may be more susceptible to GBV and frequently more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

> On the other hand, human traffickers smuggle young girls who are victims of forced migration to neighbouring countries on the promises of good living. On arrival at their various destinations, they realize that they were only lured into prostitution, forced labour or forceful organ harvest. In foreign countries forced migrants live in overcrowded and unsafe environments that heighten the likelihood of GBV. Even when they are victimized, it is also difficult for these young girls to get access to necessary legal aid, and medical treatment. Insufficient availability of these services may hamper the ability of the victims of GBV to seek assistance or redress from appropriate authorities (Interview with a staff of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) Gusau, February 2023).

In addition, some of the forced migrants who have experienced GBV have been subjected to discrimination and stigmatization from their families and the host community. Girls who are victims of GBV may be more likely to have fewer opportunities for education and support services. This attitude has made reporting GBV to appropriate authorities difficult, thus GBV is on the increase exponentially.

Across the state, there seems to be a lack of trust between the forced migrants and their host communities. In some communities, forced migrants are treated with disdain and hatred despite their predicaments. Most of them particularly women are perceived by many residents as common criminals who hide under the pretext of forced migration and supply information about residents to bandits in return for a financial token.

One of the leaders of one of the civil society organizations based in Zamfara State submits that;

> Often, some of the members of the host communities accused forced migrants of being informants that supply information about the members of the host communities to the bandits for financial gain. Most residents of the host communities associate midnight home-based abduction with forced migrants. These accusations have created a strained relationship between the forced migrants and their host communities. Hence, in some areas, forced migrants are treated as mere criminals and architects of their problems (Interview with a leader of one of the civil society organizations based in Gusau, Gusau, June 2023).

Discussion on Key Findings

It may amount to an understatement to say that the twin evils of banditry and forced migration have created socio-economic and security challenges for northern Nigeria and Zamfara State in particular. It has led to a sharp decline in agricultural production,

overstretched public infrastructure, a distorted supply of basic needs to the markets, and distrust between the forced migrants and the host communities. It has also widened the inequality among the populace, increased unemployment, and pervasive poverty across the state.

Forced migration's related economic uncertainties have made investors less confident in Zamfara State because, in an unstable environment, local and international investors are reluctant to invest, which could impede the economic growth and development of the state. Furthermore, daily, businesses are closing down in most of the communities, and investors in agribusiness, trade and commerce, and mining are fleeing the state for fear of death and abduction for ransom. The residents of the state are losing jobs and means of livelihood, and consequently, unemployment and poverty among the people are increasing exponentially.

Forced migration has disrupted the state's labour market, particularly, the informal sector. The unexpected surge of displaced people has made it more competitive for people to find jobs. This may have led to underemployment and unemployment because of the host communities' inability to accommodate the extra labour force.

The abrupt growth in population in relatively peaceful communities where forced migrants reside has put stress on the water supply, energy, and transportation networks, among other facilities. This pressure could lead to higher maintenance expenses, and the state at the moment lacks the capital required to expand and rehabilitate the existing infrastructure to suit the growing population in those communities.

Similarly, public services in the state, such as healthcare, education, and social services, are under intense pressure as a result of the influx of forced migrants. The well-being of forced migrants as well as host communities has been impacted by a reduction in the quality of public services caused by an increase in demand for such services without a corresponding increase in state resources.

The most worrisome fact is that, despite the humanitarian crises that engulfed the state, there is no officially designated forced migration camp established by local government, state, federal, or development partners. The forced migrants are unofficially occupying private and public buildings. This often makes data collection and comprehensive data on forced migrants difficult. Donor partners move from one unofficial location to another, giving assistance to the victims of forced migration. There is an urgent need to provide a temporary shelter equipped with basic facilities to ease the suffering of the migrants. This will also make data on forced migrants available and accessible.

Conclusion

Banditry is fast becoming an existential threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria. It has affected all the fabric of the Nigerian state, including its socio-economic, cultural, and political development. Of all its effects, forced migration has been one of the major challenges. It has displaced and continues to displace hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, detach them from their means of livelihood, and fuel unemployment and poverty among the people.

The challenges are too enormous for the Zamfara State government alone to handle; it must collaborate with national and international partners and coordinate with federal and local authorities to create a long-term solution to the problems brought on by forced migration.

Thus, there is a need for a multidimensional strategy to address the effect of forced migration, particularly in Zamfara State. This multidimensional strategy must target economic development initiatives, infrastructural investments, support for local businesses, and measures to win the confidence of national and international investors. The strategy must also include the promotion of community participation and proffer measures to address the underlying causes of banditry and foster conditions that would facilitate the repatriation and resettlement of displaced populations back to their ancestral homes.

Although it is clear that the people of Zamfara State are resilient, sustained peace and stability call for continued cooperation and dedication to guarantee a better and more secure future for the state. Amidst these obstacles, joint endeavours must focus on cultivating enduring resolutions for reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstructing a new modality of normalcy in Zamfara State.

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