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BANDITRY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF WEEKLY RURAL MARKETS IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Northern Nigeria has long been a major agricultural centre, supplying food domestically and supporting regional commerce through an extensive network of rural weekly markets. In recent years, however, widespread banditry in the northwest has significantly disrupted agricultural production, market activities, and cross-border agribusiness. This study investigates how insecurity has affected operations of the weekly rural markets and regional trade while also examining the influence of broader structural pressures, particularly border closures and the implementation of the cashless policy. Predicated on the eco-violence perspective, which interprets banditry partly as an outcome of persistent farmer–herder tensions intensified by environmental stress, weak institutions, and competition over scarce land and water resources. The study adopted a qualitative research design, relying primarily on in-depth interviews with farmers, traders, pastoralists, market labourers, and security personnel in selected markets across several northwestern states. These insights were supplemented with evidence from official reports and academic studies. The findings show that insecurity has reduced farming activities, displaced producers and traders, limited livestock supply, and caused the partial or complete closure of several weekly markets. Consequently, local economies have weakened and cross-border trade has declined.

Keywords: Banditry, Agribusiness, Cashless policy, border closure, eco-violence.

Introduction

Over the years, Northern Nigeria has been Nigeria's agricultural center. It supplies major agricultural products to local markets and neighboring countries. Records indicate that agricultural produce from the region accounts for a large proportion of domestic consumption and exports to foreign countries since the colonial period (Adebayo, 1992; Ahmed Wudil & Haruna, 2021; Dangiwa & Ndawayo, 2022; Sani, 2009). Its rural population has created additional value chains in agribusiness, including livestock and grains (Hartwich et al., 2010). However, more evidence has shown that the region has, over the years, been significantly

affected by conflicts of varying degrees (Mmahi & James, 2023; Njoku et al., 2023). Such conflicts include the long-standing farmers-herdsmen conflict (Abbass, 2012; Okoli &Lenshie, 2018; Olumba, 2022), identity crisis in the form of ethnic and religious clashes (Ejiofor, 2023), the Boko Haram insurgency (Wild, 2021), and the banditry (Ojo et al., 2023). The cumulative consequences of these conflicts have eroded the region's peaceful nature and political and socioeconomic stability.

Recently, bandits' internecine attacks in the northwest happened almost daily, more than the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram (Osasona, 2021). Consequently, the region has experienced the unquantifiable loss of life and property. Additionally, more records indicate that many people have been kidnapped (Enyinnaya & Olomojobi, 2022), displaced (M. Abdullahi, 2021; Kwenin, 2019), young girls and women have been raped, and farmers have been sent away from their farms (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2022a; International Crisis Group, 2020; Zamfara State Government, 2019). The overall consequences indicate an increasing human insecurity across the region. One sector that banditry heavily affects in the region is small agribusinesses operated based on a weekly market system, and their contribution to exports to foreign countries. These small-scale agribusinesses are regarded as drivers of socioeconomic growth, creating jobs, fostering prosperity, reducing poverty, and enhancing food supply security (Suleiman et al., 2016).

The operational consequences for these markets in the affected areas signaled a significant decline in economic activity across rural areas, with attendant effects on agricultural commodity exports. Since 2018, available evidence has shown that over 5,000 hectares of farmland remained uncultivated by farmers due to fear of kidnapping and the other associated effects of banditry (Mashi, 2023), such as loss of life. Based on the life experiences of people in the region, bandit activities, such as cattle rustling, stripped pastoralists of their herds, their most important livelihood source (Olaniyan& Yahaya, 2016).

Moreover, both pastoralists and farmers have been displaced, resulting in a significant decline in income across the region (A. Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2021; U. Mohammed et al., 2021). The bandits have, in several instances, burnt and raided grain silos while blocking local and international trade routes (Ladan & Matawalli, 2020). Evidently, these have cumulatively distorted farmers' agricultural production (Dennis et al., 2022; Gbamwuan, 2022) as well as traders' trading capacities and networks across the region. In practice, many popular weekly markets in Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger, and Kaduna states reduced operations significantly; some even shut down completely.

Consequently, local and international businesses have been exposed to multilevel survival threats due to the bandits' persistent attacks across the region. Therefore, the objective of this study is to highlight the effects of banditry on weekly rural markets and cross-border agribusiness in northwestern Nigeria. It uncovers the decline in the overall performance of weekly markets and cross-border agribusiness in the region. Subsequently, the paper discusses the banditry, agribusiness environment, and weekly markets in northwestern Nigeria. Additionally, it discusses the methodology and findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of future research directions.

Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Banditry has gradually evolved into a sub-regional conflict with socioeconomic and political implications on efforts toward West African security and integration (A. Abdullahi, 2019; Economist Intelligence, 2022). However, its emergence has been the subject of various discussions and interpretations across Nigeria and its neighboring countries. More

importantly, the literature has documented the quantum of its impacts on both material and non-material resources (Abdulyakeen, 2020; Ladan & Matawalli, 2020; Mashi, 2023). Extant literature has indicated that banditry has been one of the major security challenges bedeviling northern Nigeria and, by extension, Nigeria's national security. It has consumed many lives, and many victims have lost valuables due to sustained kidnapping by bandits, cattle rustling, and significant destruction of properties (Kuna & Ibrahim, 2016; Nadama, 2019; Onwuzuruigbo, 2021; Saminu et al., 2023; S. Suleiman, 2019; Ugbomah et al., 2022).

In addition, the literature has attributed the emergence of banditry to many factors (Ojo et al., 2023). Most importantly, its root has been identified from the trickle effects of eco-violence and eco-survivalism (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; Olumba, 2022; Olumba et al., 2022). In this regard, pastoralists and farmers have engaged in unending struggles due to the effects of climate change caused by water shortages and environmental resources (Ubelejit, 2016). While the conflict between pastoralists and farmers continued for decades, its escalation into militancy was due to the desperation and adoption of sophisticated weaponry (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018). As a result, the pastoralists and farmers developed militia groups to protect their interests, livelihoods, and communities (Chiroma, 2021; Ojo, 2020; Rufa'i, 2021). The conflict, over time, transitioned to an attack between the militia groups, with bandits claiming to represent the pastoralists and vigilantes protecting the farmers' side. However, the persistent attack from bandits attracted counterattacks from the vigilantes' side (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Furthermore, the vigilantes, in return, engaged in extrajudicial killings leading to the death of many suspected bandits and their families and sometimes setting their houses ablaze (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2022b). Since then, the conflict transformed with different outcomes until it finally became what it is today. However, its transformation into internecine attacks across the rural areas in the region was primarily motivated by bandits' adoption of a militant approach for utmost survival (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; Saminu et al., 2023). The gravity of the bandits' internecine attacks has presented precarious consequences for security and the socioeconomics of the people, especially those living in the affected areas. One significant consequence is the sizeable human displacement (Abdullahi, 2021) which orchestrated more fear and uncertainty. By the end of 2018, records show a displacement of about one million individuals in the region (IOM, 2022). In addition, the report of Zamfara State Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs (2022) shows a displacement of about seven hundred and twenty thousand people in the state alone. Farmers, women, children, and many other socioeconomic groupings have been displaced.

From the context of intergroup struggle (Saminu et al., 2022), banditry typifies a zero-sum game between the various actors across the region. Both bandits and vigilantes work to ensure the elimination of each other. However, that attitude has negatively impacted the rural areas and their socioeconomic condition, especially the agricultural sector on which many states in the region and neighboring countries depend. In essence, it has badly affected the agribusiness environment and the food supply chains of the international community.

Banditry and the Agribusiness Environment

Agriculture is the primary socioeconomic activity in northern Nigeria (Babajo et al., 2018). It contributes to the development of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), agriculture was one of the primary drivers of the non-oil sector, with a total contribution to the overall real GDP of 26.46 percent in the fourth quarter of 2022, comparatively lower than the fourth quarter of 2021, and lower than the third quarter

of 2022 at approximately 26.84% and 29.67% respectively. However, the overall growth rate of the agricultural sector in 2022 stood at 1.88 percent, equally lower than the 2.13 percent reported in 2021. This is a significant marker that the fluctuation tilted more to the low performance of the sector. The low performance was also due to many factors, including insecurity (Orji, 2023) orchestrated by banditry and insurgency (Gbamwuan, 2022; Mashi, 2023; U. Mohammed et al., 2021).

However, agribusiness comprises producers, processors, and consumers (Pìnheiro et al., 2022). It is made up of buyers and sellers of agricultural products. Agribusiness assembles, processes, and creates finished goods from raw agricultural commodities for domestic and international customers (Samuel et al., 2017). The control of the world's food system has largely fallen into the hands of a few major corporations in recent decades. These modifications pose concerns regarding market strength, structure, and entry methods for small agribusinesses in emerging nations into the world food system. However, global inequality has increased while international trade has grown more quickly over the past 30 years. While some nations have seen progress and wealth, many others, particularly in Africa, have lagged and have less presence in global trade (Samuel et al., 2017).

Over the years, many factors have challenged local and international contexts of agribusiness in Nigeria, such as the lack of credit facilities, technology, and intense low productivity (Balana & Oyeyemi, 2022). More recently, the bandits' attacks have also widened the consequential gravity on different areas of agribusiness in northwestern Nigeria. The impact has manifested in the decline of the rural economy, with low patronage of rural weekly markets.

On the other hand, weekly markets are a form of periodic rural markets that have significantly affected the region's socioeconomic development (Babajo et al., 2018).

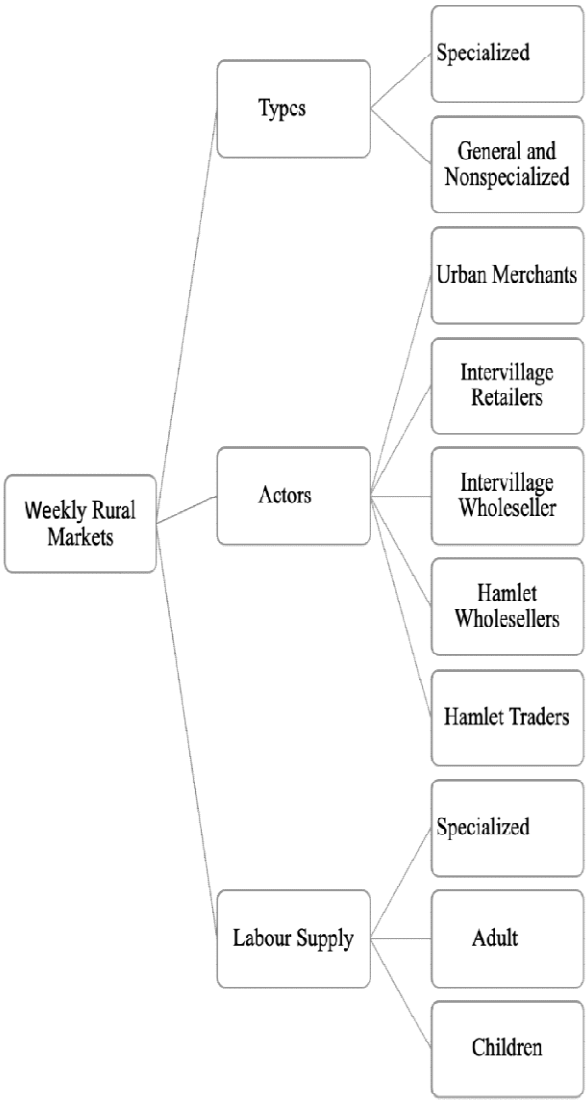
Records have shown that small and local farmers predominantly contribute to farming activities in rural areas (Chiaka et al., 2022). Major grain staples being produced across the region comprise maize, wheat, sorghum, and rice (Chiaka et al., 2022; Famine Early Warning System Network, 2008). These agricultural staples are the major trade items across the weekly rural markets for local and international consumption. Additionally, they are supplied to their final destinations from the local markets, especially in northwestern Nigeria. However, bandits' threats have driven many farmers out of their farms, and the local production rate was therefore threatened. As a result, Miller (2021) reported that Nigeria relies on imports to meet its **agricultural** product needs worth about $10 billion annually. This constitutes a deficit in the agricultural supply chain and consumption. Therefore, the cumulative consequences of banditry and the drop in agricultural production have obstructed everyday living endeavors, including the weekly markets with attendees from different states and neighboring countries. The overall context of the agribusiness environment has been threatened by the bandits' internecine attacks in the region.

The Rural Markets in Northern Nigeria

Rural markets in northern Nigeria are mostly periodic markets. Periodic markets provide outlets for disposing of rural produce, sources of local supplies, and foci for periodic service provision where a full range of fixed services would not be viable (Babajo et al., 2018). Studies have shown that these markets have significant effects on socioeconomic development (Babajo et al., 2018), especially in rural areas with a basic economic structure. Rural markets are local village trade centres that operate daily, weekly, or monthly,

depending on several factors such as history, location, available infrastructure, and operational circumstances. These markets are practically found almost globally. As indicated in Figure 1, the market comprises urban merchants, inter-village rural retailers and wholesalers, and hamlet wholesalers (Clough, 1985). Some markets specialize in particular items (Gambo & Farouq, 2015), such as grains or animals. The markets draw hundreds of people from remote and surrounding communities who come to trade their farm produce and animals, including small ruminants (Aduku et al., 1991). Moreover, the labour supply in the markets is dominated by both the activities of adults and children (Alfa & Abd Karim, 2017). On the whole, the markets are conducted in open spaces (Muhammad et al., 2022), mostly owned by the government.

Fig. 1 Weekly Rural Markets in Northern Nigeria



Source: Authors' design, 2026

Operationally, there are effectively four typical market weeks globally. These include 3- (or 6) day, 4- (or 8-) day, 5-day, and 7-day. However, the 7-day market week prevails throughout

Hausaland and many savanna districts of northern Nigeria (Hill, 2009). In addition, some markets operate daily due to their established operational and logistical capacity. There is a degree of involvement in the markets for the purchase of agricultural inputs and sales of outputs (Udry, 1990). Primary dealers in the rural markets are usually small farmers who mostly supply agricultural products. Moreover, secondary dealers from other states and neighbouring countries often patronize the markets through their agents or major companies dealing in agricultural staples. Hence, aside from dealing mostly with agricultural products, these markets also facilitate the distribution of manufactured goods from urban and rural centres to rural consumers and industry. Added to this is the activity of itinerant traders who move from one marketplace to another, selling their wares (Abdulaqadir & Umaru, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts eco-violence to analyze the emergence of banditry and its effects on the overall performance of weekly rural markets and cross-border agribusiness in northwestern Nigeria. The paper use eco-violence developed by Homer-Dixon (1999) for two reasons: It highlights the emergence of banditry from farmers-herdsmen conflict over the years and illustrates how that conflict causes a decline in the performance of agricultural production, marketing, and the export of agricultural commodities to foreign countries. Moreso, previous studies have used eco-violence to assess the incessant conflicts in northern Nigeria (Adibe et al., 2022; Awogbade et al., 2016; Olumba, 2022). Many other researchers adopted Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) (Okoli & Francis, 2014), an ungoverned spaces perspective (Ejiofor, 2022; Lenshie et al., 2020; Onwuzuruigbo, 2021), while other significant contributors predicated their analysis on the ground of relative deprivation thesis (Ejiofor, 2022). However, at the instance of the failure of adopted theoretical postulations, Okoli and Francis (2014),Osasona (2021), and Osasona (2023), among others, used the organized crime of the bandits as the focal point of analysis. Additionally, others, such as Ojo (2020), have concentrated more on ungoverned spaces, the Fulani militancy, state failure, and other environmental variables.

However, eco-violence has played a prominent role in the development of banditry in the region. Moreover, its analytical extrapolation indicates the role of eco-violence in the emergence of contending parties' desperation. In eco-violence, Homer-Dixon (1999) demonstrates that scarcities result from the deterioration and exhaustion of renewable resources, the rise in demand, and the unequal distribution of those resources. However, the societal repercussions of shortage, such as poverty, widespread migration, heightened social divisions, and weak institutions, make violence unavoidable. In addition, it incorporates the realities of the settings and events that persons involved in these confrontations encounter, such as mass killings, violent altercations, destruction of infrastructure, and the environment, large-scale displacements, social injustices, resource exploitation, and unfavourable climatic conditions (Olumba et al., 2022).

On the one hand,

> Eco-violence refers to conflicts in which competition for water and agricultural resources occurs within or between social groups or state actors, often resulting in mass murder and destruction of the environment and properties; such conflicts are exacerbated by the state's (or states') failure to address resource redistribution challenges, institutional failures, and environmental and social injustice (Olumba et al., 2022, p. 2082).

On the other hand, the operational implications have indicated that banditry emerged as a consequence of eco-violence. Additionally, more quest for survival by the groups has outrageously resulted in daily attacks with their impending effects on other business activities (Saminu et al., 2023). Therefore, as applied in this study, eco-violence illustrates the dynamic nature of banditry brought on by rivalry for the direct influence on water and agricultural resources (Olumba et al., 2022). Furthermore, according to Ajala (2020),

> "This pattern of agriculture, however, has undergone several changes. Issues such as changes in farming production patterns, population explosion, capitalism, climate change, shrinkage of Lake Chad, competition for land and water, right to grazing paths, drought and desertification, increased ethnic delineation and political manipulation have been fingered as the reasons behind the changes in the dynamics of the farmer/pastoralist relationship" (P. 2055).

The ever-increasing tensions between farmers and herdsmen signify a severe socioeconomic implication for the region. Although there is a lack of absence of agreement in the literature about the extent group's experience in the context of severe difficulties. Despite that, facts have shown that farmers and their communities who have constituted the bulk of Nigeria's agricultural production have had the most significant difficulty (Adeoye, 2017). Moreso, "the farmers/herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have demonstrated a high potential to exacerbate insecurity and food crisis, particularly in rural communities where most of the conflicts occur, with reverberating consequences nationwide" (Adeoye, 2017, p.130). Therefore, this study's critical analytical question is how banditry constitutes a significant challenge to local and international contexts of agribusiness.

Methodology

This study investigates the effects of banditry on weekly rural markets and cross-border agribusiness in Northwestern Nigeria. The researchers adopted a qualitative methodology comprising primary and secondary sources of data. The researchers gathered primary data through interviews with key respondents purposively sampled from the sixteen market areas indicated in Table 1. These sampled markets have experienced the most significant impacts of banditry in the region. Additionally, banditry has ravaged agricultural production, agribusiness, and the marketability of agriproducts at the local and international levels. The study relies heavily on the information sourced from the sampled respondents in the markets. Moreover, the researchers corroborated the interview data with data from secondary sources from relevant agencies such as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), published journal articles, and newspapers. Additionally, the researchers assuredly contacted a variety of relevant stakeholders across the region for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in question.

In order to achieve the objective of the paper, the researchers conducted interviews with 14 participants, purposively sampled and complemented with a snowballing technique. Of these, seven are farmers who doubled as local produce retailers and agreed to participate in the research. Moreover, three farmers who are also wholesalers in the markets based in Zamfara state were interviewed. Furthermore, one pastoralist, one labourer (*Dan Janyota* or DJ), and one (*Dan Nauyi* or DN) were equally interviewed. The pastoralist was chosen in order to understand how banditry affected the demands and supplies of animals in the markets. The researchers chose both categories of labourers due to their intermediary roles in the markets.

In addition, an interview with one police officer (PO), one customs officer (CO), one immigration officer (IO), and one army officer (AO) was equally conducted to learn more about their roles in connection with the difficulties in accessing the markets. Particularly, their role has partly led to the closure of many weekly rural markets to enable the military to undertake some security operations across the region. However, the interviews were all conducted between 13th August 2023 and 20th December 2023. The interviews were conducted in Hausa, the most widely spoken language across the region. Additionally, all the respondents preferred using the Hausa language during the interview.

Additionally, the researchers transcribed, cleaned, and sorted the data. Consequently, the researchers examined the data to identify key issues or events related to participants' experiences. Each transcription note was coded by conceptual unit and then categorized in a flexible format. Using constructionist thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowed the researchers to identify patterns and themes in the data. The researchers generated a variety of themes covering the operations of the markets and overall operations of the markets. The researchers developed another theme covering the roles of monetary policy and border closure in the distortion of the markets across the region and their supplies to neighbouring countries. Additionally, data analysis continued until saturation, when all conceptual units were represented.

Operational Efficacy of the Weekly Rural Markets in Northern Nigeria

This research elucidates that the diverse weekly rural markets examined in northwestern Nigeria function at varying levels of operational efficacy, exhibiting a varied decline in their operational capacities. In this context, Table 1 delineates the operational status of several weekly rural markets surveyed in northwestern Nigeria. This indicates that most of the region's rural markets operate at a moderate level, while some have ceased operations entirely. This profoundly impacted the region's local and international supply of agricultural commodities. Before the rise of banditry in the region, individuals from various states, extending to the Niger Republic, flocked to engage in business and trading activities within border communities and rural localities.

The challenges posed by banditry have significantly altered the circumstances, which generated a condition of persistent public fear, with many stakeholders distancing themselves further from the affected rural markets. This has manifested in some markets such as *Dangulbi* and *Kasuwan Wanke* in Zamfara, where at the peak of banditry, the threat of violence became even more evident (Interview/F7/2023). The operational consequences of this impending condition indicate that the traders' unavailability, especially those from other states in the region, signifies a serious dysfunction as a critical element that necessitates the market closures, ultimately impacting the supply of agricultural outputs, cattle, and other ruminants (Interview/F5/2023).

Additionally, experience has shown that bigger markets, such as *Dawanau* in Kano, known for a long history of trading different agricultural products, have been negatively affected in comparison with relatively smaller markets, like the *Yan Gulbi* market in Zamfara, that trades only a few agricultural products, such as grains and animals. Although prominent traders in maize, millet, and rice predominantly characterize the trading dynamics within the market. Those engaged in the commerce of livestock, such as cattle and other ruminants, also represent critical stakeholders within the market, all of whom were equally affected negatively (Interview/F2/2023). Furthermore, in markets such as *Kasuwar Dansadau*, with prominence in trading in a diverse array of items and trading commodities, though to a lesser

extent than *Dawanau*, experienced similar adverse effects. More specifically, numerous small-scale traders engaged in retailing textile materials, food purveyors, and local herbalists providing traditional medicinal remedies have also encountered significant reductions (Interview/F2/2023).

Prior to the emergence of banditry, weekly rural markets throughout the region operated at optimal capacity. Exports originating from *Kasuwar Dawanau* in Kano surpassed the local consumption requirements. Traders transported approximately one to two hundred large trucks of agricultural produce and livestock to international markets weekly. The dynamics of banditry often generate fluctuating market conditions in the region. For instance, during the rainy season, activities of bandits often decline in most of the affected areas, particularly in communities near urban centers in Gusau in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto states. Conversely, in other areas, such as Birnin Gwari in Kaduna State and Dansadau in Zamfara, the impact remains far less pronounced (Samaila, 2019). As banditry has markedly reduced, numerous markets have returned to their operational routines, albeit moderately. In many instances during the peak of bandits' activities, the rural markets have been adversely impacted (Dennis et al., 2022). This resulted in a substantial decline in the volume of production and the supply of goods and services (Interview/DJ/2023). More interestingly, the associated mitigating policies have, over the years, posed serious challenges to the operational efficacy of the markets due to diminished production, the displacement of farmers, and an overall reduction in market participation (Interview/DJ/2023).

Despite that, Table 1 below indicates the current operational status of selected weekly rural markets examined across the northwest. According to Table 1, many of the rural weekly markets listed still exist, but their operational status varies due to banditry, military operations, displacement of communities, and state security restrictions in northwestern Nigeria. In most cases, markets fall into three categories: fully operational, partially operational (irregular market days), or temporarily closed/relocated.

Table 1: Operational Status of Selected Weekly Markets in Northern Nigeria Affected by Banditry

Market	State	Current Situation (General Trend)
Yankara Market	Katsina	Partially operational; activity reduced due to insecurity in Faskari axis.
Sheme Market	Katsina	Operational; still active because it is close to Katsina city and under stronger security presence.
Kankara Market	Katsina	Partially operational; market activity fluctuates due to bandit attacks in Kankara LGA.
Dandume Market	Katsina	Operational but reduced; trading continues though farmers report lower turnout.
Kasuwar Dansadau	Zamfara	Highly disrupted; Dansadau axis has been a major banditry hotspot, market activity sometimes suspended.
Kasuwar Magami	Zamfara	Partially operational; livestock and grain trading reduced.
Kasuwar Wanke	Zamfara	Intermittent operation due to security concerns.
Chafe Market	Zamfara	Severely affected; trading occurs irregularly.
Yan Gulbi Market	Zamfara	Partially operational but under heavy security pressure.
Yan Tumbi Markets	Zamfara	Operational but weakened; traders complain of declining patronage.
Kasuwar Danjibga	Zamfara	Partially operational; periodic closures during security

		operations.
Kasuwar Kunci	Zamfara	Reduced activity due to displacement of farming communities.
Kasuwar Kalgo	Zamfara	Irregular operations linked to security alerts.
Kasuwar Uduwa	Kaduna	Operational; rural trade continues but at lower volumes.
Kasuwar Magani	Kaduna	Fully operational; one of the major grain markets in southern Kaduna.
Galadimawa Market	Kaduna	Operational but smaller scale.
Kasuwar Illela	Sokoto	Operational; active cross-border trade with Niger Republic.
Kasuwar Dawanau	Kano	Fully operational; remains the largest grain market in West Africa.

Source: Authors' compilation, 2026.

As indicated in Table 1, four distinct yet interrelated patterns have emerged. These include the intense disruption of the rural markets, security restrictions, and militarization of market activities, relative stability of urban-linked and border markets, and gradual transformation rather than total collapse of rural markets.

Severe Disruption of Rural Markets in Katsina and Zamfara States

Facts on the ground have shown that rural weekly markets in Katsina and Zamfara States have experienced the most severe effects due to the concentration of bandit groups and the increasing rural insecurity in the affected areas. Obviously, many weekly markets in rural communities such as Yankara, Kankara, and Dandume in Katsina State have already experienced a decline in farming and trading as a result of frequent attacks, kidnappings, and cattle rustling in surrounding villages. Additionally, in Zamfara State, markets such as Dansadau, Magami, Chafe, and Yan Tumbi have experienced frequent closures or reduced activity due to bandit activities and counterinsurgency operations. Clearly, this situation has orchestrated more challenges where farmers are unable to go to the farms or transport produce safely to markets, with extended consequences, such as a reduced supply of grains and livestock. More interestingly, many reports indicate that traders are avoiding many rural markets in banditry-affected areas, while preferring safer urban trading centres. This has weakened the traditional rural market network that historically sustained agricultural trade across the region (International Crisis Group, 2020; SBM, 2023). Consequently, while some markets remain nominally operational, they function at significantly reduced capacity with lower volumes of trade and fewer participants.

Security Restrictions and Militarization of Market Activities

Militarization of market spaces and the introduction of security restrictions on market days is another pattern observed across several rural markets in the region. For instance, in areas heavily affected by banditry, state authorities and security agencies have sometimes imposed temporary restrictions on the weekly rural markets to prevent bandits from accessing food supplies, livestock, and other logistics through rural trade networks. Again, governments in Zamfara and Katsina States periodically suspended market operations in locations such as Dansadau, Magami, and other rural trading centres during security operations aimed at disrupting bandits supply chains. Even when markets reopen, trading hours are often shortened, and security personnel are deployed to monitor activities. While these measures aim to weaken bandit groups, they also inadvertently disrupt rural livelihoods by limiting

farmers' access to markets and reducing income opportunities for traders, transporters, and labourers who depend on weekly market activities (Premiumtimes, 2021; SBM, 2024). This has contributed to the gradual erosion of rural market economies across several banditry-affected communities in the region.

Relative Stability of Urban-Linked and Border Markets

In contrast to highly insecure rural markets, evidence has shown that urban-linked and cross-border markets have remained relatively stable, largely because of stronger security presence and their strategic economic importance. Markets such as *Kasuwar Magani* in Kaduna State, Illela Market in Sokoto State, and Dawanau Grain Market in Kano State continue to operate as major agricultural trading hubs despite regional insecurity. For instance, facts have indicated that the Dawanau Market in Kano remains one of the largest grain markets in West Africa. It attracts traders from across Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Similarly, Illela Market benefits from its proximity to the Nigeria–Niger border and serves as an important node in cross-border trade networks linking northwestern Nigeria to Sahelian markets. Although these markets have experienced fluctuations due to border closures, currency reforms, and insecurity along the transportation routes, they have not suffered the same level of disruption as rural markets located deep within bandit-affected areas (Adesola & Akerele, 2025). Their resilience highlights the importance of infrastructure, security presence, and trade connectivity in sustaining agricultural market systems during periods of insecurity.

Transformation of the Weekly Rural Markets

An important trend that emerged is that banditry has not eliminated rural weekly markets but has instead transformed their structure and operations. In many communities, markets that previously attracted thousands of traders now operate on a smaller scale, with fewer participants and lower trading volumes. Some markets have also been relocated to safer towns or shifted closer to major roads and security checkpoints (Kleffmann & Ramachandran, 2024; Mahmud & Maigari, 2024). For example, traders from insecure rural markets in parts of Zamfara and Katsina have increasingly moved their business activities to areas they consider safer in Gusau, Funtua, and other relatively secure urban centres (Mahmud & Maigari, 2024; Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2021; Yahaya & Bello, 2020). This movement reflects adaptive strategies adopted by traders and farmers that seek to minimize exposure to banditry while sustaining their economic activities. However, this has caused downsizing of rural markets and has weakened traditional rural commercial networks that once linked remote farming communities to regional trade systems (International Crisis Group, 2020; FAO, 2022). As a result, the overall effect of banditry has been the progressive weakening of rural market systems and agribusiness value chains rather than their outright disappearance.

Consequently, the overall condition of the markets has manifested a deficiency in the supply of commodities, which has engendered heightened demand on one side, resulting in considerable ramifications for both farmers and traders. This has affected the participation of the numerous traders, especially from other states and the neighbouring countries, who no longer participate in the markets (Interview/DN, F1/2023). While measures were taken to mitigate the adverse impacts on market conditions, the condition escalated albeit at different magnitudes. Likewise, a significant number of rural markets throughout the region are currently functioning at a diminished capacity (Interview/DJ/2023). In general, the operational capacity of the markets is not as robust as it was during the pre-banditry period.

This decline can be attributed to factors such as reduced productivity, prevailing insecurity, and a widespread decrease in economic activities.

For more emphasis, therefore, this finding is consistent with the findings of Balogun and Adewumi (2022), that banditry has significantly affected agricultural output in Nigeria. It also supported the findings of Babatunde (2020), who stated that banditry had affected economic activities comprising trading in grains and livestock production. However, records have shown that weekly markets are returning to their normal shape, with some even transporting up to sixty trailer loads of animals weekly (Daily Trust, 2021). Consequently, one of the respondents confirmed that as the banditry is going down and with the suspension of the cashless policy, more participants are gradually coming to the market, though not as it was in the pre-banditry era (Interview/DJ/2023).

Effect of Banditry on Local and International Supplies

This study found that banditry has severely affected both local and international supply chains linked to rural weekly markets in northwestern Nigeria. The decline in local agricultural production capacity, combined with persistent attacks on farms, villages, and trade routes, has significantly constrained the movement of agricultural commodities from production zones to market centres (Ladan & Matawalli, 2020; Mohammed et al., 2021; Samuel et al., 2017). In several rural communities, farmers have reduced cultivation activities due to fear of attacks, kidnapping, and cattle rustling, thereby lowering the overall volume of produce available for trade. Similarly, traders who traditionally transported grains, livestock, and other farm products to weekly markets now operate on restricted schedules or avoid high-risk routes altogether. These disruptions have reshaped the operational patterns of rural markets, where trading activities have become irregular, and market attendance has been significantly reduced (FEWS NET, 2023a; International Crisis Group, 2020). Consequently, both farmers and traders have cut short their activities around the farms areas and the rural markets (Interview/F1/2023). This is a development that has continued to transform agribusiness supply networks in the region.

Furthermore, banditry has also affected the ability of farmers and traders to sustain consistent supply flows to the weekly rural markets. For instance, before the consolidation of banditry, weekly rural markets operated as vital nodes that connected farmers, middlemen, and regional traders within the agricultural value chain. However, under current conditions, farmers are often unable to transport their produce safely to markets, while traders face increasing risks of robbery and abduction along rural transport corridors. As a result, local producers and traders are unable to supply goods to weekly rural markets at the scale observed in the pre-banditry era (Dennis et al., 2022). Field interviews further revealed that insecurity has discouraged external buyers from visiting rural markets, thereby weakening demand and reducing commercial exchange (Interview/DJ/2023). This situation aligns with broader observations that insecurity has disrupted rural market systems across the region, thereby forcing farmers and traders to relocate to relatively safer urban areas (FEWS NET, 2023b; World Bank, 2024).

Also, beyond domestic supply disruptions, the study discovers that banditry has significantly affected international agribusiness and cross-border trade networks linked to rural markets in northern Nigeria. Traditionally, many of these markets attracted traders from neighbouring countries who purchased grains, livestock, and other agricultural commodities for resale across the Sahel region. However, insecurity in the northwest has discouraged foreign traders from participating in these markets. Respondents indicated that traders from neighbouring

countries such as Niger and Cameroon have drastically reduced their market participation due to security concerns (Interview/CO/2023). Marketers from the Niger Republic, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad who previously frequented these markets have also reduced their presence, leading to a decline in cross-border commodity flows. Consequently, several rural markets across the region experienced closures or irregular operations during periods of heightened insecurity (Ripples Nigeria, 2021). These disruptions were further compounded by government-imposed border closures and trade restrictions affecting Nigeria's borders with neighbouring countries such as Niger, Cameroon, and, in some instances, the Benin Republic (Ogbonna et al., 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Overall, these show that both domestic and foreign supply chains linked to rural markets in northern Nigeria have suffered greatly as a result of banditry. Traditional agribusiness networks that formerly connected rural producers to regional and global markets have been undermined by the combined effects of insecurity, decreased agricultural output, and dwindling trader engagement. This finding is consistent with the observation of Osasona (2021, 2022, 2023), who reported that banditry disproportionately affects rural communities and undermines their economic resilience. It also supports the view of Dennis et al. (2022) that insecurity has significantly hampered agricultural production and rural market participation. Additionally, the findings align with Mashi (2023), who noted that many traders and buyers now boycott rural markets due to security concerns. More importantly, the study further confirms the broader impact of banditry on cross-border trade corridors linking Nigeria to neighbouring countries such as the Niger Republic, thereby disrupting long-established regional trade networks (Garba, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2020; World Bank, 2024).

Conclusion

On a general note, rural weekly markets in northwest Nigeria have seen varied degrees of transformation, depending on their location and level of vulnerability to insecurity. Banditry and extensive rural relocation have had the greatest impact on markets in Katsina and Zamfara States. Attacks on farming settlements and villages have decreased agricultural output and deterred traders from visiting rural markets in many of these areas. In order to avoid attacks and regulate the movement of armed groups, several markets in these states currently operate under military protection, have limited market hours, or are subject to recurring security monitoring. Kaduna State's rural markets, on the other hand, are still mostly functional despite a sharp decline in their economic performance. These circumstances have curtailed market involvement and decreased the supply of commodities. Due to their strategic significance as important regional commercial hubs, border and urban-linked markets, such as Illela in Sokoto State and Dawanau in Kano State, have managed to continue operating. Despite the general instability impacting rural areas, they have been able to sustain relatively stable trading activities due to their close proximity to urban centers, better security presence, and participation in cross-border commerce.

Rural weekly markets in northwest Nigeria have not entirely vanished between 2020 and 2024, but they have experienced substantial operational changes as a result of insecurity. Market days have been shortened in many places, and since both domestic and foreign traders steer clear of unsafe regions, trader turnout has significantly decreased. The interruption of pastoral routes and the abandonment of farmlands have also resulted in a decrease in the availability of essential commodities, especially cattle and agricultural output. Additionally, some markets have been moved to safer towns or locations nearer major highways and

security checkpoints, enabling farmers and traders to carry on with business operations in comparatively secure settings. These findings imply that rather than completely eradicating rural markets, banditry has reduced their economic potential and changed their conventional structure, diminishing their usefulness as essential hubs in northern Nigeria's agriculture and cross-border commerce networks.

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