



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

Northwest Community Engagement

Quitting Banditry, Exiting Conflict: Pathways, Options & Way Forward

organised by

Centre for Democracy and Development

In Partnership with

Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Held at:

Grand Ibro Hotel
Abdullahi Fodio Road, Sokoto

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Since 1999 Nigeria has conducted periodic elections and in 2015 witnessed the first democratic transfer of power from one political party to another. This democratic progress has seen the expansion of the frontiers of political participation and provided citizens with an opportunity to expand civic engagement. At the same time these developments have been challenged by increasing poverty, unemployment and conflict. From Boko Haram in the northeast; to the secessionist violence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in southeast; to the oil bunkering activities of Niger Delta militants; to the prevailing ethno-religious tensions and conflict in north-central; and the violent armed banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling in the northwest, Nigeria is beset by insecurity. These violent conflicts continue to push the country towards failure, collapse and even disintegration.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) has taken a leading role in nurturing Nigeria's democracy through cultivating peaceful co-existence, supporting conflict resolution and peace-building and aiding conflict mitigation effort. One of its key strategies for achieving this objective has been sustained community engagement. This is again at the heart of its approach to supporting efforts to reduce the threat of conflict in Nigeria's northwest. As part of ongoing interventions a two-day community engagement and roundtable event was organised on 'Quitting Banditry, Exiting Conflict: Pathways, Options and the Way Forward' in Sokoto. Its key objective was to generate ideas regarding possible pathways and policy options to address the violent armed banditry in the geo-political zone.

Participants

The participants of the community engagement and roundtable were drawn from communities who have been personally affected by violent armed banditry in the northwest. In total over 90 individuals participated, with representation from:

- a) Community based associations
- b) Religious leaders
- c) Farmers associations
- d) Community security groups (Vigilantes)
- e) Repentant bandits
- f) Members of Miyetti Allah
- g) Civil society organisations
- h) Yan Sakai members
- i) Youth and women community leaders

Discussions

The programme was structured into two presentation sessions containing four papers and four syndicate and experience sharing sessions.

The first presentation by Professor SYB Kura was entitled "The act is in the governance: Armed banditry in the northwest, overview of causes, patterns and implications." The paper highlighted key causes of insecurity in the northwest, which were cited as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, climate change and a shrinking resource base. It identified different scenarios in which insecurity has affected livelihood and wellbeing, through the death of

breadwinners of the family, destruction of farmland, infiltration of weapons, sexual violence and the creation of orphaned or homeless children. The paper emphasised the need for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, but noted that it would require great effort and sustained dialogue from all key stakeholders.

The second paper by Professor M. T. Usman, entitled, “Ethnic and religious dimensions of armed conflicts in the northwest”, highlighted the ethnic background of conflicts in the northwest by tracing the links between cattle rustling and the Fulani tribe. The presentation advocated for greater inclusion of religious dimensions through societal reorientation of religious ethics and etiquettes in peace promotion and peace building in the Northwest. It made the case that Sharia law had clearly defined the responsibilities of parents, community leaders and government in the proper upbringing of children and that following Islamic principles would be one way out of the present situation because Islamic law places a high premium on human life. This is on the existential understanding that Islamic principles of social interactions and cohesions have also taken adequate care of the interest and wishes of the non-Muslims living in these areas. This notwithstanding, the major actors of the conflict are predominantly Muslims. It argued that as all the actors in the conflict are Muslims, engaging them in the language of Islam would provide a lasting solution to the protracted conflict.

The third paper by Mal A. S. Muhammed, entitled, “The escalating armed banditry conflict: The operations of Yan Sakai” expressed a belief that the operations of informal security actors, like Yan Sakai, have aggravated the crisis of banditry in the northwest. It identified some measures taken by the government at both federal, state and community levels to monitor their activities but called for more efforts towards de-escalation of the conflict through disarmament and border control.

The final paper by Dr Hannatu K. Ali of the Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna discussed “Gender dimensions of armed banditry: Women as actors and victims”. The presentation identified different levels of female involvement in banditry and argued that women are involved in both voluntary and non-voluntary capacities. It cited examples where women were forcibly conscripted into armed banditry or chose to join as a way of escaping the ravages of everyday poverty. Although conflict actors women can contribute in peacebuilding and peace promotion efforts it argued through their societal roles which provide opportunity for them to exert their influence on family decisions.

The experience sharing sessions gave space for attendees with intimate knowledge of the conflict to bring to bear their perspectives. Some of the key points made across the four sessions are outlined below:

- The lack of effective justice mechanisms was identified as one of the remote causes of the banditry crisis especially in the epicentre of the conflict, Zamfara state. Examples of extortion and injustices being perpetrated by government officials, traditional leaders and security agents were shared. In fact, it was strongly emphasised that Fulani’s were discriminated against on all social issues, especially by the police and other government agencies. Women were particularly marginalised in the formal justice system.
- Limited access to quality education linked with the rising levels of unemployment and poverty among the youth, has created a ready-made pool of recruits that bandits exploit.

- The increased number of internally displaced persons and *Almajiri* in the northwest was another problem identified. These groups were also seen as being targets of bandit gang recruitment.
- Decaying religious values because of corruption at all levels was viewed as a driver of banditry in the region. Alongside this participants decried the ethnicisation of the conflict where individuals can be killed simply because they are from a particular ethnic group. Participants from Danko/Wasagu and Fakai Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kebbi state directly attributed the rise of banditry to the extra-judicial killings of the innocent Fulani's in the area.
- Another principal cause of the conflict is struggle for land resources between farmers and herders. This was linked to the population explosion in the sub-region generally. It was noted that there were several grazing reserved areas in Goronyo and Rabah LGAs of Sokoto state that were turned into farmlands, which created tension and conflict between farmers and herders in the area.
- Participants noted contestation between the Yan Sakai/Vigilante groups and the community based organisations like Miyetti Allah as escalating conflict. Poor coordination and lack of synergy among security agencies operating in the conflict zones was also a prevailing problem.
- Conflict entrepreneurship was a major factor explaining the collapse of some peace and dialogue plans signed by the Zamfara state government. Conflict entrepreneurs were defined as those in government circles who directly benefit from the conflict by serving as go-betweens between the bandits and the state.
- The proliferation of locally made hunter guns and even AK-47s was a notable concern. In the view of participants they could easily be bought like foodstuff.
- Female involvement in armed banditry had two dimensions. There are those that joined voluntarily and had become accomplices to the criminality and those who were abducted and conscripted into the conflict theatres to render different categories of services to the bandits including providing sex services and serving as informants.

A final session saw Professor Mala Mustapha share experiences from the northeast. He identified major differences between Boko Haram and armed bandits from an ideological standpoint, and argued that greater ideological coherence with Boko Haram made the conflict more protracted, complex and difficult to mitigate. Professor Mala also outlined the series of challenges encountered in leading transitional justice efforts in the northeast. Despite these challenges he stated that CDD's anchor programme—*Al-Sulh Hayr*—has yielded significant results and that many communities have now reintegrated repentant Boko Haram members. Following huge successes recorded in resolving Boko Haram insurgency and its devastating complexities and consequences, and as part of its mandate of intervention in peace building and conflict resolution, the CDD anchored this programme “to develop the requirements that make transitional justice the appropriate mechanism for addressing the imperative of justice as an indispensable component of restoring and sustaining the peace in the communities devastated by the Boko Haram insurgency” (CDD, 2020:2). The objective of *Sulhu Alheri ni* programme was to train *ulama* as advocates of peace building and conflict resolution to employ transitional justice in their communities to address social atrocities and human rights violations committed by members of Boko Haram in Northeast, Nigeria. the programme has proved very successful. In line with this experience, he challenged the participants to think about how similar programmes might look in the northwest and more generally how the transitional justice model of the northeast can be applied and adapted to addressing the menace of armed banditry in the northwest.

Conclusion

Following the discussions participants believed that the following areas are worth further exploration in dealing with armed banditry conflict vis-à-vis addressing challenges of peace building and conflict resolution in the Northwest.

- i. A pilot *Sulhu* committee be formed to identify influential individuals that can support peacebuilding efforts in Zamfara state.
- ii. After an assessment of the impact of the *Sulhu* committee initiative in Zamfara it should be adapted and extended to the remaining states of the northwest.
- iii. Women should be an integral part of any peace initiative.
- iv. A programme should be designed by all relevant stakeholders—community leaders, security agencies, civil society groups, etc.—for the disarmament of bandits, *Yan Sakai* and community members. This is largely because with extent of the proliferation of arms among communities, not peace building deals and conflict resolutions mechanism are likely to succeed without a disarmament programme.
- v. Governments at all levels (federal, State and Local Government Councils) should be alive to their responsibilities, especially in the areas of improving security. This could be done through making adequate response to security challenges. If this is achieve, then *Yan Sakai* and their activities, as one of the key community defence and resilience strategies should be banned by the government.
- vi. Develop an effective coordination mechanism for all security agencies operating in the conflict zones.
- vii. The failure of traditional justice system has been one of the key drivers of the conflict. Thus, it is recommended that transitional justice system, as implemented in Northeast *Al-Sulh Hyr* be incorporated in all the components of peace building and conflict resolution in Northwest.
- viii. Resuscitate nomadic education programmes to address illiteracy, unemployment and Almajirai problems.
- ix. And, all peace building programmes and conflict resolution should be community-driven. Community affected by the conflict be allowed to championed the course of their peace settlement and initiatives.

APPENDIX



A TWO-DAY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ROUNDTABLE QUITTING BANDITRY, EXITING CONFLICT: PATHWAYS, OPTIONS AND WAY FORWARD STRENGTHENING THE DELIVERY OF PEACE AND SECURITY

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Day I: Monday March 28th, 2022

09.00	-	10.00	Arrival and Registration
10.00	-	10.15	National Anthem
10.15	-	10.30	Opening Remark by CDD
10.30	-	10.45	Vice Chancellor's Welcome Remark
10.45	-	11.00	Chairman's Remark (Mal A. S. Mohammed, <i>mmi</i>)
11.00	-	11.15	Tea Break
11.15	-	11.45	<i>Paper I:</i> Armed Banditry in the Northwest: Overview of Causes, Pattern and Implications, Prof Sulaiman Y. Balarabe Kura
11.50	-	12.20	<i>Paper II:</i> Ethnic Dimensions of Armed Banditry in the Northwest, Professor M. T. Usman
12.25	-	01.00	<i>Paper III:</i> The Northeast Experience of Conflict, Mitigations and Peacebuilding
01.00	-	02.00	Lunch Break and Prayers
02.00	-	03.00	Roundtable I: Community Resilience: Efficacy and Challenges (Participants: Religious Leaders, Community Based Associations, Farmers Associations)
03.00	-	03.30	Discussion (Options and Pathways)
03.30	-	03.45	Closing Remarks

Day II: Tuesday, March 29th, 2022

09.00	-	09.15	Overview of Day I Activities
09.15	-	10.05	<i>Paper IV:</i> Escalating the Conflict: The Operations of 'Yan Sakai Mal A. S. Mohammed, <i>mmi</i>
10.05	-	10.20	Tea Break
10.20	-	11.30	<i>Paper V:</i> Gender Dimension of Armed Banditry: Women as Actors and Victims, Dr Hannatu Ali, NDA Kaduna
11.30	-	01.30	Roundtable II: Exiting the Theatre of Bloodshed: Options and Pathways (Participants: Informal Security, Repentant Bandits, Miyetti Allah, CSOs)
01.30	-	02.30	Lunch and Prayers
02.30	-	03.30	Discussion: Way Forward and Next Agenda
03.30	-	04.00	Closing Remark