

Arms Proliferation, Headsmen-Farmer Clashes, Banditary and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Critical Examination of the Nexus

Sunny Mene Piate

*Department of Political Science
Akwa Ibom State University*

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Abstract

The paper examines the subject of arms proliferation, Herdsmen-Farmer conflicts, banditary and sustainable development in Nigeria: an examination of the nexus. It suggests that Nigeria is significantly impeded in terms of sustainable development as a complex combination of insecurity that endangers development in most of the areas due to intricate multi-dimensionality proliferation of arms, Herdsmen-Farmer conflicts, as well as banditary. The problems are closely interconnected, and all of them stimulate one another and create a vicious circle impeding development in all spheres. In this regard, the research investigated the role of arms proliferation, Herdsmen-Farmers clashes, and banditary in intertwining to affect sustainable development. The paper relied upon the state failure theory to discuss the situation by indicating that the inability of the Nigerian State to exercise its territory, exercise a monopoly of violence, and deliver basic services and security leads to the spread of arms, escalation of command conflict such as the Herdsmen-farmer conflict, banditry incursion, and impairs the progress of sustainable development in the country. The paper revealed that even though Nigeria has been trying to address such security challenges through different systems, being weakly governed, corrupt, socio-economically aggrieved, and the complexity of the security problem itself is really mitigating the effectiveness of such systems. The paper thus proposes an overall situation that involves a combination of effective security, an intensive social-economic development, sound governance, and peace building at the level of the community as the means of getting out of the vicious cycle of violence and aiming at gaining a peaceful and prosperous future in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Arms proliferation, Banditry, Herdsmen-farmer clash, Nomadic pastoralist; Sedentary crop farms and sustainable development.*

Corresponding Author:

Sunny Mene Piate

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Background to the Study

Nigeria is currently facing hurdles to a sustainable development that are caused by a conjoined nexus of insecurity, whose main source is arms proliferation, herdsmen farmers clashes and banditry. All of these phenomena support and strengthen each other thus creating general vicious cycle that hinders development in various areas. Arms proliferation does refer to the blistering increase in the total amount and amount of lawful and illegal weaponry being carried around internally and internationally. This aspect is most likely to be associated with proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), i.e. firearms that can be transported by a single person or a small group and that vary between pistols and assault rifles and machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and portable anti-aircraft systems. Uncontrolled proliferation and stockpiling of SALW and negative impacts that it can have on the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a core issue in the context of sustainable development. By proliferation, it means that those who possess the weapons are not only the authorised personnel of the state as they also include non-state actors and criminal groups, as well as individuals which could be as a result of illegal trade and black markets, and even smuggling. The spread of SALW is a phenomenon that deserves special consideration due to the fact that such weapons are accessible, cheap and simple to operate, sturdy and very deadly; which makes them the main tool in most modern armed conflicts, criminal groupings and even individual violence in various parts of the globe. The use of small arms and lighter weapons has become the weapon of choice in majority of conflicts today and has been the cause of high rates of armed violence even in seemingly peaceful regions which has been increased due to their accessibility, affordability and manageability.

The armed conflict is typically that engine of violence behaviour in societies, and the proliferation of small arms and Light Weapons (SALW) is the main vector in this equation. As it is stated by Collins et al. (2017), ACRL (2010), and Yoroms (2015), the sales and possession of SALW in Nigeria are those quantities and levels at which state security apparatuses are not able to implement any meaningful control over them. This can be summed as an obstacle to sustainable development, where the peace is being lost, security is being compromised and social welfare. Effects of the accessibility to arms in high amount are endless but constantly correspond to several Sustainable Development Goals. The availability of guns makes it too easy to bring local and rural violence to another level resulting into casualties, severe injuries and displacement of the larger population. This will create a climate of widespread fear and insecurity, which will stall development of communities and makes government interventions to bring sanity even harder. The subsequent dilution of the rule of law increases crime rates, undermines the belief of citizens in their institutions as well as strengthens the presence of illicit networks. In doing so, Nigeria is forced to divert a lot of financial and human resources to areas that are not needed; such as defence spending and security operation thus crushing the ability of the economy to grow.

Schools, hospitals, key roads and other key infrastructure are directly affected by armed hostilities, and this, in most cases, frustrates development gains by several decades because such facilities are directly hit by wars which in most cases, are fuelled by large quantity of SALW. Conflict affected region includes businesses closing down, investment flows reducing

and drying up of trade. The people are displaced, their economic systems ruined, and agricultural potential lost to poverty and food insecurity are increased. Violence, instability, and underdevelopment therefore become self-induce. Herdsmen and Herdsman clashes, and Nigeria have become a compound and a prolonged trend that has dire consequences on the sustainable development of the continent. Since the 1990s they have been getting even more severe, now being not only more prevalent but significantly violent. In essence, these conflicts revolve around the fight to access and control national resources, primarily land and water and in turn, be able to control these resources by two different livelihood groups, herders and farmers. Herders (pastoralists) aim at grazing livestock and accessing sources of water; they indulge in transhumance to satisfy their pasture hunting tendencies. Instead, farmers grow crops in the farmlands. With such groups moving in, clashing with each other and their interests incompatible the conflict may even degenerate into bloody skirmishes particularly when the cattle decimate the crops or when farmers block native routes of cattle grazing. In this regard, the so-called herdsmen-farmers conflict is a quickly changing path that is very evident in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, but is now manifesting in the South as well. It consists of agriculturalists who are predominantly agrarian and nomadic pastoralists who are largely Fulani interferences, over territory, water and pasture lands. The contributing factors are the desertification moving north that forces herdsmen southward, population increase, increase agricultural acreage, climate and very weak governance. The wars have escalated into the bloodiest ever with both participants being heavily armed that has come at a cost of massive loss of life, displacement of large populations and destruction of livelihoods (Piate, 2025). The issues of disagreements, which used to be regional and have low intensity and are placed in the sphere of resolving through the customary mechanisms, have become long-range and lethal conflicts that are characterized by the use of advanced weaponry.

Banditry and herdsmen farmer conflicts are the twin engines to socioeconomic and security problems in Nigeria. Even though both phenomena are a result of material and territorial contestation, there is a difference in their dynamics and consequences. The conflict between herdsmen and farmers is primarily based on the pressure the migratory populations of herders create on the dwindling resources; in contrast, banditry is the strategic utilization of the frail tip toe of law enforcement systems since it presents an easy route of exploitative and violent exertion. The first is intercommunal war along the lines of resource war, and the latter is criminal-syndicate syndrome. Irrespective of marked ideological disparity, the consequences of the two phenomena end in high levels of insecurity, economic turmoil and social dissociation. The herdsmen farmer conflicts follow a pattern of violence repeatability herder attacks on agricultural compounds are followed by retaliatory attacks on pastoral villages and a cycle of violence maintains the development (Piate, 2014, Sunday and Piate, 2019, Sunday and Piate, 2024). On the other hand, the tool set of bandits goes down to cattle rustling and extortion through to widespread kidnapping with an emphasis on school children, thus producing a wider range of damages.

These forces also produce economic externalities which are also very consequential. Banditry makes rural markets unstable, as it convinces farmers to leave their fields, creates obstructions to movement of traders and makes doing business difficult. Such demands increase the price

of food locally, amplify the widespread food insecurity in the region, and weigh down on the general dynamic of the entire economy as the productive capacity is limited especially in areas that are agriculturally oriented. There is need to incorporate holistic approaches that combine strategies that deal with threats at the same time. The process of herdsmen-farmer reconciliation has to be placed in the framework of resolving the banditry and its economic foundations as well. The multidimensional nature of such an integrated response is critical in reducing the convergence insecurity known to inhibit Nigerian development towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and especially those aimed at eradicating poverty and achieving food security, good health, better institutional governance and peaceful economic growths (Piate, 2025)

Schools are commonly a target and as a result facilities are forcibly closed and access to education is disrupted to children and this hinders development of human capital. Banditry is one of the high-profile threats to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. It does not allow endangered communities and countries to improve their lives and even prosperity through peace, prosperity, and sustainability because it puts them in a vicious circle of insecurity and poverty (Abada et al., 2018); Abdullahi, 2009; Abdulrasheed, 2021; Adegoke, 2019; Ahmed and Ahmed, 2021; Gulbi et al., 2014). The debate on sustainable development should be within the context of a wider discussion on development as a concept which is characterized by long and diverse bodies of literatures that constitute different conceptualizations across periods of time (Thomas, 2010; Piate, 2014). We can think of a linear model of economic development in the sense that an economy is seen to be capable of producing and maintaining an annual growth in its Gross National Product (GNP) at a rate of say 5 % to 7 % per annum (Todaro and Smith, 2004). On the individual level, development refers to enhanced abilities and personal capacity, more freedom, inventiveness, self-discipline and self-guided responsibility, and material well-being. Development at a societal level involves increasing the scope of stability in the management of the interpersonal and interrelationships (Rodny, 1972). Development, in short is the all-round transformation of the total social structure in such a way that the needs and wishes of individuals and groups in that structure are satisfied in a multi-form, and so that the whole structure is reoriented and thrown out of the pattern of unsatisfactoriness into the new pattern-pattern of improved material and spiritual conditions. It is the long-term increase of the society, social system to a more human life (Piate, 2024).

In the discourse of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the definition of development maybe stated out as a long term or gradual decline, or ultimate eradication of poverty and hunger; long-term educational provision to all children; expansion of gender equality; sensible use of resources and environmental conservation; and the establishment of international connections or the principle of global synergies in development. A more sophisticated understanding of these objectives implies that development not only means the ability to attain, but also to maintain a better life to the humanity. That is, development is defined as the psychological and material condition of peoples, their economic, social and institutional organization, and their capacity to continue to reproduce or improve it over time and even environments. A critical analysis of these various interpretations of the term

development reveals that there is a need to understand sustainable development as being the situation where modern needs of the current generation are met without endangering the needs of the future generation. Also, sustainable development cannot be meaningfully separated analytically based on the development since it embodies all the aspects of the broad-based concept. It would therefore suffice to say that sustainable development is a limited form of development and not an independent phenomenon that can be analytically isolated into specific components.

To explain this notion, there are numerous law and policy provisions that are set by the Nigerian government aimed at controlling small arms and light weapons (SALW) which effectiveness has been low and dissatisfactory so far because of poor implementation, unavailability of adequate power and resources and the intricate nature of the problem of controlling proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The primary law that is employed in the process of enforcement is the Firearm Act of 1990 which regulates procurement, manufacturing and sale of firearms and bullets. Experts believe this is not an adequate act in terms of regulations that combat the modern problems of SALW. After acknowledging the inadequacy that still prevails in current laws, the Senate introduced the Firearms Act Cap F28 LFN (amendment) Bill 2022 (SB, 889) on 2 February 2022. The bill aims to strengthen the control of firearms and prevent proliferation of illegal arms with the aim of harmonizing local standards with the international best practice. The end result of its purport will be to limit availability to small arms, especially those with the potential to do large-scale harm and those that are easily hidden. Accordingly, the licensing standards will be tightened: individuals who have reached a specific age limit, and have a criminal record, and are at a high risk of harming themselves or others themselves, - including (among other factors) domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, and history of suicidal behaviour - will be disallowed firearms licence. Several regional instruments on SALW have been ratified by Nigeria, most prominently, the Nairobi protocol and the ECOWAS Convention on SALW, which were signed with respective aims at cooperation and harmonization of the initiatives. Operationally, president has set up presidential committee on small arms and light weapons (PRESCOM) in 2013 to harmonize policies, strategies on disarmament, and stockpile management (Atidoga et al., 2024). At the international level, the United Nations has encouraged the joining of hands and technical assistance in the framework of Action on the Small arms as well as UN Regional Centre of Peace and Disarmament in Africa. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms (2006) gives a legal framework to the member States, including Nigeria who have the legal framework of harmonization and implementation of the control measures. The African Union is also fostering continental goals of silencing the guns on the channel of SALW circulation across Africa. Nigeria is a member of such efforts as an exchange of information, participation in operation against illicit traffic of arms, and capacity-building programmes (such as US Export Control and Border Security Programme).

Over the last several decades, the Nigerian government established a set of policy operations aimed at curbing the actions of bandits and herdsmen farmer conflicts and mitigating their effects. Remarkably, President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019 introduced the Rural Grazing

Area (RUGA) plan, which proposed government settlements to house Fulani herdsmen—such that a potential conflict arises between the Fulani herdsmen and the landowner. The plan was met with strong resistance not only because it was deemed to favor the interests of the Fulani but also because it would add fuel to the already simmering land tenure disputes. Then, the 2021 Asaba Declaration, which 17 Governors of the South of the country worked out, put more factors into the policy field. In the declaration, structural factors of the crises were identified, and among other measures to be taken, the development of ranches and institutionalization of grazing zones together with the adoption of the National Livestock Transformation Plan was encouraged. Although this Plan was designed to modernize the production of the livestock, it also welcomed community-based programs to reduce tensions between the herders and farmers. As it is up to now, however, most of these steps are still reactive rather than proactive in nature and allow the perpetrators room to multiply.

Although Nigeria has employed various mechanisms intended to help it address its unrelenting security problems, the effectiveness of the programs is also structurally undermined by the concurrent presence of a combination of interlinked structural issues, some of which can be identified as a weak governance, strong corruption, socio-economic marginalisation as well as the nature of many conflicts itself, which is intrinsically different. It is against this wider background that this study addresses the interrelationship between arms proliferation, Herdsmen-farmer conflicts, banditry and by proxy reflects on how all these processes collectively block the growth toward a sustainable development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Explication of the Discourse

The study utilizes the state failure theory to explain the main argument of his work. Through this body literature, scholars attempt to rationally determine why states lose the capacity to undertake their fundamental mandate and the necessity of maintaining order in their territory. This hence results in insecurities that mostly result in majority insecurity, economic disasters and humanitarian catastrophes. Several theorists have come up with landmark works towards the theory of state failure, and have given their perspective and definition of the theory. Key commentators are: (a) There is Robert Rotberg who defines state failure as the failure by states to deliver positive political goods most important of which is security to their citizens; (b) The definition by NulliamZartman posits that a state is in fact collapsed where states have stopped delivering basic functions, and the state has lost legitimate authority; (c) Charles Call separates the concept of state failure into security legs-legitimacy or capacity voids which emphasize on the inability of the state to address their deficiency. The concept of quasi-states proposed by Robert Jackson is also applicable, as some African states, such as an example of that, do not have positive sovereignty, or, in other words, they lack control over their territory and monopoly over the use of violence, but nonetheless stick around due to international approval and financial support. Such a similar argument is provided by Stephen Krasner, who underlines that the state is not able to control its territory and enforce its monopoly of the violence. Despite these different articulations, there are a number of shared assumptions made upon which state failure is written. The first one is that it is universally agreed that the essence of statehood and hence the authenticity of the state is pandemic on its capacity to

deliver various essential services to the people such as security, rule of law, infrastructure, education and health. When these functions are not carried out it is thus a characteristic of state failure. Second, the state efficacy boils down to monopoly on violence. The loss of this monopoly will signify a big step towards the collapse of the state.

State failure literature presents functional polity as a polity that needs legitimate and effective monopoly of force over the territory. The development of the non-state armed actors such as warlords, militia, and bandits signifies the break of this monopoly. Besides, there is an assumption of a territory: the state has to be in control of the entire complex of territory. Huge loss of territory against the insurgents or any other non-state actor is an impressive symptom of defeat. More significant still is legitimacy; although some observers insist on primacy of material capability, quite a number implicitly or explicitly assume that sustainable governance is as well dependent on the perception of legitimacy by the citizens. Legitimacy loss often has the effect of increasing disobedience, rebellion and social order breakdown. Despite the fact that external push factors may be the contributing factor to such effects, most conventional methods tend to focus internal weaknesses such as corruption, factions of elites, ethnic grievance, bad governance and mismanagement of economy as the key causers of state failure. The theoretical lens comes to specifically discuss the wicked problems through the lens of the issues of security and development in Nigeria. The lack of control over the territory, the inability to maintain a monopoly of violence and security, and the failure to provide basic services also create conditions favoring the spread of arms, the aggravation of local conflicts including herdsman-farmer wars, and the blistering emergence of banditry, all the processes that hinder long-term development of the country.

Arms proliferation, Herdsmen-Farmer Clashes, Banditry and Sustainable Development: The nexus

Arms proliferation acts as an accelerator to convert the local engagement to full-blown crisis and it empowers criminal actors. The phenomenon has been particularly evident in the farmer-herder conflicts and banditry in Nigeria, and in both cases, it directly causes loss of life, destruction of livelihoods, and massive infrastructures. This has created a reverse confidence loop of all the concepts of sustainable development. These relations between the spread of weapons, bloody conflicts between herdsmen and farmers, banditism, and sustainable development are intricate and devastating cycles: each of these phenomena exacerbates the others and the combination makes the country off-track in the path toward a positive development. The spread of the small arms and light weapons (SALW) has far reached consequences on human security in Nigeria. Insecurities created by SALW have affected the economic lives of the people including activities such as trade and agricultural production that is threatening economic security and livelihoods of the people. Also, the availability of SALW has exacerbated the situation with land, water and natural resources, creating a circle of retaliatory violence that undermines community security and capacity to access vital resources to survive.

SALW fuel the increase and multiplication of lethality and character of war. Localised conflicts would otherwise spill over into massive deaths because advanced weapons are easily

accessible. Data on arms proliferation empowers criminal networks, insurgents, bandits and herders who can challenge state authority as well as promote their influence through violence. Therefore, the vulnerability to proliferation of SALW presents disproportionate risks to some population groups including women, children, and marginalised communities and hinders their human security in terms of gender-based violence, human trafficking, and displacement.

Table 1: Arms Seizure in Nigeria Since 1999

Date	Location	Item Found	Details (Paraphrased)	Notes
Aug. 1999	Lagos	Ammunition & rifles	75,000 bullets and sacks filled with rifles were uncovered	Confiscated by security personnel
1998–2000	–	Missing weapons	Police recorded 196 guns as missing; military also reported some weapons as lost or stolen	–
Dec. 2001	Ikeja	Gun accessories	Authorities found 10,000 empty gun magazines	–
2001–2004	Plateau State	Mixed weapons	Around 1,931 assorted firearms collected from various places	Seized
Feb/March 2002	Tabido/Budo, Kwara	Gun magazines	Over 20,000 empty gun magazines discovered	Additional finds at same border area
2002	Abeokuta	Ammunition	26,500 bullets stuffed in 106 sealed boxes	Concealed and intercepted
2003–2004	Niger Delta	Arms procurement	Dokubo-Asari admitted to buying arms worth millions of naira	Linked to political operations
2005	Niger Delta	Light weapons	Various small firearms were seized	–
April 2005	Port Harcourt	Firearms & ammo	Nearly 2,800 small weapons and over 5,300 bullets confiscated	Seized in operation
April 2007	Katsina (Daura area)	Traditional weapons	Weapons like bows and arrows were gathered	Specific numbers not shared
–	Ayedun-Ekiti, Ikole LGA	Firearms	Guns retrieved from this location	–
–	Esa-Odo, Ekiti	Armed group & weapons	Group of thugs found with weapons	–
2006	Sokoto	Illegal possession	AK-47 rifle found with serial number 1970-66011-1175	Suspected criminal use
2008	Apapa Wharf	Smuggled arms	Illegal shipment of weapons from Iran uncovered	Quantity not revealed
2008	Lake Chad border	Hidden firearms	10 AK-47s found inside bags of maize, headed for smuggling route	Targeted for smuggling to Chad/Cameroon
March 2010	Shaki border	Ammunition in truck	Truck with plate XD 749 AAA was moving bullets hidden in drums under charcoal	Smart concealment strategy
–	VGC, Lagos	Large weapons stock	Pistol, bullets, empty magazines, military-grade explosives, wires, and gun kits discovered in a home	IED-making tools included
June 2010	Shandam, Plateau	Firearms & accessories	FNC rifle, AK-47, bullets, mobile phones, knives, charms were found	Two separate weapon cases in one location
July 2010	Aba, Abia State	Ammunition	Over 1,200 rounds of live ammo recovered	–
Nov. 2010	Ibadan–Ife road	Military-grade weapons	47 rifles, 2,500+ bullets, explosives, machine guns and other military equipment	High-level illegal weapons movement
Nov. 2008	Kaduna	Arms sold by soldiers	7,000 guns reportedly sold by army personnel to Niger Delta militants	Military involvement confirmed
Nov. 2010	Lagos Port	Contraband military gear	Bulletproof vests, guns, uniforms, and 8 military trucks imported illegally	Major smuggling case
May 2011	Lokpanta, Abia	Weapons for disposal	Over 3,900 guns including RPGs, pistols, and cannons, were prepared for destruction	Old and illegal arms decommissioned
July 2011	Abuja	Explosives	More than 700 explosive items were found	High risk of public harm
2011	Kano/Jigawa	Military uniforms	A large batch of army and air force clothing intercepted	No numbers mentioned
Jan. 8, 2012	Niger–Nigeria border	Military clothing	Another shipment of army camouflage intercepted	Possibly tied to smuggling ring
Jan. 2012	Ahimota, Ghana	Guns & ammo	Shipment heading to Nigeria with pump-action guns, double barrels, and ammo	Quantity not declared
Jan. 2012	Nigeria (Gary Hyde)	Massive arms shipment	British man accused of importing 80,000 guns and 32 million bullets into Nigeria between 2006–2007	Includes 40,000 AK-47s and 10,000 pistols
Jan. 15, 2012	Kaduna (Babawo's House)	Weapons, explosives, military gear	Variety of bullets, machetes, explosives in soda bottles, camouflage belts, dog tags (Nigerian & US Army)	Suspected link to Boko Haram activities

Farmer-herders conflict is a rising pattern of skirmishes in between the nomadic pastoralists and the agriculturalists. The conflict is usually placed in resource poor areas and it is a conflict basically over the shared land and water resources which is strained by an array of socio-economic, environmental and political pressures. There are several causal explanations, which have been postulated in literature. The one that stands out the most is the idea that the most immediate cause of occurrence of the clashes is the weakening of the generally recognized authority; herders, it is argued do not respect local compacts (Albert et al., 2025). Opponents of this same position state that without the approval of the owner of the farm, herders simply move into the farm capitalizing on the beliefs held that land is a shared resource under the customary land tenure systems. Other behavioural causes have also been cited like the herder's tendency to burn those lands developed in cultivation, graze on crops they have harvested, take farm products and destroy the top soil. The other key explanation variable is climatic variability, which is a long-term change in the weather condition like the temperature, precipitation and windiness in the region. As the change of climates, the phenomenon can be discussed as a global concern since it is caused by mankind and is connected to the processes of desertification or progressive degradation of the ecosystem in which the biological potential of the developed world and the environment is decreased or destroyed under the conditions of population growth and developmental pressure.

The focus of the current analysis is ecological degradation in which land capable of productive use is transformed into less productive land, at least in some cases to desert-like. Land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas is occasioned by the existence of climatic variations, as well as by human activity. According to Halidu and Abdullahi (2021), this course can be referred to as an irreversible change of Soil and vegetation of arid land towards Iridizations that lead to turning land into a desert. These changes come hand in hand with the movement of herders and their cattle to the South as the herders emigrate out of the North which has resulted into endless war between the herders and the farmers in most of the communities which are found in the South-West and South-East. The livestock in such rural areas is the most valuable asset making it one of the common targets of livestock theft (Albert et al., 2025). Rustling incidences that form both a cause and effect of herders-farmers confrontation have acted as catalysts to arm up herders to guard their cattle. In their turn, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) among the nomadic herdsman and people of agricultural communities, has exacerbated inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts that have long been rooted in the middle part of Nigeria, therefore leading to a severe jeopardization of human security. The uninformed bombardments are more deadly now as both sides now control sophisticated weapons hence undercutting the personal security and right to life of the civilians who become victims of the tug of war. In this respect, explosion of SALW has interfered with provision of vital facilities and businesses.

The farmer herder conflict has an effect in two folds, on the sustainable development. On the one hand, the conflict has brought about instability which has led to food crises to societies that rely on subsistence farming and is also one of the biggest threats to food production in the country. Dislocation, which is displacement, of farmers to their land makes the farmland to lay bare, thus leaving it prone to unrestricted grazing by Fulani herdsman. The result is a decrease

in productivity levels, poverty, social tension, destruction of social morale and population displacement that are also synonymous with crime rates. Second, the resulting conflicts immediately interfere with economic activity in affected areas, causing loss of property, failure of markets and investment. This kind of disturbance makes the local economies crippled and further increases the national economic instability. Availability of arms, too, is so widespread, as it adds more fuel to the flame and it is hard to resolve conflict. Moreover, communities have formed self-defense groups and ethnic militia in the name of protection, because communities allege that the government is inactive. Such groups, however, can increase the levels of violence, extra-judicial processes and further complicated security environment.

Table 2: Herdsmen-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria between January 2016 and June 2018

Date	Where	What Caused It	What Happened
Jan 6, 2016	Udeni Ruwa, Nasarawa State	Farmland damaged	38 people were killed, many others hurt
Jan 17, 2016	Gareji village, Taraba State	Not mentioned	3 people were killed
Jan 23, 2016	Several villages, Adamawa State	Not mentioned	60 people lost their lives, including a senior police officer
Feb 2, 2016	Agatu, Benue State	Revenge attack	7 people died, locals were left grieving
Feb 7, 2016	Tombu, Buruku, Benue State	Fight between groups	10 people killed, community was overrun
Feb 11, 2016	Abbi, Enugu State	Not mentioned	2 people died, others couldn't be found
Feb 23, 2016	A village in Agatu, Benue State	Not mentioned	50 people were killed
Feb 24, 2016	Agatu, Benue State	Retaliation for 2013 killing	Over 500 killed or injured, many forced to leave their homes
Mar 2, 2016	Ossissa, Delta State	Not mentioned	5 people killed, some injured, homes destroyed
Mar 7–17, 2016	Mbaya-Tombo, Benue State	Dispute over destroyed crops	Over 35 people lost their lives, properties destroyed

Source: Piate (2025)

The “banditry” phenomenon can be described as a subset of a much wider theme of sustainable development that exists as an expression of organised violent crime by groups of organised criminals known as bandits whose activities are those of outlawed entities that exist beyond the legal system and resorted to the use of force, advanced weapon, and intimidation as their tools of fulfilment of their objectives. Among the most striking ones are kidnapping to ransom where people or groups are taken and money paid to release them, armed robbery, where people are targeted and robbed of what they have, livestock rustling which often entails high numbers of animals stolen, a business activity that is very economical in most of the areas involved, and assault of travellers in highways and intrusions into communities. Bandits

usually dwell in ungoverned areas like forests, mountainous areas or villages that are abandoned with little or no government presence in such areas. The proliferation of the small arms and light weapons (SALW) has increased the banditry-related and kidnapping attacks particularly in the North-Western states of Nigeria hence creating a high risk of human insecurity. Through the use of these weapons the bandits raid, steal cattle, loot houses and kidnap the inhabitants in ransom. As a result, this results in many casualties, mass displacement of the communities, setting up of a climate of fear, and insecurity that damages local livelihoods. In addition, economic impact is very significant; the process of farming is paralyzed, food insufficiency deepens, and poverty increases. Massive displacement exerts extra pressure on local resources and infrastructure making the provision of basic life requirements like food, water, and medical services difficult to come by. The destruction of crops and livestock has led to food shortages, which have driven up prices and made it difficult for people to afford basic necessities, exacerbating poverty and food insecurity (Tukur, 2013).

Table 3: Recent Incidences of Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest Region

S/N	Date	Location	What Happened	Casualties / Impact
1	Mar 31, 2018	BawanDaji, Anka LGA, Zamfara	Armed men attacked the village	Over 30 people killed
2	Mar 1, 2019	Kawaye, Anka LGA, Zamfara	Village was raided by gunmen	16 killed, 40 abducted
3	Jun 9, 2019	Klahu, Tsage, Geeri (Rabah LGA), Sokoto	Coordinated attacks on multiple communities	25 people killed
4	Jul 4, 2019	Kankara & Danmusa LGAs, Katsina	Attacks by gunmen on two local governments	11 people killed
5	Aug 19, 2019	Tsayu, Jibiya LGA, Katsina	Village attacked by armed men	4 villagers killed
6	Jan 17, 2020	Babban Rafi (Gummi) & Makosa (Zurmi), Zamfara	Coordinated attacks on villages	31 people killed
7	Mar 2, 2020	Igabi & Giwa LGAs, Kaduna	Several villages raided	50 killed, several injured
8	Apr 20, 2020	Multiple villages, Katsina	Series of attacks in various areas	47 people killed
9	Apr 24, 2020	Akwunakwo, Kabirasha, Damba (Chikun), Kaduna	Bandits stormed villages	7 killed, 1 person kidnapped
10	May 6, 2020	Faskari & Sabuwa LGAs, Katsina	Armed group attacked residents and police	5 killed, 1 kidnapped, DPO shot
11	May 20, 2020	Three villages, Tsafe LGA, Zamfara	Night raid on communities	12 killed, livestock stolen
12	Jun 5, 2020	Maru & Talata-Mafara LGAs, Zamfara	Gunmen struck communities	21 people killed
13	Jun 25, 2020	Sunko, Gavya, Marafa (Shiroro), Niger	Gunmen raided villages	4 people killed
14	Jul 21, 2020	Magani & Tungan-Bajo, Rafi LGA, Niger	Mass abduction incident	16 people kidnapped
15	Jul 26, 2020	Jema'a & Kaura LGAs, Kaduna	Armed men stormed rural communities	10 people killed
16	Aug 9, 2020	Zamfarawa, Batsari LGA, Katsina	Community clash between residents and attackers	2 villagers and 8 bandits killed
17	Sep 4, 2020	Dukku & Kagara, Niger	Armed attack targeting vigilantes	22 people killed (19 vigilantes)
18	Sep 13, 2020	Udawa, Kaduna	Family abducted from farming community	16 family members kidnapped
19	Sep 18, 2020	Tangaza, Sokoto	Police station stormed by gunmen	DPO, 1 inspector killed, 2 women abducted
20	Oct 12, 2020	Faskari (Katsina) & Rafi (Niger)	Dual attacks in two states	14 killed, 3 injured, 1 kidnapped
–	Oct 12, 2020	Southern Kaduna	Community leader and son murdered	2 people killed
21	Nov 17, 2020	Kaduna-Abuja Road	Kidnap of university students	8 ABU students kidnapped
–	Nov 17, 2020	Gidan Zaki, Zangon Kataf, Kaduna	District head and son assassinated	2 people killed
22	Nov 20, 2020	Mariya, Niger	Village attack	14 kidnapped, 1 policeman killed
23	Nov 23, 2020	Kanoma, Maru LGA, Zamfara	Gunmen stormed mosque during worship	Imam and 17 worshippers kidnapped
24	Dec 1, 2020	Sabuwa LGA, Katsina	Farmers attacked while working	7 killed, 30 abducted
25	Dec 5, 2020	Kasuwan Magani, Kajuru LGA, Kaduna	Attack on community	1 person killed
26	Dec 10, 2020	Pmahbe Layout, Ushafa, Abuja	Residents kidnapped in a night operation	3 people abducted
27	Dec 12, 2020	Tse-Angbande, Makurdi LGA, Benue	Village raided overnight	4 killed, 7 injured
28	Dec 12, 2020	Kankara, Katsina	Schoolboys abducted from boarding school	About 333 students missing
29	Dec 13, 2020	Chukuba, Shiroro LGA, Niger	Village attacked by gunmen	1 person killed, 20 kidnapped

Source: Olapeju and Peter (2022)

Conclusion

This discussion critically analyzes nexus between arms proliferation, herdsmen farmer conflicts and bandits in Nigeria making the case that such phenomena as interconnected present real challenge to sustainable development due to the mutual reinforcement of these phenomena creating vicious cycle that limits developments in most sectors. The results suggest that although there are various mechanisms established by the government to contain these issues on security, their performance is significantly undermined by the existent systemic issues such as poor governance, corruption, socio-economic grievances and complexity of the conflicts in the general context of the Nigerian socio-economic and political environment. Holistic intervention approach is therefore needed, which should encompass strict security policies and well-developed socio-economic environment along with adequate governance and community-centred approaches to peace building in order to ensure the end of the cycle of violence and establishment of a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria.

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