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Niger's beef with rustling, herder attacks

By Ahmed Tahir Ajobe, Minna | Publish Date: Feb 4 2017 2:00AM

Criminal activities in neighbouring Zamafara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna states have exacerbated the situation with the border points as escape routes and the forests linking them as hideouts. The recent attacks by herders have also compounded the already delicate security situation in the state.

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Kidnapping, cattle rustling and other crimes have combined to put Niger State on the spotlight.

Criminal activities in neighbouring Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna states have exacerbated the situation with the border points as escape routes and the forests linking them as hideouts. The recent attacks by herders have also compounded the already delicate security situation in the state.

Tears over the demise of Mommoh Musa Shaba, an Assistant Superintendent with the Niger State Command of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) may have dried up. But his unceremonious exit from the world on Friday, January 13 has left a permanent vacuum in the minds of his two children and young wife even as they will endure the pains for life.

Shaba, 33, was one of the sacrificial lambs in a reprisal by herdsmen who stormed Sabon Daga area at 3.am that Friday. He, along with other officers and men of the corps as well as those of the police, were sent in to protect lives following a clash between some villagers and herders five days earlier, which led to the death of four persons. So also was the late Inspector Joshua Sarumi of the state police command, who later died of bullet wounds from the attack.

The duo along with three others confirmed by the authorities to have lost their lives, have since been buried in their respective villages, while others who sustained injuries will live to tell the story of the ugly incident.

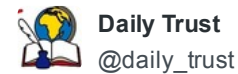
The clash expectedly left a sour taste across the state, not only because of the casualties but the level of destruction, especially of farm produce at a time when prices of foodstuff are skyrocketing. Stores of yams, millet, sorghum, maize and others were set ablaze

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in the attack which also rendered about 6, 000 people homeless. Emergency agency officials had to provide temporary camps for the displaced that have no nearby relatives to approach for shelter.

Worried by the development, Governor Abubakar Sani Bello called elders and stakeholders among the feuding parties to a roundtable and made them sign a peace accord.


“They were made to sign an undertaking that such incidents would not happen again with both parties agreeing to live together”, a source close to the meeting told our correspondent yesterday.

Following the development, the displaced persons who were camped in a private farm belonging to a former Head of State, retired General Abdulsalami Abubakar, were convinced to return home.

“The temporary camps were disbanded after the leaders of both parties asked their members to return home Monday evening,” NSEMA Director General, Ahmed Ibrahim Inga said.

He said the state government had been able to provide temporary intervention to mitigate the effect of the attack on the displaced persons, while also taking stock of the property lost in the clash for compensation.

However, unlike the herders and villagers who have cohabited at a specific location for a long period, the spontaneous attacks by cattle rustlers who are mostly migrants, can hardly be resolved through a peace accord. Security agencies through joint operations were able in the past, to curtail the activities by flushing them out of the state.

However, with the seeming end of cattle rustling, kidnapping has increased overtime in the state. Statistics of kidnap cases rose to over 40 monthly across the state among herders, almost doubling those of cattle rustling, thereby giving the police [TOP](#)  hierarchy in the state sleepless nights.

“It became a very lucrative enterprise among herders across the state,” DSP Bala Elkana, the command’s public relations officer, said. It therefore became imperative for the command to evolve a “local solution” to solve a “local problem” as community policing advocates had argued.

Security agencies, especially the police, had to return to the drawing board, rethink the strategy and deploy an anti-kidnapping unit to curb the rising menace. The command also went ahead to initiate the idea of a volunteer group of Fulani extraction to fight the



new wave of crime. The gesture led to the emergence of the Abubakar Shakallo group as a counter-force to assist the police in the fight against kidnapping.

“When cattle rustling became unattractive because of the risks involved, the perpetrators, who are mostly of Fulani extraction, resorted to kidnapping”, Shakallo noted.

The group is expected to serve as a “neighbourhood watch” to assist the police with information on the activities of criminal elements within their places of abode. The members are also expected to be on the lookout for foreign herders who often migrate with stolen cattle from neighboring states, kidnappers, cattle rustlers and armed bandits.

A non-violent approach aimed at persuading kidnappers to renounce their activities was also evolved. The initiative yielded some results with so many of them laying down their arms and even joining the volunteer group. The effort led to significant reduction in the activities, especially among herders.

However, as the state celebrated its success, there was a sudden resurgence of cattle rustling, especially in Rafin and Shiroro local government areas with the attack on the sleepy Gbada community on October 30 last year. The attack which took place at about 3am left five people dead, with many sustaining injuries, while several cows were stolen.

They also attacked Kukoki in Shiroro Local Government Area about two weeks later, killing six people and seizing 700 cows. The attacks triggered a mass exodus of people from neighbouring communities to Pandogari and Kagara towns.

Following the development, the state police command had to deploy 500 men to areas designated as dangerous points to strengthen the joint task force team already on ground in Alawa, Shiroro Local Government Area. The Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Zubairu Muzau, said the bandits were fleeing military offensive in neighboring states and were taking refuge in forests bordering Kaduna and Zamfara states.

He said the police were taking the battle to the rustlers with the deployment of three units which include counter-terrorism, anti-cattle rustling and men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The command also began air surveillance of trouble spots about a week later. However, despite the heavy deployments, the state still experiences pockets of attacks by cattle rustlers and armed bandits.



A 19-year-old senior secondary school student was killed in a night attack by bandits in Angwa Umadi Village in Shiroro on January 7. The deceased was said to have been shot at close range when he went out to ease himself. Fleeing villagers said 15 people were injured in the attack which lasted about an hour, while 212 cattle were rustled.

The war against criminals recorded a boost recently with the groundbreaking ceremony of a mobile police unit in Kontagora by the Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim K. Idris. According to the IGP, the mobile police unit will check threats to national security in form of cattle rustling, kidnapping and armed banditry in the North-central and North-west. Security experts are optimistic that the effort would go a long way in reducing criminal activities in the state.

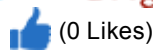


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