

# Bandits kill 4, abduct over 100 farmers in Niger

From Abubakar Akote,  
Minna

**B**andits have killed no fewer than four farmers and abducted over 100 others including women and children from 14 communities in Mashegu and Rafi local government areas of Niger State in the last three weeks.

Daily Trust gathered that more than half of the victims were kidnapped while harvesting maize, beans, guinea corn and soya beans on their farms.

Those killed were a traditional ruler, two vigilantes and one other person during an invasion in Mashegu Local Government.

Sources said the communities attacked in Mashegu included Sabon-Rijiya, Tshon-Rami, Bakwai-Bakwai, Mulo, Kawo-Mulo, Nasarawa-Mulo, Mai-Azara, Foje, Mutun-Daya, Beji, Gidan-Malam, Bokuta, Chetaku and Gbazhi, forcing residents to flee to Ibbi town and other safer places in the local government.

In Rafi and part of Shiroro local governments, 61 farmers were reportedly kidnapped in Gidigori, Pandogari and Durumi communities in the last two weeks.

Residents said while bandits had also imposed N3 million tax on each of the communities as a condition to stop kidnapping them and to allow them to harvest their farm produce, only one of the communities had been able to pay. The bandits are said to be also stealing food they already harvested.

Residents who spoke with Daily Trust said rural communities in Mashegu, Mariga, Kontagora, Rafi and Shiroro were still not as safe as widely publicised in some sections of the media.

One of them, Mohammed Sanusi, told our correspondent that one of the vigilantes he simply identified as Abubakar was shot dead after he was abducted alongside other villagers on Thursday when bandits attacked Mulo and adjoining communities during which the village head of Mulo, Alhaji Usman Garba, was also killed.

"Attacks have been going on for the past three weeks in villages in Mashegu Local Government. Right now, over 50 people are in the hands of bandits. One vigilante was killed in Tshon-Rami on Sunday. He was kidnapped alongside other people in Mulo and other communities on Thursday and he was shot dead. Another vigilante was also killed on his farm in Tshon-Rami recently. They met him harvesting his crops on his farm and they killed him with a cutlass. Right now, we cannot harvest our crops. Maize, guinea corn, beans and soya beans are getting spoiled on our farms," he said.

Another

resident,

Abdulrahman Inuwa, told Daily Trust that residents of Fage and Mulo have all fled their homes.

"They ask villages to pay N3 million tax each; it is Nasarawa Mulo that has been able to pay the tax imposed on communities. One of the three people abducted in Mulo was released and he was asked to go back home and look for money to secure the release of the remaining people. On Sunday, another boy was abducted in Fage village but he was released when he told them that he was from Nasarawa Mulo that had paid their tax. So, they released him, saying that residents of Nasarawa Mulo have settled them."

"Nobody goes to harvest his crops now. Who will go and get kidnapped? You are not with your farm produce and you get kidnapped again. Where do you get money to pay the ransom? What we are left with now is prayers. The situation has not improved in our area. How will it improve when we don't have conventional security in our area? Up till now, four village heads are in their captivity. It is only the police in Mashegu that do go on patrol and they are not more than 10 in number with only one vehicle and the vehicle is not even in a good condition," he added.

Inuwa called for the quick intervention of the state and federal governments to enable them to harvest their crops.

Another villager who craved anonymity said the farmer had abandoned their farms.

"Most of the people, over 50 of them, were kidnapped while

on their farms harvesting. Some people were from Bakwai-Bakwai, Sabon-Rijiya and Mulo villages. Some people they kidnapped were visiting labourers who came from other places to work for us as labourers.

"The village heads were kidnapped alongside their sons. They later released the two village heads and held their sons. The village head of Gwaji later died at home due to trauma and torture he underwent before he was released on Thursday. They also kidnapped the village head of Kizhi."

Daily Trust gathered that bandits have demanded N5 million ransom for each of the abductees.

However, in Rafi and Shiroro local government areas, residents said the attackers had also returned since the beginning of harvesting season, stopping them from harvesting their crops.

A farmer who is currently an internally displaced person in Kagara, the headquarters of Rafi Local Government, Ismaila Aliyu, said "We see them almost every day."

He said "In the last two weeks, 15 people were kidnapped in Gidigori; 6 people were kidnapped in Pandogari last week. About 40 people were kidnapped at Durumi. Also, Kuserki, Madaka, Hannah-Wanka, Kukkokki, Hannah-Wanka, Durumi, Kambari, Kalaibo, Allawa axis and Madaka people have not been able to harvest their crops because Rafi and Shiroro local governments are not safe," he said.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer in Niger State, DSP Wasiu Abiodun, said efforts were ongoing to rescue the abducted people. He said any further development would be made known to the public.

"The police command is making efforts in collaboration with other security agencies to rescue the abducted victims. However, tactical teams have been deployed in the area to forestall reoccurrence," he added.

When also contacted on the telephone, the Niger State Commissioner for Internal Security and Humanitarian Affairs, Emmanuel Umar, said the state government policy did not support payment of ransom or any form of tax and urged citizens to reject such from bandits.

For those that are in captivity, Umar said the state government was on top of the situation and was working closely with security agencies to rescue the victims and ensure that bandits were chased out of the state.

Umar had on Friday told journalists that even though the state had witnessed some level of peace in recent times, there were still threats and pockets of attacks in communities in Mashegu, Mariga and Kontagora local governments.

"As much as we have recorded successes, we are also aware that threats still exist. Recently, we have begun to see attacks on the fringes of Mashegu Mariga and Kontagora local government areas. His Excellency has directed all the security agencies in the state to come out in full

force in a matter of urgency and flush the bandits out," he said.

However, a top military officer told our correspondent in confidence that the activities of informants, both within the communities and security agencies, had become a major challenge in the fight against banditry and insurgency in the state.

"Each time we hear of their movement and we make an effort to launch an assault on them before you know it, they have changed their route. Sometimes, the informants are not from communities; they are within the security formations because if we are making our arrangements, a civilian that is not part of us would not know anything. So, activities of informants most of the time hinder our operations," he said.

The Nigerian Army had also recently unveiled an operation code-named Operation Mugun Bugu (deadly strike) as part of efforts to flush out bandits and insurgents from the state.

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt General Faruk Yahya, had said during the unveiling of the operation at the Nigerian Army Training Centre, Kontagora that the high-breed operational tactics were aimed at dealing with terrorism and other forms of crime in Niger State in particular and other parts of the country.

The COAS who said the security challenges facing the country were not insurmountable assured that the military in collaboration with other security agencies would defeat the adversaries.



■ Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya (m), Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN Gombe State, Reverend Father Joseph Alphonsus Shinga (2nd R), Commissioner of Higher Education, Mr. Dauda Maaji Zambuk (R), Chairman of Youths Wing of CAN, Deacon Haske (2nd L) and other officials during the Christmas homecoming on the governor by the Christian community at the Government House, Gombe yesterday

Photo: Gombe State House