



Banditry survivors recall horrific experiences as troops bombard marauders in Kaduna communities

Survivors of banditry in Chikun, Igabi, Kajuru and Birnin-Gwari local government areas of Kaduna State have relived horror tales of killing, maiming and kidnapping by gunmen, as security forces take the battle to the dreaded bandits, **ABDULGAFAR ALABELEWE** reports.

IN the last five to ten years, many communities in the mostly agrarian Chikun, Igabi, Kajuru and Birnin-Gwari local government areas of Kaduna State have come under series of attacks from bandits. Many have been killed, maimed or kidnapped while thousands of people were displaced after their communities were sacked.

The most worrisome are the Birnin-Gwari villages where bandits are firmly in charge. They take taxes to allow villagers access to their farms, recruit youths into terrorism, forcibly marry villagers' daughters and turn the farmers into slaves.

The dark days however appear to be fading out as the communities, especially those in the suburbs of the state capital, now sleep with their two eyes closed, thanks to the military and police troops making great exploit against the dreaded gunmen.

Some the survivors of who spoke with *The Nation* however called for sustenance of the military operations against the bandits, saying that those who impoverished them and made them suffer, deserve no

mercy.

We paid to bandits taxes we never paid to government - Farmer

A farmer in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area, Malam Musa Lawal, said himself and other farmers in Kungi village have paid to bandits sums of money they had never paid to the government since they were born.

He said: "These people took over our community and started telling us what to and what not to do. They started by kidnapping us, then we paid ransom and got released."

"Virtually every family in my village has had one or two people kidnapped and ransom paid. It got to a point that nobody could go to the farm again because they feared that they would be kidnapped. So, practically, we could not farm again."

"When the bandits now realised that we had nothing left to sell and pay them ransom, they allowed us to start going to the farm on condition that we would be paying them taxes from the profit we made from our farm produce."

"We agreed to that because help was not coming from the government. It is either you pay them money or they collect certain percent of your harvest."

"For example, if you harvest 10 bags of produce, they will collect two bags or even three bags. It is an outrageous form of tax that even government has never taken from us."

"In fact, I have never paid any direct tax to the government except you go to the market and they collect small money at the gate before you bring in your produce."

"In fact, the bandits are not even satisfied with what they are getting from us. They too are now farming because they feel we are getting more of the produce than them."

“My kidnap experience was not just traumatic, it was deadly. So I will even prefer death to a repeat of that horrific experience. I am telling you, if kidnappers come for me again, God forbid, I will tell them I am not going with them. I know the worst they will do is to kill me, but I prefer death to that experience.”

"We would not have had any problem with them using our land to also farm, but the problem is that they are too lazy to cultivate their own farm, so they force us to go and work on their farm without being paid."

"They have exploited us and now want to turn us into slaves on our ancestral land."

"So, we welcome this military operation, and we want it extended to the entire western part of Birnin-Gwari so that we can live a peaceful life once again."

I'll rather die than get kidnapped again - Septuagenarian

One of the survivors of the several kidnap attacks in Chikun Local Government Area, Alhaji Abdul Shafiu, a septuagenarian who was kidnapped in his home in August 2021 alongside his two daughters, told *The Nation* that he would rather be killed than get kidnapped again.

Shafiu said: "My kidnap experience was not just traumatic, it was deadly. So I will even prefer death to a repeat of that horrific experience."

"I am telling you, if kidnappers come for me again, God forbid, I will tell them I am not going with them."

"I know the worst they will do is to kill me, but I prefer death to that experience."

He added: "On that fateful day, I went to the hospital for a check-up as I was just recovering from cold. I am asthmatic, so I don't joke with my health."

"I was given medicines at the hospital and I was just in the sitting room waiting to have my dinner and take my medication before going to bed. It was just around 7 pm. Then my daughter came back

from work, and as she was just driving into the compound, her sister went to open the door for her and these criminals jumped the fence into my compound and followed my daughters into the house."

"I wanted to move and one of them holding a machete threatened to cut me into pieces if moved. I would have dared him, but I just looked back and saw the other ones with guns, like brand new rifles, and I mellowed down."

"So, my two daughters and I were marched out of the house into the bush."

"I saw hell at the hands of those criminals. First, they subjected us to trekking kilometres in the bush barefoot. Luckily, my daughters had their own shoes on."

"Along the line, one of my daughters fell down and they couldn't wait to pick her because they suspected that they were being chased by vigilante men. That was how she escaped."

"But for me and her sister, we spent three weeks in the bandits' den. They moved us from one camp to another inside the forest."

"Eventually, my family sold our hard-earned property to pay ransom, both in cash and materials. They collected money in millions and two motorcycles before we were released."

"The most traumatic moment for me there was when the bandits were negotiating with my family members for ransom."

"The bandits, small boys, none of them by my estimation was up to 30 years of age, but they would put a gun on my shoulder while making phone call to my family and fire the gun. The sound at that close range would make me go deaf for close to one hour or even more."

"In fact, there was a day the gang leader, they called him Boka, asked me to put my leg on a log of wood, that since my family refused to cooperate, he would break my leg with bullet. I put my leg because I could not have objected, then he fired the shot.

"Then, I gradually turned my head, because I didn't feel any pain. Then I discovered that the bullet didn't hit me. I was terrified, but we made out alive.

"Now, I am happy because the security operatives have been arresting the bandits responsible for that operation, one after the other. Recently, I heard that the gang leader, Boka himself has been arrested.

"Maybe now I can be thinking of going back to my house, because I have abandoned the house I built with my hard-earned gratuity for more than a year now. I will consider going back to my house because I know it is that Boka that is responsible for most attacks in the part of Chikun Local Government where I live.

"In fact, while I was in his captivity, he told me of the several attacks that I am also aware of, that he led operations."

Bandits killed my security guard right in my front, but I escaped narrowly
-Displaced landlord

A senior banker and landlord in New Millennium City, Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, said he saw death face to face, but he escaped miraculously as bandits shot his security guard right in his presence.

According to the banker, he went out with his security man popularly called *Mai Guard* that evening to assist a neighbour who had put a distress call to him, but the bandits, who had laid an ambush on the way, shot his guard in the head at close range.

He said: "Before that night in June 2020, we had never experienced bandits attack in our community. All we knew were petty thieves who came in the afternoon when everyone must have gone to work, to steal valuable items.

"So, that night, a neighbour who had told me on two occasions that some people usually came to knock on his window around 10 pm, put a call across to me that he just received a call from another neighbour of ours that some people were trying to break into his house.

"I quickly told my *Mai Guard* who had a local gun about the development and we moved. We first went to the house of the neighbour that called me and we all moved to house being attacked together.

"On our way, the *Mai Guard*, who was also holding a torch, was just flashing it round, then he beamed the light on one of the bandits who had laid ambush. Immediately, the bandits fired him in the head while the remaining two of us scampered to safety.

"We didn't realise the enormity of the problem on our hands until my *Mai Guard* was shot. Then, the person who called me immediately called the soldiers of the task force in our area. Luckily for us, the soldiers came in less than 10 minutes.

"But before they came, the bandits had succeeded in breaking into the first house and taken one of our neighbours and his 12-year-old daughter. But they didn't retreat immediately, because they obviously came with plan to break into houses and kidnap many people.

"So they were busy breaking the wall of another house when the soldiers arrived, but that didn't deter them. They continued while a part of the group engaged the soldiers in a shootout. Eventually, they had to run away due to the superior fire power of the soldiers.

"Since then, it has been over two years now but I cannot go back to my house. I am now back to paying rent again. I know the situation is now calm, but it has not been easy for me, because it was like I saw the death that killed my *Mai Guard* but I just escaped by miracle.



“In fact, there was a day the gang leader, they called him Boka, asked me to put my leg on a log of wood, that since my family refused to cooperate, he would break my leg with bullet. I put my leg because I could not have objected, then he fired the

“We are happy that the security agencies are now giving the bandits bleeding nose and we pray that the criminals are completely wiped out very soon.”

The military have in the past few weeks taken the battle to the doorstep of the bandits in their forest hideouts, neutralising the marauders, destroying their camps and rescuing hostages.

The most recent of the successful military outings was the rescue of 10 chained hostages after a fierce gun battle between the troops and the bandits, where many of the terrorists were taken out, and the killing of some of the bandits who attacked the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and kidnapped 37 students of College of Forestry Mechanization in Afaka, Igabi Local Government Area.

The mastermind of the NDA attack and notorious bandit identified as Boderi Isiya, was reported by the military to have escaped been killed in the gun duel by a whisker.

The consistent military operation where victims are now being rescued without ransom payment has no doubt reduced tension in the state, just as it has denied the gunmen the freedom to regroup to plan kidnap attacks.

On Thursday September 1, the Kaduna State Commissioner of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, reported the killing of two bandits by the Troops of Operation Forest Sanity in Birnin-Gwari Local Government Area, saying that the troops overpowered the bandits during a shootout. According to Aruwan, “Troops of Operation Forest Sanity made further gains as they continued fighting patrols and clearance operations in the Birnin Gwari area.

“In an operational feedback to the Kaduna State Government, it was reported that the troops embarked on the clearance patrol along the Birnin Gwari-Doka-Sabon Layi-Kuriga-Maganda-Farin Ruwa Road.

“The troops made contact with the bandits at Farin Ruwa. Two bandits were neutralised in the encounter as the criminal elements were forced to withdraw under the troops’ superior firepower.”

Similarly, on Wednesday, September 7, the Security Commissioner reported that troops of the Nigerian Army repelled bandits around Fondisho general area, along the Kaduna-Zaria Road in Igabi Local Government area, saying that the troops, in quick response to credible intelligence, set up an ambush position at the

location.

“On entering the area, the bandits sprang the ambush and came under intense fire as they were stoutly repelled by the troops. Two of the criminals were thus neutralised.

On Saturday, September 10, the military operation recorded additional milestone as troops killed many terrorists, including a lieutenant of the notorious bandit, Boderi Isiya, who masterminded the attack on NDA, Kaduna.

Aruwan had said in a statement that security agencies’ feedback to state government that “Notorious bandit, Boderi Isiya has narrowly escaped being neutralised while his deadly second in command and several other fighters were gunned down by Nigerian Army troops.

“A painstaking check with credible human intelligence sources further confirmed that Boderi and his terror group had a bad day at the hands of the combat-ready troops.

“The troops engaged the bandits around the Tollgate General Area of Chikun LGA. The bandits scrambled in retreat, only to run into another ambush laid by the troops in Sabon Gida general area.

“The troops engaged the bandits ferociously and ultimately subdued them. Corpses and weapons were recovered at the scene while some of the terrorists eventually died from bullet wounds.

“Boderi’s deadly second in command, one Musti, was among those identified to have been eliminated alongside one Yellow Mai-Madrid and one Dan-Katsinawa, with others yet to be identified. Some of the terrorists are battling with life-threatening wounds.

“Musti and Boderi were responsible for the security breach at the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, and the kidnapping of students of the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, the Emir of Bungudu and several other citizens last year,” he said.

On Monday, September 12, troops of the Nigerian Army also rescued six kidnapped victims during clearance patrols conducted around the Kangan Kadi area in Chikun Local Government Area of the state.

According to operational feedback to the state government by the Army, the troops, under the Operation Forest Sanity, embarked on a clearance operation from Damba to Kangan Kadi, and fired on identified bandit locations around the Kangan Kadi Forest, Labi and the Udawa

River.

The Security Commissioner said, “Bandits fled from the Kangan Kadi area under the superior firepower of the troops, leaving behind six kidnapped victims at their camp. The victims were rescued by the troops, and are identified as follows: Iliya Gide, Rabi Ali, Hussaina Gide, Naomi Nuhu and her baby, Pamela Barage.

Also on Tuesday, September 13, troops of Operation Forest Sanity neutralized several bandits and dislodged camps during clearance operations conducted across some hard-to-reach locations spanning Chikun and Igabi LGAs and rescued 10 victims chained together.

Aruwan, in a release to journalists, said: “As disclosed in an operational feedback, the troops neutralised an unspecified number of bandits while clearing out insurgent and bandit camps at Apewohe in Chikun LGA.

“The operation extended to Dakwala and Kunai hills in the same LGA, where more hideouts were cleared, though no contact was made with bandits.

“Another camp was similarly dislodged at a location known as ‘Daban Lawal Kwalba’ in Igabi LGA, after the troops overpowered heavily armed bandits guarding hostages. The troops, after clearing out the bandits, stormed the hideouts and rescued 10 kidnapped persons who were chained and bound with ropes.

“The troops untied the hostages, who were identified as follows: Surajo Aliyu, Ayuba Yakuba, Ibrahim Abdulrasheed, Aliyu Mohammed, Magaji Tasiu, Nasiru Ahmed, Muhammadu Ibrahim, Ayuba Abdulsalam, Kelvin Musa and Paul Patrick.

“The troops who came under further attack in the thick forest, successfully evacuated the hostages to a military facility.

“Furthermore, a camp was cleared at Rafin Gwaska, Igabi LGA, where the following items were recovered, among other effects: Three locally made rifles, One AK-47 magazine, One AK-47 top cover, Four Bafeng radio chargers, Eleven mobile phones, Three music boxes, Two sets of military uniforms, One frag jacket, Spanners, knives and chains.” Some community leaders have however attributed the recent successes to the gallantry moves of the new General Officer Commanding (GOC), 1 Division Nigerian Army, Major General Taoreed Lagbaja who has been severally applauded for gallantly leading his troops to battle field.