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### When Armed Robbers Raid Villages

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*Many rural communities across the nation are increasingly under attack. They must be helped*

Village dwellers in Zamfara State now live in fear following incessant attacks by armed robbers. Governor Abdulaziz Yari who has had to battle with this criminality against vulnerable communities recently put the number of fatalities within a period of three months at 160. Yet the situation is not helped by the activities of vigilante groups that have sprung up to fight these robbers who often operate on motorbikes in huge number. That is because the robbers almost always come back to further terrorise the hapless (and obviously helpless) residents of these communities whenever they lose any member in the course of their nefarious operations.

However, this sort of criminality is not restricted to Zamfara State. About three weeks ago, a herd of 150 cows were reportedly stolen in Canaan Mega Farms in Bara Village, Jema'a local government area of Kaduna State. Before then, a gang of gunmen had invaded Gwagwada village in Chikun local government area of the state, killing one person and leaving two others seriously injured. The gunmen reportedly entered the village at about 2 a.m. and started shooting sporadically into the air while some others went from house to house, collecting money and other valuables.

What has become rather worrisome is that the activities of these hoodlums who target village people are not restricted to any particular section of Nigeria. Indeed, across the country today, there are chilling reports of armed robbers invading vulnerable villages and communities that are far removed from the city centres, robbing local bank branches and often sacking the poorly equipped police posts located in some of the areas. These men of the underworld go to these rural communities fully aware of the fact that there would be little or no resistance. Moreover, they normally invade the villages in the dead of the night when there would be little or no presence of any security challenge to their operations.

The activities of these criminals have led to a situation where commercial banks have threatened a shut-down of their operations outside the Kwara State capital, according to the Ilorin office of the Central Bank of Nigeria, (CBN). This followed incidents of bank robberies during which several people have been killed. A few weeks ago, about 20 armed robbers attacked some banks in Omu Aran, Irepodun local government area of the state, killing two bank officials and a vigilante while police vehicles were damaged. A few days later, shortly before Christmas, these criminal elements moved their operations to Ofia, killing no fewer than seven people before carting away millions of naira.

From North to South to the East, men of the underworld seem to have devised a strategy to go after what could be considered easy targets. Last April, at least two persons, including a 70-year man, were killed when a gang of armed robbers invaded Awa, a sleepy community in Oguta local government area of Imo State. About three villagers were stabbed by the robbers who also raped a number of women in addition to making away with cash and property worth

millions of naira. According to an eye witness, “the robbers commenced their nasty operation at about midnight and continued until about 3 a.m. Some families in Umunkoli, Umuorie, Ndionyeagorom, Ndivuelekwa and Umuokparaku were ravaged”.

Now that the criminals are changing their operational method, it is incumbent on the security agencies to also adopt new strategies that will checkmate the antics of these men of the underworld who have now turned rural dwellers to easy preys. It is also important that the authorities in the states and local governments are equally involved in providing paid local neighbourhood watch, especially in vulnerable communities. But more importantly, the police should be alive to their responsibility – to both city dwellers and to those who live in rural communities.

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