

Katsina Residents Groaning in the Jaw of Bandits

In this piece, **Francis Sardauna** examines the new wave of banditry and other criminal activities sweeping through farming communities and villages of Katsina State

The raging wave of banditry and kidnapping in most parts of Katsina State is giving many residents of the state a cause for concern. The level of insecurity has tainted the once serene, safe and peaceful atmosphere that defined the state in the past, striking fears into the hearts of its residents.

The merchants of evil who hawk an assortment of maleficent items such as AK-47 rifles have assaulted its serenity and turned the once peaceful state into a nightmare orchestrated by persistent attacks on farming communities and villages of the state.

Of recent, the level of insecurity has become so bad that no part of the state is totally free from the grip of the hoodlums whose activities appear to be threatening to bring down the socio-economic and well-being of the people of the state despite efforts by security operatives to quench the scourge.

This situation forces inhabitants of the state, particularly those living in Kankara, Batsari, Jibia, Safana, Dandume, Faskari and Sabuwa local governments, to be denoting a deep inarticulate sound conveying pain, despair, agony and misery in communities of the affected local governments.

People are being killed, kidnapped on the road, business places, farms and in the comfort of their ancestral homes in the eight banditry-ravaged local governments. While many victims have lost their lives, even after their loved ones had struggled to pay ransom, scores are still in captivity.

Some of the Recent Attacks by Bandits on Communities

Evidently, some armed bandits attacked Wurma community in Kurfi local government area of the state on February 26, 2024, abducted 12 residents and burnt down a newly built healthcare facility, police outpost, shops and many houses.

The motorcycle-riding bandits were said to have first set the police outpost on fire before moving to the primary healthcare centre to burn it. They also invaded Lambo village a week before the Wurma's attack forcing residents to flee the area.

Although policemen attached to the ruined police outstation make restive efforts to impede the attackers but they couldn't due to manpower shortage and lack of adequate weapons to fight the marauding criminals.

However, no life was lost in the Wurma's attack but the 12 abductees, mostly women and children, are still wallowing in captivity of their abductors.

The criminals, also strike out on February 21, 2024 in Burdugau B-community of Kankara local government where they killed the local government Commander of the Katsina Community Watch Corps and two members of the vigilante group.

A fresh onslaught was also launched on Nasarawa village in Faskari local government area of the state on February 19, 2024 by the bandits. During the attack, the hoodlums killed six people and left 10 others with varying degrees of gunshots.

On February 26, no fewer than 17 women and children were kidnapped and one person killed in a fresh attack on another Burdugau village in Malumfashi local government area of the state. These abductees are yet to be released.

More perturbing, is the recent video clip released by the bandits who threatened to remarry a bride and 62 other women that were abducted in Sabuwa local government area of the state.

The women were members of a wedding procession abducted by the bandits around Gamji in Damari on February 1, 2024 while escorting the bride to her newly inaugurated matrimonial home.

The video that has gained significant attention on social media shows the group of bandits making threats, demanding ransom from the captors' relatives, or else they will force the already-married bride to marry someone else.

In the video, the leader of the gang, dressed



The ruins of Wurma Primary Healthcare Centre

in a police uniform, stated that there were 63 captives, not 50 as claimed in some quarters, and threatened to sell off the other wedding guests if their demands were not met.

These and many other bandits' attacks forced residents of the state to wake up from their tongue-tied notion. They have now resulted in protests to register their grievances to the government and security agencies.

The victims who could no longer continue with their behaviour, have staged different protests in their communities and villages irrespective of their political inclinations for the government to tackle the blazing security challenges afflicting the state.

Recently, hundreds of residents of Kankara took to the streets of the local government headquarters to protest over what they termed prevailing bandits attacks, killings, and kidnapping in communities in the area.

The irate youths as part of their drive to get their voices heard, blocked the Marabar Kankara-Katsina highway. The protest was triggered by an attack on the Unguwar Baushe in Kankara which lasted for about "13 hours without security personnel intervention".

The protesters called on the federal and state governments as well as security agencies to, as a matter of urgency, tame the worsening insecurity bedevilling agrarian communities of the state.

Also, residents of Kurfi Local Government Area of the state have protested over incessant bandits attacks in the area. Most of the protesters were from Birchi, Wurma and other neighbouring villages of the local government.

Irked by the spate of insecurity in the state, the protesters blocked the ever-busy Dutsinma-Katsina highway

on a recent Friday morning. The villagers set up bonfires made up of dried items on the road.

The development made many road users, especially commercial vehicles, plying the area to seek alternative routes to continue their trips. Some motorists waited for hours before the road was eventually cleared by security operatives.

Meanwhile, this mounting state of insecurity, according to security experts, is a threat to the state's democracy and the existence of the once serene, safe and peaceful atmosphere that defined the state of hospitality in the past.

Arguably, the government's reaction to these nefarious activities of the bandits has always been rhetorical condemnation in the face of depressed and helpless citizens who can no longer sleep in their ancestral homes.

We've Restored Peace in 13 LGAs—Govt

But the state Deputy Governor, Faruk Lawal while briefing journalists on the security situation of the state, said the government has restored peace in 13 out of the 22 local government areas battling with the security challenges.

He highlighted Dutsin-Ma, Batagarawa, Charanchi, Ingawa, Bindawa, Kusada, Funtua, Danja, Bakori, Malumfashi, Kafur, Musawa and Matazu as the local governments where peace has been restored.

According to him, the restoration of peace in the 13 councils was as a result of fierce operations of the Community Watch Corps officers in collaboration with conventional security agencies.

He said: "I am happy to report that out of the 22 local governments that were under the frontline and some that were affected by this issue of insecurity, for now, we are able to rescue 13 out of the 22 LGAs. Peace has been restored in these places."

In addition, he said the state government had procured 10 Armoured Personnel Carrier vehicles, 61 new Hilux vehicles and 700 motorcycles and distributed them across the local government areas to aid security

agencies' operations.

CSOs, Residents Rejects Govt's Claim

However, Lawal's claim of restoring peace in the 13 local governments has been described by residents of the state as a mere attempt by the government to enfold the resurgence of bandits' activities in the state.

The residents argued that the 13 local governments claimed to have been enjoying peace by the state government, are still witnessing attacks, killings and abductions by the criminals in recent times.

One of the residents from Malumfashi, Muhammed Adam, said: "The government claimed to be battle ready in addressing security challenges that we are confronted with but they are doing nothing."

"To make the matter worse, they claimed to have returned peace in 13 LGAs, including Malumfashi local government. It is not true because the bandits are still killing and kidnapping people in these LGAs."

"Even yesterday they killed one person and abducted 17 women and children in Burdugau village of Malumfashi local government. So, the government is just trying to cover the resurgence of insecurity in Katsina state."

Similarly, the State Chairman of the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Mr. AbdulRahman Abdullahi, said the nefarious activities of the bandits have not been completely disseminated in the 13 vulnerable local governments.

He said although there is remarkable security improvement in the 13 vulnerable local governments, that "does not mean the activities of bandits have been subdued completely because even last week, four people were kidnapped in Dutsin-Ma."

The CSOs chairman called on the state government to sustain its present efforts and strengthen synergy in operation between local, state and federal security outfits for better security results.

Also, Governor Dikko Umaru Radda's recent call for self-defence and enhanced collaboration between the community and security agencies is met with scepticism as some residents question whether their concerns are genuinely being taken into account.

Thus, residents of the state who are now groaning in the jaw of these bandits, are demanding for transparency and accountability from the government in addressing the foreseen challenges of recent killings, kidnapping and looting by the hoodlums.

Therefore, the prevailing scenario in the state suggests that the government of Katsina State has not done enough to meet its primary responsibility of safeguarding lives and property as well as considering the welfare of the citizenry