

The Effect of Rural Banditry on Food Security in Nigeria: A Case of Ovia North East Local Government Area, Edo State

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Abstract

The farmer-herder crisis is one of the major insecurities facing Nigeria today. Though not a recent phenomenon, it has snowballed into a hydra-headed scourge that appears to be threatening the continued existence of Nigeria. Several theories account for its existence: climate change, corruption, poverty, ethnicity, Muslim-ideology, urbanization, contracting land spaces, Anti-Open Grazing Laws and others. In all these, ostensible realities of daily casualties, kidnapping, rape and destruction of crops cannot be under-reported. It is in the face of these realities that the study examined the effect of farmer-herder crisis on food security in Edo State, using Ovia North East as a case study. The study utilized semi-structured questionnaire to elicit responses from four sampled communities (Uhiere, Osasimwinoba, Odighi and Okokuo) in the sampled LGA. An initial 200 questionnaires were distributed but only 188 were returned. Based on these findings, the study therefore recommended that there is need for the government to tackle poverty in the Northern part of the country, there is need for the security agents are not living up to their billing in terms of tackling the crisis, there is need for the government implemented state and community policing and the need for the government (both federal and state) to make policies towards cushioning the effect of rising food inflation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, Farmer-Herder crisis, Food Security, Herdsmen, Rural Banditry

Introduction

Nigeria has been immersed with complex, hydra-headed violent crises, ignited by multifaceted banditry that connotes acts of terrorism and intractable herder-farmer crisis which is fast turning into a sophisticated and organized banditry, forming alliance with known terrorist groups such as Boko Haram (BH) and Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) (Ebonine, 2022a). Nigeria is equally bedevilled with spates of security crises that appear to threaten the continued existence of the country as a unified whole. In the North East, terrorists hold sway, in the North West, terrorism, banditry and farmer-herder clashes are prevalent, in the North-Central, banditry and farmer-herders clashes are dominant, in the South-West, banditry is on the rage, in the South-East, secessionist struggles is ostensible, in the South-South it is cult clashes while hostage taking and kidnapping are prevalent in the whole country (Ebonine, 2022b). However, it appears that the farmer-herder clashes which is speedily taking nuanced forms such as killings, kidnapping and abductions for ransom is the most existential threat facing Nigerians today as the activities of the terrorists appear to have subsided in recent times. Between 2019 and 2020, no fewer than 310 attacks were recorded resulting to no fewer than 859 fatalities (Eromosele, 2022). More recently, it was reported that herdsmen killed about 589 persons (Ebonine, 2022b). Abductions have also been on the increase in recent times, including school children for ransom. Reprisals and counter-reprisals have equally been on the increase affecting farmers, herders and innocent people.

Rural banditry, which is commonly occurring between Fulani herders and farmers has been an age-long phenomenon defining the economic survival of people in West Africa with dire consequences on both human and animal lives, properties, orderliness and peaceful co-existence (Nwozor, Olanrewaju, Oshewolo, Oladoyin, Adedire and Okidu, 2021). Breusers, Nederlof, and van Rheenen (1998) equally opined that conflict between herders and farmers is an old phenomenon; with many observers in agreement that the phenomenon has been around the West African sub-region since 20th century (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009). However, prior to 20th century, the phenomenon was prevalent in states such as Sudan and Guinea and even in Sahel zones where pastoralism was predominant as against crop cultivation, which was mainly practised on a small scale, usually during the short rainy season (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009).

Mountains of reasons have been adduced as occasioning farmer-herder crisis in Nigeria. Climate change, contracting land spaces as a result of urbanization and industrialization, some unfavourable agricultural policies, land invasion, reallocation of water resources, infrastructural deficits and criminal intrusion of elites into the menace for personal selfish interests (Ajala, 2020). In contemporary times, violent conflicts are no more fuelled by ideological differences as it was in the 20th century, but by fierce competition over who controls renewable resources such as land and water (Ajala, 2020). In other words, competition over scarce resources such as arable lands and water often degenerate into a zero-sum conflict. In Nigeria, therefore, the menace of rural banditry appears to have had a profound impact on agriculture in Nigeria more than other crises.

Agriculture accounts for about 50 percent of Nigeria's GDP while pastoralism accounts for about 40 percent (Akov, 2017). Besides, Nigeria's food security is guaranteed once the North is peaceful as the bulk of farm produce consumed in the different parts of the country hails from the region. This is as over 70 percent of Nigerians work in the agricultural sector (All Africa News, 2022). Thus, the rising level of hunger in Nigeria which is due to short supply of farm produce from the North with a concomitant rise in the prices of the few available ones in the market has been devastating. Moreover, given the incessant killings and abductions, some farmers have lost incentive in farming opting for another dissimilar business for survival.

Theoretical Framework

Eco-Scarcity Theory

One of the well-known (and disputable) hypotheses in the discussions of natural resource conflicts is the eco-scarcity theory. According to Thomas Homer-Dixon (1994), theorists in the 1990s proposed intricate causal relationships between environmental pressure, which they defined as scarcities of renewable resources, and the commencement or outbreak of violent conflict. Homer-Dixon (1994) also provides a substantial collection of empirical studies linking violent consequences to climate change-induced elements such as environmental devastation, rising temperatures, depletion of the ozone layer, depletion of agricultural land, water resources exhaustion, the downturn of aquatic resources, and loss of habitat. He also outlines a tentative theoretical framework for clarifying these linkages. According to him, the availability of renewables and population increase work alone or in different combination to increase the shortage of agriculture, freshwater, forests, and fish for particular categories of people. Productivity may drop in local areas affected by the scarcity as well as across national and regional economies. The affected population may leave for new territories or be expelled. Ethnic disputes frequently arise when migratory groups establish in new locations.

Disagreements along past and present cultural lines that cross communal fault lines like race and faith are a reflection of the scarcity discourse (Penu and Paalo, 2021). International Crisis Group (2018) categorises disputes over natural resources into categories such as herders versus growers, native-born versus immigrants, and herders versus herders. Agricultural output decreases when politics influence social fault lines, such as when herders and farmers or subsets of each category unite with or support one political group of the state over (Paalo, 2020). The main goal of agricultural production is to ensure that there is always sufficient food available for everyone to consume in order to meet their dietary demands. Several violent communal confrontations have been caused by the herders' frequent moves as they look for abundant pastures and fresh water (Itemoagbo and Ebonine, 2022). As a result, many farmers and herders have passed away, while others have seen a decline in the production of their crops and animal products (Akerjiir, 2020).

As already noted in the study, in the past, there have been confrontations between farmers and herders in Nigeria, but more recently, due to increases in population and climate change additional land designated for grazing and cattle routes has been farmed. It is crucial to remember that these conflicts directly affect the agriculture productivity of those affected and the nation.

Research Methodology

This explained various steps taken to elicit needed responses from participants. The steps were research design, study area, population of study, sample size and sampling method, instrumentation, validity and reliability of instrument, sources of data collection and data analysis.

Research Design

The study adopted quantitative research design that draws data using semi-structured questionnaire to put in perspective the impact of rural banditry on food security in Ovia North East LGA of Edo State.

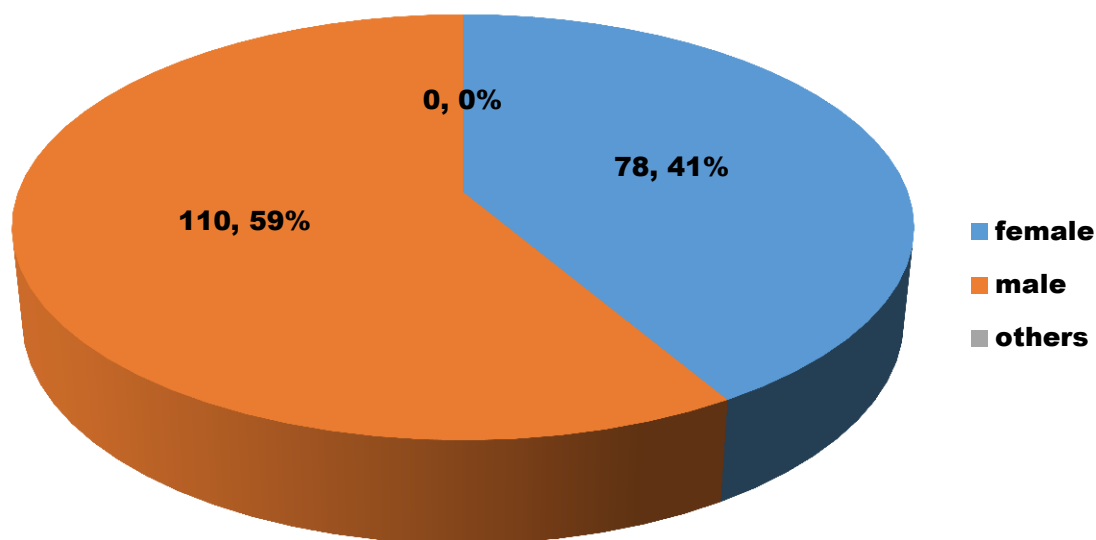
Sample Size and Sampling Method

The sample size for the study comprised two hundred (200) respondents who were farmers in the four selected communities of Ovia North East LGA. The selected communities were Uhiere, Osasimwinoba, Odighi and Okokuo who have experiencing the scourge of rural banditry attacks in light of their recent protests in that regard. On this score, 50 respondents in each of the selected community were surveyed on the basis of the impacts of bandits' attacks on food security.

The communities were purposively selected based on multiple reports of frequent farmers-herders clashes. Furthermore, given that the actual farming population in these communities was difficult to ascertain, the study utilized snowball sampling technique to select the 200 participants that took part in the survey. This sampling technique meant that once the first farming participant was identified, he/she referred the researcher to another and so on until the required number of participants was surveyed. Though, this type of sampling method vitiates possibility of generalization, it nonetheless provided a platform to survey the targeted participants and had unhindered access to their vivid experiences on the menace of rural banditry in their communities.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

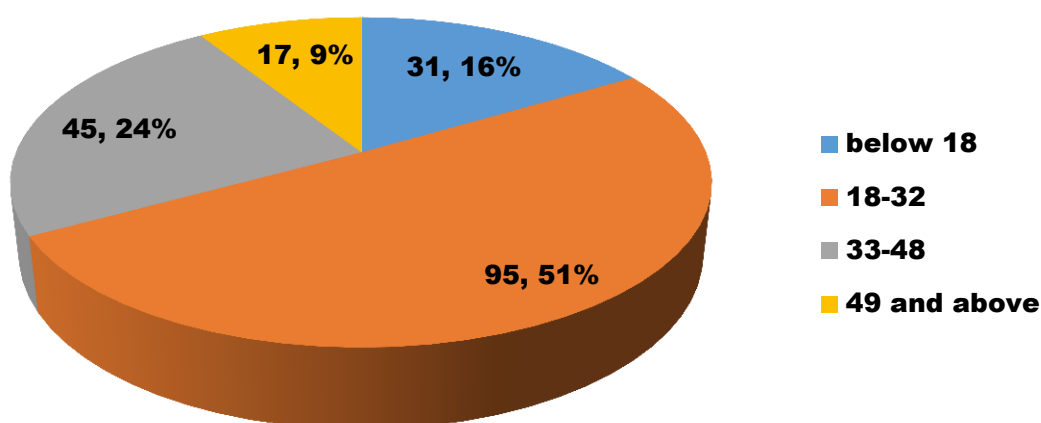
Chart 1: Sex of the Respondents



Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the chart 1 above, 78 respondents constituting 41% of respondents are female while 110 respondents constituting 59% of respondents are male. The little high percentage of men in the study explains patriarchal system in the communities in which men dominate agricultural activities while women serve as assistants.

Chart 2: Age of the Respondents



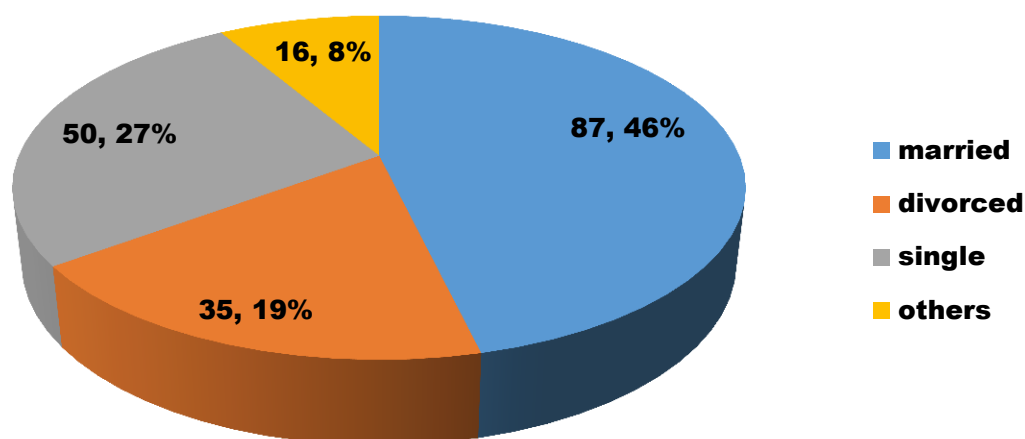
Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the chart 2 above, 31 respondents constituting 16% of respondents are below the age of 18; 95 respondents constituting 51% of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 32; 45 respondents constituting 24% of respondents are between the ages of 33 and 48; and 17 respondents constituting 9% of the respondents are between the ages of 49 and above. By this distribution, respondents within the age bracket of 18 and 32 participated more in the survey. This finding corroborates with the finding made by Obaniyi et al (2020) that found the same

age bracket group in their study and opined that ideally, this youthful age bracket should be beneficial to agricultural productivity in the communities because they possessed the physical and mental strength required for engagement with cultivation of staple crops such as cassava, yam, potatoes, cocoyam and others. The same with the finding made by Adisa (2012) in that greater percentage of rural farmers in Kwara State are men.

However, in contrast, Agbamu (2014) noted that this finding may not be entirely true based on the study conducted in Delta State, Nigeria in which it was discovered that 60% of cassava farmers were females and not males.

Chart 3: Marital Status of the Respondents



Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the chart 3 above, 87 respondents constituting 46% of respondents are married, 35 respondents constituting 19% of respondents are divorced, 50 respondents constituting 27% of respondents are single and 16 respondents constituting 8% of respondents are (others) not divorced, married or single. Respondents who are married participated more in the study. This finding is not surprising on the score that people living in rural areas marry early enough for so many reasons including having increased workforce through procreation that will assist in farm activities. Also, as Obaniyi et al (2019) discovered in their study, that greater percentage of respondents in South West, Nigeria were married and of youthful age bracket.

Table 1: Academic Qualification of the Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid none	48	25.5	25.5	25.5
SSCE/GCE	70	37.2	37.2	62.8
Graduate	38	20.2	20.2	83.0
Undergraduate	14	7.4	7.4	90.4
postgraduate	3	1.6	1.6	92.0
others	15	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	188	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From table 1 above, 48 respondents constituting 25.5% of respondents do not possess any academic qualification, 70 respondents constituting 37.2% of respondents have SSCE/GCE certificates, 38 respondents constituting 20.2% of respondents are graduates, 14 respondents constituting 7.4% of respondents are undergraduates, 3 respondents constituting 1.6% of respondents have postgraduate students, and 15 respondents constituting 15% of respondents have other certificates. Thus, respondents who possess SSCE/GCE respondents participated more in the study. This is not surprising given that the level of poverty and infrastructural decay in most rural areas in the state do not allow for higher schooling.

This finding is in line with the earlier finding by Obaniyi et al (2020) that the greater number (40.8%) of rural farmers in Osun State, Nigeria had secondary school certificates. However, this finding contradicts the earlier finding made by Rashid (2012) who found that majority of the rural farmers surveyed had non-formal education.

Table 2: Religious Background of the Respondents

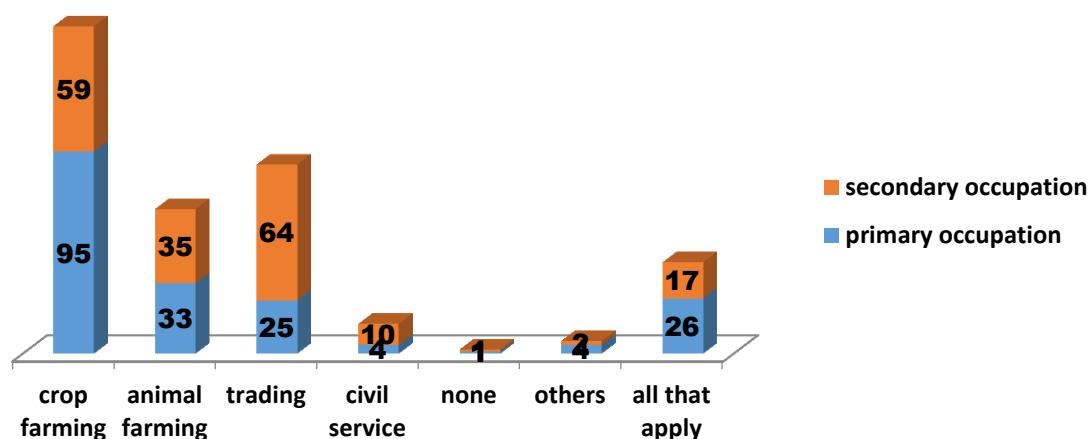
Religion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Islam	18	9.6	9.6	9.6
Christianity	103	54.8	54.8	64.4
Traditional religion	44	23.4	23.4	87.8
Others	23	12.2	12.2	100.0
Total	188	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the table 2 above, 18 respondents constituting 9.6% of respondents practice Islam, 103 respondents constituting 54.8% practice Christianity, 44 respondents constituting 23.4% practice Traditional Religion and 16 respondents constituting 23% of respondents practice

other religion. Thus, respondents who practice Christianity participated more in the study. This finding is not surprising given that Edo State is predominantly a Christian State. If however, this study was conducted in the Muslim-dominated states in the North, it would not be in doubt that the greater percentage of respondents would have been Muslims.

Chart 4: Distribution of Respondents by Occupation



Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the chart 4 above, 95 and 59 respondents who constitute 50.5% and 31.4% respectively take crop farming as primary and secondary occupation respectively. 33 and 35 respondents who constitute 17.6% and 18.6% respectively take animal farming as primary and secondary occupation respectively. 25 and 64 respondents who constitute 13.3% and 34% respectively take trading as primary and secondary occupation respectively. 4 and 10 respondents who constitute 2.1% and 5.3% respectively take civil service as primary and secondary occupation respectively. 1 and 1 respondents who constitute 0.5% and 0.5% respectively do not have any occupation as primary or secondary occupation respectively. 4 and 2 respondents who constitute 2.1% and 1.1% respectively have other primary and secondary occupation respectively. 26 and 17 respondents who constitute 13.8% and 9.0% respectively take all as both primary and secondary occupation respectively. Thus, it could be deduced that while majority of the respondents (50.5%) take crop farming as primary occupation, only 64 respondents (34%) take trading as secondary occupation.

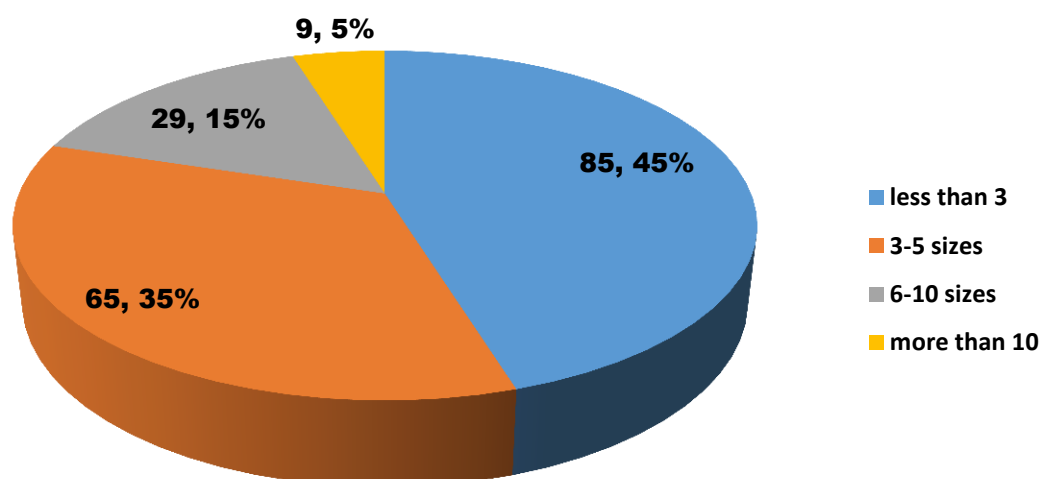
Table 3: Distribution the Respondents Based on their Experiences of Rural Banditry

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	personal exp	79	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Exp. with others	44	23.4	23.4	65.4
	Both Exp.	7	3.7	3.7	69.1
	None	58	30.9	30.9	100.0
	Total	188	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From table above, 79 respondents constituting 42.0% of respondents have personal experiences with banditry, 44 respondents constituting 44% of respondents know about banditry from the experiences of others in the communities, 7 respondents constituting 3.7% of respondents have both personal experience and experiences of others and 58 respondents constituting 30.9% of respondents do not have any experiences. Thus, it could be summarized that 130 respondents constituting 3.7% had experiences with banditry while 58 respondents constituting did not experience banditry

Chart 5: Distribution of respondents by Family Size

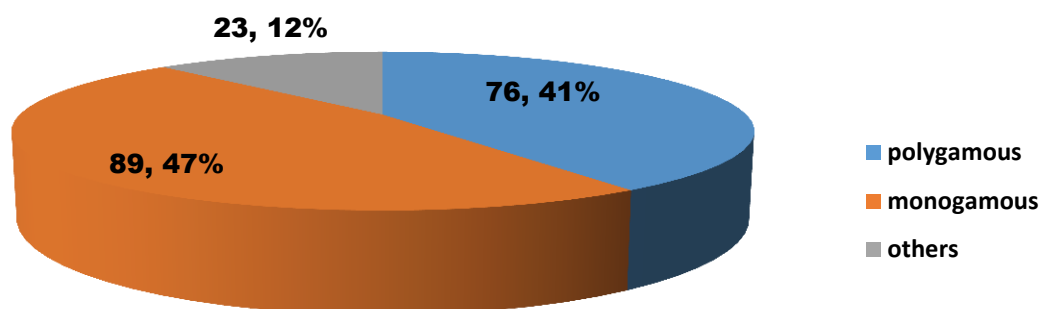


Source: Survey Data (2023).

From the chart 5 above, 85 respondents constituting 45% have family size of less than 3, 65 respondents constituting 35% have between 3 and 5 family size, 29 respondents constituting 15% have between 6 and 10 and 9 respondents constituting 5% have more than 10. Thus, respondents whose family sizes are less than 3 participated more in the study.

This finding is partially supported by the earlier study by Obaniyi et al (2020) where they noted that the majority (about 86.8%) of rural farmers in Osun State had family sizes between 3 and 5. According to the authors, the reason for this predominant family large is to reduce the cost of labour force and also provide defence in the event of any attack from the herdsman.

Chart 6: Distribution of respondents by Family Type



Source: Survey Data (2023)

From chart 6 above, 76 respondents constituting 40.0% are from polygamous families, 89 respondents constituting 47.3% are from monogamous families and 23 respondents constituting 13.2% are from other families Thus, respondents from monogamous families participated more in the study.

This finding is not surprising given the type of religion practiced by the respondents. Christianity prohibits polygamy and that explains the widespread of monogamous families in the South of Nigeria including Edo State. In other regions, such as in the North, where their religion permits polygamy, it would not be out of place to find many polygamous families with even greater large family sizes than in the South.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by Current Monthly Income

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than 5000	47	25.0	25.0	25.0
Btw 5000 and 20000	23	12.2	12.2	37.2
Btw 21,000 and 50,000	61	32.4	32.4	69.7
More than 50,000	57	30.3	30.3	100.0
Total	188	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From table 4 above, 47 respondents constituting 25.0% of respondents have less than N5,000 as their monthly earnings, 23 respondents constituting 12.2% of respondents earn between N5000 and 20000 monthly, 61 respondents constituting 32.4% of respondents earn between

N21000 and 50000 monthly and 57 respondents constituting 30.3% of respondents earn more than N50,000 monthly. Thus, respondents who currently earn between N21,000 and N50,000 participated more in the study.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by Previous Monthly Income

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than 5,000	8	4.3	4.3	4.3
Btw 5,000 and 20,000	17	9.0	9.0	13.3
Btw 21,000 and 50,000	23	12.2	12.2	25.5
More than 50,000	140	74.5	74.5	100.0
Total	188	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From table 5 above, 8 respondents constituting 4.3% of respondents earned less than N5,000 monthly before the banditry, 17 respondents constituting 9.0% of respondents earned between N5,000 and N20,000 monthly before the banditry, 23 respondents constituting 12.2% of respondents earned between N21000 and 50000 monthly before the banditry and 140 respondents constituting 74.5% of respondents earned more than N50,000 monthly. Thus, respondents who currently earned more than N50,000 monthly before the banditry participated more in the study.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by Years of Farming Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid less than 1	69	36.7	36.7	36.7
1-5	29	15.4	15.4	52.1
6-10	24	12.8	12.8	64.9
11-15	19	10.1	10.1	75.0
16-20	10	5.3	5.3	80.3
more than 20	37	19.7	19.7	100.0
Total	188	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the table 6 above, 69 respondents who constitute 36.7% have farmed less than 1 year. 29 respondents who constitute 15.4% have farmed between 1 and 5 years. 24 respondents who constitute 12.8% have farmed between 6 and 10 years. 19 respondents who constitute 10.1% have farmed between 11 and 15 years. 10 respondents who constitute 5.3% have farmed

between 16 and 20 years and 37 respondents who constitute 19.7% have farmed more than 20 years. Thus, respondents who have farmed less than 1 year participated more in the survey.

Conclusion

Following the findings made in the course of the study, it can be concluded that rural banditry has an impact on food security in Edo State. The following specific conclusions are also reached:

First, banditry has an effect on the size of land cultivated in Ovia North East LGA. Second, banditry has an effect on the size of annual crop yields in Ovia North East LGA. Third, banditry has an effect on food prices in Ovia North East LGA. Fourth, banditry has an effect on agricultural investment in Ovia North East LGA. Fifth, the scourge of banditry has thrown up various coping mechanisms such as relocation to safer places, relying on friends, buying for on credit and going hunger strike.

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