

IMPACT OF BANDITRY ON FOREST CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS OF ADJOINING COMMUNITIES IN ONIGAMBARI FOREST RESERVE, OYO STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

In recent years, rising banditry has posed much threat to both forest conservation and community livelihoods across Nigeria, yet empirical studies exploring these dynamics remain limited. This study specifically examined the impact of banditry on forest conservation and the livelihoods of adjoining communities in Onigambari Forest Reserve, Oyo State, Nigeria. The reserve, known for its biodiversity and economic significance, has increasingly become vulnerable to insecurity, necessitating a deeper understanding of its socio-ecological implications. A qualitative research design was employed to capture community experiences and perspectives. Purposive sampling was used to select 98 participants comprising forest guards, men, women, and youth from adjoining communities. Data were generated through ten focus group discussions (FGDs), ensuring representation across gender and age categories. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured protocol and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis, which facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and meanings across narratives. Findings revealed four dominant impacts of banditry. First, pervasive fear curtailed mobility and limited access to forest resources and markets. Second, forest guard operations were disrupted, enabling increased illegal logging, poaching, and unregulated resource exploitation. Third, livelihoods suffered substantial decline, with women particularly those dependent on non-timber forest products bearing disproportionate losses. Lastly, while some security measures had been introduced, they were largely inadequate in addressing the scale of the crisis. The study concludes that banditry undermines both ecological integrity and community wellbeing, with gendered and socio-economic disparities in vulnerability. It recommends integrated interventions, including the strengthening of security outfits, promotion of alternative livelihood opportunities, and provision of psychosocial support to affected populations, as crucial for sustainable conservation and resilience-building in forest-dependent communities.

Keywords: Banditry, Forest conservation, Livelihoods, Security

1.0 Introduction

According to Bhushan et al. (2024), forests provide millions of people around the world with a means of subsistence, livelihood, and cultural legacy, particularly in emerging nations where reliance on natural resources is still strong. In both environmental and socioeconomic discourse, the interaction between trees and the livelihoods of nearby communities has drawn more attention since it emphasizes the connection between sustainable development, economic survival, and conservation. Communities living close to forests have depended on these natural resources for generations for a variety of livelihood pursuits, such as small-scale business ventures, hunting, fishing, agriculture, and the gathering of non-timber forest products (NTFP) (Aluko et al, 2020; Asamoah et al, 2024).

Numerous goods from forests, including fuel wood, fruits, nuts, fibers, medicinal plants, fuel wood, and resins, support family economies and act as safety nets in hard times (Gupta et al, 2021; Bayesa & Bushara, 2022). Forests provide ecological services that are essential to the sustainability of rural lives, in addition to the obvious material benefits. In order for agriculture to be productive, they must control the climate, preserve water supplies, and preserve soil fertility. In order to increase productivity and sustainability, traditional agricultural systems in communities that share forests frequently integrate agro forestry techniques, which combine the cultivation of trees with the production of crops and livestock (Achmad et al, 2022). This coordinated strategy maintains biodiversity while guaranteeing long-term benefits. However, the relationship between forests and livelihoods is fraught with challenges.

In addition to the major deforestation and forest degradation caused by growing population pressure, economic growth, and infrastructure development, banditry is a more recent phenomenon that is endangering both ecological stability and the financial stability of dependent communities. Historically, banditry has been both a symptom of and a response to social, economic, and political conditions, reflecting the complexity of the societies in which it occurs. Banditry is defined as violent and robbery activities carried out by individuals or groups, known as bandits, who operate outside the law (Osasana, 2023). These acts typically target travelers, rural communities, or isolated settlements and involve theft, extortion, kidnapping, and occasionally murder (Ayegbusi, 2024; Ojewale, 2024). Ejifor (2023), observed that banditry has evolved but still presents serious problems, particularly in areas with poor governance, economic inequality, and social unrest. Ayegbusi (2024) noted that bandit groups have evolved into organized crime syndicates that, in some places, engage in activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking.

The origins of banditry in Nigeria are linked to long-standing conflicts between herders and farmers exacerbated by resource scarcity, environmental deterioration, and socioeconomic difficulties (Ojewale, 2024a). Competition increased as available water and arable land decreased, which made some individuals resort to criminality. The forest reserves in Nigeria, which were first created to preserve biodiversity and maintain ecological equilibrium, have gradually turned into havens for criminal activity, particularly banditry (Tang et al, 2023). Local economics, environmental sustainability, and national security are all seriously threatened by this change.

The remarkable biodiversity and ecological value of Nigeria's Oyo State's Onigambari Forest Reserve have long been acknowledged (Ibrahim et al, 2023). But there have been cases of banditry in and around the forest reserve in recent years, which puts conservation efforts at serious risk. Banditry, which is defined by violent attacks, armed robberies, and kidnapping, has increased in the area, causing increased insecurity and interfering with the activities of local communities, government organizations, and forest conservationists. This situation may compromise the safety of those working to protect the forest and also

undermined the implementation of essential conservation strategies aimed at preserving the forest's ecological integrity and the livelihoods of adjoining communities.

Critical gaps still exist despite the fact that numerous studies have together demonstrated the disastrous effects of banditry on economic activity, security, and conservation. However, no study has been done expressly on how banditry, forest conservation, and local livelihoods interact in South-Western Nigeria. There is a knowledge gap about how comparable dynamics play out in other regions because the majority of studies concentrate on Northern Nigeria. This study on the impact of banditry on forest conservation and the livelihoods of adjoining communities in the Onigambari Forest Reserve area of Oyo State is justified by these gaps as it seeks to provide region-specific insights into how banditry affects conservation efforts in South-Western Nigeria, using qualitative data to capture both environmental and socio-economic dimensions. Specifically, the study assessed how banditry influences conservation efforts in Onigambari, evaluated the effects of banditry on the livelihoods of local communities that depend on forest resources and analyzed the effectiveness of security interventions in mitigating the impacts of banditry on forest management and local livelihoods.

2.0 Literature Review

Banditry in Nigeria has emerged as a multidimensional security challenge, affecting environmental conservation, human security, socio-economic activities, and governance. Existing literature on the subject presents various perspectives, methodologies, and geographical contexts, shedding light on the complex interactions between banditry, conservation efforts, and community livelihoods. Critically analyzing and comparing these studies, key gaps emerged that justify a focused investigation into the impact of banditry on forest conservation and the livelihoods of adjoining communities in the Onigambari Forest Reserve area of Oyo State.

The study by Onihuwa et al. (2023) provided an empirical analysis of banditry's impact on Kainji Lake National Park, particularly in relation to illegal hunting, habitat destruction, and looting of park infrastructure. The study's reliance on primary data through surveys among park staff offered direct insights into the threats to conservation. Strategies such as joint military operations and peace committees were explored as mitigation measures, presenting a security-oriented approach to conservation challenges. However, this study is limited in its examination of community-level impacts, focusing predominantly on the perspectives of park officials rather than those of local residents who interact daily with the park.

Ojo *et al.* (2023) adopted a broader security perspective by analyzing armed banditry across North-West Nigeria. Their theoretical analysis, based on secondary data, examined the socio-political and economic drivers of banditry, such as unemployment, weak governance, and resource competition. Unlike Onihuwa *et al.* (2023), this study does not offer empirical evidence from affected communities but provided a macro-level understanding of banditry's manifestations, including kidnappings, killings, and displacement. While valuable for contextualizing banditry as a national security issue, its lack of primary data limits its applicability to specific conservation concerns.

Similarly, Igbini (2022) investigated security threats in Katsina State through a qualitative analysis grounded in the natural state theory, which posits that insecurity thrives where governance is weak and livelihood opportunities are scarce. While this study aligns with Ojo *et al.* (2023) in emphasizing governance failures, it differs by proposing sustainable livelihood programs as a long-term solution to banditry. This socio-economic perspective contrasts with the immediate, security-driven interventions highlighted by Onihuwa et al. (2023). However, its reliance on secondary data limits its empirical depth, leaving room for further investigation into how banditry affects forest-dependent communities at a micro level.

Okoro (2022) extends the discussion by linking banditry to the existence of ungoverned spaces in Kaduna and Zamfara States, using environmental crime theory. By incorporating interviews and secondary data, the study connects banditry to the depletion of tourism and food production. Unlike Onihuwa et al. (2023), which focused on a specific conservation area, Okoro (2022) examined the broader economic consequences of banditry. However, its regional focus on Northern Nigeria leaves a gap in understanding similar dynamics in the South-Western context, particularly in the Onigambari Forest Reserve.

Meer et al. (2022) provided an environmental perspective by analyzing banditry's effects on the North-East Guinea Savanna ecological zone in Benue State. Their mixed-method approach, including Likert scale analysis and correlation tests, quantified local community perceptions of forest degradation, biodiversity loss, and economic displacement. This study's use of statistical tools offers a more rigorous measurement of banditry's environmental impact than the qualitative approaches used by Okoro (2022) and Igbini (2022). However, it does not explicitly address governance structures or security interventions, which are critical for mitigating banditry's effects.

In contrast to these studies, Ukaeje (2021) and Onwuzuruigbo (2020) frame banditry within the context of weak forest governance. Both argued that the absence of security structures within forested areas enables criminal activity, including cattle rustling and organized crime. While Ukaeje (2021) situates this issue within national security debates, Onwuzuruigbo (2020) narrows the focus to cattle rustling as a specific consequence of governance failure. These studies provide valuable theoretical foundations but lack empirical data on how governance challenges specifically impact forest conservation efforts.

Ayeni et al. (2025) revisit Kainji Lake National Park with a cross-sectional research approach, collecting data from 113 respondents to assess the impact of illegal logging and banditry on biodiversity. Their findings, which highlight species-specific declines, reinforce the ecological consequences identified by Meer et al. (2022). However, this study's focus on conservation overlooks the socio-economic implications of banditry for local communities, particularly those dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods.

Ojewale (2024b) introduced an international dimension by analyzing cattle rustling in the border regions of Southwest Niger and Northwest Nigeria. His statistical evidence of rising cattle rustling incidents highlights cross-border governance challenges, arms trafficking, and informal trade networks. This study expands the scope of banditry research beyond national borders, underscoring the need for regional collaboration. However, it does not address the environmental implications of banditry within localized conservation areas, leaving an unexplored intersection between transnational crime and forest conservation.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the environmental security theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) to understand the dynamics of how banditry affects forest conservation efforts and the economic well-being of communities around Onigambari Forest Reserve, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Environmental security theory

Environmental theory broadens the definition of threats to include ecological shocks, resource depletion, and environmental degradation in addition to traditional military threats (Vayrynen, 1998; De Wilde, 2008; Taiye, 2023). Because environmental degradation poses a threat to human and national security, Jessica Tuchman Mathews contended that it should be included in the security agenda (Mathews, 1989).

This viewpoint was expanded by Thomas Homer-Dixon (1991, 1995), who described how environmental shortages brought on by population pressure, resource depletion, and unequal access can combine with poor governance and poverty to cause resentment, migration, economic downturn, and ultimately violent

conflict. Although sectoral scholars like Peter Gleick (2017) showed how particular resource scarcities (such as water) can spark conflicts in situations with inadequate institutional capacity.

Applied to the Onigambari Forest Reserve, environmental security theory provides a useful lens for understanding banditry as both a symptom and driver of environmental insecurity. The forest's high-value timber, non-timber forest products, and fuel wood resources, combined with limited enforcement capacity, create opportunities for illegal logging, poaching, and violent extortion. Banditry disrupts forest-based livelihoods by increasing transaction costs, restricting mobility, and reducing income stability while simultaneously accelerating ecological degradation. This reflects the theory's central claim that environmental change and scarcity can undermine human security (food, health, and income) and ecological integrity in tandem (Mathews, 1989). Moreover, weak governance and unequal access to forest benefits intensify grievances, pushing some community members toward illicit coping strategies, further entrenching the scarcity conflict cycle.

Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998) is particularly relevant in analyzing how banditry affects the economic well-being of forest-dependent communities. The framework identifies five core asset categories—human, natural, financial, social, and physical capital—which influence households' abilities to sustain their livelihoods in the face of external shocks such as banditry.

1. **Natural Capital:** Onigambari Forest Reserve provides essential resources such as timber, medicinal plants, and game for local communities. Banditry leads to restricted access to these resources, either due to government-imposed curfews or fear of attacks, thereby diminishing the ability of residents to sustain their livelihoods (Onihuwa et al. (2023).
2. **Financial Capital:** Many households depend on forest-based income, whether through the sale of harvested products or employment in forest-related activities such as ecotourism or logging. When banditry escalates, economic activities decline, leading to income losses and increased poverty (Nwankpa, 2024).
3. **Human Capital:** Fear and insecurity associated with banditry disrupt education and skills acquisition, limiting human capital development (Sanchi et al, 2022; Ajiboye et al, 2024). Young people who might have engaged in sustainable forestry or conservation initiatives may instead migrate to urban centers or resort to illegal activities for survival.
4. **Social Capital:** The presence of bandits erodes trust within communities, leading to weakened social networks and reduced cooperation in community-led conservation efforts. In many instances, local conservation groups are unable to function effectively due to threats from armed groups (Meer, et al 2022).
5. **Physical Capital:** Infrastructure such as roads, markets, and storage facilities may be destroyed or rendered unsafe due to bandit attacks, further hampering conservation efforts and economic activities. This aligns with the SLF argument that access to key assets determines resilience against shocks and stressors (Cui et al, 2025).

While political ecology highlights the structural dimensions of forest conflicts, SLF sheds light on the micro-level livelihood challenges that communities face in response to insecurity. These theoretical perspectives thus offer a multidimensional approach to analyzing the socio-environmental consequences of banditry in Onigambari Forest Reserve.

3.0 Material and Method

The study was conducted in and around the Onigambari Forest Reserve, located in Oluyole Local Government Area of Oyo State, Southwestern Nigeria. The reserve is an ecological zone known for its rich biodiversity and for supporting both conservation and economic activities such as farming, fuel wood collection, and non-timber forest product harvesting. However, reports of banditry, kidnapping and violent activities have raised concerns about the reserve's safety, ecological integrity, and the wellbeing of local populations.

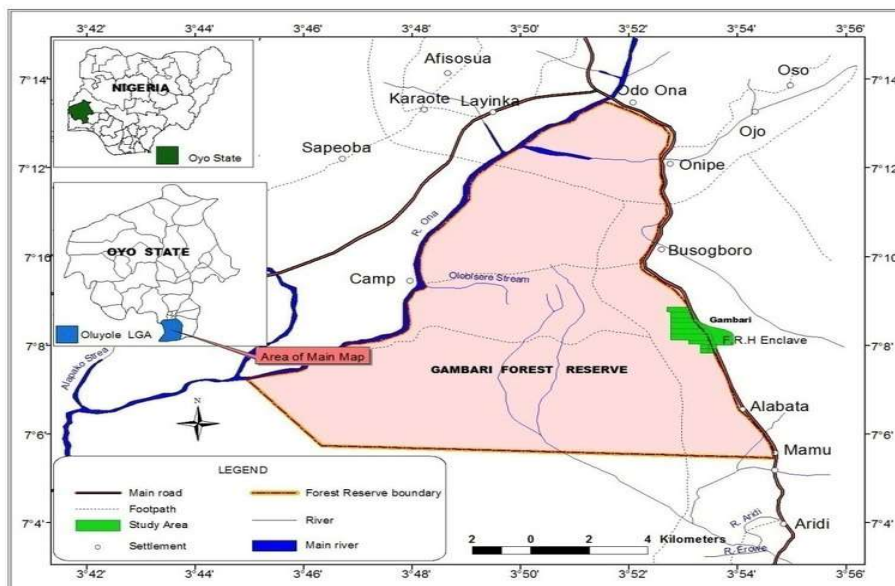


Figure 1: Map of Onigambari Forest Reserve

3.1 Population of the Study

The population for the study comprised: forest guards directly involved in patrolling and monitoring the forest, adult male and female members of communities adjoining the forest who are engaged in farming, forest resource collection, petty trading and Youths residing in the communities.

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Size

Three communities located within the precinct of the forest reserve (Onigambari, Oloowa, and Busogboro) were randomly selected for the study. A purposive sampling technique was then employed to recruit participants who possessed firsthand knowledge and experience relevant to the research objectives. This approach ensured adequate representation across different social categories, recognizing that the impact of banditry may vary depending on individuals' roles in conservation and livelihood activities. In total, 98 participants were engaged in ten focus group discussions (FGDs). These comprised one group of forest guards with 8 participants, three groups of women (10 participants each, drawn from the selected communities), three groups of men (10 participants each, drawn from the selected communities), and three groups of youths (10 participants each, drawn from the selected communities).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Discussions were the primary data collection method. FGDs were chosen for their effectiveness in generating rich, interactive discussions and revealing shared experiences, collective knowledge, and communal concerns. The study was conducted in April- June, 2024. Each FGD session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, was conducted in Yoruba language (the local dialect) to ensure participant comfort, and was facilitated using a semi-structured FGD guide. The FGD guide contained open-ended questions that explored: Perceptions and experiences of insecurity and banditry in the forest area, changes in forest access, resource use, conservation practices, impact of insecurity on household livelihoods and community wellbeing. And adaptive and coping strategies employed by community members and Suggestions for improving forest protection and community resilience.

Each session was moderated by the lead researcher, assisted by a trained note-taker and a local interpreter (when needed). With prior consent, discussions were audio-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis. Data from audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with data through repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes to identify relevant features, searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represent the data, defining and naming themes to reflect key narratives and insights and producing the final report with illustrative quotes from participants. Coding was done manually, and emerging patterns were compared across groups to identify areas of convergence and divergence in experiences and perspectives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were briefed on the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. Anonymity was maintained by not recording identifying information, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage without any repercussions.

4.0 RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from various stakeholders identified four major themes that illustrate the multifaceted impacts of insecurity on forest conservation efforts and community livelihoods. The result is further illustrated in Figure 1.

4.1 Insecurity and Fear Induced by Banditry

The most prominent and immediate theme that emerged from the data was the pervasive sense of insecurity and fear caused by banditry in the Onigambari Forest Reserve. Across all focus groups, participants consistently described how their daily lives, routines, and engagement with the forest had been upended due to rising violence and uncertainty.

4.1.1 Restricted Mobility and Daily Activities

Forest guards reported that the intensity of banditry often made it unsafe to carry out regular patrol duties or even report to work. One forest guard noted,

"It is usually difficult to go to work when banditry activities are intense in this area."

This restricted mobility undermined conservation operations, as forest areas were left unmonitored and vulnerable to illegal activities.

4.1.2 Fear of Kidnapping and Trauma

The threat of kidnapping emerged as a key concern, extending beyond forest officials to ordinary residents of adjoining communities. The psychological toll was significant. One community member explained, “

The fear alone has caused major trauma to some people in the community.”(FGD Women Group, Busogboro Community, 2024).

The emotional burden associated with living under constant threat has implications not only for community wellbeing but also for trust in institutional support.

4.1.3 Decline in Economic and Trading Activities

The fear generated by banditry also curtailed the economic vibrancy of the forest zone. With traders and buyers avoiding the area, local markets experienced a drastic downturn. Economic stagnation was a recurrent complaint among participants, as the forest previously served as a central hub for income generation.

4.2 Impact on Forest Conservation

The environmental consequences of insecurity were profound. The absence of regular surveillance and enforcement emboldened illegal actors, leading to ecological degradation.

4.2.1 Disruption of Forest Guard Operations

Forest guards described how fear curtailed their ability to monitor and protect conservation zones. One participant stated, “

If the forest guard finds it difficult to work, the security in the forest area becomes a problem resulting in illegal logging activities, poaching, and illegal exploitation of forest resources.” These disruptions eroded years of conservation progress and increased forest vulnerability.

4.2.2 Increased Illegal Logging, Poaching, and Resource Exploitation

Participants observed a surge in illegal logging and poaching, particularly during peak periods of insecurity. These activities not only depleted biodiversity but also endangered rare species and disrupted ecological functions. The nexus between insecurity and environmental degradation underlines the urgent need for integrated forest governance.

4.3 Livelihood Disruption

Another prominent theme is the disruption to forest-dependent livelihoods, which deepened the economic vulnerability of the affected communities. Male participants, particularly those engaged in farming or the sale of forest products emphasized how restricted access to forest zones had made it nearly impossible to sustain their livelihoods. One of the male participants stated,

“We community members found it difficult to sustain our livelihood as most people here derive their source of livelihood from the forest zone” (FGD Male Participants, Onigambari Community, 2024).

With reduced mobility and increased risk, farming activities were either abandoned or severely reduced, leading to decreased food production and income levels. Market activities also suffered due to the security crisis. Trade and commercial exchange, especially with external buyers, dwindled drastically as fear gripped both local producers and distant traders. One participant recounted,

“People who come here to buy goods or trade here found it difficult” (FGD, Women Participants, Onigambari Community, 2024).

This not only cut off income streams but also led to shortages and inflated prices of essential goods within the community. Women were particularly hard-hit by these changes. Many women in the communities rely on the forest for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), firewood, and agricultural surplus to sustain household income. The insecurity curtailed their economic independence and stretched household survival strategies. At the same time, women were saddled with emotional and care giving responsibilities amidst rising poverty and fear. Their dual burden economic and emotional illustrates the gendered nature of the crisis and its disproportionate impact on women. The increasing hardship further led to food insecurity, malnutrition risks, and the breakdown of informal safety nets.

4.4 Community Response and Security Interventions

There was a general acknowledgment of the positive role played by “*Amotekun*,” the regional security outfit. This was corroborated by one of the participants who stated thus:

“I give kudos to Amotekun...they have been able to forestall some sense of security,” (FGD Male Participants, Oolowa Community, 2024).

However, there was a consensus that *Amotekun* and the police need further support and proper equipment to fully tackle the crisis. Community members expressed a desire for a sustained and well-coordinated government response, not only in the form of security but also through livelihood recovery programs and conservation support mechanisms. Women and youths especially emphasized the need for empowerment programs, trauma counseling, and alternative livelihoods as pathways for recovery. Many youths, disconnected from school or work during the crisis, remain in vulnerable positions and may be at risk of engaging in criminal behavior if not engaged productively.



Figure 2: Interconnected Impacts of Banditry on Security, Livelihoods, and Forest Conservation in Onigambari Forest Reserve

5.0 Discussion

The pervasive sense of fear and threat to life among forest guards and community members align with the Environmental Security Theory, which posits that environmental degradation and resource scarcity can exacerbate insecurity, while insecurity can, in turn, worsen environmental degradation. For community members, especially women and youths, the psychological and physical vulnerability described in this study corresponds with findings from scholars such as Ojewale (2024b), who noted that rising insecurity in Nigeria has created trauma-inducing environments, particularly for marginalized groups with limited coping resources

The study further highlights how insecurity has led to a direct and measurable decline in forest conservation activities. The challenge faced by forest guards and the increased activities of illegal loggers and poachers underscore the breakdown of institutional capacity, which the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) categorizes under the "institutional and policy context" affecting access to assets and livelihood outcomes. Existing literature supports the finding that conflict and insecurity disrupt conservation work. For example, Onwuzuruigbo (2021) assert that insecurity often leads to "ecological release" in forested regions, where illegal actors exploit the absence of regulatory oversight to intensify resource extraction. The shift of local youths from conservation to illegal logging due to displacement and lack of alternative livelihoods mirrors the argument by Baral and Heinen (2007), who found that disenfranchised youth in conflict zones often turn to environmentally harmful economic activities out of necessity.

The widespread disruption of forest-dependent livelihoods documented in this study is a powerful illustration of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework in action. The framework emphasizes the importance of five capital assets—natural, human, financial, social, and physical. In the context of Onigambari, all these assets have been undermined. Natural capital (access to forest resources) has been compromised by insecurity, human capital (skills and health) has been degraded by trauma and fear, financial capital has declined due to loss of income, social capital has weakened as community networks strain under pressure, and physical capital (such as transport and market infrastructure) has been affected by restricted mobility and fear. This multi-dimensional livelihood erosion is consistent with findings by Olanrewaju & Balana (2023) who documented how violent conflict in Nigeria's agrarian communities result in livelihood insecurity, poverty deepening, and increased food insecurity. The disproportionate impact on women as primary caregivers and economic contributors further resonates with the gendered analysis of livelihood disruptions by Afifah et al (2025) who stressed the importance of recognizing women's dual roles in both production and reproduction, particularly in crisis contexts.

The community's adaptive responses such as neighborhood watch groups and reliance on *Amotekun* demonstrate resilience, albeit limited by structural constraints. The appreciation of *Amotekun* and the desire for more robust state involvement reflect calls in the literature for multi-layered and community-integrated security architecture in rural Nigeria (Ukaeje, 2021). While these local interventions offer short-term relief, they lack the institutional capacity and long-term strategic planning necessary to combat organized armed groups effectively.

Conclusion

The findings paint a sobering picture of life at the intersection of ecological fragility and human insecurity. Banditry in the Onigambari Forest Reserve transformed the landscape, literally and figuratively by undermining conservation structures, fracturing livelihoods, and instilling fear in forest-reliant populations. The implications are multidimensional. First, forest conservation strategies must account for the security context in which they operate. Second, interventions must go beyond militarized responses to incorporate social, economic, and psychological dimensions. Third, any sustainable solution

must actively involve local communities as co-managers and beneficiaries of forest resources. In line with global discourses on environmental security and community-based natural resource management, this study affirms that forests and people are inseparable. For policy to be effective in forest zones like Onigambari, it must bridge institutional gaps, empower local actors, and integrate conservation with livelihood resilience and peace building.

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