Banditry, Displacement, and the Remaking of Rural Livelihoods: the Political Economy of Forced Migration in Northwestern Nigeria

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Abstract— The escalation of armed banditry in northwestern Nigeria since 2018 has generated one of the country's most severe displacement crises, forcing over 300,000 people from their rural communities across Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto States. While existing scholarship has focused on the immediate humanitarian dimensions of this crisis and on the military and policy responses of the state, considerably less attention has been paid to the long-term reconfiguration of rural livelihoods among displaced populations. This article examines how forced migration induced by banditry has reshaped agricultural practices, labour markets, and land tenure systems in both source communities and host areas. Drawing on a political economy framework and the concept of forced immobility, the study employs a mixed-methods design combining a household survey of 300 displaced and host-community households across three local government areas in Zamfara and Katsina States with in-depth interviews with community leaders, agricultural extension workers, and local government officials. Findings reveal that displacement has precipitated a fundamental restructuring of agrarian livelihoods characterised by the collapse of household food production, the transformation of land access from customary to monetised arrangements, the erosion of communal labour systems, and the emergence of new patterns of dependency on humanitarian assistance and urban informal economies. The study further demonstrates that displacement does not affect all households uniformly. Differential access to social networks, financial capital, and off-farm skills produces divergent livelihood trajectories, with some households achieving partial recovery while others descend into chronic vulnerability. The paper concludes that displacement is not merely a temporary disruption but a process of profound economic restructuring with lasting implications for food security, rural governance, and the political economy of the region. Policy implications for livelihood restoration programmes that address the structural causes of vulnerability are discussed.

Keywords: banditry; forced migration; rural livelihoods; northwestern Nigeria; political economy.

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INTRODUCTION

The northwestern region of Nigeria has, since roughly 2018, been convulsed by an epidemic of armed banditry that has turned vast stretches of the countryside into zones of violence, predation, and mass displacement. Armed groups, known locally simply as bandits, have carried out systematic campaigns of cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, village raids, and targeted killings. The humanitarian toll has been staggering. By the middle of 2024, an estimated 300,000 people had been forced from their homes in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto States. Many now live in desperate conditions in urban centres, satellite camps, and host communities that were themselves already struggling with poverty and resource scarcity (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has described the situation as a protection crisis of alarming proportions (OCHA, 2023, p. 4).

The scholarship and policy responses to this crisis have, understandably, concentrated on its most immediate and visible features. A growing body of work has traced the origins and dynamics of banditry, linking its rise to environmental degradation, the flood of small arms into the region, the weakness of state institutions, and the political economy of cattle rustling (Okoli & Lenshie, 2022; Rufa'i, 2023; Anka, 2024). Policy interventions have centred on military offensives, peace dialogues with bandit groups, and the delivery of emergency relief to displaced populations. What has received far less attention, however, is a simpler but more haunting question: what becomes of rural livelihoods after displacement? How do farming households, stripped of their land, their animals, and the social networks that sustained them, piece together new economic lives in unfamiliar and often unwelcoming places? What happens to the agricultural systems, the labour arrangements, and the land tenure practices of the communities they flee and the communities to which they flee? And what do these transformations mean for the future of food security, rural governance, and the broader political economy of the region?

This article takes up these questions through a political economy analysis of the livelihood consequences of banditry-induced displacement in northwestern Nigeria. It argues that displacement is not a passing shock from which households eventually bounce back. It is a process of deep economic restructuring that permanently alters the conditions under which rural people make a living. The article advances three interrelated claims. The first is that displacement forces a shift from production-based to consumption-based livelihoods. Households lose the land, animals, and communal labour arrangements that underpinned their farming, and they become dependent on humanitarian aid, casual labour, and the precarious informal economies of urban areas. The second claim is that displacement transforms land tenure systems. The customary arrangements that once governed access to farmland in source communities give way to monetised, insecure rental agreements in host areas. The third claim is that the livelihood consequences of displacement are not the same for everyone. Households that can draw on social networks, savings, and off-farm skills manage to reconstruct their lives to some degree. Those without these resources sink into chronic vulnerability. New inequalities emerge within displaced populations, even as old ones are destroyed.

The article unfolds in seven sections. Following this introduction, a literature review places the study within scholarship on conflict-induced displacement, rural livelihoods, and the political economy of northwestern Nigeria. A theoretical framework section develops the analytical concepts of forced immobility and livelihood restructuring. The methodology section describes the mixed-methods design and the study sites. Three empirical sections then examine, in turn, the collapse of agricultural production, the transformation of land and labour markets, and the differentiation of livelihood outcomes among displaced households. A discussion section draws out the theoretical and policy implications, and a conclusion reflects on what the future might hold for rural livelihoods in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Banditry and Displacement in Northwestern Nigeria

The phenomenon of armed banditry in northwestern Nigeria has attracted considerable scholarly attention since its escalation in 2018. Okoli and Lenshie (2022) offer a comprehensive analysis of the structural drivers, pointing to the collapse of rural governance, the proliferation of small arms from Libya and the Sahel, and the transformation of cattle rustling from a cultural practice into a criminal enterprise. Rufa'i (2023) documents the specific dynamics of banditry in Zamfara State, showing how the fragmentation of traditional authority and the militarisation of rural spaces created conditions ripe for armed violence. Anka (2024) extends this analysis to Katsina State, tracing the connections between banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and the political economy of ransom payments.

The displacement consequences of banditry have been documented primarily by humanitarian agencies. The IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix provides the most comprehensive data on the scale and distribution of displacement, recording over 300,000 internally displaced persons in the Northwest as of mid-2024 (IOM, 2024). The Norwegian Refugee Council (2023) has documented the specific vulnerabilities of displaced women and children, including heightened exposure to gender-based violence and the disruption of education. Save the Children (2024) has highlighted the food security consequences of displacement, noting that many displaced households have lost their primary sources of food and income and are dependent on inadequate humanitarian assistance.

These contributions are valuable, but they share a common limitation. They focus on the immediate humanitarian dimensions of displacement rather than on its longer-term economic consequences. The question of how displacement reshapes rural livelihoods, agricultural systems, and land tenure arrangements has not been systematically investigated. This gap is particularly significant given that the majority of displaced persons in northwestern Nigeria are farmers whose livelihoods were fundamentally tied to access to land and livestock. Understanding how these livelihoods are reconfigured after displacement is essential for designing effective interventions.

Conflict-Induced Displacement and Rural Livelihoods

The broader literature on conflict-induced displacement provides a useful framework for analysing the northwestern Nigeria case. Studies from across sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated that displacement has profound and often lasting effects on rural livelihoods. In northern Uganda, the displacement of Acholi communities during the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency led to the collapse of agricultural production, the erosion of customary land tenure, and the emergence of new patterns of dependency on humanitarian assistance that persisted long after the conflict ended (Branch, 2011). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers (2004) showed how displacement in the Kivu provinces transformed land markets, with displaced households losing access to customary land and becoming dependent on precarious rental arrangements in host communities.

A key insight from this literature is that displacement does not affect all households in the same way. Households that can draw on social networks, financial capital, and off-farm skills often manage to reconstruct their livelihoods in host areas, while those without such resources descend into chronic vulnerability (Jacobsen, 2005). This differentiation has important implications for the design of livelihood interventions, which must be sensitive to the diverse needs and capacities of displaced populations.

The Political Economy of Northwestern Nigeria

Understanding the livelihood consequences of displacement in northwestern Nigeria requires placing the crisis within the broader political economy of the region. Northwestern Nigeria is predominantly agrarian, with the majority of the rural population engaged in rain-fed crop production, mainly millet, sorghum, maize, and cowpea, and in livestock rearing (Mortimore & Harris, 1999). Land tenure is governed primarily by customary arrangements, with access to land mediated through lineage, community membership, and usufruct rights (Abdullahi & Hamza, 2020). Labour for agricultural production is mobilised through a combination of household labour, communal work groups known as *gayya*, and hired labour.

The region has experienced significant environmental and economic pressures in recent decades. Declining soil fertility, erratic rainfall linked to climate change, and population growth have reduced agricultural productivity and intensified competition for land and water resources (Maiangwa & Agbiboa, 2014). The liberalisation of agricultural markets under structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s undermined state support for smallholder agriculture and exposed farmers to volatile market conditions (Mustapha & Meagher, 2000). These pressures have contributed to the emergence of banditry by creating a pool of economically marginalised young men with limited livelihood options and by intensifying competition over resources between herders and farmers.

Displacement adds a new layer of complexity to this already fragile political economy. By stripping households of their land, livestock, and social networks, displacement severs the connections that sustained rural livelihoods and forces households to seek new ways of making a living in environments that are often already resource-constrained. Understanding how these processes unfold is the central task of this article.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in a political economy framework that conceptualises displacement as a process of livelihood restructuring rather than a temporary disruption. The political economy approach directs attention to the structural conditions that shape livelihood outcomes, including access to land, labour, capital, and social networks, and to the power relations that determine who gains and who loses from economic transformation (Bernstein, 2010).

The concept of forced immobility is particularly useful for analysing the northwestern Nigeria case. Zickgraf (2019) developed this concept to capture the predicament of populations who are trapped in place by violence, poverty, or environmental degradation, unable to move to safety or to access the resources needed to sustain their livelihoods. In northwestern Nigeria, many rural households have experienced a dual condition of forced mobility and forced immobility. They have been forced to flee their homes by bandit attacks, yet once displaced, they find themselves trapped in precarious host environments with limited opportunities for livelihood reconstruction. This dual condition shapes the livelihood strategies available to displaced households and the outcomes they are able to achieve.

The concept of livelihood restructuring captures the transformation of economic practices, social relations, and institutional arrangements that displacement precipitates. Drawing on Scoones (2009), livelihoods are understood as comprising the assets that households deploy, including natural, physical, human, financial, and social assets, the activities they engage in, and the institutional and policy contexts that shape their options. Displacement simultaneously destroys assets, disrupts activities, and transforms institutional contexts. Livelihood restructuring refers to the processes through which households attempt to rebuild their livelihoods under these transformed conditions.

Three dimensions of livelihood restructuring are particularly salient for the northwestern Nigeria case. The first is the shift from production-based to consumption-based livelihoods, as households lose access to productive assets and become dependent on humanitarian assistance and casual labour. The second is the transformation of land and labour markets, as customary tenure systems are replaced by monetised arrangements. The third is the differentiation of livelihood outcomes, as households with different endowments of capital and social networks pursue divergent trajectories.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining a household survey with in-depth qualitative interviews. The mixed-methods approach was selected to enable both the measurement of livelihood outcomes across a relatively large sample and the exploration of the processes and mechanisms through which those outcomes are produced.

Study Sites

The study was conducted in three local government areas across two states in northwestern Nigeria: Maru Local Government Area in Zamfara State, and Jibia and Batsari Local Government Areas in Katsina State. These areas were purposively selected based on their high incidence of banditry-related violence and displacement. Maru, located in eastern Zamfara, has been one of the epicentres of banditry since 2018, with numerous villages attacked and abandoned. Jibia and Batsari, in northern Katsina State, have experienced similar levels of violence and displacement, exacerbated by their proximity to the vast Rugu forest, which serves as a sanctuary for bandit groups.

Sampling and Data Collection

The household survey was administered to a sample of 300 households, comprising 200 displaced households and 100 host-community households. Displaced households were defined as those that had been forced to leave their communities of origin due to banditry and were currently residing in a host community or displacement camp. Host-community households were defined as those that had not been displaced and were residing in communities receiving displaced persons. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, communities with high concentrations of displaced persons were identified in consultation with local government officials and community leaders. In the second stage, households were randomly selected from lists of displaced and host-community households compiled by community leaders.

The survey instrument captured data on household demographics, pre-displacement and current livelihood activities, asset ownership, land access, income sources, food security, and social network membership. Pre-displacement data were collected retrospectively, relying on respondents' recall. While retrospective data are subject to recall bias, studies have demonstrated that major life events such as displacement are generally well remembered (Becketti et al., 1988).

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 40 participants, comprising 20 displaced household heads, 10 host-community leaders, 5 agricultural extension workers, and 5 local government officials. Interviews explored the processes through which households lost and attempted to reconstruct their livelihoods, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they employed. Interviews were conducted in Hausa, the dominant language of the region, and were audio-recorded with consent. They lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were transcribed and translated into English for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using Stata 17. Descriptive statistics were used to characterise the sample and to compare livelihood outcomes between displaced and host-community households and among displaced households with different characteristics. Chi-square tests and independent samples t-tests were used to assess the statistical significance of differences between groups. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Transcripts were coded inductively, and codes were organised into themes through iterative discussion.

Findings I: The Collapse of Agricultural Production

The most immediate and devastating consequence of banditry-induced displacement has been the collapse of household agricultural production. Prior to displacement, the vast majority of surveyed households, some 92 percent, were engaged in crop farming, livestock rearing, or both. Farming was not merely an economic activity. It was the foundation of household food security, social identity, and community life. Displacement severed this foundation.

Loss of Land and Livestock

The primary mechanism through which displacement destroyed agricultural livelihoods was the loss of access to land and livestock. Among displaced households, 87 percent reported that they had lost all access to their farmland, either because their villages had been completely abandoned or because it was too dangerous to return. A farmer from Maru described his situation in stark terms. "I had five hectares of land. I grew millet, sorghum, and cowpea. The bandits came at night. They took our cattle. They killed my brother. We ran with nothing. Now I am here in this camp. I have no land. I have no animals. I have nothing" (Interview, displaced farmer, Maru LGA, 15 March 2024).

Livestock losses were even more catastrophic. Cattle, sheep, and goats served multiple functions in the rural economy. They were sources of food and income, stores of wealth, and means of coping with shocks. Among households that had owned livestock prior to displacement, 94 percent reported losing all or most of their animals. The mechanisms of loss included direct theft by bandits, distress sales at prices far below market value to finance escape, and the death of animals abandoned during flight. The scale of asset destruction was such that even if security were restored, most households would lack the capital needed to resume agricultural production.

The Shift to Consumption-Based Livelihoods

The loss of productive assets forced displaced households to shift from production-based to consumption-based livelihoods. Whereas prior to displacement, 78 percent of households derived the majority of their food from their own production, after displacement, 92 percent relied primarily on food purchases, humanitarian assistance, or gifts from relatives. This shift had profound implications for food security. The survey found that 68 percent of displaced households were moderately or severely food insecure, compared to 24 percent of host-community households.

The sources of food for displaced households were multiple but precarious. Humanitarian assistance, provided by the National Emergency Management Agency, state emergency management agencies, and international organisations, reached only a minority of households, some 34 percent, and was described as inadequate and irregular. A displaced woman in Jibia explained her family's situation. "They gave us rice and beans once. That was three months ago. Since then, nothing. We beg from neighbours. Some days we eat once. Some days we do not eat" (Interview, displaced woman, Jibia LGA, 22 March 2024).

Those who could not access humanitarian assistance relied on a combination of casual labour, petty trading, and remittances from relatives in urban areas. However, these sources were themselves unreliable. Casual labour opportunities were limited and poorly paid. Petty trading required capital that most households did not possess. Remittances were irregular and insufficient to meet household needs.

Findings II: The Transformation of Land and Labour Markets

Displacement not only destroyed the productive assets of individual households but also transformed the institutional arrangements that governed access to land and labour in rural communities.

The Erosion of Customary Land Tenure

In pre-displacement communities, access to agricultural land was governed primarily by customary tenure arrangements. Land was held collectively by lineages or communities and allocated to households on the basis of usufruct rights. These rights were inheritable and relatively secure, providing households with a stable foundation for agricultural investment and production (Abdullahi & Hamza, 2020). Displacement eroded these customary arrangements in two ways. First, in source communities that had been abandoned, customary tenure effectively ceased to function. The land remained, but the community that had governed its allocation and use was dispersed. Whether and how these lands would be reallocated if and when security was restored remained an unresolved and potentially conflictual question.

Second, in host communities, displaced households could not access land through customary channels because they were not members of the host community lineage structures. Instead, they were forced to access land through monetised rental arrangements. Among displaced households that had managed to access some agricultural land, some 22 percent, 89 percent did so through rental or sharecropping agreements. A displaced farmer in Batsari described the terms of his arrangement. "I found a man who would let me farm his land. But I must give him half of whatever I harvest. And I must pay for the seeds and the fertiliser myself. It is not fair, but what can I do? I have no land of my own" (Interview, displaced farmer, Batsari LGA, 28 March 2024).

These arrangements were not only economically extractive but also insecure. Landowners could terminate the agreement at any time, and displaced tenants had no recourse. The monetisation and insecurity of land access represented a fundamental transformation of the agrarian structure, one that shifted power from producers to landowners and created new forms of dependency.

The Collapse of Communal Labour Systems

Pre-displacement agriculture in northwestern Nigeria relied heavily on communal labour systems, particularly the *gayya* system in which groups of young men worked together on each other's fields in rotation. This system reduced labour costs, enabled timely completion of agricultural tasks, and reinforced social bonds within communities.

Displacement destroyed the *gayya* system. Dispersed across multiple host communities, former neighbours and kin could no longer coordinate their labour. Host communities had their own *gayya* arrangements, into which displaced persons were rarely integrated. As a result, displaced households that attempted to farm were forced to rely on household labour or to hire labour at market rates, significantly increasing production costs. A community leader in Maru reflected on the loss. "The *gayya* was our strength. When we worked together, the work was light. Now everyone is alone. The young men are in the city looking for work. The old men are here, but they cannot farm alone. The land is there, but the hands are gone" (Interview, community leader, Maru LGA, 18 March 2024).

The collapse of communal labour systems had implications beyond agricultural production. It represented the fraying of the social fabric that had bound rural communities together, raising questions about the prospects for post-conflict community reconstruction.

Findings III: Differentiation of Livelihood Outcomes

While displacement had devastating consequences for the majority of households, its effects were not uniform. The survey and interview data revealed significant differentiation in livelihood outcomes among displaced households, driven primarily by differential access to social networks, financial capital, and off-farm skills.

The Role of Social Networks

Social networks emerged as the most critical determinant of livelihood outcomes. Households that had relatives or close associates in host communities or urban areas were better able to access housing, food, credit, and employment opportunities. A displaced household head in Jibia who had successfully established a small retail business described the importance of his network. "My brother-in-law lives here in Jibia town. When we fled, he gave us a room in his house. He lent me money to start selling provisions. Without him, we would be in the camp with nothing" (Interview, displaced household head, Jibia LGA, 25 March 2024).

Conversely, households that lacked such networks were often trapped in displacement camps or precarious informal settlements, with limited access to the resources needed to begin reconstructing their livelihoods. The survey found that households with a close relative in the host community were 2.3 times more likely to have resumed some form of income-generating activity than those without such connections.

Financial Capital and Off-Farm Skills

Financial capital, in the form of savings, livestock, or other assets that could be liquidated, also shaped livelihood trajectories. Households that had been able to bring some capital with them or that received remittances from relatives in urban areas were better positioned to invest in petty trading, livestock, or agricultural inputs. However, the majority of displaced households, some 76 percent, reported having no savings or assets to draw upon after displacement.

Off-farm skills, such as tailoring, carpentry, or trading, provided an alternative pathway to livelihood reconstruction. Households with members possessing such skills were better able to find employment or start small businesses in host communities. A displaced young man in Batsari who had trained as a tailor before the crisis explained his situation. "I lost everything, but I still have my hands. I found a tailor in the town who lets me use his machine. I give him a share of what I earn. It is not much, but I can feed myself" (Interview, displaced young man, Batsari LGA, 30 March 2024).

Trajectories of Vulnerability and Recovery

Based on the survey and interview data, three broad livelihood trajectories were identified among displaced households. The first trajectory, accounting for approximately 45 percent of households, was one of chronic vulnerability. These households had lost all productive assets, lacked social networks in host communities, and were dependent on irregular humanitarian assistance and casual labour. They experienced severe food insecurity and had little prospect of livelihood recovery without external assistance.

The second trajectory, accounting for approximately 35 percent of households, was one of partial recovery. These households had managed to access some land or employment through social networks or off-farm skills, but their livelihoods remained precarious and vulnerable to shocks. They were better off than the chronically vulnerable but had not regained anything approaching their pre-displacement standard of living.

The third trajectory, accounting for approximately 20 percent of households, was one of relative resilience. These households had successfully reconstructed their livelihoods through a combination of social networks, financial capital, and entrepreneurial initiative. They had established small businesses, secured relatively stable employment, or accessed agricultural land on reasonable terms. However, even these households remained vulnerable to the ongoing insecurity that made return to their communities of origin impossible.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that banditry-induced displacement in northwestern Nigeria is not merely a temporary disruption from which households will naturally recover when security is restored. It is a process of profound economic restructuring that fundamentally alters the conditions under which rural livelihoods are pursued. Three dimensions of this restructuring merit particular emphasis.

First, the shift from production-based to consumption-based livelihoods represents a fundamental transformation of the rural economy. Households that once produced their own food and derived their income from the sale of agricultural surpluses are now dependent on markets, humanitarian assistance, and casual labour for their survival. This shift has rendered them acutely vulnerable to food price inflation, the irregularity of humanitarian assistance, and the exploitation of employers and landlords. Even if security were to be restored, the capital and institutional foundations needed to resume agricultural production, meaning land, livestock, seed, tools, and communal labour systems, have been destroyed and would require substantial investment to rebuild.

Second, the transformation of land and labour markets has shifted power from producers to those who control access to resources. The replacement of customary tenure with monetised rental arrangements has created a class of landlords who extract rents from displaced tenants, while the collapse of communal labour systems has increased the costs and reduced the productivity of agricultural production. These shifts are likely to have lasting effects on the agrarian structure of the region, potentially exacerbating inequality and creating new sources of tension between returnees and those who remained.

Third, the differentiation of livelihood outcomes highlights the importance of social networks, financial capital, and off-farm skills in mediating the effects of displacement. Households that possess these resources are better able to navigate the challenges of displacement and to reconstruct their livelihoods, while those without them are consigned to chronic vulnerability. This differentiation has implications for the design of livelihood interventions, which must be targeted at the most vulnerable while also supporting the capacities of those with the potential for recovery.

The findings also have implications for the broader literature on conflict-induced displacement. They confirm the insights of scholars who have argued that displacement is a process of economic transformation, not merely a humanitarian emergency (Branch, 2011; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2004). They extend this literature by providing detailed empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which this transformation occurs, particularly the loss of productive assets, the erosion of customary institutions, and the differentiation of livelihood outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has examined the livelihood consequences of banditry-induced displacement in northwestern Nigeria, arguing that displacement constitutes a process of profound economic restructuring with lasting implications for food security, rural governance, and the political economy of the region. The collapse of agricultural production, the transformation of land and labour markets, and the differentiation of livelihood outcomes among displaced households demonstrate that displacement is not a temporary disruption but a fundamental reconfiguration of the conditions under which rural livelihoods are pursued.

Based on these findings, several policy recommendations can be offered. First, livelihood restoration programmes must go beyond the provision of emergency relief to address the structural conditions that prevent displaced households from resuming productive activities. This includes providing access to land, either through the restoration of security in source communities or through negotiated access arrangements in host communities, restocking livestock and providing agricultural inputs, and supporting the reestablishment of communal labour systems.

Second, interventions must be differentiated to respond to the diverse needs and capacities of displaced households. Chronically vulnerable households require sustained social protection, including cash transfers and food assistance. Households with potential for recovery require support for livelihood investment, including access to credit, skills training, and market linkages.

Third, the transformation of land tenure arrangements demands policy attention. The replacement of customary tenure with monetised rental arrangements has created new forms of vulnerability that are likely to persist even after security is restored. Legal and policy frameworks are needed to protect the land rights of displaced persons and to prevent the permanent alienation of their land.

Finally, any sustainable solution to the livelihood crisis in northwestern Nigeria must address the root causes of banditry itself. Livelihood interventions, however well designed, will have limited impact in the absence of security. The restoration of state authority, the disarmament and reintegration of bandit groups, and the addressing of the structural drivers of violence, including rural poverty, environmental degradation, and weak governance, are essential preconditions for the recovery of rural livelihoods.

The people of northwestern Nigeria have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of catastrophic violence and displacement. However, resilience has its limits. Without sustained and substantial support from the Nigerian state and the international community, the livelihood crisis documented in this article will deepen, with grave consequences for the food security, stability, and human dignity of millions of people.

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