

**INTER-SECURITY AGENCIES COOPERATION AND COUNTER-BANDITRY
OPERATIONS IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study examines the role, efficiency, and effectiveness of inter-agency security collaboration in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State, Nigeria. Drawing on the collaborative governance theory and in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis, it investigates how cooperation among the Nigerian Army, Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Department of State Services (DSS), and vigilante groups shapes operational outcomes. The findings indicate that, when properly managed, inter-agency cooperation enhances intelligence sharing, improves coordination of responses, and strengthens control of high-risk areas, thereby improving security outcomes. However, the study also reveals that effectiveness is constrained by institutional rivalries, inadequate logistics, weak communication networks, overlapping command structures, and limited community trust and participation. Despite these challenges, joint patrols, shared intelligence mechanisms, and civil-military engagement have contributed to relative stability in some conflict-prone areas. The study recommends strengthening institutional synergy, improving resource mobilisation, and deepening community-security partnerships to enhance the long-term effectiveness of counter-banditry operations in Taraba State.

Keywords: *Banditry, civil-military relations, inter-agency cooperation, security outcomes, community-security partnerships*

Introduction

Banditry is a persistent form of organized criminal violence that has emerged across diverse historical and geographical settings, particularly in contexts of political instability, weak governance, and economic marginalization. From medieval Europe and Latin America to contemporary poorly governed regions, banditry has thrived where state authority is limited, borders are porous, and economic hardship drives illicit livelihoods. In Africa, it has evolved from traditional cattle rustling and highway robbery into highly organized armed networks. In the Sahel, political fragility, resource competition, and climate change have intensified insecurity and enabled the growth of transnational bandit groups linked to terrorism, smuggling, and cross-border crime (OECD, 2020; Clionadh, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2021), with porous borders allowing these groups to evade enforcement and sustain transnational raids (Debos, 2016).

In Nigeria, banditry has expanded into a multidimensional internal security crisis with severe socio-economic and political consequences. Initially rooted in rural cattle rustling, it has developed into a sophisticated system of organized crime involving kidnapping for ransom, mass killings, and widespread community destruction. Key drivers include rural poverty, environmental degradation, small-arms proliferation, weakened traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, climate change-induced desertification, the collapse of pastoral livelihoods, and

transborder arms trafficking (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2022; Egbejule, 2022; Ejiofor, 2022; Ojo, 2020; Blench, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2022; Balogun, 2024). Structural weaknesses in state institutions and ineffective security responses have further worsened the crisis (Akinetum, 2021; Okoli, 2021). As a result, northern states such as Taraba, Kaduna, Zamfara, and Katsina have experienced mass displacement, loss of lives, and livelihood destruction, making inter-agency coordination a central priority in counter-banditry efforts (Aminu, 2021; Abiodun et al., 2019; Chukwu, 2022; Ogundipe, 2022).

Globally and regionally, collaborative security mechanisms, particularly intelligence sharing and joint operations, remain critical to addressing organized criminal violence. Bodies such as the UNODC and INTERPOL support initiatives to curb illicit arms flows and strengthen border control, while African responses include the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (Adeyeye, 2024; Pinto, 2025), ECOWAS, IGAD (Herpolsheimer, 2024; Sabala, 2024), and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin (Ofongo, 2024). In Nigeria, military operations such as Hadarin Daji and Thunder Strike have employed airstrikes, ground offensives, and intelligence-led raids (Danjuma, 2019; Egbegi, 2021; Kadiri, 2023), but their effectiveness has been constrained by weak inter-agency collaboration, corruption, and resource shortages (Falana, 2022; Gani, 2023). These challenges are evident in Taraba State, where joint Army-Police-CJTF operations between 2015 and 2023 achieved notable successes but were undermined by coordination gaps and institutional rivalries, highlighting the need for sustained intelligence-driven strategies and stronger inter-agency cooperation.

Banditry, Inter Agency Collaboration and Counter-Banditry Operations in Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria is widely conceptualized as an evolving and complex security phenomenon shaped by violence, governance deficits, and socio-economic deprivation. While Okoli and Ugwu (2019) define banditry as the actual or threatened use of violence to dispossess individuals of property, Ladan (2015) characterizes it as a gang-based activity that may also involve lone actors. Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) further situate banditry within environments marked by entrenched poverty, weak governance, and ineffective law enforcement, which together create conditions conducive to violent crime. The resulting displacement, loss of livelihoods, and climate of fear deepen insecurity and underdevelopment (Mahmud & Maigari, 2024; Adesola & Akerele, 2025). However, much of the existing literature remains largely descriptive, offering limited engagement with the political economy of banditry, including issues of state complicity and structural drivers, thereby constraining conceptual depth.

Counter-banditry approaches in Nigeria emphasize multidimensional strategies that combine intelligence gathering, surveillance, military intervention, and community engagement (Kwede & Danbala, 2024; Obi & Iwuoha, 2023). Scholars underscore the importance of intelligence-led operations and surveillance technologies such as drones and satellite imagery in anticipating and deterring attacks (Smith, 2020; Williams & Anderson, 2022). Nonetheless, these responses are often reactive, militarized, and fragmented, undermining their long-term effectiveness (Garba et al., 2024). Although calls have been made to integrate human intelligence and community-based mechanisms into national counter-banditry frameworks (Dansabo et al., 2024), empirical evidence on how such integration functions within Nigeria's complex socio-

political context remains limited. As a result, the operational dynamics and coordination mechanisms underpinning counter-banditry efforts are insufficiently examined.

Inter-security agency collaboration is widely recognized as a core pillar of effective national security management, particularly given the blurring boundaries between military, police, and intelligence roles in addressing converging internal and external threats. While joint task forces and coordinated operations exist, institutional fragmentation, bureaucratic competition, political interference, and resource disparities continue to undermine collaboration. Although inter-agency collaboration entails joint operations, resource sharing, and strategic planning (Umar, 2019; Kareem, 2018), Nigerian security agencies often exhibit jurisdictional rivalry and prestige competition (Gberinyer et al., 2024; Udochukwu & Uchenna, 2024). Despite acknowledgment of successful joint operations such as Operation Puff Adder and Operation Hadarin Daji (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2019), challenges persist, including overlapping mandates, weak technological capacity, and limited institutionalization of cooperation (Abiodun et al., 2019; Aliyu, 2021; Eze, 2020). While recent studies emphasize community engagement and intelligence-led collaboration (Duru, 2020; Kwede & Danbala, 2024; Onuche & Martins, 2024), the literature remains unclear on how inter-agency cooperation translates into measurable counter-banditry outcomes. This gap underscores the need for empirical research on the governance structures, operational synergy, and policy mechanisms required to institutionalize and sustain effective inter-agency collaboration in Nigeria's security sector.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in the theory of collaborative governance advanced by Ansell and Gash (2018), which explains how diverse stakeholders collectively address complex societal problems that exceed the capacity of any single institution. The theory emphasizes inclusive decision-making involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private actors, and community groups, particularly in situations where authority, expertise, or resources are fragmented. It highlights the importance of information sharing, resource pooling, and joint strategy development to promote mutual accountability and shared responsibility. Central to this framework is trust-building, which Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) identify as the basis of effective collaboration through the creation of social capital, while Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) stress shared leadership as a means of distributing decision-making power and encouraging innovation through diverse perspectives.

Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) further extend the theory through the concept of collaborative dynamics, which focuses on continuous interaction, shared learning, and adaptive problem-solving among participants. Adaptive learning is presented as critical to sustaining collaboration, as it enables stakeholders to evaluate outcomes and adjust strategies in response to changing conditions. Despite these strengths, the theory has faced criticism for its idealized assumptions of equality and inclusiveness. Scholars argue that unequal power relations often allow dominant actors to control decision-making, thereby undermining fairness (Shifidi, Sitas, & Meissner, 2024). Others note that collaboration is time- and resource-intensive, posing challenges in resource-constrained settings such as Nigeria (Huxham & Vangen, 2000), while Provan and Kenis (2007) point to the theory's limited guidance on managing conflict and collaboration breakdowns.

Notwithstanding these limitations, collaborative governance theory remains widely applicable across sectors, including environmental management and security governance. Bodin (2017) demonstrates its relevance in natural resource management, where trust and inclusivity enhance joint outcomes, while Moynihan (2009) applies the framework to inter-agency collaboration in counter-terrorism and crime prevention. In security contexts, the theory explains how coordinated action among law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and international partners can improve responses to complex threats. However, its application is often constrained by institutional rivalry, information hoarding, and mistrust, particularly in security sectors characterized by hierarchical command structures and weak institutions, such as Nigeria's.

Within this study, collaborative governance theory provides a useful analytical lens for examining coordination challenges among security agencies involved in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State, including the Nigerian Army, Police Force, and Civil Defence Corps. Effective counter-banditry requires integrating diverse institutional perspectives, fostering shared responsibility, and leveraging each agency's comparative strengths. Persistent inter-agency distrust and operational conflicts underscore the need for trust-building mechanisms and joint decision-making structures. By applying this framework, the study identifies factors shaping collaboration and proposes strategies to overcome institutional and relational barriers, reinforcing the argument that combating banditry demands a collective governance approach in which interdependent security agencies operate as a coordinated network rather than isolated entities.

Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to examine inter-security agency collaboration and counter-banditry operations in Taraba State, Nigeria, between 2015 and 2023. This design was appropriate for systematically describing and interpreting existing practices, coordination structures, and operational challenges without probing deeply into the psychological dimensions of participants' experiences. It enabled an objective assessment of how the Nigerian Army (NA), Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Department of State Services (DSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and local vigilante groups coordinated in addressing banditry. By focusing on observable patterns of cooperation, competition, and organizational bottlenecks, the design provided a realistic picture of how inter-agency collaboration functioned in practice and how it shaped joint security performance.

Data were collected using a qualitative approach through Key Informant Interviews with a total of 90 security personnel drawn from the five agencies: 36 from the military, 20 from the police, 12 from the DSS, 10 from the NSCDC, and 12 local vigilantes. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure the inclusion of personnel with direct operational experience and in-depth knowledge of inter-agency collaboration. This approach was particularly suitable given the sensitivity of security operations and the challenges of accessing respondents through conventional sampling methods. In addition, secondary data from government reports, academic literature, and policy documents were analyzed to provide contextual depth and to triangulate and validate insights obtained from the field.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic and content analysis to systematically interpret interview transcripts and documentary sources. Thematic analysis involved coding data around

key themes such as intelligence sharing, communication efficiency, operational rivalry, and coordination frameworks, enabling the identification of recurring patterns that shaped inter-agency collaboration. Content analysis complemented this by examining policy documents and institutional texts to uncover broader trends, practices, and frameworks influencing cooperation. The combined use of these analytical techniques ensured that the findings were empirically grounded and analytically robust, offering nuanced insights into the strengths, limitations, and future prospects of inter-security agency collaboration in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State.

The Role of Security Agencies in Counter-Banditry Operations in Taraba State

Security agencies played a critical role in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State amid persistent threats from armed groups. The military, police, DSS, Civil Defense Corps, and local vigilantes carried out complementary tasks in intelligence gathering, surveillance, patrols, and community protection. While collaboration enhanced effectiveness, challenges like limited resources and overlapping mandates persisted. The military, as the backbone of operations, conducted coordinated raids, border patrols, and aerial and ground surveillance, strengthening other agencies' efforts and restoring community confidence. A Military Personnel Member explained:

Our main role was to spearhead direct combat against bandit enclaves, conduct regular patrols, establish forward operating bases, and rapidly respond to crisis points. Whenever villages were under attack, quick interventions pushed bandits back and instilled a sense of safety in the locals (KII with a Lance Corporal, Donga, August 24, 2023).

This demonstrates how the military's tactical coordination and presence in high-risk areas underpinned joint operations and provided both defensive and offensive support to vulnerable communities. The respondent explained that their duties included routine patrols, establishing forward operating bases in hotspot areas, and rapidly responding to distress calls during attacks, making the military the backbone of direct combat and community defense. However, their role extended beyond combat to strategic and supportive functions that reinforced the broader security structure. As one Military Personnel Officer interviewed in Takum noted:

Beyond combat, we played a vital role in logistics and tactical support to other security agencies. Often, the police and vigilantes lacked the firepower, mobility, and technical capacity to engage bandits in difficult terrains like mountains and forests. In such cases, we reinforced their positions with heavy weapons, vehicles, and trained manpower, preventing a loss of momentum against the bandits. (KII with a Military Personnel Officer, Takum, August 27, 2023).

This account underscores how the military's resources and expertise were central to effective multi-agency coordination, enabling even less-equipped security actors to contribute meaningfully. Joint operations with other agencies focused on countering banditry and securing key transportation routes. A Military Personnel Member in Jalingo explained:

We have actively engaged in high-risk rescue operations for kidnapped victims, often held in forests or remote mountainous areas. Poor terrain and accessibility made missions challenging, but rescuing hostages remained a top

priority to restore community confidence and weaken bandit influence. (KII with Military Personnel Member in Jalingo, June 10, 2023).

The military combined combat operations with soft approaches, recognizing that rebuilding civilian trust was as vital as tactical success. Respondents noted that the military typically led joint patrols due to superior firepower, while other agencies handled intelligence, community stabilization, and follow-up security. This coordination also enabled the creation of safe corridors during farming seasons, allowing rural residents to access farms with reduced risk of attacks. The interview responses from the Police Sergeant provide a deeper understanding of their mandate, challenges, and contributions. The officer states that:

One of the most important things we did was maintain law and order in the areas cleared of bandits by the military. We moved in to stabilize the communities affected, restore confidence among the residents, and manage the delicate process of investigating crimes committed during the attack. This follow-up role ensured that the gains of military (KII with a Police Sergeant in Jalingo, June 15, 2020).

This response highlights the police's transitional role in Taraba State, stepping in where military operations leave a security vacuum. They ensure peace is maintained, institutions function, and communities return to normal, preventing the resurgence of violence. The Police Sergeant further explained:

The police role in counter-banditry is not limited to enforcement; we mediate between actors, provide humanitarian protection, and collaborate on intelligence. Beyond enforcement, we intervene in conflicts, such as clashes between farmers and herders fueled by bandit attacks by brokering temporary truces and facilitating dialogue to reduce tensions and prevent renewed violence (KII with a Police Sergeant in Jalingo, June 15, 2020).

This underscores the multifaceted responsibilities of the police, combining stabilization, mediation, and intelligence functions to sustain security after military engagement. In this context, the police in Taraba State acts not only as law enforcers but also as mediators in complex conflicts, brokering truces to break cycles of reprisals and create space for peace initiatives, even if temporarily. They also engaged in intelligence sharing with other security agencies to strengthen operations. A Senior Police Officer explained:

We worked with the DSS to track financiers and sponsors of bandit activities. The lack of advanced investigative tools and financial tracking systems made it difficult to uncover the deeper networks sustaining the groups. Despite these limitations, joint intelligence sharing allowed us to map some local support structures (KII with Senior Police Officer in Donga, July 6, 2023).

This response highlights the police's role in targeting the financial networks sustaining banditry, showing that even with limited technology and resources, intelligence-sharing with the DSS enhanced identification of local support systems, though deeper financial structures often remained hidden. DSS personnel emphasized that actionable intelligence was key to preventing attacks, intercepting arms, and uncovering collaborators who aided bandits. A Senior DSS Officer in Jalingo explained:

We are intelligence officers involved in counter-banditry operations. In Taraba, our central role is to gather and analyze intelligence. We monitor mobile communications, coded messages, and word-of-mouth networks to map routes

used by bandits to enter villages or retreat into forests. We don't fight directly but provide timely, accurate intelligence that guides military and police operations. Without this, most operations would be blind and riskier (KII with Senior DSS Officer in Jalingo, February 12, 2022).

The respondent highlights DSS's strategic role in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State, emphasizing intelligence gathering and coordination as its core strength. Unlike combat units, DSS provides actionable information that guides the timing and direction of military and police interventions. A critical part of their work involves undercover surveillance, targeting both bandits and their supply networks. As a Senior DSS Officer in Jalingo explained:

We are heavily involved in undercover surveillance. I have tracked local collaborators supplying food, fuel, and ammunition to bandits. Often, these were ordinary-looking traders or transporters, difficult to identify without careful observation. We sometimes embedded ourselves in the community, posing as buyers or farmers to confirm suspicions. This work is dangerous but essential, as cutting off supplies weakens bandit operations (KII with a Senior DSS Officer, June 27, 2021).

This testimony illustrates how DSS targets the economic lifelines of bandit groups by identifying and dismantling their supply networks, disrupting the logistical flows that sustain criminal activities. The danger involved in embedding within communities underscores the sophistication of DSS operations, which rely on both discretion and local presence.

Another key aspect of DSS operations involves providing strategic advice on the deployment of security infrastructure. By analyzing gathered intelligence, they anticipate bandit movements and alternative routes used to evade detection. As one Senior DSS Officer in Jalingo recounted:

We advised on the deployment of security checkpoints. From our intelligence, bandits avoided the main highways and used bush paths and abandoned farmlands to move weapons. We recommended that mobile checkpoints should be positioned in remote sparsely populated areas. When implemented, this advice saw the interception of several arms and motorcycles, which reduced the frequency of raids in those locations. (KII with a Senior DSS Officer, Jalingo, August 24, 2023).

This statement highlights how intelligence-led policing improves security by adapting strategies to field realities. Instead of relying on static checkpoints, DSS input enabled flexible monitoring of critical routes. Collaboration with other agencies was central to their success. As a DSS Analyst, Takum, explained:

Another part of our work involved inter-agency coordination, where we met with the military, police, and civil defense corps to harmonize intelligence. There was sometimes rivalry over credit, but when coordination worked, the results were clear. It has produced joint operation based on shared intelligence that have led to the rescue of kidnapped people, including farmers, motorists and several businessmen (KII with a DSS Analyst in Bali, August 20, 2023).

This account underscores both the opportunities and challenges of inter-agency collaboration. While competition for recognition sometimes created friction, joint operations based on shared intelligence achieved tangible successes in saving lives and restoring security. Vigilante groups, though informal, have become central to countering banditry in Taraba State. A Vigilante Senior Operational Officer explained:

A great strength emanates from knowing this land. Bandits can hide in mountains and woods, but we know each footpath and settlement. We have led many soldiers and police through routes that no outsider would find. Many rescue missions without our support would surely have failed (KII with a Vigilante Senior Operational Officer in Wukari, June 10, 2023).

Vigilantes thus complement formal security forces by providing localized intelligence, geographical familiarity, and rapid response in rural areas, extending the reach of state operations into difficult terrains.

Their collaboration with state agencies ensures timely intervention, particularly in volatile zones where official presence is limited. One Vigilante Personnel Member, noted:

Often, we patrol with soldiers and civil defense officers. In Kurmi areas, we move together at night because the forests are dangerous. The soldiers have weapons but we know the tracks. Together, we have ambushed bandit camps and recovered stolen cattle (KII with a Vigilante Personnel Member in Baissa, Kurmi, September 2, 2023).

These joint patrols illustrate operational synergy: state agencies contribute firepower and authority, while vigilantes provide local knowledge and trusted networks. Beyond operational support, vigilantes also play a key role in community sensitization and prevention, helping to deter youth from joining bandit groups. Their integration into counter-banditry efforts highlights the importance of blending formal security capacities with local expertise, showing how collaborative approaches can enhance effectiveness in complex security environments.

Effects of Inter-Security Agency Collaboration on Counter-Banditry Operation

The counter-banditry operations in Taraba State improved intelligence sharing, operational precision, and troop morale through inter-agency collaboration. Joint planning among the military, DSS, police, civil defense, and vigilantes shifted operations from fragmented, reactive responses to proactive, intelligence-driven strikes that reduced casualties and resource waste. Previously, military operations were often isolated and relied little on external intelligence, leading to missed targets and inefficiency. Integrating DSS intelligence and vigilante guidance significantly enhanced the accuracy of strikes. As one frontline Soldier noted:

Before collaboration, we were mostly in the wrong areas chasing shadows. With DSS and vigilante intelligence, our raids became more precise—we could strike bandit camps directly, thus saving time and reducing casualties (KII with a Soldier in Wukari, October 23, 2023).

This account highlights how past fragmented operations wasted manpower and resources, whereas integrating DSS and vigilante intelligence enabled precision strikes. Inter-agency collaboration optimized both time and casualty management in counter-banditry operations. A Military Personnel Member in Jalingo explained:

Interagency coordination has revolutionized our operations. Instead of being at the receiving end of an attack, we are now proactive. Real-time intelligence provided by the DSS and vigilantes aids the short response time. Sometimes, maintaining a soldier on site in remote rural areas is not easy (KII with a Military Personnel Member, Jalingo, August 23, 2023)

The officer emphasized the shift from reactive to proactive engagement. While intelligence improves response times, sustaining troop morale during extended rural missions remains a

challenge, showing that collaboration enhances operational effectiveness but cannot fully address human endurance issues.

Beyond tactical gains, interagency coordination also addresses the human dimension of operations. A soldier emphasized the value of timing: with aerial surveillance and shared intelligence, troops can anticipate bandit movements, intercept them proactively, and engage directly rather than reacting, significantly boosting operational effectiveness. (KII with a Lance Corporal, Donga, August 24, 2023). A senior officer highlighted how collaboration creates a chain of accountability:

Soldiers operate knowing they have the support of police, DSS, and vigilantes, reducing operational risks and enabling decisive action in difficult terrains (KII with a Military Personnel Member, Jalingo, June 24, 2023).

This collective security and mutual backing foster confidence, cohesion, and calculated risk-taking across units. From the police perspective, similar improvements emerged. Previously criticized for slow and reactive responses due to limited resources, interagency collaboration enhanced their speed, effectiveness, and legitimacy within communities. A Police Officer in Takum observed:

In those days before we started working with other agencies, our people used to accuse us of being too slow. We would arrive at scenes after the bandits had already escaped. But since the DSS started sharing their intelligence with us, and with vigilantes joining in, we now reach locations much faster. Patrolling with the army gives us courage, especially in areas we used to fear (KII with a Police Sergeant, Takum, July 15, 2022).

The Sergeant's response illustrates how police operations in Takum shifted from delayed responses to prompt, intelligence-driven actions. Joint patrols and DSS inputs boosted confidence, transforming the police from reactive to proactive actors in counter-banditry. A Police Inspector in Takum explained:

The DSS provides us with signals which we depend on before heading out. In the past, we moved around without knowing where we were exposing our people, thus putting them at unnecessary risks. Now, we go prepared and based on intelligence; that has reduced both casualties and wasted operations. Our results speak for themselves (KII with a Police Inspector, Takum, July 17, 2023).

This underscores how intelligence-sharing revolutionized police operations, minimizing risks and improving outcomes. Similarly, a Police Sergeant in Donga highlighted the enhanced coordination and operational efficiency resulting from inter-agency collaboration, thus:

These vigilantes have taught us much about the terrain: the narrow paths, the rivers, and the bush tracks the bandits use. With their guidance, we have intercepted groups that would otherwise have slipped away. It goes to show how local knowledge can be as important as the weapons in this fight (KII with a Police Sergeant, Donga, July 2, 2023).

From this interview, the Sergeant evidences how vigilante terrain knowledge complements police operations. His statement undoubtedly affirms the indispensable position of local agency in bridging the gap between formal policing and grassroots realities in bandit-prone areas.

Inter-agency collaboration has significantly reshaped the role of the DSS in Taraba State, improving intelligence use, reducing rivalries, and enhancing operational outcomes. A Senior DSS Officer in Jalingo summarized the change:

Rivalry led agencies to dismiss DSS intelligence, undermining operations. Today, shared successes show that collective responsibility is more effective, gradually building trust and improving coordination despite lingering frictions (KII with a Senior DSS Officer, Jalingo, June 2, 2023).

This illustrates how collaboration is fostering a culture of cooperation, prioritizing shared credit over individual prestige, and strengthening operational efficiency. Collaborative efforts are strengthening trust, improving communication, and fostering sustained coordination in counter-banditry operations, promoting both operational effectiveness and institutional learning. A DSS analyst from Takum highlighted the strategic impact on disrupting bandit networks:

Previously, financiers operated freely as our reports were ignored. Now, police and army act promptly on our intelligence, targeting these networks and weakening the bandits' capacity to plan and execute attacks. Collaboration has turned intelligence into direct operational impact (KII with a DSS Analyst, Takum, August 23, 2023).

This shows that inter-agency cooperation extends intelligence beyond tactical use, directly dismantling the financial backbone of bandit operations and reducing their operational capacity. Evidence from the field shows that the NSCDC has become a vital link between local communities and formal security agencies. Collaboration has transformed their role, enhanced intelligence sharing, improved community relations, and strengthened institutional recognition and adaptability. A NSCDC officer explained:

Working with other agencies has taught us advanced surveillance, reporting, and communication methods. This has made our interventions faster, more coordinated, and precise, reducing risks for both personnel and communities. Collaboration has improved our professional capacity, agency relationships, and demonstrated the value of shared knowledge and joint training (KII with a NSCDC Officer, Bali, August 20, 2023).

This shows that inter-agency collaboration has equipped NSCDC officers with practical skills, enabling them to conduct operations more effectively, accurately, and safely.

Security agencies have improved operational efficiency by cross-checking intelligence, reducing errors, and focusing resources where they are most needed, thereby protecting both personnel and civilians. A NSCDC officer explained:

Bandits constantly adapt their tactics, making timely intelligence crucial. By sharing real-time updates with the army and police, and verifying information on the ground, we can anticipate their movements and adjust our operations. This proactive approach reduces successful attacks, builds community trust, and boosts team morale as we see the tangible results of coordinated efforts (KII with a NSCDC Officer, Takum, August 23, 2023).

This highlights how inter-agency collaboration enables NSCDC to respond to evolving threats, strengthen public confidence, and enhance personnel morale. Furthermore, partnerships with local vigilantes combine grassroots knowledge with formal security structures, improving operational capacity and community engagement. Vigilantes in Kurmi have shifted from a reactive to a proactive role in counter-banditry. A member explained:

Before, we only reported after attacks, limiting our ability to protect communities. Now, collaborating closely with the police and army, we share real-time intelligence and provide early warnings. This helps prevent attacks, safeguard lives and property, and shows the community that their cooperation matters (KII with a Vigilante Member, Baissa, Kurmi, September 2, 2023).

This proactive engagement improves the efficiency of formal security operations, reduces human and material loss, and builds community trust. A Vigilante Leader in Takum added:

Regular coordination with police, army, and other agencies helps us plan patrols using our knowledge of high-risk areas and bandit hideouts. This ensures our intelligence directly shapes operational decisions, making interventions more strategic and effective (KII with Vigilante Leader, Takum, August 21, 2023).

These accounts highlight how vigilantes enhance preventive capacity and strengthen community resilience while integrating local knowledge into formal security operations. Inter-agency collaboration allows formal security forces to integrate local knowledge from vigilante groups into operational planning, making patrols more strategic, focused, and responsive. Understanding terrain, criminal patterns, and community dynamics helps prioritize high-risk zones, reduce attacks, and optimize resources. A Vigilante Leader in Wukari noted:

Our members are committed to protecting communities, but alone we are vulnerable and can grow weary. Collaboration with the army, police, and other agencies distributes responsibilities, ensures coordinated operations, and strengthens both the safety of our members and the effectiveness and sustainability of security efforts (KII with a Vigilante Leader, Wukari, June 10, 2023).

This highlights how collaboration with formal security forces enhances the adaptive capacity of vigilantes, enabling timely and effective responses to changing bandit tactics. Another Vigilante Leader in Wukari explained:

Bandits' tactics keep changing. We cannot act alone. Consistent information sharing with the army and police helps us keep pace and makes our interventions more effective. Working together motivates us, knowing we are protecting our community (KII with a Vigilante Leader, Wukari, June 10, 2023).

The testimony shows that collaboration elevates vigilantes from informal actors to recognized partners, boosting morale, credibility, and community trust, while strengthening the overall effectiveness and sustainability of security operations.

The first objective examined the roles of security agencies in counter-banditry operations in Taraba State, revealing a shift from fragmented responses to an integrated, multi-actor framework. The military remains the primary actor in direct engagements, using superior firepower to neutralize threats. Crucially, military operations now rely on DSS intelligence and local guidance from vigilante groups to execute precise strikes, minimizing civilian casualties and optimizing limited resources (Falana 2022; Gberindyer, Okoro & Adishi 2024). This coordination has improved the timeliness, accuracy, and legitimacy of operations.

The police, whose mandate extends beyond combat, stabilize areas post-operation by manning checkpoints, resolving farmer-herder disputes, investigating crimes, and securing IDP camps, thereby preventing further violence (Chilaka & Idika 2017). The DSS has evolved from a

background intelligence agency to an active operational partner, providing actionable intelligence on bandit communications, logistics, and hideouts, now embedded within joint planning and operational decision-making (Ikeanyibe et al., 2023).

The NSCDC, once focused on guarding infrastructure, now conducts surveillance, engages communities, and provides early-warning intelligence that triggers rapid deployment of other agencies (Akale & Owan, 2023). Vigilante groups, due to their proximity to affected communities, play a crucial grassroots role by navigating difficult terrain, sharing knowledge of bandit routes, and sometimes detaining suspects until formal security forces arrive (Mohammed, Yusuf & Garba, 2019).

The second objective assessed the impact of inter-agency collaboration on countering banditry, showing marked gains in effectiveness and efficiency. Operations have moved from uncoordinated, reactive responses to intelligence-driven, coordinated campaigns. Joint patrols have increased security presence, deterred bandits, and reassured rural communities. Shared intelligence between the DSS, NSCDC, police, and vigilantes has improved precision, reduced duplication, and conserved resources (Ikeanyibe et al., 2023). For the military, this enables focused offensives with lower fatigue, ammunition use, and civilian risk (Falana, 2022), while police interventions have become timelier, building community trust and encouraging citizen intelligence (Chilaka & Idika, 2017).

NSCDC personnel report enhanced capacity through shared training with the military and police, resulting in better reporting, tactical responses, and morale. Vigilante groups, once informal and uncoordinated, are now recognized as valuable partners, providing intelligence that informs operational planning and guidance in difficult terrain. Overall, inter-agency collaboration acts as a force multiplier, extending the reach and effectiveness of each agency. These findings support prior research showing that harmonized intelligence systems and coordinated patrols disrupt criminal networks, strengthen rural security, and build community resilience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that shifting from fragmented, agency-specific responses to an integrated inter-agency framework has significantly strengthened counter-banditry operations in Taraba State. Collaboration among the military, police, DSS, NSCDC, and vigilante groups has improved operational effectiveness through intelligence sharing, coordinated patrols, and clearer role differentiation. The military remains the lead in kinetic operations, but actionable DSS intelligence and local vigilante knowledge have increased both precision and legitimacy. The police stabilize communities, NSCDC focuses on surveillance and infrastructure protection, and vigilantes provide grassroots intelligence, collectively creating a more responsive and cohesive security architecture. This coordination has reduced duplication, expanded coverage, minimized civilian casualties, and gradually restored public confidence. However, gains are challenged by logistical constraints, inter-agency rivalries, and communication gaps. The study makes the following recommendations:

- a. To build on the demonstrated benefits of collaboration, security agencies should institutionalize joint command centres, standard operating procedures, and routine coordination mechanisms. This ensures that roles are clearly defined, intelligence flows

efficiently, and operational efforts are unified, enhancing both response capacity and operational coherence.

- b. Given the critical role of vigilantes and local communities in providing timely, actionable intelligence, security agencies should formalize channels for community engagement and intelligence sharing. This approach improves situational awareness, allows proactive interventions, and strengthens community trust and resilience, ensuring operations are both effective and locally grounded.

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