ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNITY-BASED INTELLIGENCE GATHERING AND KIDNAPPING ACTIVITIES IN BENUE STATE

NDUBUISI ISAAC
Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ndubuisi.isaac@unn.edu.ng; Tel No: +2348035450930

AMAKA PQ UZODINMA*
Peacebuilding Zonal Office, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution IPCR,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South East, Federal Secretariat, Awka, Anambra State
priscaamaka444@hotmail.com (Corres. Author)
Tel No: +2348037272277

EMMANUEL NNACHETA MBAH
Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
mbahemmanuelnnacheta@gmail.com; Tel No: +2349020387895

ABSTRACT
Community-based intelligence gathering is essential to internal security and the anticipation of criminal threats. However, in Nigeria, including Benue State, the process is seriously hampered. This includes citizens' unwillingness to provide helpful intelligence information to security agencies, with a sudden increase in kidnapping operations posing socio-political instability as well as economic development. This study critically examines the connection between community-based intelligence gathering and the increasing rates of kidnapping in Benue State and the broader socio-political and economic consequences. A documentary research method was applied whereby data were gathered from secondary sources, and content analysis was employed in analyzing the data. The Mosaic theory of intelligence was utilized as the conceptual framework, which offered insight into fractured structures of intelligence operations and their effects on state security. The proof indicates that poor coordination of intelligence, public distrust, and lack of institutional incentives for information sharing have eroded local intelligence systems. This has created an enabling environment for kidnapping gangs to operate, thereby distorting trade, displacing individuals, and weakening governance. The study recommends the improvement of law enforcement in terms of training, improved equipment, and coordinated operations. The study also recommends investment in infrastructure and the local economies as a response to the root causes of insecurity. Most importantly, long-term financing and reform of intelligence operations to provide timely and reliable information flows that are conducive to efficient crime prevention and community safety are crucial.
Keywords: Community, Intelligence gathering, Kidnapping, Benue State.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Effective intelligence gathering is widely recognized as a foundation for crime prevention and internal security. The nations that have achieved remarkable success in crime reduction have relied heavily on robust intelligence networks with the capability to detect and thwart criminal plots prior to carrying them out. This preventive strategy works in advanced countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, where the law imposes intelligence as the first line of defense (Enyia et al., 2022). For instance, following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks within the United States, there was a domestic shift in

intelligence methods that emphasized federal and local collaboration to make state-level law enforcement agencies contribute effectively towards national security (Merilyn, 2005). Conversely, in Nigeria and other African countries, intelligence gathering is often poorly funded, poorly coordinated, and compromised by corruption and the lack of political will (Lasisi & Ene, 2019; Ayuk, 2019). Such structural weaknesses continue to undermine national security programs and expose the country to continued violence and instability.

It is in this regard that other scholars like Phenson, Ojie, Esin and Atai (2014) and Adegoke (2020) have also identified major impediments to intelligence in Nigeria. They are the public's hesitation to offer valuable information, citizens' poor participation in security management, and general mistrust of police agencies. Despite the presence of such intelligence organizations as the Department of State Services, Defence Intelligence Agency, and National Intelligence Agency, the country continues to experience long-standing internal security threats. Benue State, in this instance, is a casualty of this intelligence structure failure to the extent that it has resulted in the multiplication of kidnapping activities. What began in the Niger Delta as youth political hostage-taking has become an exceptionally well-coordinated violent criminal venture, driven by joblessness among youths, economic necessity, and the desire for illegal riches (Enyia et al., 2022).

A particularly sharp manifestation of such a security issue is found in the Sankera geopolitical zone of Benue State that includes Katsina-Ala, Ukum, and Logo local government councils. Since more than a decade, the area has seen the operations of armed militia groups, specifically the "Ghana group" so called after its former leader, Terwase Akwaza. The group has been accused of kidnappings, assassinations, mass murders, and other violent crimes (Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo, & Shabu, 2022). The effects of such crimes are widespread. As Enobakhare and Oleabhiele (2022) put it, the deteriorating security crisis has displaced food production, pushed farmers off their farms, and led to a sudden surge in food insecurity. Economic activities in the area have collapsed as traders, farmers, and residents abandon their operations and farms due to fear. Consequently, the socio-economic fabric of the impacted communities has been greatly undermined, leading to added poverty and underdevelopment in the area.

Whereas earlier works identified some aspects of intelligence collection and abduction in Benue State, they have never provided empirical analysis that strictly examines the link between community-based systems of intelligence and kidnapping as a socio-political and economic emergency. Many are anecdotal, based mostly on the mass media and not scientific studies. This study seeks to fill this void by offering a critical examination of the nexus between community-based intelligence networks and kidnapping gangs' operational strategy, as well as how these have shaped development outcomes in Benue State. To this effect, this article is divided into six sections. The first is introduction and conceptual clarification. The second is the theoretical framework and methodology. The third is an analysis of kidnapping gangs' operations. The fourth analyzes the economic and socio-political implications. The fifth offers a conclusion, while the sixth presents evidence-informed recommendations.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION
INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Intelligence gathering constitutes a well-defined strategy meticulously crafted and instituted by security organizations to procure and extract confidential information from adversarial entities through means such as infiltration, espionage, surveillance technology, cyber intrusion, and similar methodologies, with the paramount objective of preempting and mitigating security

vulnerabilities that could adversely impact the health, welfare, and socio-economic advancement of a nation (Enyia et al, 2022). The Operations Security Intelligence Threat Handbook (OSITH) designates intelligence gathering as intelligence collection, which is the outcome derived from the synthesis, assessment, analysis, and interpretation of amassed information, yielding insights that equip a nation with a comprehensive understanding of its adversaries, typically focusing on military capabilities or other issues that pose direct or indirect threats to national security. This signifies that intelligence gathering represents the culmination of processed information by governmental agencies, which is subsequently disseminated to policymakers and various law enforcement bodies. Such processed information is invaluable for the preservation of security within any nation, as it provides critical insights and guidance regarding the trends and patterns of criminal activities within a given system.

KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping is characterized as a methodical and organized form of theft, which, while not as lethal as armed robbery, proves to be more lucrative than the latter. The financial incentives associated with this crime have prompted individuals engaged in such activities to persist despite existing legal prohibitions. According to Inyang (2013), kidnapping is defined as the coercive abduction, unlawful removal, and detention of an individual against their volition. This encompasses the act of forcibly taking an individual to extort a ransom or resolve disputes among individuals. In this context, kidnapping pertains to the criminal act of abducting, confining, or forcibly carrying away an individual through deception or coercion, often with the intent of subjecting them to involuntary labour in exchange for a ransom. Indeed, numerous jurisdictions categorize it as a serious criminal offense, subjecting perpetrators to significant prison sentences or capital punishment.

2.2 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study draws from intelligence and security studies, namely conceptualizing intelligence as product and process. Lowenthal (2002; 2011), Bimfort (1958), and Kent (1966) are among authors who opine that intelligence is a necessity in statecraft given that it works for national security through enabling timely decision-making and response to evolving threats. Intelligence involves a systematic process—planning, collection, processing, analysis, dissemination, and feedback—known as the intelligence cycle. The model provides for anticipatory crime prevention and security of national resources. Bang (2017) and Clausewitz (2008) explain that the intelligence cycle is not sequential but adaptive and dependent on changing operating conditions. Inside Nigeria, structural inefficiencies, ineffective inter-agency cooperation, and poor integration of producers and users affect the effectiveness of this process (Nte, 2013; Nte, Eke & Anele, 2010). Intelligence, it is argued by Onovo (2004), must be multidimensional and cover operational, criminal, and enterprise kinds. Intelligence inside Nigeria, however, as the literature illustrates, is frequently reactive and politically driven, jeopardizing its preventive orientation. These observations from theory highlight a gap in appropriating and situating intelligence models to local security contexts, as the case is with states like Benue where complex socio-political and ethnic realities constrain the provision of security.

2.3 EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical evidence indicates that poor intelligence collection has increased the prevalence of kidnapping and other related crimes in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State. Intelligence failure in utilization and systemic corruption are given by Adegoke (2014) and Phenson et al. (2014) as the reason for the persistence of insecurity. Emmanuel (2022) explains that the majority of officers who are responsible for intelligence are poorly trained and motivated, while Inyang and Ubong (2013) argue that internal corruption in law agencies disempowers crime

prevention. Some empirical reports outline how kidnapping evolved from political agitation in the Niger Delta to being a mass criminal venture across Nigeria (Akpan, 2010; Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018). Kidnapping statistics documented by Raheem (2008), Global Kidnapping Review (2016), and Perlberg (2013) bring Nigeria's humongous global ranking for kidnapping incidents to attention. In Benue, particularly Sankera, militia organizations have thrived due to poor intelligence platforms and non-integration into society. Moreover, Okoli and Agada (2014) note that much of the information available is broken or estimates rather than formatted intelligence. Despite such research, little has been accomplished in empirical examination of the applicability of community-based intelligence in countering kidnapping or its socio-political and economic impacts in Benue State. This is an area that underscores the need for data-driven, localized research to integrate grassroots intelligence models into mainstream security systems.

3   METHODOLOGY
3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research adopted the Mosaic Theory as the analytical paradigm to examine community-oriented intelligence accumulation and abduction operations within Benue State. The "Mosaic Theory" was articulated by Irvine in 1972 and includes subsequent contributors such as Pozen (2005). This theoretical framework delineates a fundamental principle of intelligence collection: seemingly disparate pieces of information, despite possessing limited or negligible value to their individual holders, can acquire enhanced significance when amalgamated with other information. The integration of these elements elucidates their interconnections and fosters analytic synergies, thereby rendering the resultant mosaic of information more valuable than the aggregate value of its individual components. Fundamentally, the mosaic theory represents a construct of informational synergy. It encapsulates a mechanism wherein adversaries gather, amalgamate, and compile informational elements, many of which may be innocuous in isolation. Furthermore, it posits an outcome wherein this methodological process, through a sophisticated analytic transformation, converts benign information into actionable intelligence, with pertinent data potentially sourced from governmental entities, various public platforms, the adversary's proprietary channels, or any amalgamation thereof (Pozen, 2005).

The theory bears significant relevance and applicability to the present investigation, chiefly by providing substantial insights into the operations of community-based intelligence gathering conducted by the Department of State Service (DSS), also referred to as the State Security Service (SSS), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Intelligence, which are intelligence organizations in Nigeria entrusted with the mandate of delivering timely and precise intelligence to mitigate threats to national security, particularly concerning abduction incidents in the context of Nigeria, of which Benue State is an integral component. In consideration of the aforementioned aspects, the undertakings of these governmental security agencies extend beyond merely appropriating confidential information and are executed in a strategically comprehensive manner, often clandestinely.

This assertion is predicated on the premise that various Defense Intelligence agencies have actively engaged in the acquisition of seemingly disparate informational fragments with the aspiration of synthesizing them into a cohesive representation. In essence, they perpetually construct mosaics. This is predicated upon the logic that it would be imprudent to render classification decisions on an item-by-item basis; instead, "protection through classification is necessitated if the amalgamation of unclassified informational items presents an additional factor that justifies safeguarding the information considered in its entirety. This is undertaken to evaluate the security risk associated with disclosing a specific document, and to accomplish this, the mosaic theory mandates that one must contemplate the potential mosaics to which the

document may contribute. In this regard, the mosaic, rather than the document, emerges as the pertinent unit for risk assessment.

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a single-case ex post facto research design. Ex post facto research is a form of descriptive inquiry wherein the independent variable has already occurred, therefore the researcher begins with the observation and analysis of the dependent variable. According to Cohen and Manon (cited in Ezeibe, 2015), this design explores potential causal associations by finding current conditions and tracing likely causal factors. The ex post facto research design is optimally best suited for use when experimental manipulation is not possible—e.g., when individuals have already been exposed to some condition or when the treatment variable occurs naturally, beyond researcher control. In this research, community-based intelligence gathering and kidnapping activities in Benue State are naturally occurring phenomena beyond researcher control. This merits the application of the ex post facto design, which allows for longitudinal observation and measurement of the selected case without experimental manipulation.

Apart from the research design, the study employed the documentary method of data collection for the intention of gathering adequate evidence for intense analysis. The documentary method involves the use of official or personal documents as first-hand sources of facts (Nworgu, 2006). Therefore, the study relied on secondary data that comprised a diverse range of material such as scholarly books, journals, and electronic as well as hardcopy publications comprising relevant comments on the subject of research. In analyzing data, content analytical approach was employed. Content analysis has been described as a systematic approach of inferring through objectively determining specific characteristics in communication messages (Ezeibe, 2015). This method of analysis was chosen for its potential to facilitate the systematic and efficient review of large sets of data. It allows the analyst to surface underlying themes and patterns within the existing data and is hence the right method of analysis to use in reviewing the socio-political and economic influences of kidnapping and community intelligence activities in Benue State.

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
4.1 ACTIVITIES OF KIDNAPPING GANGS IN BENUE STATE

Kidnapping has turned into a vast security issue in Nigeria that has greatly retarded national development and stability. Kidnapping is no longer a small issue but one that necessitates a national consensus in the sense of a response. Miscreants can easily utilize this crime as an easy and effective means of extorting cash by kidnapping individuals. Osumah and Aghedo (2011) add that Nigerian kidnapping has now become a strategic tool used for economic survival, political bargaining, and competitive politics within business and political undertakings. Enobakhare and Oleabhiele (2022) also argue that persistent cases of kidnapping, including in Benue State, are directly linked to rampant youth unemployment and widespread poverty. This socio-economic vulnerability is evidenced by the poverty level of Benue State, 32.9 percent, 21st among the 36 states in Nigeria.

Beyond economic poverty, there are additional factors contributing to the rising rate of kidnappings in the region. Yakubu (2022), similar to Abagen and Tyona (2018), attributes the rise in kidnapping to the proliferation of small and light weapons as well as the existence of porous national borders that offer criminals loopholes to access arms and evade police pursuit. Nte (2013) presents a counter but complementary perspective, citing a lack of synergy between Nigeria's intelligence producers and end users as an inherent weakness in the efforts to combat the phenomenon. Collectively, these considerations have enabled the proliferation of Benue

State kidnapping syndicates whose operations have subverted the development process in the state. The following is a complete analysis of one of the most popular such groups.

4.2   THE GHANA GROUP OF KIDNAPPERS

One of the most renowned of the kidnapping gangs present in Benue State is the Ghana Group, its name derived from the fact that the first leader of the group was the late Terwase Akwaza, more widely known as Ghana. This gang has been most active in the Sankera geopolitical axis, which comprises Katsina-Ala, Ukum, and Logo local government councils. The Ghana Group has been engaged in various violent criminal activities for over a decade, ranging from mass killings, kidnappings for ransom, political killings, armed robbery, rustling of cattle, terrorism, and assassination. Hagher (2019) reports that the group charged taxes to farmers, merchants, and influential community leaders, operating a de facto parallel system of authority through coercion and brute force. The character and operational nature of the Ghana Group is contained in the information calculated in the following table.

Table1: The Nature and Character of the Activities of Ghana Kidnapping Group in Benue State

Names of Leaders	Position	Job Description	Category of people Recruited	Victims	Sponsors	Location/ Area of Dominance
Late Terwase Akwaza	Founder	Commander -in- Chief of kidnapping	foot soldiers from villages, youths, adults and okada riders	Farmers, traders and prominent people	Payment of membership fees, sympathizers and informants	Sankera geopolitical axis comprising Katsina Ala, Ukum, and Logo local Governments' Area
Aondofa Akwaza	Revenue collector					
Suku Oraondo	Defacto-Chief Justice and the Head of the Pegan Religion					

Source: Researchers compilation from Hagher (2019)

The facts before us indicate that the Ghana group has emerged as a strong and deeply rooted criminal gang in Benue State. Led by the late Terwase Akwaza, alias Ghana, the group developed an extensive and sophisticated intelligence network nourished by informants throughout the state. This network supposedly included complicit elements of formal security agencies, from which information was gathered, thus increasing the group's operational capacity. Akwaza established a quasi-authoritarian criminal regime, mirroring the structure of a state government. Akwaza functioned as the Commander in Chief at the top with his headquarters in Gbishe. His brother, Aondofa Akwaza, controlled revenue collection, and Suku Oraondo held the position of a de facto Chief Justice and was also leading the revival of a traditional religious order of the group.

Membership of the Ghana group was predominantly coercive. According to Hagher (2019), the kindred heads and the local ward commanders had the responsibility of recruiting the foot soldiers from their immediate communities, and failure to do that was treated as a capital offence. It is estimated that approximately three thousand youths labored under Akwaza's command, often employing force and intimidation. Adult males were reportedly forced to enlist and pay membership dues, and up to seventy-five percent of the adult inhabitants of Shitile land were active sympathizers, financiers, or informants. All motorcyclists in the area were automatic recruits in the militia. The consequences of such pervasive militia activity are

catastrophic. Jibo (2021) is of the opinion that the vast ungoverned spaces in the area have facilitated the group's free movement and operational dominance. The populations under this group's control have been subjected to long-term insecurity, deepening poverty, and constant fear. As such, the residents have been socially and economically marginalized in a state of endless terror and abandonment. Also, due to the security problems, essential services such as health and education have not been available, since most public buildings have been closed for a long period.

4.3   THE GBATSE KIDNAP GANG

Another notable criminal gang terrorizing Benue State is the Gbatse kidnap gang, led by Iorwuese Ikpila. This gang was based in Ushongo Local Government Area and had a major involvement in kidnapping and armed robbery across different local government areas that consist of Ukum, Logo, Katsina-Ala, Ushongo, and Kwande (Jibo, 2021). The activities of the gang became more renowned in 2019 when security operatives from the Benue State Command of the Nigerian Police arrested Ikpila alongside five other members of the gang at Gbatse, Ushongo, on 21st September 2019 (Nigeria Oracle, 2019). The operations of this gang contributed to the rising insecurity and destabilized socio-economic activities in the affected communities. Their presence added to the atmosphere of fear among citizens, again underlining the necessity for organized intelligence gathering and upgraded law enforcement methods to break up these kinds of networks:

Intelligence reports revealed the presence of a kidnap gang within Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State. Following this, a special security team was dispatched there to conduct an in-depth investigation. On 21 September 2019, the ring leader, Mr. Iorwuese Ikpila, and five other accomplices were arrested by the security agents.During the course of the investigation, the suspects had admitted to previously conducting armed robbery operations all over Zone A before they modified their modus operandi to kidnapping due to the increased presence of security agents on the highways. They nevertheless admitted to kidnapping sixteen individuals, taking their cars, motorcycles, and other personal belongings. In order to hide their crimes, the victims were killed, buried in shallow graves, and cassava was planted on top of the graves to cover up the trail. The victims' bodies were then exhumed and identified by their respective families (Nigeria Oracle, 2019, pp. 1–2).

Typical example of this unpleasant scenario above is exemplified in the table below.

Table 2: The Gbatse Kidnap Gang and their activities in Benue State

Names of Leaders	Position	Mode of Recruitment	Major activities	Victims	Sponsors	Year of operation	Location/ Area of operation
Iorwuese Ikpila	Gang leader	Use of force	Kidnapping, armed robbery and killing of victims	Farmers, traders and prominent people	Payment of membership fees, sympathizers and informants	2019-2022	Ukum, Logo, Kastina-Ala, Ushongo and Kwande Local Government Areas of the State

Source: Researchers compilation from Nigeria Oracle (2019) and Jibo (2021)

The facts presented thus far reveal Benue State to have big and intricate security challenges. Such threats are not by themselves but rather symbols of greater national security concerns, including the persistent farmers-herders conflict and locally fermented crises by virtue of political mismanagement. Although some of these issues are symptoms of national instability, others are exacerbated by political elites in the state's inaction and action. In this context, Jibo (2021) presents a compelling analysis of Benue State political affairs. According to him, ever since the return to democratic governance in 1999:

Tiv political stakeholders have been short of strategic thought and commitment to service. Far from prioritizing the developmental concerns of their constituents, most view politics as a means of obtaining and enjoying state power for personal aggrandizement. This self-centred tilt by the political class has impaired effective governance and assisted in deteriorating social and security institutions in the state (Jibo, 2021, p. 200).

Beyond the issues outlined above, Achumba et al. (2013) identify prevalent material disparities and social injustices as fundamental causes of kidnapping and other security concerns in Nigeria, including Benue State. Increased public awareness of economic and social disparities has fostered feelings of exclusion and disillusionment. These sentiments of systemic inequality in access to opportunities and state resources are likely to provoke violent responses from marginalized groups. There is a widespread sentiment among certain segments of society that they are being neglected by government development programmes and political patronage, leading to disaffection, anger, and ultimately rebellion (Achumba & Akpor, 2013). Furthermore, Achumba et al. contend that the weakness of Nigeria's security institutions exacerbates the problem. They highlight insufficient budgetary provision for the police and other security agencies, outdated technology, inadequate training, poor conditions of service, and a general shortage of personnel as key factors contributing to the persistence of kidnapping. Olonisakin (2008) makes a similar point by identifying under-policing as a structural problem and noting Nigeria's police-population ratio of 1:45, which falls far short of the United Nations-recommended minimum. This deficit severely undermines the capacity of the Nigerian Police Force to function effectively against crime. Overall, these structural failures intensify rising insecurity and have dire negative repercussions for the socio-economic development of Benue State.

4.4. IMPACT OF KIDNAPPING ACTIVITIES ON DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE

As pointed out inter alia, the various forms of kidnapping activities and their inherent insecurity-related challenges above have negative implications for development in Benue State. Therefore, the impacts of this insecurity emanating from kidnapping on development in the state will be interrogated under the following themes:

FOOD INSECURITY

Kidnapping and attendant insecurity have had extremely adverse effects on agricultural production and the availability of food in Benue State. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2019), communal conflict in Nigeria wasted more than twelve billion dollars in agricultural output in the twentieth century's latter decades. Due to the significance of agriculture in economic stability, especially in insecure regions such as Benue, the impact is dire. Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo, and Shabu (2022) explained that ongoing insecurity has made it difficult for farmers to access their fields or get their products to markets. This disturbance has led to the decline in food availability as well as the rise in the cost of staple foods such as cassava, yam, and garri. Moreover, the fear of kidnapping has prevented traders from engaging in normal market transactions, thereby undermining the economic foundation of the local communities. Failure to engage in agricultural production and commercial trade adversely

affects Benue's position as the food basket of Nigeria and presents significant challenges to the long-term food security of the state and nation.

REDUCTION OF INTERNAL REVENUE FOR THE STATE

Kidnapping has not only affected livelihoods but also significantly impacted on the generation of internal revenue for the state. Economic activities like trading have been negatively impacted, with significant effects on local markets. For example, in 2021, the Ugba International Yam Market, a key commercial hub in Logo Local Government Area, was shut down for months as a result of the terror of kidnapping and militia attacks. It is reported by Kwanga et al. (2022) that this market, which hitherto attracted business from southeast Nigeria traders and provided transport space for forty-five to forty-eight truckloads of yams weekly, now barely moves ten truckloads on market days. This sudden decline in volume of trade has direct implications for the revenue base of the state, which indirectly relies on taxes and levies generated from such business activities. Reduced commercial activity translates into lost business opportunities as well as economic stagnation in general.

DISRUPTION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict, and other security issues have led to the near breakdown of economic activities in most of Benue State's rural communities. These interferences have taken the form of the destruction of life, crops, farms, seeds, and seedlings. Through these, several individuals have been rendered incapable of returning to farming or business activities. The sustained insecurity has placed the whole nation in extensive rural joblessness and has resulted in the pending spectre of starvation among the affected communities. The inability of natives to sustain life-supporting economic activities has weakened social cohesion and introduced increased vulnerabilities in those already disadvantaged communities.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
5.1 CONCLUSION

Intelligence collection is an important tool for decision-making by security agencies and policymakers. Intelligence provides refined knowledge that allows for understanding trends and patterns of criminal activity, particularly at the community level. Effective intelligence systems enhance national and local security through the provision of timely crime prevention. But in the case of Benue State, there is an evident dichotomy between producers and consumers of intelligence. This gap has resulted in inadequate coordination among security actors, thus undermining the response as a whole to new security threats.

Consequently, criminal activities such as kidnapping, cultism, and militancy have become widespread, resulting in the widespread loss of life and property. These have had significant socio-economic impacts on Benue State. The fear of kidnapping has driven many traders and farmers from their means of livelihood, putting agriculture production and business transactions in abeyance. This has led to a decline in food production and a hike in food prices, which further constricts the local economy. Additionally, market players and entrepreneurs have turned to other areas out of insecurity. The net effect is the economic worsening of the region and rising social instability, which calls for urgent and collective policy intervention.

5.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively address the multifaceted problems of kidnapping and underdevelopment in Benue State, the overarching and coordinated approach is required. The approach ought to aim at boosting security, building the socio-economic base, and addressing the cause of criminality. The following are suggested measures:

Building Law Enforcement and Security Capacity: The government needs to focus priority effort on building capacities of local security forces and police. The effort will entail provision of adequate training, updated equipment, and logistics support, and good intelligence collection and inter-agency coordination. Enhanced operational capacity will enhance the ability of security forces to detect, prevent, and respond to kidnapping and other crimes.

Encouraging Infrastructure Development and Economic Empowerment: Investment in such critical infrastructure as roads, electricity, and telecommunications infrastructure will not only facilitate access to areas previously inaccessible but also drive economic activity. Improved infrastructure will enable farmers to transport their produce to markets and stem the exposure of communities to criminal intrusions. The government should also stimulate small- and medium-scale enterprises and private investment to drive local economic growth and job creation, thereby stemming the socioeconomic incentives for youths' participation in criminal networks.

Alleviation of Kidnapping Root Causes: The high rate of kidnapping in Benue State is rooted in deep-seated issues such as poverty, unemployment of youth, illiteracy, and social exclusion. The root causes can be tackled only by policy interventions that are holistic in nature, including job-creation schemes, vocational training schemes, offering education support, and community development schemes. Social inclusion policies also need to be strengthened so that excluded groups are integrated into the mainstream economy and governance mechanism. These efforts will help to reduce the appeal of criminal lifestyles to vulnerable groups.

Intelligence Operations Financing and Maintenance: Effective intelligence is essential to preemptive and reactive security measures. Therefore, intelligence agencies must be funded regularly and on time to provide for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of beneficial information. Institutional mechanisms must be developed to facilitate the coordination of intelligence operations to ensure that intelligence work is well coordinated, professionally conducted, and adequately funded to provide effective information for real-time response to insecurity.

Finally**,** addressing the kidnappings and underdevelopment in Benue State requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving the state, civil society, community, and international development agencies. Long-term commitment to security reform, inclusive development, and social justice will be required for peaceful and prosperous future in the region.

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