

Youth Agitation and Criminality: Implications on Socio-economic Development of Tivland, 2001-2023

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Abstract: *Globally, youth agitation has remained a perennial problem and has resulted in a lot of civil unrest. In Africa, it is a behavioural pattern that has degenerated into numerous implications, which relate to issues of neglect, lack of recognition, non-inclusion in development/political blueprint, instability, and rural conflict. In Tivland of Benue State, agitation by youth has led to insecurity and other criminal activities. Particularly in the Sankera axis, which comprises (Logo, Katsina-Ala, and Ukum, Local Government Areas). The effect of this phenomenon has provoked this study. The study adopts the application of a multidisciplinary instrumentation based on qualitative and quantitative research methods of data collection, relying mainly on both primary and secondary sources, with quantitative content analysis deployed to present data on undocumented deaths and destruction of properties. Findings indicate that agitations from youths within the Sankera axis took a criminal dimension and created a violent socio-economic and political atmosphere that led to kidnapping, armed robbery, and killings. This ugly development not only disrupted economic activities but also threatened the rural peace of the area and other social endeavours. The domino effect spilled to places like Wukuri, Takum, and some parts of Taraba state. Insecurity, occasioned by youth agitation, led to more than 10,000 deaths. It also led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the Sankera axis of Tivland. Relatedly, it has resulted in educational collapse and low agricultural output in the areas, also affecting trade and the free flow of humans.*

Keywords: agitations, crime, development, displacement, economy, youth, insecurity, Tivland

INTRODUCTION

The quantum and complexity of security, social, and economic challenges occasioned by youth agitation in Nigeria have remained a major subject of concern among scholars and the generality

of Nigerians. Since independence in 1960, Nigerian youths have been involved and, most times, are at the vanguard of violent crises that erupted in various parts of the country (Igho & Ikpa, 2013; Duke & Agbaji, 2018). In the recent past, it was the economically motivated Niger Delta militants in the south that led to Isaac Boro's agitation for the independence of the Niger Delta people (Siollun, 2009). Similarly, youth agitation under the umbrella of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in South East Nigeria led to the resuscitation of Biafra (Mohammed & Ahmed, 2024). In Western Nigeria, youths have organized themselves under the platform of Oodua People's Congress (OPC) to express their anger against societal issues. In North Central Nigeria, the Tiv Youth Organization (TYO) refuted the Yoke of Hausa-Fulani domination of Tivland (Jibo, 1994).

Although the military's entrance into the country's political governance suppressed youth agitation, pockets of youth-engineered crises were recorded in Nigeria. The Maintessine crisis of the early 1980s was engineered by young Northern Muslim Youths (Isichei, 1987). In some southern parts of Nigeria, the phenomenon was responsible for the high rates of criminal activities during the 1980s (Rotimi, 1984). Kidnapping, for instance, during the early 2000s in South-East Nigeria was largely because of youth agitation and other economic and political factors (Ikezua, 2023). Perplexing to note is the fact that many lives and properties of immense and unquantifiable value are lost as a result of youth agitation. In Tivland of central Nigeria, this social problem is prevalent and has continued to assume catastrophic dimensions. It has not only resulted in intra-communal conflicts but has also led to high-profile killings. Few examples suffice. In 2001, youth agitation following the Tiv-Jukun communal conflicts resulted in the killing of 19 soldiers (Human Rights, 2001). The soldiers were killed on the allegation of colluding with the Jukun to kill and displace Tiv communities in Taraba State. The end of the crisis in 2002 signalled a new trend in youth agitations in the area under consideration. Most of the warlords began to engage in criminal activities that affected the rural peace of the area.

Similarly, persistent killings became the daily routine of youths in that area. For example, in 2015, Chief Atoza Hindan, a prominent politician and opinion leader, was killed in his hometown in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area. On the same day, 12 others were killed in the Yoyo district of the same Local Government. Also, another prominent personality in the area, Chief Terkura Suswam, and his aide were killed in 2021. Apart from these politicians, several District Heads (traditional rulers) were killed in different locations at Logo, Katsina-Ala, and Ukum Local Government Areas. The District Head of Kundav, Chief Awua Alabar, was also killed in 2020. This social phenomenon has also birthed militia groups whose activities are catastrophic and have threatened the rural peace and security. The first known militia group was the "Gana group". The group was named after the founder, Terwase Akwaza, who, together with some criminal elements, engaged in acts of kidnapping, highway robbery, and killings. Communities like Tse Vue and Tse Ikyeen villages in Ukum Local Government Area were attacked by the group in 2018. Also, security agencies were not spared. The heinous activities of this armed militia group led to several deaths of security personnel. In fact, before the group leader was killed by military personnel, the

mere mention of his name evoked a sense of terror. Apart from tormenting residents along the Benue-Taraba border, he was dreaded by communities within the Sankera axis of Benue North-East zone, where his nefarious activities led to wanton killings and destruction of properties.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON YOUTHS AGITATIONS

Youth agitation in Nigeria has long vexed scholars (Igho & Ikpa, 2013; Duke & Agbaji, 2018; Chukwuezi, 2009; Chukwuemeka & Aghara, 2010; Yusuf, 2014). The presence of this phenomenon in Nigeria's socio-economic and political corridors has created severe implications for Nigeria's agriculture, education, social, industrial, and internal security. Literature, therefore, is replete with the implications of youth agitation in Nigeria. Ezebuilo (2023) examines youth agitations and sustainable rural development in Akwa-Ibom State. The work argues about the criminal activities that are occasioned as a result of youth agitations. The work further illuminates how this ugly development has hampered rural development in the Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa-Ibom State. Ojobah, Chima, and Emina (2020) examine the impact of youth restiveness on rural educational development. The authors illuminated how this social phenomenon has affected education in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State. Similarly, Snapps and Hamilton (2011) interrogate the impact of this social malady on industrial disruption in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta, which is Nigeria's oil hub, has experienced a series of crises that are because of long neglect of the youth and the underdevelopment of the area despite the presence of oil resources. On mitigating youth agitations, Anasi (2010) and Akhabue and Agbaji (2018) provide policy options.

Kelly Bryan (2014) sheds more light on the concept of youth Agitation, which he refers to as a situation of the inability of the youths to be still or quiet, and in most instances, difficult to control, especially when they are unsatisfied with something. This leads to clamour by the youths over issues of deprivation, neglect, marginalization, and other feelings of dissatisfaction. It further argues that youth agitations could also pass as engagements with the aim of restoration of rights and dignity or self-seeking and criminal activities, as these agitations sometimes are anchored on constructive (Positive) demands or destructive (Negative) demands. These works further established the importance of education as a panacea to youth agitations and also advocated for youth inclusion in governance. The above literature reviewed on this subject matter has not covered Tivland of central Nigeria. Worrisome is the lack of literature on the impact of youth agitations and the criminality they have birthed in the Sankara axis of Tivland. This study has therefore filled this knowledge gap.

Conceptual Issues

Young people make up the majority of the African population and play an important role in societal interactions and transitions. Nonetheless, children and teenagers are frequently marginalized in the public sphere and in important political, socioeconomic, and cultural developments. Thus, youth ordinarily is a category of early adulthood, emerging in activity and involvement in society but

somewhat limited by societal values and some levels of dependency and perhaps agency (National Youth Policy, 2009). As a demographic and social group, youth face significant tensions and conflicts as they mature socially and physically and adjust to reality. Youths are engaged in a struggle for survival, identity, and inclusion, a struggle that shapes how they, as a social group, respond to or more broadly relate to the state and society in terms of engagement or disengagement, incorporation or alienation, rapprochement or resistance, integration or deviance (National Youth Policy, 2009).

Arising from the above, youth agitations can somewhat manifest as youth restiveness. Thus, several scholars have attempted to define youth restiveness. According to Oyegbule and Agwadu (2020), youth restiveness is a continuous protest by a group of young people to compel a constituted authority to achieve a desired objective. He went on to say that it is the combination of any action or activity that defines unhealthy, socially unacceptable behavior by young people in any community. That is, it is a social political activity and activities primarily carried out by a group of young people in order to demand their rights, and most of the time, lives and property are lost in the community. It is a phenomenon that, in practice, can lead to a near-collapse of law and order, low production due to disruption of productive activity, higher crime rates, and intra-ethnic conflicts. According to Abdullahi and Issah (2016), the incidence and durability of youth restiveness have apparently damaged and jeopardized the country's social security systems. They go on to say that, in addition to militancy in the Niger-Delta region and acts of terrorism in north-east Nigeria, other common forms of youth violence include clashes between cult members, political clashes, land disputes, communal clashes, religious clashes, herdsmen/farmers clashes, and ethnic and tribal conflict. Most of the perpetrators of this violence are young people who feel disenfranchised, angry, and frustrated in society. Politicians have sometimes used them as simple instruments to further their own interests. Undoubtedly, cultist operations in educational institutions are no longer carried out at night but in open daylight, and many members have died in inter-cult shootouts and conflicts (Ekong, 2012). Similarly, Igbo and Ikpa (2013) argue that additional types of young restiveness include demonstrations, riots, and civil disturbances in which youths express their demands. This component of teenage restiveness has given rise to different militant groups, which in extreme cases result in criminal operations such as kidnapping, assassination, robbery, arson, and insurrection, among others, as seen in the Sankera area of Tivland.

Historical Evolution/Causes of Youth Agitations in Sankera

Shortly after Nigeria attained political independence, most parts of the country became charged, arising from political tensions, ethnic rivalry, and leadership failures. These situations set the atmosphere of mistrust, giving room for the emergence of agitators, including youths across the country. While it is true that the crisis has continued to fashion the socio-political history and intergroup relations of the Nigerian state with greater consequences on human existence, the magnitude with which the crisis in Tivland erupted has an untold impact and implications.

Terhembra Wuan and Terdoo Ikpanor (2014) trace the origin of youths' agitations in Sankera axis to the Military invasion of Zaki-Biam in 2001, citing the alleged Tiv massacre of some military personnel on a peacekeeping mission during the conflict involving the Tiv ethnic group of Benue and the Jukun ethnic group of Taraba States in 2001, this incident, according to the authors set the stage for the military reprisal which happened in October 2001, when Nigerian army invaded Benue state communities in Kastina-Ala, Ukum and Logo in reprisal exercise to teach the Tiv people a lesson of their lives. The resultant attacks on Tiv towns and villages of Gbeji, Vaase, Tse-Adoor, Sankera, Anyiin, Kyado, and Zaki-Biam, leading to the killings of hundreds of people, as well as the displacement of people in Ukum, Kastina-ala, and Logo Local Government Areas. According to Wuan and Ikpanor, these invasions caused untold hardship on those who were personally affected, thereby forcing youths to mobilize themselves as agitators of what they describe as injustice and persecution for themselves as well as their kin and Kins. It was therefore at this point that the foundation for youth agitations within the Sankera axis was laid and built upon.

Closely related is the fact that the axis referred to as Sankera could easily pass as the agricultural hub of Benue State, owing to the availability of fertile land. With the ever-expanding human population overwhelming the available land, there has always been the urge or quest to explore arable land elsewhere, thereby creating room for crisis between those in contention for the available land. These crises most of the time assume dangerous dimensions, escalating beyond families to intercommunity and even across tribal lines. This no doubt leads to armed conflicts and violence, a situation that usually paves the way for youths turning into agitators for themselves and their communities for the purpose of securing farmland for farming purposes.

Furthermore, the fallout from the border demarcation arising from the creation of Taraba state adjusted boundaries around Katsina-Ala, Logo and Ukum areas, placing some of the Tiv communities under the jurisdiction of Jukum areas of Taraba State, who not only refused to accept these Tiv as bona fide indigenous members of Taraba State but went on to continually launch unwarranted attacks on the Tiv, leading to prolong border crisis. According to Ugbeili (2019), this created a situation that prompted Tiv youths from the affected areas to resort to carrying arms and agitating for their survival in terms of securing land, for agricultural purposes, as well as protecting their lives and properties that were usually threatened, and occasionally came under siege from external aggressors, including armed herders.

These scenarios no doubt contributed in no small measure towards setting the stage for the escalation of youth agitations within the Sankera axis. The criminal dimension of youths' agitation within the area can, however, be rightly attributed to the political actors from the area who began the recruitment of these youths as political thugs, arming them with dangerous weapons to deploy against perceived political opponents. According to Kusuugh Terungwa (2025), following the return to fourth-republic democratic rule in Nigeria in the year 1999, the crop of politicians that took centre stage appeared desperate, uncultured, and crude. The introduction of thuggery by these

political actors, who went as far as empowering the youths, who, by the way, were mostly unemployed. These youths, out of ignorance, interpreted their criminal empowerment by these political actors as a newfound dependable means of livelihood. The youth thugs, therefore, operated from different camps as major political actors within the Sankera axis kept and maintained them. Things, however, began to fall apart as these political thugs felt the compensation that accrued to them after elections were won and lost was not commiserate to the dirty jobs they had done. For them, this grievance constituted enough grounds to deploy the weapons in their custody, courtesy of the politicians, to negative use. Considering that the politicians who created or birthed these thugs could no longer exert real control or authority over them, the youths resorted to using these weapons for criminal activities to make ends meet. This thuggery later transformed into full-blown militia groups, a profitable venture that the gangsters now preferred to any form of job, including government employment. The thugs turned militia would later graduate to deploying other tactics, such as getting involved in armed robbery and kidnapping. The hallmark of these ugly outings occurred through the instrumentality of Terwase Akwaza, popularly referred to as Gana, who was the undisputed leader of the militia groups in the entire Sankera area and presided over crimes spanning robbery, kidnapping, murder, arbitration in matters of dispute, revenue collection in local markets, and highways Bagu (2023). Other criminal groups that operated with the same energy as that of Gana included those headed by Tor Abaji. Ojondo and Utukpam. These criminals, using their various gangs, made life unbearable for both indigenes and visitors alike, forcing most people doing legitimate businesses to relocate to other places outside Sankera.

The prevailing circumstance constituted a grave security challenge as insecurity continued to linger, a situation that informed an amnesty programme by the Benue State Government. This amnesty program was designed to provide a pathway to peace and a lasting solution to the insecurity within the area. Criminal gangs were all invited to surrender their illegal weapons and, in return, receive amnesty from the state government, accompanied by various compensation packages. The amnesty program would later backfire and rather contribute to the escalation of the security challenge within the area. The amnesty program was initiated during the administration of Governor Samuel Ortom to recover all illegal arms in the hands of criminal gangs. At the same time, the government would, in turn, see to the rehabilitation and reintegration of repentant criminals. These repentant criminal gangs were to benefit from economic empowerment interventions and be trained in agricultural ventures such as piggery, fisheries, and poultry Mchia and Aster (2023). Gana and a few of his close lieutenants were assigned to the lucrative task of coordinating huge revenues, a move that exposed them to a major source of state revenue. This huge financial exposure succeeded in creating tension as others who were not fortunate enough to get similar contract offers felt short-changed, forcing such aggrieved youths to renege on the established agreement with the government, resulting in renewed merciless killing and counter killings between perceived repentant criminal youths, warlords, and innocent members of the society.

This crossfire extended to government officials, some of whom were accused by militia youths of betraying them. According to Bagu (2023), Gana, who, while alive, remained the undisputed gang leader of the mafia youth within the Sankera region, was specifically accused by the Benue State government of having a hand in the murder of a top government official, a security adviser to the governor, and subsequently declared wanted by the same government. This development forced him to abandon the amnesty program.

The emergence of these thugs, later turned into violent militia groups, created by the political class, therefore signalled the beginning of the criminal dimension that youth agitations assumed within the Sankera axis, with consequential impact on the socio-economic fabric of the area.

Current Situation of Youths' Agitations within Sankera

With the emergence of militias and criminal gangs as youth agitators within Sankera, the foundation already set for violence and crime was now to be consolidated, paving the way for heinous atrocities such as robbery, kidnapping, murder, and illegal revenue collection from local markets. extortion and booty collection from poor local farmers, harassment of motorists, and occasional gang clashes that constantly disrupt the peace of the area. These criminal actors, armed with weapons that politicians had empowered them with, began to terrorize the communities, and, arising from the gains they were making out of their criminal activities, went further to recruit other idle and gullible young minds. Power tussle and desire for dominance among these criminal gangs led to the proliferation, thereby making the Sankera axis a hub of criminal gangs that operated to the detriment of the locals, threatening the peace of the area.

Commenting on the reasons that necessitated the upsurge of these criminal gangs, a security expert, Agudu (2024), pointed to the combination of a tussle for supremacy, access to wealth, a quest for reprisal in pursuit of ethnic nationalism, and outright displays of criminality. These manifested through the desire of these criminal gangs to assert dominance within the area following the death of Gana, who remained the undisputed leader of the militia criminal within the area until his killing by security operations of the federal government. The killing of Gana on the 8th of September 2020, on his way to embrace another opportunity extended to him for the amnesty programme by agents of government, did not sit well with a large fraction of the militia network loyal to his cause, and who believed and subscribed to his ideology. Feeling betrayed by the killing of their supreme leader, these criminal gangs embarked on a killing expedition. These killings were carried out blindly, with victims cutting across old and young. Male and female, religious and traditionalist. Market squares, schools, religious worship places, residential houses, and farms became killing and kidnapping fields. As observed by Agudu, on March 24th 2021, in Abaji market, a group of unknown gunmen came shooting sporadically, and many lives were lost. On the 29th March, 2021, Tor-Donga market in Katsina-Ala LGA was invaded by gunmen. Many people were killed, and some others were wounded. This created a tense atmosphere as the killings continued unabated, as witnessed by an indigene of the area, Aonover Tindiga (2023).

Commenting on the disastrous consequences of the activities of the criminal youths, Mrs Kpamkwase Grace (2024) revealed that so many persons fell victim to the bullets of these youth criminal gangs, which frequently became operational in markets like Gbor and Harga, both in Katsina-Ala, Kyado, and Zaki-Biam in Ukum, cutting the lives of persons such as Rev Fr. Ferdinand Ngugban on the 30th of March 2021, while ministering at his pastoral station of St Paul Parish Ayetwar. There was also the killing of Dr Terkura Suswam, elder brother to a former governor of Benue State, Gabriel Suswam, at his private residence in Anyiin, Logo LGA. Hon. Atoza Hindan, a prominent elder statesman, and other prominent politicians and opinion leaders from the area, such as Hon Lumunga Dzegeigyuve, Hon Douglas Begha, Hon Eric Asema, Hon Terhemem Baso Anza, and other victims of these criminal acts, extended to traditional rulers from the area who dared to call out these criminal gangs Tyosenda (2023).

Farmers, too, suffered collateral damage as this militia youth invaded farms during harvest, placing all manner of demands on the poor farmers, which mostly required the farmers to cede most parts of their farm produce or risk being murdered. Tyowase Orvega (2024), while commenting on the criminality of this behaviour, claimed the criminal gang youth could invade your farm and confiscate farm products such as yams, millets, and rice. This view is corroborated by Tyowase (2024), who argued that farmland is vandalized by criminals in Sankera.

Kidnapping for a huge ransom also became the order of the day, with most victims ending up losing their lives Agudu, (2024). The atmosphere in Sankera not only became so tense, arising from the criminal activities of these miscreants, but life became so unbearable for the majority of the people; equally, life became so cheap that it could be cut short without any form of provocation or warning. The people of Sankera were forced to endure all manner of hardship, go through trauma, and live under constant fear. This situation had corresponding implications on the socio-economic aspects of the lives of the people within the area and beyond.

Economic and Social Implications of Youth Agitations within Sankera

The crisis emanating from agitations from the youths within the Sankera axis has, just like many other crises worldwide, produced suffering, discomfort, hardship, and altered the socio-economic fabric of the area. Beginning from 2011, when the crisis within the area began to assume a dangerous dimension, countless lives have been lost, properties worth several billions destroyed, families either displaced or separated, sources of livelihood destroyed, vocations and educational aspirations aborted; these no doubt had severe implications on the socio-economic aspects of the Sankera region. In the first place, the Sankera axis is historically known for its vibrant economic and social standing within Benue State and beyond. The damages done by these criminal youths, therefore, brought the economic and social fortunes of the area to its knees. Sankera region, like many other localities in Nigeria, lacks viable production industries. This created a situation whereby trading, civil service, and agricultural ventures such as farming remained the major known source of employment within the area. It also remains an undisputed fact that the majority of the youth population within the 3 local government areas that make up the Sankera axis basically

remained unemployed. The few exceptions comprise the underemployed, with some engaging in petty business-like motorcycle riding, otherwise referred to as Okada, commercial vehicle drivers, buying and selling, while others are into full-time farming. The constant harassment of the people trying to earn a decent living through their day-to-day chores by these militia youths forced a lot of people to live in perpetual fear. Agudu (2024) observed that farmers, for instance, were forced to abandon their farms as a result of constant harassment and extortion of their farm produce, with the same situation playing out for innocent persons engaged in trading as a result of constant attacks on market days and arbitrary taxation imposed by these youths' miscreants. The persistent killings and kidnapping equally forced most people to relocate from the Sankera axis to other towns considered more peaceful or secured and by so doing, exposing the Sankera axis to economic and human resource decline as a result of massive closures of thriving businesses and human capital flight.

As observed earlier, the life wires of the economy of Sankera axis rest basically in its agricultural potential; it is the farm produce that supplies market centres across the state and beyond. However, constant onslaught by criminal gangs parading under the guise of youth agitators led to the displacement of farmers, forcing them to take refuge in internally displaced camps or in cluster settings around towns like Zaki-Biam, Tor Donga, Peva, and Katsina-Ala. This development has of course, pushed the drivers of food producers from their production terrain, invariably setting the stage for food scarcity, resulting in the skyrocketing of food prices

Table 1: A brief timeline of some crisis arising from criminal youth clashes

Year	Parties involved	Duration	Deaths	Injured	Property damaged	No of IDPs
2013	Rampage by criminal gang at Mbatyula	2 days	7	25	80 farms invaded , vechiles and other valuables looted	35
2015	Rampage by Unknown gunmen at Harga / Gbor	3days	56	80	Destruction of markets and goods worth several millions of Naira	Nil
2017	Clash between Antyo Anyam and Terungwa Igbawua (Oroudu)	5 days	200	400	Over 120 houses and destroyed, including crops	275
2019	Clash between criminal gang at Peva	4days	2	12	Thatched huts, vehicles and crops destroyed	62
2021	Clash by rival criminal gang at zaki -Biam	1 day	10	23	Yam market destroyed crops looted and shops destroyed	57
2021	Rampage by unkown gunmen at Gbishe and TorDonga	3 days	87	109	Yam farms destroyed and looted	347

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2022	Rampage by fullfire	5 days	Tse Andoor	35	55 huts,crops & vehicles	178
2023	Clash between shitile and Ukum gang youths	4 days	2	19	Shops and residential buildings were destroyed	98

Source: Researchers' field work, 2024

The preceding segment of this study drew our attention to the fact that due to the criminal activities of these criminal youths, thousands of people from the Sankera axis, comprising men and women, mostly the aged, children, and even a fraction of able-bodied youths, have been displaced within the region, leading to their confinement in makeshift camps. This category of persons, usually referred to as internally displaced persons (IDP), having lost their sources of livelihood, are forced to live in very terrible conditions with health, security, feeding, and other social challenges. In the reality of destruction of farmers' crops and killing of their breadwinners as well as displacing them, hunger and poverty become a daily dilemma that characterizes these IDPs across Sankera axis, forcing them to go through the brunt of the post-crisis times given that their source of income and food had been destroyed and haven being prevented from accessing even their farm lands for new cultivations. In this sense, hunger and starvation became a daily reality of this collection of the IDPs in the affected locations in Sankera, at the LGEA, primary school Ugba, NKST primary school Anyii, and camps. And in the Shelter camp in Katsina-Ala LGA, the findings of this study, as revealed to us by an NGO worker in the area (Aba Thomas 2024), show that over 10,871 children in these camps were mostly suffering from malnutrition due to poor feeding and living conditions.

Vanguards reported in 2021 that the NKST Anyiin camp alone housed over 4,583 children, and 75% of them were malnourished because of inadequate feeding. These children became disconnected from their learning processes as schools had been destroyed. These calamities are not good for growing children, for they can affect their entire being in the long run. Findings from this study equally revealed that all the IDPs within the Sankera axis faced similar challenges of accommodation, inadequate food, poor nutrition, poverty, unemployment, lack of clothing, lack of access to schools and proper health systems, leading to untold short and long-term impacts on the lives of IDPs and those of the upcoming generations. These negatives include but are not limited to homelessness, hooliganism, pending social vices, diseases and deaths, starvation, declining literacy level, low productivity, high level of dependency, and increasing spate of child labour, insecurity, and criminality.

Other effects identified included changes in demographic compositions of the rural communities, economic and political backwardness, psychological trauma, and cultural decadence amongst the people. The Global Protection Cluster Group argues that:

Forced out of their homes, IDPs also experience specific forms of deprivation, such as loss of income, shelter, and

often face heightened or particular protection risks. These risks may include: armed attacks and abuse while fleeing in search of safety; family separation, including an increase in the number of separated and unaccompanied children; heightened risk of sexual and gender based violence, particularly affecting women and children; arbitrary deprivation of land, homes, and other property and displacements into inhospitable environments where they suffer stigmas, marginalization, discrimination, and harassment.

This situation, as described by the GPCG, is not far from the conditions of Sankera IDPs. The avalanche of these IDPs within Sankera represents a time bomb that spans beyond the region, the state, and Nigeria at large. A major fallout of these displacements of people, leading to their confinement to IDPs, is the political deprivations that accompany it. The political equation in Sankera axis remained altered as a result of the massive displacement of citizens who were either murdered or driven away from their ancestral homes. The implication of this fallout could be seen in the decimation of the voting strength of the people. According to Tyolumun Aie (2024), in a democratic setting, your ability to lobby and bargain for democratic gains rests mainly in the voting strength of your community. In Sankera Axis, recorded sources indicate that during the 2019 general election, 27 polling units cutting across council wards in Ukum and Katsina-Ala were grounded as electoral material was not deployed there owing to the volatile nature of the area arising from security concerns. By implication, the people from the affected polling units were automatically disenfranchised. Aie went further to assert that, if voting is a critical function of democracy and numbers are key characters of political determination, then the exclusion of these large groups in a given voting exercise is not justice to the people civic rights and responsibility. In the same light, during the 2023 general elections, greater parts of Katsina-Ala East state constituency recorded low turnout of voters as majority of polling units were relocated from rural settings to metropolitan areas making it difficult for most citizens to exercise franchise.

Another disburser challenge posed by youth agitation within the area is the inability of law-abiding citizens to practice their religious obligations freely, devoid of any form of harassment. Religion plays a fundamental role in the formation of people's lives; in Sankera and elsewhere, its importance cannot be easily wished away; hence, it cannot be entirely separated from the lifestyle and livelihood of the people. In Sankera axis, the Christian religion holds sway as over 95 percent of the inhabitants of the area are practitioners of the Christian faith, with the two major denominations within the area being the Roman Catholic Church and the Nongu U Kristu U Sudan ken Tiv (NKST). (Bagu 2023) These two religions, and by extension their members, have come under severe attack following the threat to peace arising from the criminal activities of the youth gangs. Places of worship and those involved in pastoral work (care for the people of God) have had a sour taste of the activities of these criminal youths. The catholic Diocese of Katsina-Ala

responsible for catholic worshippers across the 3 local government in the area lost pastoral agents, including a Rev Father, 17 Catchiests, church warden as well as several thousands of the lay faithful between 2016 to 2023 about 231 churches had closed down out of which about 60 churches operating under 8 catholic parishes were razed down to ashes with the following few destroyed, St Thomas catholic church Kenvanger, NKST church Kyagh, NKST Akura, RCM church Vingir, RCM Anyom, RCM Zungwe, unroofed by criminal gangs, St John the Baptist Kasar Churches razed other infrastructures of value belonging to the churches equally suffered various degrees of damages.

The ugly incident grounded the financial strength of these churches, resulting in very low and unstable incomes for evangelism and propagation of missionary work. Poor harvest and bazaar as well as low turnout for thanksgiving became the order of the day, these used to be avenues by which these churches generated revenues, but with worshipers being unable to meet their financial obligations to the church arising from them being deprived of their livelihoods by these criminal bandits, the churches could no longer built schools, hospitals and worships places, even the existing ones began to collapse. There was also a decline in the number of the worshipping community as most persons were either killed or forced to relocate to places considered safer outside of the Sankera region. It was this scenario that forced about 231 churches to close between 2016 and 2023 (Bagu, 2023).

Major educational centres were equally not spared from the menace of the insecurity arising from youth agitation within Sankera region, Before tings fell apart, the Sankera region no doubt boasts of very renowned institutions of learning such as Government college Katsina –Ala, one of the first secondary school to be established in Northern Nigeria in the year 1914, there is also the Divine Love Girls College, St Gerald Secondary school, NkST secondary school, Mbapuun Grammer school, Atongu Memorial and a host of other credible institutions of learning. The College of Education Katsina-Ala, established as far back as the 1970s, is another citadel of learning serving as a hub for teacher training within the northern part of the country. The presence of these institutions brought persons seeking a Western education from near and far, but this too was to be altered as a result of the activities of these youths, who not only planted fear in the minds of these students and their parents but also destroyed most of these schools physically. Parents had no choice but to withdraw their children and wards from most schools in Sankera, leading to a decline in students’ enrolment.

Table 2: A list of some schools that were completely shut down, destroyed, or burnt in Sankera as a result of youth restiveness

S/NO	NAME OF SCHOOL	STATUS
1	RCM Primary school Aye Twar	Destroyed
2	RCM Primary school Agbami	Destroyed
3	NKST Primary school Hwange	Razed down

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4	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Kwaghgen			
5	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Ikyomke			
6	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Alu			
7	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Branch-Kungu			
8	LGEA	Primary	school	Razed down
	Ayila			
9	LGEA	Primary	school	Razed down
	Mbagbeen-Tya			
10	UBE	Primary	school	Razed down
	Kenvager			
11	LGEA	Primary	school	Shut down
	Tsume			
12	Nyamkam	Nur/Primary	school	Converted to IDP
	Kenvager			
13	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Atongu			
14	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Tsume			
15	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Vingir			
16	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Hemen Tsevav			
17	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Peva			
18	LGEA	Primary	school	Converted to IDP
	KwaghAondo			
19	LGEA	Primary	school	Razed down
	Gyudu			
20	LGEA	Primary	school	Razed down
	Gbise			
21	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Gawa			
22	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Senga			
23	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Adamu			
24	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Agbu			
25	LGEA	Primary	school	Shut down shut down
	Kurkuan			
26	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Mtam			
27	LGEA	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Gbenger			
28	LGEA	Primary	school	Converted to IDP
	Saaikya			
29	NKST	Primary	school	Destroyed
	Agee			
30	UBE	primary	school	Destroyed
	senga			
31	NKST	primary	school	Destroyed
	Hundu			
32	Utange	community	secondary	Destroyed
	school Kasar			
33	Dona Pacem	Secondary	School	Destroyed
	Aye-twar			
34	Nyakam	Nur/primary	school	Destroyed
	Atumbe			

Source: Researchers fieldwork 2024

Commenting on the overall damage done by youth agitators, within the Sankera axis especially as it relates to socio economic aspects of the lives of the people, a prominent member of the Shitile Development Association (SEDA) Mson Avaan (2025) argued that the quantum of damage done as shown by the available data gathered by the association exposes the evil harboured by humans to their fellow humans as well as the inability of Government security agencies in protecting lives and properties of vulnerable citizens. In like manner, official document as released by a group known as the Collation of Sankera Elites (CSA) reported that between July 2022 and December 2023 over 200 villages had been attacked resulting in the killing of several persons including, notably communities such as Gbagir, a village in the Tyuluv council ward which was, attacked between march 9th 2022 and April 2023 leaving not less than 80 persons dead, Ayati, Jootar, Gbeji, Vaase, Chitto and Afia were severely attacked by these criminal bandits leading to wanton destruction of valued properties and economic trees. Other identified communities affected by this carnage, according to the Collation of Sankera Elites, included: Ayilamo, Ikyungwa, Haaga, Tor-Donga, Kam. At Ayilamo Community alone, for instance, a total number of about 145 houses were destroyed, with properties worth eight hundred million naira destroyed. The properties include 2 hospitals, 15 shops, 4 vehicles, 10 motorcycles, and farm produce such as tubers of yams estimated at 250,000, 213 bags of cassava chips, 150 bags of rice, and 140 bags of soybeans among several other valuable items. The report by Collation of Sankera Elites equally revealed that about 522 houses were burnt at Gbeji, Anyiir, Abaji, Kyado, communities, as well as 15 generating plants. In addition, more than 300,000 tubers of yams, 270 bags of groundnut, 800 bags filled with farm products ranging from soybeans, rice, Bambara nuts, locust beans, and corn, among many other valuables, were destroyed. According to CSE, other properties of note destroyed included the Tor –Donga Main Market, worth 1.5 billion naira. The level of damage by the Assessment Committee estimated that over 132 houses were burnt, including provisional and lock-up stores, and industrial and farm produce were stored.

The most troubling aspect of the activities of these criminal bandits as observed by Tyosenda (2023) remained the onslaught on the traditional institutions. The respect which used to be accorded to the traditional leaders and institutions in Sankera eroded with the emergence of these criminal youths. Not only did they elevate outright disregard for the traditional institutions, but these gun-wielding youths have been on a rampage, murdering traditional rulers who dared call them out for their criminality. The gruesome assassination of Zaki Tyoor Awua Alabar in Kendev council ward of Ukam local Government, alongside three other kindred heads, namely Zaki Orza Ahoo, Zaki Baja Anungwa, and Zaki Anyom, and numerous other royal victims. As of December 2023, no fewer than 25 traditional leaders within the Sankera axis had fallen through the guns of the violent youths, so much so that it is safe to conclude that in Sankera, the traditional social order has been eroded through the instrumentality of the barrel of the gun.

CONCLUSION

The study which centres on youth agitation from the Sankera axis of Benue state in Central Nigeria discovered that the origin of youth agitation from the study area emanated from genius concerns of youth exclusion, ethnic tensions and cross border crisis but later assumed a criminal dimension especially as a fall out of being used and dumped by political actors. The period of study indicates that, peace has eluded the area, because peace is indubitably an indispensable ingredient and a core catalyst for societal growth and development. The prevailing crisis arising from the youth agitations remained a recipe for underdevelopment, frustrating all genuine human efforts geared towards development. Sankera area, which used to be on a fast course to become one of the fastest-growing areas structurally and economically in Benue state and Nigeria at large. Having been beset by an unpunctuated crisis of a violent nature has unfortunately reset the ugly wheels of sorrowful diminishing returns. The prevailing economic and social consequences of their conditioning stances have cast clouds of doubt, which seem to threaten and ridicule the craving for development and general well-being as a people., food insecurity surged as a result of inability of farmers to access their farms, trading and business closed down creating room for unemployment and decline in the economic life, schools, worships centres and other aspect of social life closed down for fear of the dreaded militia that sprang up Quite lamentable and obnoxious is the indignity with which human lives are treated, the wanton destruction of properties as well as economic facilities, and utter disregard for the traditional and formal institutions of learning. Amidst all these, the government seemed helpless, but if the Sankera area must advance in the queue of societal development, real peace, pragmatic rehabilitation as a matter of urgency, needs to be on board. To this end, the government, the religious bodies, the traditional institutions, and other stakeholders must make conscious efforts to quell the tides of social abnormalities. Thus, all efforts towards taming the monster of insecurity disguised as youth agitation must be seen as a collective responsibility.

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