AFRICAN JOURNAL of Social & Behavioural Sciences

Volume 16, Number 8 (2026)
Print ISSN: 2141-209X
ISSN-L: 2141-209X
Double-blind peer reviewed

Research Article
DOI: https://doi.org/10.68442/ajsbs/2026/v16i8.029

The Ransom Tax: Illicit Economies on the Trans-African Highway and the Erosion of AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 in South-East Nigeria

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Received: 16 October 2026 • **Accepted:** 23 October 2026 • **Published:** 24 October 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how kidnapping for ransom, treated here as an informal "ransom tax", undermines the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Aspiration 1 of the African Union's Agenda 2063 in South-East Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. It asks why a continental trade regime has so little hold on a corridor where ransom is collected from traders and transporters. The South-East lies on the Nigerian leg of Trans-African Highway (TAH) 8 and is a node for the movement of goods towards Cameroon and Central Africa. Because of the security situation, the study used a qualitative documentary design and drew on secondary datasets (SBM Intelligence, the National Bureau of Statistics and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project) and on African Union reports, media archives and the academic literature. Regime theory is used to explain why the AfCFTA regime has a weak effect at the corridor level. Three themes emerged: the ransom tax as a non-tariff barrier, the Monday sit-at-home as a de facto corridor closure, and weak prosecution as regime impunity. The documents suggest that these practices weaken Aspiration 1 in three ways. They raise costs for small traders and transporters, who are least able to pay for escorts and protection; they may divert trade to routes seen as safer; and they may discourage investment in corridor markets. The paper concludes that the AfCFTA regime needs a corridor-level security strategy, developed with sub-national governments, if the goals of Agenda 2063 are to be met. The evidence is documentary, and some corridor-level figures need independent confirmation.

Keywords: Agenda 2063; African Continental Free Trade Area; Aspiration 1; Kidnapping; Ransom Tax; Trans-African Highway; Illicit Economies; South-East Nigeria

Cite this article: Ojukwu, S. M. G., Onwunyi, U. M., Mbah, C. C., & Osegbue, C. P. (2026). The ransom tax: Illicit economies on the Trans-African Highway and the erosion of AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 in South-East Nigeria. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences, 16*(8), 352–360. https://doi.org/10.68442/ajsbs/2026/v16i8.029

Introduction

Illicit economies are now central to the study of insecurity in Africa. Examples include piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the trade in conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone and coltan smuggling in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ellis & Shaw, 2015; Nordstrom, 2007). One of the fastest-growing illicit economies in West Africa is kidnapping for ransom. In Nigeria, it has moved from a peripheral crime to a large industry that challenges the state's hold on the means of violence and the safety of its citizens.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) estimated that Nigerians paid about ₦2.23 trillion in ransom between May 2023 and April 2024. SBM Intelligence, which tracks reported cases, recorded 4,722 abductions in 997 incidents between July 2024 and June 2025, with kidnappers demanding more than ₦48 billion and receiving at least ₦2.57 billion (Premium Times, 2025). Its 2026 report counted 7,825 victims and ₦7.78 billion paid, against ₦22.9 billion demanded (David, 2026). The NBS estimate comes from a household survey and the SBM counts from reported cases, so the two sets of figures are

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not comparable and differ greatly in size. Both, however, point to a large and organised source of income for armed groups.

Most recorded kidnapping in Nigeria takes place in the North. SBM Intelligence put the North's share of abducted persons at 93.7 per cent in its 2026 report (David, 2026). This paper therefore does not claim that the South-East has the country's highest levels of kidnapping. Its argument is about position. The region sits on the Nigerian leg of a continental trade corridor, so even a modest amount of kidnapping and extortion may carry costs for trade that reach well beyond Nigeria.

Agenda 2063, adopted by the African Union in 2015 as "The Africa We Want", is a fifty-year blueprint for the continent's transformation (African Union Commission, 2015). Its Aspiration 4 envisions a peaceful and secure Africa, and its flagship project, Silencing the Guns, was first meant to end wars, violent conflict, gender-based violence and genocide by 2020, with the target date later moved to 2030. Under this project, attention has focused mainly on civil wars, coups, and terrorism. Research and policy on insecurity in Nigeria have likewise concentrated on terrorism and banditry, and local illicit economies such as kidnapping for ransom, which turn violence into income, have received less attention.

Aspiration 1, "A Prosperous Africa Based on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development", looks to inclusive growth, transformed economies and job creation (African Union Commission, 2015). Its main instrument is the AfCFTA, which began trading on 1 January 2021 and covers a market of more than 1.3 billion people. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2018) estimated that removing import duties alone could raise intra-African trade by 52.3 per cent, and that the gain could double if non-tariff barriers were also reduced. World Bank analysis likewise stresses that the benefits of the agreement depend on lower trade costs and fewer non-tariff barriers, and not on tariff cuts alone (Echandi et al., 2022). In this vision, prosperity depends on the free movement of goods, services and people across Trans-African trade corridors.

Intra-African trade nevertheless remains low. Between 2015 and 2017 it made up about 15 per cent of Africa's total trade, compared with about 67 per cent in Europe and 61 per cent in Asia (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2019). The usual explanations point to infrastructure gaps, missing links in the Trans-African Highway (TAH) network, poor border management and disputes over rules of origin. This paper argues that illicit economies operating on the existing infrastructure add to these barriers.

Nigeria offers a clear example. Three Trans-African Highway routes end in Lagos: TAH 2 (Algiers to Lagos, 4,504 km), TAH 7 (Dakar to Lagos, about 4,760 km) and TAH 8 (Lagos to Mombasa, about 6,260 km) (African Union, n.d.). The coastal Abidjan–Lagos section is being developed as a 1,028-kilometre, six-lane dual carriageway through five countries, and in July 2025 it entered the final design phase (Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], 2025). On paper, Nigeria should be among the main beneficiaries of the AfCFTA. The authors argue that insecurity, including insecurity driven by illicit economic activity, limits those gains. They place the South-East on the TAH 8 route, through Onitsha and Enugu and onward to Cameroon and Central Africa. Their documentary evidence suggests that movement on the Onitsha–Enugu and Onitsha–Ihiala–Owerri roads is disrupted by kidnapping, by criminal groups based in forests and by the Monday sit-at-home order, which armed groups that invoke the separatist cause enforce (Nwangwu, 2023). Onitsha Main Market, often described as the largest market in West Africa, is closed on those Mondays. The authors also contend that some traders now route goods through Cotonou in Benin instead of Lagos because they regard it as safer, but this claim needs trade-flow data before it can be treated as established.

This article introduces the concept of the ransom tax to explain what happens on such corridors. The ransom tax is an informal levy that armed groups impose on corridor users, namely drivers, traders and passengers, through kidnapping, abduction and extortion. Like a tariff, it raises the price of goods, lowers trade volumes and can divert trade to safer routes. Unlike a tariff, the state does not collect it, it is not invested in infrastructure and it falls outside the AfCFTA's dispute settlement system. The term is an analytical device and not a legal category. The authors' argument is that, while the AfCFTA is phasing out formal tariffs, the ransom tax puts a cost on movement that member states do not control. This is more than a security problem. It bears directly on Aspiration 1, which requires inclusive growth in which small

traders and transporters can take part in continental trade without fear of expropriation by criminal groups.

Existing literature has treated these issues separately. AfCFTA research focuses on legal and economic integration and gives little attention to insecurity as a barrier to trade. Studies of illicit economies deal with mining, drugs, arms and human trafficking and say less about kidnapping as a corridor economy. Writing on Agenda 2063 concentrates on its aspirations and offers little evidence on how they falter at the corridor level. This article brings the three together by asking one question: How does kidnapping for ransom on Trans-African corridors undermine the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 in South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

Illicit Economies Revisited

Illicit economies are usually defined as systems that produce and exchange illegal goods and services, use illegal means to produce legal goods, or evade formal regulation. Earlier work often treated them as criminal activity that exists outside the formal economy. Nordstrom (2007) challenged this view by showing that licit and illicit trade are bound together, and that money from drugs, arms and trafficking flows into banks, property and politics. Felbab-Brown (2017) makes a related point, arguing that illicit economies and civil violence are more complex than a simple contest between criminals and the state. Ellis and Shaw (2015) warn against treating organised crime in Africa as an outside force that acts against the state, and stress that it is often embedded in political and social networks. Ellis (2016) develops this view for Nigeria in a history of the country's organised crime.

Tilly (1985) offers a useful starting point for the idea of a ransom tax. He argued that states grew out of protection rackets, in which those who offer protection from violence also help to produce the threat. Armed groups that demand payment for safe passage can be understood in a similar way, as actors that sell protection against a danger they help to create.

Studies of kidnapping in Nigeria have examined its political economy (Omotola & Oyewole, 2024), its sociological dimensions (Demehin et al., 2024) and the factors that shape how seriously citizens judge it (Enemuwe et al., 2025). Work on the South-East has linked insecurity to separatist agitation and the state's response to it (Nwangwu, 2023). Much of this work treats kidnapping as a crime to be policed and counts incidents, victims and rescues. Fewer studies ask what ransom does to the cost of moving goods, which is the question taken up here.

This paper therefore treats kidnapping for ransom as a ransom tax. In the authors' interpretation of the documents, armed groups in forest areas of the South-East, such as Ihiala and Okigwe, hold territory, collect payments (ransom and protection fees) and enforce compliance through the threat of further abduction. These are functions that resemble those of a state. The difference is that a state is expected to use taxation to fund public goods, while these groups spend ransom on private consumption and arms, which erodes the public good. Illicit economies can thus be seen as an alternative route to accumulation, driven by arms proliferation and by social, economic and political conditions.

The link between illicit economies and trade corridors is under-explored, and it has received almost no attention for kidnapping. The authors extend a corridor approach to kidnapping and suggest that the routes used for AfCFTA trade, such as Lagos, Benin City, Onitsha and Enugu towards Yaoundé, are the same routes along which ransom is collected.

Three gaps follow. First, writing on the AfCFTA seldom treats insecurity as a barrier that can take the place of tariffs. Second, the corridor literature gives little attention to the South-East as a weak point on TAH 8. Third, studies of illicit economies seldom treat ransom as a form of taxation on trade. The paper proposes that kidnapping for ransom undermines Aspiration 1 through three mechanisms: (1) it raises transaction costs for traders and transporters; (2) it may divert trade to routes considered safer, such as those through Cotonou or Ghana; and (3) it may deter investment in corridor markets such as Aba and

Onitsha. In doing so it turns insecurity from a security problem into an economic one, and from a sub-national concern into a continental one.

Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1: Prosperity through Integration

Agenda 2063 sets out seven aspirations for the continent's transformation over fifty years (African Union Commission, 2015). Aspiration 1 envisions a prosperous Africa built on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Its targets include a high standard of living, well-educated citizens, transformed economies, modern agriculture and a blue and green economy. The aspiration rests on the assumption that economic integration will drive prosperity. The AfCFTA, adopted in 2018 and operational since 2021, is the main instrument for that purpose.

Earlier continental plans, notably the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), also set ambitious goals that were weakly implemented. In the authors' view, there is a risk that Agenda 2063 follows the same path if insecurity is treated as a background condition and not as an economic system that takes value from trade.

Trans-African Corridors: Infrastructure without Security

The Trans-African Highway network was conceived in the early 1970s under the leadership of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and it comprises nine routes that were developed with the African Development Bank and the African Union (African Union, n.d.). The network was meant to promote trade and reduce poverty through highway development and the management of road-based trade corridors. Discussion of the network has long centred on missing links, such as unpaved sections in Central Africa and the Sahara crossing, and on delays at borders.

Corridor projects are generally planned around roads, customs and border procedures. The Abidjan–Lagos project, for example, has moved through technical studies to which each of the five countries involved committed US$1.4 million (ECOWAS, 2025). Such planning assumes that states regulate corridor space. The authors argue that the assumption does not hold along parts of TAH 8 in the South-East, where armed groups regulate movement through kidnapping and extortion on the Onitsha–Enugu and Ihiala–Owerri roads. Even though TAH 8 is described as a vibrant trade corridor, the stretch that crosses the South-East is, in the authors' account, one of its most distorted sections.

Theoretical Framework

Regime Theory and the Problem of Domestication

Regime theory was developed by scholars such as Krasner (1983), Keohane (1984) and Young (1989). Krasner (1983) defines an international regime as a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given issue area. The theory explains how states cooperate without a world government. Keohane (1984) argued that regimes lower transaction costs, supply information and make it easier to monitor compliance, and Young (1989) examined how regimes are formed. Compliance remains the main difficulty, because states can sign agreements without carrying them out. A regime can therefore be formed with success and still have little effect.

Regime theory suits this study because the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 are regimes and not simply treaties. The AfCFTA has principles (the free movement of goods will drive prosperity), norms (member states should not impose non-tariff barriers), rules (the protocols on trade in goods, rules of origin and dispute settlement) and decision-making procedures (the Secretariat, the Council of Ministers and the Dispute Settlement Body). Aspiration 1 can be described in the same way. It has principles (inclusive growth requires integration), norms (peace is a condition for prosperity) and procedures (monitoring by the African Union Commission and the Ten-Year Implementation Plans).

Two claims from regime theory matter here. First, regimes tend to persist even when they deliver few benefits, because actors have invested in them and expect others to comply. Second, the effect of a regime depends on domestication, which is the translation of international norms into national law,

institutions and practice. A regime can be formally adopted and yet remain largely empty if domestication is narrow or selective.

Domestication is the process by which international regimes are taken into domestic legal and institutional orders. Studies of norm compliance (Checkel, 2001; Risse et al., 1999) show that adopting a rule and changing behaviour are different things. Building on this, the authors distinguish formal domestication, meaning the passing of laws and the ratification of treaties, from substantive domestication, meaning a real change in the behaviour of state and non-state actors. Nigeria ratified the AfCFTA in 2020, enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act in 2015 and passed the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (Establishment) Act in 2024. Substantive domestication would be shown, for example, when a trader in Onitsha experiences free movement or a driver on TAH 8 feels safe. By that test, Aspirations 1 and 4, which call for a prosperous and a peaceful and secure Africa, have not yet been matched by effective implementation.

Silencing the Guns has been taken up in Nigeria mainly as an arms-control and counter-terrorism project. The authors argue that commercial kidnapping for ransom in the South-East, which is a form of illicit enterprise and not ideological terrorism, falls outside the operational focus of the small arms centre and of the counter-terrorism machinery. This weakens the regime at the sub-national level and, with it, the AfCFTA.

In the South-East, armed groups based in forests such as those of Ihiala, Okigwe and Udi can be seen as a competing regime. In the authors' account, it has its own principles (ransom is legitimate), norms (drivers must pay for protection to pass), rules (the Monday sit-at-home must be observed, and ransom must be paid in cash or by POS transfer without being traced) and decision-making procedures (gang leaders decide the ransom amount, the negotiation and the release). This alternative order is criminal, but it also performs some functions of governance, since it taxes and uses force to secure compliance. It stands against the AfCFTA principle that goods should flow freely, because the ransom regime says that goods flow when ransom is paid. Its version of inclusion extends only to those who can afford protection, while Agenda 2063 calls for growth that includes everyone. The trader from Onitsha is caught between the formal regime of free trade promised by the AfCFTA and the informal ransom regime. Regime theory therefore suggests that insecurity harms trade when it gives rise to a competing regime that imposes its own rules in place of those the AfCFTA has laid down, and when it exposes the narrow domestication of the regime by the Nigerian state.

Method

The study used a qualitative documentary design, because the security situation in the study area made the collection of primary data unsafe. It focused on the critical nodes of TAH 8 in the South-East, namely the Onitsha–Ihiala–Owerri and Onitsha–Enugu roads, which the authors treat as strategic junctions on the routes to Cameroon, Chad and Central Africa. Secondary quantitative data came from SBM Intelligence (2020–2025), the NBS Crime Experience and Security Perception Survey (2024) and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2015–2025). Secondary qualitative material came from reports of the African Union, the International Crisis Group and the United Nations Development Programme, from records of Operation UDO KA, the Nigeria Police Force Anti-Kidnapping Unit and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (2024–2026), from media archives and from the academic literature. The documents were grouped under three themes: the ransom tax, the Monday sit-at-home as corridor closure, and weak prosecution as regime impunity.

Some of the corridor-level figures used in the findings, for example those on escort fees, container costs and conviction rates, come from documents compiled by the authors and could not all be checked against a published source for this version. They are reported with attribution and should be treated as indicative.

Findings

Three themes emerged from the documents: the ransom as a tax, the Monday sit-at-home as corridor closure, and the absence of prosecution as regime impunity. Together, they suggest that kidnapping for ransom works as a system of extraction and not as a series of isolated crimes.

Ransom as Tax: The Informal Levy on Movement

The documents suggest that the ransom tax works in three ways. The first is direct payment. Reports compiled by the authors indicate that traders in Onitsha Main Market spend between ₦20,000 and ₦50,000 a day on armed escorts. The second is a rise in transport costs. A trader in Onitsha Main Market is reported to have estimated that the cost of moving a 40-foot container from Lagos to Onitsha rose from ₦800,000 in 2021 to ₦2.5 million in 2025 because of security escorts and the ransom tax. Part of this cost is likely to be passed on to buyers in Cameroon and Chad who obtain goods from Onitsha. The third is advance payment. Many transport companies are reported to pay large sums to ransom intermediaries beforehand to avoid abduction.

The tax also appears to vary with the value of the load. The authors' records indicate that transporters are made to pay in proportion to the value of the goods they carry, and that drivers who work on Mondays, when the sit-at-home order is enforced, pay more in ransom and protection fees. This pattern runs against the AfCFTA norm that non-tariff barriers should be removed, because it raises the cost of goods and services on the Onitsha–Enugu corridor.

Ransom is also demanded from ordinary travellers. In the early hours of 1 October 2026, gunmen hijacked two buses on the Owerri–Onitsha expressway in Imo State and abducted their passengers, among them 19 prospective corps members of the National Youth Service Corps, as first reported (Iheaka, 2026). Later reports put the number of corps members freed at 20, and the release took place a week after the abduction (Ugwu, 2026). The demand was reported as ₦50 million for each victim in one account (Sahara Reporters, 2026) and as a reduced ₦5 million each in another (Ugwu, 2026). The Imo State police commissioner said that he knew of no ransom payment (Sahara Reporters, 2026). Ransom is usually paid in cash or by point-of-sale (POS) transfer, and the authors know of no public record that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) or the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) has traced such payments. If that is so, it points to a gap in the regime's capacity to follow the money.

Monday Sit-at-Home as Corridor Closure

The Monday sit-at-home order was first directed by groups linked to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to protest the detention of Nnamdi Kanu. Since 2021, observance of the order has repeatedly closed markets in Onitsha on Mondays, and the cost falls on trade. The Anambra State Commissioner for Information said in January 2026 that the state loses an average of ₦8 billion on each Monday when markets are shut (Channels Television, 2026). The state government ordered Onitsha Main Market closed for a week after traders failed to open on a Monday (Channels Television, 2026). Traders who travel from Cameroon, Gabon and Chad on Sundays to buy on Monday are reported to be left stranded.

The authors suggest that the sit-at-home may reinforce the criminal economy, since reduced security activity on Mondays may leave room for kidnappers to operate. This link has not been tested and would need data on the timing of abductions. The effect on the AfCFTA is more direct. The Protocol on Trade in Goods commits member states to remove non-tariff barriers, and a closure that falls every Monday shortens the working week of traders who depend on Monday logistics. Because the order is enforced by armed groups and not imposed by the state, it is not a non-tariff barrier in the legal sense, but it has the same economic effect. The authors also suggest that Cotonou, which is not subject to a weekly closure, may attract traders from Lagos and Onitsha, although trade-flow data would be needed to show this.

No Prosecution as Regime Impunity

Weak prosecution sustains impunity and weakens the AfCFTA regime. Although kidnapping is widespread on the corridor, prosecution appears to be rare. Data from the Anambra State Ministry of Justice for 2024–2025, as cited by the authors, show that only 7 of 124 kidnapping cases filed ended in

conviction, a rate of 5.6 per cent. The remaining cases were dismissed for lack of evidence, adjourned indefinitely or withdrawn after victims were threatened. Without tracking of ransom payments, prosecutors find it hard to link kidnappers to their crimes. This may signal to kidnappers that the activity carries low risk and high returns.

Discussion

The findings suggest that kidnapping for ransom on the South-East section of TAH 8 undermines Aspiration 1 in three ways that match the concerns of the AfCFTA itself. Each should be seen as a proposition that the documents support in part, and not as an established result.

Higher Costs and Less Inclusive Growth

Aspiration 1 requires growth in which small businesses, traders, transporters and women in the informal economy can take part in continental trade. The ransom tax hinders this because small operators cannot afford security escorts or protection levies. Larger traders who can pay may continue to use the corridor and pass costs on to consumers. Small traders, especially women, may be unable to take up the opportunities that the AfCFTA offers, such as selling goods to buyers in Bamenda, Cameroon.

Trade Diversion and Weaker Integration

The AfCFTA seeks to raise trade within and among Africa's sub-regions by removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers. If the ransom tax and the Monday closures push traders to other routes, for example from Lagos to Cotonou or from Onitsha to Kumasi in Ghana, as the authors suggest, Nigeria loses trade and so does intra-African trade as a whole. The available documents do not allow this diversion to be measured, and trade data from Benin and Ghana would be needed to test it.

Weaker Investment and Sustainable Development

Aspiration 1 gives priority to investment in infrastructure, manufacturing and human capital. Investors are drawn to places where the safety of their assets can be assured, so persistent kidnapping may discourage investment in corridor markets such as Aba and Onitsha. The authors cite reports from Anambra State bodies that name kidnapping as a reason for investors preferring other countries, but no direct investment data could be checked for this version. While the AfCFTA promises access to a market of more than 1.3 billion people, the ransom regime makes part of that market harder to reach.

Limitations

The study relies on documents and not on primary data, so it cannot show causation. Some of the corridor-level figures could not be checked against published sources, as noted above. The South-East is not the region with the highest recorded levels of kidnapping, since most abducted persons are in the North (David, 2026), so the argument rests on the position of the region on a trade corridor and not on the scale of kidnapping alone. The claims about trade diversion and investment need trade-flow and investment data. Future work could test them through interviews with traders and transporters, through customs data from Benin and Ghana, and through comparison with corridors in other regions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The central argument of this article is that the promise of the AfCFTA and of Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1 is being eroded by a ransom tax that illicit economies impose on Trans-African corridors. Kidnapping for ransom acts like a non-tariff barrier because it raises costs, the Monday sit-at-home closes markets, and weak prosecution allows the practice to continue at little risk. Using regime theory, the paper showed that Nigeria has taken up the Silencing the Guns project mainly through arms control and counter-terrorism, with little provision for the security of trade corridors. Ransom payments are not followed by the financial authorities, and the legal provisions are weak. The evidence is documentary and partly

indicative, but it is consistent with the view that insecurity should be treated as an economic issue for the AfCFTA and not only as a security matter.

Recommendations

Based on the framework used here, the recommendations are addressed to three levels of authority.

African Union and AfCFTA Secretariat: Regime Reform

The African Union should extend its understanding of Silencing the Guns beyond conventional wars to include illicit economies such as kidnapping for ransom and banditry, and should add the ransom collection rate as an indicator in its progress reports. A sub-national illicit economy monitoring unit under the Peace and Security Council could track data on kidnapping, such as ACLED records, and not only coups. The AfCFTA Secretariat should link implementation to security assessments of trade corridors, so that no corridor is promoted as operational without a kidnapping-risk assessment.

Federal Government of Nigeria: Disrupting the Economy, Not Only the Criminals

Federal security policy should move from a mainly kinetic approach to one that also disrupts the economy of kidnapping. The EFCC and the NFIU should trace the POS terminals and bank transfers used to collect ransom, and the government should consider freezing the accounts involved and prosecuting POS agents, using approaches similar to those applied against terrorism financing. Ungoverned forests in the South-East could be designated special forest security zones, with forest guards and drone surveillance and not only army checkpoints on the roads. Controls on small arms should be strengthened by implementing a national small arms database and by tightening controls at entry points. A trader apprenticeship support fund for the South-East could offer young people an alternative to quick money from ransom.

South-East Governors' Forum: A Human Security Approach

The governors could establish a South-East human security trust that compensates victims and supports farming in affected areas such as Eha-Amufu and Orsu, in order to restore food security. State governments could revive the Igba-boi apprenticeship system with grants backed by the state, which would also serve Aspiration 1 on job creation. Communities should have a role in forest governance, with forest guards recruited locally and intelligence shared with the formal agencies, and with community vigilante groups funded and supervised by the state. Joint forest mapping and drone surveillance in places such as Isuikwuato and Ihiala would deny armed groups operational bases. These steps fit the human security framework (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). The Monday sit-at-home needs to end because it creates a vacuum that kidnappers may exploit, and political and community dialogue that separates separatist agitation from the criminal economy should be pursued. State governments should align their development plans with the Agenda 2063 framework, and the Silencing the Guns framework should be taken up at state level through state peacebuilding agencies that coordinate disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

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