

THE EFFECTS OF INSECURITY ON FOOD SECURITY IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY REINFORCEMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the effects of insecurity on food security in Benue State, Nigeria and its implications for Policy Reinforcement, focusing on how violent conflicts disrupt agricultural production, market stability, and household nutrition. Using a qualitative method based on secondary data, the study reviews academic journals, government publication, policy brief and media reports to analyse eight core food security variables such as availability, physical access, economic access, stability, utilisation, nutrition, resilience, and displacement. Findings reveal that persistent farmer-herder clashes, banditry, and communal violence have led to significant decline in crop and livestock output, unsafe transport routes, higher food prices, and unstable food supplies. Displacement of farming populations has caused dietary deficiencies and eroded resilience, leaving many households dependent on aid. Although government interventions, such as security deployments, agricultural input schemes, and mediation forums, have provided partial relief, they remain inadequate to fully address the crisis. The study concludes that achieving food security in Benue requires integrated policy actions that can combine enhanced rural security with agricultural recovery, improved market access, targeted nutrition programmes, and resilience-building strategies. These findings have implications for designing policies that address both the immediate humanitarian needs and the long-term stability of Nigeria's "food basket" state. The study recommends that government should strengthen security, support displaced farmers and secure transport routes.

Keywords: Food security, Insecurity, Nigeria, Policy reinforcement and Public Policy

Introduction

Insecurity refers to a pervasive lack of safety and protection experienced by individuals or communities, encompassing threats from violence, kidnapping, theft, and communal conflicts (Akinoyemi & Olaniyan, 2022). Food security, by contrast, means that "all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life" (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2021). The importance of food security cannot be overstated, it provides significant benefits for human health and serves as the basis for sustained economic growth (World Bank, 2022), and it is

also an investment in wider stability where food insecurity prevails, instability and conflict often follow (FAO, 2022).

In Nigeria, insecurity and food security are closely intertwined. High levels of violence and instability prevent people from farming, transporting food, or accessing markets safely, which in turn undermines food availability and access (Eze, 2023). Conversely, severe food insecurity manifesting as hunger and competition for scarce resources can fuel grievances and conflicts; indeed, studies find that deprivation and hunger have been primary drivers of violence and war in Africa (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). In the Nigerian context, this two-way relationship means that insecurity and food insecurity mutually reinforce each other, creating vicious cycles particularly in vulnerable regions.

Nigeria faces multiple forms of insecurity, ranging from armed banditry, kidnapping, and armed robbery to insurgency (notably the Boko Haram conflict in the north-east) and communal violence between herders and farmers (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). In the agrarian Middle Belt region, especially Benue State, recurring clashes between semi-nomadic pastoralists and settled farming communities have intensified over recent years, with the conflict growing deadlier. For example, one report noted that farmer-herder violence in states like Benue caused over 5,000 deaths since 2015, reflecting a sharp escalation in that period (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Several underlying factors drive insecurity in Nigeria. Competition over land and water resources exacerbated by climate change and environmental stress is a major trigger of clashes, as groups vie for dwindling grazing areas and fertile farmland (Blench, 2021). Weak governance and policing, which allow impunity, and the widespread proliferation of small arms have emboldened criminal activity. Pervasive poverty and youth unemployment also contribute, by making recruitment into armed groups easier, while ethnic and religious tensions can further inflame local conflicts (Okoli & Atelhe, 2022). In Benue State, for instance, changing climate patterns and desertification in northern Nigeria have pushed herders southward; shrinking pastureland has heightened competition and led to more frequent farmer-herder confrontations (Benue State Ministry of Agriculture, 2020).

Insecurity disrupts agricultural production and food systems in multiple ways. Violence displaces farming populations and often forces them to abandon fields; crops may be destroyed or left unharvested, and rural markets become inaccessible due to road ambushes or fear of attack (Eze, 2023). In Nigeria, such conditions have led to vast tracts of arable land going uncultivated, causing lower crop yields and significant post-harvest losses (FAO, 2021). Food supply chain disruptions drive up prices of staples for example, the price of a yam tuber or a measure of grain has more than doubled in some conflict-affected areas (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). The outcome is higher levels of hunger and malnutrition, with millions of Nigerians now relying on humanitarian food aid, especially in the conflict-ravaged north (World Food Programme [WFP], 2022; FAO, 2022). In Benue State (traditionally known as the nation's "food basket"), attacks on farmers have left many fields fallow and greatly reduced the output of maize, yam, and other staples (Benue State Ministry of Agriculture, 2020).

The Nigerian government has implemented various measures to combat insecurity and mitigate its effect on food security. Security forces have been deployed to conflict hotspots, and special task forces and ranger units have been created to protect farming communities (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [FMARD], 2021). There have been efforts to improve intelligence and early-warning systems in rural areas, and to work with local vigilante groups for community policing. To address the food security fallout, authorities have launched agricultural support programs for instance, the Central Bank's Anchor Borrowers' Scheme has provided farmers with seeds, fertilizers, and credit to boost production (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2021). The government has also tried to negotiate peace between farmers and herders, supporting mediation committees and endorsing initiatives like ranching and the National Livestock Transformation Plan to reduce open grazing conflicts. In Benue State, the state government and NGOs have organised peace-building forums and dialogues between herder and farmer communities (International Crisis Group, 2021). Agencies such as the FAO have stepped in to support livelihoods for example, FAO's recent project in Benue provides improved animal feed and farming inputs to both herders and farmers, aiming to reduce competition over land (FAO, 2022).

Based on the analysis of insecurity's impact on food security in Benue State, policy reinforcement emerges as an urgent imperative to break the vicious cycle of violence and hunger. The existing measures including security deployments, agricultural support programs like the Anchor Borrowers' Scheme, and peace-building dialogues have proven insufficient to counteract the deep-rooted drivers of conflict, such as climate-induced resource competition, weak governance, and proliferation of arms (Ezeoba (2017). Therefore, policy must be reinforced through integrated, mutually supportive strategies that simultaneously enhance physical security, strengthen livelihoods, and address structural triggers. This requires not only scaling up and properly funding existing frameworks like the National Livestock Transformation Plan but also ensuring tighter coordination between security, agricultural, and environmental agencies to protect farming communities, secure supply chains, and

promote climate-resilient practices (Chukwu *et al.*, 2024). Ultimately, reinforcing policy in this holistic manner is essential to restoring Benue's role as Nigeria's "food basket" and achieving sustainable food security.

Statement of the Problem

Despite its strategic role as Nigeria's "food basket," Benue State continues to experience deep insecurity that threatens its agricultural base and weakens food security. This problem is worsened by weak management responses and the absence of sustainable recovery plans for displaced farming populations. Even where security forces or relief programs are deployed, interventions are often short-term and fail to rebuild the confidence of farmers to return to their land. Without adequate protection, displaced families remain in camps or urban centres, unable to contribute to food production. The long-term effect is a cycle of declining farm output, unstable food markets, and rising vulnerability of households. If this trend continues, the state may lose its status as the nation's food basket, and the wider Nigerian food system will remain fragile.

Objectives

This paper analyses insecurity and Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria: Implications for strengthening Policy. Specifically, the objectives of this paper are to:

1. Identify the trends of Insecurity in Benue State, Nigeria
2. Highlights the impact of insecurity on Food Security in Benue State

2.1 Concept of Insecurity

The United Nations Development Programme (1994) defined insecurity within its human security framework as the absence of safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression, as well as from sudden disruptions in daily life. This broader approach reframes security away from territorial or military concerns toward the protection of people's survival, livelihoods, and dignity. Insecurity thus comprises multiple interlinked threats to economic, health, political, and environmental that undermine fundamental human freedoms, requiring comprehensive, multi-sectoral policy responses (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).

Buzan (1991) defined insecurity as the condition that arises when an actor's freedom from threat is compromised. He conceptualized security as the pursuit of freedom from threats jeopardising the existence or identity of actors such as states, societies, or individuals. In this framework, insecurity is understood as the measurable or perceived weakening of an actor's ability to maintain core functions and identity in the face of specific threats, spanning military, political, economic, societal, and environmental sectors (Buzan, 1991).

Baldwin (1997) defined insecurity in a conceptual manner as a state in which threats to valued objects are present and the likelihood or magnitude of disruptive loss is unacceptably high. He emphasised that insecurity should be analytically specified by identifying whose security is at stake, what values are threatened, and the degree of risk involved. This approach makes insecurity an operationalisable concept, enabling clearer measurement

and policy prioritisation rather than treating insecurity as a vague or catch-all term (Baldwin, 1997).

Concept of Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 1996) defined food security as a condition when “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” The comprehensive definition highlights four critical dimensions: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. It underscores that food security is not only about the quantity of food but also about the quality and consistent access, emphasising the importance of combined food systems that support diverse nutritional needs (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 1996).

Maxwell and Smith (1992) defined food security as the ability of a population to acquire food in adequate quantity and quality to meet their nutritional requirements consistently over time. Their definition stresses the interplay between food supply and demand, focusing on the economic and social factors that enable or constrain access to food. They highlight that food insecurity arises not merely from a lack of food production but also from systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities within food distribution networks and household resources (Maxwell & Smith, 1992).

Sen (1981) defined food security through the lens of entitlements, describing it as the ability of individuals or households to command sufficient food through production, purchase, or social transfers. Sen’s entitlement approach draws attention to the social, economic, and political dimensions that affect individuals’ capability to secure food, shifting the focus from aggregate food availability to individual rights and resources. This perspective has been fundamental in understanding food insecurity as a problem of distribution and access, rather than simply food supply (Sen, 1981).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2020) defined food security as consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living, but also introduced the concept of food insecurity as limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the inability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. This dual focus recognises food security as a dynamic condition, sensitive to economic shifts and social factors, and underlines the importance of food safety and social dignity in acquiring food (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2020). Barrett (2010) defined food security as a multi-dimensional state where food availability, access, utilisation, and stability collectively ensure that individuals or populations have secure access to sufficient and appropriate food. Barrett further elaborates that food security must be understood within the broader context of livelihoods, risk management, and governance, emphasising that vulnerabilities and shocks, such as climate change or conflict, significantly impact food security.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Conflict Theory as propounded by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and the Cobb–Douglas

Production Function developed by Charles Cobb and Paul Douglas (1928). Karl Marx’s conflict theory emphasises that society is in a constant state of tension due to competition over scarce resources, leading to inequality and social unrest. This perspective is relevant to insecurity in Benue State, where conflicts over land, water, and grazing routes between farmers and herders often lead to violence, displacement, and destruction of livelihoods. Such insecurity disrupts farming activities, reduces access to farmland, and creates fear that discourages farmers from investing in agricultural production. By applying conflict theory, this study shows that food insecurity in Benue is not only a result of environmental or technical factors but also of social struggles over resources that weaken agricultural stability and community resilience.

The Cobb–Douglas Production Function, on the other hand, provides an economic explanation of how insecurity translates into reduced agricultural output. The model, expressed as $Q = AL^{\alpha}K^{\beta}$, where Q is output, L is labour, K is capital, and A represents productivity, explains the relationship between production inputs and output. Insecure environments reduce labour availability as farmers abandon their farms due to attacks or displacement. Similarly, capital inputs such as machinery, storage facilities, livestock, and irrigation systems are often destroyed or underutilised during conflict, while potential investors are discouraged by high risks. These reductions in labour and capital directly lower agricultural output, worsening food insecurity in the region. The relevance of the Cobb–Douglas framework to this study lies in its ability to show quantitatively how insecurity undermines the productive capacity of farmers, thereby linking insecurity to food shortages in Benue State.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Saad (2024) conducted a study on the effects of insecurity on agricultural production in Batsari Local Government Area of Katsina State, employing multiple regression analysis to measure the relationship between insecurity and agricultural performance. The findings revealed that persistent banditry, crop destruction, and displacement of farmers significantly reduced agricultural output, confirming that insecurity is a major determinant of food shortages in the area. In a similar study, Usman (2022) examined the impact of insecurity on food production in Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Using survey and econometric analysis, he found that kidnapping, cattle rustling, and violent attacks disrupted farming cycles, leading to reduced harvests, increased food scarcity, and higher prices in local markets. Both studies demonstrate that localized insecurity directly undermines food production and household food access.

At the national level, Nwosu, Ndukwe, Aguwamba, and Uchegbu (2023) investigated the combined impact of human-induced global warming and insecurity on agricultural productivity in Nigeria from 1981 to 2020 using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model. Their findings revealed that terrorist attacks and fatal insecurity events had significant negative effects on agricultural output, while population growth and methane emissions had mixed but notable influences on productivity. Similarly, Abubakar (2021) assessed Nigeria’s agricultural performance between 1999 and 2020 using time-series data. The study showed that inflation reduced agricultural growth, while government

expenditure on internal security, corruption perception, and trade openness had positive effects on agricultural performance. These studies highlight how macro-level economic and security conditions interact to shape agricultural outcomes, illustrating the dual role of insecurity and broader economic forces in influencing food production.

Focusing more specifically on conflict-induced food insecurity, Eneji, Babagario, and Agri (2019) employed Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression to study crime and agricultural productivity in Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State. Their results indicated a strong inverse relationship between crime, unemployment, and agricultural performance, where insecurity reduced farming participation and harvest levels. Complementing this, Ijirshar, Ker, and Terlumun (2015) investigated farmer-herder conflicts in Benue State, revealing that frequent Fulani herdsmen attacks severely constrained agricultural productivity. The study reported widespread displacement of farmers, destruction of farmlands, and declining crop yields, all of which undermined household food security and local economies. These findings emphasises that insecurity not only limits agricultural productivity but also exacerbates poverty, displacement, and socio-economic instability, particularly in Nigeria's food basket regions.

2.5 Research Method

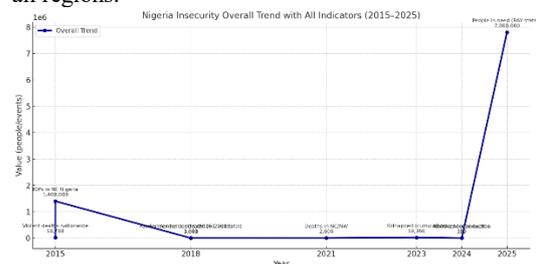
This study adopted a purely qualitative research design, relying exclusively on secondary data to explore the impact of insecurity on food security in Benue State from 2015 to 2025. The qualitative approach is suitable because it enables an in-depth exploration of patterns, themes, and narratives found in documented reports, rather than focusing on numerical measurements. Data were gathered from existing credible sources, including academic journal articles, government publications, policy briefs, humanitarian organisation reports, media coverage, and verified databases such as those from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Special attention was given to reports from the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture, security agencies, and local NGOs involved in agricultural recovery and humanitarian aid.

The study involved document analysis as the main method. This process includes careful reading and interpretation of secondary materials to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the eight core variables of food security availability, accessibility, utilisation, stability, agency, sustainability, quality, and safety as they are affected by insecurity in Benue State. Themes were developed by comparing findings across multiple sources to ensure validity and depth (Bowen, 2009). The analysis was thematic, allowing the researcher to group information into meaningful categories such as disruption of farming activities, market instability, displacement of farmers, and reduced dietary quality. This approach made it possible to understand not only the factual events but also the underlying socio-political and economic contexts that shape the food security situation.

Trends in Insecurity in Nigeria

From 2015 to 2025, insecurity in Nigeria has shifted from a mainly North-East insurgency to a nationwide crisis

involving banditry, farmer-herder clashes, kidnappings, separatist violence, and maritime threats. These conflicts have caused mass displacement, economic losses, and rising humanitarian needs, with millions affected across all regions.



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2025)

Figure: Nigeria's Insecurity Trends (2015–2025)

This chart shows major insecurity indicators in Nigeria over the past decade, highlighting key events and statistics such as violent deaths, displacement, farmer-herder clashes, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, and humanitarian needs. Each point represents a notable data record from reports and publications, connected to form an overall trend line. The visual emphasises how insecurity has evolved, intensified, and diversified over time, affecting lives and communities nationwide.

1. Boko Haram and the North-East Insurgency (2015–2017)

From 2015, the dominant security crisis in Nigeria was the Boko Haram and Islamic State-affiliated insurgency in the North-East, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. Large-scale attacks on towns and civilian populations — including mass killings such as the Baga massacre destroyed markets, villages, schools, and health services, causing widespread displacement and the collapse of livelihoods (Wise *et al.*, 2023). Even after major military operations between 2015 and 2016 that pushed some fighters back, the insurgency remained deadly and protracted. Civilians continued to face suicide and vehicle-borne bombings, abductions, and attacks on schools and humanitarian workers (Wise *et al.*, 2023; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2016). This insurgency established long-term humanitarian needs and contributed a large share of Nigeria's internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 2014–2016.

2. Banditry, Cattle Raids, and the North-West/North-Central Expansion (2017–2021)

From about 2017, the geography of violence widened. Armed "bandit" groups in the North-West (e.g., Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina) and parts of the North-Central (e.g., Plateau, Benue, Niger) evolved from cattle rustling and criminal raids into mass attacks, village burnings, and mass abductions. Unlike the ideologically driven insurgency in the North-East, this violence was largely criminal and economically motivated but became highly militarised and deadly. Reports documented repeated village raids, school closures, and millions affected by food and livelihood losses in these regions (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [ACLED], 2022; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). These years also saw increasing clashes between herders and farmers, deepening governance gaps and fuelling cycles of revenge attacks (ACLED, 2022).

3. Kidnapping for Ransom and Criminal Entrepreneurship (2019–2024)

Kidnapping emerged as a national crisis and a lucrative criminal enterprise. Since 2019, hundreds of mass abductions defined as incidents involving five or more victims have been recorded, affecting thousands of people overall. These kidnappings targeted students, travellers, and entire villages, transforming from regional problems into a nationwide security threat affecting highways, schools, and towns near state capitals. Analysts have characterised kidnapping as an organised criminal economy in which ransom payments sustain the operations and expansion of armed groups (SBM Intelligence, 2023; UNODC, 2020). These crimes have raised transport costs, disrupted education and commerce, and placed additional strain on state security budgets.

4. New Fronts: Separatist Violence, Cults, and Maritime Threats (2020–2024)

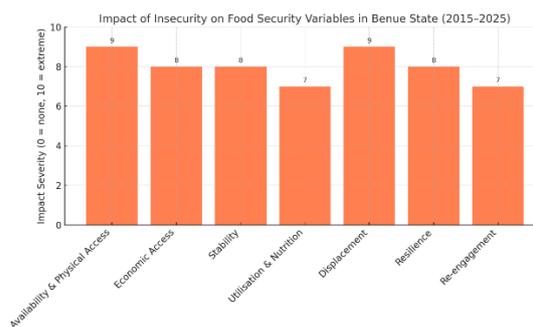
While jihadist and bandit violence dominated the north, by 2020 other violent trends intensified in other regions. In the South-East, separatist and militant actions targeting security agents and electoral officials increased (ACLED, 2022). Urban “cult” militias in some southern states generated spikes in violence and fatalities. Meanwhile, in the Niger Delta, maritime insecurity—including oil theft and attacks on pipelines persisted. ACLED’s conflict datasets indicate that by 2023–2024, political-violence events had expanded both in form and location, with 2024 recording a year-on-year increase and the proliferation of violent actors across multiple regions. These emerging fronts complicated national responses and stretched already overburdened security forces (ACLED, 2022).

5. Humanitarian Impact — Displacement, Deaths, and Service Collapse (2015–2024)

The human toll of insecurity has been large and increasing. Displacement that began with the Boko Haram insurgency persisted and expanded as violence spread to other regions. Estimates suggest that around 2.15 million people were internally displaced in 2015 (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2015; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2015), rising to approximately 3.58 million IDPs by the end of 2024 (IOM, 2024). ACLED’s 2024 Conflict Index recorded about a 25% increase in political-violence events compared to 2023, while reports documented thousands of kidnappings and abductions in recent years (SBM Intelligence, 2023; UNODC, 2020). The consequences included large humanitarian needs for shelter, food, health, and protection, prolonged school closures, and the loss of livelihoods for millions of households.

3.2 Impact of Insecurity on Food Security in Benue State, Nigeria (2015–2025)

Benue State, often called the “food basket of the nation” because of its large crop and livestock production, has faced increasing insecurity over the past decade. Since 2015, violent conflicts between farmers and herders, bandit attacks, and communal clashes have disrupted farming activities, displaced thousands of people, and weakened the state’s role in supplying food to Nigeria. These challenges have affected every part of food security from how much food is produced to how well people can afford, access, and use it.



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2025

Figure: Benue Insecurity and Food Security Trends (2015–2025)

1. Availability and Physical Access

Insecurity in Benue State has seriously reduced the amount of food that is produced. When armed groups attack farming communities, farmers are often forced to leave their land before planting or during harvest time. This means crops like yam, cassava, rice, and maize are either never planted or are left to rot in the fields. Livestock such as goats, cattle, and poultry are often stolen or killed during these attacks. Aondoakaa *et al.* (2025) found that in the years of intense violence, agricultural output in Benue dropped significantly. This fall in production is not only because of direct destruction but also because farmers fear returning to their fields, especially in remote areas far from the protection of towns or security checkpoints.

Physical access to food has also become more difficult because of unsafe roads and transport routes. In many parts of Benue, traders avoid certain markets because the journey passes through conflict zones. Those who do take the risk usually increase their prices to cover the danger, which makes food more expensive when it reaches the market (Chukwu *et al.*, 2024). In some cases, vehicles carrying food are attacked, and the goods are stolen before they get to the towns. This chain of events reduces the amount of food available in both rural and urban markets. As a result, even when some farmers still manage to produce food, it may not physically reach the consumers who need it the most.

2. Economic Access and Stability

Economic access means how easily people can afford to buy the food they need. In Benue, insecurity has pushed food prices up, making it harder for poor households to eat properly. Chukwu *et al.* (2024) show that transport costs have increased sharply because of the extra risks drivers take when moving food from one place to another. When these costs are passed on to buyers, staple foods such as rice, beans, maize, and vegetables become too expensive for many families. This problem is worse for displaced households, who often lose their sources of income and cannot cope with higher prices.

Stability refers to having a steady supply of food all year round. In Benue, stability has been badly affected because insecurity interrupts the seasonal cycles of planting and harvesting. When planting is delayed or harvesting is incomplete, there are shortages during certain times of the year, especially during the lean season before the next harvest. According to FAO (2024), more than 33 million Nigerians were projected to face high levels of food insecurity during recent lean seasons, and Benue’s instability is part of this national problem. Unstable supplies mean that even when food is available at one time

of the year, it may disappear or become too costly just a few months later.

3. Utilisation (Food Use) and Nutrition

Utilisation refers to how well households can use the food they have to meet their nutritional needs. In Benue, insecurity has made it difficult for many households to prepare balanced meals. Displaced families often survive on food aid, which may include only basic grains and lack vegetables, fruits, and protein sources. This kind of diet can lead to nutrient deficiencies over time. Edeh and Okwori (2019) and Ogbu et al. (2025) report that children in IDP camps face higher risks of malnutrition because they lack both the variety and quantity of food needed for healthy growth. Without good nutrition, even when people are eating enough calories, their health can still decline.

Nutrition is also linked to other factors like clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. Insecurity often damages these services, making it hard for families to store food safely or prepare it in hygienic conditions. When clean water is not available, diarrhoeal diseases become more common, especially among children, and this makes it harder for the body to absorb nutrients. In some conflict-affected areas of Benue, health facilities have closed or been abandoned, meaning malnourished children cannot get treatment. This combination of poor diet and poor health conditions makes the nutritional impact of insecurity even more severe.

4. Displacement, Resilience, and Re-engagement

Insecurity has caused large-scale displacement in Benue State, forcing people to leave their homes and farms behind. Displaced farmers lose access to their land, tools, and stored harvests. They often have to start from zero in new locations, and in many cases, they cannot find land to farm at all. Edeh and Okwori (2019) note that in some years, over 170,000 people have been displaced in Benue, and the numbers remain high. Ogbu et al. (2025) highlight that in IDP camps, people depend heavily on food donations or casual work, neither of which provide a stable or sufficient source of food.

Resilience is the ability to recover from a shock like displacement. In Benue, resilience has been weakened by repeated cycles of violence. Families that are displaced multiple times lose whatever small assets they may have managed to rebuild. Without targeted support, many households remain trapped in a state of dependency on humanitarian aid. Recovery is also slow because insecurity makes it risky for displaced people to return home and restart farming. Some NGOs have tried to provide seeds, tools, or livestock to help them re-engage in farming, but without stronger security, these measures cannot fully restore resilience.

Table 1: Food Security Variables Affected by Insecurity in Benue State

Core Variable	Impact of Insecurity – Key Fact/Figure	Source
Availability	Significant drop in crop and livestock output	Aondoakaa et al., 2025
Physical Access	Reduced food reaching markets due to unsafe roads	Chukwu et al., 2024
Economic Access	Higher food prices from transport risk premiums	Chukwu et al., 2024
Stability	Recurring shortages during lean seasons; 33.1M Nigerians insecure	FAO, 2024
Utilisation	Displacement leads to limited diets and health issues	Edeh & Okwori, 2019; Ogbu et al., 2025

Nutrition	Malnutrition rising among displaced children	Edeh & Okwori, 2019; Ogbu et al., 2025
Resilience	Displaced households struggle to recover agriculturally	Edeh & Okwori, 2019; Ogbu et al., 2025
Displacement	Over 170,000 people displaced in single-year estimates	Edeh & Okwori, 2019

Source: FAO, 2024

Policy Reinforcement Implications: Effects of Insecurity on Food Security in Benue State

Insecurity in Benue State between 2015 and 2025 has created deep challenges for food security, affecting farming systems, market stability, and household nutrition. Persistent conflict has disrupted agricultural production, displaced communities, and reduced access to affordable and nutritious food. Addressing these challenges requires well-structured and practical policies that go beyond short-term relief, aiming instead for long-term resilience and sustainable food systems. The following policy implications outline actionable steps that can help restore and protect food security in Benue State despite ongoing security threats.

1. Strengthening Rural Security for Agricultural Productivity

To address the insecurity that disrupts agricultural productivity, policies must focus on making rural farming communities in Benue State safe enough for year-round farming activities. Many farming zones in Guma, Gwer West, Logo, and Katsina-Ala local government areas have been abandoned because of repeated herder–farmer clashes, armed banditry, and targeted attacks on farmlands. A practical policy would involve the deployment of Agro-Ranger units of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to patrol farmlands during critical planting and harvesting periods. In addition, community-based security structures should be legally recognised and integrated into state security plans, allowing trained local vigilante groups to collaborate with formal security agencies. The state government could also introduce seasonal farm security maps showing areas of high threat and assigning security personnel accordingly. Such targeted policies would directly enable farmers to return to their land, plant early, and harvest without fear.

2. Supporting Displaced Farmers with Agricultural Recovery Programs

The large population of internally displaced farmers in Benue estimated at over 2 million between 2015 and 2024 has created a significant gap in food production. A practical recovery policy should start with mapping and registering displaced farmers so they can be given access to safe, fertile land in secure zones through government land banks or partnerships with private landowners. In addition, agricultural starter packs containing seeds, cutlasses, fertilisers, and sprayers should be distributed at the start of every planting season. To ensure these interventions lead to long-term recovery, mobile agricultural extension services should be deployed to IDP camps and resettlement areas, offering training on improved planting techniques, climate-smart agriculture, and pest control. Policies could also introduce interest-free agricultural loans for displaced farmers who have lost their sources of income, enabling them to buy livestock or diversify into poultry and fish farming, which can be done on smaller, secured plots.

3. Securing and Upgrading Food Transport Networks

Even when crops are produced, insecurity often prevents them from reaching markets in Makurdi, Gboko, or

Otukpo, leading to wastage in rural areas and price hikes in urban centres. A practical policy would involve setting up secured market–farm transport corridors with regular patrols along key highways such as the Makurdi–Gboko road and the Aliade–Otukpo axis. The government could also install community monitoring points with communication gadgets at strategic road junctions to alert security agencies in real time about suspicious activities. Alongside security, upgrading infrastructure is critical. Rural feeder roads in agricultural hubs like Logo and Ukum should be rehabilitated to make them accessible year-round, even during the rainy season. In addition, creating centralised aggregation centres in secure zones where farmers can sell directly to bulk buyers would reduce the need for risky long-distance trips.

4. Improving Nutrition Support in Conflict-Affected Areas

Insecurity in Benue has severely affected not just the quantity of food but also its nutritional quality. Many displaced households now rely on carbohydrate-heavy diets with little protein or micronutrients, leading to malnutrition, especially among children and pregnant women. A practical policy should introduce emergency nutrition units within IDP camps, staffed with trained nutritionists who can provide fortified meals and nutritional supplements. State and local governments, in collaboration with NGOs, could roll out school feeding programs in conflict-affected LGAs, ensuring children receive at least one balanced meal daily. For hard-to-reach rural areas, mobile food distribution vans equipped with cold storage could deliver fresh vegetables, dairy, and protein-rich foods weekly. Additionally, policies should fund nutrition education campaigns teaching displaced families how to prepare balanced meals from available resources, even under food scarcity conditions.

5. Building Long-Term Resilience Against Future Shocks

Policies must look beyond immediate crisis management to ensure that Benue's food system can withstand future insecurity or climate shocks. One practical step is to establish community grain banks in safe locations, where surplus harvests are stored under proper conditions for use during shortages. The state government could also promote crop diversification schemes, encouraging farmers to plant both staple crops (such as yam, rice, and maize) and fast-growing vegetables that can provide quick income and improve diets. Agricultural insurance schemes tailored for smallholder farmers should be subsidised by the government to protect against losses from insecurity-related destruction. Additionally, farmer cooperatives could be strengthened to enable bulk purchasing of inputs, collective marketing, and stronger negotiation power with buyers. These policies would not only rebuild production capacity but also make rural communities less vulnerable to the economic shocks that follow insecurity.

Conclusion

This study has shown that insecurity in Benue State between 2015 and 2025 has severely weakened food security across all its core dimensions availability, access, stability, utilisation, nutrition, resilience, and displacement. Violent conflicts between farmers and herders, banditry, and communal clashes have disrupted farming cycles, displaced large numbers of people, and increased food prices. The findings reveal that insecurity does not only reduce agricultural production but also destabilises markets, limits nutritional intake, and damages long-term resilience. This multi-dimensional

impact creates a cycle where food shortages fuel further insecurity, making recovery more difficult.

The government's efforts, including security deployments, agricultural recovery programmes, and peacebuilding dialogues, have yielded some gains but have not been sufficient to reverse the trend. Sustainable solutions will require integrated approaches that address both security and agricultural development. By ensuring rural safety, restoring displaced farmers to production, improving transport networks, and expanding nutrition support, Benue State can rebuild its role as Nigeria's food basket while reducing vulnerability to future shocks.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for this study:

1. It is recommended that there is need to strengthen rural security through Agro-Ranger patrols, seasonal farm security mapping, and recognition of community vigilante groups.
2. There is need to support displaced farmers with land access, starter packs, mobile extension services, and interest-free loans for agricultural recovery.
3. It is recommended that there is need to secure transport routes with patrol corridors, road rehabilitation, and central aggregation centres to reduce market disruptions.

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