

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND INSECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of current insecurity challenges on agricultural productivity in Nigeria while adopting the failed state theoretical framework. The study highlights that the agricultural sector in Nigeria remains a critical factor for economic growth, food security, and poverty reduction. Insecurity was however identified as a major challenge to agricultural productivity in Nigeria as kidnappings, terrorism, banditry, ethno-religious crisis, political and electoral violence were identified to have affected agricultural activities. This paper adopts a descriptive research design and data was collected from secondary sources with content analysis utilized for data analysis. Findings reveal that insecurity has affected agricultural output, manpower availability for agrarian purposes, agricultural produce distribution and also caused inflation in prices of food commodities. Issues such as porous borders, unlawful possession of arms by unauthorized persons, corruption, poverty and unemployment amongst others were identified as major factors promoting insecurity in Nigeria. The study, therefore, recommends measures such as strengthening of security institutions, applying appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms and provision of adequate support in the area of finance and rural infrastructure provision as necessary solutions for improved agricultural performance amidst the current insecurity situation facing the country.

Keywords: *Agriculture, Productivity, Insecurity*

1. Introduction

Socio-economic development of a country entails the proper running of all sectors of the economy for the purpose of actualizing desired goals and objectives. Agriculture is a critical sector in Nigeria, contributing significantly to the country's GDP and employing a large percentage of the population. However, in recent years, the sector has faced severe disruptions due to increasing insecurity. Security of any country is a prerequisite for meaningful growth and development to take place as business activities cannot thrive in an uncondusive environment. Insecurity tends to cripple economic and social undertakings, reduce business prospects and has multiplier effects on other development sectors.

In recent times, insecurity and terrorism has been a major challenge facing the Nigerian Government. Banditry, kidnapping for ransom, terrorist attacks, militancy, destruction of oil related conflicts, herdsman/farmers clash, religious and communal crisis, rape and attack on women and children have created a state of instability and reduced socio-economic activities greatly. This is not surprising as people tend to avoid investing in areas of conflict and uncertainty. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) revealed that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Nigeria averages \$5.3 billion annually from 2005-2007. However, this has dropped remarkably to \$3.3 billion within 2015 to 2019 which is the period that has been marked by intensified and extensive insecurity in Nigeria (Bailey, 2020).

Despite efforts by the Government to tackle these challenges posed by insecurity and terrorism in the country, the rate of insurgency and insecurity is still alarming (Obi, 2015). The insecurity situation has also taken its toll on the agricultural sector of the country. The oil boom of the 1970s led to over reliance and dependence on revenue from the oil sector leading to the neglect of agriculture in Nigeria. However, due to current dwindling oil prices and reduced revenue from oil in recent times, there has been an urgent reawakening on the need to diversify the revenue base of the nation and promote agriculture. The agricultural sector over the years has experienced problems such as farmers' limited access to finance, outdated technology, poor infrastructure and storage facilities, inadequate government support and current insecurity problems leading to low productivity. Agricultural advancement is vital to a country like Nigeria which has the second highest burden of stunted children across the globe (UNICEF, 2015). With Nigeria having at least 5% of the global burden of under-nutrition and more than 14 million malnourished children, food and nutrition remains an important objective of the nation's agricultural policy (FAO, 2021). Included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG2) is the target to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (United Nations, 2015).

Unfortunately, insecurity has greatly affected agricultural productivity as farmers no longer feel safe to go to their farms due to the incessant killings, kidnapping, banditry and terrorist attacks. Distribution of farm produce has also been significantly affected by high transportation costs as the roads are no longer safe for movement of people and goods. This has increased cost of doing business and created difficult and cumbersome processes for distributing farm produce. Unfortunately, the impact of this problem has been transferred also to consumers as a result of high prices of food and declining purchasing power leading to poor nutrition.

Giving consideration to the rapid population increase in Nigeria, it is expedient that new innovations, safe and conducive environment for business activities be put in place to improve agricultural output which is a prerequisite for eradicating poverty and hunger. This paper therefore investigates the extent to which insecurity challenges have impacted agricultural productivity in Nigeria.

2. Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity refers to the state of fear, anxiety, restlessness, uncertainty stemming from lackadaisical attitude of our disgruntled and greedy politicians, militants and Boko haram sects (Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2019). It can be described as the prevalent and manifold threat to the safety, stability and well-being of persons, groups and the country at large. Insecurity encompasses a broad spectrum of issues including violent crimes, terrorism, ethno-religious conflicts, political violence and socio-economic stability. Achumba et al (2013) define insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is seen as a state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. The subsequent viewpoint identifies insecurity as a state of being visible to risk or anxiety. Anxiety in this case, is an unclear but unpleasant emotion that is experienced in the expectation of some possible misfortune. Insecurity therefore depicts a feeling of uncertainty and realization of being exposed to harmful situations.

When there is adequate security, there is improved business activities, peace, tranquility and human capital development. It is expected that the government and various communities work in a coordinated pattern to ensure a peaceful and conducive environment is maintained to facilitate development. Consequently, provision of national security of lives and properties within a sovereign state is an important social contract between the people, the state and the government (Etim et al., 2017).

Nigeria is currently confronted with loads of challenges which is rapidly stagnating the development and progress of her core industrial and sensitive sectors. According to Akinola (2018), the nation's socio-political advancement, economic growth and quality of life of the Nigerian people have been significantly affected by the high level of insecurity. This is corroborated by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2021) which acknowledged that Nigeria faces series of security challenges that ranges from farmer-herder conflict to violent religious extremism, banditry, secessionist agitations, brutality by security agencies, especially the police, attacks on oil installations and infrastructure, piracy among others. These problems have constituted threats to the peace, security and development of the country and loss of resources. Forms of insecurity in Nigeria includes:

1. **Terrorism and Insurgency:** The emergence of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in 2009 has been a major challenge to the country's security. There has been cases of bombings, assassinations, mass abductions notably the kidnapping of over 200 chibok school girls in 2014, kidnapping of 20 Greenfield university students in Kaduna and the Kaduna train attack in 2022 (Obiezu, 2024) etc. This insurgency and terrorist attacks have brought about displacement of millions of people and disrupted economic activities in these locations.
2. **Kidnappings and Banditry:** Violent attacks are carried out in many rural communities and mass abductions of innocent victims is on the increase. Unfortunately, families are made to pay huge ransoms to secure their loved ones who are brutally tortured and even killed in the process. Okoli and Ugwu (2019), noted that the rise in these activities have resulted to the displacement of thousands of people and strained the country's fragile security apparatus. Business activities especially agriculture and product distribution have been crippled due to the fear of travelling on the major road highways in Nigeria which has become a den for the operation of kidnapers.
3. **Ethno-Religious Crisis:** Ethnic and religious conflicts impose serious security threats in various communities in Nigeria. The herder-farmers conflict prevalent in the middle-belt region has led to the killing of many innocent citizens and this breeds deepening mistrust among various communities causing a lot of uncertainty and unrest (Ibrahim, 2014).
4. **Political and Electoral Violence:** Political and Electoral crisis are usually manifested during elections mainly due to the electoral processes being marred by vote-buying, political thuggery, rigging and killing of political opponents. Militant movements in the Niger-Delta region have been involved in various agitations as a result of neglect of the development of their regions (political marginalization) and resource control (Obi, 2009). These agitations and violent acts have disrupted economic activities creating a non conducive environment for business activities to be executed.

2.1. Factors that Promote Insecurity in Nigeria

2.1.1. Unlawful possession of Arms and Weapons

Arms and ammunitions are in custody of unauthorized persons who use it to cause havoc and kill innocent citizens. The United Nations analysis reveals that out of the 500 million weapons circulating in West Africa, 350 million which represents 70% of such weapons are domiciled in Nigeria (Vanguard, 2016). This goes a long

way to expose the nation's security inadequacies and reasons for the incessant maiming and destruction of lives and properties in the country.

2.1.2. Permeable Borders

The nation's frontiers are not adequately guarded against foreign invaders, and intruders who enter the country through these routes are not adequately scrutinized. Some of these foreign nationals from Chad, Niger and Benin Republic have come into the country with heavy weapons, bombs and personnel to propagate their evil acts. Eselebor (2018), rightly noted that poorly managed borders have encouraged illegal arms, illicit drugs and criminals to enter the country and move about freely without adequate identification, tracking and checkmating.

2.1.3. Poverty and Unemployment

One of the main causes of insecurity in Nigeria is the inability of successive administrations to handle the problems of unemployment, poverty, and unequal wealth distribution among ethnic nationalities. High unemployment rates especially among youths have promoted criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping and cybercrime (Adebayo, 2013). Due to the absence of meaningful means of livelihood, these idle individuals engage in whatever available means to survive regardless of the legality or otherwise of the means. These youths are easily recruited into militant groups and trained to kill, rob, kidnap, smuggle and hijack (Udoh, 2015).

2.1.4. Religious Fanaticism and Ethnic clashes

Religious fanaticism has been a major cause of insecurity in Nigeria and this has given rise to many religious terrorist formations such as the Boko haram sect which is responsible for causing major terrorist attacks especially in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Ethnic issues have also escalated due to land and power control tussles. Examples of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria includes the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis in the 80s-90s, Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000, Jos riot of 2002, Tiv-Chukun crisis in 2001 just to mention but a few (Haldin & Opeyemi, 2016). These aforementioned crises have led to the killing of innocent lives and loss of properties worth millions of Naira.

2.1.5. Corruption

Corruption and the misappropriation of state resources constitute a significant catalyst for conflict in Nigeria. The public's sense of injustice and hardship as a result of the political elite's and government officials' corrupt practices has sparked violence and hostility and hindered peaceful coexistence and tolerance.

2.1.6. Low Motivation and Weak Security Systems

Nigeria's insecurity situation has been made worse by lack of security officials' training, inadequate intelligence collection, and a shortage of security equipment and experience. Furthermore, security officials' low pay and lack of enthusiasm have resulted in inefficiency and a negative work attitude. According to Olawale (2018), inadequate funding, corruption and poor training within security organizations have weakened their performance greatly. It has been observed that some security professionals are heavily political and work to further the goals of the ruling party rather than the country. Some of these personnel undermine government efforts to address insecurity by disclosing highly classified and confidential information.

2.1.7. Secessionist Movement

In Nigeria's history, there have been more calls for secession in recent times due to the sense of unfairness, neglect, and deprivation felt by residents of particular regions. Recent calls that pose a threat to Nigeria's continued existence are the Movement for the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East and the agitation for the Yoruba Nation, also known as the Oduduwa Republic, in the South-West. In the course of their agitations and as they work towards their objectives, these movements have caused turmoil, uncertainty, and disturbance.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution states expressly that it is the responsibility of government to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens. Regretfully, the Nigerian government has failed in this area, making it a significant challenge. Despite massive expenditures allocated to reducing insecurity, the number of kidnappings and terrorist assaults have been rising. The current insecurity situation has posed a big threat to human existence and economic development thereby causing retrogression and backwardness in the Nigerian economy. The nation's agricultural productivity is seriously threatened by the disruption of business, economic, and agrarian activities caused by terrorism, violence, inter- and intra-ethnic and religious conflicts, banditry and kidnapping of innocent citizens.

2.2. Insecurity and Agricultural Productivity in Nigeria: The Nexus

The United Nations (2017) has predicted that by 2050, Nigeria is likely to become the third most populous country in the world, after China and India. The ability to steadily meet food demands of the growing population is highly dependent on the performance of the agricultural sector. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity and this has affected agricultural output to a very large extent. The following are the effect of insecurity on agricultural productivity:

2.2.1. Low Output

Due to fear of attacks by terrorists, herdsmen and kidnappers, a lot of farmers have abandoned their farm lands. Consequently, farmers are no longer able to produce in sufficient quantities to meet with demands. The National President of All farmers Association in Nigeria lamented that they have lost 50% of production to insecurity (Nnodim, 2021). This inability of farmers to produce in sufficient quantities has resulted to food shortages and scarcity. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that between 2022 and 2024, about half a million farmers were displaced leading to a loss of over 2 trillion Naira (Ajiboye, 2025). Farmers in Borno which is the country's major producing state have abandoned their farmlands and fled to other regions for safety resulting in decline of the state's contribution to the nation's food production from 30% to almost nothing (Proshare Financial News, 2021).

2.2.2. Decreased Manpower Available for Farming Operations

The present state of instability has given rise to the death of men, women, children, and young people. Kidnapping has also been on the increase which has caused the payment of huge ransoms in order to get family and friends reunited with their loved ones. The Institute of Peace Studies revealed that in 2024, over 3,500 cases of kidnapping occurred in Nigeria (Ajiboye, 2025). Consequently, able bodied persons who hitherto could have provided labour in the farms have all taken to their heels and abandoned farming as an occupation for fear of being attacked. Kimenyi et al (2014) identified that the lack of labor was due to the threat of attacks on farmers on their way to their farms or bombs planted on the road to their farms and this has caused inadequate and improperly timed weeding and harvesting of crops. This decline in manpower has taken a toll on agricultural productivity in the country.

2.2.3. High Cost of food prices

Insecurity has grossly affected food production and this has ensued in the escalation of prices of food commodities in Nigeria. People can no longer continue their farming activities and this has brought about an alteration of the agriculture value chain in the country thereby leading to reduction of food production (Fawole et al 2015). The World Bank in its recent 2021 report on Nigeria stated that on the supply side, a combination of unfavorable weather, insecurity and conflict, and pandemic related shocks affecting agriculture is pushing food prices up. Also, the then Nigeria's Central Bank Governor, Mr. Godwin Emefiele while addressing the media explained that the uptick in Nigeria's food inflation was due to the worsening security situation in most parts of the country. He further explained that the increase in inflationary pressure is attributable to security challenges in the food-producing areas in Nigeria where farmers face frequent attacks by herdsmen

and bandits in their various farms (Oyekanmi, 2021). Kemenyi et al (2014) attributed the rise in prices to a decrease in agricultural outputs, uncertainties at markets and an increase in transportation costs.

2.2.4. Displacement of People

Farming communities have been displaced as a result of terrorist assaults and conflict, particularly in northeastern Nigeria. Due to escalating conflicts throughout Nigeria, the number of displaced people has been rising since 2013 (Nwozor et al., 2019). This is linked to a startling rate of agricultural productivity since it has halted food production and impacted livelihoods. As at December 2023, 3,397,531 people were displaced in Nigeria due to conflict and violence (ReliefWeb, 2024). These displaced persons are currently staying at refugee camps and as such cannot contribute meaningfully to economic and agricultural activities.

2.2.5. Difficulty in distribution of Agricultural Supplies

Due to the closure of several trade routes and their unsafe use, it is now more difficult to distribute farm produce. It is anticipated that these routes will link rural marketplaces where food vendors and consumers meet, particularly on market days. Unfortunately, bandits, kidnappers and terrorists attack innocent traders and buyers snatching food items, stealing their money, kidnapping or taking their lives. This is a major challenge as food distribution within the country is limited. Access to local raw materials for further production is a challenge as people no longer feel safe to travel by road. This has caused many manufacturers to depend mostly on importation of their agricultural supplies leading to increased demand for scarce foreign exchange (Guardian Newspaper, 2021).

2.2.6. Discouragement of prospective agro-based Investors

Insecurity no doubt has discouraged both foreign and local investors that previously had intentions to invest in Nigeria. Investor confidence can worsen particularly where there is weak and ineffective government response to security challenges (Omole, 2020). Due to uncertainty, potential agro-investors are not encouraged to carry out any form of investment in Nigeria and this greatly affects agricultural productivity and all-round economic growth.

3. Empirical Review

Usman (2022) carried out an investigation on the impact of insecurity on food production in Igabi Local Government area in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive design with questionnaires administered to farmers in the study area. Findings revealed that insecurity arising from banditry, kidnapping and cattle rusting was responsible for food shortage and high cost of food commodities. The study recommended the utilization of modern farming equipment for greater yield and enhanced productivity.

In a study carried out at Gombe state Nigeria, Agri, Babagario and Agri (2019) researched on the effects of insecurity on agricultural productivity in Nigeria. Findings revealed that communal clashes, militancy and rise in boko haram insurgency have negative impact on agricultural productivity leading to a decline in growth and development of the agricultural sector.

Amadi-Robert et al. (2024) investigated the effect of insecurity on the performance of the agricultural sector during the period of 1990 to 2021. While adopting the Auto-Regressive Distributive Lag (ARDL) model, the study revealed a relationship between insecurity and agricultural sector performance in the long run.

In a research carried out at Ose local government area of Ondo state, Nigeria, Abimbola, Olubanji and Tope (2024) studied the effect of insecurity on agricultural production. The research was carried out in four farming communities in the study area and interviews were conducted to generate information on the causes and effects of insecurity on agricultural production. The study identified that herdsmen attack, armed robbery and kidnapping were major causes of insecurity which has led to loss of profit and food shortages.

In analyzing the impact of insecurity on agricultural development in Nigeria, Ioryue, Jimoh and Ejeh (2024) adopted the Human Security background as their theoretical framework and combined both quantitative and qualitative approach in conducting their research. Findings revealed a significant decline in agricultural productivity due to security challenges in the area of study and identified the urgent need for comprehensive security reforms in Nigeria.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the ‘failed state theory’ which identifies that a state is termed as “failed” when it loses its ability to perform the basic functions of governance. Such functions include provision of basic amenities, maintenance of law and order, upholding the rule of law among others. Ignatieff (2002) adopts an understanding of state failure as a situation where the central government has lost its monopoly of the means of violence. This is corroborated by Rotberg (2004)

who perceives a failed state as one that is consumed by internal violence and ceases to deliver positive political goods to its inhabitants. The primary good identified by Rotberg, is the provision of security within a territory and its belief that security is a facilitator for the provision of all other goods and services. Insecurity tends to exist in states where institutions are weak, basic services are poorly provided, weak governance and also in states that lack capacity to maintain law and order. Di John (2010) postulates that several causes of state failure include issues bordering on resource paucity inciting conflict, resource abundance infuriating corruption and marginalization; clienteles' establishment that lead to criminalization of the state and the argument that contemporary wars have generated an economy built on plunder and sustained through violence. Key areas in which states are expected to perform are:

- a) To protect citizens from both internal and external threats and when governments fail to prevent violence, crime and insurgency, criminal organizations and unlawful institutions take over their territories.
- b) States are expected to provide basic amenities and infrastructure such as education, health, power supply, and welfare programmes. When there is failure on the part of government to provide these facilities, it leads to poverty, unrest, agitations and struggles among the people.
- c) The rule of law must be followed for peace and equity to reign in societies. In a failed state issues ranging from corruption, impunity and lack of accountability tend to weaken the legal framework of institutions in existence.
- d) States are expected to possess monopoly on the use of force for bringing about security and orderliness. Unfortunately, in states where non-state actors like militant groups, terrorists and insurgents gain possession and control over weapons and territories, state authority is diminished.
- e) Legitimacy and public trust is an essential component of state authorities. When citizens no longer have trust or confidence in the ability of the state to practice good governance, it leads to loss of legitimacy and civil unrest in communities.

Failed state does not mean a complete collapse but signifies severe weaknesses in key areas of governance as very few states can be described as completely failed or collapsed (Barma, (2025). While Nigeria is not a completely failed state, there are significant weaknesses that must be addressed to reposition the country for full actualization of its potentials. Criminality and conflicts by warring factions is a key indicator of a state losing its grip on the territorial security apparatus. The Boko haram insurgency, banditry and kidnapping attacks on innocent citizens

have greatly affected agricultural and economic activities as these hoodlums unleash mayhem on innocent citizens and go scot free on a daily basis. Lives and properties are lost and citizens no longer move freely to engage in their legitimate businesses for fear of these nefarious attacks. Institutional corruption has permeated into every sector of the Nigerian society which includes the political class, judiciary, executive, legislature as well as the law enforcement agencies. Corrupt and sharp practices foster inequality, poverty and bitterness which are usually exploited by violent groups. Failure to provide basic infrastructure and services such as education and healthcare facilitates anger, resentment and feelings of deprivation all leading to a crisis prone society. Insecurity in the agricultural sector has posed a major challenge on the nation's food security leading to acute food shortage and poverty with millions facing famine conditions and worsening crisis situation (FAO, 2020). There is an urgent need therefore to address these critical problems through stronger and inclusive governance, introduction of effective anti-corruption methods and meaningful security reforms to ensure a conducive environment is provided for business activities to thrive.

5. Conclusion

Agriculture is strategic for building the nation's economy, contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), promoting employment and ensuring food security. However, persistent insecurity which includes terrorism, banditry, herder-farmer conflicts and kidnappings have severely impacted agricultural productivity. Farmers are unable to access their farm lands which has culminated to inflation, food shortage and economic instability. Addressing these security challenges is critical for improving agricultural performance, food adequacy and economic stability. of which this study hereby recommends the following:

This study hereby recommends the following:

- Security institutions and personnel should be strengthened through the provision of periodic training and supply of equipment needed for combatting insecurity. The security apparatus in rural areas should be reinforced through professionalized rural security operations and promotion of community policing.
- Appropriate conflict resolution mechanism should be adopted through the means of dialogue with secessionist movements and warring factions so as to have full knowledge of their grievances and demands with the objective of finding solutions.
- Intelligence gathering should be more intensified and more effort in place to identify personnel and individuals working with bandits, kidnappers and terrorists. Drones and satellite technology should be provided to beef up

surveillance which is necessary for efficient performance of law enforcement agencies.

- Offenders and perpetrators who violate Nigeria's national security should be made to face swift and severe penalties. When caught and convicted, those who violate national peace, terrorists, bandits, and kidnappers must be held accountable and subject to the full weight of the law. This would preserve peace and stability and act as a deterrence to possible criminals.
- To win back the confidence of the populace, the nation's political elite and government representatives should embrace the values of accountability, integrity, and good governance. National interest should take precedence over individual and self-serving objectives.
- To guarantee that young people are gainfully employed and involved in worthwhile endeavors, the government should step up its efforts to reduce poverty and combat the unemployment threat. This will help people avoid negative vices and advance peace and stability in the country.
- Support in the form of loan facilities and grants should be provided to displaced farmers and government is advised to intensify the provision of basic rural infrastructure, storage facilities and irrigation systems for improved agricultural sector performance.

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