

Rising Insecurity and its Implications on Food Security in Niger North Senatorial District, Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the rising insecurity in Niger North Senatorial District and its implications on food security in Niger state. Despite the unwavering commitments and efforts of the Government of Niger State in collaboration with the Federal government of Nigeria to tackle the overwhelming situation; insecurity still persists in the zone with its attendant massive loss and destructions of human lives and properties through frequent invasion of communities to kidnap and unlawful killings of people, imposing unlawful taxes to farmers, women abuse (rape), cattle rustling, among others. These, therefore, resulted in people fleeing their ancestral homes, disruption of farming and consequent rise in the prices of foodstuffs hence, deepening the level of poverty as well as food insecurity in the state. However, the study recommends the following; the government should ensure effective formulation and implementation of policies capable of addressing the root causes of the insecurity not only in the state but the country at large among others.

Key words: Rising insecurity, implications, food security, Niger North, Niger state, Nigeria.

Introduction

Every country needs to be able to produce enough food for its people to live on, and this can only be done in a safe and welcoming environment. As such, it is necessary for any country to advance economically, socially, or politically. In order for every nation to achieve its desired progress and development, security is the single most crucial aspect that assures and guarantees peace and stability. According to Akintokumbo (2011), creating a stable and peaceful environment is essential for the nation's or community's ability to experience real economic growth and development. According to Audu (2013), security is defined as the presence of circumstances that permit members of a society to go about their normal, everyday activities free from harassment or threats to their lives and property. According to Eme and Anyadike (2013), security solely refers to the absence of any dangers, risks of physical or moral violence, and deterioration. In light of the aforementioned conclusions, it can be seen that security is a requirement for any meaningful and harmonious coexistence of humans with its environment.

However, insecurity is in direct opposition to the security of people's lives and property in every society. In light of the foregoing, it is no longer a secret

that Nigeria is currently dealing with significant and complicated security issues that endanger both its territorial coexistence and stability as a sovereign state. The increasing incidents of bokoharam insurgency, banditry, kidnappings, armed robberies, cultism, political thuggery, ethnic violence, herdsman/farmers disputes, religious conflicts, and many other crimes are evidence of this, as are the daily mainstream and social media coverage on them. Unfortunately, despite governments' substantial financial efforts in the sector, these unpleasant security threats have been progressively growing. According to Achumber *et al.* (2013), insecurity is a state of anxiety brought on by the worry of not having enough protection from harm. According to Eigege and Cooke (2016), instability in Nigeria not only has an impact on agricultural activity but also causes farming communities to be uprooted and makes it very difficult for farmers to peacefully access regional markets. This, however, demonstrates how any society's unsecured character can result in disorder, which can breed about deformities in the residents' regular daily routines.

Globally, both governmental and non-governmental organizations place a high priority on food security because of its singular significance for

human health and peaceful coexistence. This is done to make sure that the world's population, which is constantly expanding, lives a meaningful and fulfilled life free from hunger. In light of this, Abbey (2011) defines food security as a state in which all people and households, both local and global, have direct and economic access to enough, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for a strong and healthy life at all times. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, [FAO], (2012), food and nutrition security is assumed to exist "when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services, and care, allowing for a healthy and active life."

However, in Nigeria, food security is a completely different issue because, as mentioned above, it is gradually confronting a significant challenge. One of the biggest problems Nigeria and other developing countries face, according to Achor (2003), is food security. He continued by saying that the main reason of widespread extreme poverty and hunger among the populace was governments' incapacity to produce enough food for their constantly growing populations. The conclusion of Fadare, *et al.* (2019) thus backs up the argument in the previous submission that food insecurity and the prevalence of under nutrition in Nigeria are among the worst in the world. But in light of the aforementioned, this paper seeks to examine the rise in insecurity in Nigeria in relation to the Niger State North Senatorial District, one of the state's affected zones, in order to understand its causes, implications for food security, and potential solutions to the ugly situation.

Niger State and Insecurity

One of the seven states in the North Central zone is Niger state, which is located in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. According to land area, it is the largest state in Nigeria; about 80% of the land is cultivated (State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability, [SPARC] 2015). Despite being blessed with such a vast area of fertile land for agriculture, the state has a history of being one of the most peaceful and safest in Nigeria. You hardly ever see or hear groups fighting one another, such as the ethnic violence or farmers/herders clashes as in other states. But with the current influx of some undesirable components, the entire narratives which had previously been portrayed

as being so beneficial to the state have taken a different turn. In accordance with the foregoing, the former Niger State Commissioner for Information and Strategy stated in an interview with the Premium Times on the 19th September, 2021, following his abduction on the 9th August, 2021, that "this has been happening as a result of the boundary the state shares with some of the already affected states in the Northwestern region of the country, like Zamfara State to the North, Kebbi to the North West, and Kaduna to the East through its large exurban population

The state becomes a haven for bandits, where they carry out their evil deeds and, when pursued, flee into these adjacent states, he continued. This supports the finding of Rufa'i (2021), who found that "120 bandit gangs are currently active in the Northwestern States of the nation, including Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, Katsina, and Kaduna States as well as Niger State itself from the North Central". These gangs are armed with thousands of high-tech weapons. As a result, the state frequently finds it difficult to sustain its inheritance in terms of the well-known robust agricultural producing capacities and the peaceful coexistence of its residents due to the terrible circumstances in and around the state. Therefore, this single reason can seriously affect the free flow of agricultural produce in the state.

Niger North and Food Security

In recent years Niger state's north senatorial district has experienced a significant rise in insecurity posing a substantial threat to food security in the region. The agricultural produce and products grown in this region of the state were a key source of food and revenue for the local population. Niger north, on the other hand, is one of the state's three senatorial districts and is made up of eight (8) local government area councils, including Agwara, Borgu, Kontagora, Mariga, Mashegu (one of the top 10 largest by land mass), Nasko, Rijau, and Wushishi, respectively. The zone makes up the majority of the state's total land area and is well known for producing important food crops such as maize, rice, guinea corn, millet, groundnuts, cowpea, soy beans, cassava, and yam as well as vegetable crops and other valuable trees like Shea butter. Additionally, small and big ruminants, poultry, as well as aquatic animals, primarily fish, are included in animal production.

Having a larger proportion of the state's fertile and productive land resources, in addition to being known for its thriving agricultural activities in both the state

and the nation at large, the zone also once from “2006 to 2019 hosted a farm belonging to the Nigerian flour mill company called Kaboji Farms with a land area of 10,000 ha that was primarily used for the production of food crops like maize, cowpea, and soy bean”. As a result, the zone has a unique added advantage in terms of both agricultural productive capacities and employment opportunities for local residents, helping to lower levels of poverty and thus improving food security in the region as well as revenue generation for the state government.

However, given the condition of the security situation in the area as of right now, the aforementioned company has long already opted to halt operations and shift to a safer location. Once more, large-scale farmers from all across the zone are only left with the choice of continuing to operate throughout the off-seasons or significantly reducing their level of production. Most small-scale farmers have stopped working for the season, but thanks to God's mercy, a handful has been able to continue. This is primarily a result of bandits and cattle rustlers' relentless activities, which frequently involve invading these communities to unleash their terror attacks, which frequently result in unlawful killings of people, the imposition of unlawful taxes on farmers, the abuse of women (rape), kidnappings, cattle rustling, and looting of property, all of which will exacerbate the rise in food prices (Fadare, *et al.* 2019). These consequently caused the majority of farmers who live in rural areas to migrate in large numbers, leaving their ancestral houses and farmlands vacant. As a result, there will be food production shortage, which will lead to increased poverty among residents of the zone as well as a general drop in the state's GDP.

Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria

Many academicians, like Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu (2019), have identified a number of causes of insecurity in Nigeria as follows;

- a) **Unemployment/Poverty:** - Youths are drawn to violent crimes most frequently because of the high rates of unemployment and poverty they experience throughout Nigeria, not just in Niger State (Adagbo *et al.* 2012). According to NBS (2021), Niger State is the eighth-poorest state in the nation while the young unemployment rate in Nigeria is at 42.5%. According to Akwara *et al.* (2013), unemployment leads to poverty, and poverty leads to insecurity. As a result, the state's
- ongoing insecurity fosters the recruitment of young people.
- b) **Porous Borders:** - The porous nature of the Nigeria's borders aids the unchecked influx of migrants, mainly young men, from neighboring countries such as Republic of Niger, Chad and that of Benin are responsible of the criminal acts (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012). Achumba *et al.* (2013) opined that the porous frontiers of the country where movement of individuals are largely untracked have greatly contributed to the level of insecurity in Nigeria.
- c) **Proliferation of Small Arms and Ammunitions:** - Reports revealed that the groups terrorizing Nigeria especially North western region, obtain their sophisticated weapons through the porous borders of the country. Edeko (2011) observed that Nigeria hosts over 70 percent of about 80 million illegal weapons in West Africa. The illicit proliferation of these weapons in the hands of their operators posed a huge challenge to the peace and security as well as the agricultural productivity of the country and the state in particular.
- d) **Poor Governance:** - In many instances, the rising incidents of violent attacks are symptoms of weak, exclusionary or exploitative governance not only in Niger state but most of the affected States in the country. Majority of the affected areas in the state are underdeveloped infra structurally and this can escalate the rate of poverty in the areas while poverty can lead to insecurity (Akwara *et al.*, 2013). This therefore, can affect to a great extent the rate of their investment into any productive activities which agriculture is inclusive.
- e) **Narcotics:** - Criminals and their allies are often involved in trafficking/smuggling illegal substances within and outside the country. These terrorists always take drugs that change their human thoughts before unveiling their terror attacks on their targets.
- f) **Weak and Overburden Security System:** - This is a major contributory factor to the level of insecurity in Nigeria and this be attributed a number of factors including inadequate funding of the security agencies, lack of modern equipments both weaponry and training, poor welfare of security personnel and inadequacy

(Achumba, 2013). Nigeria's security architecture is overstretched, like the Nigerian military are on active deployment to many states of the federation, to tackle internal security threats which should have been carried out by the police (2021).

Implications of Insecurity on Food Security in Niger North

However, security avails any given society the opportunity for development (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). While Ewetan and Urhie (2014) opined that insecurity is known to hinder business activities agriculture inclusive and discourage both local and foreign investors. Therefore, the implications include;

- Deepening the level of poverty and hunger among citizens of the zone and state entirely.
- Food price inflation
- Detraction of both local and foreign investors into the sector.
- Overall decline in agricultural productivity in the zone as well as the state.
- Dislocation and displacement of farming communities within the zone.
- Rural – urban migration among the displaced farming communities with consequent over stretching the available infrastructures in the metropolitan areas.
- Disrupting the supply chain of food and essential commodities to the markets as well as their outright closure at times.

Conclusion

The study concludes that insecurity as an opposite of security often creates a wide range of destructions to whatever environment it found itself. Having reviewed the related literature about insecurity in the state and the country at large, it was however found that, despite the unwavering commitments and efforts made by the government of Niger state in collaboration with the federal government of Nigeria in tackling the overwhelming situation in the state. The insecurity challenge still persists in the state with its attendant massive destructions to human lives and properties through frequent invasion of communities to kidnap people, unlawful killings of people, imposition of unlawful taxes, women abuse (rape), cattle rustling, looting of items, setting homes as well as police stations and military bases ablaze among others. These there by resulted in people fleeing their ancestral homes, disruption of farming and consequent rise in the prices

of foodstuffs hence, deepening the level of food insecurity, poverty, in the land as well as the overall decline in the GDP of the state.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

- 1 Government should ensure effective formulation and implementation of policies capable of addressing the root causes of the insecurity such as unemployment/poverty, corrupt and weak judicial system, poor governance, proliferation of small arms and ammunitions, Narcotics prohibition among others.
- 2 Government should ensure that full autonomy to Local Governments is granted so that infrastructural facilities and other developmental projects can be executed by the locals with their own funds without unnecessarily being handicap.
- 3 Government should also ensure the creation of community police to fight banditry only and not to be used for political reasons having fully knowing their respective terrains.
- 4 Also, government should ensure legalizing the local vigilante groups with a little restructuring to be allowed to carry modern arms having known their terrain much better than the military and police meant for the job and their integration into the state payroll.
- 5 Finally, government should ensure effective collaboration with the established religious and traditional institutions to build community resilience against the prevailing insecurity.
- 6 Employment and empowerment opportunities should often be provided to people by both government and non-governmental organizations as these can help in reducing idleness among youths.

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