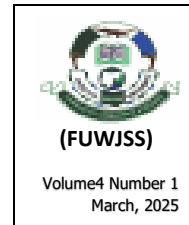


IMPLICATIONS OF INSECURITY ON FOOD PRODUCTION IN SANKERA AXIS OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA



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Abstract

This study examines the implications of insecurity on food production in Sankera axis of Benue State. The specific objectives of the study coalesce on explaining the causes and sources of insecurity and how these impact on food production in Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria. The descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted for the study. Data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire administered to 378 respondents, and this was complemented with key informant interviews. Findings of the study revealed that political struggle, poverty, farmers/herders conflict, porous borders and weak security system are the major sources and causes of insecurity in Sankera axis of Benue State. On the implications of insecurity on food production, the study found displacement of farmers, loss of farmland, reduced farming activities, reduced access to markets, decrease agricultural investment, loss of livestock and crops as the major implications of insecurity on food production in the study area. The study concludes that insecurity in Sankera axis of Benue State is not merely a localized issue but a pervasive threat that undermines the very foundations of food security in the area. Thus, the study recommends dialogue among politicians to address the lingering issues among them that has constituted the major source of insecurity in Sankera axis. Also, there should be the formation of local security outfits to compliment the efforts of the conventional security and the resettlement of displaced farmers to farmlands.

Keywords: Insecurity, food production, markets, porous borders, Sankera

Introduction

Food production is the backbone of a nation's survival and development. It provides the basic necessities of life, employs a significant portion of the population, and contributes significantly to the country's economy (Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO 2019). Adequate Food production also ensures food security, which is a fundamental human right. A nation that produces its own food is less reliant on imports and is better equipped to feed its population, especially in times of crisis. It also has a positive impact on public health, as a well-fed population is less susceptible to diseases and malnutrition (World Health Organization, WHO 2018; FAO, 2019).

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented plaque of crisis and insecurity, each leading to loss of lives and displacement of farmers and loss of farmland resulting to a significant decline in food production which has posed a threat to food security. According to Ezeoha (2011) “Security means stability and continually of livelihood, predictability of relationships, feeling safe and belonging to a social group. Insecurity on the other hand, is the antithesis of security. It has been ascribed different interpretations in association with the various ways which it affects individuals. Some of the common descriptors of insecurity include: want of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; want of confidence; doubtful; inadequately guarded or protected; lacking stability; troubled; lack of protection; and unsafe, to mention a few. All of these have been used by different people to define the concept of insecurity. These different descriptors, however, run into a common reference to a state of vulnerability to harm and loss of life, property or livelihood.

Insecurity in the country is manifested in different forms such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence and farmers/herders conflict. The struggle for political power leading to conflicts in most parts of the country has also been a cause of insecurity. The Global Peace Index (2023) ranked Nigeria as the 147th out of 163 countries in the 2023 Global Peace Index. This is a confirmation of the high level of insecurity confronting the nation.

The Sankara axis of Benue State has been one of the worse hit in terms of insecurity, a region known for its rich agricultural potential, has been plagued by security concerns that threaten the livelihoods of farmers and the food security of the region. The incessant attacks by armed herdsmen, bandits, and other criminal elements have led to the destruction of farms, displacement of farmers, and disruption of food production (World Bank, 2019; FAO, 2019). According to reports, many farmers in the region have abandoned their farms due to fear of attacks, resulting in a significant decline in food production (World Bank, 2018). The situation has been exacerbated by the lack of adequate security presence and support for farmers, leaving them vulnerable to attacks (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2017). This study aims to investigate the causes, sources and implications of insecurity on food production in the Sankara axis of Benue State, with a view to identifying strategies for addressing the challenges and promoting sustainable food production in the region.

Insecurity and Food Production in Nigeria

Insecurity refers to a state of being vulnerable or exposed to danger, threat, or risk (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Psychology Today (2019) defined insecurity as a feeling of uncertainty, instability, or vulnerability about oneself, one's relationships, or one's environment. To Becker (1973), insecurity is a fundamental human experience that arises from the awareness of our own vulnerability and mortality. Insecurity is also described as a social construct that is shaped by cultural, economic, and political factors (UNESCO, 2017). Sigmund Freud (1929) also described insecurity as a state of mind that is characterized by feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. To the World Bank (2019) Insecurity is the result of the interaction between individual and environmental factors, such as poverty, violence, and political instability.

Food production refers to the process of growing, raising, and harvesting plants and animals for human consumption (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2020). Connell (2017) defined Food production is the process of transforming raw materials into edible products, including farming, processing, and distribution. To the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2019), Food production involves the use of land, water, and other resources to produce food crops and livestock, as well as the management of post-harvest handling and storage. According to the World Bank (2019), Food production is a critical component of food systems, which also include processing, marketing, and consumption. However, this study conceptualized food security as all processes involved in transforming raw agricultural products into safe, nutritious and appealing food products for human consumption. It encompasses various stages from farm to table including agricultural production, processing, manufacturing and packaging. Several causes account for the high rate of insecurity experienced in Nigeria in recent time, some of which the study highlighted below:

Unemployment and poverty are two significant causes of insecurity in Nigeria, contributing to various forms of violence, crime, and social unrest. Nigeria's unemployment rate has been increasing over the years, reaching 23.1% in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020) while The youth unemployment rate is particularly alarming, with 40.8% of Nigerians between 15-34 years old unemployed or underemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Unemployed youth are more likely to engage in criminal activities, such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and terrorism (Ogundiwin, 2014). Unemployment has also been identified as a factor in the recruitment of Boko Haram insurgents, particularly among young people (International Crisis Group, 2014).

Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with 87 million people living in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2020). The country's Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality, is 0.485, indicating significant disparities in wealth distribution (World Bank, 2020). Poverty limits people's access to basic needs like healthcare, education, and food, exacerbating insecurity thereby fueling socio-economic frustrations, leading to increased tensions and conflicts (Adebayo, 2013; Economic Community of West African States, 2019).

Ethno-religious conflicts among various tribes and religion in Nigeria have arisen from distrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country. Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner, (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor, (2011) identified ethno-religious conflict as a major source of insecurity in Nigeria. Ethno-religious conflict was defined as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation. Frequent and persistent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity), present the country with a major security challenge. In all parts of Nigeria, there exist ethno-religious conflicts and these according to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002) have emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities. The claim over

scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy, local government, councils, control of markets and sharia among other trivial issues have resulted in large scale killings and violence amongst groups in Nigeria (Adagba, et al, 2012).

The farmers and headers conflict is also one of the major intergroup conflicts that have disrupted security in several parts of the country recently. Every farming system has a boundary which separates it from the larger system that makes up the environment. Conflicts and violent clashes between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have been a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa (Tonah, 2006). The boundary represents the limits in the larger system. Farmers regularly compete with nomadic herders for farmland, pastures, water, trees and the use of rangeland in general (Akpaki, 2002).

There is also the issue of weak security system which results from inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training. This is in addition to poor attitudinal and behavioural disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring. And even when these exist, some personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and are easily swallowed by their personal interest to serve their people, rather than the nation. Thus, instead of being national watch dogs and defending national interest and values, and protecting people from harm by criminals, they soon become saboteurs of government effort, by supporting and fuelling insecurity through either leaking vital security information or aiding and abetting criminals to acquire weapons or to escape the long arm of the law.

At the most proximate and least disputable level, terrorism is the most fundamental source of insecurity in Nigeria today, and its primary bases and sources of support have generally been located in religious fanaticism and intolerance particularly in Islam dominated states of Nigeria. Terrorism which is a global phenomenon where no one is safe was defined by Sampson and Onuoha (2011) as “the premeditated use or threat of use of violence by an individual or group to cause fear, destruction or death, especially against unarmed targets, property or infrastructure in a state, intended to compel those in authority to respond to the demands and expectations of the individual or group behind such violent acts”. A good example of terrorism in Nigeria is an Islamic insurgency with a political undertone by a faceless group based in the Northern region of the country, which called itself Boko Haram, which takes into account the legitimate political, social and economic grievances of the Northern population. Nigeria has lost up to 1000 lives in the North since 2009 to the insurgency of this infamous Islamic sect, Boko Haram.

In Nigeria, the specter of insecurity looms large, casting a shadow over the nation’s ability to ensure food security. The rampant insecurity in Nigeria disrupts the very fabric of daily life, particularly in rural areas where agriculture serves as a lifeline. Farmers, essential to the nation’s food production, find themselves caught in the crossfire of conflicts, rendering their fields unattended and unproductive (Oxfam, 2019). The pervasive fear of violence forces many to abandon their lands, leading to a decline in crop cultivation and harvest, subsequently amplifying the threat to food security.

Furthermore, the displacement of farmers and rural communities aggravates the challenges faced by the agricultural sector (UNHCR, 2020). Forced migration results in the abandonment of once-fertile lands, contributing to a downward spiral in productivity. As displaced individuals seek refuge in urban areas, the strain on resources exacerbates the already delicate balance, further compromising the nation's capacity to ensure a steady and sustainable food supply.

Insecurity's impact extends beyond the fields, reaching critical infrastructure that is pivotal for the transportation and distribution of agricultural produce. Roads and transportation networks, often targeted in acts of violence, crumble under the weight of insecurity, hindering farmers' ability to transport their goods to markets (FAO, 2019; World Bank, 2019). The resulting disruptions in supply chains contribute to rising food prices and decreased affordability for consumers, deepening the crisis (USAID, 2020).

Economically, insecurity leaves an indelible mark on Nigeria's food security landscape. A weakened agricultural sector translates to reduced employment opportunities and income for farmers, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. The economic fallout extends beyond agriculture, affecting various sectors that contribute to overall food availability and affordability, compounding the challenges faced by the nation (CBN, 2020). Prolonged insecurity has the potential to escalate into a full-blown humanitarian crisis. Displacement, food shortages, and limited access to basic amenities create conditions conducive to malnutrition and disease outbreaks. The most vulnerable segments of society, particularly women and children, bear the disproportionate brunt of these challenges, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and food insecurity that becomes increasingly difficult to break.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the conflict theory to give a theoretical insight of the problem. The Conflict theory, a sociological perspective, posits that social behavior is shaped by conflict and competition for resources (Marx & Engels, 1848). This theory suggests that those who control the resources, in this case, land and food production, hold power over those who do not (Weber, 1946). In the context of the Sankara axis of Benue State, conflict theory can be applied to understand the implications of insecurity on food production.

The Sankara axis of Benue State has experienced recurrent attacks by Fulani herdsmen on farmers, leading to displacement, destruction of crops, and loss of livelihoods (Human Rights Watch, 2016). This insecurity has resulted in a decline in food production, as farmers are unable to access their farmlands or invest in their crops due to fear of attacks (International Crisis Group, 2018). Conflict theory suggests that this insecurity is a manifestation of the struggle for control over resources, in this case, land and water. The conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the Sankara axis of Benue State is rooted in the competition for resources, particularly land and water (Okereke, 2017). The Fulani herdsmen, who are primarily pastoralists, require large areas of land for grazing, while the farmers, who are primarily agriculturalists, require land for farming (Adebayo, 2017). This competition for resources has led to tensions and

conflicts between the two groups, resulting in insecurity and a decline in food production.

Conflict theory also suggests that the state plays a role in perpetuating the conflict by failing to address the underlying issues driving the competition for resources (Tilly, 1985). In the case of the Sankara axis of Benue State, the government has been criticized for its slow response to the crisis and its failure to provide adequate support to farmers and Fulani herdsmen (Amnesty International, 2018). This lack of effective governance has contributed to the escalation of the conflict and the decline in food production. Furthermore, conflict theory highlights the importance of understanding the historical and structural factors that contribute to the conflict (Wallerstein, 1974). In the case of the Sankara axis of Benue State, the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen is rooted in the legacy of colonialism and the subsequent displacement of communities (Okpu, 2017). Understanding these historical and structural factors is crucial to addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and finding a lasting solution to the insecurity and decline in food production.

Research Methodology

The study was cross-sectional in design employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. It was carried out in Sankara axis of Benue State. Sankara is a federal constituency in Benue state comprising of three local government areas including Katsina-Ala, Ukum and Logo Local Government Areas. According to the Bureau of Statistics (2020) Sankara has a projected population of about 475,947 people (Ukum 140, 417, Katsina-Ala 173, 471, Logo 162, 059). Sankara is well-known for its enormous food production and arguably is the reason for the appellation of the food basket of the nation given to Benue State. The Axis is the major yam producers in Nigeria and in West Africa. Other crops such as groundnuts, cassava, rice, beans, guinea corn and others are also produced in large quantities in the axis. Sankara axis has however in recent time been plagued with insecurity that has affected food production.

The population of the study was made up of all people residing within the Sankara axis aged 18 years and above. According to data obtained from the Bureau of Statistics (2020), Sankara has a projected population of about 475, 947 persons. Due to the large nature of the population, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected for the study using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to arrive at individual respondents. Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) were as methods of data collection. The triangulation method was used for the analysis of collected data.

Results and Discussions

Data collected for the study is presented in line with study objectives and the socio-demographic variables of respondents

Socio-Demographic Variables of respondents

The study collected data on the socio-demographic variables of respondents including sex, age, marital status, level of education and primary occupation. The data is presented in Table 1 below

Table 1: Demographic Attributes of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (n=378)	Percentage (%=100)
Sex		
Male	269	71.2
Female	109	28.8
Age		
18-30	70	18.5
31-45	127	33.6
46-55	114	30.2
56-65	38	10.1
65 Above	29	7.7
Marital Status		
Single	115	30.4
Married	213	56.3
Divorced	-	-
Widowed	50	13.2
Level of Education		
None	42	11.1
Primary	113	29.9
Secondary	159	42.1
Tertiary	64	16.9
Primary Occupation		
Civil Service	43	11.4
Farming	228	60.3
Trading	79	20.9

Source: Field Survey 2024

Data obtained on the socio-demographic variables of respondents indicated that, 71.2% (269) of the respondents were male while 28.8% (109) were female. On the age distribution of respondents, study findings revealed that 18.5% (70) respondents fell within the age range of 18-30 years, 33.6% (127) were of the age bracket of 31-45 years while 30.2% (114) respondents were in the age category of 46-55 years, 10.1% (38) fell in the age range of 56-65 years and 7.7% (29) were of the ages of 66 years and above.

Concerning the marital status of respondents study findings showed that 56.3% (213) respondents were married, 30.4% (115) were single and 13.2% (50) were widowed. Educational status of respondents indicated that 11.1% (42) respondents had no formal education, 29.9% (113) had primary qualifications while 42.1% (159) had secondary qualification and 16.9% (64) had tertiary qualifications. On occupational distribution of respondents, study findings revealed that 11.4% (43) were civil servants, 60.3% (228) were farmers while 20.9% (79) were petty traders and 7.4% (28) were craft men.

Sources and Causes of Insecurity in Sankera Axis of Benue State

Data on the sources and causes of insecurity in Sankera Axis of Benue State is presented in figure 1 below:

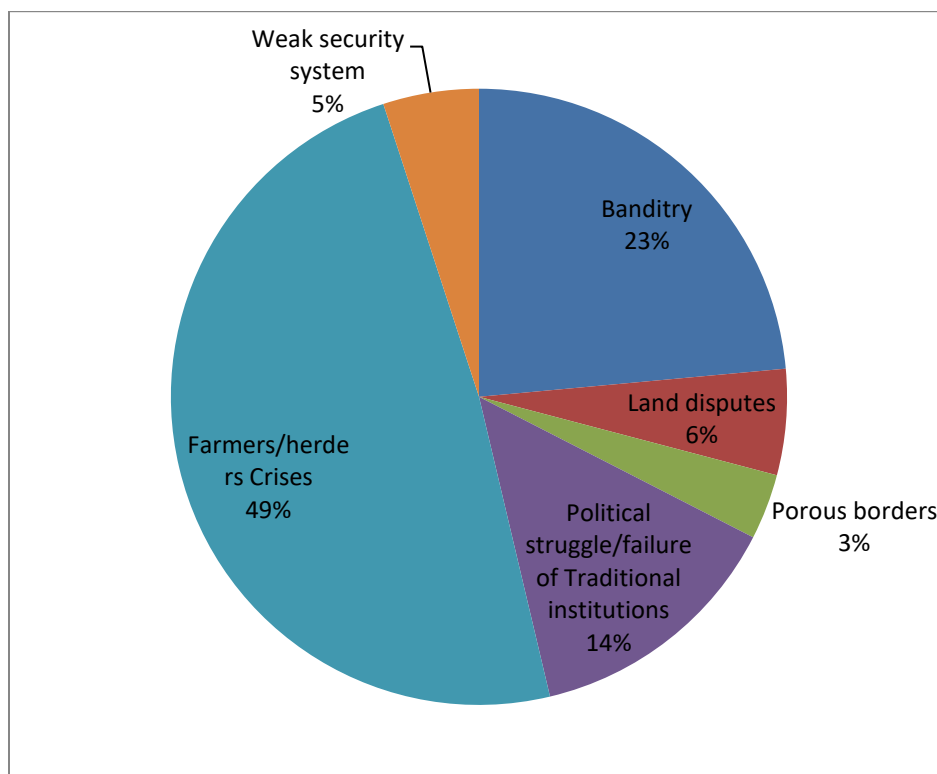


Figure 1: Sources and causes of insecurity in Sankera axis of Benue State

Source: Field survey, 2024

Figure 1 presents data on the sources and causes of insecurity in the study area. Findings of the study indicated that 49% of the respondents maintained that the major cause of insecurity in Sankara axis is the conflict between farmers and Fulani herders, 23% of the respondents pointed to banditry while 14% maintained that political struggle and failure of the traditional institutions in the study area are the major causes of insecurity. Other sources and causes of insecurity in the study area as revealed by respondents included land disputes (6%), weak security system (5%) and porous borders (3%).

The data above indicates that there are multiple sources and causes of insecurity in Sankara axis of Benue state that has impeded food production in the study area. Key informant interviews with respondents also did not show any remarkable difference with the views of other respondents. Most of the interviewees also mentioned failure of traditional institutions in the area, political struggle among notable politicians in the axis, banditry activities, farmers/herders conflict, porous borders, weak security system and others as the major sources of insecurity in the study area. Concerning the failure of traditional institutions in the study area, respondents revealed that the heads of traditional institutions including 2nd class chief, district and kindred heads who are supposed to call people to order are themselves involve in the criminality bedeviling the axis. In a recent video which was

circulated on social media, the speaker accused a traditional ruler of sponsoring a kidnapping gang in Logo Local Government area where his gang kidnap their victims and ransoms are paid to the said traditional ruler.

A 57 Year old farmer in Gbagir, Katsina-Ala Local Government Area started thus:

Most of the insecurity problems we are having in Sankara today, the traditional rulers are part of it. Some of these traditional rulers have sold out our lands secretly to the Fulani herdsmen without our knowledge. The Fulanis are now claiming ownership of these lands. This is the major cause of the conflict between us and the herders. They need the land to graze while we need our land for farming. Many farmers have been displaced by those Fulani Herdsmen and have completely taken over their land for grazing (KII, 2024)

Similarly, a 37 year old farmer in Ugba town also lamented:

It will shock you to know that some of our traditional rulers here are involved in the kidnapping activities that have taken over our communities recently. For security reasons, I don't want to mention names, but we know them. They have boys that do those jobs for them. They kidnap people collect ransom and the chiefs partake in the sharing of these criminal proceeds. If the traditional institution which is supposed to uphold morality is itself involved in this type of criminal activities, then we have a big problem in our hands (KII, 2024)

Furthermore, respondents also commented on the political struggle between notable political leaders in Sankara axis which has contributed significantly to the poor security situation in the area. They stressed that during electioneering campaigns some politicians acquired arms and handed to thugs in the area which they use to intimidate opponents, it is the same arms that the boys are using to unleash terror on people of Sankara axis even after elections have been won and lost.

Furthermore, respondents also commented on the most worrisome source of insecurity in the study area, the farmers/herders crises. According to them even though other challenges exist, this is the biggest of all of them. The fight between farmers and herders over land for farming and grazing has constituted a serious security threat in the area. Most farmers have been displaced from their farmlands to various IDP camps or to live with their relatives in more safer towns as a result of fear of attack by the herders.

Responding, a 47 year old respondent in Chito, Ukum Local Government Area reiterated:

I cannot count the number of people the herders have killed around this community in recent years, most people in the neighbouring villages have been displaced, their homes and farmlands have completely been taken over by the herders. These crises have brought serious hardship on the people as their major source of livelihood which is farming has been taken away from them (KII, 2024)

The findings on the sources and causes of crime are in line with earlier findings of Ebonyi & Bojande (2024) who found that the farmers-herders crisis has had troubling impacts including a reduction in inputs and income for farmers and nomads, displacement of farmers, erosion, and loss of lives,

arms running, destruction of properties, lost stored farm produce, including hatred and fear, increased unemployment and underdevelopment.

Implications of Insecurity on Food Production in Sankera Axis of Benue State

Study findings on the implications of insecurity on food production in Sankera Axis of Benue State is presented in Figure 2 below:

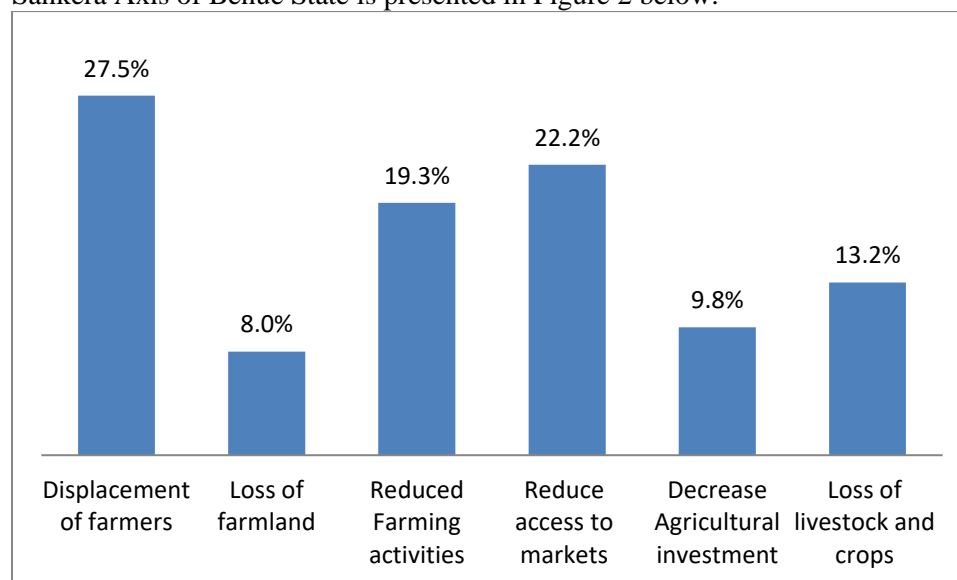


Figure 2: Implications of insecurity on food production in Sankera Axis of Benue State

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 2 presents data on the implications of insecurity on food production in Sankera axis of Benue State. Findings of the study indicated that 27.5% of the respondents noted that displacement of farmers is the major implication of insecurity on food production in the study area, 8% of the respondents pointed to loss of farmland while 19.3% of the respondents opined that reduced farming activities is the major implication of insecurity on food production in the study area. Other implications found by the study were reduced access to markets (22.2%), decrease investment in agriculture (9.8%) and loss of livestock and crops (13.2%)

From the findings above, it can be deduced that there are several implications of insecurity on food production in Sankera axis. Most of the respondents' lamented that these implications are seen in the displacement of farmers from their ancestral homes. The displacement of farmers results into loss of crops, livestock and farmland making it impossible to continue farming. According to respondents most farmers around Sankara axis especially in the rural areas have been sacked from their homes either by herders or by bandits most of whom according to respondents are natives of the area. When displaced, most of the farmers find refuge in displaced persons camps or move in to live with relatives in other towns and villages completely abandoning farming activities as a result of losing farmland, seedlings, and other agricultural inputs necessary for food production.

Commenting, a 47 year old displaced farmer from Tiza village who reside at an IDP camp in Anyiin town, Logo Local Government Area stated thus:

I came from Tiza village in Tombo Council Ward but because of the farmers/herders crises we have been displaced from our village and have taken refuge here. Before the crises I had a big yam farm that produces thousands of yams annually, i also was into groundnut, millet and guniea corn farming, all of these were produced in large quantities. But look at me now, I have lost everything, I and my entire family and the rest of Tiza people are homeless, we do not have farmland or even seedling and capital to farm again. We are now living from hand to mouth. (KII, 2024)

Similarly, another farmer from Zaki-Biam in Ukum Local Government Area lamented:

The situation here is worrisome, we are no longer talking about the issue of fulanis. Our major concern now is our own sons who have turn our once peaceful and prosperous community in something we cannot explain. Ukum people were known to be the largest yam producers but look at what insecurity has reduced us to. We can no longer go to the farms for fear of been killed or kidnapped by our own boys. Most farmers in the villages are now displaced and we are now all clustered in Zaki-Bian town without any meaningful farming activities (KII, 2024)

Furthermore, findings also revealed that with the level of insecurity in the study area resulting in the loss of farmlands, seedlings and other agricultural inputs, majority of farmers have lost interest in farming thereby decreasing investment in agriculture which poses a threat to food security. Most farmers who have been sacked from the farmlands have migrated to towns were they have developed other coping strategies such as trading and are gradually losing interest in farming

A 56 year old POS operator in Katsina-Ala town respondent thus:

I was a farmer while in my village in Tordonga but because of the crises I have been displaced, I have lost my farmland and seedlings so it will be difficult for me to go back into farming. So for me to survive, as you can see, with the little money I saved while I was farming I used it to start this POS business that is what have been sustaining me and my family (KII, 2024)

These findings collaborates the earlier findings by UNHCR (2020) who found that the displacement of farmers and rural communities aggravates the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. Forced migration results in the abandonment of once-fertile lands, contributing to a downward spiral in productivity. As displaced individuals seek refuge in urban areas, the strain on resources exacerbates the already delicate balance, further compromising the nation's capacity to ensure a steady and sustainable food supply.

Table 2: Strategies to curtail the extent of insecurity in order to boost food production in Sankera Axis of Benue State

Factors	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Amnesty Programme	89	23.7
Dialogue	21	5.6
Enforcement of the Anti-Open grazing Law	184	49.1
Beefing up security in the axis	52	13.9
Strengthening the traditional institution in the axis	32	8.5
Total	375	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 2 present data on the possible solutions that can help ameliorate the extent of insecurity in order to boost food production in Sankera axis of Benue State. Findings of the study indicated that 23.7% of the respondents said granting amnesty to those criminal elements unleashing terror in the axis will go a long way in reducing the extent of the problem, 5.6% of the respondents pointed to dialogue while 49.1% of the respondents noted that the enforcement of the already existing anti-open grazing law will to some extent solve the security situation in the study area. Other solutions proffered by respondents include beefing up security in the axis (13.9%) and strengthening the traditional institution (8.5%)

Commenting on the measures to curtail the level of insecurity in the axis, majority of the key informants also pointed to similar measures such as granting amnesty to the criminal elements who are willing to accept peace. They noted that some of the bandits possessing arms live in the bush and come out to commit atrocities then go back into hiding. They have no freedom and cannot come out in the open as they are on the wanted list of security agencies as a result some of them are tired of these condition and maybe willing to accept an offer of amnesty and embrace peace.

A 48 year old trader in Zaki-Biam town stated thus:

We know almost all of these boys who are causing trouble in Sankera, they are known. The security agencies know them and most of them are on the wanted list as such they cannot move freely, they are always in hiding because of the fear of being arrested by security operatives. They hid in the bush and come out to commit crime and go back and I can tell you that most of them are not happy with this condition they are in. if the government announce an amnesty programme, I am sure most of them will surrender their arms and embrace peace (KII, 2024)

Furthermore, respondents also pointed to the importance of enforcing the already existing anti-open grazing law enacted by the Benue State Government. They stressed that despite the law been in place, headers freely graze openly and encroach on farmers farms and farmland which lead

to most of the conflict between the farmers and the herders in Sankera axis. Commenting, a 56 year old farmer in Anyiin stated thus:

The major security problem we have here is the fight over land between farmers and the Fulani herdsmen. When the anti-open grazing law was enacted by the formal administration in Benue State we were all happy that the crises will become a thing of the past but unfortunately, the law has not been enforced. There are still Fulani people that graze openly and encroach on farmers' farmlands (KII, 2024)

Relatedly, respondents also commented on dialogue, beefing up security in the study area and strengthening the traditional institutions as some of the major solutions to enhance security in Sankera axis. According to some of the respondents, some traditional rulers are involved in the criminal activities going on in Sankera. They call for the fishing out, suspension and subsequent prosecution of such chiefs. Security beef ups and dialogue between top politicians who are believed to be the source of the crises was also encouraged by respondents as part of the measures that will bring lasting solution in the Sankera axis of Benue State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Insecurity in Nigeria is not merely a localized issue but a pervasive threat that undermines the very foundations of food security. Addressing this multifaceted challenge demands a concerted effort, involving both short-term interventions and long-term strategies. Enhancing security measures, investing in rural development, and fostering community resilience are imperative steps toward breaking the shackles of insecurity and ensuring a more food-secure future for Nigeria. The collaborative engagement of government, civil society, and international partners is pivotal in navigating the complex terrain and steering the nation toward sustainable solutions.

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