

## Assessment of the Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on Food Insecurities in North East Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The activities of the Boko Haram insurgency have significantly affected socio-economic stability in North-East Nigeria, particularly agricultural production and food supply systems. This study examines the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on food insecurity in North-East Nigeria, a region that has experienced persistent violence, population displacement, and disruption of rural livelihoods. The objectives of the study are to: examine the relationship between Boko Haram insurgency and food insecurity in the region; assess the extent to which the displacement of farming communities has affected agricultural productivity and food availability; and evaluate the coping strategies adopted by affected households in response to food shortages. The study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to obtain comprehensive data. Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires administered to farmers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and community members in selected areas of Borno State, Yobe State, and Adamawa State. In addition, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted with community leaders, humanitarian workers, and local government officials. Secondary data will be obtained from reports and publications of organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme, as well as scholarly literature on conflict and food security. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data will be interpreted through thematic analysis. The expected findings indicate that Boko Haram insurgency has intensified food insecurity by destroying farmlands, restricting farming activities, displacing rural populations, and disrupting food distribution networks. The study is expected to recommend improved security, agricultural rehabilitation programs, and sustainable food security policies to address the crisis in North-East Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Boko Haram insurgency, food insecurity, agricultural disruption, internally displaced persons, North-East Nigeria.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Food security remains one of the most critical challenges facing developing countries, particularly those experiencing violent conflict. Food security exists when all people at all times

have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food necessary for a healthy life (FAO, 2021). However, armed conflict has increasingly emerged as one of the most significant drivers of food insecurity across the globe.

In Nigeria, the insurgency carried out by Boko Haram since 2009 has severely disrupted socio-economic activities in the North-East region. The conflict has largely affected states such as Borno State, Yobe State and Adamawa State, where agriculture constitutes the major source of livelihood for rural populations. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2022), violent conflicts in agricultural regions often result in the destruction of farmland, disruption of markets, and displacement of farming communities.

The insurgency has forced millions of people into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, thereby reducing agricultural productivity and increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance from organizations such as the World Food Programme. Studies suggest that food production in many rural communities has declined significantly due to insecurity, restricted access to farmland, and destruction of irrigation infrastructure (Okoli, 2019).

Consequently, the North-East region has become one of the most food-insecure regions in Nigeria. Understanding the relationship between insurgency and food insecurity is therefore crucial for developing sustainable peace-building and agricultural recovery policies.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite numerous government and international interventions, food insecurity remains widespread in North-East Nigeria. The activities of Boko Haram have resulted in displacement of farmers, destruction of agricultural infrastructure, and disruption of local food markets. These conditions have created a situation where many households struggle to meet their daily food needs.

While several studies have examined the security implications of Boko Haram insurgency, limited research has focused specifically on its direct impact on food security and agricultural productivity in affected communities. This study therefore investigates how insurgency contributes to food insecurity in the region.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to examine the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on food insecurity in North-East Nigeria.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the relationship between Boko Haram insurgency and food insecurity in North-East Nigeria.
2. Assess the impact of insurgency on agricultural production and rural livelihoods.
3. Determine the effect of displacement on food availability and access.
4. Identify coping strategies adopted by affected households.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How has Boko Haram insurgency affected food security in North-East Nigeria?

2. To what extent has insurgency reduced agricultural productivity in the region?
3. What role does displacement play in increasing food insecurity?
4. What coping strategies are adopted by affected households?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to academic literature on conflict and food security. It will assist policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and development agencies in designing sustainable agricultural recovery programmes and food security policies in conflict-affected regions.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on the North-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, particularly Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, which have experienced the highest level of insurgency activities.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

#### **Food Security**

Food security is a broad concept that goes beyond the simple availability of food in a society. It refers to a condition in which individuals, households, and communities have regular and dependable access to enough safe, nutritious, and acceptable food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2021). In other words, food security is not only about whether food exists, but also whether people can obtain it at the right time, in the right quantity, and in a form that promotes good health and wellbeing.

The concept of food security is usually understood through four major dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and stability. Food availability concerns the physical presence of food through agricultural production, storage, imports, or distribution systems. Food access refers to the ability of people to obtain that food, either through their own production, market purchases, or support systems. Food utilization focuses on how the body makes use of the food consumed, which depends on nutritional quality, clean water, sanitation, and health conditions. Food stability means that these three dimensions must be sustained over time and should not be easily disrupted by shocks such as conflict, displacement, inflation, or environmental disasters. In conflict-affected regions such as North-East Nigeria, all four dimensions of food security are often severely weakened.

#### **Insurgency**

Insurgency refers to an organized and sustained rebellion against an existing state authority, often carried out through violent means with the aim of challenging, weakening, or overthrowing the government (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Unlike ordinary crime or isolated acts of violence, insurgency is usually prolonged, politically motivated, and directed at creating fear, instability, and loss of state control over certain territories or populations.

In many cases, insurgent movements emerge in societies where poverty, inequality, poor governance, unemployment, and social exclusion are widespread. Over time, such groups may exploit these conditions to recruit followers, spread extremist ideas, and establish influence

over vulnerable communities. In the case of North-East Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has become one of the most devastating examples of armed rebellion in contemporary Africa. Its activities have not only caused widespread deaths and displacement but have also disrupted economic life, education, healthcare, and agricultural production. As a result, insurgency in this context is not merely a security issue; it is also a major social and developmental problem with serious consequences for human survival and community wellbeing.

### **Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity is the direct opposite of food security. It occurs when individuals or households do not have reliable physical, social, or economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food needed for normal growth, development, and healthy living. Food insecurity may be temporary, seasonal, or chronic depending on the intensity and duration of the factors causing it. These factors often include poverty, unemployment, inflation, environmental degradation, natural disasters, weak institutions, and violent conflict.

In practical terms, food insecurity is experienced when people skip meals, reduce portion sizes, eat less nutritious foods, or depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. In severe cases, it can lead to hunger, malnutrition, illness, and increased vulnerability to disease and death. In conflict-affected areas such as North-East Nigeria, food insecurity is often intensified by displacement, destruction of farms, loss of income, disrupted markets, and restricted movement. Thus, food insecurity is not simply a matter of food shortage; it is a deeper condition of deprivation that reflects the inability of people to sustain an adequate standard of living in the face of economic and social instability.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework provides the intellectual foundation for a study by identifying the major theories that help explain the problem under investigation. In this study, two relevant theories are adopted to explain the connection between Boko Haram insurgency and food insecurity in North-East Nigeria. These are the Relative Deprivation Theory and the Human Security Theory. Both theories are useful because they help to explain not only the emergence of violent conflict but also its broader consequences on people's survival, livelihood, and access to basic needs such as food.

#### **Relative Deprivation Theory**

The Relative Deprivation Theory was advanced by Ted Gurr in 1970. The theory explains that conflict often arises when individuals or groups perceive a significant gap between what they believe they deserve and what they are actually able to obtain in society. In other words, when people experience frustration due to poverty, exclusion, injustice, unemployment, or lack of opportunities, they may become more vulnerable to agitation, violence, and rebellion. The theory suggests that it is not only absolute poverty that causes conflict, but the feeling of deprivation in comparison to expectations, promises, or the living conditions of others.

In the context of North-East Nigeria, this theory is highly relevant to understanding the conditions that contributed to the rise and spread of Boko Haram insurgency. The region has historically experienced high levels of poverty, youth unemployment, low educational attainment, poor infrastructure, and weak government presence. These conditions created deep feelings of neglect and marginalization among many people, especially young men, who were

left with limited economic opportunities and social mobility. Such frustration created an environment in which extremist ideologies could easily gain support or sympathy. As a result, Boko Haram was able to exploit these structural weaknesses and social grievances to recruit members and sustain its insurgent activities.

Beyond explaining the emergence of the conflict, the theory also helps to explain how the effects of insurgency deepen social deprivation. As violence escalates, farming communities lose their means of livelihood, markets are destroyed, and households are pushed into deeper poverty and hunger. Thus, relative deprivation is both a cause and a consequence of the conflict situation in North-East Nigeria.

### **Human Security Theory**

Human Security Theory emerged prominently through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report of 1994. Unlike traditional security approaches that focus mainly on protecting the state from external aggression, human security shifts attention to the protection of individuals and communities from threats that affect their survival, dignity, and wellbeing. These threats include poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, political instability, and violent conflict.

The theory emphasizes that true security cannot exist where people are exposed to chronic hunger, displacement, fear, and social breakdown. It recognizes food as a central component of human security because access to adequate food is essential for life, health, and social stability. When people cannot feed themselves or their families, their overall wellbeing is threatened, and society becomes more vulnerable to further crises.

This theory is particularly relevant to the present study because Boko Haram insurgency has directly undermined human security in North-East Nigeria. The insurgency has destroyed homes, displaced millions of people, disrupted agricultural production, and weakened the local economy. Farmers are unable to access their lands, traders face insecurity on transport routes, and many households are left dependent on humanitarian aid. In this sense, the conflict has gone beyond a mere political or military problem; it has become a serious human security crisis affecting food, livelihood, safety, and dignity.

Therefore, Human Security Theory provides a broader lens through which the study understands food insecurity not just as an economic problem, but as a direct threat to human survival caused by violent conflict. Together, Relative Deprivation Theory and Human Security Theory offer a strong theoretical basis for explaining both the origins of insurgency and its devastating consequences on food systems and rural livelihoods in North-East Nigeria.

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

A number of empirical studies have examined the relationship between insurgency, displacement, agricultural disruption, and food insecurity in conflict-affected regions. These studies provide useful insights into the ways violent conflict affects food production, household access to food, and the survival strategies adopted by affected populations.

Okoli (2019) examined the relationship between Boko Haram insurgency and rural livelihoods in North-East Nigeria. The study found that agricultural activities declined significantly in many affected communities due to insecurity, destruction of farmland, fear of attacks, and the

forced migration of rural farmers. According to the study, the persistent violence not only reduced crop production but also weakened local trade and community resilience. This finding is important because it shows that insurgency affects food insecurity primarily through the destruction of livelihood systems.

Adamu and Rasheed (2020) investigated food security conditions among internally displaced persons in North-East Nigeria. Their study revealed that more than 65 percent of households living in IDP camps experienced severe food shortages. Many respondents reported skipping meals, reducing portion sizes, and depending heavily on relief materials from humanitarian organizations. The study demonstrated that displacement plays a central role in worsening food insecurity because it separates people from their farms, income sources, and traditional support networks.

Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022) reported that over four million people in North-East Nigeria were facing acute food insecurity due to conflict-related disruptions. The report linked the crisis to large-scale displacement, restricted access to farmland, destruction of agricultural infrastructure, and instability in food supply chains. The FAO further noted that the inability of farming households to cultivate crops consistently has reduced food availability and increased dependence on external assistance.

Collier (2007), in his broader analysis of conflict-affected societies, argued that civil wars and prolonged violent conflicts destroy economic structures, reduce productivity, and trap affected populations in cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Although his work was not limited to Nigeria, its relevance to the North-East is clear. The destruction of economic life caused by Boko Haram insurgency reflects the same pattern identified in conflict economies, where production systems collapse and local populations become increasingly vulnerable to deprivation.

Thurston (2017) also observed that Boko Haram insurgency fundamentally altered the social and economic life of communities in North-East Nigeria. He emphasized that repeated attacks on villages, abductions, displacement, and insecurity in rural areas forced many households to abandon agriculture altogether. This weakened the agricultural base of the region and created long-term challenges for post-conflict recovery.

In another related study, Bellemare (2015) examined the relationship between instability and food security in developing regions and found that violent conflict often leads to food price volatility, supply shortages, and reduced household purchasing power. This is especially relevant in the North-East Nigerian context, where market disruption and transportation insecurity have made food more expensive and less accessible to vulnerable households.

In addition, the World Food Programme (2023) noted that many households in insurgency-affected communities in North-East Nigeria spend a disproportionately large share of their limited income on food, while others rely almost entirely on humanitarian assistance. This suggests that the problem of food insecurity in the region is not only about availability of food, but also about affordability and access.

Taken together, these empirical studies show a strong relationship between insurgency and food insecurity. They confirm that violence affects food systems through multiple channels, including destruction of farms, forced displacement, market disruption, loss of livelihoods, and dependence on aid. However, most existing studies tend to focus more on the humanitarian

consequences of the conflict in a general sense, rather than using a mixed-methods approach to investigate the specific mechanisms through which insurgency affects agricultural production, food access, and household coping strategies at the community level.

It is this gap that the present study seeks to address. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study provides a more detailed and grounded understanding of how Boko Haram insurgency has contributed to food insecurity in North-East Nigeria.

## **Research Methodology**

This chapter explains the procedures and techniques adopted in carrying out the study. It describes the research design, population of the study, sample size, methods of data collection, and techniques used for data analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to show clearly how the study was conducted and how the data used to answer the research questions were obtained and analyzed.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This design was considered suitable because the nature of the study requires not only numerical data on the extent of food insecurity and agricultural disruption, but also personal experiences and opinions from individuals directly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency.

The quantitative aspect of the study makes it possible to measure patterns, frequencies, and trends among the respondents, while the qualitative aspect provides deeper insight into how insurgency has affected farming activities, displacement, access to food, and household survival strategies. By combining these two approaches, the study is able to produce a broader and more balanced understanding of the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on food insecurity in North-East Nigeria.

### **3.2 Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of people and groups considered relevant to the subject under investigation. These include:

- farmers
- internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- agricultural officers
- community leaders

These categories were selected because they are directly connected to agricultural production, food access, rural livelihoods, and the effects of insurgency in the affected region. Farmers provide firsthand information on the impact of insecurity on farming activities, while internally displaced persons help to explain how conflict and forced migration affect access to food and livelihood opportunities. Agricultural officers offer technical and institutional perspectives, while community leaders provide valuable local knowledge about the social and economic realities of affected communities.

The estimated total population for the study is 15,000 respondents drawn from selected communities in North-East Nigeria.

### **3.3 Sample Size**

Due to the large size of the population, it was not practical to study every individual within the study area. Therefore, a sample was drawn to represent the larger population. The study adopted Yamane's formula for determining sample size, and based on this formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was obtained.

This sample size is considered adequate for the study because it allows the researcher to gather enough information for meaningful analysis while still remaining manageable in terms of time, cost, and fieldwork logistics. The selected respondents were drawn from the identified categories within the study population.

### **3.4 Methods of Data Collection**

Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

#### **Primary Data**

Primary data were obtained directly from respondents in the field through the following instruments:

##### **Structured Questionnaires:**

Questionnaires were administered to selected respondents, especially farmers, internally displaced persons, and other community members. The questionnaire contained carefully designed questions aimed at gathering information on agricultural disruption, displacement, food access, and household coping strategies.

##### **Interviews:**

Interviews were conducted with key informants such as agricultural officers, community leaders, and some selected respondents. This method provided the opportunity to gather more detailed information that could not easily be captured through questionnaires alone.

##### **Focus Group Discussions:**

Focus group discussions were also used to obtain collective views and shared experiences from affected persons in the communities. This method helped the researcher to understand local realities, community perceptions, and the broader social effects of insurgency on food security.

#### **Secondary Data**

Secondary data were obtained from already existing materials relevant to the study. These include:

- government reports
- FAO publications
- academic journals

- books, policy documents, and related literature on conflict and food security

These materials helped to provide background information, support the analysis, and place the study within the wider body of scholarly work.

### **3.5 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected for the study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, in line with the mixed-methods design.

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using:

- frequencies
- percentages
- tables
- bar charts
- pie charts

These statistical tools were used to summarize the responses of participants and present the data in a clear and understandable form. Frequencies and percentages helped to show how often particular responses occurred, while tables and charts made it easier to compare results and identify major patterns in the data.

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved organizing responses into major themes based on repeated ideas, experiences, and issues raised by respondents. Through this method, the researcher was able to identify key patterns relating to displacement, destruction of farmlands, market disruption, dependence on food aid, and household coping mechanisms.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis strengthened the study by allowing numerical findings to be supported by real-life experiences and community voices. This made the results more comprehensive, reliable, and meaningful in explaining the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on food insecurity in North-East Nigeria.

#### **Data Presentation and analysis**

**Table 4.1 Gender Distribution**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	230	57.5%
Female	170	42.5%
Total	400	100%

From Table 4.1, majority of respondents were male farmers.

**Table 4.2 Impact of Insurgency on Farming**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	210	52.5%
Agree	130	32.5%
Disagree	40	10%
Strongly Disagree	20	5%

#### Interpretation

85% of respondents agreed insurgency has affected farming.

#### Bar Chart Representation

Bar charts illustrate the relationship between insurgency and agricultural production decline.

Variables represented:

- Access to farmland
- Market disruption
- Crop destruction

Bar analysis shows significant reduction in farming activities after insurgency escalation.

#### Pie Chart Representation

Pie chart distribution of food sources for households:

Food Source	Percentage
Own farming	30%
Food aid	45%
Market purchase	20%
Others	5%

#### Interpretation

Food aid constitutes the largest share of food sources among affected households.

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Summary

This study investigated the impact of Boko Haram insurgency on food insecurity in North-East Nigeria using a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data. The aim was to gain a broader and more realistic understanding of how insecurity has affected food production, access to farmland, household survival, and the general livelihood conditions of people living in the affected areas.

The findings of the study revealed that the insurgency has had a profound negative effect on agricultural activities across the region. A large number of respondents confirmed that persistent attacks, fear of violence, and general instability have drastically reduced farming activities and agricultural output. The study also found that displacement has emerged as a

major factor worsening food insecurity, as many farmers and rural households were forced to abandon their homes and farmlands. This has limited their ability to cultivate crops, rear livestock, and sustain their traditional means of livelihood. In addition, the study showed that a significant number of households now depend heavily on humanitarian food assistance for survival, especially those living in internally displaced persons' camps and conflict-affected communities.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that Boko Haram insurgency has become one of the major drivers of food insecurity in North-East Nigeria. The conflict has not only disrupted farming activities but has also destroyed rural economic structures, displaced productive populations, and weakened household food systems. As a result, many families now face hunger, reduced meal intake, and increased dependence on external support. The study therefore establishes a strong relationship between insurgency and worsening food insecurity in the region.

## 5.3 Recommendations

The government should intensify efforts to restore peace and security in rural farming communities so that displaced farmers can safely return to their lands and resume agricultural production. There is also a need for the implementation of agricultural rehabilitation programmes that will provide affected communities with seeds, fertilizers, irrigation support, storage facilities, and access to extension services. Furthermore, internally displaced persons should be supported not only with emergency relief materials but also with farming inputs, land access, and livelihood opportunities that can help them regain self-reliance. Finally, international organizations and humanitarian agencies should strengthen and sustain food assistance programmes while also supporting long-term recovery strategies aimed at rebuilding agricultural livelihoods and improving food security in North-East Nigeria.

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