

Effect of Insecurity on Socio-economic Development of Nigeria: A Discourse

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Abstract

The study examines how persistent insecurity has affected Nigeria's socio-economic development through violence, destruction of property, displacement and disruption of productive activities. The study aimed to examine the effect of insecurity on economic development, identify associated problems, and assess prospects for reducing its negative consequences. The study was anchored on Human Security Theory, which emphasizes protection of individuals from threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity. A descriptive research methodology was adopted using secondary data from sources to examine relevant evidence on insecurity and economic development. The study considered major cases and indicators of insecurity in Nigeria, such as: Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta militancy and the effects of banditry, and kidnapping on socio-economic activities. The study concludes that insecurity undermines investment, employment and economic growth. It recommends stronger security institutions, transnational border collaboration among neighboring countries, provision of qualitative education, heavy investment in agriculture, improved governance, job creation and community-based security measures to promote sustainable economic development.

Keywords: Insecurity, Socio-Economic Development, Insurgency, Major Indicators Of Insecurity, Approaches To The Successful Revamping Of The Agricultural Sector

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE BACKGROUND PROBLEM

Insecurity in Nigeria is not just problematic and nebulous, but has remained a national issue which attracts international attention. This issue has made Nigeria a subject of discussion in the comity of nation-states due to the importance of Nigeria in the world politics occasioned by her abundant natural resources of different types.

Insecurity has emerged as one of the most critical challenges confronting Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, the country has experienced increasing incidences of terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes, herder-farmer conflicts, oil pipeline vandalism, and other forms of violent crime, all of which have threatened lives, property, and national stability (Agbibo, 2013; Eze, 2019). These security challenges have weakened state institutions, strained national cohesion, and undermined public confidence in the government's ability to provide protection for its citizens. Despite Nigeria's vast human and natural resource endowments, persistent insecurity has continued to impede its efforts toward sustainable economic development.

Socio-economic development is broadly defined as a process that brings about qualitative and quantitative improvements in the welfare of citizens through increased productivity, employment generation, infrastructural expansion, poverty reduction, and improved access to social services (Sen, 1999; Todaro & Smith, 2020). However, economic development cannot thrive in an environment characterized by instability and fear. In Nigeria, insecurity has significantly disrupted productive economic activities, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing, trade, and transportation. Violent attacks on rural communities have led to the displacement of farmers and the abandonment of farmlands, resulting in declining agricultural output, food insecurity, and rising inflationary pressures. (Ajakaiye & Jerome, 2015; World Bank, 2020). Similarly, insecurity in urban and industrial areas has affected supply chains, reduced operating hours for businesses, constrained industrial productivity, and most devastatingly affected exchange rate and direct foreign investment which totally impacted on the economic situation of Nigeria.

The impact of insecurity on investment and business operations in Nigeria has been particularly profound. A stable security environment is a key determinant of investment decisions, as investors seek to minimize risk and uncertainty. In Nigeria, frequent incidents of violence, kidnapping, and attacks on infrastructure have discouraged domestic and foreign investors, leading to reduced capital inflows and relocation of businesses to safer regions or countries (UNCTAD, 2021). This in effect leads to the increase in the cost of doing business through higher expenditures on private security, insurance, and logistics, which ultimately reduces profitability and limits expansion opportunities for firms and thereby thwarting the employment opportunities to the teeming unemployed persons in Nigeria.

Insecurity has also imposed heavy fiscal and developmental burdens on the Nigerian government. A growing share of public expenditure is allocated to security-related activities, including military operations, counter-terrorism efforts, and internal security policing. While such spending is necessary to contain security threats, it diverts limited public resources away from critical development sectors such as education, healthcare, power supply, transportation, and housing (IMF, 2020; World Bank, 2021). This diversion has contributed to delays, abandonment, or poor implementation of development projects, thereby slowing economic progress and worsening socio-economic conditions such as unemployment and poverty.

The persistence of insecurity in Nigeria reflects deeper structural and governance-related challenges. High levels of youth unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, and weak institutional capacity have been identified as underlying factors that fuel insecurity and violent conflicts (UNDP, 2019; Onuoha, 2014). These conditions create a vicious cycle in which underdevelopment breeds insecurity, and insecurity in

turn deepens underdevelopment. As a result, efforts to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development in Nigeria remain fragile without addressing both security and socio-economic challenges simultaneously.

Furthermore, insecurity has indirect effects on human and social development in the state. It contributes to unemployment, school dropout rates in affected areas, youth frustration, and social instability. When young people are exposed to violence and lack economic opportunities, they may become more vulnerable to criminal activities, thereby creating a cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment that becomes difficult to break. (Nwagboso, 2012). Since it affects government performance and resource allocation, funds that could have been used for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and industrial development are often diverted to security management and crisis response, (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). This limits long-term development planning and slows down the pace of economic transformation in the state

Despite these challenges, there are significant prospects for improving security and promoting sustainable economic development in Nigeria. Strengthening community-based security systems, enhancing collaboration between security agencies and local communities, and improving intelligence gathering can help reduce crime rates. Youth empowerment programmes, entrepreneurship support, and vocational training can also reduce unemployment and limit involvement in criminal activities. Investment in education, agriculture, infrastructure, and industrial development can further expand economic opportunities and reduce poverty levels across communities.

Good governance, transparency, and equitable distribution of development projects remain essential in addressing the root causes of insecurity. When citizens perceive fairness in governance and access to opportunities, grievances that often lead to unrest are reduced. Furthermore, the adoption of modern security technologies such as surveillance systems, emergency response platforms, and digital monitoring tools can strengthen security operations and improve response time. Therefore, a comprehensive approach combining security reforms, economic empowerment, infrastructure development, institutional strengthening, and good governance is necessary to ensure sustainable development and long-term prosperity in Nigeria.

Nigeria's economic potential is significantly hampered by insecurity. Despite abundant natural resources, a large labor force, and strategic geographic positioning, the nation continues to face persistent underdevelopment. A major factor contributing to this underdevelopment is the prevalence of insecurity across the country. Insurgent activities in the Northeast, kidnappings and armed banditry in the Northwest, militancy in the Niger Delta, and recurrent communal clashes in other regions have collectively disrupted economic activities, caused massive displacement of citizens, and reduced investor confidence (Eze, 2019; Agbiboa, 2013).

The financial implications are equally severe. Billions of Naira are spent annually on security operations at the expense of essential developmental projects. Infrastructure is destroyed or underutilized due to fear of attacks, while local and foreign investors are deterred from investing in unstable regions (World Bank, 2020). In addition, insecurity fosters a culture of fear and uncertainty that undermines entrepreneurship, reduces productivity, and perpetuates poverty. The ongoing brain drain from conflict-affected areas further erodes human capital, essential for driving economic development (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Despite the magnitude of these challenges, scholarly research on the direct and indirect effects of insecurity on economic development in Nigeria remains fragmented. Most studies focus on specific regions or forms of insecurity, while neglecting a holistic understanding of how insecurity interacts with economic indicators at the national level (UNCTAD, 2021). This research therefore seeks to address this knowledge gap by examining the effects of insecurity on Nigeria's economic development and identifying

prospects for sustainable solutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Human security theory is used as the basis of analysis. The Human Security Theory, which was first proposed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994 in its Human Development Report marked a significant shift in the concept of security, moving away from the traditional state-centered approach, which emphasizes the protection of national borders and territorial integrity, toward a people-centered approach that prioritizes the protection of individuals and communities. According to the UNDP (1994), human security encompasses freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity. This means that security is not merely the absence of armed conflict but also the assurance that individuals can access basic human needs, live without fear of violence, and participate meaningfully in socio-economic and political life.

Human Security Theory posits that threats to personal safety, livelihoods, and basic human needs directly undermine socio-economic development. Insecurity in Nigeria, manifested in forms such as terrorism, insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal clashes, disrupts productive economic activities by causing loss of lives, destruction of property, and displacement of communities. These challenges lead to abandoned farmlands, reduced commercial and industrial operations, relocation of businesses to safer areas, and declining foreign and domestic investment (Ajakaiye & Jerome, 2015; Eze, 2019). The theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how insecurity prevents individuals and communities from fully engaging in economic activities, thereby slowing national development.

A key tenet of Human Security Theory is its recognition of the interconnection between socio-economic conditions and insecurity. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, poor governance, and lack of access to essential services create vulnerabilities that can be exploited by criminal networks, insurgent groups, or terrorist organizations. In Nigeria, for example, youth unemployment and social exclusion in regions such as the Northeast and Northwest have contributed to recruitment into Boko Haram and bandit groups. This illustrates the cyclical nature of insecurity and underdevelopment: economic deprivation fosters insecurity, while insecurity further diminishes economic opportunities and disrupts development initiatives (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The Study applied qualitative/descriptive research, using contextual design which entails analyzing scholarly texts, journals, bulletins, articles, newspapers, textbooks, government reports, internet and international development agency publications. This allowed data generated to be effectively analyzed. Qualitative/descriptive data analysis focuses on data that give reliable descriptive information on the phenomenon under investigation to meet the objectives of a particular study.

IMPACT OF INSECURITY AND INDICATORS

The Boko Haram insurgency is one of the most significant security challenges in Nigeria's contemporary history. The group, officially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, emerged in 2002 under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State. Initially operating as a religious movement advocating strict Islamic teachings, the group became increasingly radicalized and transformed into a violent insurgent organization following clashes with security forces and the death of its founder in 2009 (Onuoha, 2014). The insurgency officially escalated in 2009 when Boko Haram launched a series of attacks against government institutions, security agencies, religious centers, schools, markets, and civilian populations across North-East Nigeria. The conflict was particularly severe in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, where the group sought to establish an Islamic state and reject Western education and governance

systems (Awojobi, 2014). The name "Boko Haram" is commonly interpreted as "Western education is forbidden," reflecting the group's opposition to Western values and institutions.

Major Indicators of the Boko Haram Crisis

Indicators	Estimated Value
Start of insurgency	2009
People killed	Over 37,000
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)	Over 2.6 million
States most affected	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
Communities destroyed	Thousands
Schools destroyed/closed	Hundreds
Agricultural losses	Billions of dollars
Refugees in neighboring countries	Hundreds of thousands

Source: UN, Humanitarian Agencies and Academic Studies (2026)

The insurgency led to a dramatic increase in internal displacement, peaking around 2016 when over 2.6 million people were displaced. The insurgency contributed significantly to poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and social dislocation. Many farming communities abandoned their farmlands due to insecurity, resulting in reduced agricultural output and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. Businesses were forced to close, while government resources that could have been used for development projects were redirected toward security operations and post-conflict reconstruction (Awojobi, 2014). Although sustained military operations by the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force have weakened the group and reclaimed many territories previously under its control, Boko Haram and its splinter faction, Islamic State West Africa Province, continue to carry out attacks in some parts of the North-East. Consequently, the insurgency remains a major obstacle to peace, security, and economic development in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Decline in Major Crop Production

Crop	Estimated Decline (%)
Sorghum	82%
Rice	67%
Millet	55%

Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), (2026)

Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood in North-East Nigeria. Boko Haram attacks forced many farmers to abandon their farmlands due to insecurity. Research shows that crop production in the region experienced significant decline during the peak of insurgency. In Borno State alone, production of major crops such as sorghum, rice and millet fell sharply because farmers could no longer access their farms safely.

Major Indicators of Niger Delta Militancy and Oil Theft in Nigeria

Indicator	Estimated Value
Major Militancy Period	2004–2009
Amnesty Programme Launch	2009
Daily Oil Production Losses (Peak Periods)	200,000–500,000 barrels
Estimated Annual Revenue Losses	Billions of US Dollars
States Most Affected	Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom
Illegal Refineries Destroyed (Recent Years)	Thousands
Major Economic Sector Affected	Petroleum Industry
Main Environmental Impact	Oil Spills and Pollution

Source: NEITI (2023); NNPC Reports (2022); UNEP (2011).

The Niger Delta militancy and oil theft crisis represent one of the most persistent security challenges affecting Nigeria's economic development. The Niger Delta region, which comprises oil-producing states such as Rivers State, Delta State, Bayelsa State, Akwa Ibom State, and Ondo State, is the center of Nigeria's petroleum industry and accounts for the majority of the country's foreign exchange earnings and government revenue. Despite its economic significance, the region has experienced decades of environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, and perceived marginalization, which contributed to the emergence of militant groups and widespread oil theft activities (Watts, 2008).

Militancy in the Niger Delta gained prominence in the early 2000s with the rise of armed groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. These groups demanded greater resource control, environmental justice, and improved socio-economic conditions for local communities. To achieve their objectives, militants engaged in attacks on oil installations, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of oil workers, sabotage of petroleum facilities, and confrontations with security agencies (Ibaba, 2011).

Oil theft, commonly referred to as "illegal bunkering," emerged alongside militancy as a major criminal enterprise in the region. The practice involves the unauthorized tapping of crude oil pipelines, diversion of petroleum products, and illegal refining of stolen crude oil. Criminal networks, sometimes involving local actors and organized syndicates, exploit weaknesses in pipeline surveillance and security infrastructure to siphon large quantities of crude oil for domestic and international black markets (Nwajiaku-Dahou, 2012).

The activities of militants and oil thieves have had severe economic consequences for Nigeria. Pipeline vandalism and crude oil theft have resulted in substantial revenue losses, reduced oil production, and increased operational costs for oil companies. The Nigerian government has consistently reported billions of dollars in annual losses due to oil theft and production disruptions. Furthermore, attacks on oil infrastructure have discouraged foreign investment and undermined confidence in the petroleum sector (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative [NEITI], 2023).

Key Statistics on Banditry and Kidnapping

Indicator	Figure
Mass kidnappings since 2019	735 incidents
Victims abducted since 2019	15,398 persons
Kidnapping incidents (July 2024–June 2025)	997 incidents
Victims abducted (July 2024–June 2025)	4,722 persons
Deaths linked to kidnappings	762 persons
Ransom paid (July 2024–June 2025)	₦2.57 billion
Banditry-related deaths in 2024	1,452 deaths
Most affected states	Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina

Source: SBM Intelligence (2024–2025); EUAA Security Report

The North-West region remains the epicenter of banditry in Nigeria, accounting for the highest number of attacks, abductions, and fatalities. The vast forests stretching across Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Niger States provide safe havens for criminal groups, making security operations more difficult (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Summarily, insecurity in Nigeria ranging from insurgency, kidnapping, militancy etc have brought about:

- i. Kidnapping has become highly commercialized, generating billions of naira in ransom payments annually;
- ii. Banditry has significantly reduced agricultural productivity, especially in North-West Nigeria where farming is the major occupation;
- iii. Urban crime has increased the cost of doing business, reducing investment and economic expansion;
- iv. School kidnappings have worsened educational outcomes, increasing the number of out-of-school children;
- v. Displacement caused by insecurity has deepened poverty and humanitarian challenges, particularly in rural communities; and
- vi. Insecurity diverts government expenditure from development projects to security operations, slowing economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

The recommendations given here are not in any particular order of importance but based on how relevant and important they are if implemented to cushion the insecurity menace in Nigeria.

- i. The Sahel’s descent into violence, marked by the increasing territorial control of jihadist insurgent groups and the impact on state authority, is no longer confined by geographic borders. Instead, it has become a transnational phenomenon that intersects directly with Nigeria’s struggles with insurgency, banditry, and governance deficits in its northern regions. These developments are directly relevant to Nigeria due to the transnational reach of these militant groups. Sahelian and Nigerian jihadist networks and organised criminals increasingly use the porous and poorly governed borderlands between Niger and Nigeria as corridors to transport fighters, arms, and illicit goods. The situation in Niger is particularly precarious. Suffice to say that apart from the internal security arrangement in Nigeria, concerted efforts should be made towards Intelligence-sharing, joint border patrols, and coordinated military operations, which are all critical tools in managing

transnational threats. There are clear indications that the insecurity issues in Nigeria, particularly insurgency and banditry are equally perpetrated by foreigners in collaboration with the Nigerian bandits, based on the porous nature of Nigeria, collaboration with the security agencies of neighboring countries is inevitable for a joint task force to fight transnational insecurity that worsen internal securities of States in the ECOWAS and in the SAHEL countries;

- ii. Internally, greater emphasis should be placed on community policing, youth empowerment programmes, skills acquisition initiatives, poverty reduction strategies, and good governance. Providing meaningful employment opportunities and promoting inclusive development will help address some of the underlying causes of insecurity while enhancing peace, social stability, and sustainable economic development. It is a known fact that, “an idle hand is the devil’s workshop”, those involved in any form of security breaches are not meaningfully engaged, that is to say, if meaningful employments are provided, it will go a long way in curbing youth restiveness which could result in participating in activities that breach security in the country;
- iii. Education being the bedrock for development should be highly invested in by the government. There should be free and compulsory education throughout Nigeria from primary to secondary level and a subsidized tertiary education for all. These should go with revised curriculum to incorporate the Nigerian factor, a system of education that will solve the country’s societal problems. Science and technology should be paid premium attention to in the reform of the educational sector. Skills development, vocational education. These are to bring about self-reliance, and technologically driven economy. This recommendation is capable of making the youth be informed of the ills and consequences of religious fanaticism and crimes of all forms.
- iv. Currently in Nigeria, the best way to improve the security of the country is national development, good governance and employment. Be that as it may, the government and relevant security agencies should equally strengthen security measures through improved intelligence gathering, increased surveillance, adequate funding of security institutions, and effective law enforcement. This will help reduce criminal activities such as kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, and communal conflicts, thereby creating a secure environment necessary for economic development. With this, security in the country will cease to be inventive, but rather preventive.
- v. The agricultural sector investment can divert the attention of youth from crime. The agricultural sector is a very large sector that can provide junk employment capacity. This could be achieved through three approaches to the successful revamping of the agricultural sector as postulated by Udotim. (2025). According to him, the three approaches are: Provision of Market and Mechanism for Export (PMME), the Massive Self Involvement (MSI), and the Gentleman Farmer Approach (GFA). Under PMME approach, government at all levels (federal, states and local government), corporate and private investors can provide market for farmers; whether commercial or medium scale farmers to encourage many people especially the youth to realize the untapped gold mine in the agricultural sector and venture into it as business that could boom and improve the economy of the country more beneficial than the crude oil with its attendant environmental hazards and degradation. The MSI approach is predicated upon the PMME approach. The take-off of the MSI approach is based on the success of the PMME approach. The prominent belief here is that when there is a market for farmers to sell their farm produce, there would be many people that would be attracted to the agricultural sector to farm for business. Under the PMME approach, the establishment of industries that would use various farm produce as raw materials for finished and consumable goods and the mechanism and regulation for exportation of surplus farm produce is a way of changing the mind set of people about agriculture. When agriculture is carried out as business with good and reasonable profits made from it, there would be a massive participation and

involvement in agriculture for business – hence the approach of MSI. The GFA is an alternative to Nigerians who have the chronic desire for office work to satisfy their wants. Under this approach, government, corporate bodies and multinational companies can establish farms; mostly plantations and large hectares of farm lands whereby people, especially graduates can work. The federal and state governments can achieve this in collaboration with ministries of agriculture and agricultural extension agencies. This kind of farming, in order to attract gentlemen to work daily like in other government or public jobs, should be basically mechanized farming, all necessary farm equipment and facilities – both for farming and for workers to be motivated. (Udotim, 2025).

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