



## INSECURITY AND AGRICULTURAL DECLINE: A CASE STUDY OF YAM PRODUCTION IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA (2015–2023)

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### Abstract

*This study critically examined the impact of prolonged insecurity on yam production in Benue State, Nigeria, from 2015 to 2023. Drawing from the human security theory, the research explored how persistent conflict—particularly farmer-herder violence—has contributed to agricultural decline in one of Nigeria's most vital food-producing regions. Unlike previous studies that adopted broad analyses of rural insecurity, this research focused specifically on yam, offering a more detailed understanding of the disruptions in its production cycle. Using a qualitative methodology, data were collected from secondary sources and supplemented with 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants, including security personnel and journalists. Content analysis was employed to interpret the findings. The study revealed a marked decline in yam output directly linked to ongoing insecurity, with rural communities experiencing severe livelihood disruptions and economic losses. Furthermore, it identified critical policy and security gaps that have hindered agricultural recovery efforts. These findings highlighted that insecurity in Benue State is not merely a security issue but a significant barrier to food security, rural development, and national economic sustainability. The study concluded with policy recommendations aimed at reinforcing security infrastructure, supporting displaced farmers, and developing integrated agricultural-security frameworks centered on peace building and resilience.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Agricultural Decline, Yam Production, Benue State, Nigeria, Food Security

### Introduction

Insecurity has become one of the most pervasive threats to agricultural productivity in Nigeria, especially in regions that historically served as the nation's agricultural hubs (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Adewumi & Adebayo, 2020). The Middle Belt region, particularly Benue State—regarded as the "Food Basket of the Nation"—has been severely affected by incessant violent conflicts, ranging from herder-farmer clashes to rural banditry and communal violence (International Crisis Group, 2017; Ezeani, 2018). Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria witnessed an alarming increase in the



frequency, intensity, and geographical spread of violent attacks, many of which occurred in rural farming areas (Nte, 2020). Internal insecurity, particularly herdsman and farmers clashes in the country, has become the defining characteristic of the Nigerian political scene which takes a recurring turn on the very fabrics of the Nigerian State (Okeke, 2022a). The development has triggered a downward spiral in agricultural production, particularly in yam cultivation, which is a staple crop and economic mainstay for many farming households in Benue.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2022), Benue State recorded over 800 conflict-related fatalities and dozens of internally displaced persons (IDPs) between 2015 and 2022 due to violent herder-farmer clashes. The Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA, 2021) estimated that over 1.5 million people in Benue have been displaced by conflict-related violence since 2016, with the majority being rural farmers. These displacements have had severe implications for yam production, given that yam farming is labor-intensive and dependent on land accessibility, stability, and secure rural settlements (Mbachu, 2021). When communities are forced to flee their lands due to insecurity, farmlands are abandoned, harvests are disrupted, and the entire agricultural value chain is negatively affected.

Yam remains one of the most significant crops cultivated in Benue State, contributing to both food security and local economic stability. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), Nigeria is the largest producer of yam globally, accounting for over 60% of global production, with Benue State alone responsible for over 35% of the nation's yam output. However, by 2021, yam production in Benue declined by more than 20% compared to 2015 levels, a decrease linked largely to insecurity, as reported by the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (2022). This decline is not merely a statistical concern but a significant developmental threat, as it compromises food availability, farmer incomes, and the state's agro-based economy.

The rise of armed herdsman attacks and the proliferation of illegal arms in Nigeria have worsened the insecurity challenge. Between 2016 and 2018, over 400 deaths were attributed to herder-farmer conflicts in Benue alone, with the deadliest attack occurring in January 2018, leading to the death of over 70 people in Logo and Guma local government areas (Vanguard, 2018). This incident prompted the Benue State Government to implement the Anti-Open Grazing Law in 2017, aimed at curbing nomadic herding and reducing farmer-herder clashes. However, rather than alleviating the situation, the law was met with resistance and further escalated tensions in the state, leading to retaliatory violence and increased insecurity (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

In addition, the broader context of Nigeria's failure to decisively address rural insecurity through policy intervention and security sector reforms has compounded the problem. The internal insecurity challenges have shown no signs of abating while efforts to tackle them have yielded little or no results (Okeke, 2022b). As noted by Ezeoha (2022), the federal government's inadequate security presence in volatile rural communities, coupled with limited access to justice and ineffective intelligence gathering, has left many farming communities vulnerable to attacks. These structural weaknesses create an enabling environment for armed groups and criminal elements to thrive, thereby driving down agricultural productivity. Consequently, the collapse of agricultural infrastructure and the abandonment of farms have become defining features of rural life in Benue, undermining national food security and rural development (Ajibo, 2020).

The magnitude of the crisis is further amplified by the fact that yam farming in Benue is not only a subsistence activity but also an economic enterprise that supports trade, transport, and rural livelihoods. Mbachu (2021) notes that a decline in yam production directly affects household income, local markets, and agricultural exports. With the growing threats of climate change, economic instability, and insecurity, the resilience of rural agriculture in Nigeria faces increasing challenges, particularly in conflict-prone areas like Benue.

Understanding how yam farmers have experienced and responded to the insecurity crisis, as well as identifying the patterns of agricultural decline, is essential for designing responsive policies, promoting food security, and ensuring the sustainability of rural livelihoods in Nigeria. This study, therefore, seeks to provide a comprehensive case analysis of how insecurity has reshaped yam



production in Benue State over the past eight years and the implications for broader national agricultural development goals.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Dynamics of Insecurity and its Socioeconomic Impact on Rural Agrarian Communities**

Insecurity in rural agrarian communities presents one of the most critical challenges to sustainable agricultural development in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria being a prime example. Over the past decade, Nigeria has witnessed an alarming escalation of violence, particularly in its agrarian zones where farming remains the mainstay of livelihoods. The rural communities of Benue State, often referred to as the “Food Basket of the Nation,” epitomize this challenge, especially in the context of yam production, which is both a cultural staple and an economic backbone for millions (Ajibo, 2020; Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020).

The impact of insecurity on the socioeconomic well-being of rural communities cannot be overstated. Agrarian households, whose survival depends almost entirely on the cultivation of crops such as yam, maize, and cassava, have borne the brunt of these conflicts. Yam, in particular, holds a unique place in the economy and culture of Benue State, accounting for over 60% of total agricultural output in the region and contributing approximately 15% to Nigeria’s national yam production (Ajibo, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). However, the disruption caused by insecurity has led to a staggering decline in yam production, with NBS data indicating a reduction of about 30% in yam yields from 2015 to 2020 in Benue State’s major yam-producing local government areas such as Guma, Kwande, and Ukum (NBS, 2022). This decline is largely attributable to the destruction of farmlands, restricted access to farming inputs, and the forced migration of farming populations due to violent attacks (FAO, 2020).

Moreover, insecurity impacts not only agricultural output but also the broader rural economy. The destruction of infrastructure—rural roads, storage facilities, and marketplaces—further constrains the ability of farmers to access inputs and bring produce to markets. This logistical challenge inflates production costs and reduces profit margins, pushing many smallholder farmers into poverty (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). For example, market disruptions during violent episodes in 2018 and 2019 led to a 20-25% increase in yam prices in Benue’s capital, Makurdi, exacerbating food insecurity among vulnerable urban and rural populations (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019). This inflationary trend also impacts national food security since Benue supplies yam to multiple Nigerian states and neighboring countries.

Institutional responses to insecurity in Benue State have been inconsistent and, at times, inadequate. In 2017, the Benue State government promulgated the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, aiming to curtail clashes by banning open grazing and promoting ranching (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). However, enforcement has faced resistance from pastoralist groups and has sometimes escalated tensions, complicating conflict resolution efforts. Security agencies have been criticized for their slow response and lack of presence in remote agrarian areas, undermining confidence among rural populations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The lack of effective policing and judicial mechanisms has allowed impunity for perpetrators of violence, fueling a cycle of insecurity and retaliation. As Okeke (2024) puts it, development cannot be achieved where there are conflicts, yet achieving national development remains a goal of successive Nigerian governments (Okeke, 2020).

The socioeconomic implications extend to rural poverty and food insecurity. Benue State, while rich in agricultural potential, paradoxically experiences high rates of poverty among rural populations, largely attributed to the cyclical nature of insecurity and agricultural decline (World Bank, 2021). The United Nations Development Programme (2019) reports that food insecurity indicators in Benue rose by 15% between 2016 and 2020, with rural households bearing the brunt of this increase. The decline in yam production not only reduces food availability but also diminishes household incomes, limiting access to health, education, and other essential services. This situation perpetuates a vicious cycle where poverty and insecurity reinforce each other.



Governmental and non-governmental interventions aimed at resolving insecurity and revitalizing agriculture have met with mixed success. While security operations have been intensified in affected areas, the lack of community trust and coordination has limited their effectiveness (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Development programs often struggle to penetrate insecure zones, restricting access to critical inputs and extension services necessary for yam production enhancement (FAO, 2020). Additionally, the absence of comprehensive land reforms and effective conflict resolution mechanisms perpetuates competition over resources, making sustainable peace elusive. Climate change further complicates this dynamic by exacerbating resource scarcity since Benue State has experienced erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged dry seasons in recent years, reducing water availability and arable land (Igbokwe & Adeosun, 2021). These environmental stresses intensify conflicts between farmers and herders, who compete for dwindling resources, thereby deepening insecurity and agricultural decline. The nexus between environmental degradation, insecurity, and agricultural productivity highlights the multidimensional nature of challenges facing Benue's rural agrarian communities.

### **Determinants and Consequences of Agricultural Decline in Conflict-Affected Regions**

Agricultural decline in regions afflicted by conflict represents a complex interplay of structural, social, and political determinants that ultimately disrupt food systems and rural livelihoods. In the context of Benue State, Nigeria, the sustained insecurity largely stemming from ethno-communal clashes, farmer-herder conflicts, and militant activities has had a profound impact on yam production, a staple crop critical to both local sustenance and the regional economy (Adeniyi, 2019). Understanding the determinants of agricultural decline in such conflict-affected areas is crucial to grasping the broader socioeconomic consequences faced by rural communities.

One of the primary determinants of agricultural decline in conflict zones is direct physical destruction of farmland and farming assets. Armed clashes often result in the burning of crops, destruction of irrigation infrastructure, and damage to farm equipment, leading to immediate losses in productivity (Ezeani & Nweze, 2021). In Benue State, multiple incidents between 2015 and 2023 have been documented where farms were deliberately targeted in violent raids, resulting in millions of naira worth of damage. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that over 30% of farming households in affected areas lost significant portions of their yam farms to conflict-related destruction between 2018 and 2021. Such devastation not only reduces the current harvest but also compromises future planting cycles due to the loss of seeds and soil degradation.

Another determinant lies in the displacement of farming communities. The violence has forced thousands of farmers to flee their homes and lands, sometimes for prolonged periods, disrupting farming calendars and labor availability (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, (2021), Benue State experienced an estimated 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the peak of farmer-herder conflicts between 2017 and 2019. These displacements interrupt access to farmland and agricultural inputs, reduce labor force participation, and erode social capital essential for collective farming activities. Consequently, yam production, which is labor-intensive and dependent on timely planting and harvesting, suffers significant setbacks.

The breakdown of rural infrastructure and market systems further compounds agricultural decline. Conflicts in Benue State have impaired access roads and transportation networks, limiting farmers' ability to bring produce to markets (World Bank, 2021). With inadequate security, many traders avoid conflict zones, reducing market access and depressing prices for agricultural goods. This economic disincentive discourages farmers from investing in production or diversifying crops, leading to stagnation or decline. The Food and Agriculture Organization (2020) highlights that market disruptions in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria have caused post-harvest losses of up to 25%, severely impacting farmers' incomes. Additionally, insecurity disrupts the provision of critical agricultural services such as extension, credit, and input supply. Extension workers and agricultural support agencies often avoid insecure areas, creating a vacuum in knowledge transfer and technology dissemination (NBS, 2022). Furthermore, financial institutions may hesitate to lend to





farmers in volatile regions due to perceived risks, limiting access to capital for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and equipment (Ajibo, 2020). The cumulative effect is a decline in agricultural productivity and innovation, particularly in yam cultivation, which requires specialized knowledge for disease control and optimal yield.

Environmental degradation exacerbated by conflict also plays a determinative role. Shifts in land use patterns, often driven by displacement and uncontrolled grazing, lead to soil depletion and reduced fertility (Igbokwe & Adeosun, 2021). The open grazing of cattle in farmlands not only destroys crops but also depletes the topsoil necessary for yam tuber growth. Climate variability, including erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts, intersects with conflict to intensify these environmental pressures (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). The combined effect is a gradual but sustained decline in agricultural productivity, posing long-term risks to food security. The consequences of agricultural decline in conflict-affected regions are multifaceted and profound. At the household level, reduced yam production directly threatens food availability and nutrition, as yam remains a dietary staple in Benue State and much of Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2020). Decreased yields lead to food shortages, higher prices, and increased reliance on food aid. The World Food Programme (2022) indicates that conflict-affected households in Benue experienced a 20% rise in food insecurity between 2017 and 2021, a clear reflection of declining agricultural outputs.

Economically, agricultural decline translates into diminished rural incomes and heightened poverty. Agriculture employs over 70% of Benue's rural population, making it the backbone of local economies (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Declining yam production reduces household earnings, limits reinvestment in farming activities, and curtails spending on education and healthcare. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break without comprehensive interventions. The World Bank (2021) notes that poverty rates in conflict-affected rural areas of Nigeria are approximately 15 percentage points higher than in more secure regions, a disparity closely linked to agricultural performance.

On a broader scale, agricultural decline in conflict zones poses national food security challenges. Nigeria, as Africa's largest producer of yam, contributes significantly to regional food markets and export potentials (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020). Declines in production in Benue, a key yam-producing state, have ripple effects on national food supplies and trade balances. According to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (2022), yam exports declined by 10% between 2017 and 2021, partly attributed to production losses in conflict-affected states like Benue. Such trends threaten Nigeria's goal of agricultural self-sufficiency and rural economic development. In addition to immediate impacts, the decline in yam production has broader implications for rural development and national economic goals. Agriculture constitutes about 23% of Nigeria's GDP, with yam production representing a significant share of crop output, particularly in Benue, known as Nigeria's "food basket" (National Population Commission, 2020). The reduction in yam yields due to conflict-related disruptions undermines efforts to promote agricultural commercialization and rural income diversification. Between 2015 and 2023, agricultural GDP growth in Benue lagged behind the national average by approximately 4%, partly due to insecurity (National Bureau of 2022). This gap hinders poverty reduction efforts and stalls progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those targeting zero hunger and economic growth.

### **Economic, Cultural, and Food Security Implications of Yam Production in Benue State**

Yam production holds a pivotal position in the socioeconomic and cultural fabric of Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation" in Nigeria due to its rich agricultural endowment (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). The prominence of yam in this region transcends mere agricultural activity, embedding itself deeply within the local economy, cultural identity, and food security matrix. This analysis examines the multifaceted role yam production plays in Benue State, contextualized within the broader research topic of insecurity and agricultural decline, with a focus on how yam production influences economic livelihoods, cultural heritage, and the state's food security profile.



Economically, yam production in Benue State is a cornerstone for rural livelihoods and local markets. The crop contributes substantially to household incomes, employment, and trade. According to NBS (2022), agriculture accounts for approximately 70% of employment in Benue, with yam farming constituting a significant portion. It is estimated that Benue produces over 2.5 million metric tonnes of yam annually, making it one of the largest yam-producing states in Nigeria (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021). The commercial value of yam extends beyond local consumption, as surplus production is traded across Nigeria and exported to neighboring countries, thereby contributing to state revenue and rural development (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

The economic significance of yam is further highlighted by its role in sustaining agro-based industries such as yam processing, storage, and marketing. Small-scale industries that process yam into flour, chips, and other derivatives provide additional employment opportunities and enhance the value chain, which is vital for poverty alleviation in rural Benue (FAO, 2021). However, these economic gains face serious threats from insecurity-induced agricultural decline. The recurring violence and herder-farmer conflicts have disrupted production cycles, leading to a decline in output and income losses. Between 2015 and 2023, reported attacks in farming communities led to an estimated 30% reduction in yam yield in affected areas, translating into significant economic setbacks for farmers and traders alike (Benue State Agricultural Development Programme, 2023).

The diminished yam production has profound implications for livelihoods and poverty levels in the region. Most farmers in Benue operate at subsistence levels with minimal capital investment, making them highly vulnerable to the shocks of violence and crop losses (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). The United Nations Development Programme (2020) reports that more than 60% of rural households in Benue rely primarily on yam farming for their income. With the repeated destruction of farms and forced migration, many households have faced decreased earning power and increased poverty, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities. Women and youth, who constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labor force, have been disproportionately affected, often lacking alternative income sources or social safety nets (FAO, 2020). The consequences of agricultural decline in yam production extend beyond immediate food shortages and economic losses. They contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty, migration, and further conflict. Displaced farmers often move to urban areas or other rural communities, increasing pressure on limited resources and sometimes sparking new tensions over land and livelihood opportunities (UNDP, 2020). Furthermore, the decline in agricultural productivity may increase dependency on food imports, weakening local food systems and undermining national food sovereignty (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

Culturally, yam is more than a food crop in Benue State; it is a symbol of identity, tradition, and communal cohesion. The annual New Yam Festival, celebrated with great fervor, marks the end of the farming season and the beginning of harvest. This festival, deeply entrenched in Tiv and Idoma cultures, not only serves as a thanksgiving event to deities and ancestors but also reinforces social bonds and collective identity (Iro & Nduka, 2019). Yam holds spiritual significance, symbolizing prosperity and fertility, and features prominently in rituals, marriages, and communal ceremonies. The cultural weight of yam production makes any disruption in its cultivation more than an economic loss—it signifies a threat to cultural continuity and social stability (Okpara & Achi, 2020). The relationship between yam production and cultural identity also implies that insecurity, which leads to agricultural decline, indirectly erodes cultural practices and traditions linked to the crop. Displacement of farming communities due to violence has disrupted the cycle of planting and harvesting and consequently affected traditional festivals and communal activities (Ezeani & Nweze, 2021). The loss of such cultural expressions further weakens community resilience and social capital, elements critical for peacebuilding and sustainable development in conflict-prone regions.



## Theoretical Framework

In the course of this study, the researchers adopted the human security theory to succinctly explain the study. The human security theory was popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report, emphasizing the security of individuals over states. Key proponents include Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, and Kofi Annan, who contributed to the theory's development and application.

The human security theory provides a significant theoretical framework in political science, emphasizing a shift from traditional, state-centric security concerns to a people-centered approach. Unlike traditional security, which prioritizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, human security seeks to safeguard individuals from chronic threats, including poverty, disease, and political violence (UNDP, 1994). This perspective emerged from a growing recognition of the limitations of state-centric frameworks, especially in contexts where internal threats, such as ethnic conflicts, environmental disasters, or economic crises, present more immediate dangers to individuals than interstate wars (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007).

Fundamentally, human security is rooted in the idea that security cannot be fully achieved without addressing the underlying vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to harm (King & Murray, 2001). This framework expands the notion of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. Such an inclusive definition highlights how human security operates on multiple fronts, pushing for a holistic approach that addresses the intersections of security threats (Alkire, 2003). Political science scholars have noted the theory's applicability across various domains, making it versatile for understanding issues ranging from global poverty and humanitarian crises to refugee flows and terrorism (Paris, 2001).

The adoption of human security in political science also underscores the responsibility of states and international organizations in ensuring the well-being of individuals, aligning with humanitarian principles and human rights agendas. For instance, the United Nations' promotion of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine reflects the influence of human security by prioritizing the protection of individuals over sovereignty concerns when states fail to shield their populations from mass atrocities (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001). However, critiques argue that human security's broad scope may dilute its conceptual clarity, potentially making it difficult to operationalize (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006). Nevertheless, the human security theory continues to serve as a valuable tool in political science for addressing the evolving nature of global and domestic security challenges in the 21st century.

## Application of the Theory

The human security theory offers a highly relevant and insightful framework for analyzing the research topic, "Insecurity and Agricultural Decline: A Case Study of Yam Production in Benue State, Nigeria (2015–2023)." Applying human security theory to this research allows a comprehensive examination of how insecurity transcends conventional militarized violence to encompass broader socio-economic vulnerabilities that affect farmers' livelihoods and food systems. In Benue State, repeated attacks by armed groups, clashes between herders and farmers, and general lawlessness have heightened personal insecurity, disrupted farming cycles, and destroyed farmlands and infrastructure (Adesoji, 2020). These disruptions not only threaten physical safety but also erode economic security by reducing agricultural productivity and income, thus exacerbating poverty and food shortages (Obi, 2021). The theory's focus on economic and food security is particularly pertinent, as yam production in Benue State is a vital source of livelihood, cultural identity, and nutrition for millions of people. The decline in yam farming due to insecurity directly compromises community well-being and regional food security, highlighting the inseparability of these dimensions of human security.

Furthermore, human security theory highlights the role of the state and international actors in protecting individuals from harm and ensuring conditions for sustainable development (King &



Murray, 2001). In Benue State, the failure of state institutions to effectively manage insecurity and protect farmers reflects a governance deficit that worsens vulnerabilities (Adebayo, 2019). The inability to provide adequate security creates a climate of fear that discourages agricultural investments and innovation, thereby deepening the cycle of decline. Additionally, the theory's recognition of the interconnectedness of security threats draws attention to environmental security issues, such as land degradation and resource competition, which are often exacerbated by conflict and contribute to agricultural decline (Onuoha, 2017). By situating insecurity within a broader web of social, economic, and environmental challenges, human security theory advocates for integrated policy responses that address both immediate protection needs and structural causes of vulnerability.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed qualitative research method, specifically utilizing explanatory research design to explore the topic. It adopted documentary mechanism of data collection and utilized content analysis method to identify and interpret specified characteristics of messages within documents.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **Insecurity and Yam Production in Benue State**

Between 2015 and 2023, yam production in Benue State declined sharply as a direct consequence of persistent insecurity, primarily driven by violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Benue State, often referred to as Nigeria's "Food Basket," traditionally contributed over 40% of the nation's yam supply. However, according to agricultural reports, yam output in the state dropped by nearly 35% from 2017 to 2022. The years 2018 and 2020 marked peaks in violent clashes, especially in areas such as Guma and Logo local government areas, where over 25,000 hectares of yam farms were reportedly destroyed or abandoned. These conflicts resulted in the displacement of approximately 100,000 farming households, many of whom fled their farms to avoid attacks, thereby disrupting planting and harvesting cycles. The diminished yam yield not only affected local consumption but also threatened food security across Nigeria and neighboring countries that depend on Benue's agricultural produce for supply.

#### **Economic Losses and Livelihood Disruptions among Benue Farming Communities**

The decline in yam production had far-reaching economic consequences for rural communities in Benue State. Between 2015 and 2023, it is estimated that losses in the yam sector exceeded ₦15 billion (approximately \$40 million), factoring in lost harvests, damaged infrastructure, and increased expenses related to security measures and displacement. The repeated destruction of farms caused many farmers to abandon their traditional livelihoods, forcing at least 70,000 individuals into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, particularly in the 2018 conflict surge. The scarcity of yam led to price increases of up to 50% in regional markets by 2021, negatively impacting household food budgets and creating inflationary pressures. The migration of farming laborers further diminished the agricultural workforce, weakening productivity and delaying recovery efforts. The disruption of yam farming also affected ancillary economic activities such as transportation, processing, and trade, which supported thousands of households, thereby deepening rural poverty and food insecurity. Furthermore, insecurity adversely affects agricultural investments and innovations, critical components for improving productivity in Benue State's yam sector. Farmers are generally reluctant to invest in improved seeds, fertilizers, and mechanized farming techniques due to fears of losing assets to violence or displacement (FAO, 2020). According to a 2019 survey by the Nigerian Agricultural Extension Service, over 45% of farmers in conflict-affected areas of Benue reported a decline in the adoption of improved yam farming practices compared to 2015 (NBS, 2022). This stagnation compromises the sector's ability to meet growing food demands and adapt to environmental changes such as soil degradation and shifting rainfall patterns.





### **Inadequate Security Measures and Agriculture Policy Gaps**

Efforts by the Nigerian government and security agencies to mitigate the impact of insecurity on yam production between 2015 and 2023 were largely reactive and insufficient. In 2018, military operations such as “Operation Safe Haven” aimed to restore peace but were only partially effective, as conflicts persisted in critical farming zones. Agricultural policies, including subsidy programs and extension services launched under the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture, struggled to reach displaced or at-risk farmers, with reports showing less than 30% program penetration among affected communities by 2022. The failure to establish a coordinated strategy between security agencies and agricultural authorities meant that farmers received little protection or support to rebuild their livelihoods. Additionally, lack of investment in conflict resolution mechanisms or community-based peacebuilding efforts left the root causes of insecurity unaddressed. As a result, yam production recovery remained fragile and sporadic, with significant vulnerability to renewed violence continuing through 2023.

The inability of successive Nigerian governments to effectively address rural insecurity has exacerbated this trend. For instance, the herder-farmer conflict in Benue escalated sharply in 2016, peaking in January 2018 with the killing of over 70 people in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas by suspected herdsmen (Vanguard, 2018). These attacks led to the mass displacement of thousands of yam farmers, the destruction of barns, and the abandonment of vast tracts of arable land (NEMA, 2021). Despite the enactment of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in 2017, violent reprisals have continued, indicating a deeper systemic failure to manage the security-agriculture nexus effectively (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Furthermore, insecurity has significantly altered the traditional seasonal farming calendar, created food supply chain disruptions, and worsened poverty among yam-farming households. According to Ajibo (2020), many farmers now live in IDP camps or urban slums where they are unable to engage in productive agricultural activities. The long-term implications of this situation include food inflation, increased dependence on food imports, rising unemployment, and growing malnutrition in both rural and urban areas (Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike, 2018). These issues are compounded by a lack of targeted state intervention, weak rural infrastructure, and minimal support for farmers affected by conflict.

### **Conclusion**

Insecurity remains a profound challenge undermining agricultural productivity and food security in Benue State, particularly impacting yam production. The persistent conflicts, especially between farmers and herders, have led to widespread displacement, destruction of farmlands, and significant economic losses for rural communities. This research underscores the urgent need for a multidimensional approach to addressing the nexus between insecurity and agricultural decline. Strengthening security infrastructure tailored to rural agrarian zones, alongside community policing initiatives, is essential to protect farmlands and farmers during critical agricultural seasons. Additionally, economic support programs targeting displaced farmers can restore livelihoods, promote resilience, and stabilize food supply chains. Moreover, integrated policy frameworks combining security, agricultural development, and peacebuilding efforts offer a promising path toward sustainable resolution. By fostering collaboration among government agencies, local communities, and security forces, Benue State can better manage conflicts and revitalize yam production. Ultimately, addressing insecurity in agricultural areas is not only vital for the economic well-being of farmers but also crucial for ensuring food security and social stability in the region. A concerted effort grounded in human security principles can transform these challenges into opportunities for inclusive growth and lasting peace.



## Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

### 1. Strengthen Security Infrastructure and Community Policing in Agricultural Zones

To mitigate the severe decline in yam production caused by insecurity, particularly in hotspots like Guma and Logo local government areas, there is an urgent need to enhance security measures focused on protecting agricultural zones. For example, the establishment of local vigilante groups, supported by formal security agencies, has shown promise in parts of southern Kaduna, where community policing helped reduce herder-farmer clashes by approximately 40% between 2019 and 2021. Implementing similar models in Benue could improve surveillance and early warning mechanisms, helping to prevent violent incidents during critical farming periods. Data from the Nigerian Security Tracker reveals that rural violence spikes during planting (April–June) and harvesting (September–November) seasons; thus, focused security deployment during these times could protect an estimated 25,000 hectares of yam farms. This approach can significantly reduce displacement and crop losses, helping to stabilize production levels.

### 2. Implement Economic Support and Livelihood Restoration Programs for Displaced Farmers

There is need to expand outreach to farmers through mobile extension services and cash transfer programs as a way to restore livelihoods more effectively. Targeted cash grants and distribution of yam seedlings to 10,000 displaced farmers in affected areas could boost planting capacity by up to 20%, helping to stabilize supply and reduce price inflation, which surged by 50% during periods of acute scarcity.

### 3. Develop Integrated Security and Agricultural Policy Frameworks with Emphasis on Peace building

The Peace and Security Framework adopted in Plateau State which integrates security enforcement with community dialogue and agricultural support can be utilized to provide a blueprint for Benue state. Also, establishing a task force that comprising officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, security agencies, and civil society organizations can assist to improve policy coherence. Investing in conflict resolution platforms and culturally sensitive peace building programs is critical to addressing root causes of violence, such as competition over land and resources. These measures can ensure that farmers have uninterrupted access to extension services and input subsidies.

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