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**INSECURITY AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN ADO LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
BENUE STATE, 2015-2025.**

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Abstract

Insecurity in Ado Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State has significantly disrupted agricultural activities across key agrarian communities, leading to a decline in food production. This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the impact of insecurity on agricultural production in five selected wards, namely Agila, Igumale, Ulayi, Ijigban, and Utonkon. Data were collected through 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving 25 participants, supplemented by secondary sources drawn from government reports, textbooks, and academic publications. The data were analysed thematically using the Failed State Theory as a guiding analytical framework. Findings reveal that insecurity in Ado LGA is multidimensional and characterized by herder invasions of farming communities, theft, communal conflicts, and forced displacement. The study further shows that these forms of insecurity have significantly reduced agricultural productivity due to limited access to labour, transport services, storage facilities, and essential farm inputs. Consequently, food production and rural livelihoods in Ado LGA have been adversely affected. The study concludes that sustainable, inclusive, and well-coordinated policy interventions, particularly inter-agency collaboration, strengthened security networks, agricultural support programmes, and community engagement, are essential for addressing insecurity-induced food production challenges. It recommends that government authorities enhance farm security through coordinated patrols involving formal security agencies and community vigilante groups. Furthermore, consistent interventions such as input subsidies and agricultural extension services should be implemented in collaboration with local leaders and farmer associations to strengthen resilience and safeguard food production in Ado LGA.

Keywords: Insecurity, Agricultural Productivity, Crop Production, Farm Security, Benue State

Introduction

Agriculture is vital for food production and rural livelihoods, and socio-economic development, yet it faces growing challenges from environmental, economic, and socio-political disruptions. Insecurity through armed conflicts, communal violence, banditry, theft and political instability threatens agricultural productivity by destroying farmlands, displacing farmers, and disrupting food supply chains. Global cases like Yemen, South Sudan, and Syria show how instability sharply reduces crop yields and triggers food crises (FAO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). In Africa, where smallholder farming predominates, insecurity severely impacts food production, forcing farmers to abandon lands and limiting market access. In regions such as the Sahel, conflicts over land and water, worsened by climate change, have led to shortages and malnutrition (UNDP, 2022). Evidence from Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya highlights how insecurity undermines rural livelihoods and national food systems, exposing the fragility of African agrarian economies (Okpo, 2022; Agida, 2024; Abiye, 2024).

Nigeria's Middle Belt exemplifies the intersection of insecurity and food production. The region's agrarian economy, reliant on both crop farming and pastoralism, has been destabilized by escalating conflict. Evidence suggests that rising insecurity in this region corresponds with reduced crop production, abandonment of farmlands, and disrupted harvesting cycles. Abiye (2024) reports that a one percent increase in insecurity correlates with a 0.2 percent decline in crop production and a 0.3 percent reduction in livestock output, indicating the direct impact of violence on food systems.

These findings reveal that insecurity imposes not only episodic shocks but also systemic vulnerabilities, weakening the structural capacity for sustained food production.

According to Tsuwa (2015), in all the 23 Local Government Areas of Benue State, 80% of the rural dwellers are farmers, 15% are fishermen and the remaining 5% are urban or semi-urban civil servants and those who carry out small-scale business. This accounts for why there are usually contestations over land and water resources in the state. These contestations in some cases lead to communal conflicts between communities and recently with the nomads that have changed style, strategies and modus operandi of interacting with communities in the state. Undoubtedly, communal clashes and farmer-herder conflicts as forms of insecurity have had devastating impacts on food production, especially in the Ado Local Government Area of Benue State.

Benue State, located in Nigeria's North-Central zone and known as the "Food Basket of the Nation," plays a vital role in national food security through the cultivation of yams, cassava, maize, rice, vegetables, and livestock. Agriculture in the state provides food, employment, and socio-economic stability. Despite its agricultural potential, Benue has faced increasing insecurity since 2015, driven by recurrent farmer-herder conflicts, competition over land and water resources, and broader socio-political tensions (Abiye, 2024; Agida, 2024). These conflicts have resulted in crop destruction, livestock losses, market closures, and the displacement of farming households, directly threatening livelihoods and food security.

Within the state, Ado Local Government Area (LGA), with its headquarters at Igumale, is a largely agrarian community that produces staple crops such as yams, cassava, maize, and rice, alongside vegetables, palm oil, and small-scale fishery activities. The local economy is integrated into broader food supply networks through small-scale industries and local processing of farm produce (Nwachukwu, 2023). Nevertheless, insecurity has significantly disrupted agricultural activities in the area. Reports indicate that over the past five years, approximately 12,500 hectares of farmland have been abandoned due to communal clashes and banditry. Specific incidents include the destruction of maize and yam farms in 2022, resulting in an estimated loss of 3,800 metric tons, and

the damage of 2,500 hectares of cassava in 2023, leading to a loss of 4,000 metric tons. Livestock theft has also been recurrent, with over 1,200 cattle and 3,500 goats lost between 2021 and 2024 (Nwachukwu, 2023).

These disruptions have led to the temporary displacement of more than 5,000 individuals during peak farming seasons, reducing household incomes, limiting market access, increasing food prices, and exacerbating food insecurity. Social consequences include interruptions in schooling, reduced dietary diversity, and heightened poverty. Despite its impact, no critical study has been carried out to assess the impact of the disruption on the totality of food production in Ado LGA. This paper, therefore, examines the nature of insecurity in Ado LGA and the impact of it on crop production and its extended influence on crop production and post-harvest losses, and livelihood in the area.

Conceptualizing Insecurity

Security is widely understood as the condition in which individuals, communities, and the state are protected from threats that could undermine life, property, and general well-being. It represents a fundamental requirement for social order and development because no meaningful economic, political, or social activity can take place in an environment of constant fear or violence. In conflict-affected and developing regions, insecurity has been widely identified as a major constraint on national development, particularly in rural agrarian communities where livelihoods depend heavily on stable environmental and social conditions (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Blattman & Miguel, 2010).

Expanding on this foundation, security is increasingly conceptualized as a shared responsibility involving the state, institutions, and citizens rather than being solely a government function (Luckham, 2003; Reno, 2002). This reflects the growing recognition of hybrid governance and community-based security arrangements in fragile contexts. Similarly, human security scholarship emphasizes that security is closely linked to human dignity, as it enables individuals to live without fear and to engage productively in economic and social activities (Owen, 2004; UNDP, 1994). In the same vein, empirical studies show that poverty, unemployment, and inequality significantly heighten vulnerability to violence and instability (Justino, 2009; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Furthermore, insecurity is strongly associated with weak institutions and governance failures that erode state capacity and public trust (Rotberg, 2004; World Bank, 2011).

On the other hand, insecurity refers to a condition of exposure to danger, instability, or uncertainty in which individuals and societies are unable to guarantee the safety of life, property, and well-being. In Nigeria, insecurity has been described as multidimensional, including armed banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping, terrorism, and communal violence (Tsuwa & Nomsoor, 2025; Raleigh et al., 2010). Tsuwa (2014) further explains that Nigeria's insecurity is a complex and escalating crisis driven by structural, socioeconomic, and political factors, and has evolved from localized conflict into more organized and widespread violence. In such situations, institutions responsible for maintaining law and order are often overstretched, increasing vulnerability to displacement and livelihood disruption (Blattman & Miguel, 2010). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017) similarly notes that insecurity directly affects agricultural production, rural mobility, and food systems. In addition, insecurity is often unevenly distributed within societies, with rural communities disproportionately affected due to weak state presence and structural inequality (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013). This demonstrates that insecurity is not merely an absence of protection but also a reflection of deeper socio-economic and political imbalances.

Rom (2023) emphasizes that insecurity is closely tied to governance deficits, where weak accountability and institutional failure create environments in which threats persist. Contemporary

scholarship also shows that insecurity is increasingly complex and transnational in nature, shaped by global pressures such as climate change, migration, and systemic instability (Buhaug, 2015; Barnett, 2003). Tsuwa and Nomsoor (2025) further highlight that insecurity in Nigeria is driven by corruption, poverty, youth unemployment, and the proliferation of small arms. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that insecurity is not a single-dimensional phenomenon but a multidimensional condition arising from interconnected political, economic, and structural failures.

Conceptualizing Food Production

Food production refers to the organized process of growing, harvesting, processing, and distributing food materials for human consumption. It encompasses all activities involved in converting natural resources such as land, water, and biological inputs into edible agricultural and livestock products that sustain human life. According to FAO (2017), food production includes crop cultivation, animal husbandry, fisheries, and agro-processing activities that collectively ensure the availability of adequate, safe, and nutritious food for the population. This definition highlights food production not merely as farming, but as a broader system that integrates primary production with processing and distribution networks.

In a more economic sense, food production is understood as a key component of the agricultural sector that drives rural livelihoods, employment, and national development. World Bank (2018) describes food production as the backbone of agrarian economies, particularly in developing countries where a large proportion of the population depends directly on agriculture for survival and income. It involves the use of both traditional and modern technologies to increase output, improve efficiency, and ensure food security. This perspective emphasizes the role of productivity, innovation, and investment in strengthening food systems.

From a developmental viewpoint, food production is closely linked to food security, which refers to the availability, accessibility, and affordability of sufficient food for all individuals at all times. IFAD (2019), argues that effective food production systems are essential for reducing hunger and poverty, especially in rural communities where agricultural activities dominate economic life. In this context, food production is not only about quantity but also about quality, sustainability, and resilience against environmental and economic shocks. Furthermore, studies such as Reardon et al(2019); Pingali (2012) show that food production systems have increasingly evolved beyond subsistence agriculture to incorporate mechanized farming, agro-industrial processing, and integration into global value chains and supply networks (Reardon et al., 2019; Pingali, 2012). This transformation has made food production a complex system influenced by climate conditions, technological advancement, government policies, and market forces. Similarly, sustainable food production systems are widely recognized in the literature as requiring integrated soil conservation practices, environmental protection, and climate-resilient agricultural strategies to maintain long-term productivity (Pretty, 2008; Lal, 2015). In addition, Ojo (2023) explains that food production in developing countries is often constrained by factors such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to credit, poor storage facilities, and climate variability. Despite these challenges, it remains a critical sector for poverty reduction and economic diversification. FAO (2024) further emphasizes that improving food production systems is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to zero hunger and sustainable agriculture.

Theoretical Framework

The Failed State Theory is used as a theoretical framework for the study. The theory is most strongly associated with Robert I. Rotberg (2002), who is widely regarded as its leading proponent. Rotberg argues that states exist primarily to deliver “political goods,” especially security, and when they can no longer perform this core function, they move toward failure or collapse. According to him, a failed state is one where government authority has effectively broken down, violence becomes widespread, and institutions no longer function effectively.

The basic assumption of the failed state theory is that the primary function of the state is to provide security, maintain order, and ensure the welfare of its citizens; when these functions break down, the state is considered “failed” or “fragile.” It assumes a clear standard of effective governance based largely on Western institutional models, where strong bureaucracies, monopoly of force, and rule of law define state success. The theory further assumes that failure is measurable through indicators such as internal conflict, corruption, weak institutions, economic collapse, and loss of territorial control. It also presumes that state weakness is largely internal, arising from poor leadership, institutional decay, and governance failure, although some interpretations acknowledge external influences such as war, globalization, and foreign intervention

However, the theory has been widely critiqued for being overly simplistic and Western-centric. Scholars such as Call (2008) argue that the label “failed state” is often too broad and fails to capture the different degrees and forms of state weakness. Similarly, Clapham (2003), criticizes the theory for assuming a universal model of the state that does not adequately reflect African and postcolonial realities, where informal institutions often play significant governance roles. Another major critique is that the theory is sometimes used politically to justify external intervention in weaker states under the guise of humanitarian or security concerns. Additionally, Ginty (2010) argues that many so-called failed states still maintain localized order and governance systems, even when central authority is weak, meaning that “failure” is not absolute but uneven and context-dependent

Despite these critiques, the theory remains highly relevant for this study. It provides a framework to analyse how weak governance, poor security, and limited state capacity disrupt agricultural activities, reduce access to inputs, compromise market networks, and threaten livelihoods. It highlights the feedback loop between socio-economic deprivation and insecurity, showing how poverty and underdevelopment increase vulnerability, while insecurity undermines productivity, displaces households, and erodes traditional agricultural activities.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the impact of insecurity on food production in Ado Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. The study is confined to Ado LGA, with an estimated population of 266,200 people (National Population Commission, 2025), and focuses on five selected council wards: Agila, Igumale, Ulayi, Ijigban, and Utonkon. These wards were selected because they are key agrarian and market communities frequently affected by insecurity, including farmer-herder conflicts, land disputes, and rural violence.

The target population comprises farmers, local market traders, household heads, community leaders, transport operators, officials from the Local Government Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, and representatives of security agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force and the Civil Defence Corps. These categories were selected due to their direct involvement in or knowledge of agricultural production systems, food distribution networks, and local security dynamics.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only individuals with relevant experience, practical knowledge, and firsthand exposure to insecurity-related agricultural challenges were included in the study. The study engaged a total of 25 participants, comprising 15 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) drawn from key stakeholder groups and 10 participants involved in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were conducted across the five selected wards, with two FGDs per ward, ensuring broad representation across farming and community-based actors.

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained through KIIs and FGDs, generating rich qualitative insights in the form of narratives, perceptions, and lived

experiences on insecurity and food production. Secondary data were sourced from textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, government publications, statistical reports, and relevant online materials, which provided theoretical and contextual support for the study.

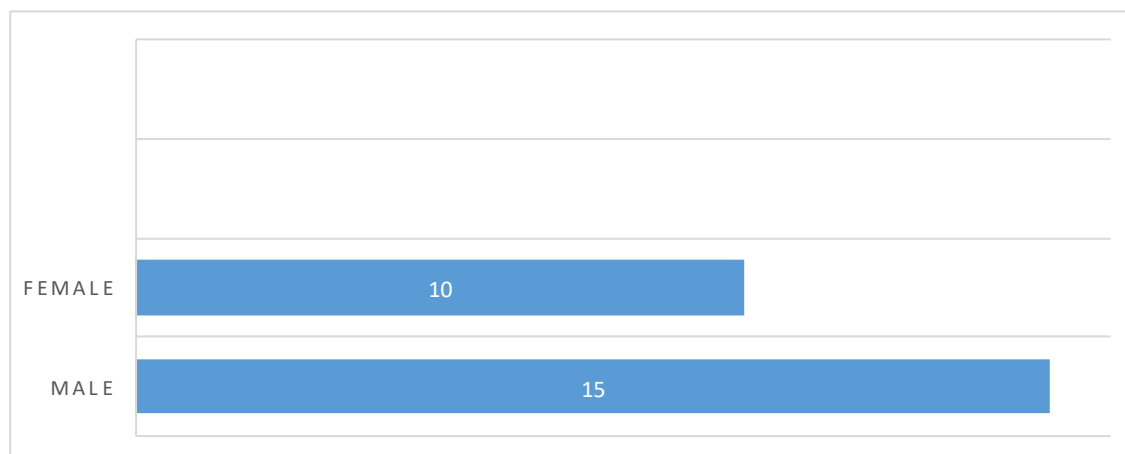
Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. All interviews and discussions were transcribed, coded, and systematically organised into themes such as the impact of insecurity on agricultural activities, labour availability, farmland utilization, post-harvest handling, market access, and government interventions.

To ensure trustworthiness and rigor, the study adopted several qualitative validity measures. Member checking was conducted by returning summaries of interpreted findings to selected participants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of responses. Peer debriefing was also employed, where preliminary findings were reviewed by academic colleagues to reduce researcher bias and enhance analytical depth. In addition, triangulation of data sources (KIIs, FGDs, and secondary materials) was used to strengthen credibility, while an audit trail was maintained through systematic documentation of data collection and analysis procedures to ensure transparency and dependability.

Socio-demographic Analysis of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study on the impact of insecurity on food production in Ado Local Government Area, Benue State. Understanding the respondents' characteristics, including sex, age, occupation, and educational background, provides context for interpreting their perceptions, experiences, and responses to insecurity-related challenges. The distribution of these attributes ensures that the study captures diverse perspectives from farmers, traders, household heads, and institutional actors, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

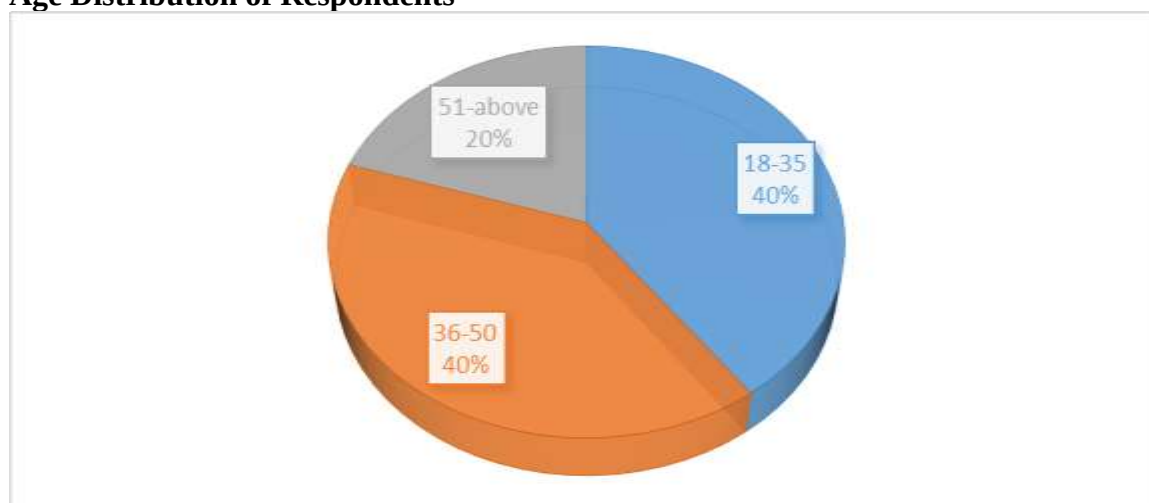
Sex Distribution of Respondents



Source: Field work, 2026

The chart shows that out of 25 respondents, 15 (60%) were male and 10 (40%) were female. This indicates a higher representation of males in the study, which reflects the male dominance in farming and institutional roles in Ado LGA, while women are more involved in trading, household management, and agricultural processing activities.

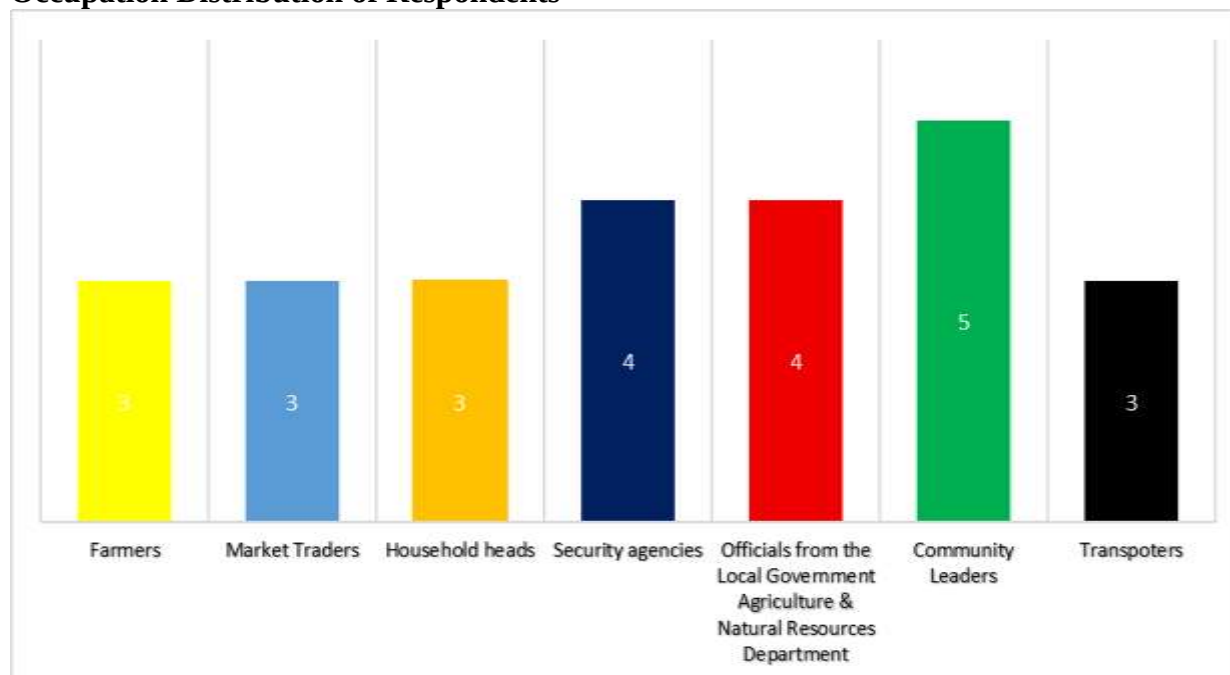
Age Distribution of Respondents



Source: Field work, 2026

The chart categorises respondents into three groups: 18-35 years (10 respondents, 40%), 36-50 years (10 respondents, 40%), and 51+ years (5 respondents, 20%). The largest proportion falls in the 36-50-year range, showing that most respondents are middle-aged, actively engaged in farming, market activities, and household responsibilities. The presence of younger (20-35) and older (51+) participants ensures representation of different generational perspectives on insecurity and food production.

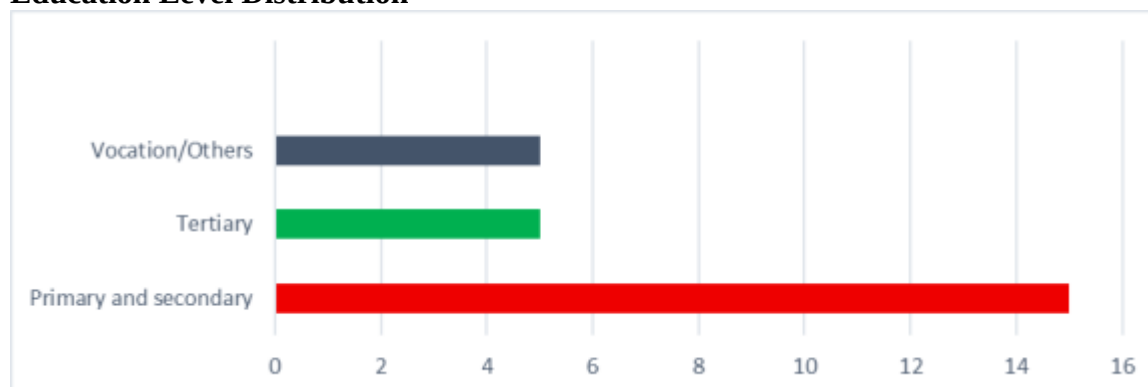
Occupation Distribution of Respondents



Source: Field work, 2026

Respondents were grouped into farmers (3, 12%), market traders (3, 12%), household heads (3, 12%), officials from the Agriculture & Natural Resources Department (4, 16%), and security agency representatives (4, 16%) Community Leaders (5, 20%) and Transporters of farm produce (3, 12%). The pie chart shows a balanced mix between agricultural producers, household managers, and institutional actors, ensuring that both practical and policy perspectives are included in the analysis.

Education Level Distribution



Source: Field work, 2026

The education pie chart indicates that respondents' highest levels of education were: primary/secondary (15, 60%), tertiary (5, 20%), and vocational/other (5, 20%). This distribution reflects that nearly half of the respondents have a tertiary education, particularly among institutional and security officials, while farmers and household heads have varying levels of formal education, providing a mix of technical, local, and practical knowledge relevant to the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Understanding the Nature of Insecurity in Ado Local Government Area, Benue State

This section explored the nature of insecurity in Ado Local Government Area (LGA), Benue State. This was achieved through qualitative data collected from key stakeholders within the study area using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Thus, a male respondent, a community head from Igumale, who was interviewed on 29th January, 2026, stated that the most common form of insecurity in the community is frequent clashes between farmers and herders, often arising when cattle destroy crops such as yams, cassava, and maize. These clashes sometimes become violent, creating fear among farmers who now avoid distant farms or abandon fertile lands. This has disrupted agricultural productivity and strained relationships between neighbouring communities.

A male respondent, a community head from Agila, who was interviewed on 29th January, 2026, stated that communal tensions over land ownership, grazing routes, and traditional boundaries also contribute significantly to insecurity. These disputes often escalate into violence, forcing farmers to cultivate smaller and safer plots near their homes. This has reduced access to farmland, weakened cooperation among communities, and disrupted both agricultural and economic activities.

A female respondent, a local market trader from Agila, who was interviewed on 29th January, 2026, stated that banditry and armed robbery are common along rural roads, where traders and farmers are frequently attacked and dispossessed of produce and money. This has discouraged movement to rural markets and reduced the flow of agricultural produce. Similarly, a male transporter from Igumale noted that insecurity has made transportation of farm produce risky, causing delays and spoilage, thereby disrupting the agricultural supply chain.

A male respondent, a farmer from Ulayi, who was interviewed on 29th January, 2026, stated that crop destruction and theft by unidentified individuals have become widespread, discouraging large-scale farming and forcing farmers to cultivate smaller plots. This has significantly reduced crop output and household income. A male respondent, a police officer, added that kidnapping and armed attacks are serious threats in remote areas, creating fear and limiting the movement of farmers and traders. A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, further noted that displacement of farming households due to violent attacks leaves farms unattended, resulting in poor yields and long-term food shortages.

A focus group discussion was conducted on 29th January, 2026, at the central community hall in Igumale, the administrative headquarters of Ado Local Government Area, involving farmers, traders, transporters, household heads, and security personnel drawn from Agila, Ulayi, Ijigban, Utokon, and Igumale. Participants reported that insecurity in the area is multi-dimensional, including farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, banditry, crop theft, and displacement. Farmers explained that fear of attacks has led to abandonment of farmland and reduced cultivation, while traders and transporters highlighted the risks associated with moving goods to markets. Household heads emphasized that insecurity has restricted movement and reduced access to food, while security personnel noted that remote areas remain highly vulnerable due to limited security presence.

Participants further revealed that insecurity has resulted in secondary effects such as reduced adoption of modern farming techniques, limited market access, and increased prices of staple foods. Agricultural activities such as palm oil and rice production have declined because workers avoid remote plantations, while shortages of crops like yams, maize, and cassava have been reported in local markets. Fishing activities have also been affected due to unsafe waterways, further reducing livelihood options.

Effect of Insecurity on Crop Production in Ado LGA

This section examined the effect of insecurity on crop production in Ado Local Government Area (LGA), Benue State. This was achieved through the collection of qualitative data from relevant stakeholders within the study area using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Thus, a male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that insecurity has significantly reduced the quantity of crops produced in the community. Many farmers now abandon their farms due to fear of attacks, leaving large portions of farmland uncultivated. This has disrupted farming cycles and reduced efficiency, while weeds and pests further damage unattended crops. As a result, households face declining income and local markets experience shortages of staple foods.

A female respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that farmers often delay planting due to fear of spending long hours on farms without protection. Crops such as cassava, tomatoes, and maize are affected by poor timing, leading to low yields and spoilage. Farmers are also reluctant to invest in improved inputs, choosing instead to cultivate smaller plots or less labour-intensive crops, which reduces overall output and disrupts food supply.

A male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that insecurity has led to theft of livestock and destruction of farm equipment, reducing productivity. Farmers are discouraged from visiting farms regularly, leaving crops unattended and farmlands underutilized. This has reduced output and discouraged the adoption of improved farming methods, creating a cycle of low investment and low production.

A female respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that insecurity has limited the use of modern farming techniques such as mechanization and irrigation. Farmers now avoid crops that require constant supervision and instead focus on low-risk crops, leading to lower yields, reduced income, and declining agricultural productivity.

A male respondent, a police officer, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that insecurity has disrupted farming schedules, especially during planting and harvesting periods. Many farmers abandon farms due to fear of attacks, resulting in reduced crop output and shortages of staples like maize, yams, and cassava. The psychological stress associated with insecurity also reduces farmers' motivation and efficiency.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that fear of attacks has forced farmers to reduce farm sizes and prioritize safety over productivity. Smaller cultivated areas result in lower output, while the risk of losing crops discourages investment in farm inputs. This has created a cycle of declining production and increased vulnerability among farming households.

A male respondent, a police officer, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that the displacement of farmers has further reduced crop production, as farms are left unattended for long periods. This has led to shortages of staple crops such as rice and maize, increased food prices, and reduced household income. Displacement also limits access to inputs and markets, worsening the situation.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, who was interviewed on 30th January, 2026, stated that insecurity disrupts access to essential farm inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. Farmers are forced to cultivate smaller plots and low-risk crops, leading to reduced productivity and food shortages. This has made agriculture a high-risk activity and weakened the economic stability of the community.

A focus group discussion was conducted on 30th January, 2026, at the central community hall in Igumale, involving farmers, traders, and household heads from Agila, Utonkon, Igumale, and Ijigban. Participants reported that insecurity has forced farmers to abandon large portions of farmland, particularly in remote areas, leading to reduced production and income. Delays in planting and harvesting have affected crops such as rice and tomatoes, while fear of attacks discourages the use of modern farming techniques and tools. Traders confirmed that reduced crop output has disrupted market supply, causing shortages and rising prices of staples such as yams, maize, and cassava. Household heads noted that food access has declined, with families purchasing smaller quantities or travelling to other areas to obtain food. Overall, participants emphasized that insecurity has significantly reduced crop production, disrupted farming activities, increased food prices, and undermined livelihoods in Ado Local Government Area.

Effect of Insecurity on Labour Availability and Post-Harvest Losses in Ado LGA, Benue State

This section examined the effect of insecurity on labour availability and post-harvest losses in Ado Local Government Area (LGA), Benue State. In this regard, insights were obtained from key stakeholders through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) within the study area. Thus, a male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that insecurity in the community has significantly limited the availability of labour for farming activities, as many farmhands are reluctant to work in remote areas such as Agila and Utonkon due to fear of attacks, theft, and banditry. This has made it difficult for farmers to secure adequate labour during critical farming periods such as planting, weeding, and harvesting. As a result, some farms, particularly yam and cassava fields, remain partially harvested, while family members are forced to take on multiple tasks, leading to reduced efficiency, delayed operations, and lower crop yields.

A female respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that farmers now face serious challenges in mobilising labour because seasonal workers are unwilling to travel through unsafe routes. In places like Utonkon, farmers reported shortages of hired labour during planting seasons, which resulted in delayed sowing and poor crop establishment. Many farmers now depend on family labour or local workers, which limits productivity and disrupts farming schedules, especially for labour-intensive crops such as tomatoes, maize, and yams.

A male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that insecurity has forced many experienced labourers to relocate to safer areas, leaving farms unattended and increasing the cost of hiring labour. Farmers now pay higher wages to attract workers, which reduces profit margins. This labour scarcity has made it difficult to maintain farms effectively, resulting in delayed planting, poor maintenance, and reduced agricultural output.

A female respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that due to labour shortages, many farmers now cultivate smaller portions of land that can be managed safely with limited manpower. Some farmlands in Utonkon and Igumale have been partially abandoned because farmers cannot

secure enough labour. This has also reduced the use of modern farming techniques, leading to lower productivity and diminished crop quality.

A male respondent, a police officer, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that the presence of armed groups and insecurity along farm routes has discouraged labourers from working in remote areas, leading to underutilised farmlands. This has delayed harvesting and resulted in crop losses, as some produce spoils in the field due to insufficient labour to complete essential tasks. Consequently, both agricultural productivity and household income have declined.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that labourers now demand higher wages due to the risks associated with farming in insecure areas, and many refuse to work beyond the safety of their communities. This has forced farmers to rely heavily on family labour, which is often insufficient for large-scale farming. As a result, production has declined, and the risk of crop losses has increased significantly.

A male respondent, a police officer, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that the displacement of farm labourers has further worsened the situation, as many have migrated to safer communities, leaving farmers with limited workforce options. This has affected crops such as rice and tomatoes that require timely attention, resulting in delayed planting and harvesting, reduced yields, and declining market supply.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, who was interviewed on 31st January, 2026, stated that labour shortages have forced farmers to adjust cropping patterns by focusing on less labour-intensive crops such as cassava instead of rice and vegetables. Combined with unsafe routes and abandoned farmlands, limited labour availability has become a major constraint on agricultural production, making farming increasingly risky and less profitable.

A focus group discussion involving farmers, traders, and household heads from Agila, Utonkon, Igumale, and Ijigban, conducted on 31st January, 2026, revealed that participants explained that insecurity has drastically reduced labour availability, as many workers refuse to travel to remote farms due to fear of attacks, theft, and kidnapping. Several farms were left partially planted or harvested because labourers avoided unsafe routes, particularly forested paths. The shortage of labour has delayed key farming activities such as land preparation, planting, weeding, and harvesting, leading to reduced yields and increased crop spoilage. Participants also noted that labour scarcity has contributed to post-harvest losses, as crops are sometimes left unharvested or poorly stored due to insufficient manpower.

Furthermore, participants highlighted that insecurity has increased labour costs, as workers demand higher wages to compensate for the risks involved. Many households now depend on family labour, which is often inadequate for managing large farms. Displacement of skilled labourers has also reduced the availability of experienced workers, further affecting farm productivity. Traders confirmed that reduced harvesting due to labour shortages has led to irregular market supply, causing price increases for staple foods such as maize, rice, and yams.

Role of Government Interventions in Ado LGA, Benue State

The study examined the role of government interventions in addressing the impact of insecurity on agricultural production in Ado Local Government Area (LGA), Benue State. In this regard, insights were obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving relevant stakeholders within the study area.

A male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that he is aware of several government programmes aimed at supporting farmers in insecure areas. Initiatives include farm protection patrols, community policing, and market escorts for high-value crops. For instance, in Utonkon and Agila, local vigilante groups work with the police to escort farmers transporting cassava and yams to Igumale market, significantly reducing theft. Additionally, agricultural input subsidies provide seeds, fertilizers, and agro-chemicals at reduced costs to encourage continued cultivation despite insecurity.

A female respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that early warning and rapid response mechanisms have been introduced in high-risk communities. Collaborating with NEMA and local security units, alerts about potential attacks are sent via radio, SMS, and community meetings. For example, farmers in Igumale were advised to delay harvesting due to armed intrusions near isolated farms, preventing significant post-harvest losses. Community-based surveillance programmes also enable residents to monitor farmland borders and report suspicious activity.

A male respondent, a police officer, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that security patrols target both farms and transport routes, especially during planting and harvesting seasons. In Agila, joint patrols escorted farmers carrying maize and cassava over a 15-kilometre route to Igumale market, reducing the risk of theft. Workshops educate farmers on safe storage, crop handling, and collaboration with local authorities, helping them adopt safer practices.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that government programmes also include training on mitigating losses from insecurity. Workshops in Utonkon and Ijigban teach farmers to use secure storage, stagger harvesting, and implement crop diversification. In Igumale, farmers were assisted in constructing reinforced storage sheds to protect maize, tomatoes, and peppers. Motorised transport or wheelbarrows are sometimes provided to move crops quickly to safer markets.

A male respondent, an official from the Local Government Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that agricultural extension officers conduct field visits to monitor crop production and advise on safer crops, planting schedules, and protective escorts. In Agila, officers and local police helped 15 farmers transport yams safely to market, preventing significant theft-related losses.

A female respondent, a Civil Defence officer, interviewed on 1st February, 2026, stated that government support includes emergency response funds for farmers who lose crops to insecurity. In 2025, small grants were disbursed in Igumale and Utonkon to compensate losses, enabling farmers to purchase seeds and inputs for the next season. Community policing initiatives also encourage farmers to work collectively and alert authorities about threats.

A focus group discussion conducted on 1st February, 2026, at the central community hall in Igumale with farmers, traders, and household heads from Agila, Utonkon, Igumale, and Ijigban revealed that participants acknowledged government programmes such as patrols, community vigilance, training, and input subsidies. Farmers explained that police escorts and Civil Defence patrols helped transport crops safely; for example, one Utonkon farmer moved over a tonne of cassava to market without loss. Training on staggered harvesting and reinforced storage protected hundreds of kilograms of tomatoes and maize. Community-based surveillance allowed small groups of households to monitor fields and alert authorities. However, participants noted inconsistent implementation. Remote farms often lacked patrols, forcing reliance on family labour and

improvised safety measures. During peak tomato harvests, some farmers had to stagger transport across days, resulting in roughly 15% spoilage. Traders confirmed irregular produce supply, causing price spikes and forcing farmers to sell at 20-30% below market value to avoid losses.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the data collected and presented above, the findings reveal that insecurity in Ado Local Government Area is widespread and affects multiple aspects of community life. Remote communities near forests, grazing routes, and isolated farmlands experience frequent incidents such as farmer-herder conflicts, banditry, theft, and communal clashes. These incidents disrupt farming activities, reduce crop yields, and limit access to markets. As a result, households abandon or reduce cultivation and avoid investing in modern farming techniques. Food availability and local livelihoods are negatively affected. In contrast, central towns closer to security structures experience fewer incidents, though minor attacks still occur. The persistent nature of insecurity creates long-term vulnerability, weakening household resilience. Overall, insecurity undermines agricultural stability and socio-economic wellbeing, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and improved security collaboration.

The study further showed that insecurity has severely undermined crop production and agricultural stability in Ado Local Government Area. Persistent fear of attacks, theft, and displacement has forced many farmers to abandon farmlands or reduce cultivated areas, especially in remote communities like Agila and Utonkon. This has disrupted farming calendars, causing delayed planting and irregular harvesting, which reduces yields and crop quality. Labour shortages have emerged as workers avoid farming due to insecurity, limiting productivity. Staple crops such as yams, maize, cassava, and rice are heavily affected, while perishable crops suffer spoilage due to delays. Farmers are also discouraged from investing in improved inputs and technologies. Consequently, food supply chains are weakened, market prices increase, and household food access declines, making agriculture risky and unpredictable.

The findings also showed that insecurity has significantly affected labour availability and increased post-harvest losses in Ado Local Government Area. Fear of attacks, kidnapping, and theft has discouraged labourers from working in remote areas, creating shortages during key farming stages. This has led to delayed operations, incomplete harvesting, and crop spoilage. Labour costs have also increased, reducing farmers' profits. Insecurity further disrupts post-harvest activities, as farmers face difficulties transporting and storing produce safely. Crops are exposed to theft, pests, and weather damage, leading to losses. Many farmers are forced to sell at lower prices locally, limiting income and reinvestment. Overall, these challenges reduce output, disrupt market supply, increase food prices, and weaken household food security.

The study further discovered that government interventions play a role in addressing insecurity but remain limited in effectiveness. Farmers are aware of measures such as security patrols, community policing, input subsidies, and extension services. In some areas, coordinated efforts by security agencies and local vigilantes have helped farmers transport produce safely and reduce losses. Training and support programmes have also encouraged better farming and storage practices. However, these interventions are constrained by inconsistent implementation, inadequate manpower, and limited coverage. Benefits are mostly felt in accessible areas, while remote communities remain vulnerable. Post-harvest losses and labour shortages persist despite these efforts. Overall, more consistent and inclusive interventions are needed to effectively improve security and agricultural productivity.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of insecurity on food production in Ado LGA, Benue State, focusing on crop production, labour, farmland use, post-harvest losses, and government interventions. Findings show that insecurity significantly disrupted farming, causing reduced acreage, delayed planting, and premature harvesting in communities like Agila, Utonkon, and Ijigban. Labour shortages due to fear of attacks further limited productivity, forcing farmers to focus on low-risk crops. Post-harvest losses ranged between 20-40%, driven by theft, inadequate storage, delayed transport, and spoilage, reducing income and market supply. Government interventions such as patrols, community policing, input subsidies, and extension services provided some relief but were limited by inconsistent coverage and resources. Overall, agriculture in Ado LGA has become high-risk and unpredictable, undermining food security and household livelihoods.

Recommendations

1. Government and local authorities should strengthen security measures in high-risk and remote areas. Early warning systems and coordinated patrols during planting and harvesting can help farmers cultivate larger areas safely. Provision of subsidized inputs, improved seeds, and irrigation will encourage productivity despite insecurity.
2. Community-based security arrangements and safe farm corridors should allow local and migrant workers to operate without fear. Cooperative farming systems with pooled labour and shared security responsibilities can be promoted. Mechanization, such as tractors and simple machinery, should be provided to reduce reliance on scarce labour.
3. Farmers should have access to secure storage facilities near farms and markets. Improved transport, escorted delivery, and cold chain systems for perishable crops can prevent theft and spoilage. Training on proper handling and crop diversification should be delivered through extension services.
4. Policies and programs should be consistent, inclusive, and adequately funded. Regular security patrols and well-resourced extension services should reach vulnerable farmers. Collaboration with community groups and monitoring mechanisms will improve effectiveness and trust.

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