



Food Scarcity, Insecurity, Poor Road Network and Social Instability in IMO State

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ABSTRACT

Food scarcity and social instability are twin social problems that are plaguing every rural community in Imo state in the recent times. This is regardless of various efforts made by both Federal and state governments to boost agricultural production in rural communities. The paper examines the impact of food scarcity, insecurity, poor road infrastructure on social instability in Imo state. The study utilized a survey research design in sample of 646 respondents across selected rural and semi-urban communities using a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal that there are high levels of food scarcity, insecurity, and poor road conditions which is strongly correlated with reported social instability in Imo state. The findings suggest that these factors form a vicious cycle that significantly undermines socio-economic stability. The study recommends integrated policy interventions focusing on enhancing security, agricultural investment, and critical road infrastructure to foster sustainable development and peace in the region

INTRODUCTION

Food scarcity is one of the contemporary social problems facing many nations of the world today. Food is said to be scarce when it is not sufficiently available to meet the needs of a population. Food scarcity or food insecurity is one of the major factors that fuel social instability in many parts of Nigeria in general and Imo state in particular. As observed by Ibekwe (2024), food insecurity has persisted in Nigeria despite the country's vast agricultural potentials. Agriculture is a science and act of growing crops, rearing of animal produce for the benefit of man and his environment. It is also the production of plants and animals for the survival of man, Ukaegbu et al (2020). It involves the science of farming, which includes the cultivation of soil for growing crops, rearing animal to provide food and other products and harvesting grown crops as effectively as possible.

Actually it allowed human civilization to expand to the great heights that in recent times, and honestly it took humanity from simple hunter gatherers way of life to a more complex society. Uzoagba (2025) postulates that in the traditional society, our parents were able to sustain life through planting, harvesting and sales of agricultural products. He maintained that our parents trained their children in school, paid their taxes and were able to contribute to community development. Observably, agriculture is a major means of foreign exchange in Nigeria. Keke (2023) opined that in the 70's that Nigeria was known as a leading nation in export of agricultural products such as cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, etc and that gave her the pride of place among committee of nations. Agriculture plays a crucial role is economic development, particularly in developing nations. It provides food, security, generates income, employment, contributes to overall economic growth, supplying raw materials and foreign exchange for national development. It is the practice of cultivating plants and rearing animals to produce food and fiber and other materials for human use.

Agriculture is vital for national development, playing a crucial role in economic growth, food security and poverty reduction. It provides livelihoods, generates employment and contributes significantly to a nation's GDP and foreign earning. Furthermore, agriculture underpins the food system, impacting nutrition, health and overall societal wellbeing of citizens. Agriculture provides agro-based industries with raw materials that they process into goods for consumers. e.g coca for beverages. Many parts of plants, e.g. roots, leaves and barks are medicinal herbs which people use to treat many diseases, Wikipedia.org. One of the major purpose of agriculture is the production of food. Uzoagba (2024) opined that food is any substance that gives living things energy to grow and maintain healthy life. In the words of Ukaegbu et al (2020) food is any substance (liquid or solid) which when eaten and digested can provide the body with nourishment. Food is a substance consumed by living organisms to provide nourishment and energy for growth, repair and vital processes. It can be raw, processed, or formulated and is typically of plants, animals or fungal origin. It is also a substance that when consumed by organism, gives nutritional support, Wikipedia? Food contains substances called nutrients which can be used by the body for nourishments. These nutrients include carbohydrates, proteins, fat, oil,

mineral salts, vitamins and water. Health is dependent on balance supply of food nutrient. From the foregoing, it is observable and understandable that food is an essential ingredient in the existence of human life, that without it life cannot function effectively. Scarcity of food in any part of the world, be it nation, state or local government is a major setback to life and continued existence of citizens living in such environment. Food scarcity impacts citizens, leading to malnutrition, reduced economic productivity and increased social unrest. It can also result in higher mortality rates among vulnerable populations and hinder long-term development. The objective of this paper is to analysis the impact of food scarcity, insecurity, poor road network on social instability in Imo State.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The main proponents of this theory were John Dollard, Miller, Neal E, Doob Leonard W, Mowrer Orval H. and Sears Robert R. In their work entitled Frustration–Aggression published in 1939, they posited that frustration always lead to aggression and aggression is always preceded by frustration. For them, aggression is often a direct consequence of frustration. Frustration is a feeling of being irritated or angry due to something blocking the achievement of a goal (Shorey & Gonzalez, 2023). According to frustration-aggression theory, inability to achieve one’s goal leads to displacement and aggression. When a person feels frustrated internally, some environmental factors may increase that frustration and the anger that followed as a result leads a person to behave aggressively. Similarly, when the factor that caused the frustration is unavailable for aggression, one may displace it and put their aggression on something or someone unrelated (Shorey & Gonzalez, 2023). When people are hungry because food is costly or because they do not have financial resources that grants access to food, it leads them to anger and ultimately to react to aggression. They may transfer such anger to other people around them or to government or its agents seen within the vicinity. A hungry man (trapped in food scarcity) is indeed an angry man (ready to act aggressively due to anger).

Conceptual Clarification

Agriculture

Agriculture is the broad term for everything that goes into growing crops and raising animals, to provide food and materials that people can use and enjoy. It is a major sector of the Nigerian economy accounting for up to 35% of total employment in 2020 according to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), agriculture remains the foundation of Nigerian economy providing livelihood for most Nigerians and generating millions of jobs. Nigeria depends on exportation of agricultural products for generation of most of its national revenue. People across the globe have practiced agriculture for thousands of years. Today, through modern farming innovations and plants science technologies, many nations have witnessed mass production of foods. Agriculture is a way of life, a livelihood and a passion that people enjoy day in and day out. Agriculture is another word for farming. It includes both growing

and harvesting of crops and raising animals, or livestock. The product of agriculture that people eat comes from both plants and animals. Plants foods include fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, milk, eggs, etc. Plants and animals also supply such natural materials as cotton, flour, wood and hides. Workers process these materials into thread, cloth, cereal and leather. Growing trees are another important agricultural product from tree farms, they are used for making furniture, books, etc. People practice agriculture on farms, on ranches and in orchards all over the world. Farmers raise crops and livestock in every climate and in all kinds of different soil. Some region receive a lot of sunlight or rainfall.

Food

Food refers to any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for the body. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2018), food is essential for human health and well-being, providing energy, nutrients, and sustenance for growth, development, and maintenance of bodily functions. It is a source of energy and nutrients that are necessary for both humans and animals. Uzoagba (2024) opined that food is any substance that gives living things energy to grow and maintain healthy life. Food can come in different forms, such as solid, grains and vegetables while liquids are milk and juice. Food provides the essential nutrients for growth and maintenance of bodily functions. It is a primary source of energy for the body, allow us to be active, move and perform various tasks. Food comes in different types which include cereals, diary products, fats and oil, carbohydrates, protein, fruits and vegetables. It provides the body with necessary nutrients, energy, builds and repairs tissues, supports immune system, regulates bodily processes and contributes to overall healthy and wellbeing of people. Food is very important for good healthy living. The primary sources of food are plants and animals. Plants provide essential nutrients like carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, through fruits, vegetables and grains. Animals offer proteins and fats through meat, fish, eggs and products. Food is an essential ingredients for the survival of mankind.

Food Insecurity

Food scarcity is defined as the lack of access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, can have significant social and economic implications. Research has shown that food scarcity can lead to social instability, unrest, and conflict, Brinkman, & Hendrix (2011). This means lack of access to sufficient and affordable food at all times, leading to hunger, malnutrition and potentially social unrest. Food scarcity can also lead to food insecurity, meaning people lack regular access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for healthy life, Wikipedia.org. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations highlights the importance of food security in maintaining social stability and promoting economic development, FAO (2019). Food scarcity is not only a factor which affects human physiological and emotional health but it is also threat to social stability.

Social Instability

Social instability denotes absence of stability and order in the society. Generally, it refers to a state where society is experiencing significant disruptions or lack of order, leading to unrest and potential conflict. Social instability works interwoven with insecurity to poses a threat to lives and properties of individuals

and erode social cohesion in the society. Social instability is when social justice is not in place thereby leading to the increase in social problems, while limiting social progress (Knight, 2013). Social stability means a state of unrest, disruption within a society that can be exemplified by breakdown in social order, norms and values. This aspect of instability is evident in different forms such as protest, economic conflict, political violence, social unrest and economic meltdown. Social instability sometimes has important negative implications that hinders economic development and tend to undermine political stability and potentially leading to human insecurity.

The Role of Government in Curbing Food Insecurity in Imo State

Imo state was one of the states created in 1976 by late Murtala Mohammed lead federal government administration. The state since then has struggled with the problem of food insecurity. This situation was because the state embraced civil services as a major way of life. Sixty percent of the citizens were mainly civil servants while forty percent were peasant farmers and traders, Uzoagba (2024). Food production in the state had been on arithmetic rate simply because the population that engage in food production was too small to produce enough food that is needed to take care of teaming population. According to Keke (2023), the increase in population of the state demands increase in food production for the benefits of citizens. In his words, a growing population requires government intervention especially in the areas of food production. Food is one of the basic necessities of life. One of the roles of any responsive government is to ensure the provision of food for its citizens but the question is “can government provide food for every individual or citizen in the state”? The answer is no. Okeke (2023) enumerated a number of ways through which government can provide food that will carter for its citizens. One of such ways is by building of farm settlements that will employ youths for food production. Secondly, provision of improved grains of different kinds such as maize, cassava, millet, yam etc to farmers.

Thirdly, provision of fertilizers to all farmers in the state as that will encourage massive production of food. Fourthly, training of youth corpsers posted in state on how to acquire skills on the use of mechanized technologies and equipments e.g tractors so that they can be used in farms for large scale food production. Ebubedike (2022) opined that government should encourage local farmers in all the local government areas of the state through subsidizing the prices of agricultural materials such as fertilizers, feeds and animals yields. Laying credence to this, Egere (2021) stated that government should make farming or agriculture to look very attractive in the state by giving youths soft loans and encouraging them to engage in fishing, poultry, plantain, pineapple, snail, rice, cat-fishery, vegetable and cucumber farming. Honestly, if government can adopt these approaches, Imo state will be one of the leading states in food production and proudly eliminate food scarcity and ensure healthy living of its citizens.

The Nexus Between Food Scarcity and Social Instability in Imo State

Imo state since it's creation have enjoyed relative peace. Citizens were known for night crawling. Citizens of other states of Nigeria come to Imo state to spend their weakened simply because of the peaceful nature of the environment. Ebirim et al (2014) observed that since 2011, the state started witnessing series of

unprecedented crime such as kidnapping, armed robbery, herdsmen activities, IPOB, ESN, Yahoo boys and other related crime. Young men who are suppose to engage in several farming activities now join crime as they find it as the cheapest means of making money. Farming activities now decline into zero level prompting food scarcity in the state.

Ebirim, Uzoagba & Ohizu (2015) opined that the youths who are suppose to be the labour force in our various communities join yahoo business and are chased around by law enforcement agents thereby reducing the population in the villages to old men and women who do not have the strength to engage in active farming. He further stated that herdsmen activities in our communities also slow down food production in the state. There cows engage in destruction of crops and render farmers empty at the end of every farming season. Also, rampant kidnapping activities have left farmers on the run, they no longer visit their farms for fear of been kidnapped. Supporting their view Okonkwo (2019) observed that the conflict between herdsmen and farmers has lead to serious decline in food production in the state thereby causing serious food insecurity on the lives of our citizens. He also stated that the activities of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) has further heightened fear among farmers as many of them are banned from going to their farms for the fear of being killed.

Effects of Poor Road Network on Food Insecurity in Imo State

Many roads in Imo State is in a deplorable condition. Successive government has done a lot in trying to fix and mend the road network but much has not been achieved. This poor road network according to Anyanwu (2019) has affected food production and distribution in the state. Many of the rural communities are food producing areas and they are food basket of the state. Regrettably, roads leading to these communities are in a very deplorable condition thereby retarding the rate at which agricultural products flow. These poor road network caused the prices of goods to go up as farmers pay exorbitantly for motorist to transport their goods from the point of production to their various destinations. Okeke (2023) observed that the soaring nature of transport fares had been a major impediment to the delivery of agriculture production to the final consumers.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objective of this research, a survey research design was adopted. This is suitable when first-hand information from respondents is required. The population of this study comprised people who are either resident in the selected rural and semi-urban local government areas or have been affected by the insecurity challenges Imo state. The population is made up of farmers, traders, artisans, civil servants and households. Using multistage random sampling technique, the sample size of this study was 646 respondents selected from communities in three local government areas. For privacy of the respondents, the selected communities were not mentioned. A structured 4 - point Likert scale instrument made up of four sections was constructed for the purpose of data collection. The sections cover items on food scarcity indicators,

insecurity factors, road network condition and social instability indicators. The data collected was analysed using weighted mean with a cut-off mean of 2.5.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result of section 1 devoted to food scarcity is presented in Table. There is consensus among respondents that there is food scarcity, high food prices, inaccessible food etc prevalence in their communities. As shown in Table 1, the high cost of food (Item 2, $\bar{X}=3.56$) and the impact of rural insecurity on food supply (Item 5, $\bar{X}=3.45$) were the most strongly agreed-upon indicators of food scarcity. The perceived inaccessibility of food (Item 3, $M=2.78$) recorded a relatively lower, though still significant, mean. The composite mean of 3.22 shows that the respondents believe that food scarcity is a social problem in the community.

Table 1. Food Scarcity

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}
1	There is food scarcity in my community.	313 (48.5)	210 (32.5)	78 (12.1)	45 (7.0)	3.22
2	Food prices are very high in my community.	411 (63.6)	198 (30.7)	25 (3.9)	12 (1.9)	3.56
3	Food is inaccessible to all households	174 (26.9)	245 (37.9)	142 (22.0)	85 (13.2)	2.78
4	Seasonal variations cause fluctuations in food availability.	237 (36.7)	280 (43.3)	91 (14.1)	38 (5.9)	3.11
5	Insecurity in rural areas affects food supply to my community.	365 (56.5)	224 (34.7)	42 (6.5)	15 (2.3)	3.45
	Composite mean					3.22

Percentage Response in bracket (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree=1)

Result of section 2 devoted to insecurity is presented in Table 2. The result demonstrates that insecurity is a severe impediment to daily life and economic activity. An overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that kidnapping and attacks discourage movement and trade (Item 7, $\bar{X}=3.50$) and that insecurity contributes directly to social instability (Item 10, $\bar{X}=3.46$). The composite mean of 3.40 shows that the respondents believe that insecurity is a social problem in the community.

Table 2. Insecurity

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}
6	Insecurity prevents farmers from cultivating their farms.	346 (53.6)	220 (34.1)	58 (9.0)	22 (3.4)	3.38
7	Cases of kidnapping and attacks discourage movement and trade	392 (60.7)	201 (31.1)	35 (5.4)	18 (2.8)	3.5
8	Insecurity has negatively affected food distribution	340 (52.6)	238 (36.8)	48 (7.4)	20 (3.1)	3.39

	The fear of attacks has increased migration from rural to urban areas	301 (46.6)	252 (39.0)	65 (10.1)	28 (4.3)	3.28
9	Insecurity contributes to social instability in my community	366 (56.7)	225 (34.8)	40 (6.2)	15 (2.3)	3.46
	Composite mean					3.40

Percentage Response in bracket (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree=1)

Result of section 3 devoted to road network is presented in Table3. The respondents were most critical of the road network. The high cost of transportation (Item 12, \bar{X} =3.61) and the difficulty in moving food to market (Item 11, \bar{X} =3.56) were identified as major consequences of poor infrastructure. The strong agreement confirms the perceived absence of good roads and their potential to alleviate food scarcity. The composite mean of 3.03 shows that the respondents believe that poor road network is a social problem in the community.

Table 3. Road Network

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}
11	Poor road networks make it difficult to transport food to market	411 (63.6)	195 (30.2)	30 (4.6)	10 (1.5)	3.56
12	Bad roads increase the cost of transporting food items	428 (66.3)	188 (29.1)	22 (3.4)	8 (1.2)	3.61
13	Road conditions discourage traders from supplying food to remote communities	311 (48.1)	240 (37.2)	70 (10.8)	25 (3.9)	3.3
14	Poor roads contribute to food wastage during transportation	269 (41.6)	260 (40.2)	85 (13.2)	32 (5.0)	3.18
15	Good road networks can reduce food scarcity	20 (3.1)	52 (8.0)	172 (26.6)	402 (62.2)	1.52
	Composite mean					3.03

Percentage Response in bracket (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree=1)

Finally, Table 4 indicates a clear perception of growing social instability (Item 20, \bar{X} =3.35). Respondents directly linked this instability to the three core variables: frustration from poor roads (Item 18, \bar{X} =3.21), conflicts from insecurity (Item 17, \bar{X} =3.16), and youth restiveness from food scarcity (Item 16, \bar{X} =3.07). While direct experience with protests (Item 19) was lower (\bar{X} =2.72), it still indicates a notable level of civil unrest. The composite mean of 3.10 shows that the respondents believe that food scarcity, insecurity and poor road network causes social instability in the community.

Table 4. Social Instability

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}
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	Food scarcity causes youth	231	270	105		
16	restiveness in my community	(35.8)	(41.8)	(16.3)	40 (6.2)	3.07
	Insecurity leads to frequent	266	255	90		
17	community conflicts	(41.2)	(39.5)	(13.9)	35 (5.4)	3.16
	Poor road networks increase	266	280	72		
18	frustrations among residents	(41.2)	(43.3)	(11.1)	28 (4.3)	3.21
	Food scarcity, insecurity, and	170	223	158		
19	poor roads have led to protest	(26.3)	(34.5)	(24.5)	95 (14.7)	2.72
	Social instability has increased	326	240			
20	in my community in recent year	(50.5)	(37.2)	58 (9.0)	22 (3.4)	3.35
	Composite mean					3.10

Percentage Response in bracket (Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree =2, Strongly Disagree=1)

Discussion of Finding

The findings of this study align with the theoretical framework that posits a interconnected relationship between livelihood threats and social cohesion. The high mean scores across all sections confirm that communities in Imo State are experiencing a synergistic crisis. These results explain how insecurity acts as a primary catalyst that disrupt the agricultural value chain at both production (preventing farming) and distribution (hindering movement of goods) levels. This directly exacerbates food scarcity which leads to high prices that strain household income and expenditure. The finding also reveal that poor road infrastructure worsens food scarcity problem by increasing transaction costs and post-harvest losses. This makes food less affordable and accessible even when it is in short supply. Consequently, there is a tripartite problem that occasions an environment of frustration, economic hardship, and fear. This ultimately manifests as social instability. The result shows that residents perceive that there is a linkage between these underlying issues of food scarcity, insecurity, poor road network and outcomes like youth restiveness, community conflicts, and protests. This vicious cycle creates social instability that further discourage investment and economic activity, which in turn deepens food scarcity and deprivation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study is to analyze the interconnection between food scarcity, insecurity, poor road network and social instability. The finding shows that food scarcity, insecurity, poor road network work together to create social instability. Thus, the study concludes that food scarcity, insecurity, and poor road networks are not isolated issues but are deeply intertwined drivers of social instability in Imo State. This collectively cripple economic activities which threaten livelihoods and erode the social fabric of communities. The high level of agreement among a diverse sample of residents indicates that this is a widespread and critically felt problem. Without urgent and holistic intervention, this cycle is likely to persist, further endangering the development and peace of the state.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on The Findings, This Study Recommends That:

The government should deploy more security personnel to rural areas and adopt local vigilantes to help restore farmers confidence to cultivate and break the cycle food scarcity. There is need for investment in critical infrastructure. Efforts should be made towards rehabilitation and construction of rural roads. This will reduce transportation costs and food price, minimize food wastages, stimulate commerce and improve food security. Agricultural support programs such as subsidized inputs, modern storage facilities, and support for dry-season farming should be implemented to boost local food production and mitigate seasonal scarcity and price fluctuations. This will further create social stability.

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