

## Insecurity and Socio-Economic Development in Ukum Local Government Area, Benue State

Benjamin Shaibume<sup>1</sup> & Kingsley Ushahemba Ayangealu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science,

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Administration  
Benue State University, Makurdi

*Corresponding author: benshacks2013@gmail.com*

### Abstract

Nigeria's security woes, especially since the advent of democracy in 1999 to date, could be analyzed from a variety of theoretical standpoints. Thus, this can be attributed to seemingly multitudes of systemic challenges responsible for the present security fiasco in Nigeria. The general insecurity and the threat of it have continued to overwhelm the socio-economic and political process to the extent that security issues have remained a fundamental challenge to successive governments and the people of the country. This paper examines the effects of insecurity on the socio-economic development of the Ukum Local Government Area. Data for this study were collected through the distribution of 200 well-structured questionnaires to Ukum residents. Data collected were analyzed and presented in tables, percentages, and charts. The paper adopted Per-Olof Wikström's Situational Action Theory (SAT) as its framework of analysis to explain the issues under study. The findings reveal that insecurity in Ukum is primarily driven by poverty and high unemployment rates, among other factors. The study also highlights that insecurity has adversely affected the residents' livelihoods, turning many into internally displaced persons (IDPs), disrupting businesses, and causing destruction to properties and lives. The paper recommends increased monitoring, and surveillance of the Nigerian borders by the security agencies, addressing corruption, improving governance, and creating job opportunities to alleviate poverty and address the root causes of insecurity.

**Keywords:** Security, Insecurity, Socio-economic Development, Militia and Conflicts

### Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria has reached a critical level, manifesting in numerous aspects of national life. Daily loss of lives, a shrinking population, struggling businesses, declining investments, and the closure of multinational companies are evident. Unemployment is rising, and the general public is living in fear. This situation threatens both governance and economic progress in the nation. Since the advent of democracy in Nigeria, the country has faced unprecedented security challenges that have kept both Nigerians and foreigners on high alert. Particularly from 2015 to the present, the level of insecurity, driven by various groups, has become alarmingly severe. This includes militancy in the South-South region, kidnappings in the South East, ritual killings in the West, armed robbery, political assassinations, and violent herder-farmers conflicts. More recently, militia activities in the North-Central region and insurgency, kidnappings, and suicide bombings in parts of the North, especially the Northeast, have further exacerbated the situation.

The widespread security issues in Nigeria have deeply affected Benue State, particularly the Sankera region, turning it into a significant national security concern (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). In Benue State and specifically in Ukum local government, there is evidence of a substantial relocation of businesses and humanitarian organizations from the affected areas to more peaceful regions of the country (Nwagbosa, 2012). Suleiman (2021), and Kufour (2012)

have noted that high levels of insecurity in a region often lead to population migration, resulting in a loss of skilled labour and a decline in economic activities. Insecurity is a critical barrier to Nigeria's development, impeding economic progress by destroying existing infrastructure and hindering the creation of new infrastructure and a secure environment for economic activities.

Over time, ethno-religious conflicts have been recognized as a major source of insecurity in Benue State and Nigeria as a whole. However, recent developments have seen armed militias and herder-farmer conflicts surpass these traditional issues, leading to severe consequences for livelihoods and property (Ibrahim & Igbuzor, 2002; Hazen & Horner, 2007; Salawu, 2010; Igbuzor, 2011). In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, there is often a lack of harmony, mutual suspicion, and fear, which can escalate into violent confrontations over grievances. These conflicts frequently center on disputes over resource allocation, power, land, chieftaincy titles, local government positions, market control, and religious expansion. Such disputes have led to widespread killings and violence among various ethno-religious groups in the country (Adagba, Ugwu & Eme, 2012).

According to Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro (2013), insecurity is the antithesis of security which attracts such common descriptors as want of safety, danger, hazard, as well as want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded or protected, instability, trouble, lack of protection and being unsafe among others. They submitted that all the descriptors point to vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property, or livelihood. Therefore, they considered insecurity a state of not knowing, a lack of control, and the inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or that make them vulnerable. Beland (2005) described insecurity as "the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection." It refers to a lack of inadequate freedom from danger. This paper investigates the insecurity and socio-economic development in Ukum Local Government Area, Benue State.

### **Insecurity in Ukum Local Government Area, Benue State**

In Ukum local government, conflicts involving farmers and herders, communal disputes, banditry, armed militias, and kidnappings have reached alarming levels of criminality, resulting in significant human and economic harm. These conflicts have led to sexual assaults on women and girls, attacks on civilians and law enforcement, assaults on villages, and destruction of crops. Historically, disputes between farmers/herders and Jukun/Tiv communities have centered around natural resources and have often been framed as social conflicts between locals and outsiders (Oyinloye, 2020). Recently, banditry, farmer/herder clashes, and armed militia activities have exacerbated insecurity in Benue State, particularly in the Sankera region (including Ukum LGA). This has heightened community tensions, disrupted development activities, intensified religious conflicts, undermined social cohesion, and discouraged investment (Maigari et al., 2021). Kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling, and looting are further threats to national peace and security. Oyinloye (2020) observes that armed militias and banditry have resulted in widespread killings and property destruction. The increase in armed militias in Benue State, especially in Ukum, raises concerns about the effectiveness of government response. The state's security forces have struggled to manage the militia issue in Ukum and the Sankera region due to a lack of political will and operational challenges faced by the security personnel (Okolie, 2019).

The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of effective community mechanisms to tackle security issues in rural areas. The existing socio-economic conditions in Ukum Local

Government Area have worsened the security situation. The rural pastoral sector remains poorly regulated, and factors such as illicit artisanal mining and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Sankera region are significant contributors to ongoing conflicts involving herders, armed militias, and other security issues in states like Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, and Plateau.

The socio-economic impact of insecurity is substantial. Those who join fighting forces, are killed, or flee can no longer contribute productively. The destruction of schools, markets, farms, homes, industries, and infrastructure diminishes the economy's productive capacity. Additionally, the displacement of people lowers export production, reducing foreign exchange earnings and import potential, which further constrains economic output, leading to decreased employment and income. The government's inability to effectively address insecurity may be linked to its failure to meet the developmental needs of the population. This inadequacy has driven people to form various alliances, resulting in increased ethnic hatred, religious bigotry, political rivalry, and a growing number of discontented citizens who feel marginalized and deprived of access to national resources (Onifade, Imhonopi, & Urim, 2013).

The ongoing insecurity in Ukum, Sankera, Benue State, and across Nigeria has severely strained the country's security infrastructure, highlighting the need for a more thorough understanding to tackle the rise in violent crime. The increase in banditry, militia activities, herder conflicts, and terrorist attacks has placed a considerable financial strain on fiscal policy and resulted in higher national security expenditures (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2014). These attacks have escalated into a national crisis, with kidnapping and banditry now affecting all regions, endangering both investments and lives.

### **Implications of Insecurity on Human Wellbeing and Socio-Economic Development**

Although the cost of the prevalence of insecurity in Nigeria, Benue State and Ukum LGA is difficult to measure in monetary or real terms, however it is clear to observers that it has cost Nigerians enormous human and material resources. Security plays a major role in the existence and sustenance of human being. In this wise Coupland (2007) observed that insecurity has a far-reaching impact on people's lives and well-being and for this singular reason the government has to be alive to its responsibility of guaranteeing security. When people's security is guaranteed, it gives them the freedom, physically and mentally to get on with the business of building their lives without fear of molestation or violent death. Thus, to experience a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being security is essential (Meddings, 2001), without security, there can be no stable society rather there will be prevalent fear and danger from violent death (Hobbes 1651, cited in Coupland, *ibid*). There are links between human security and health as insecurity leads to the collapse in the health care delivery which has concomitant effect on the people's well-being (Mori, Meddings and Bettcher, 2004).

There are also the associated effects of insecurity which include fear, coercion, displacement and deprivation of basic daily needs such as drinking-water, food and health care. Human security entails access to food, nutrition, clean drinking water, hygiene and sanitation and housing which could only be got through peace. For instance, displaced populations are subject to a variety of health risks and are prone to a high mortality rate. This is largely because they are dispossessed of food, clean water, proper sanitation, and possibilities of providing economic security for themselves. Malnutrition, overcrowding, and lack of sanitation frequently combine to facilitate the emergence of epidemics of transmissible disease in such populations. Often, children and the elderly are the population groups most

susceptible to death from such causes. Thus, where basic conditions of peace and development are met, good health can be attained as part of human security (Meddings, 2001; Ghobarah, Huth and Russett, 2004; Mori, Meddings, and Bettcher, 2004; Bhadelia, 2005).

The impact of insecurity on the economy, the productive aspect of most manufacturing businesses depends largely on the availability and regular supply of raw materials for production. Insecurity has cut off the supply of such raw materials hence, jeopardizing production activities. Besides this, insecurity affects the marketing of finished products as there is a continuous exodus from areas of insecurity. There is also an increase in security spending as most business organizations operating in Nigeria spend a lot on maintaining private security outfits. The destruction of their business building, properties, and equipment is tantamount to loss of capital which has ruined not a few businesses in Nigeria.

Thus, security is critical for the nation's development and its absence of security means that economic growth and development cannot be achieved (Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Insecurity is a risk factor that business owners and managers dread and avoid by relocating their businesses elsewhere. In the case of Nigeria, there is also evidence of some businessmen and manufacturing companies having to relocate particularly from the North in recent times to other peaceful parts of the country (Nwagboso, 2012). Many of the businessmen and women who are engaged in various businesses in Benue State and Ukum LGA have had to relocate to other parts of the state or return to their home states to avoid the violence orchestrated by the herders and armed militia (Suleiman, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper utilizes Per-Olof Wikström's Situational Action Theory (SAT) (2004), which examines the reasons behind violent crime by considering cognitive, bioethical, socioeconomic, and environmental factors. The theory aims to understand why individuals choose to violate rules and laws (Wikström, 2006; Bouhana & Wikström, 2011). According to Situational Action Theory, criminal behavior results from a combination of factors: being in environments that foster repeated offending, having a predisposition towards criminal acts, the extent of effort invested in poorly managed or uncontrolled settings, and the level of awareness of one's actions. All these elements interact to lead to criminal conduct, which society condemns (Wikström, 2014). Situational action theory posits that an individual's personality and their environment are key factors influencing their decision to commit crimes (Wikström, 2006). Although the environment can sometimes sway these decisions, individuals remain responsible for their actions. Essentially, people engage in criminal behaviour when they perceive it as a viable option given the circumstances or when they have insufficient self-control (Wikström, Per-Olof, 2019).

The situational action theory is founded on four main elements: the circumstances, the environment, the individual's character, and their level of exposure (Accord, 2022). In Nigeria, these factors contribute to the high crime rates, particularly in remote regions where poverty, insufficient supervision, and limited resources foster unlawful activities (Wilkstrom, 2014; Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). People with a low propensity for crime are less likely to engage in illegal behaviour due to their strong personal values and the presence of law enforcement (Oyewole & Omotola, 2022). The theory posits that behaviour is shaped by one's environment, and influences such as family, community, and traditional authorities can either promote or deter criminal activities, including militia groups, banditry, terrorism, and insurgency.

In the end, situational action theory emphasizes the intricate relationship between an individual's environment, circumstances, setting, and behaviour, which can influence whether they commit crimes or follow the law. This theory provides the most comprehensive explanation for the ongoing insecurity in Benue State, especially in the Ukum local government area.

### **Methodology**

Data for the achievement of the paper were generated through the administration of 200 well-structured questionnaires with close-ended questions to the inhabitants of Ukum local government, basically selected from farmers, businessmen and women, traditional and political leaders, as well as youths of the area, while secondary data sources for this paper came from journal articles, internet sources, and official reports from government agencies. The data generated is analyzed using the descriptive method of data analysis, which makes use of percentages, tables, and others.

Ukum Local Government Area is located between longitude 8° 40' East and latitude 6° 55' to 7° 23' North, covering an area of 1,514 square kilometres (585 square miles). According to the 2006 census, it has a population of approximately 216,930. The local government headquarters, Sankera, is situated to the east along the Katsina-Ala Wukari road. The majority of the people in Ukum are farmers, engaging in agricultural activities alongside fishing, blacksmithing, carving, and weaving. The region boasts rich, fertile soil ideal for agriculture. It is home to the Zaki Biam Yam Market, the largest yam market in the world, and Zaki Biam is also the largest town in Ukum Local Government Area (Wikipedia, 2024).

### **Result and Findings**

#### **Socio-demographic Data of Respondents**

This section of the paper discusses the socio-demographic features of the respondents such as gender, age, educational qualification, and category among others.

**Table 1: Demographic Attributes of Respondents**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	104	52
Female	96	48
<b>Age (years)</b>		
18-43	93	44.4
44-68	77	29.2
69- above	30	18.3
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	46	23
Married	132	66
Widowed	22	11
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
Non-Formal	17	8.5
First School Leaving Certificate	65	32.5
Secondary School Certificate	86	43
Tertiary Institution	32	16
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil /Public Servant	21	10.5
Farmer	112	56

Trader	51	25.5
Artisan	16	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

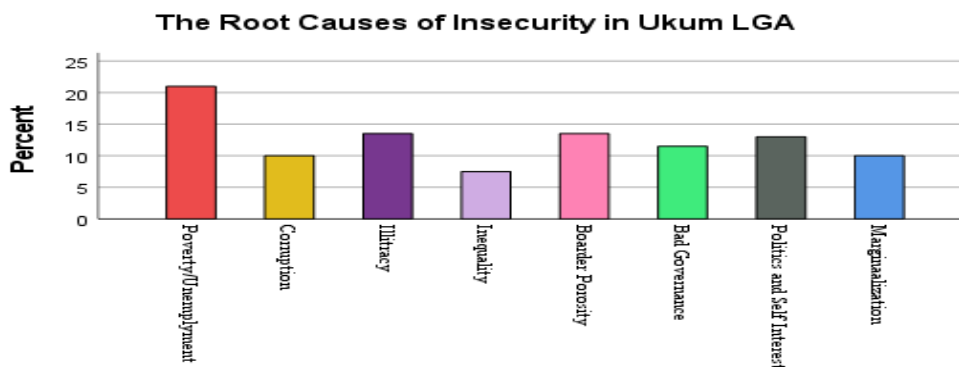
Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the study respondents, with 104 (52%) being male and 96 (48%) being female. Age distribution indicates that 93 (44.4%) of the respondents were between 18 and 43 years old, 77 (29.2%) were aged 44 to 68 years, and 30 (18.3%) were over 68 years. Additionally, 46 (40.4%) of the respondents were single, 132 (66%) were married, and 22 (11%) were either divorced or widowed. Regarding educational qualifications, 17 (8.5%) had no formal education, 65 (32.5%) had completed their First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), 86 (43%) had Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE), and 32 (16%) had tertiary education. In terms of occupation, 21 (10.5%) were civil/public servants, 112 (56%) were farmers, 51 (25.5%) were traders, and 16 (8%) were engaged in various skilled trades.

The results from Table 1 clearly demonstrate the appropriateness and suitability of the respondents for the research. The gender distribution reflects adherence to gender balance in the study. The age range of the respondents, with the majority being between 18-43 (44.4%) and 43-68 (29.2%), indicates that they are mature enough to provide informed responses. The high percentage of married respondents (66%) suggests that they are responsible individuals. The educational background of the respondents 32.5% with FSLC, 43% with SSCE, and 16% with tertiary education indicates they possess the necessary educational qualifications to provide insightful opinions on the research topic. Finally, the occupational data highlights the productivity levels and economic roles of the respondents in the study area.

**Table 2: Causes of Insecurity in Ukum LGA**

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty/Unemployment	42	21.0
Corruption	20	10.0
Illiteracy	27	13.5
Inequality	15	7.5
Boarder Porosity	27	13.5
Bad Governance	23	11.5
Politics and Self-Interest	26	13.0
Marginalization	20	10.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2024



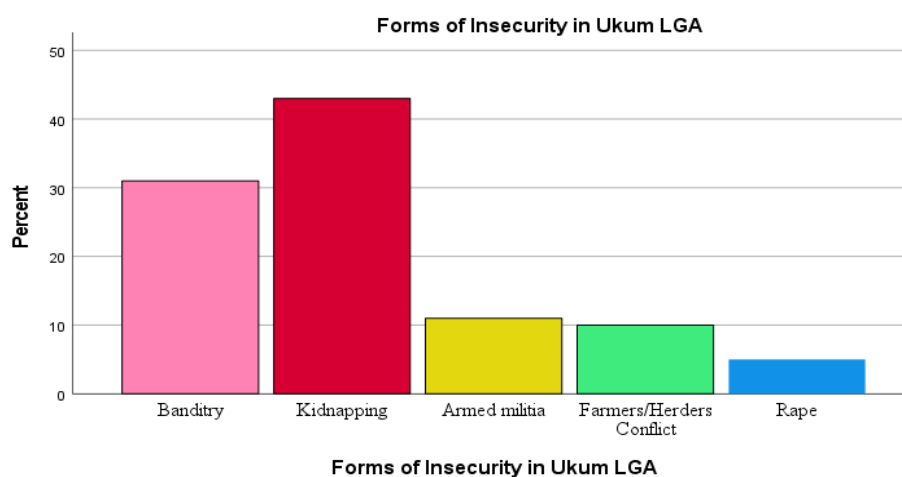
**Figure 1:**

Table 2 and Figure 1 show the root cause of insecurity in Ukum local government area. The analysis revealed that poverty/unemployment is the major cause of insecurity in Ukum with a 21% rating while causes like corruption are rated at 10%, illiteracy at 13.5%, inequality at 7.5%, the porous border at 13.5%, bad governance at 11.5%, marginalization of other ethnic groups and clans 10% and politics and self-interest of individuals within the local area 13%.

**Table 3: Forms of Insecurity in Ukum LGA**

Forms	Frequency	Percentage
Banditry	62	31.0
Kidnapping	86	43.0
Destruction of Lives/Property	22	11.0
Farmers/Herders Conflict	20	10.0
Rape	10	5.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2024



**Figure.2**

Table 3 and Figure 2 revealed the forms of insecurity prevalent in Ukum Local Government and how they affect the socioeconomic development of the local government. From the analysis, kidnapping is prevalent in the local government with 43%, banditry with 31%, destruction of lives and properties 11%, farmers/herders' conflict 10% while rape is about 5% in the area.

### **Consequences of Insecurity on the Socio-economic development of Ukum Local Government Area.**

Insecurity has severe consequences on the development of any society and Ukum local government is not an exception. The following table shows the effect of insecurity on the development of the local government.

**Table 4: Effect of Insecurity in Ukum LGA.**

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Agreed (N/%)</b>	<b>Disagreed (N/%)</b>
Insecurity has caused loss of lives/properties in the Ukum local government	200(100%)	-
There is hunger and famine in the local government as a result of insecurity	172(86%)	28(14%)
Insecurity has caused the retarded growth and development of SMEs Ukum	187(93.5%)	13(6.5%)
Schools, hospitals, markets, etc. are not accessible because of insecurity in the local government area	177(88.5%)	33(16.5%)
Insecurity has caused the displacement of people in the area	200(100%)	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Work, 2024

Table 4 revealed the consequences of insecurity in Ukum local government area. From the analysis in Table 4 insecurity has destroyed the lives and properties of individuals in the local government as agreed by the entire sampled population, 172(86%) of the respondents in the area agreed that the prevalence of insecurity in the local government has brought hunger and famine in the area which is known for its agricultural capacity. The table revealed 187(93.5%) agreed that insecurity has retarded the development of small and medium-scale enterprises in the area which employed the majority of the population of the local government; 177(88.5%) of the respondents agreed that schools, hospitals markets and other basic infrastructure supplying the basic needs of the people of the local government have become inaccessible and 200(100%) of the respondents also agreed that insecurity has displaced people of the local government from their ancestral homes into IDP camps hindering them from engaging productive ventures aid survival.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Based on the data collected, presented, and analyzed, the findings indicate that the prevalence of insecurity in the Ukum Local Government Area stems from several factors, including high poverty and unemployment rates, corruption, poor governance, inequality, porous borders, and the nature of local politics. These issues have perpetuated insecurity in the area. This aligns with Onuoha (2011), who noted that widespread frustration due to poverty and inequality has fueled crises and insecurity in Nigeria.

The study identifies communal clashes, conflicts between farmers and herders, rape, banditry, and armed militia activities as the primary forms of insecurity in Ukum Local Government Area. The consequences of this insecurity on socio-economic development include loss of lives, property, and businesses, as well as restricted access to essential services such as schools, hospitals, and markets. The current insecurity has led to hunger and famine in what was once a thriving agricultural hub known for products like yam and groundnuts. The transformation of the local government area from a business center to a deserted region and IDP camp highlights the detrimental impact of insecurity on socio-economic development. These findings corroborate Adesoji (2010), who reported that many businesses, farmers, and students have suffered losses due to insecurity in the region. The study reveals that socio-economic development has been severely hindered by criminal activities. Many businesses have either shut down, relocated or been looted by militias, armed robbers and rural residents can no longer engage in farming or business activities due to frequent kidnappings and



attacks by militias and herders. Thus, insecurity has profoundly affected the socio-economic development of the area.

### **Conclusion**

Insecurity in the Ukum Local Government Area has had detrimental effects on the local, state, and national economy. It is important to note that insecurity deters investment, making the area unattractive to entrepreneurs. Like other troubled regions, insecurity in Ukum disrupts business operations, leading to the closure of many enterprises, especially in areas frequently affected by violence. This situation also negatively impacts agriculture, increases the number of out-of-school children, displaces people, and restricts economic activities. Consequently, the study concludes that the prevalence of insecurity in Ukum, like in other regions, has significantly hindered socio-economic development. Access to many areas, particularly for farmers and businesspeople, has become severely restricted.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The federal and state governments should implement several measures. Community policing, involving local residents, should be adopted to tackle insecurity effectively. The federal government should support a nationwide ban on open grazing, similar to the Benue State anti-open grazing law enacted in 2019.
- ii. All levels of government should work to eliminate corruption and promote good governance. It is also crucial for the government to create employment opportunities for young people and to establish business-friendly policies that support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- iii. Nigerian youths should be trained in our educational institutions to be practically oriented, emphasizing innovations skills acquisition, and talent exhibition based on artisanship and apprenticeship instead of appearing bookish and presenting the picture of a gentleman scholar/worker in an armchair.
- iv. The Nigerian state and the political leadership should tirelessly work towards addressing the present level of poverty, hunger and starvation, homelessness, squalor, inequalities, and unemployment among the youth.
- v. Increase monitoring, surveillance, and control of infiltration and use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), should be maintained at the borders of Nigeria by our security agencies with countries that are transit zones for international arms markets. These include Benin Republic which is a gateway to the arms networks in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Senegal, Guinea, and Mali as well as Niger which is a linkage point to the terror markets of Libya, Sudan, and Chad.

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