

Innovations

Conflicts and Food Security in Nigeria: Political Economy Perspective

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Abstract: *This paper examines the nexus of conflict and food security in Nigeria through a political economy lens. Nigeria's multifaceted conflict landscape, comprising insurgency, farmer-herder clashes, militancy, and ethnic-religious tensions, has severely disrupted agricultural productivity, market access, and food distribution. Using a political economy framework, the paper explores how systemic issues such as resource mismanagement, corruption, inequality, and weak institutions exacerbate both conflict and food insecurity. It reviews the historical and structural context of Nigeria's political economy, analyzes the impact of neoliberal and nationalist policies on agricultural sustainability, and highlights the role of gender, land tenure systems, and the "resource curse" in deepening vulnerability. Drawing on case studies from the Northeast, Middle Belt, and Niger Delta, the paper underscores the centrality of peace building, institutional reform, and sustainable livelihood interventions in achieving long-term food security. It concludes that addressing conflict is imperative for securing Nigeria's food systems and recommends structural and policy transformations anchored in equity and inclusiveness.*

Keywords: Conflict, Food Security, Political Economy, Nigeria, Institutionalism

1.0 Introduction

The agricultural industry in Nigeria makes a sizable contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs a significant portion of the labour force, particularly in rural areas. Despite its significance, farmers encounter several dangers and uncertainties that have an impact on output. Food security has suffered over the previous decade because of a variety of conflicts, including

herder-farmer disputes, banditry, insurrections, ethnic tensions, cattle rustling, flooding, and drought (Ukase and Jato, 2020). Due to the considerable loss of life, property, and displacement of farming communities because of these dangers, farming operations have decreased, and farmers now constitute a large percentage of the vulnerable population in Nigeria. There is a tendency that it can be argued that each geo-political zone in Nigeria is devilled by the menace of insecurity in varying degrees. Between 2009 and 2023, the Northeast and North-West had experienced ceaseless insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and drought. In the North Central, there has been an unending farmer-herder conflict and flooding. Unlike the scenario in the North-East, North-West, and North Central, the Southwest and Eastern parts of the country have continued to be troubled by kidnapping, youth militancy, and ethnic tensions.

Conflicts arise when multiple individuals, communities, groups, or nations attempt to achieve goals that are incompatible or mutually exclusive (Osisima, 2016). These desired objectives can be hindered by various factors such as a shortage of resources, conflicts of personal interests, disparities between ideas, conventions, and principles, and the feeling of being marginalized by other parties. The significance of available land and resources, the contested authority of traditional leaders and rulers, the establishment of local government councils and their seat of government, competition among ethnic groups to gain access to scarce political and economic resources, conflicting cultural interests, values, and preferences among micro- and macro-social structures, population growth, and other factors were highlighted by Otite (2001) and Osisima (2004) as the major causes of conflicts.

There are various reasons why this paper is justified. First off, Nigeria is one of the most populated countries in Africa and a major producer of food. As a major producer of food and export crops, it is pertinent to note that any disruptions to food production and delivery will impact the entire region. In addition, Nigeria's conflict situation has a detrimental effect on food security. For effective policies and initiatives to resolve these conflicts and enhance food security, it is essential to understand their sources and multifaceted effects. Suffice it to say that a threat to food security can have serious socioeconomic and political repercussions because it is a crucial component of human security. Food insecurity in Nigeria is frequently linked to violence, as well as hunger, poverty, and social injustice.

Furthermore, structural issues like corruption, poor governance, and economic inequality, which have an impact on food security, characterized Nigeria's political economy. It will be interesting to dissect this in the country's context. Finally, research on conflict and food security in Nigeria from the lens of political economy can serve to pinpoint the underlying structural problems that fuel conflict and food insecurity, as well as guide the development of interventions and policies that will help to solve these problems.

This paper aims to understand the nexus of conflicts and food security in Nigeria from a political economy perspective. The specific objectives of the paper are to:

- i. examine the basic political economy's thoughts and their implications on Nigeria's food security
- ii. assess the resource curse and conflict situation in Nigeria
- iii. understand ethnic and religious factors in conflict and food security in Nigeria

The second section of this paper dwelt on an overview of the Nigerian political economy with issues on historical background and context, economic and political structures and systems, and key actors and institutions being discussed. The third section is on the nexus of conflict and food security in Nigeria. The section specifically considered the definition of food security, the political dimension of food security strategies in Nigeria, the causes of conflicts, and the effects of conflicts on food security. Section four focused on case studies of conflict and food security in Nigeria, with emphasis on; Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt, and Niger Delta militancy. Section five, which addressed the specific objectives of the study, covered the political perspectives on conflict and food security in Nigeria with a focus on the major political economy thoughts and implications on food security, the resource curse and conflict, and ethnic and religious factors in conflict and food security. The final section (section six) is on conclusions.

2.0 Overview of the Nigerian Political Economy

2.1 Historical background and context

Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960. However, political unrest, rampant corruption, and a lack of economic diversification outside of oil hindered the country's progress. Although the oil boom in the 1970s temporarily increased affluence and economic fortune in the country, it also strengthened the country's enduring reliance on oil exports at the expense of agriculture, which, through the colonial regime, functioned as the major income earner for the country. Despite having gone through periods of military control, coups, civil war, democratic transitions, and economic reforms, the nation has not yet completely realized its potential as a regional economic force. The interaction of elements such as ethnicity, religion, regionalism, corruption, and rent-seeking characterizes Nigeria's political economy.

Nigeria's colonial history is frequently cited as an important influencer in the country's political and economic development. The divide-and-rule tactics used by the British colonial government, as well as the colonial regime's concentration on the export of raw commodities rather than fostering indigenous industry, characterised the extent to which the colonial regime gave the Nigerian economy an outward orientation (Ineke, 2023). Today's political and economic structures in

Nigeria still reflect this legacy. Suffice it to say that since independence, the economy of the country has remained outward-driven without any significant attempt at changing the status quo.

Nigeria's economy during the colonial era was primarily focused on the exportation of basic goods (cocoa, rubber, and palm oil), with little attention paid to the development of regional industries or infrastructure. After gaining independence, this pattern of economic growth persisted, and the 1950s Niger Delta oil discovery sparked a quick transition to a crude oil-based economy. However, the over-reliance on oil exports has made the nation susceptible to changes in the price of oil on a worldwide scale and has hampered the growth of other economic sectors (Shaibu, 2021; Ake, 1996). The economy and politics of Nigeria were completely altered when oil was discovered in the 1950s. Over 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 70% of government revenue are derived from oil exports (World Bank, 2021). As revenue sharing between the central government and the oil-producing states has been a difficult subject, the oil industry is also a source of conflict and corruption. There have been numerous protests and battles over environmental degradation, resource management, and political representation in the Niger Delta region, which produces most of Nigeria's oil (Nwankwo, 2018).

Several military takeovers and authoritarian governments, many of which were characterized by corruption, poor administration, and a lack of accountability, have left their imprint on Nigeria's political history. As a result, funds that could have been used for infrastructure, education, and healthcare instead went into the pockets of a few elites, which had a detrimental effect on the nation's economic growth. According to Soludo (2006), a lack of accountability and transparency has weakened public confidence in government institutions, resulting in a pervasive feeling of cynicism and apathy among the populace.

Nigeria's political economy could be defined by a blend of state-led and market-oriented policies, with an emphasis on privatization and economic liberalization. The legacy of past mismanagement and corruption, however, has made it challenging to put changes into place effectively, and there continue to be problems with things like infrastructure development, job creation, and poverty reduction. However, there are also chances for economic growth and development, especially in industries like manufacturing, agriculture, and technology (Adepoju, 2019).

2.2 Economic and political structures and systems

An interplay of economic and political institutions and systems has shaped the political economy of Nigeria. The resource curse, which has been defined by a significant reliance on oil exports and a neglect of other sectors, has contributed

to the stagnation or slow growth of non-oil industries and a lack of diversification in the Nigerian political economy (Obadan, 2015). This has led to a high rate of poverty, a lack of job prospects, and an economy that is susceptible to fluctuations in the price of oil on a worldwide scale.

The economic structures of Nigeria have also been significantly shaped by its political system. The Nigerian state has been defined by a powerful executive branch that has been able to manage economic policies and resources, as well as a centralized and authoritarian administration (Adejumobi, 2002). Due to a lack of institutional checks and balances, politicians and bureaucrats are engaging in a high level of corruption and rent-seeking activity.

Additionally, a lengthy history of neoliberal economic policies, such as privatization, deregulation, and trade liberalization, has had an impact on the Nigerian economy (Oyatoye *et al.*, 2019). International entities such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have advocated these policies as a means of promoting economic growth and development. However, corruption, cronyism, and a lack of transparency have damaged the execution of these programmes in Nigeria, producing inconsistent results and increasing wealth inequality (Oyatoye *et al.*, 2019).

2.3 Key actors and institutions

The political economy of Nigeria is characterized by a network of institutions and individuals that influence its outcomes and policies. Political elites, who have been noted as the primary decision-makers in Nigeria's political and economic landscape, are at the core of these actors (Mbaku, 2019). These elites have access to resources and have a history of using this influence to keep a tight grip on political and economic institutions. Because they are frequently motivated by personal interests, they are more likely to engage in rent-seeking and other corrupt activities (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2009).

In addition to political elites, civil society organizations, labour unions, religious organizations, and ethnic associations are important players in the Nigerian political economy (Okeke and Bassey, 2017). Nigeria's democratic procedures and the fight for policy reforms have been greatly influenced by civil society organizations (Mkandawire, 2015). On the other hand, labour unions have a history of fighting for their members' rights to better pay and working conditions. Ethnic organizations have a history of promoting the interests of their various ethnic communities (for example, the *Ohaneze Ndigbo* and *Arewa Consultative Forum*).

The political economy of Nigeria is distinguished by a complex web of formal and informal institutions. Government, the judicial system, and regulatory

organizations [for example, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)] are examples of formal institutions. Traditional authorities, religious organizations, and unofficial market groups are examples of informal institutions (Okeke and Bassey, 2017). These organizations frequently operate outside the reach of the state but have a big impact on the political and economic consequences of the nation.

The most significant institution is the president-led central government. The government oversees establishing and carrying out economic policies, controlling the nation's natural resources, and enforcing business and commercial regulations. The responsibility for enacting legislation and overseeing governmental affairs falls to the National Assembly, which is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is a part of the government's legislative branch. The responsibility for interpreting the law and ensuring that the government abides by its letter and spirit falls to the judiciary, which is independent of the other two arms of government.

3.0 The Link between Conflict and Food Security in Nigeria

3.1 Concept of Food Security

Food security is interpreted differently in the literature, but it means that everyone should have access to enough food that is safe, nutritious, and satisfies their dietary needs and tastes, for active lives. The essential elements of food security are food availability, access, use, stability, agency, and stability. The FAO advises a minimum daily energy consumption of 2,250 kilocalories and a minimum protein intake of 0.75 grams per kilogram of body weight per day for maintaining good nutrition (FAO, 2016; Amazaet *al.*, 2006). Food security has been characterized in several ways. For instance, Carter & Barrett (2006) defined food security as the ability of households in food-deficient regions or countries to meet yearly consumption goals. Gurkam (2005) highlights the availability of safe and nutritious food for people to maintain excellent health and an active lifestyle, while Okpanachi (2004) states that food security involves access for all people to sufficient food for an active and healthy life.

As a response to fluctuating agricultural commodity prices and volatility in the currency and energy markets, the first focus of food security was on assuring food availability and stabilizing prices of staple foods (Berry *et al.*, 2015). However, food shortages, hunger, and famine forced a revision of the concept of food security that considered the vital requirements and actions of potentially exposed and impacted individuals (Shaw, 2007). An expansion of the FAO definition of food security to include ensuring access to available supplies and economic access to food was made possible by a better knowledge of how agricultural markets functioned under pressure and how at-risk communities struggled to get food (Berry *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, in 1994, in response to the UN Development

Programme's Human Development Report (UN Development Programme, 1994), the idea of food security was considered a human rights problem.

Over time, there have been advances and revisions made to the definition of food security. The definition included a social component after the FAO's report, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World," was published in 2001. It was acknowledged that fighting poverty on its own would not guarantee food security. Stability was introduced as the fourth dimension to the idea of food security during the 2009 World Summit on Food Security. Recently, agency and sustainability were added as the definition's fifth and sixth factors to consider the long-term aspect of food security.

3.2 Political Dimension of Nigeria's Food Security Strategies

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has implemented a variety of agricultural development programmes to address concerns relating to food security. A few of these programmes, such as the National Accelerated Food Program (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), National Green Revolution Programme (NGRP), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) and the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) will briefly be discussed.

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), established in 1973, encourages farmers to employ contemporary agricultural methods to boost food output. The initiative started in 1974 and was administered by the national crop centres, with the necessary infrastructure being provided by the agro-services centres. The NAFPP attempted to persuade farmers to use seed, fertilizer, and cultural practice packages that were most appropriate for certain areas. Idachaba (2006) said that the programme was first tested through what he referred to as the Mini-kit and production kit in eight pilot States before it was hurriedly adopted. By 1976, NAFPP was replaced with Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) due to the limited coverage of the NAFPP.

The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), which started in 1976, was targeted at weaning the Nigerian nation off its unhealthy reliance on oil. The programme inspired Nigerians to grow the food they eat, either alone or with others. At the Federal, State, and Local Government Areas (LGAs) levels, it was managed by a national council. During OFN, storage facilities were built at key locations across the nation. In addition to this, fertilizers were imported and sold to farmers at discounted prices. During this period, agrochemicals, land clearing and preparation were subsidized by the Government through the OFN. In general, OFN aimed to boost the number of farmers and enhance public awareness of the crucial role that agriculture could play in the nation. Everyone was ordered to cultivate the ground around him. However, for a variety of reasons, these efforts fell short of the predicted bumper crop and were subsequently dubbed

Operation Fool the Nation (Ekpu, 2009). Idachaba (2006) listed a few of the shortcomings of OFN, such as its operational issues, a lack of a comprehensive food strategy, and the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Shehu Shagari's administration also started the National Green Revolution Programme (NGRP) in April 1980 to combat food insecurity in Nigeria. To improve the NGRP's implementation, the government established the National Council on Green Revolution, which would collaborate closely with the State committees to guarantee that all obstacles to the supply of agricultural inputs are removed. Idachaba (2006) outlined the NGRP's goals, which included raising food and other raw material production, raising fish and animal output, and raising export crop production and processing. But regrettably, the high level of corruption prevented the programme from achieving its goals. The programme was put on hold in 1984 when the military assumed control.

To increase access to agricultural loans, the Nigerian government launched the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) under the Central Bank of Nigeria in 1978. However, the programme experienced a significant setback in the late 1980s because of a high incidence of farmer loan default, which deterred banks from extending more credits under the ACGS. The River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) was founded in 1973 to utilize the nation's water resources and maximize agricultural output to achieve food self-sufficiency. In 1974, the RBDA began testing in Sokoto-Rima and the Chad Basin. It expanded to other regions in 1976, and on May 26, 1977, it was fully introduced. To attain food self-sufficiency, the Federal Government of Nigeria established 11 RBDAs in 1976. To create accessibility and free movement of the food produced in rural and urban areas to areas where they are in high demand, the Directorate for Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) was founded in 1986. The programme, however, was doomed to failure due to a lack of funding, dedication, and severe corruption (Ojo & Adebayo, 2012).

With the transition to civilian rule in 1999, the Nigerian government increased its focus on food production and pledged to fight hunger and malnutrition by ensuring everyone had access to enough food. Numerous food security programmes were initiated, and existing ones were strengthened to accomplish this goal (Shaibu, 2021; Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; Bello, 2004). One of the strengthened programmes was the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), an integrated strategy that was created because the special crop programmes failed to meet the government of Nigeria's goals for rural development and food security (Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe, 2012). The ADPs were a potent tool for upgrading rural communities' agriculture (Okolo, 2006). The accomplishments made in the ADP programmes of Funtua, Gusau, Gombe, Lafia, and Anyigba resulted in the creation of full-fledged state-wide ADPs, which continue to offer

training, technical assistance, and extension to the sizable farm-household population in all states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The ADPs' operations are, however, currently restricted by a shortage of funding.

3.3 Effects of Conflicts on Food Security

Nigeria's food security has been severely impacted by conflict, especially in the north of the country, where most of the violence has taken place. Conflicts have caused farmers to be relocated to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps, farmlands to be destroyed, and people to lose their jobs, all of which have worsened food poverty. Conflict significantly reduces agricultural output and food supply (Oluwakemi *et al.*, 2020). A significant humanitarian catastrophe has been caused by the fight with Boko Haram in the north-eastern part of Nigeria, leaving millions of people in need of food aid. Millions of people have been displaced because of the violence, which has affected trade. A lot of people lack access to essentials, including food and water, due to the conflict's restrictions on humanitarian aid (FAO, 2020). Food security has also been significantly impacted by disputes between farmers and herders in Central Nigeria. Due to the displacement of farmers and the loss of farms caused by these issues, agricultural output and food availability have decreased. The deaths caused by the hostilities have significantly worsened the country's food security situation (FAO, 2018).

Food security is unquestionably a crucial part of human security and a requirement for sustainable development. Food security may be severely impacted by violence, and this is particularly true in Nigeria, a nation that has seen numerous conflicts recently. Conflicts in Nigeria have resulted in the eviction of residents, the destruction of agriculture, livestock, and fishing equipment, as well as the disruption of the supply and production of food. As a result, many households now seriously worry about food insecurity. The following are some implications of conflict on Nigeria's food security:

1. **Loss of Livelihoods and Displacement:** Conflict in Nigeria has resulted in the displacement of numerous individuals, the majority of whom were compelled to abandon their homes and farms. The loss of livelihoods, such as farming, fishing, and livestock production, is frequently a result of this displacement. There has been a drop in food production and supply in regions where armed conflict is prevalent because of the forced abandonment of many farms by farmers.
2. **Farmlands and other resources used to produce food are frequently destroyed** during conflicts in Nigeria, including irrigation systems, farm machinery, and processing facilities. When these resources are destroyed, food production often decreases, which results in food shortages and price increases.
3. **Food supply systems in Nigeria are frequently disrupted by conflict**, making it difficult for food to get to affected communities. In certain instances, routes used to transport food supplies have been destroyed or barricaded, making it difficult

for food to reach some populations. Food shortages and price increases are frequently caused by this interruption, which can be extremely difficult for people.

4. Humanitarian Access Restrictions: Conflict in Nigeria can restrict access for relief organizations to the impacted areas, making it challenging to deliver urgently needed food assistance. The ability of assistance organizations to reach impacted populations has occasionally been impeded or denied due to restrictions on or denials of humanitarian access.

3.5. Nexus of Political Economy, Conflict and Food Security in Nigeria

Conflicts in Nigeria have a huge impact on food security, and the political economy is a major factor in this. The relationship between politics, economics, and institutions in determining economic results, particularly food security, is emphasized by the political economy perspective.

The distribution of resources is one way that the political economy has an impact on food security. Conflicts may cause resources to be diverted from farming and food production to military projects, reducing the availability and accessibility of food. According to Ogwumike and Adeoye (2017), hostilities in Nigeria's northeast and Niger Delta region have hampered agricultural activity, resulting in a drop in food output and an increase in food costs. Further aggravating food insecurity is the possibility that political elites may distribute resources to their supporters while ignoring the needs of vulnerable groups like small-scale farmers and pastoralists (FAO, 2018).

The organizations and policies that control the food systems are another way that the political economy has an impact on food security. Political and economic interests frequently have an impact on the institutions and policies that create food systems, such as land tenure regimes and trade policies. Conflicts can weaken institutions and undermine governance, which makes it challenging to put into practice effective policies and initiatives to address food poverty (FAO, 2018). The high degree of food insecurity in Nigeria is a result of the absence of adequate institutions and policies to support agriculture and food systems (Ogwumike and Adeoye, 2017).

Economic injustices like poverty, inequality, and unemployment frequently fuel political unrest and violence and can result in disputes over the use of resources like land and water (Asiyanbola & Ayinde, 2018; Igbuzor, 2012). Conflicts can affect markets, trade, and agricultural production, resulting in food shortages, price increases, and decreased access to food for vulnerable populations (FAO, 2018).

Furthermore, elites and powerful groups frequently use their influence over resources to manipulate markets, policies, and institutions to their advantage,

perpetuating inequality and exclusion (Asiyanbola & Ayinde, 2018; Igbuzor, 2012). The susceptibility of marginalized groups, such as women, children, and smallholder farmers, who may lack access to market opportunities, financing, and productive assets, might be made worse by this. As a result, these people might be obliged to consume meals that are of inferior quality or less variety, which could result in malnutrition and other health issues (FAO, 2018).

4.0. Case Studies of Conflict and Food Security in Nigeria

4.1. Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East

The Northern Nigerian Boko Haram insurgency is a complicated problem with both political and economic causes. The group's first complaints were about corruption, the central government's neglect of Northern Nigeria, and their desire to enforce strict Islamic law. The gang, however, has developed and increased its actions, including attacking schools, markets, and places of worship, causing extensive damage and fatalities. The Nigerian government has also been plagued by corruption, which results in improper resource allocation and increased public unhappiness (Umar, 2013; Mustapha, 2010).

Another way to look at the Boko Haram insurgency is as a reaction to industrialization and globalization. The group wants to impose its conservative interpretation of Islam on Nigerian culture. The group, which has drawn inspiration from international jihadist organisations like Al-Qaeda, has been able to use porous borders and unreliable administration to take its operations outside of Nigeria's boundaries (Omotola, 2013).

Existing reports indicated that unemployment and poverty help fuel the Boko Haram conflict. The organization has been successful in enlisting young men who lack employment alternatives and have low faith in the future. Boko Haram has been successful in attracting support and adherents by giving them a sense of purpose and belonging. This objective material position increased the elite's exploitation of youth to obtain political power, as evidenced that young men associated with ECOMOG and the Yusufiyya organization were employed as agents during the 2003 election in Borno State (Onuoha, 2014). To enhance their religio-political influence, Boko Haram leaders took advantage of the nation's widespread poverty, unemployment, inequality, social marginalization, and growing unhappiness with the Nigerian government. The northeast area of Nigeria is one of the most economically impoverished in the country, with high rates of inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Dauda, 2017; Khan and Cheri, 2016; Ngbea, 2014). This has made it easier for Boko Haram to attract people since it can provide cash incentives and promises of a better life to young people with few other options for employment.

4.2 Farmer-Herder Conflicts in the Middle Belt

Undoubtedly, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria is on the rise and poses a danger to the country's food security, livestock output, and efforts to reduce poverty. The conflicts disrupt and endanger the viability of agriculture and pastoral production in impacted areas, in addition to having a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of individuals involved. This is a result of the fact that farmers and herdsmen both depend on the same environment and region for their livelihoods, which may be marked by political inequality or a lack of resources.

Many hypotheses, including the tragedy of the commons, have been proposed to explain the current violence in Nigeria between farmers and herdsmen. According to the hypothesis, if common resources are not adequately managed, they will be misused. For example, in an open grazing system, it is anticipated that each herdsman will work to maintain as many cattle as possible on the commons (free grasses/natural feed) (Shaibu, 2018). Conflicts over the utilization of natural resources are growing and more common throughout Nigeria, including the North Central region (Shaibu, 2018; Adisa & Adekunle, 2010).

Pastoralists possess roughly 90% of the nation's herd in Nigeria, which consists of numerous cattle, donkeys, camels, goats, and sheep (Peace, 2017). Between 20 and 30 percent of the total agricultural output and 6 to 8 percent of the overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are accounted for by livestock in the country's agricultural sector (Olomola & Nwafor, 2018). But the biggest problem and most frequent resource use conflict in the nation continues to be the conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Cattle ranching is more than just a source of income for herdsmen; it is also a component of their culture and identity. A long-running struggle with farmers has resulted from their perception that any threat to their herds is a direct challenge to their survival and shared destiny. In recent decades, this war has gotten worse, costing thousands of deaths, displacing tens of thousands of people, and causing enormous economic damage. Herdsmen graze freely, ruin crops, obstruct traffic, attack villages, and engage in other aggressive behaviour throughout Nigeria's central and southern areas. According to Obasanmi & Enoma (2022), Okoro (2018), and Peace (2017), with annual financial losses estimated at up to \$13.7 billion, the conflict has a serious detrimental impact on the affected populations' lives, property, food security, and educational progress.

4.3 Niger Delta militancy in the South-South

Because of the perceived economic exploitation of the region by the Nigerian government and international oil companies, the Niger Delta region in South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria has experienced social instability and terrorist activity. The residents have not reaped the full benefits of this wealth in natural

resources, even though the region is the source of Nigeria's oil wealth, and oil production accounts for over 80% of the nation's revenue (Elwerfelli & Benhin, 2018; Abdullateef *et al.*, 2017; Akuruju, 2015; Asobie, 2012). This has caused the Niger Delta region to experience severe poverty, environmental degradation, and political marginalization.

The Niger Delta insurgency has its origins in a series of protests and unrests that occurred in the early 1990s over what residents viewed as neglect and marginalization. One of the most notable organizations to arise at this time was the "Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)" under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa. MOSOP promoted enhanced local community control over and use of the area's natural resources and regional political sovereignty (Ibeanu, 2003). Since then, several militant organizations have appeared in the area, including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), to mention a few. These organizations have attacked oil installations and facilities, abducted oil employees, and engaged in other violent actions in the area. As a result, oil output has decreased, and the Nigerian government and foreign oil firms have suffered large financial losses (Akpan, 2013). To address this issue, there was the 2009 amnesty initiative sought to disarm militants and offer them employment prospects and other forms of economic opportunity (Owonikoko, 2020; Ikoh & Ukpung, 2013). While the programme has been successful in lowering the degree of violence in the area, many of the root causes of the militancy still have not been resolved (Nwajiaku, 2015).

5.0 Political Economy Perspective on Conflict and Food Security in Nigeria

5.1 Neoliberalism and its impact on food security

The dominant economic theory, known as neoliberalism, places a strong emphasis on the contribution of markets and private enterprise to economic growth and development. Neoliberal policies were adopted in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted in an economic restructuring marked by trade liberalization, deregulation, and privatization of state-owned businesses. Although this restructuring was intended to boost economic productivity and encourage private investment, it had a significant impact on the nation's food security (Akinlo, 2017; Odoemenam, 2017). The implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) with the express purpose of liberalizing the economy, cutting back on government spending, and promoting foreign investment was the result of this (Ogunyemi, 2015).

The displacement of smallholder farmers and the consolidation of agricultural production in the hands of giant agribusinesses were two major effects of neoliberal policies on food security in Nigeria (Okpara & Umeh, 2015).

Smallholder farmers found it challenging to compete with large-scale producers after the elimination of subsidies and other state assistance programs. A decrease in total agricultural productivity resulted from the displacement of several small farmers into other economic sectors.

Neoliberal policies, namely in the fields of transportation, storage, and marketing, allegedly also contributed to the neglect of rural infrastructure, according to Okpara & Umeh (2015). Smallholder farmers found it challenging to reach markets and transport their goods because of this neglect, which caused crops to rot and be wasted. Additionally, the breakdown of the nation's agricultural input supply system caused by the privatization of state-owned businesses like the Nigerian National Supply Company (NNSC) undermined the productivity of small-scale farmers (Odukoya, 2020).

The concentration of export-oriented agriculture over domestic food production has also influenced Nigeria's food security (Oya, 2013). As a result, farmers are focusing more on products that can be exported for foreign cash, which has led to a decrease in the production of food for local consumption. Additionally, by decreasing their production and income due to the withdrawal of government aid and subsidies for smallholder farmers, poverty and food insecurity have been made worse (Ogunyemi, 2015).

5.2 Economic Nationalism and Food Security in Nigeria

An ideology known as economic nationalism emphasizes the value of a nation's economic independence and the necessity to defend home industries from international competition. In the Nigerian context, various governments have promoted economic nationalism, particularly during times of economic distress. Existing literature shows that economic nationalism has hampered the growth of the agricultural sector and restricted the flow of food imports, which has had a negative influence on food security in Nigeria (Olisahet *et al.*, 2022; Koning, 2017; Pillay, 2009).

Aboyade (1986) asserts that the economic nationalism-driven import substitution policies that Nigeria adopted in the 1970s and 1980s had a detrimental effect on the agricultural sector. Due to these policies, agricultural productivity and food output declined, and urban industry growth was encouraged at the expense of agriculture. The neglect of the agricultural sector by successive Nigerian governments, according to Olayoku (2013), can also be ascribed to the implementation of economic nationalism policies that prioritized the growth of industry above agriculture. Furthermore, the bulk of farmers' homesteads in rural areas have been abandoned because Nigeria supported economic nationalism. Due to a lack of funding for rural infrastructure projects, restricted access to finance options, and subpar extension services, agriculture productivity and food

security have all been negatively impacted. According to Akpan (2018), the promotion of mega-city projects and the focus on urban growth have made the neglect of the rural sector worse.

The emphasis on encouraging domestic production and consumption is one significant effect of economic nationalism on food security in Nigeria. To increase local agriculture production and processing, the government has implemented measures like import substitution, export promotion, and local content development. For instance, the government has put in place measures to increase regional rice production, such as the Anchor Borrowers' Programme, which gives smallholder farmers loans to increase their output. Regarding essentials like rice, these strategies have had some effectiveness in boosting food production and lowering the nation's dependency on imports.

5.3 Structuralism and Food Security in Nigeria

The fundamental structures of society and the economy are the focus of structuralism, a theory of development. The structuralist perspective contends that Nigeria's problems with food security are caused by the structure of the country's economy, which is marked by high levels of inequality, a lack of diversification, and an excessive reliance on oil exports. In this perspective, food security is seen as being directly related to more general challenges of economic growth and structural change.

Olukoshi (2008), a prominent proponent of structuralism in Nigeria, has maintained that the country's problems with food security are caused by a failure to address the structural issues at the root of poverty and inequality. The author further stressed that Nigeria must take a more structuralist approach to development, one that emphasizes lowering inequality, diversifying the economy, and encouraging increased food production and self-sufficiency.

The necessity to address the issue of rural poverty is a crucial component of the structuralist approach to food security in Nigeria. Olukoshi (2007) asserts that rural poverty poses a significant barrier to food security because it prevents small-scale farmers from making investments in their operations and raising production. Olukoshi suggests several strategies to address this issue, including improvements in rural infrastructure, more loan availability for small-scale farmers, and improved policy environments for small-scale agriculture.

5.4 Institutionalism and Food Security in Nigeria

The study of formal and informal institutions, their relationships, and their effects on society is referred to as institutionalism. Institutionalism is a key factor in deciding whether policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing food security in Nigeria will be successful. The creation, execution, and evaluation of food

security policies and initiatives involve institutions like governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations.

The efficiency with which institutions carry out plans and initiatives is one of the major problems with institutionalism and food security in Nigeria. As an illustration, the National Agricultural Extension, Research and Liaison Services (NAERLS) has come under fire for failing to adequately tell farmers about new technology and advances, which has led to low productivity and food insecurity (Adewumi, 2014). Insufficient capital, a lack of political will, and poor administration have all been blamed for this failure.

Additionally, it has been discovered that institutions are constrained by rent-seeking and corruption, which has resulted in the theft of funds intended for food security initiatives. The provision of subsidized fertilizers and other inputs to farmers in Nigeria has been criticized for being dishonest, leading to low productivity and food insecurity (Ajani *et al.*, 2005; Ojo & Adekunle, 2015).

However, some organizations have been successful in tackling Nigeria's difficulties with food security. For instance, according to Oyinbo & Adelekan (2019), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has put in place programmes to increase smallholder farmers' production, lower post-harvest losses, and improve their access to loans and markets. In the targeted communities, these programmes have successfully improved food security and decreased poverty.

Oluwatayo & Adegboye (2017) stated that among others, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Agricultural Seeds Council, the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services, and the National Root Crops Research Institute make up the institutional framework for food security in Nigeria. However, due to problems such as corruption, poor management, and insufficient budget, these institutions' efficiency has been questioned.

Institutionalism also emphasizes the significance of land tenure and property rights in maintaining food security. The lack of transparency and security in Nigeria's system of land tenure, which is based on traditional rules and practices, has drawn criticism, particularly in regions where land is a crucial resource for agriculture. Aremu & Adegbite (2019) asserted that this has led to disputes over land use and ownership that have jeopardized the food security of the impacted communities.

To achieve food security in Nigeria, institutionalists emphasize the importance of strong and effective institutions, policies, and property rights regimes. The

institutional framework for food security in Nigeria, however, has inadequacies and difficulties that have led to the country's continued food insecurity and malnutrition.

5.5 Gender and Food Security

Women frequently face the brunt of food poverty in many nations, including Nigeria (FAO, 2014), making gender a significant element in food security. Women's ability to access resources and make decisions can have a significant impact on their ability to obtain enough food for themselves and their families. Women in Nigeria are frequently denied access to financing and land ownership (Amusan *et al.*, 2021), which might hinder their capacity to engage in agricultural production and establish a reliable source of income. Their capacity to purchase food or make investments in food production may be impacted as a result.

The empowerment of women can benefit food security (Asadullah and Kambhampati. 2021). For instance, food security was better for women who had access to credit and worked in agriculture than it was for those who did not (Oseni, 2018). Similar results were observed in Ethiopia when families headed by women were more likely to experience food security than households headed by men (Tefera & Tadesse, 2015). These findings underline the need for policies and programmes that address gender inequalities in access to resources and decision-making power. Also, a study conducted in Ghana reported a favourable relationship between household food security and women's involvement in financial decision-making (Asenso-Okyere *et al.*, 1997). Women's education was found to be positively correlated with household food security in another study conducted in Nepal (Malapit *et al.*, 2013).

However, achieving food security continues to be significantly hampered by gender-based inequality and discrimination, particularly in developing nations. Women's rights, education, and economic involvement should be given top priority by policies and initiatives, which can help remove these obstacles and increase everyone's access to food.

5.6 Resource curse and conflict

The phrase "resource curse" describes the paradoxical situation in which nations with abundant natural resources, such as oil, minerals, and gas, suffer from slow economic growth and development, severe poverty, and frequent wars. When oil was discovered in Nigeria in the 1950s, the nation's economic structure changed, with oil exports taking over as the primary source of revenue. Other economic sectors, such as agriculture, which were essential to the nation's food security, were neglected because of this shift.

In Nigeria, particularly in the oil-extraction region of the Niger Delta, political violence and conflict have been greatly exacerbated by the resource curse (Ross, 2015). Because of corruption and a lack of public investment in infrastructure and fundamental social services, poverty and inequality have been made worse by the government's inability to handle oil earnings properly. As a result, militant organizations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which has attacked oil sites and abducted oil workers and exacerbated conflict and instability, have developed in the Niger Delta.

The resource curse has also resulted in environmental deterioration and health risks for populations living close to oil facilities, as well as confrontations between various groups vying for control of the oil wealth (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, Nigeria's resource curse has greatly contributed to societal discontent and violence in addition to impeding economic progress and development.

Eboh & Nwokolo (2017) reported that the resource curse also played a role in Nigeria's agricultural sector's downfall. The authors contend that the neglect of the agricultural industry, which historically served as the backbone of the economy, has resulted from the concentration on oil exports. Due to this disregard, agricultural output has decreased, which has increased food insecurity in the nation.

5.7 Ethnic and religious factors in conflict and food security

Awareness of the dynamics of conflicts in Nigeria and how they affect food security requires an understanding of both ethnic and religious variables. Over 250 different ethnic groups, each with its unique language, culture, and religion, make up the diverse nation of Nigeria. The nation is split along ethnic and religious lines, and this rift has long been a source of strife and violence. The historical, social, economic, and political causes of ethnic and religious strife in Nigeria include colonization, marginalization, and the unequal distribution of resources (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Food security in Nigeria is significantly impacted by racial and religious tensions. Due to the disruption of farming operations, evictions, and infrastructure destruction caused by conflicts, there are food shortages and rising food costs. For instance, the Middle Belt region's regular conflicts between farmers and herders have resulted in the displacement of thousands of people and the devastation of farms, which has had a detrimental effect on the region's ability to produce food. Millions of people have been displaced because of the Boko Haram insurgency's actions in the North-East, which have affected their ability to access and produce food.

According to Akinpelu & Oyewole (2021), conflicts between ethnic groups and religions are important causes of food insecurity in Nigeria. The study discovered that these disputes have a major effect on food distribution, access, and production. According to the authors, to guarantee long-term food security in the nation, the government must deal with the underlying causes of these conflicts. Particularly, during election seasons, ethnic and religious tensions are frequently used to garner support for political leaders. These politicians take advantage of ethnic and religious divisions to foster a "us versus them" mentality and win the support of their own ethnic and religious communities. This tactic works especially well in Nigeria, where identity plays a significant role in both social and political life. However, it frequently results in bloody conflict that compromises food security, especially in rural regions where farming and food production are the primary sources of income.

6.0 Conclusions

Conflict and food insecurity are mutually reinforcing challenges that have significantly undermined Nigeria's development. While conflict disrupts agricultural production, displaces populations, and destroys infrastructure, food insecurity can also act as a trigger or sustainer of conflict. However, understanding these linkages through a political economy perspective reveals that these problems are not just natural occurrences or failures of agricultural production, but are deeply rooted in structural, institutional, and economic dynamics.

Neoliberal reforms, policy inconsistencies, corruption, land tenure challenges, gender-based exclusion, and the failure to address ethnic and religious grievances have all contributed to a fragile food system. Thus, solving Nigeria's food insecurity crisis requires a multi-level approach that integrates peace building, institutional reform, social justice, and inclusive agricultural policies.

Gender-sensitive land reform, agro-ecological alternatives to current market-based models, ethnic and religious tolerance, and stronger governance mechanisms are essential for addressing the underlying causes of both conflict and food insecurity. As such, food security should not be treated merely as a humanitarian goal, but as a strategic pillar for national peace and development.

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