

Migration, Insecurity, and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: Analysing the Interconnections and Impacts on National Development**Musa Balarabe Musa¹ & Danladi Baba Daradara²**

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The interrelationship between insecurity, migration, and underdevelopment has become an increasingly important concern in contemporary Nigeria, particularly amid the growing incidence of armed banditry, kidnapping, insurgency, and communal violence. This paper examines how insecurity shapes migration and displacement patterns and how these processes contribute to socioeconomic and developmental vulnerabilities. Drawing on the Push-Pull Theory of Migration and the Human Security Paradigm, the paper conceptualises insecurity as a major push factor that compels individuals and households to leave their communities in search of safety and livelihood opportunities. Using a qualitative approach based on secondary data, documentary evidence, and comparative analysis of conflict-affected regions, the study examines the implications of insecurity-induced migration for livelihoods, agricultural production, food security, access to education and healthcare, infrastructure, employment, and local economic activities. The analysis indicates that persistent insecurity disrupts rural livelihoods, restricts mobility, weakens economic activity, increases pressure on host communities and public services, and reinforces existing patterns of poverty and underdevelopment. The paper further argues that insecurity, displacement, and underdevelopment constitute a mutually reinforcing cycle in which violence generates population displacement and livelihood disruption, while socioeconomic deprivation and institutional vulnerabilities may heighten exposure to further insecurity. The paper recommends an integrated policy approach combining effective security governance with livelihood restoration, agricultural recovery, social protection, infrastructure development, human capital investment, and durable solutions for displaced and host communities. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential for strengthening human security, reducing displacement, and promoting sustainable and inclusive development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, Forced Displacement, Insecurity, Migration, Underdevelopment,**INTRODUCTION**

Migration in Nigeria has historically been shaped by a combination of socio-economic, environmental, and political factors. Traditionally, rural-to-urban migration has been a dominant trend, driven by economic opportunities, rapid *urbanisation*, and environmental pressures such as desertification in northern Nigeria. However, in recent years, insecurity, particularly the rise of armed banditry, kidnappings, insurgency, and communal conflicts, has emerged as a major push

factor, leading to mass displacement and forced migration. The scale of internal displacement in Nigeria has reached alarming levels, with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2021) reporting over 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the country. The Northwest and Northeast regions, in particular, have witnessed large-scale displacement due to escalating armed banditry, terrorist activities by Boko Haram and ISWAP, and recurring communal clashes over land and natural resources. These crises have disrupted livelihoods, agricultural activities, and local economies, forcing many to seek refuge in relatively safer urban centers or IDP camps.

Additionally, cross-border migration into neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon has intensified, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020) highlighting the increasing number of Nigerian refugees fleeing violence. This mass displacement presents serious humanitarian, security, and socio-economic challenges, not only for Nigeria but for the broader West African region. The spillover effects of Nigerian insecurity have strained diplomatic relations and increased pressure on international relief agencies providing support to displaced populations. The impact of these migration patterns is far-reaching, affecting national stability, economic productivity, and regional development. Addressing these issues requires a multi-sectoral approach that includes strengthening security measures, improving governance, and creating sustainable economic opportunities to reduce the factors driving forced migration in Nigeria.

Nigeria has experienced worsening insecurity over the past decade, with insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts significantly impacting national stability. In the Northeast, Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have continued their violent insurgency, resulting in mass displacement, economic devastation, and the destruction of critical infrastructure (Zenn, 2021). These groups have targeted communities, schools, and government institutions, leading to the internal displacement of over 2.5 million people, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2023).

In the Northwest, armed banditry has emerged as a dominant security challenge. Bandits operate in loosely organized criminal networks, engaging in cattle rustling, village raids, and mass kidnappings for ransom (Foucher, 2020). These activities have forced thousands of rural inhabitants to flee to urban centers or IDP camps, further straining already limited resources. The

mass abductions of students from schools in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina States highlight the increasing sophistication and boldness of these criminal elements. Beyond insurgency and banditry, communal and ethnic conflicts in regions such as the Middle Belt have fueled land disputes, resource-based clashes, and violent confrontations between farming and herding communities (Adebanwi, 2017). These conflicts, often exacerbated by climate change-induced resource scarcity, have intensified internal displacement and rural-to-urban migration, further deepening economic and social inequalities.

The relationship between migration, insecurity, and underdevelopment in Nigeria is complex and mutually reinforcing, particularly in conflict-affected areas of the North-West and North-Central regions. Insecurity arising from armed banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and farmer-herder conflicts has become an important driver of forced migration and internal displacement. Forced migration should therefore not be viewed merely as a demographic outcome of insecurity; it is also a process through which existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities are reproduced and intensified. Recent evidence from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2025) indicates that approximately 1.38 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were identified across ten conflict-affected states in North-Central and North-West Nigeria as of October 2025. These states include Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Benue, Kogi, Niger, Nasarawa, and Plateau. Armed banditry and kidnapping accounted for 54% of identified displacement, while farmer-herder conflicts accounted for another 33%. Importantly, approximately 81% of displaced persons were living within host communities rather than in formal camps, creating additional demands on already limited local resources and services (IOM, 2025).

The experiences of Sokoto and Zamfara demonstrate the direct relationship between insecurity and forced migration in the North-West. In June 2025, attacks associated with armed banditry and kidnapping in communities in Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State displaced approximately 18,500 people. About 13,000 displaced persons moved to Isa town, while approximately 5,500 crossed into neighbouring Zamfara State (IOM, 2025). Such movements demonstrate how insecurity can rapidly transform relatively stable communities into areas of humanitarian vulnerability. Beyond the immediate need for food, shelter, and protection, displacement frequently disrupts access to farmland, markets, education, healthcare, employment, and other essential services. Consequently, the effects of insecurity extend beyond the immediate

loss of physical safety to undermine the socioeconomic foundations of household and community development.

Agriculture is particularly vulnerable to insecurity-induced displacement in Northern Nigeria. A large proportion of rural households depend on crop production, livestock rearing, and related activities for their livelihoods. When insecurity prevents farmers from accessing their fields or forces them to abandon their communities, productive assets and sources of income are lost. Reduced agricultural activity can consequently contribute to declining household incomes, food insecurity, unemployment, and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. In Katsina and Zamfara States, the interaction between farmer-herder tensions, climate variability, desertification, population growth, and competition over land and other natural resources has contributed to heightened vulnerability to conflict and displacement (IOM, 2024). Thus, insecurity should be understood within a broader structural context in which demographic, environmental, economic, and governance-related pressures interact.

Forced migration also generates considerable socioeconomic pressure in receiving and host communities. Since the majority of displaced persons live among host populations, rather than in formal camps, their arrival increases demand for housing, water, sanitation, healthcare, education, food, transportation, and employment. Where public infrastructure is already inadequate, rapid population inflows can intensify competition for scarce resources and economic opportunities. The World Bank (2025) notes that conflict and insecurity in Northern Nigeria have displaced millions of people and placed significant pressure on infrastructure, public services, and local government institutions. The situation consequently produces a dual burden: displaced households experience the loss of livelihoods and productive assets, while host communities must absorb additional populations without necessarily receiving sufficient resources to expand public services.

The consequences of prolonged displacement extend to human capital development. Displacement can interrupt children's schooling, restrict access to healthcare, reduce opportunities for employment, and weaken household livelihood strategies. Where displacement persists for extended periods, households may lose productive assets, land access, social networks, and opportunities for economic mobility. Such conditions can deepen poverty and social exclusion and may reproduce socioeconomic disadvantage across generations. The developmental implications are therefore substantial because human capital losses accumulated during displacement can

reduce the capacity of individuals and communities to recover even after immediate insecurity has declined.

Insecurity also constrains investment and local economic activity. Businesses operating in conflict-affected areas face increased risks associated with kidnapping, destruction of property, disruption of transportation, market closures, and uncertainty about the continuity of commercial operations. Farmers may be unable to cultivate their land, traders may reduce their movements, and investors may be reluctant to commit capital to areas where security conditions are unpredictable. These disruptions reduce production, employment, household income, and market activity, thereby weakening the local economic base. The resulting relationship is circular: underdevelopment and limited economic opportunities can increase vulnerability to insecurity, while insecurity simultaneously destroys the productive activities required to promote economic development.

The relationship between migration, insecurity, and underdevelopment can therefore be conceptualised as a reinforcing cycle. Insecurity produces forced migration by undermining the physical and economic conditions necessary for people to remain in their communities. Displacement subsequently disrupts livelihoods, reduces agricultural production, interrupts education and healthcare, and increases dependence on humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the concentration of displaced populations in host communities increases pressure on infrastructure, employment opportunities, public services, and natural resources. These pressures can deepen poverty and social vulnerability, potentially creating conditions that sustain further insecurity and migration.

For Northern Nigeria, particularly Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina States, breaking this cycle requires moving beyond short-term emergency responses towards integrated development and durable solutions approaches. Security interventions need to be complemented by investments in agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods, education, healthcare, infrastructure, social protection, employment creation, and conflict-sensitive development. The World Bank's (2026) recent investment in expanding agricultural value chains and employment opportunities further underscores the importance of strengthening agriculture as a pathway to improved livelihoods and economic resilience. Such interventions are particularly relevant in Northern Nigeria, where agriculture remains central to household livelihoods and food security.

Ultimately, sustainable development in conflict-affected areas cannot be achieved through security interventions alone. It requires restoring the conditions that allow individuals and households to remain safely in their communities, while simultaneously providing displaced populations with opportunities for dignified return, local integration, or resettlement where return is not feasible. Addressing the interconnected causes and consequences of migration, insecurity, and underdevelopment therefore requires coordinated policies that combine security, livelihood recovery, human capital development, social protection, infrastructure provision, and effective local governance. Such an approach would not only address the immediate humanitarian consequences of displacement but also contribute to breaking the structural cycle through which insecurity and underdevelopment reinforce one another.

Statement of the Research Problem

Nigeria continues to face a complex and persistent security and displacement crisis, with significant implications for socioeconomic development. Armed banditry, kidnapping, insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, and communal violence have displaced populations, disrupted livelihoods, weakened access to essential services, and undermined the economic and social stability of affected communities. Although the manifestations and intensity of insecurity vary across regions, the North-West and North-Central zones have become particularly important in understanding the contemporary relationship between insecurity, forced migration, and underdevelopment. Recent evidence from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2025) indicates that 1,378,124 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were identified across ten states in these two geopolitical zones as of October 2025. The affected states include Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna, Kano, Benue, Kogi, Niger, Nasarawa, and Plateau. Armed banditry and kidnapping constituted the leading reported causes of displacement, accounting for 54% of displacement, followed by farmer-herder conflicts at 33%, communal clashes at 7%, natural disasters at 3%, and insurgency at 2% (IOM, 2025).

The scale and persistence of displacement suggest that insecurity in Nigeria is no longer only a security or humanitarian concern but also a significant development challenge. In many affected communities, insecurity disrupts agricultural production, destroys productive assets, restricts mobility, interrupts education, limits access to healthcare, and reduces opportunities for employment and income generation. In the North-West, for example, recurrent attacks have

repeatedly forced households to abandon their communities and seek safety elsewhere. In June 2025, attacks by armed bandits in parts of Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State resulted in the displacement of thousands of people, with some moving to Isa town and others crossing into neighbouring Zamfara State (IOM, 2025). Such movements illustrate how insecurity can disrupt established patterns of settlement and livelihood while simultaneously transferring socioeconomic pressures from areas of origin to receiving communities.

The developmental consequences of forced migration are particularly serious because the majority of displaced people do not live in formal camps but within host communities. According to IOM (2025), approximately 81% of IDPs identified in North-Central and North-West Nigeria were living in host communities. This pattern of displacement creates additional demands for housing, food, water, healthcare, education, sanitation, employment, and other public services. Host communities, many of which already experience inadequate infrastructure and limited economic opportunities, may therefore face increased competition for scarce resources. The World Bank (2025) similarly reports that conflict and insecurity have displaced more than 3.5 million people in Northern Nigeria, placing considerable pressure on local infrastructure and government institutions and increasing competition for limited livelihood opportunities. Consequently, displacement can generate a cycle in which insecurity produces population movement, population movement increases pressure on host communities, and socioeconomic pressures further weaken community resilience.

The problem is also evident in the disruption of livelihoods and productive activities. Rural households in many parts of Northern Nigeria depend substantially on agriculture, livestock production, petty trading, and other informal economic activities. Persistent insecurity can prevent farmers from accessing their farmland, restrict movement to markets, reduce livestock mobility, and discourage investment in productive activities. The resulting loss of livelihoods can increase household poverty and food insecurity and heighten dependence on humanitarian assistance. When these effects persist over time, insecurity can undermine the productive capacity of communities and weaken the foundations required for sustainable local development.

Despite the scale of the crisis, existing responses have often been dominated by security operations and short-term humanitarian interventions. While such interventions are necessary for protecting lives and responding to immediate needs, they may not adequately address the structural

socioeconomic conditions associated with prolonged displacement and underdevelopment. The World Bank's (2025) approval of a US\$300 million Solutions for the Internally Displaced and Host Communities (SOLID) project reflects growing recognition that displacement requires more comprehensive development-oriented responses. The project seeks to improve access to essential services and economic opportunities for displaced populations and host communities and to strengthen their resilience and self-reliance. The scale of this intervention also illustrates the extent to which displacement has become a development challenge requiring sustained institutional and financial responses.

A further problem concerns the relationship between insecurity and the capacity of the state to promote development. Persistent insecurity requires substantial public expenditure on security, emergency relief, displacement management, and humanitarian assistance. At the same time, affected communities require investments in education, healthcare, roads, water supply, agricultural development, employment, and social protection. Where public resources are limited, sustained crisis management may constrain the capacity of government to make adequate investments in these longer-term development priorities. This creates a potentially self-reinforcing relationship in which insecurity generates displacement and economic disruption, while underdevelopment and limited livelihood opportunities increase vulnerability to further instability.

Despite increasing attention from government, development agencies, humanitarian organisations, and researchers, important gaps remain in understanding the interconnected processes through which insecurity, migration, and underdevelopment reinforce one another in Nigeria. Existing interventions frequently address displacement, security, poverty, or development as separate policy problems, whereas the realities experienced by affected populations are interconnected. There is therefore a need for research that moves beyond examining insecurity simply as a cause of migration and instead investigates how insecurity-induced migration subsequently affects livelihoods, access to services, human capital, local economies, host communities, and broader development outcomes.

The central problem, therefore, is not simply that insecurity is causing population displacement in Nigeria, but that repeated displacement may be weakening the socioeconomic foundations upon which sustainable development depends. The continued movement of populations from insecure areas, the disruption of productive livelihoods, increasing pressure on host communities, and the

diversion of public resources toward crisis management may collectively reinforce existing patterns of poverty, inequality, marginalisation, and underdevelopment. Yet, the mechanisms through which these processes interact remain insufficiently understood, particularly in the North-Western states where armed banditry and kidnapping have become major drivers of displacement.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the relationship between insecurity, migration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. It specifically seeks to understand how insecurity drives forced migration, how migration affects the socioeconomic conditions of displaced and host populations, and how these processes contribute to or reinforce underdevelopment. By examining these relationships as interconnected dimensions of a broader social and development crisis, the study aims to contribute empirical evidence that can support more integrated policies addressing security, displacement, livelihood recovery, social protection, and sustainable development in conflict-affected communities.

Objectives of the Study

The paper aims to examine the interrelationship between insecurity, migration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria by assessing the extent to which insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts drive migration and displacement; examining the socioeconomic and governance implications of insecurity-induced migration, particularly its effects on livelihoods, employment, access to essential services, infrastructure, and human capital; and proposing evidence-based policy measures for mitigating insecurity, addressing displacement, restoring livelihoods, and promoting sustainable development in affected and host communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration in Nigeria: Trends and Patterns

Internal Migration

Internal migration in Nigeria is primarily driven by both economic factors and insecurity. Traditionally, internal migration involved rural-to-urban movements, as individuals sought better economic opportunities in cities such as Lagos, Kano, and Abuja. However, in recent years, displacement due to violent conflicts, especially in the northeastern and northwestern regions, has drastically increased internal migration. According to the International Organisation for Migration (2021), internal displacement in Nigeria has risen sharply due to Boko Haram insurgency,

banditry, and communal conflicts. These movements have resulted in social and economic challenges, particularly for the displaced populations and host communities (UNHCR, 2020).

Cross-border Migration and Refugee Movements

Nigeria's insecurity has also triggered significant cross-border migration, particularly into neighboring countries like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This has placed a strain on regional stability and increased humanitarian challenges. The Boko Haram insurgency, in particular, has driven people out of Nigeria's northeastern region into the Lake Chad Basin, creating refugee crises in countries already dealing with their own socio-political issues (Zenn, 2021). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are more than 300,000 Nigerian refugees in these neighboring countries, contributing to regional migration patterns that complicate security and development efforts.

Insecurity in Nigeria: Causes and Dimensions

Insurgency in the Northeastern part of Nigeria

The rise of Boko Haram in 2009 marked a turning point in Nigeria's security landscape. The insurgency has caused mass displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and a humanitarian crisis in the northeastern states (Zenn, 2021). Boko Haram's tactics of abduction, suicide bombings, and targeted killings have driven millions from their homes, contributing significantly to internal migration and underdevelopment. Moreover, the insurgency has disrupted agricultural production and trade routes, exacerbating poverty and unemployment, which in turn fuels further insecurity (Campbell, 2020).

Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the northwestern region, has emerged as a critical security challenge in recent years. Armed groups engage in activities such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village raids, forcing thousands to flee their homes (Foucher, 2020). The violence perpetrated by bandits has created a vicious cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment, as affected areas often lack adequate government presence and infrastructure, limiting access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods.

Communal and Ethnic Conflicts in North Central Nigeria

Communal and ethnic conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt region, have contributed to both internal migration and underdevelopment. These conflicts often arise over land, resources, and political control between various ethnic groups (Adebanwi, 2017). The displacement caused by these conflicts creates additional strain on already fragile communities, leading to further social fragmentation and economic deprivation.

Underdevelopment: Indicators and Challenges

Economic Underdevelopment

Economic underdevelopment in Nigeria is characterised by low income, high poverty rates, and limited access to economic opportunities. In conflict-ridden areas, economic activities are severely disrupted, leaving populations dependent on subsistence agriculture and informal labor, both of which are vulnerable to insecurity (Okechukwu & Wodi, 2021). This cycle of poverty, migration, and underdevelopment further weakens the social and economic resilience of communities.

Infrastructure Deficits

Insecurity also exacerbates Nigeria's infrastructure deficits. Roads, schools, healthcare facilities, and power supply networks are often destroyed in conflict zones, making it difficult for governments and humanitarian organisations to provide essential services. In regions plagued by insurgency and banditry, infrastructure development is stalled, hindering the prospects for long-term economic growth and stability (Campbell, 2020).

Governance and Social Services Breakdown

The combination of insecurity and migration has led to the collapse of governance structures in certain regions of Nigeria. Government presence in many conflict-affected areas is minimal, resulting in the breakdown of law enforcement, social services, and development planning. This governance vacuum allows non-state actors such as militant groups and bandits to exert control, further perpetuating instability and underdevelopment (Foucher, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Push-Pull Theory of Migration

The push-pull theory of migration explains migration decisions based on push factors that drive people away from their current location and pull factors that attract them to a new location (Lee,

1966). Push factors include conflict, poverty, and lack of opportunities, while pull factors involve better security, economic opportunities, and access to services in a different location. In the Nigerian context, insecurity, poverty, and environmental degradation serve as push factors for internal and cross-border migration, while perceived safety and economic prospects in urban centers or other countries act as pull factors (Adepoju, 2000).

In Nigeria, push factors such as insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts have compelled millions to migrate. Conversely, urban areas like Lagos and Abuja, as well as neighboring countries, serve as pull factors, offering relatively better security and economic opportunities. However, as more migrants flood into these areas, the infrastructure and services become strained, often leading to underdevelopment in both origin and destination regions (IOM, 2021).

Human Security Paradigm

Concept of Human Security

The human security paradigm broadens the concept of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, and political security (UNDP, 1994). It posits that threats to human security, such as poverty, disease, and environmental degradation, often precede migration. These factors, combined with traditional security threats like insurgency and banditry, compel individuals to seek safer environments (Osaghae, 2007). In Nigeria, human security threats such as food insecurity, lack of access to healthcare, and unemployment drive migration, particularly in conflict-ridden areas. These factors not only compel people to leave but also contribute to the underdevelopment of both origin and destination regions. For instance, migration leads to population surges in urban centers, overwhelming already weak infrastructure and creating new vulnerabilities (Okechukwu & Wodi, 2021). At the same time, the rural areas left behind face labor shortages, further exacerbating poverty and underdevelopment.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design based on documentary analysis and comparative case-study approaches to examine the interrelationship between insecurity, migration, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The design facilitates an in-depth interpretation of how insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts shape population displacement and its socioeconomic and governance consequences. The study draws on secondary evidence from official government publications, international organisations, peer-reviewed studies, and

policy reports to identify patterns, trends, and relationships across conflict-affected settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study relies exclusively on secondary data obtained from official government institutions, international organisations, academic publications, and policy and humanitarian reports. Major sources include the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), National Population Commission (NPC), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Bank, and relevant Nigerian government and development institutions. Particular attention is given to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which provides systematic information on the magnitude, geographical distribution, causes, and conditions of internal displacement. The IOM's October 2025 assessment identified 1,378,124 internally displaced persons across ten states in North-Central and North-West Nigeria, with armed banditry and kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, communal clashes, natural disasters, and insurgency among the principal drivers of displacement (International Organisation for Migration [IOM], 2025). Additional evidence was obtained from peer-reviewed studies and policy reports addressing insecurity, forced migration, livelihoods, governance, and development in Nigeria.

The study adopts a comparative case-study approach focusing on Nigeria's North-East and North-West geopolitical zones. The North-East provides a context for examining prolonged insurgency and its consequences for displacement and development, while the North-West, particularly Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, provides a context for examining armed banditry, kidnapping, communal tensions, and associated population displacement. The cases were purposively selected because they represent major contemporary settings of insecurity-induced displacement while exhibiting important differences in the nature and dynamics of insecurity. Comparative analysis facilitates examination of how different forms of insecurity affect migration, livelihoods, access to social services, governance, and development outcomes.

The study employs qualitative content analysis to systematically examine evidence obtained from the selected secondary sources. Following the principles of qualitative content analysis, relevant documentary materials were reviewed, coded, categorised, and interpreted according to recurring concepts and themes (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis was organised around four interconnected themes: (1) insecurity as a driver of forced migration and displacement; (2) socioeconomic consequences for displaced populations and affected communities; (3) pressures on host

communities, infrastructure, and public institutions; and (4) implications for governance and sustainable development. Evidence from different sources was triangulated to identify convergent and divergent findings and to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation. The analysis focuses on relationships and mechanisms evident in the documentary evidence rather than claiming statistical causality.

FINDINGS

Insecurity, Migration, and Underdevelopment: A Vicious Cycle

Economic Consequences of Insecurity

Insecurity has become an important constraint on economic development in conflict-affected parts of Nigeria, particularly in the North-East and North-West. Insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts disrupt agriculture, livestock production, trade, transportation, and other livelihood activities. Recurrent attacks can prevent farmers from accessing farmland, restrict movement to markets, destroy productive assets, and force households to abandon established sources of income. These disruptions reduce household earning capacity and agricultural production while increasing vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty. The effects extend to local markets, where insecurity can increase transaction costs, restrict mobility, disrupt supply chains, and discourage private investment. The World Bank (2025) identifies conflict and displacement as significant constraints on livelihoods and economic resilience in Northern Nigeria and has consequently supported interventions aimed at restoring livelihoods, strengthening infrastructure, and expanding economic opportunities for displaced and host populations.

Insecurity-induced displacement further compounds these economic effects by removing economically active populations from productive activities and concentrating displaced households in areas with limited employment opportunities. The resulting loss of productive capacity in areas of origin, combined with increased demand for scarce economic opportunities in host communities, can deepen poverty and socioeconomic inequality. Consequently, insecurity contributes to underdevelopment not only through the direct destruction or disruption of economic activities but also through the displacement of human and productive resources.

Infrastructure and Social Services

The effects of insecurity also extend to essential infrastructure and social services. Conflict and displacement can disrupt access to schools, healthcare facilities, water and sanitation services, housing, roads, and other public infrastructure. In the North-East, years of insurgency have contributed to significant humanitarian and development challenges, including disruption of education and healthcare services. In the North-West, recurrent attacks and displacement have similarly increased pressure on already limited public services. The concentration of displaced populations within host communities is particularly significant because most IDPs do not reside in formal camps. IOM (2025) reported that approximately 81% of identified IDPs in North-Central and North-West Nigeria were living in host communities, thereby increasing demand for education, healthcare, water, sanitation, shelter, food, and other essential services.

The disruption of education is especially consequential because prolonged insecurity and displacement can interrupt children's schooling and reduce opportunities for human capital development. Similarly, restricted access to healthcare can increase the vulnerability of displaced and host populations to preventable illness and adverse health outcomes. Destruction, abandonment, or overuse of infrastructure therefore creates a development deficit that may persist beyond the immediate period of conflict. Rebuilding physical infrastructure without restoring the institutional and human resources necessary to operate public services may also limit the effectiveness of post-conflict recovery.

Governance Challenges and Institutional Capacity

Insecurity also presents significant challenges to governance and state capacity. Persistent violence can constrain the ability of government institutions to provide security, deliver public services, regulate economic activities, and implement development programmes effectively in affected communities. Where state presence becomes limited or inconsistent, communities may increasingly depend on informal institutions, traditional authorities, community-based organisations, humanitarian agencies, or other non-state actors for security and basic services. Such circumstances can weaken public confidence in state institutions and complicate the implementation of development policies.

The governance implications extend beyond the direct loss of territorial or administrative control. Persistent displacement requires government institutions to allocate substantial resources to

security operations, humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation, and the provision of services to displaced and host populations. This can place additional pressure on already constrained public finances and administrative capacity. The World Bank's (2025) establishment of the Solutions for the Internally Displaced and Host Communities (SOLID) project, with an investment of US\$300 million, illustrates the scale of institutional intervention required to strengthen resilience, access to services, livelihoods, and economic opportunities among displaced and host populations in Northern Nigeria.

Implications for Regional and National Development

The interaction between insecurity, forced migration, economic disruption, weakened public services, and governance challenges produces a reinforcing cycle of vulnerability and underdevelopment. Insecurity drives displacement by making communities unsafe and disrupting livelihoods; displacement subsequently reduces household productive capacity, increases pressure on host communities, and intensifies demand for scarce public services and employment. These socioeconomic pressures can deepen poverty, inequality, and social vulnerability, thereby weakening community resilience and constraining opportunities for sustainable development.

The cycle also has implications beyond individual communities. Prolonged insecurity and displacement can reduce agricultural production, disrupt regional markets, weaken human capital formation, increase public expenditure on security and humanitarian responses, and divert institutional attention from longer-term development priorities. The cumulative effect is a reduction in the capacity of affected regions to generate inclusive economic growth and improve living standards. At the national level, persistent insecurity and displacement consequently represent not only humanitarian and security challenges but also structural obstacles to Nigeria's broader development objectives.

Breaking this cycle requires an integrated policy approach that connects security interventions with development and durable solutions for displaced populations. Military and law-enforcement responses remain important for protecting communities, but they need to be complemented by investments in livelihood restoration, agricultural recovery, education, healthcare, infrastructure, social protection, employment creation, and accountable local governance. The World Bank (2025) similarly emphasises the need to move beyond emergency assistance towards approaches that strengthen resilience, livelihoods, essential services, and economic opportunities for both

displaced populations and host communities. Such an integrated approach is necessary to address not only the immediate consequences of insecurity-induced migration but also the structural conditions that enable insecurity and underdevelopment to reinforce one another.

Human Security and Developmental Implications

Economic Insecurity and Poverty

Economic insecurity in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria has significantly contributed to poverty and underdevelopment. The loss of livelihoods due to displacement, destruction of farmlands, and disruption of local economies exacerbates the cycle of poverty. Insecurity forces individuals and families to abandon productive activities, particularly in agriculture, which is a major source of income for rural communities. This economic dislocation leads to increased dependency on humanitarian aid and remittances, while opportunities for sustainable development diminish (Olusegun, 2021). The persistent poverty deepens vulnerabilities, making it harder for displaced populations to recover and rebuild their lives.

Food Insecurity and Its Impact on Displaced Populations

Food insecurity is a direct consequence of conflict and displacement in Nigeria. In conflict zones such as the Northeast, insurgent activities by Boko Haram have resulted in the destruction of agricultural land and the disruption of food supply chains, leading to widespread hunger and malnutrition (FAO, 2021). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) face difficulties accessing adequate food, as many are confined to camps with limited resources. The lack of access to land and markets further aggravates the situation, making it challenging for displaced populations to secure food, thereby compounding their vulnerability.

Health Insecurity and the Spread of Disease in Migrant Communities

Health insecurity is another critical issue affecting displaced populations and migrant communities in Nigeria. Conflict-related displacement often results in overcrowded refugee camps and settlements, where there is limited access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare services. This creates fertile ground for the spread of communicable diseases such as cholera, malaria, and tuberculosis (WHO, 2020). Moreover, the destruction of healthcare infrastructure in conflict zones exacerbates the health crisis, leading to increased maternal and child mortality rates and a decline in overall health outcomes. Health insecurity not only impacts individuals but also undermines broader human development goals.

Broader Implications for Human Development in Nigeria

The combined effects of economic, food, and health insecurity have broader implications for human development in Nigeria. The displacement and disruption caused by insecurity hinder progress on key development indicators, including poverty alleviation, education, and health. In conflict-affected regions, the population's ability to access education and healthcare is severely restricted, while opportunities for employment and economic participation are diminished. This undermines Nigeria's efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to ending poverty, hunger, and promoting good health and well-being (UNDP, 2020). Without addressing the root causes of insecurity and displacement, Nigeria's human development trajectory remains compromised.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the complex relationship between migration, insecurity, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Migration in Nigeria is driven by both conflict-related factors (such as insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts) and economic hardships. Forced displacement is prevalent in conflict-affected regions, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest. Insecurity disrupts economic activities, especially in agriculture and trade, leading to widespread poverty and underdevelopment. The collapse of essential infrastructure and social services further exacerbates this crisis. Migration, while often a coping mechanism, can intensify the vicious cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment by undermining regional security and fostering instability in both origin and destination areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. **Strengthening Human Security and Addressing Root Causes of Migration:** Migration in conflict zones is often driven by underlying issues such as poverty, lack of access to education, healthcare, and basic social services. Addressing these root causes is vital for promoting stability and sustainable development.
 - a. **Enhancing Economic Opportunities in Conflict Zones:** Providing alternative livelihoods and income-generating activities can reduce migration pressures. Programs like agricultural support initiatives, microcredit schemes, and vocational training can create employment opportunities, especially for youth and displaced populations (Kimenyi *et al.*, 2021).

- b. **Improving Access to Education, Healthcare, and Social Services:** Conflict-affected areas need to focus on improving access to essential services. Rehabilitating schools, hospitals, and other social infrastructures is critical for building resilience in affected communities. Access to quality education and healthcare will help reduce the vulnerabilities that drive migration (UNDP, 2020).
- ii. **Security Sector Reforms:** Security reforms are crucial for restoring stability in regions plagued by insurgency and banditry. The state's capacity to protect citizens and ensure public safety must be strengthened through multi-level approaches. Comprehensive security sector reforms are necessary, incorporating both military and civilian strategies. The government must enhance the capacity of local law enforcement agencies, improve intelligence sharing, and engage local communities in conflict resolution processes (Campbell, 2020). Furthermore, human rights abuses by security forces should be addressed to rebuild trust with affected populations.
- iii. **Regional Collaboration and Migration Management:** Given the cross-border nature of migration in West Africa, particularly in regions affected by conflict, regional cooperation is critical for managing refugee flows and displaced persons. There should be cross-border cooperation for managing refugees and displaced persons. Nigeria must strengthen its partnerships with neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to create regional frameworks for addressing forced migration. This includes collaborative efforts to facilitate the safe return of refugees, share intelligence on security threats, and improve regional humanitarian aid coordination (IOM, 2021).
- iv. **Governance and Institutional Strengthening:** Improving governance at the local level is essential to address insecurity and development challenges in conflict-prone regions. Effective governance ensures the delivery of essential services and enhances public trust in State institutions. This should include enhancing local governance and State presence in conflict-prone areas. To address the structural drivers of insecurity, local governance must be strengthened. This involves promoting accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. Ensuring that local authorities have the resources and capacity to provide basic services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure will foster stability and reduce the likelihood of further displacement (Aghedo & Osumah, 2021).

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