

Human Security Threats and Forced Migration in Benue State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

The security dilemma in Benue State has rendered the farming communities in the state unsafe and uninhabitable, forcing the population into massive relocation, displacements and forced migration. The people have been denied of the much-needed security, which is a sine qua non for actualizing life's aspirations. The paper examines human security threats and forced migration in Benue State. It employed the qualitative research method with semi-structured interview as its instrument of field data collection, and adopted the structural functionalist and forced migration (push-pull model) theories. A sample of forty-five (45) participants (community leaders, displaced persons, farmers, local vigilantes and migrant returnees) were selected by means of purposive sampling from five of the hardest hit local government areas (Agatu, Guma, Logo, Kwande and Makurdi) in the state. The research questions were answered using the data collected from field survey. The responses were used in analyzing each question thematically. The study reveals that the major drivers of the security threats in Benue State have been the unresolved feud between farmers and herders over grazing rights; the passage of the open grazing prohibition law by the state government in 2017; and the failure of the government to secure the people from the persistent attacks. Again, the forceful displacements of most of the populations from their homes, the loss of livelihoods, the massive killings and destructions, among other threats, have pushed many of the population into forced migration as a means of escape. More so, the security crisis has created series of socioeconomic and humanitarian problems in the state. Based on the findings the study recommends that the federal government should as a matter of urgency depoliticize the crisis by unleashing the outright punishment on the criminal elements among herders in Benue State, and other parts of the country. The state government should initiate peace building efforts in the affected communities by ensuring that only genuine herders operate their herding business in the state. Also, the government, both state and federal, should ensure that facilities in IDPs are safe and conducive for the temporary abode of displaced persons, and then reconstruct and rehabilitate their native homes for their safe return and habitation. Lastly, the paper emphasized the need for the government to strengthen and equip the security structure in the country for adequate security of people and their livelihoods.

Keywords: Security Threats, Mass Displacements, Deprivations, Exclusion, Forced Migration.

INTRODUCTION

Security challenge in Benue State has become unprecedented, alarming and frightening, creating serious humanitarian crisis in the Nigerian Middle Belt. Thousands of lives have been lost, means of livelihood destroyed, and thousands of the population from various farming communities in the state have fled their homes and become displaced and homeless (Ukase & Jato, 2022). The once robust 'agricultural hub' of the nation has become ailing, poor and unsafe terrain due to heightened insecurity that is disrupting the socio-economic and agricultural activities of the population. Benue State once supplied food to several other states in the country besides itself, through its massive agricultural produce which earned it the slogan, 'food basket of the nation.' But today, the state struggles to survive in the midst of the persistent and occasional attacks on its key food producing communities, such as Guma, Logo, Kwande Agatu and Makurdi (Alia, 2025; Ukase & Jato, 2022).

Report indicate that Benue State started experiencing pockets of violence since the early 1800s with the movement of Fulani Herdsmen into the state and emergence of herdsmen and farmers disputes (Ukase & Jato, 2022). Over the years, the crisis deepened and escalated, reaching its peak in 2014, 2018 and becoming even more bloody in recent time, particularly in 2024 and 2025, with records of mass killings, maiming and internal displacement of thousand others (Alia, 2025; Eneyo).

One of the major security implications of the prolonged crisis is the emergence of forced and irregular movements among the population, especially young persons in the state (Agaigbe, 2023). Forced irregular migration involves entering into countries illegally through the help of smugglers and traffickers who act as extra-legal travel agents. Such movements are usually carried out through lands, transit states and sea travels as the travelers lack the necessary documents for regular travels. This pattern of travelling has become a regular phenomenon in Benue State in recent years. The issue has become intensified as traffickers now capitalize on the crisis as an avenue to lure the vulnerable and unsuspecting victims of violent attacks into forced migration with promises and assurance of a beautiful and better life, and the actualization of a fulfilled life abroad. In their frustrations and desperation, many of Benue inhabitants, who have become stranded, and who perceive such movements as an escape from the dreadful security issues that has engulfed their land, eagerly embrace such travelling process presented as ‘help’ or ‘sponsorship’ by traffickers. A combination of security issues that cut across violent physical attacks, destruction of means of livelihood, economic woes, and massive deprivations and unemployment, leading to frustration and vulnerability, have intensified the emergence of large outflows of inhabitants from Benue State. Thus, forced migration has remained an insurmountable and recurring issue in Nigeria.

Over the years, the issue has attracted the attention of several local and international governmental and non-governmental agencies. Extensive works has been carried out on the issue by scholars from diverse climes (Agaigbe, 2023; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2021; Awoniyi, 2017; Mohammed, 2016; Carling, 2006;). Most of these works named Nigeria as a major hub for forced or irregular migration (Carling, 2006; Awoniyi, 2017; Adepoju & Van der Wiel, 2010). In fact, it is on record that no other sub-Saharan country has produced more irregular migrants than Nigeria in the past decade (Connor, 2018.).

Discourses and conferences have been held at various fora on the best possible approaches to addressing these forced movements, particularly in Nigeria (Okah-Donli, 2018; Mafukidze, 2023). However, effective and strategic efforts at addressing the major drivers popularly referred to as ‘push factors’ for irregular or forced migration have not been decisively addressed in the country. Hence, Nigerians, especially victims and survivors of violent attacks raging across several states and communities in the country, and in Benue in particular, have resorted to forced migration.

The foregoing issues generated the following research questions:

- What is the nature and major drivers of security threats in Benue State?
- What are the major effects of the crisis on the people and the state?
- To what extent as the crisis in Benue State induced forced or irregular migration in the state?

The paper surveys the relationship between the deadly security threats in Benue State occasioned by persistent herdsmen attacks on rural communities and forced migration, especially among displaced persons in the state. It is organized into seven sections. Section one presented the introductory aspect of the paper. Section two dwells on the conceptual and theoretical review of the salient concepts in the paper. Section three examines the nature and dimensions of the threats to human security in Benue State and section four attempted a connection between human security threats and forced migration in the state. Section five presents the materials and method employed by the paper. Section six provides the discussions while section seven draws conclusion and provides recommendations based on the findings.

Concept of Human Security

Simply put, security is protection from harms and threats to life and livelihood while the absence of this is insecurity.

Human security is the state of being free from war, violence, terror, and access to basic needs of food, shelter,

clothing, health and serene environment. When these basic needs are denied and the quality of lives of people is reduced, the result is human insecurity. Human security became a popular concept in the Global Human Development Report in 1994 and this led to series of works and discourses on the idea. Then, in 2012, the United Nations General Assembly gave a general definition to the concept. The UN General Assembly (2012) emphasized that ‘member states are required to identify and address widespread challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people’ (UN General Assembly, 2012). The UN further stressed that "the safety of people in a broader sense includes their physical security, economic and social well-being, respect for their dignity and values as human beings, and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (UN, 2016). Personal or human insecurity involves physical violence in all its forms such as attacks on persons, killings, maiming, human trafficking, etc; all of which are fast becoming a normal trend in the country, and particularly in crisis torn communities.

Forced/Irregular Migration

Migration ordinarily means the movement of people from a particular geographical location to another in response to the several attracting push factors and repelling pull factors. Migration can be engaged in willingly or forcefully. People may decide to willingly migrate without duress to seek better opportunities outside their terrain. But when such movements are induced by threats, it becomes forced movements. In recent years however, there has been a shift from the voluntary movement of people to forceful and irregular movements in response to threats or dangerous situations in their communities or home countries. Forced migration refers to induced forcible movement of people (Badr, 2020). Forced migration is the movement that involves elements of coercion, that includes threats to life and means of livelihood. Mukhtar, Rose, Choy and Bibi-Farouk (2018) perceive forced migration as the movement of persons from a particular location to escape natural or man-made disasters in the forms of conflict, persecution, repression, ecological issues, and other situations that endangers their freedom and quality of life.

According to De Genova (2002, p.420), “irregular migration emerged as a major issue only in the last few years.” It is perceived as “the movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries, and takes place when a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel documents or does not fulfill the administrative requirements for leaving the country” (Bacon & Robin, 2018, p.3). Eghafona (2019, p.63) notes that “there are many ways for a migrant to be classified as irregular, and these criteria differ by country, but in general, it is a threat and security risk to any nation.”

Theoretical Consideration

The structural functionalist and forced migration (push-pull model) theories were adopted.

Structural Functionalist Theory

Structural functionalism developed from the works scholars such as Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Radcliffe-Brown, and Robert K Merton. Structural functionalism envisions society as a system of interconnected parts and the ways in which these different parts work for the good of the system (Cancian, 1968; Easton, 1965; Fish, 1991). The authors described political system as that which “allocates values by means of policies; the allocations are authoritative, and its authoritative allocations are binding on society as a whole” (Fisher, 1991, pp.140). The fulcrum of Structural Functionalist theory is that systems have inbuilt structures which carry out designed functions for the survival of the state or political system (Ninalowo, 2010). There is an organic relationship between these structures to the extent of an interrelated functioning so as to avoid system failure or system collapse. Hence, chaos arises if any part of the political system fails to perform its function (Ninalowo, 2010). The state itself is part of societal system and it could be considered as a political system. As a part of the societal system, there are functions expected of it to maintain the stability of the system. Systemic failure arises when the state fails in its responsibility to perform its functions. And as a political system, the state becomes endangered when the structures of the state witness challenge in the performance of their functions (Mcloughlin, 2012). Thus, the Nigerian state has failed in its manifest functions to maintain the political system for functional security framework and good governance, which has become the bane of the Nigerian state. The state in Nigeria has weak political institutions of conflict management and resolution, including a weak judicial

structure. These make her conducive to conditions that favour criminality and poverty (Fearon & Laiton, 2003). From the above explanation, the structural functionalist theory explains that the weakness of the state is the weakness of the political systems and the structures whose designed functions determine its stability (Ninalowo, 2010). The inability of the parts that makes up the political system to effectively perform the functions of input, output and system maintenance has affected the delivery of good governance that are capable of providing security and safety across its territory. Hence, the citizens (the case of the farming population in Benue State) are deprived of the opportunities to enjoy the good life, contributions to societal development and fulfill their life's aspirations.

The Push-Pull Model

The push-pull foundational framework entrenched in the classical migration economics (Bijak, 2006). The theory is of the viewpoint that movements, especially irregular or forced movements, is created by factors that repel (push) people from their place of origin (destinations) and attract (pull) them to desired destinations. In forced migration, the push factors include recurring violence, armed conflicts, persecutions, hunger, starvation, displacements and killings, among others, while the pull factors are perceived as those factors that make life worthwhile, such as safety, social welfare, strong institutions, humanitarian aids, and the enabling environment for actualizing life aspiration (Oberg, 1996; Lee, 1966)

Nature and Dimension of Human Security Threats in Benue State

A major security issue in Benue has been the tussle between herdsmen and crop farmers, which has evolved since the past decade and half and has taken a dangerous tone in recent years. What started in 2008 in the Guma and Gwer-West Local Government Areas in the state, as a minor skirmish between herdsmen and farmers, has gradually and steadily escalated into a bloody violence, affecting most parts of the state. Ten years later, in 2018, the crisis had reached, not just the whole Guma and most parts of Gwer-West, but has spread to other areas including Agatu, Makurdi, Logo, Tarka, Okpokwu, Ukum, Katsina-Ala, Kwande, and Buruku (Ukase & Jato, 2022), with deadly invasions resulting in the massacre of thousands of the population.

Herdsmen attacks on farming communities in several communities across Nigeria emerged as a serious internal security threat since the 21st century. More worrisome is the violent pattern which the attacks have become within the past few years. However, the Benue case is even most worrisome and frightening. Human security threat took a troubling shape in Benue especially since 2014 (Agaigbe, 2023). The crisis manifest in several forms, including open grazing on cultivated farms and destruction of crops, physical attacks on persons, especially rural farming populations, kidnappings for ransom, attacks on private and public properties such as houses, schools, offices, churches, etc, killing, maiming, and other forms of calamities (Agaigbe, 2023; Genyi, 2017)

The dimension and ferocity of violent attacks on human lives and livelihood in Benue State are quite alarming. Thousands of the population, including farmers, traders, security personnel, clergy men, community heads, civil servants, etc have been killed and are still being killed. Reports on the death toll reveals the catastrophic and inhuman nature and dimension of the crisis. For instance, between 2014 and 2016 alone, over 4,000 (four thousand) deaths, 2,900 (two thousand nine hundred) injured, and the destruction of over 2,000 buildings (including residences and churches), were reported (Genyi, 2017). Another report indicates that between 2014 and 2019, there were 3,087 deaths (Nigeria Security Watch, 2020). Again, between 2015 and 2023, the death rate resulting from the attacks had risen to 5,654 (UN, 2024).

Human Security Threat and Irregular Migration in Benue State

Threat to human security as well as agricultural and infrastructural facilities across various communities in Benue State has been reported (Alia, 2025; Agaigbe, 2023; Genyi, 2017; Akuto, 2017). Reports also show that some communities in the state are gradually being wiped out and till date, the government has not been able to arrest or halt the situation (Alia, 2025). In the state, poverty and unemployment rate, particularly among the rural farming population, has risen to a high proportion due to the incessant and wanton destruction of the socio-economic and agricultural resources of the population and the disruption in their socioeconomic activities

(Agaigbe, 2023). It is a general notion that no meaningful economic or developmental progress can be attained in the face of crisis. Hence, the people have not only become poorer in economic term, the location has been deserted by many inhabitants and investors, contributing to a reduction in the state's economic growth.

Indeed, the threats to human lives and livelihoods in Benue, in the face of the excruciating economic climate in the country, is a precipitating factor of the escalation in massive engagements in irregular or forced migration to terrains considered to be safe and conducive for the sustenance of lives and actualization of life aspirations.

The world over, migration is a popular phenomenon, driven by socio-economic, political, environmental, cultural, and security issues. People move out of their own community, state or country to another in order to satisfy their life's aspirations. However, what is troubling about these movements, is the sheer scale of forced or irregularity in response to conflicts, disasters, deprivations and security threats. Millions of people in different parts of the world have fled from crises occasioned by conflicts or disasters, severe suffering due to abject poverty and unemployment, and other threats to life and livelihood (Divell, 2011).

Irregular migration in the forms of human smuggling and trafficking, engineered by smugglers and traffickers, is fraught with several implications that further perpetuate the woes of migrants who engage in the venture as an escape from the various issues that threaten their lives.

Location of Study

Benue State is located within the Nigerian middle belt zone (North-Central). Situated within latitude 6.5° and 8.5° North and longitude 7.47° North and 10° East, with a landmass of 32,955 square kilometer (Genyi, 2017). The state headquarter is Makurdi, which is the major city in the state. With an estimated population of 6,141,300 (NBS, 2021), Benue is one of the major agricultural zones in Nigeria, and among the top states in the cultivation of yams. The state is dominated by Christians, with few Muslims settlers. The major ethnic groups in the state are Tiv (the predominant tribe), Idoma, Jukun, Igede, Etolu, Abakpa, Hausa, and Akweya (Genyi, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study employing the semi-structured interview technique in collecting data. The study was carried in five local government areas in Benue State, namely: Guma, Logo, Kwande, Agatu and Makurdi. These local government areas were chosen because they have the highest records of killings, internal displacements and forced migration in the state and also, for the purpose of accessibility to participants. Forty-five (45) participants were purposively selected to include direct victims of attacks (displaced persons, relocated natives, migrant returnees), community leaders, farmers, civil servants, and security operatives. The sample comprised both male and female participants who are residents of the five selected local government areas. Prior to the conduct of the interviews, notice was given to each of the five selected communities through their leaders on the researcher's plan to conduct the interviews with the participants. After this, repeated visits and phone contacts were made to obtain the people's consent and the appropriate dates and locations to conduct the interviews. Having received the participants' consent, the researcher went ahead to conduct the interviews.

In conducting the interviews, the semi-structured interview method which relies on open-ended questions was employed. The method enabled the researcher to design open-ended questions that allows participants to freely express their opinions on research questions. This creates ease of indepth discussion for both the researcher and the research participants. This interview type enables the generating of rich data and ideas as the researcher is able to get deeply into specific issues that arises. Face-to-face (oral) and telephone interviews were conducted with the participants at different days and locations. At the end, information gleaned from the respondents was transcribed and analyzed to answer the research questions.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In answering the research questions, data from field survey were analyzed thematically. The thematic analysis of data began with the organization and categorisation of data under specific themes and sub-themes, based on the information derived from the interviews. This process, which is also known as "open coding" was employed to

enable the researcher tentatively identify and categorizes data based on each of the research question developed for the study.

Major Drivers of Security Threats in Benue State

Farmers and herders have had some skirmishes over rights to land use for farming and grazing in the state. Farmers have been complaining that herders are destroying their means of livelihood, yet herders claim rights to graze wherever their herd find grass. But the skirmishes escalated over time, resulting in catastrophic damage. Describing the nature of the security threats in the state, a farmer from Agatu local government area (Participant A), declared, *‘what we have experienced in recent times in our community is an atrocity occasioned from the unresolved feud between farmers and herders over land use. It appears that the herders have decided to take over farming communities by force going by the manner in which they attack farmers and other persons in these communities. In fact, they just move their herds into already cultivated farms, destroying the crops, driving out farmers, and killing those who attempt to stop them.’*¹

Indeed, Benue has become enmeshed in an untoward security dilemma that has robbed her of peace, safety and stability. It appears that the incessant feuds between farmers and herders in the state has been downplayed with no proper conflict resolution mechanisms employed by concerned authorities. Hence, when the crisis became heightened and the government intervened through the passage of certain regulations to control movements of herds, the resultant effects was like adding fuel to an already burning fire. This was stressed by a farmer from Agatu local government area (Participant B), who emphasized thus, *“regular attacks on our community have become the order of the day, especially since the passage of the anti-open grazing law by the state government in 2017. Since then, the herdsmen have refused to let us be. They keep invading our communities to attack us, destroy our properties and even our homes.”*²

Actually, the attitude of government, especially the federal government since the crisis intensified in the state, has fueled the crisis, and it appears that there may be no immediate end in sight. The security gap created by the inability of the government to tackle the crisis decisively have accentuated the situation in the state. One of the participants from Guma local government area, a displaced person (Participant C), lamented thus, *“in fact, the government have failed in its duty to security the people of this state. It is the primary responsibility of the government to protect the citizens from both internal and external attacks.”*³

Apart from governmental failure in securing the population in Benue State from incessant attacks, as a major driver of the conflict, many also believe that the crisis is fueled by the determination of the Fulani nation to Islamize the Nigerian state at all cost. Emphasizing this factor, a community leader from Makurdi local government area (Participant D), had this to say, *“we believe that the Fulani people are bent on actualizing their Islamization agenda in Nigeria going by the impunity with which they attack unarmed and innocent people in the state over grazing rights. In fact, the persistence in these attacks goes to show that it is beyond grazing rights tussle. There is definitely a bigger agenda.”*⁴

The believe that the Fulanis are attempting to actualize a hidden agenda to Islamize Nigeria has been widely rumoured by many Nigerians. For instance, Asogwa and Okafor (2016) lamented that the Fulanis moves with their jihad as a tool to radically Islamize terrains after a successful conquest. Sadly, the weak posture of the federal government towards the security threats posed by this ethnic group leaves one without doubts about this accusation.

Extent to which the Crisis has Induced Forced Migration among the Population

The rate of killings of innocent farmers and the destruction of livelihoods in Benue State is quite alarming. Many of the population across different local government areas, particularly the farming communities, have been displaced, rendered homeless and poor. Commenting on the impact of the crisis on the population, a displaced person from Logo local government area of the state (Participant E), lamented thus, *“several of us were forcefully displaced from our homes. Many of us were able to escape from our communities during the attacks and came to reside here in this school compound with little or no food and adequate clothing. So many of our people were killed, our houses were destroyed as well as our cultivated crops. We are not happy here; our children are not well catered for and their education is on hold because of the crisis. This crisis has indeed brought us to anguish*

and hopelessness, and any route to escaping from this torment would be a blessing. Even some of our people have been able to relocate to other parts of the state to live with extended families, and others were lucky enough to migrate to bigger cities far away from here.”⁵

In fact, the security threats in Benue State have been reported to be colossal (Alia, 2025; Agaigbe, 2023; Genyi, 2017; Akuto, 2017). The situation has been terrible and have left thousands of the people with no choice than to migrate from their communities, abandoning their homes, properties and social and communal ties, which they have built over the years. Many of these displaced persons are further victimized as prey for human traffickers and smugglers. Connecting the security threats to forced migration, one of the participants, a displaced person from Logo local government area (Participant F), commented thus, *frustration and loss of hope in one’s native home has driven many of our people into unplanned and risky journeys to unknown destinations within and outside the country, where they believe is safe, conducive and enabling enough for the actualization of their aspirations.*”⁶

In view of the foregoing statements, Obaji and Aloba (2016) asserted that “displaced persons are exposed to security threats, family separation, loss of lives, and vulnerable to human trafficking, and other forms of exploitations. Indeed, exposure to uncertainty and excessive sufferings have the tendency to push one into engaging in risky and illegal ventures in the desperation to survive.

The persistence of the security threats has created huge fear among the people such that the fear of reprisal attacks has led to mass exodus of the natives from the state. While commenting on this, a relocated native of Guma (Participant G), emphasized that, *“since the herders are still operating freely across farming communities in the state, no one knows when the attacks will end completely and which quarter or community will be attacked next. Therefore, it is safer for us to move out of communities considers unsafe to other parts of the state, or better still, migrate out of the state and the country, to find relief and the enabling environment for personal safety and progress.”*⁷

No doubt the catastrophic attacks in Benue have troubled her peace, safety and livelihoods, making the state unconducive for socioeconomic and developmental attainments. Therefore, most of the inhabitants, especially in the hardest hit communities have been forcefully displaced and many forced into irregular migration.

Effect of the Crisis on the People and the State

The security threats in Benue State have created series of socioeconomic, political, environmental and humanitarian problems in the state. The displacements of thousands of the population from the state, particularly farmers, across various farming communities, has led to drastic reduction in farming and other socioeconomic activities in the affected communities, giving rise to hunger, economic hardship, as insufficient food, hike in prices and therefore, unaffordability of essential commodities become the people’s reality.

According to some of the participants, a community leader and two displaced persons from Kwande local government area (Participant H, I. and J), *“forced relocation has drastically affected food production in most of the farming communities in the state, with several populations facing severe economic hardship. Having abandoned farming and other socioeconomic activities, which survives us as our means of livelihoods due to the crisis, many of us have become homeless, jobless and frustrated. Thousands of our people have been subjected to hunger, starvation and malnutrition.”*⁸

Sadly, besides the issue of excessive hunger and starvation created by the security threats in the state, the facilities provided by the government to ease the plight of the displaced population in the state are not adequate. A community leader from Agatu local government (Participant K) hinted thus, *“look, even the IDP camps around here and the host communities within and around these camps are not that safe and mostly lack comfort. In fact, most of the displaced persons live in overcrowded camps, without decent toilets, clean water, power supply and food. Many are susceptible to different illnesses and because they lack access to basic medical supplies, many, especially women and children, have died of preventable ailments like diarrhea, fever, and measles. Apart from the sorrow state, these IDPs are not even safe for the people. Many of the IDPs have been attacked by hoodlums who take away their foodstuffs and assault the women.”*⁹

This assertion was confirmed by Akutor (2017), when she noted that insecurity has remained a major challenge facing IDPs in Benue State. The security issue, according to the author, stems from various conflictual issues ranging from undue pressure over limited resources – host indigenes perceive the displaced persons as intruding on the scarce resources in their domain; competition or scramble for relief materials from government and non-governmental agencies; host indigenes having a sense of entitlement over such resources; and worst still, is indigenes of host communities engaging in gender-based violence and exploitation of the displaced women (Akutor, 2017).

Furthermore, the security issues occasioned by inadequate governmental response and the unfavourable conditions the displaced populations are exposed to in the IDP camps, makes them vulnerable and open to continuous exploitations. Human traffickers under the guise of rendering ‘humanitarian assistance’ have lured many of the young persons, especially young girls, into forced and irregular migration to neighbouring countries, and others to the western nations, on the promises of better life. A migrant returnee (Participant L) lamented thus, *“the security situation is quite overwhelming. Not only has it truncated many lives and livelihoods, many of our youth have relocated to other destinations and others have left the country completely. Personally, I engaged in a forced migration with the help of a relative who lives abroad, but was unlucky and returned back by the IOM organization few months ago. Honestly, I wish I can access financial assistance to enable me travel back, make good fortune and come to take my siblings and mother, because as it stands now, we have no community or home to call ours.”*¹⁰

Certainly, the recursion to forced or irregular migration has been connected to exposure to severe security threats and hardships. Scholars have emphasized the undisputable link between unfavourable socioeconomic, political and security conditions and forced migration across different terrains (Obaji & Aloba, 2016). However, the challenges faced by forced or irregular migrants could be worse.

Most often, irregular migrants are misguided on the dire consequences of such movements. Due to their predicaments and vulnerability, they readily accept the offer having little or no actual knowledge of the nature of such movements. Hence, they become victims of the numerous negative implications in irregular movements. These migrants are exposed to various hurdles beginning with arduous route through the desert, transit camps where they are exploited, inadequate feeding, dehydration due to water scarcity, in the desert, health hazard, heat intensity, attacks by criminals or wild animals in the desert, and trekking when there is breakdown of vehicles (Okah-Donli, 2018). After arriving at transit countries, they are again exposed to the risk of crossing the Mediterranean Sea, which is the most dangerous and risky as they have to be ferried by often overloaded speed boat or rubber boats, provided by smugglers, which often times capsize leaving many migrants perishing in the sea (Awoniyi, 2017). Even after arriving at their destination countries, they again exposed to further suffering because, as irregular migrants, they are often subjected to labour exploited in order to earn income to survive.

Koser (2007, p.54) had warned that irregular migration is ‘the threat to host nation sovereignty, and as a result migrants are often subjected to stereotyping and xenophobia. Migrants... particularly women and children... face great hazards in simply entering the country.’ Migrant smuggling and human trafficking are both common methods for entering a country irregularly, and while smuggling is voluntary, human trafficking is not, although in reality the line is blurred. Irregular migrants are not recognized or given the required documentations or permit; these categories of migrants enter a destination country through illegal means either through trafficking or smuggling (Rezouni, 2010).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data presented and analyzed revealed that the major drivers of the security threats in Benue State have been the unresolved feud between farmers and herders over grazing rights; the passage of the open grazing prohibition law by the state government in 2017; the failure of the government to secure the people from the persistent attacks, and the alleged Islamization agenda of the Fulani nation. The finding confirms the study by Ameh (2018, p.28), that skirmishes between herders and farmers occasioned by the unresolved issues of blockade of grazing routes and the passage of the anti-open grazing law in Benue State are the major causes of the herders-farmers violent conflict in the state. Also, the study by Asogwa and Okafor (2016), concludes that the crisis in Benue state has a religious colouration, precipitated by the Islamization agenda by the Fulani nation. furthermore, a study carried

out by Fani-Kayode (2021) indicates that the designation of communal lands as grazing routes or reserves is questionable, since cattle rearing is a private and personal business engagement. The act amounts to depriving farming communities' access to economic engagement.

It has also been observed from the study that forceful displacements of most of the populations from their home communities, the loss of livelihoods, the massive killings, destruction of properties including buildings and cultivated farms, frustration and loss of hope in their native homes, have pushed many of the population into attempting any route to escape, including forced migration. Moreover, exposure to uncertainty and excessive sufferings are said to trigger irregular or forced movements of people to unknown and dangerous terrains in the desperation for safety and survival. Furthermore, the persistency of the attacks in some communities, and the fear of reprisal attacks in some others have the tendency to force people into forced migrations and relocations. Empirical findings by Rosenje, Soluade, Olatoye, Peju-Rosenje and Adeniyi (2022) indicates that security threats is a major issue that forces millions of people to relocate from their native homes and communities to other locations in search of peace and safety.

Again, findings from field study indicate that the security crisis occasioned by herdsmen attacks in farming population in Benue State has created series of socioeconomic, political, environmental and humanitarian problems in the state. Parts of the issues created in the state is forceful relocation and displacements of millions, drastic reduction in farming and other socioeconomic activities, hunger, hardship, insufficient food production, hike in prices of essential commodities, homelessness, joblessness, diseases, gender-based violence and exploitations, deaths, and making them victims of forced migrations, with its attendant consequences. The finding confirms the study by Alia (2025) who asserted that the security threats in Benu State has seriously affected lives and wellbeing and have resulted in the death of thousands of people, destruction of properties, displacements of thousands, heightened poverty, misery, sufferings, trauma, psychological and emotional pains.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined security threats and forced migration and the effect on the welfare of the people and the state of Benue. The study discovered that the security issue in Benue State escalated after the passage of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Act in 2017 by the state government. Furthermore, the recursion to irregular movements by victims of forced displacements, who are being further victimized by traffickers, who presents themselves as rescuers and sponsors of hopes, indicates a sorrow state of complicated security dilemma in the state. Hence, the inability of the government to address the driving factors and the seeming impunity with which the herders go about fomenting these attacks in the state makes one wonder if there is respite in sight.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper makes the following policy recommendations towards addressing the untoward security issue in Benue State:

The federal government should as a matter of urgency depoliticize the crisis by unleashing the outright punishment on the criminal elements among herders in Benue State, and other parts of the country. Hence, there should be strict enforcement and compliance to banning of arms and ammunition by herders across the country. The federal government should ensure fairness and equity in access to and usage of lands for agricultural activities across the country.

The state government should initiate peace building efforts in the affected communities by ensuring that only genuine herders operate their herding business in the state. The government should offer needed supports by establishing grazing reserves and cattle colonies for herders in the state.

The government, both state and federal, should revisit internally displaced persons camps across the country, especially in Benue State, and ensure that the facilities are safe and conducive for their temporary abode, and then reconstruct and rehabilitate their native homes for their safe return and habitation.

Most importantly, both the federal and state governments should put the necessary machineries in place to strengthen and equip the security structure in the country, to ensure that lives and livelihoods are secure everyone in the country.

Notes

1. Interview with a farmer (male) at Agatu Local Government Area, on 6th March, 2026.
2. Interview with a farmer (male) at Agatu Local Government Area, on 6th March, 2026.
3. Interview with a displaced trader/weaver at Guma Local Government Area, on 8th March, 2026.
4. Interview with a community leader (male) at Makurdi Local Government Area, on 8th March, 2026.
5. Interview with a displaced person (female) at Logo Local Government Area, Displaced Person Camp, on 11th March, 2026.
6. Interview with a displaced person (female) at Logo Local Government Area, displaced persons camp, on 11th March, 2026.
7. Interview with a relocated indigene, civil servant and farmer (male) at Guma Local Government Area, on 12th March, 2026.
8. Interview with a community leader (male) and two displaced persons (females) at Kwande Local Government Area, on 13th March, 2026.
9. Interview with a community leader (male) at Agatu Local Government Area, on 13th March, 2026.

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