Humanitarian, peace and stability, Nigeria

Why do the people who grow and move Nigeria's food blame insecurity first for high prices?

Because it hits every link in the chain at once: it shrinks what farmers plant, cuts what reaches markets and adds a security bill to trade. In our pilot survey of farmers, suppliers and retailers, 71.4% of those who answered named insecurity as a cause of food inflation, nearly twice the share for any other cause.

By **James Lumowo**, Research Director. From our own fieldwork.

Published October 2026. Data as of 18 October 2026 (survey fieldwork 2023–24).

In short

- Insecurity outranks every other cause of food inflation. 71.4% of respondents who answered named it, against 38.5% for the level of agricultural development and for government policy, and 37.4% for climate change. Asked for the single factor most affecting their business, 56 of 93 suppliers and retailers chose insecurity.
- It cuts supply before food reaches a market. Security (32.5%) and available capital (31.3%) topped the factors farmers weighed in deciding how much land to plant. A Kano tomato wholesaler said the trucks reaching his market fell from about 50 a day to 15–20.
- Security has become a cost of trade. Security levies made up 14.1% of the levy types respondents said they pay, more than union dues. Asked what government should do for food security, 57.1% said reduce or end insecurity.

The evidence

Each figure carries its source, its date and a label for how much weight it can bear. Open 'How we know this' for the method.

Survey estimate 2023–24

71.4%

of respondents who answered named insecurity as a cause of current food inflation, nearly twice the share for any other cause.

Nigeria Food Security Project pilot survey, delivered by Probatio Africa's founder for SCRIH

How we know this

Seven causes were offered, and respondents could name several. Next came the level of agricultural development and government policy (38.5% each) and climate change (37.4%). The study files do not say which respondents were asked this question. A second question, with 15 causes, also put insecurity first (74.1%). A purposive pilot sample of 194 farmers, suppliers and retailers in six states and the FCT: it describes these respondents, not all of Nigeria's food producers and traders.

Survey estimate 2023–24

56 of 93

suppliers and retailers named insecurity as the single factor most affecting their business (60.2%).

Nigeria Food Security Project pilot survey, delivered by Probatio Africa's founder for SCRIH

How we know this

Only suppliers and retailers were asked this question, and 93 answered. One answer each, from the same seven factors. A purposive pilot sample of 194 farmers, suppliers and retailers in six states and the FCT: it describes these respondents, not all of Nigeria's food producers and traders.

Survey estimate 2023–24

57.1%

of respondents said government should reduce or end insecurity to improve food security, ahead of cutting food imports (47.2%).

Nigeria Food Security Project pilot survey, delivered by Probatio Africa's founder for SCRIH

How we know this

Respondents could name several priorities for government. A purposive pilot sample of 194 farmers, suppliers and retailers in six states and the FCT: it describes these respondents, not all of Nigeria's food producers and traders.

Modelled or projected July 2026

36.2 million

Nigerians faced acute food insecurity, with conflict a main driver of hunger in the north.

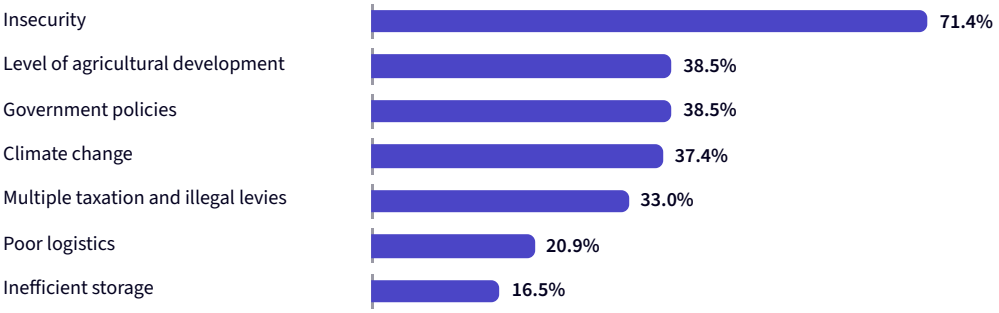
World Food Programme, 2 July 2026

How we know this

WFP's estimate, drawing on the Cadre Harmonisé analysis of food insecurity. A projection, not a count.

Insecurity is named as a cause of food inflation nearly twice as often as anything else

Share of respondents who answered naming each cause of current food inflation; several answers allowed



Pilot survey of farmers, suppliers and retailers in six states and the FCT, 2023–24. A purposive sample: the shares describe the respondents, not all Nigerian traders.

Sources: 1.

What the data show

Respondents were offered seven possible causes of current food inflation and could name several. 71.4% of those who answered named insecurity, nearly twice the share for the next causes: the level of agricultural development and government policy (38.5% each) and climate change (37.4%) [1]. A second question, with a longer list of 15 causes, gave the same order: 74.1% chose insecurity, ahead of government (33.5%) and climate change (32.9%) [1].

The effect starts on the farm. Security (32.5%) and available capital (31.3%) topped the factors farmers weighed in deciding how much land to plant [1]. A commercial farmer in Borno described fertile land around Baga as out of reach because of insecurity [1]. A Kano tomato wholesaler said the trucks reaching his market fell from about 50 a day to 15–20 because of insecurity, and that what he could supply fell from 30–50 baskets a month to 15–20, which he put down to insecurity, the season and demand [1].

Traders feel it most in their business. Asked for the single factor most affecting their business, 56 of the 93 suppliers and retailers who answered named insecurity: more than climate change, poor logistics, multiple taxation and government policy combined [1].

Protection has become a cost of trade. Security levies made up 14.1% of the levy types respondents said they pay, more than union dues (11.7%) [1]. Asked what government should do for food security, 57.1% said reduce or end insecurity, ahead of cutting food imports (47.2%) [1].

Why it matters now

WFP estimated in July 2026 that 36.2 million Nigerians faced acute food insecurity, and named conflict as a main driver of hunger in the north [2]. At the same time, funding for Nigeria's humanitarian plan fell 63% between 2022 and 2025, and the 2026 plan targets 2.5 million people in three north-eastern states. 83% of the Nigerians projected to face crisis-level hunger in the 2026 lean season lived outside those states [3].

What this means for decisions

- Treat security as food policy. Respondents' first ask of government was to reduce or end insecurity [1]. Securing the planting and harvest seasons and the main north–south food routes would act on supply directly.
- Shrinking aid makes market prices a humanitarian issue. Most Nigerians facing crisis-level hunger live outside the states the humanitarian plan covers [3]. For them, what insecurity adds to the price of food matters more than aid.
- Count the security bill. Security levies sit alongside government taxes in what respondents pay [1]. Recording who collects them, and where, would show what security costs the food trade and where it is being paid for privately.
- Measure what perception cannot. Respondents rank insecurity first, but no one has measured how much it adds to the price of a bag of maize or a basket of tomatoes. That costing is the next study to commission.

Method

- A pilot survey of 194 farmers, suppliers and retailers in Benue, Borno, Edo, Kano, Lagos and Oyo and the FCT, delivered by Probatio Africa's founder in 2023–24 for the Supply Chain Research and Innovation Hub (SCRIH) and analysed in SPSS [1]. Shares are of the respondents who answered each question. Where a question allowed several answers, shares do not add up to 100%.
- Focus groups with truck owners and drivers and with wholesalers in Kano, and interviews with a tomato wholesaler, retailers, market association leaders, commercial farmers in Borno and two officials of the Borno State Ministry of Agriculture, coded by theme in ATLAS.ti [1].
- Levy shares are shares of all the levy types respondents named, each type counted once per respondent. They show who collects, not how much is paid.
- Humanitarian funding and coverage figures are from our brief on humanitarian funding, which gives their sources and arithmetic [3].

Limitations

- Respondents were chosen because they were available and fitted the study, not at random. The figures describe the people we reached, not all Nigerian farmers and traders.
- Results are pooled across states. Insecurity is concentrated in the north, so one national figure mixes very different places.
- These are views, not measured costs. The survey asked what drives prices; it did not measure how much insecurity adds.
- The study files do not say which respondents answered each of the two questions on the causes of inflation. Both put insecurity first.
- Interview accounts are single voices, quoted as examples, not counts.
- Fieldwork was in 2023–24. Security has since improved in some areas and worsened in others.

Sources

1. Probatio Africa's founder, for the Supply Chain Research and Innovation Hub (SCRIH) (2023–24). **Nigeria Food Security Project, pilot: survey of farmers, suppliers and retailers, with focus groups and interviews**. Unpublished study data, used with the client's consent. The study is summarised in our case studies.
2. World Food Programme (2 July 2026). **Conflict and shrinking humanitarian assistance drive northern Nigeria hunger crisis to levels not seen in nearly a decade**. https://www.wfp.org/news/conflict-and-shrinking-humanitarian-assistance-drives-northern-nigeria-hunger-crisis-levels
3. Probatio Africa (October 2026). **With humanitarian funding halved, who does Nigeria's aid plan now leave out?.** Evidence brief, from OCHA and Cadre Harmonisé data. https://probatioafrica.com/evidence/briefs/nigeria-humanitarian-funding

How to cite this brief

Lumowo, J. (2026). Why do the people who grow and move Nigeria's food blame insecurity first for high prices? Evidence brief, Probatio Africa. Data as of 18 October 2026 (survey fieldwork 2023–24). https://probatioafrica.com/evidence/briefs/nigeria-insecurity-food-prices.

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Probatio Africa evidence brief. Humanitarian, peace and stability, Nigeria. Published October 2026; data as of 18 October 2026 (survey fieldwork 2023–24). Read online, with links to every source: probatioafrica.com/evidence/briefs/nigeria-insecurity-food-prices