

MONDAY SIT-AT-HOME AND FOOD SECURITY IN EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)-imposed Monday sit-at-home order has become an established tradition in Nigeria's southeast region, and more recently, it has been a periodic occurrence, particularly in Ebonyi State. This study examines the effects of this order on food security, production, and distribution in Ebonyi State. This study aims to explore the relationship between the IPOB Monday sit-at-home order and food availability, as well as the socioeconomic impact on farmers and food production. Using a qualitative approach, the study gathered data through news reports and content analyses. Key informants, including farmers and traders, share their experiences and observations about the directive's impact on Ebonyi State's food security. The study grounds its analysis in Social Identity Theory, examining the motivations behind the sit-at-home order and its influence on social cohesion and food security in the state. In addition, the study anchored on Social Identity Theory, which allows for an examination of the motivations behind the Monday sit-at-home order and its effects on social cohesion and food security within Ebonyi State. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive responses that encompass both dialogue and action to address the challenges posed by Monday's sit-at-home order on food security in Ebonyi State. It calls for efforts to foster social cohesiveness, inclusivity, and resolution of grievances, seeking peaceful alternatives to mitigate the underlying concerns that have fuelled hostilities.

Keywords: Food Security, Sit-at-home, Southeast, IPOB.

Introduction

In recent years, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has achieved significant strides in its pursuit of self-determination in Southern Nigeria. One of its strategies is the implementation of a "stay at home" order every Monday, influencing business operations and social interactions in the region. This directive has sparked heated debates concerning civil rights and freedoms in the area. However, despite its substantial impact on the economy, supply chain, and overall well-being, there remains limited research on its effects on food security, particularly in states like Ebony State. The IPOB's Monday sit-at-home order is viewed as a form of civil disobedience aimed at advancing their political agenda. It involves the closure of businesses, schools, and workplaces while restricting movement, leading to significant economic disruptions and public health implications. Nevertheless, the immediate consequences on food security have not been fully examined, and this aspect is of utmost importance considering its crucial role in human health and economic development. Food security encompasses more than just the availability of food; it also entails access and proper utilization to safeguard public health and productivity. Any disruption in the food supply can result in higher prices, declining food quality, and shortages. With the normalization of the Monday stay-at-home practice, an air of uncertainty pervaded the economy in Ebony State, and concerns are mounting about the region's food security.

The situation is particularly challenging for farmers, vital participants in food production, as the order can lead to reduced yields, supply chain disruptions, and increased food prices. The local population heavily relies on agriculture for their livelihood, making them especially vulnerable to food-related issues. Addressing the potential problems stemming from Monday's sit-at-home order and food security in Ebony State is imperative. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on the direct and indirect effects of

the IPOB-managed Monday stay-at-home practice on food security. It aims to explore its impact on food production and distribution within the state.

By delving into the relationship between the sit-at-home order and food security, this research aims to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and the community. Through a comprehensive understanding, effective strategies can be developed to address the challenges and ensure the well-being and food security of the people.

Conceptual Review

This section conceptualizes and reviews previous and recent literature on the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the sit-at-home order. This is essential in analyzing the impacts of the Monday sit-at-home order by the IPOB in the Southeast and how the normalization of the Monday sit-at-home order affects farmers' livelihoods and food production in Ebonyi State. Over the past decade, IPOB has emerged as a formidable movement driven by the pursuit of self-determination. Ekpo & Agory (2019) attribute the rise of IPOB to a civil group in southeast Nigeria advocating for peaceful secession from Nigeria, specifically seeking self-determination for the Igbo people, primarily residing in the southeast region. As a result, IPOB has organized numerous protests and demonstrations, particularly in the Igbo-dominated areas of southeast Nigeria.

Conversely, the European Asylum Support Office (2018) presents an alternate view, positing that IPOB is an offshoot of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), providing subtle empowerment to the movement for the Southeast's independence. Adding to the discourse, Goggins (2017) contends that IPOB originated from the visionary leadership of Nnamdi Kanu, with the movement's primary objective being to raise awareness among the people of the Southeast and Nigeria as a whole. The radio station, Biafra (Nwangwu, 2018), has played a pivotal role in achieving partial success in this regard.

In the examination of the IPOB sit-at-home directive, Ofoma (2023) observed that while the academic realm in the southeastern region experienced minimal disruption due to the order, its repercussions were far-reaching in economic activities and human security in Ebonyi State, creating food scarcity in the area. In the context of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Southeast region of Nigeria, food security has become an important lens through which to understand the implications of the Monday sit-at-home order. The order enforced by the IPOB disrupts economic activities including the functioning of markets, transportation networks, and supply chains. These disruptions can significantly affect the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food within a region, thereby affecting food security. Food availability is a key factor in food security. Monday's stay-at-home order disrupted agriculture, preventing farmers from growing crops or raising livestock. This can lead to lower agricultural productivity and a lower local food supply, ultimately affecting the market availability of food. In addition, the shutdown has limited food imports from other regions and further reduced food choices. Prior to the normalization of the sit-in in the southeast, the Nigerian government, through the Nigerian military, tried to disrupt IPOB operations by launching Operation Anaconda Dance (II) and *Exercise Egwuekwe* (II) in the southeast. Demands to reduce political conflicts and conflicts in the region. The Nigerian army's attack on the IPOB resulted in many arbitrary arrests and detentions of IPOB members, executions of IPOB members, and militarization of IPOB activities (Abada et al., 2017). Nnamdi Kanu established the Eastern Safety Net in December 2020, and according to Uzoma (2020), the establishment of the Eastern Safety Net was due to the Eastern Governor's inability to protect Igbo lives and property. In addition, the leaders of the regional states established the Southeast Security Council called *Ebube-Agu* to bring peace to the region with the help of the legislature. In addition, the administration has repeatedly issued a statement urging people not to heed the IPOB's stay-at-home advice, saying that all necessary precautions have been taken for their safety. *Vanguard* (2021) reports

that Ebonyi Province Governor Umahi, who is chairman of the Southeast Conference, said that the Eastern region lost 10 billion naira at home every Monday. Ebonyi State in particular is ignoring the area's continued housing demand; however, large numbers of people in the east continued to abide by the IPOB stay-at-home rule on Monday, mostly out of fear and government efforts to protect them from harm.

On a positive note, Menghestab Haile (2005: 2169) identifies several factors that contribute to food security in Africa, particularly Nigeria. These problems include inadequate infrastructure, high transportation costs, lack of good business ideas, propensity for extreme weather conditions, high disease burdens such as HIV/AIDS, lack of safety net systems, conflicts and limited agriculture. Smith (1998) states that poverty is the biggest problem for food security in Africa. However, this study considers food security as a state in which all people in the population have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and healthy food to meet their needs and preferences for a good and healthy life. It includes the availability of food and its development, availability and stability over time. Food security is a multifaceted concept influenced by many factors such as agriculture, business, infrastructure, social security, management and health management.

The Sit at Home order in the southeast tends to impact the accessibility of food, and limited transportation and movement restrictions hinder the distribution of food from production centres to markets and consumers. This can result in increased transportation costs and reduced access to food, particularly for vulnerable populations who rely heavily on local markets for their food needs. Additionally, the closure of schools and businesses can have indirect effects on food accessibility, as school feeding programs and employment opportunities may be disrupted, affecting individuals' purchasing power and their ability to access food. Moreover, the Monday sit-at-home order can influence the stability of food security in the southeast region. This order creates uncertainties in the business environment, discourages investment, and disrupts supply chains. These factors can contribute to market volatility, price fluctuations, and reduced food availability over time, leading to increased food insecurity and vulnerability in the population. Understanding the interconnectedness between food security and the Monday sit-at-home order enforced by the IPOB is crucial for devising appropriate strategies to mitigate the potential negative consequences.

Methodology

This study adopts the Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, as the theoretical framework to explore the impact of the Monday sit-at-home order on food security in Ebonyi State. This theory focuses on how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, thereby influencing their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Using Social Identity Theory, this study examines how the Monday sit-at-home order imposed by the IPOB shapes the collective identity of its followers and affects interactions between different social groups in Ebonyi State. By analyzing the intergroup relations influenced by order, the framework offers insights into its implications for food production, distribution, and overall food security. The central premise of Social Identity Theory is that group membership plays a crucial role in determining attitudes and behaviours. This study explores how the sit-at-home order reinforces the social identity of IPOB supporters, influencing their perceptions of other community members, and their impact on food availability and production. Furthermore, the framework allows an examination of the motivations behind the sit-at-home order and its effects on social cohesion in Ebonyi. Understanding the underlying reasons for and potential exacerbations of tensions and grievances provides comprehensive insights into its potential impact on food security.

Qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and content analysis were used to gather data and engage key informants, particularly farmers and traders, to share experiences and observations on the order's impact on food security.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of this research and its approaches. The following semi-structured interview questions were written and given to key informants to analyze the effects of the Monday sit-at-home order by IPOB in the Southeast and how its normalization has impacted farmers' livelihoods and food production in Ebonyi State:

1. Can you describe the specific ways in which the Monday sit-at-home order enforced by the IPOB has affected the availability and accessibility of food in Ebonyi State?
2. How has the Monday sit-at-home order affected local farmers, traders, and other actors in the food supply chain?
3. Can you provide examples of the challenges they face and any innovative strategies they have employed to cope with disruptions?

Table 1. Number and categories of selected participants

Categories of Informants	Total Number of Informants	Sex of Informants
Traders	22	11 females, 11 males
Farmers	15	9 females, 6 farmers
	37	37

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Table 2: Demographic Anatomy of Respondents

Factor	Option	% count
Gender	Male	44.5
	Female	55.5
Age	Female	38-47
	Male	48-57
Marital Status	Married	73.5
	Single	26.0
	Divorced	0.005
Educational Qualification	B.SC and Above	14.75
	SSCE/WAEC	63.5
	FSLC	11.5
Ethnic Group	Igbo	99.0
	Others	1.0
Religion	Christian	94.5
	Tradition and Others	5.5
Occupation	Farmer	44.5
	Trader	55.5

Alita, 2023

A total of 37 informants were selected and interviewed in Margaret Umahi's International Market in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, considering that this market is not just the largest market in the state, but also one of the largest markets in the southeast, and stands as a meeting point to both the rural and the urban centres, particularly farmers and traders. Therefore, this market logically represents the 13 local areas that constitute Ebonyi State.

Table 3. Prices of major food items before and during the sit-at-home order in Ebonyi State: A comparison between South and South, Southeast, and Ebonyi State based on interviews with farmers and traders.

Food Items	The base price of foodstuffs in South-south and South-East before the Sit-at-home order 2020(₦)	Market price during sit-at-home in 2021 (₦)	Market price during sit-at-home in 2022 (₦)	Percentage increase between 2021-2022
1kg of Tomato	₦215	₦ 342.25	₦ 445.12	30%
1kg of rice	₦225	₦417.00	₦519.22	14%
1kg of beans	₦180	₦ 397.04	₦789.74	13.14%
1kg of beef	₦ 1,100	₦ 1,768.14	₦ 2,199.37	24.39%
1kg of palm oil	₦ 320	₦ 709.50	₦927.34	30%
Vegetable oil	₦ 650	₦ 812.94	₦1,073.89	32.35%

Source: Alita (2023) respondents' data.

Based on the semi-structured interviews conducted, the prices of food products in Ebonyi State during the sit-at-home were compared with those in the southeast and south-south before the sit-at-home (Table 2 above). Additionally, it demonstrates a notable rise in food prices in the southeast, where social and commercial activities continue to be the hardest hit by the enforcement of the sit-at-home order issued by the outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in protest of the federal government's trial of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu. The order has been cancelled multiple times in Ebonyi State and security personnel have been deployed, but this has not stopped criminals from carrying it out. Nigeria's southeastern region is well known for its buying and selling. The market is where they derive their fortune. All markets are closed for any order placed for sit-at-home delivery every Monday. Economic activities in the entire zone were significantly affected by this. Nobody buys or sells anything. Additionally, no one benefits financially from the market. Food sellers do not sell to those who rely on these food vendors and are unable to cook without food. In addition, a hungry man becomes irritated.

Violent agitation has led to significant insecurity in Ebonyi State and has not only targeted security forces but also carried out attacks on individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, vehicles transporting

agricultural products, and traders delivering goods. These actions disrupted agricultural activities in Ebonyi State, leading to the displacement of farmers and food shortages. The enforcement of sit-at-home orders by the IPOB further exacerbates food insecurity, as daily wage earners are deprived of income every Monday. Additionally, communal clashes, particularly between neighbouring states, have resulted in the death, destruction, and loss of livelihoods (Abdulaziz, 2021). Attacks on transporters and the burning of goods, such as palm oil, onions, and vegetables, have caused financial losses and reduced the willingness of drivers to transport goods to the region. The destruction of farmlands and livestock during the planting and harvesting seasons further harmed food production and security in Ebonyi (Ojoye, 2019). The overall impact is an increase in personal food insecurity, as victims are left destitute and unable to meet their basic food needs.

The analysis of this study further provides a sobering account of the negative consequences of violent activities associated with IPOB in the southeast and Ebonyi State in particular. These acts of violence disrupt agricultural activities, negatively impacting the livelihoods of farmers, traders, and transporters, while also contributing to a decline in food production and security. Attacks on individuals based on their ethnic background and destruction of property lead to displacement, loss of income, and personal food insecurity (Okafor, 2020).

Effects of Monday Sit-at Home on Food Security in Ebonyi State

The research discovered a pattern of identical responses among the respondents after transcribing and analyzing the results from the interviews conducted with the selected farmers and traders in Ebonyi State at Margaret Umahi's International Market Abakaliki, the Ebonyi state capital. Each of the respondents pinpointed and elaborated on the continued sit-at-home order, which was fearfully observed by the majority of the masses, as the primary factor affecting food production and distribution in the state. As illustrated in Table 2, both farmers and traders blamed the daily rise of food items within the state as a major side effect of the continued observance of the sit-at-home. In responding to the questions unanimously centred their responses on the following factors.

The fear of reprisal, on the other hand, was raised by the farmers and traders and has significantly impacted food production, distribution, and agriculture in Ebonyi State. This fear stems from the persistent unrest and insecurity caused by the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and other armed groups in the region. As a result, farmers, traders, and agricultural workers are faced with numerous challenges that hinder their ability to cultivate, distribute, and access food, leading to adverse consequences for food security. One of the primary reasons for the decline in food production in Ebonyi State is the fear among farmers of being caught in the crossfire between security forces and IPOB members. The unpredictable nature of these conflicts has created an environment of uncertainty and apprehension, deterring farmers from venturing into their fields and investing in agricultural activities. Fear of reprisals and attacks has led to many farmlands being abandoned or left uncultivated, resulting in reduced crop yields and decreased food availability.

Furthermore, the fear of reprisal has also disrupted the distribution channels for agricultural products in the state. Traders and transporters face significant risks when attempting to move goods to markets or other regions, as they fear being targeted by armed groups. Consequently, the supply chain has been severely affected, leading to shortages of essential food items in local markets and neighbouring states. The overall impact of the fear of reprisal on agriculture in Ebonyi State has been a decline in investment and agricultural productivity. With limited access to markets and uncertainty about the safety of their investments, farmers have become reluctant to adopt modern farming techniques and technologies, leading to a stagnation in agricultural growth.

Additionally, the fear of reprisal has also resulted in the displacement of rural communities in the

state. Many families have been forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods due to the escalating violence, further exacerbating food insecurity. Displaced populations often struggle to find alternative sources of income and sustenance, making them highly vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition.

The following, as deduced from the informants' responses, describes how the state's food security is affected by the normalization of the sit-at-home in Ebonyi.

- a. **Disruption of Supply Chains:** The respondents, particularly the farmers, described how the Monday sit-at-home order disrupted the transportation and distribution of food from production centres (rural areas) to markets located in urban centres. They further highlighted challenges such as limited access to transportation, increased transportation costs, and delays in delivering food supplies, notably on Mondays, as major roads leading to urban centres are deserted by commercial motorists. These factors hinder the farmers from connecting to the urban markets on Mondays which most times forces them to sell the farm produce in the local market thereby cutting the distribution of food to the urban areas.
- b. **Market Closure:** The participants mentioned how the Monday sit-at-home order has led to the closure of markets, thereby reducing the availability of food for consumers. They equally highlight the impact of market closures on the inflow of food from other regions, particularly the southeastern states, resulting in limited options and reduced access to diverse food products. Based on further observations carried out in the study, it was discovered that the largest market in the state is Margaret Umahi's International Market; however, this market looks deserted every Monday as most of the shops and stores in each complex remain under lock and keys, except for a few pedestrian traders.
- c. **Reduced Agricultural Productivity:** Participants, especially farmers, explained in utter dismay how the sit-at-home order has affected agricultural activities. They mentioned the challenges faced in cultivating crops and raising livestock, leading to decreased food production and the limited availability of locally sourced food. With the normalization of sit-at-home, the farmers thought it wise to reduce the level of production to avoid waste of food materials, especially perishables like vegetables
- d. **Impact on Local Food Trade:** The analysis from the traders' perspective also reviewed the Monday sit-at-home order, which affected their ability to procure and sell food products. They pointed out the difficulties in sourcing food supplies and the decline in customers due to reduced economic activity.
- e. **Price Fluctuations:** Since the start of the sit-at-home on August 9, 2021, food prices have frequently been increasing. Both farmers and traders describe price fluctuations, citing examples of increased prices due to limited supply or decreased prices resulting from reduced demand on sit-at-home days.
- f. **Food Storage and Preservation Challenges:** Participants highlighted the difficulties faced in storing and preserving food during the Monday sit-at-home order. They may discuss issues, such as limited access to refrigeration and inadequate storage facilities, which can contribute to food waste and reduced food availability.

Interestingly, the participants, notably the farmers, shared the coping strategies they employed to mitigate the impact of the sit-at-home order on food availability and accessibility. This included initiatives such as community gardens, alternative market arrangements, and local food-sharing networks.

Coping Strategies Adopted by Farmers and Traders in Ebonyi State

Following its history of underdevelopment, Ebonyi is thought to be one of the Southern Nations Nationality and Peoples Region's areas (SNNP) with chronic and seasonal food insecurity, according to

the Ebonyi Agricultural Office. About 24 food-insecure kebeles in Ebonyi are now adopting the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP-Annex 3). The total food production is consistently insufficient to meet the population's food needs (Elizabeth, 2022). High population development, unpredictable weather patterns, unchecked environmental degradation, underdeveloped infrastructure, and frequent droughts are the main causes. These factors have been compounded by the sit-at-home order of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

The study identified the following as the impact of sit-at-home on farmers in Ebonyi State:

- *Reduced access to markets:* In Ebonyi, many farmers are currently faced with the challenge of selling their products because of the closure of markets on Mondays. This has ultimately led to financial losses and the waste of perishable goods.
- *Disrupted supply chains:* Farmers experience difficulties in obtaining necessary inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, as transportation and supply chains are affected by the sit-at-home order.
- *Decreased productivity:* Limited access to labour, markets, and resources has resulted in reduced agricultural productivity, affecting both the quantity and quality of their produce.

Innovative coping strategies by farmers

- *Diversification:* Some farmers discussed the need to explore alternative crops or non-agricultural activities to mitigate the impact of the sit-at-home order on their income and livelihoods. They elaborated on the need to diversify crops that last longer to avoid wastage and damage.
- *Local market networks:* Some farmers stated that they have, in some cases, established direct relationships with consumers or local retailers to sell their produce outside formal markets affected by the sit-at-home order. Even though the method is more hectic, it remains the best alternative for selling goods. Some farmers agreed to have joined and formed cooperatives or associations to pool resources, share knowledge, and collectively address the challenges posed by the sit-at-home order.

2. Impact on Traders:

- *Reduced customer demand:* Many traders, particularly in urban centres, have experienced decreased footfall and consumer demand owing to restricted movement and the closure of markets on Mondays. This is because most of their customers come from remote villages, but the sit-at-home has restricted the inflow of customers to the market.
- *Supply chain disruptions:* A sit-at-home order may disrupt the flow of goods, causing delays in receiving products from farmers and difficulties in transporting goods to other regions. Further observation reveals how quiet and slow Mondays look because of the slow movements of activities arising from the fear of attacks by members of the IPOB. Therefore, supply chain disruptions have seen traders incurring losses due to perishable goods that cannot be sold or rescheduled transactions as a result of the sit-at-home order.

Innovative coping strategies by traders in Ebonyi amid continued sit-at-home

- *Online platforms:* Some traders have adopted digital platforms, such as social media channels, to reach customers, advertise products, and facilitate online sales, bypassing the limitations imposed by the sit-at-home order. However, not every farmer or trader is literate enough to operate on social media platforms.
- *Collaboration with farmers:* Some literate traders disclosed the establishment of closer ties with farmers to ensure a consistent supply of goods and create mutually beneficial partnerships.
- *Diversifying product offerings:* Likewise, farmers and some traders are starting to explore new

product lines or diversify their range of goods to cater to changing consumer preferences and adapt to disruptions caused by the sit-at-home order.

The results of this study show that there is a substantial association between normalized IPOB sit-at-home orders and dwindling economic activities, which is in line with the study's goals of evaluating the relationship between the Monday sit-at-home order by IPOB and the availability of food in Ebonyi State and examining the socioeconomic effects of the normalization of the Monday sit-at-home order on farmers and food production in Ebonyi State. The study's analysis of the data unequivocally showed that economic activity in the region was booming before the Indigenous People of Biafra's pronouncement of the sit-at-home order, especially concerning food item prices. This is in line with Kingsley et al. (2022) claim that Mondays are a disruption for business in the Southeast because people are so terrified of the order and its enforcers that they are strongly discouraged from leaving their homes for work, as is the case in Ebonyi State. According to Okoye (2021), the IPOB sit-at-home order has enormous and disastrous effects on socioeconomic activity in the southeast since citizens' rights to manage their enterprises, investments, and farms have been violated. According to the governor of Ebonyi State, who also serves as the head of the governor's forum for the southeast, over \$ 8 billion was estimated as the daily financial loss of sit-at-home orders in the region (Tribune, 2022).

Conclusion

The Monday sit-at-home order has had profound impact on food security in Ebonyi State. Disruptions caused by the order, including market closures, transportation limitations, and restricted movement, have resulted in reduced food availability, escalating food prices, and limited access to nutritious food options. These repercussions disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and increase the risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. Through qualitative interviews, valuable insights were gained regarding the adaptive strategies adopted by communities in response to the order. Local farmers and traders embrace alternative agricultural practices, such as backyard gardening and small-scale farming, to ensure a consistent food supply. However, it is crucial to recognize that these individual efforts alone cannot adequately address the broader systemic challenges of the Monday sit-at-home order. The policy implications of this research are twofold. First, there is a need for proactive measures to support local food production and supply chains in Ebonyi. Investments in agricultural infrastructure, extension services, and market facilitation can enhance the resilience of the food system and mitigate the disruptions caused by this order. Second, it is crucial to engage in dialogue and seek peaceful resolutions to address the underlying issues that have led to the enforcement of the sit-at-home order. Efforts should focus on promoting social cohesion, fostering inclusivity, and addressing grievances that have fuelled tensions.

This study has some limitations. The research focused on the specific context of Ebonyi State and may not capture the full range of implications on food security in the broader Southeast Region. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional nature limits its ability to establish causal relationships. Further longitudinal research is needed to monitor the evolving impact of Monday's sit-at-home orders on food security over time.

This study recommends the urgent need for comprehensive government interventions to address the challenges posed by the Monday sit-at-home order on food security in Ebonyi State. By implementing evidence-based policies that support local food production, enhance market access, and promote dialogue with the leadership of IPOB, stakeholders can work towards ensuring the well-being and food security of the population, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of the region.

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