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Hardship, Hunger, Poverty, Insecurity and Inflation: The Need for New Minimum Wage in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is currently experiencing severe socioeconomic pressures manifested in rising inflation, food insecurity, poverty, hardship and insecurity. These conditions have substantially weakened the purchasing power of workers and raised concerns about the adequacy of the existing minimum wage. This study examines the relationship between hardship, hunger, poverty, insecurity and inflation and the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria, drawing on deprivation theory as the study's theoretical perspective. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a broader understanding of the socioeconomic and policy dimensions of minimum wage adequacy. The study population comprises 110 respondents, including civil servants, politicians and members of the security forces residing in three selected states in Nigeria. Data were collected through a 25-item structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, complemented by secondary information from relevant economic and policy sources. Descriptive statistics, including simple percentages, means and standard deviations, as well as inferential techniques, were employed to examine the relationships among the variables. The study finds that government policy and attitude, economic depression, poor leadership, and ecological and security challenges jointly contribute to hardship, inflation, insecurity and poverty in contemporary Nigeria. These conditions have significantly eroded the purchasing power of workers and increased the difficulty of meeting basic household needs. The study therefore argues that the review of the minimum wage should be understood not merely as a wage-policy intervention but as part of a broader strategy for addressing poverty, food insecurity, declining purchasing power and socioeconomic vulnerability. The study recommends that government strengthen mechanisms for monitoring the prices and availability of essential goods and services, improve economic management, and periodically review wages and salaries in line with prevailing economic conditions to ensure that workers receive a wage capable of supporting a dignified standard of living.

Keywords: *Minimum wage, inflation, poverty, hunger, insecurity, hardship, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is facing a profound cost-of-living crisis characterised by increasing hardship, hunger, poverty, insecurity and inflation. The persistence of these challenges has raised fundamental questions about the adequacy of the current minimum wage and the capacity of workers to meet their basic needs. Although the national minimum wage has been increased to ₦70,000, the rapid rise in the prices of food, energy, transportation, housing and other essential commodities has substantially weakened its real purchasing power. Consequently, the debate surrounding the minimum wage has increasingly shifted from the question of a legally prescribed minimum to the broader question of whether workers receive an income that is sufficient to support a basic and dignified standard of living.

The deterioration in living conditions has intensified demands by organised labour and other stakeholders for an urgent upward review of wages. Peter (2026) observes that rising inflation and increasing fuel costs have made it increasingly difficult for many workers to afford essential goods and services, thereby strengthening demands for a living wage rather than a minimum wage. Rubery (2003) similarly highlights the relationship between inadequate purchasing power, poverty, food and energy costs, and inflation. These pressures are particularly significant in an environment where income growth does not correspond with the increasing cost of essential goods and services. The implication is that nominal increases in wages may provide limited improvement in workers' welfare when inflation simultaneously erodes their real income.

The Nigerian situation is further complicated by the interaction between economic and structural factors. Persistent inflation, currency depreciation, fuel subsidy removal, insecurity, declining agricultural productivity and weaknesses in economic management have contributed to the deterioration of household purchasing power. Peter (2026) identifies inflation, naira devaluation, insecurity, fuel subsidy removal and broader economic regression as important factors driving the current economic difficulties. Esekpa, Ekarika and Uzu (2024) similarly draw attention to the inadequacy of existing wages and the need for wage revaluation in response to changing economic conditions. The consequences extend beyond individual workers to households, businesses and the broader economy, as declining real wages may contribute to reduced consumption, shrinking middle-class purchasing power and increasing socioeconomic vulnerability.

The relationship between wages and living standards must therefore be understood within the broader socioeconomic environment. A worker's nominal salary may remain unchanged while the real value of that salary declines considerably because of inflation. When the prices of food, transportation, housing, energy and other basic commodities rise faster than wages, households are compelled to reduce consumption, accumulate debt, withdraw children from educational opportunities, or compromise other essential needs. In this context, the minimum wage becomes not only a labour-market issue but also an instrument of social protection and poverty reduction.

The role of government is particularly important because wage policy cannot be isolated from broader economic policy. Nwokowa (2023) notes that lack of policy continuity, inadequate funding, political favouritism, poor planning and weaknesses in public administration can contribute to inefficient income distribution and socioeconomic hardship. Olawale (2023) further associates increasing hardship and hunger with declining agricultural productivity, particularly where insecurity affects farming communities. Eze (2022) observes that dependence on imported food exposes domestic food prices to international price movements and other external shocks. These conditions demonstrate that increasing the minimum wage, although necessary, must be complemented by policies that address the structural causes of inflation, food insecurity and poverty.

Insecurity represents another critical dimension of the problem. Persistent insecurity affects agricultural production, investment, employment and household welfare. When farmers cannot safely access their farms, agricultural output may decline and food prices may increase. Similarly, insecurity discourages investment and economic activity, thereby weakening employment opportunities and household income. Joe (2021) reports concerns raised by organised labour regarding the worsening economic and security conditions and the burden placed on Nigerian workers and citizens by economic policies. Such concerns reinforce the argument that wage reform must be situated within a broader framework of economic stabilisation and social protection.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to determine a new numerical minimum wage but to develop a wage system that reflects prevailing economic realities and protects workers against severe deterioration in their standard of living. A meaningful minimum wage should take into consideration inflation, food prices, transportation costs, housing costs, household needs, productivity and regional economic differences. It should also be accompanied by mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and periodic review.

It is against this background that this paper examines hardship, hunger, poverty, insecurity and inflation and the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria. The study argues that the current socioeconomic conditions make the review of minimum wage an important component of efforts to protect workers, reduce poverty and restore purchasing power. The paper consequently focuses on the relationship between socioeconomic hardship and the need for wage reform in Nigeria.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to evaluate the relationship between insecurity, poverty, inflation and hunger and the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria.
The specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain whether poverty, insecurity, inflation and hunger positively predict the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which socioeconomic challenges have a positive predictive effect on the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives of the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated:
H_{01}: Poverty, insecurity, inflation and hunger do not positively predict the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria.
H_{02}: Socioeconomic challenges have no significant predictive effect on the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE ECONOMIC NEXUS BETWEEN HARDSHIP, HUNGER AND POVERTY

Hardship, hunger and poverty are closely interconnected socioeconomic conditions. Poverty is multidimensional and extends beyond inadequate income to include limited access to food, housing, healthcare, education, employment opportunities and other essential services. From this perspective, poverty represents a condition in which individuals and households lack the resources and capabilities required to attain an acceptable standard of living.

Economic hardship becomes particularly severe when household income is insufficient to meet basic needs. Food, clothing, shelter, transportation and other necessities constitute fundamental components of household welfare. When the purchasing power of income declines, households experience increasing difficulty in satisfying these needs. Thus, the adequacy of wages is directly connected to the ability of workers and their families to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

In Nigeria, the persistence of hardship, hunger and poverty is associated with structural weaknesses in human-capital development, industrialisation, agricultural productivity and employment creation. Limited opportunities for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers can reduce household income and reinforce economic vulnerability. These conditions may create a cycle in which low income reduces access to essential goods and services, while inadequate access to such resources further limits individuals' capacity to improve their economic circumstances. Nwokowa (2023) argues that inconsistent government policy frameworks, political instability, inadequate funding, lack of policy continuity, political favouritism and poor economic planning have weakened economic performance and contributed to inefficient income distribution. Such institutional weaknesses can intensify hardship because they undermine the effectiveness of public interventions designed to address poverty and improve living conditions.

Agriculture is particularly important in this relationship. Olawale (2023) associates increasing hunger and hardship with declining agricultural productivity, especially in areas affected by insecurity. When insecurity prevents farmers from accessing agricultural land, producing food or transporting agricultural products safely, domestic food supply may decline. Reduced supply can contribute to rising food prices and consequently increase the burden on low- and fixed-income households. Eze (2022) further notes that dependence on food imports exposes the Nigerian economy to international price fluctuations and external economic shocks. The implication is that wage policy and food-security policy cannot be treated as completely separate policy areas. Where food prices rise rapidly, workers require greater income to maintain their previous consumption levels. Consequently, a minimum wage that does not adequately respond to changes in the cost of living may gradually lose its capacity to protect workers from poverty and hunger.

GOVERNMENT INFLATIONARY POLICY

Inflation represents one of the most significant challenges affecting the adequacy of the minimum wage in Nigeria. Persistent increases in the general price level reduce the real value of workers' earnings and weaken household purchasing power. Consequently, even where nominal wages increase, workers may experience little improvement in their living standards when the rate of inflation exceeds wage growth.

The Nigerian inflationary environment has been influenced by a combination of domestic and external factors, including exchange-rate volatility, currency depreciation, supply-chain disruptions, rising energy costs and weaknesses in fiscal and monetary management. Eze (2022) and Olawale (2023) identify supply-chain disruptions, naira depreciation, increasing energy costs and government borrowing among factors contributing to inflationary pressures.

The consequences of inflation are particularly severe for low-income workers because a larger proportion of their income is devoted to basic necessities. When food, transportation, energy and housing costs increase, there is limited income remaining for savings, education, healthcare and other household requirements. Inflation therefore reduces the effectiveness of a fixed minimum wage over time.

Nwokowa (2023) and Olawale (2023) further argue that fiscal deficits and policy misalignment can intensify inflationary pressures and reduce purchasing power. This demonstrates that wage policy should be coordinated with broader macroeconomic management. A new minimum wage may provide immediate income relief, but its sustainability depends partly on government capacity to address the inflationary pressures that continually erode real wages.

Government intervention should therefore extend beyond periodic wage adjustments. There is a need for effective economic management, improved food production, strengthened supply systems and policies that stabilise the purchasing power of households. A minimum-wage policy that is not accompanied by measures to control inflation risks becoming ineffective as the real value of wages declines.

INSECURITY AND THE MINIMUM WAGE DILEMMA

Insecurity is another major factor shaping the socioeconomic conditions within which minimum-wage policy operates in Nigeria. Insecurity encompasses conditions characterised by danger, uncertainty, instability, threats to life and property, and inadequate protection of individuals and communities. It can adversely affect economic activity, agricultural production, investment, employment and household welfare.

Akinyemi (2023) conceptualises insecurity in terms of inadequate protection from danger and breaches of peace arising from activities capable of disrupting socioeconomic, cultural and political life. From an economic perspective, insecurity can undermine the capacity of individuals and institutions to participate effectively in productive activities. The relationship between insecurity and minimum wage is therefore indirect but significant. Insecurity can increase the cost of living by disrupting agricultural production, transportation, trade and investment. It can also reduce employment opportunities and household income. For example, where farmers are unable to cultivate their land safely, food production may decline, resulting in higher food prices. Similarly, insecurity may increase transportation and business costs, which are ultimately reflected in consumer prices.

Adeboye and Yusuf (2023) view insecurity as a condition in which governments are unable to adequately protect important societal values, institutions, welfare and the wellbeing of citizens. This perspective highlights the importance of security as a prerequisite for economic development and effective social policy. In practical terms, insecurity manifests through threats to life and property, displacement, restricted economic activity and reduced access to productive resources. It consequently creates an additional burden for low-income workers who may already struggle to meet basic needs. Workers may spend a greater proportion of their income on transportation, security and other costs generated by insecurity.

In addition, disagreements between government and labour unions over wage adjustments can complicate the implementation of minimum-wage policy. Where there is insufficient institutional dialogue and weak mechanisms for periodic wage review, the gap between workers' income and the cost of living may widen. The need for a new minimum wage should therefore be accompanied by stronger government-labour engagement, effective implementation mechanisms and broader policies aimed at improving economic and physical security.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria within the context of hardship, inflation, poverty, hunger and insecurity. The approach enables the study to examine both measurable socioeconomic relationships and the broader policy and institutional context surrounding minimum-wage adequacy.

Quantitative Approach

The quantitative component draws on primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire, while secondary economic and policy information was obtained from relevant institutional and economic sources, including publications and reports of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the World Bank.

The study population comprises 110 respondents, including civil servants, politicians and members of the security forces residing in three selected states in Nigeria. A convenience sampling technique was adopted. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items structured on a five-point Likert scale.

The quantitative component covers the period 2018–2026 and considers indicators relating to:

- monthly and annual inflation trends;
- core inflation;
- poverty and hardship;
- hunger and food insecurity;
- multidimensional poverty;
- income distribution;
- prevalence of undernourishment; and
- insecurity.

Statistical Techniques

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to summarise the characteristics and patterns of the variables. Inferential analysis was employed to examine the relationships among the variables and to test the stated hypotheses. Correlation and regression analysis were considered appropriate for assessing the predictive relationships between socioeconomic challenges and the need for a new minimum wage. Time-series analysis was also considered in examining patterns and changes in key socioeconomic indicators over the period under consideration. This provides a basis for identifying changes in inflation, poverty, hardship, hunger and related indicators over time.

Qualitative Approach

The qualitative component provides contextual and interpretative understanding of the effectiveness of government policies and interventions relating to minimum wage, poverty, inflation, hardship and socioeconomic welfare. Relevant qualitative sources include poverty-reduction strategies, government budgets, economic recovery programmes, policy documents, news reports, public opinions, focus-group discussions, and perspectives from policymakers and economists. The qualitative analysis focuses on identifying major challenges and patterns in policy effectiveness, stakeholder perspectives, policy statements and the nature of government interventions aimed at addressing socioeconomic hardship.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The study integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria. The mixed-method approach enables the study to cross-validate statistical trends with policy narratives and stakeholder perspectives. For example, quantitative evidence relating to inflation, poverty and income distribution can be interpreted alongside qualitative evidence concerning policy implementation, economic hardship and the experiences of affected stakeholders. This integration provides a stronger basis for understanding not only the statistical relationship among the variables but also the institutional and socioeconomic conditions that shape workers' living standards.

The integration of the two approaches consequently provides a basis for developing policy recommendations that are informed by both empirical evidence and stakeholder perspectives.

Rather than viewing the minimum wage as an isolated labour-policy instrument, the study situates wage reform within the broader challenges of inflation, poverty, hunger, insecurity and declining purchasing power in Nigeria.

DATA COLLECTION AND SOURCE

The paper relied on secondary data formation from reputable source

INDICATOR	SOURCES
Hardship index	Global Hunger, FAO, NBS
Hunger rate	UNDP, FAO, NBS
Poverty index BANK	Global Hunger index UNDP, MBS, WORLD
Inflation index	World Bank, MBS, CBN
Hunger rate	undernourishment prevalence and insecurity report
Poverty index -	ratio , national poverty headcount
Inflation rate -	MBS and CBN annual rate
Insecurity rate -	

Table 1: Nigerian Minimum Wage in Comparison to the United States Dollar

Year	National Minimum Wage (₦)	18/₦ RATE	Minimum Wage ($)
1981	₦125	0.61	204.92
1991	₦250	9.91	25.23
2000	₦5,500	102.11	53.86
2011	₦18,000	153.86	116.99
2018	₦30,000	306.08	98.01
2024	₦30,000	1,507.45	19.90
2024c	62,000	1,507.45	41.13
2024e	₦70,000	1,507.45	46.44

Source: Statisense, ADSR research (2024)

Table 1 illustrates the substantial erosion of the value of Nigeria's minimum wage when expressed in United States dollars over the period 1981–2024. In 1981, the national minimum wage of ₦125 was equivalent to approximately US$204.92 at an exchange rate of ₦0.61 to US$1. However, by 1991, although the nominal minimum wage had doubled to ₦250, its dollar value had fallen sharply to US$25.23. This indicates that the increase in nominal wages was accompanied by a substantial depreciation of the naira, thereby reducing the international and real purchasing value of workers' earnings.

The same pattern continued in subsequent years. The minimum wage increased considerably in nominal terms from ₦5,500 in 2000 to ₦18,000 in 2011 and ₦30,000 in 2018. Nevertheless, its dollar equivalent remained relatively low, rising to US$53.86 in 2000 and US$116.99 in 2011 before declining to US$98.01 in 2018. The most striking deterioration occurred in 2024, when ₦30,000 was equivalent to only US$19.90, reflecting the severe depreciation of the naira and the declining external value of workers' earnings. Even the proposed increases to ₦62,000 and ₦70,000 in 2024 corresponded to only US$41.13 and US$46.44, respectively. The figures therefore demonstrate that increases in the nominal minimum wage do not necessarily translate into comparable improvements in workers' economic welfare.

In relation to the central argument of this paper, the table provides important evidence of the growing gap between nominal wages and workers' purchasing capacity. The dramatic decline in the dollar value of the minimum wage is indicative of broader macroeconomic pressures, particularly currency depreciation and inflation. For workers whose incomes are fixed or increase more slowly than the cost of goods and services, the consequence is declining purchasing power and increasing difficulty in meeting basic needs such as food, transportation, housing, healthcare and education. Thus, the issue is not merely whether the minimum wage has increased in naira terms, but whether such increases are sufficient to protect workers against the rising cost of living.

The table also strengthens the argument that Nigeria's minimum-wage policy requires regular review in response to changing economic conditions. The movement from ₦125 in 1981 to ₦70,000 in 2024 appears substantial in nominal terms, but the corresponding dollar values reveal that the purchasing value of the wage has not been sustained. This provides a strong basis for the argument that minimum-wage determination should take greater account of inflation, exchange-rate depreciation and the actual cost of maintaining a decent standard of living. Consequently, the demand for a new minimum wage should be viewed within the broader objective of protecting workers from hardship, hunger and poverty, rather than simply increasing the numerical value of wages. The table therefore reinforces the central thesis of this paper that a sustainable minimum-wage framework in Nigeria should be periodically reviewed and linked to prevailing economic realities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nigeria is currently confronted with significant socioeconomic challenges, including insecurity, poverty, inflation, hunger and widespread economic hardship. These conditions have generated sustained concern among workers, trade unions and other stakeholders regarding the adequacy of the existing minimum wage. The continuing economic difficulties have consequently intensified labour demands for a new and more responsive minimum wage. Ajaero and Festus (2026) reported that negotiations for a new minimum wage were expected to commence by July 2026, with the objective of addressing the rising levels of poverty, insecurity, hunger, inflation and hardship experienced by Nigerian workers. Against this background, this study adopts Relative Deprivation Theory as its theoretical framework for explaining the relationship between deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and demands for improved wages.

Relative Deprivation Theory, as discussed by Emmanuel, Otu and Odey (2017), is associated with the early work of Stouffer and his associates, who examined the relationship between individuals' satisfaction and their relative positions within a social system. The central proposition of the theory is that people's perceptions of deprivation are shaped not simply by their absolute material conditions but also by the perceived gap between what they believe they should receive and what they actually receive. Thus, dissatisfaction emerges when individuals perceive a significant discrepancy between their expectations, entitlements or legitimate aspirations and their actual socioeconomic circumstances.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to the Nigerian minimum-wage debate. Economic dissatisfaction and social tension do not arise solely from the objective experience of hunger, hardship, inflation, insecurity and poverty. They are also influenced by individuals' perceptions of whether their income and living conditions are consistent with what they believe they deserve or require to maintain an acceptable standard of living. When workers perceive that their wages are increasingly inadequate compared with the rising cost of food, transportation, housing, energy and other necessities, feelings of deprivation may intensify. Such perceptions can generate frustration, resentment and collective demands for improved socioeconomic conditions.

The argument is further supported by Ted Robert Gurr's (1970) formulation of relative deprivation, which explains social and political behaviour in terms of the discrepancy between people's expectations of what they believe they ought to have and what they actually possess. In this context, workers may participate in trade-union and labour movements not simply because they experience material deprivation, but because they perceive that existing wages are inconsistent with their legitimate expectations and the prevailing cost of living. Collective mobilisation therefore becomes a mechanism through which workers seek to reduce the perceived gap between their expected and actual economic conditions.

The relevance of deprivation theory to the Nigerian context is evident in the recurring agitation by organised labour and trade unions for higher wages and improved working conditions. As inflation and other economic pressures increase the cost of living, the existing minimum wage may become progressively disconnected from workers' expectations and basic household requirements. The resulting perception of deprivation can strengthen collective action, labour negotiations and demands for a living wage. In this sense, labour agitation should not be understood merely as a demand for higher nominal salaries but as a response to a perceived deterioration in economic wellbeing.

The broader concept of deprivation also draws attention to the importance of stable social and institutional relationships in human wellbeing. Bowlby's (1953) work, although developed primarily within the context of attachment and psychological development, emphasises the importance of stable, continuous and supportive relationships for healthy human development. In applying this broader perspective to the present study, socioeconomic insecurity and persistent deprivation can be understood as conditions that undermine individual and household wellbeing. Continuous exposure to hardship, poverty, hunger, inflation and insecurity can generate psychological and social pressures that influence people's perceptions of government responsiveness and their willingness to support or challenge existing socioeconomic arrangements.

Within this context, trade unions become important institutional actors through which workers collectively articulate their grievances and negotiate with government and employers. Labour unionism provides a mechanism through which individual experiences of economic deprivation can be transformed into collective demands for improved wages and working conditions. The persistent demand for a living wage in Nigeria can therefore be interpreted as an expression of collective efforts to reduce the perceived gap between workers' economic expectations and their actual living conditions.

Practically, the minimum wage represents an important institutional mechanism through which government seeks to protect workers from severe economic deprivation. It establishes a wage floor intended to provide a minimum level of remuneration for workers. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism depends on prevailing economic conditions. Where inflation, poverty, insecurity and food prices rise substantially, a fixed minimum wage may lose its purchasing power and consequently become inadequate for meeting basic needs. The effectiveness of minimum-wage policy is therefore closely connected to broader socioeconomic, political and institutional conditions, including income inequality, economic structure and the capacity of government to implement and enforce wage regulations.

Minimum-wage policy is consequently not only an economic instrument but also a mechanism for addressing socioeconomic inequality and worker vulnerability. Societies periodically review minimum wages because economic conditions, productivity, prices and living costs change over time. A minimum wage that is appropriate under one set of economic conditions may become inadequate under another. In Nigeria, the rapid increase in inflation and the associated deterioration in purchasing power have heightened concerns regarding the capacity of the existing minimum wage to protect workers from hardship, hunger and poverty.

The application of Relative Deprivation Theory therefore provides a useful explanation for understanding why socioeconomic hardship can generate demands for a new minimum wage. As the gap widens between workers' perceived economic needs and their actual earnings, dissatisfaction is likely to increase. This dissatisfaction can subsequently manifest through labour negotiations, trade-union mobilisation and demands for government intervention. The theory thus provides a conceptual link between economic hardship and perceived deprivation, perceived deprivation and collective labour action, and collective labour action and demands for a more adequate minimum wage.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF MINIMUM WAGE

The socioeconomic, political and cultural evidence surrounding Nigeria's minimum-wage debate, particularly the renewed demand for a higher minimum wage in 2026, is strongly connected to the challenges associated with the implementation of the ₦70,000 national minimum wage signed into law in 2024. The implementation occurred against a difficult economic background characterised by inflation, hunger, hardship, insecurity and poverty. These challenges have also generated differences in the implementation and compliance with minimum-wage provisions across different levels of government and across states and sectors of the Nigerian economy.

The empirical evidence reviewed within the 2024–2026 period focuses on several important dimensions of minimum-wage policy, including labour productivity, agricultural conditions, the declining real value of wages, unemployment, uneven implementation and private-sector compliance. These issues are particularly important because the effectiveness of a minimum wage cannot be assessed solely by examining its nominal monetary value. Its actual impact depends on the purchasing power of workers, the prevailing inflation rate, employment conditions, productivity and the capacity of employers and government institutions to comply with wage regulations.

Okafor (2010) applied a mixed-method approach in Lagos, using survey and regression analysis to examine the effects of minimum-wage enforcement on sectoral employment. The study reported approximately 80% non-compliance and identified a negative employment effect of about 2% among compliant firms in the informal sector. The study, however, had limitations relating to gender and rural-specific impacts. Despite these limitations, the findings demonstrate the importance of implementation and enforcement in determining the effectiveness of minimum-wage policy.]

In Ghana, Teal (2011) employed household-level econometric analysis, including a probit model, to examine the economic effects of real minimum wages on unemployment and formal and informal employment. The findings indicated a negative employment effect, suggesting a potential reduction in employment in some firms. Although the institutional and economic structures of Ghana differ from those of Nigeria, the evidence provides a useful comparative perspective on the possible employment consequences associated with minimum-wage increases.

In the United States, Hirsch et al. (2015) examined the relationship between minimum wages and labour productivity using a regression-based panel design and quarterly data covering 1995–2013. The findings indicated a 2–4% reduction in employee turnover and gains in efficiency, suggesting that higher minimum wages can, under certain circumstances, generate productivity-related benefits for employers. This evidence is relevant to the Nigerian debate because it challenges the assumption that minimum-wage increases necessarily produce only adverse economic consequences.

Ologbo (2023) examined the socioeconomic relationship between upward minimum-wage reviews and aggregate labour productivity in Nigeria using the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM). The study reported productivity gains associated with increases in the minimum wage. This finding suggests that wage increases may potentially contribute to improved worker productivity, although the magnitude and sustainability of such effects depend on broader economic and institutional conditions.

Evidence from the United States has also examined the relationship between minimum wages, income and poverty using regression-based panel analysis of Current Population Survey (CPS) data covering 1979–2006. The findings indicated a poverty-reduction effect of approximately 1–2% and no significant adverse effect on income, poverty and inflation. However, the transferability of these findings to Nigeria is constrained by significant differences between the two economies, particularly the structure of Nigeria's labour market and the importance of the informal sector.

In South Africa, Dinkelman and Ranchhod (2017) employed propensity-score matching using labour-force survey data to examine the effects of extending minimum-wage protection to domestic workers. The study found that wage increases were associated with a modest reduction in poverty of approximately 3% and a narrowing of income disparities without significant adverse employment effects. However, the study was sector-specific, and its findings may therefore not be directly generalisable across all sectors of the Nigerian economy.

Taken together, the empirical evidence indicates that the consequences of minimum-wage increases are not uniform across countries, sectors or economic conditions. The effects may depend on the level of wage adjustment, inflation, labour productivity, enforcement capacity, employment structure and the relative size of the formal and informal sectors. For Nigeria, these considerations are particularly important because the informal sector constitutes a significant component of economic activity and employment.

The empirical evidence therefore provides justification for examining the Nigerian minimum-wage question through an integrated socioeconomic and econometric perspective. Relevant indicators include labour productivity, employment rates, poverty rates, inflation, hunger and hardship, the real value of the minimum wage and GDP growth. These indicators provide a broader basis for evaluating whether the existing minimum wage adequately responds to the socioeconomic realities confronting Nigerian workers.

The theoretical and empirical perspectives converge on the argument that minimum-wage policy should be assessed beyond the nominal increase in workers' earnings. Relative Deprivation Theory explains how widening gaps between workers' expectations and their actual economic circumstances can generate dissatisfaction and collective demands for change, while empirical evidence demonstrates that minimum-wage adjustments can produce different effects on employment, productivity and poverty depending on the economic and institutional context. The Nigerian minimum-wage debate should therefore be situated within a broader framework of economic development, inflation management, poverty reduction, productivity improvement and social protection.

TABLE 2: NIGERIAN NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE (1981-2024)

Year	National Minimum Wage	Inflation Rate	Poverty Rate	Insecurity rate	Unemployment Rate	Hunger	hardship
1981	₦125.00	20.81%	28.1%	< 5%	20.1%		26%

1991	₦250.00	7.36%	42.7%	4-6%	48.8%	48.8%	
1998	₦5,500	10.84%	65.6%	7-8%	20.9%		
1999	₦7,500	6.62%	42.7%	8-11%	39.9%		60%
2011	₦18,000	10.34%	87.7%	15%	15.5%	9.3%	70%
2019	₦30,000	11.40%	40.1%	22%	27.9%	14.6%	
2024	₦70,000	32.70%	56.70%	23-25%	28.8%	28.8%	

Source: National Bureau of statistic or kimact development initiative report , Global hunger index GHI FAO 2001

Table 2 demonstrates the changing relationship between Nigeria's national minimum wage and major socioeconomic indicators between 1981 and 2024. Although the nominal minimum wage increased substantially from ₦125 in 1981 to ₦70,000 in 2024, this increase occurred alongside persistent poverty, unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hardship. The most notable deterioration is observed in 2024, when the minimum wage of ₦70,000 coincided with an inflation rate of 32.70%, a poverty rate of 56.70%, insecurity estimated at 23–25%, and unemployment of 28.8%. This suggests that increases in the nominal minimum wage have not necessarily translated into corresponding improvements in workers' living conditions.

The table further indicates that the relationship between minimum wage and socioeconomic wellbeing is complex. For example, the minimum wage increased from ₦18,000 in 2011 to ₦30,000 in 2019 and subsequently to ₦70,000 in 2024, while hardship and other socioeconomic pressures remained significant. The 2024 figures particularly highlight the erosion of purchasing power under high inflation. Thus, the adequacy of the minimum wage should not be assessed solely by its nominal value but by its capacity to enable workers to meet essential needs. Overall, Table 2 supports the central argument of this paper that Nigeria requires a more responsive and periodically reviewed minimum-wage framework that takes account of inflation, poverty, unemployment, hunger, insecurity and the overall cost of living.

CHALLENGES OF NIGERIAN NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

Despite numerous economic initiatives and policy interventions, the implementation of the national minimum wage in Nigeria continues to encounter significant socioeconomic, institutional and political challenges. Esekpa, Ekarika and Uzu (2024) noted that several government initiatives are constrained by economic factors, including inadequate and unreliable records, weak assessment of institutional and financial capacity, limited capacity of employers to pay prescribed minimum wages, inadequate statistical information, labour-market challenges and weak enforcement mechanisms. These challenges make it difficult to determine and implement a minimum wage that adequately reflects prevailing economic realities. Structural factors, including technological limitations, geographical conditions, population density and environmental circumstances, further complicate effective minimum-wage implementation across different parts of the country.

Eme (2009) identified additional challenges associated with the operation of minimum-wage policy, including the absence of a sufficiently competitive economy, the interaction of demand and supply forces, market imperfections, weaknesses in institutional frameworks and the changing economic role of market mechanisms. These factors can affect both the determination of appropriate wage levels and the ability of employers to comply with statutory wage requirements. Similarly, Fapohund (2004) highlighted constraints such as intra-agency conflicts, corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks, mismanagement of public resources and weak accountability. Such institutional weaknesses can undermine the effective implementation of government programmes and may result in the abandonment or ineffective execution of potentially beneficial initiatives.

Other important challenges include inadequate public awareness, weak legislative provisions and implementation mechanisms, unfair labour practices, poor enforcement of minimum-wage regulations, inadequate ministerial supervision, weak labour inspection services and limited public enlightenment. Economic instability further compounds these challenges by generating inflationary pressures that erode the real value of workers' wages. Consequently, even when the nominal minimum wage is increased, persistent inflation may reduce its purchasing power and leave workers exposed to continuing hardship, hunger and poverty. This creates a critical policy dilemma in which periodic wage increases may provide temporary relief but become inadequate as the cost of living continues to rise.

INSECURITY, INFLATION, HUNGER, HARDSHIP AND POVERTY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MINIMUM-WAGE POLICY

In 2026, Nigeria, like many African countries, continues to face interconnected socioeconomic, political and security challenges, including killings, kidnapping, underdevelopment, unequal distribution of resources, inflation, economic regression and hunger. These conditions have contributed to increasing poverty and hardship and have intensified the debate over the adequacy of the national minimum wage. In this context, minimum-wage policy serves as an important component of the broader social and economic protection framework by providing a wage floor for low-paid workers and helping households cope with the rising cost of living.

The major policy initiatives relevant to addressing these challenges include:

- Economic reforms: Measures aimed at improving economic stability, productivity and the capacity of the economy to support sustainable employment and wages.
- Wage floors for low-paid workers: Establishing minimum levels of remuneration intended to protect workers from excessively low wages and declining purchasing power.
- Social protection: Providing mechanisms that reduce the vulnerability of households affected by unemployment, poverty and economic shocks.
- Food-security measures: Interventions designed to improve access to affordable and adequate food and reduce the impact of rising food prices on low-income households.

In Nigeria, specific initiatives include support for tertiary institutions, the implementation of the national minimum wage, state-level wage implementation, consequential adjustments and increases in NYSC allowances. These initiatives are intended to provide financial and material support to workers and other vulnerable groups across the country and to complement broader development and social-protection interventions. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends substantially on implementation capacity, institutional coordination, economic stability and the purchasing power of wages. Where inflation rises faster than income, the benefits of nominal wage increases may be rapidly eroded. Similarly, insecurity and weak productive capacity can increase the cost of food and other essential goods, thereby reducing the real value of workers' earnings. The effectiveness of minimum-wage policy should therefore be assessed not only in terms of the amount approved but also in terms of its ability to improve workers' actual living conditions.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE ANALYSIS

The demographic profile of the respondents provides socioeconomic and occupational context for understanding perceptions of minimum-wage policy. The study considers gender, age, occupation and educational attainment as key demographic characteristics. Gender: Male respondents accounted for 70 (63.6%) of the respondents, indicating a higher representation of males in the study sample. Age: Respondents aged 36–45 constituted the largest group, accounting for 45 (27.3%), followed by those aged 26–35 (40.2%), 18–25 (13.6%), and respondents aged 46 years and above. The distribution indicates substantial representation of respondents within the economically active population. Occupation: Civil servants constituted the largest occupational group, accounting for 50% of the respondents, followed by politicians (27.3%) and members of the security forces (22.7%). The occupational composition is particularly relevant to the study because public-sector workers are directly affected by national minimum-wage policies and their implementation. Education: Respondents with B.Sc. qualifications constituted the largest educational category (36.4%), followed by those with HND or equivalent qualifications (22.7%) and respondents with SSCE qualifications (18.2%).

In summary, the demographic profile provides a useful background for interpreting respondents' views on minimum-wage adequacy. The socioeconomic conditions identified in the study suggest that an increase in the minimum wage has the potential to improve workers' purchasing power and contribute to the reduction of poverty, hunger and hardship. However, the extent to which a wage increase can address these challenges depends on the broader economic environment, particularly inflation, insecurity, employment conditions and the effective implementation of minimum-wage provisions.

TABLE 3: VARIABLE FREQUENCY (%)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	70	63.6%
	Female	40	36.4%
	18-25	20	18.6%
	26-35	30	40.9%
	36-45	45	27.3%
	46 and above	15	18.2%
Occupation	Civil Servant	55	50.0%
	Politician	30	27.3%
	Military Force	25	22.7%
Education	B.Sc.	40	36.4%
	HND	25	22.7%
	ND/NCE	15	13.6%
	SSCE	20	18.2%
	Postgraduate	10	9.0%

Source: Field Work, 2026

From the foregoing analysis, the paper concludes that the demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the majority of the participants were male, civil servants and B.Sc. holders. This demographic composition provides the relevant background for interpreting the respondents' views on the need for a new living wage in Nigeria.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS I

To achieve the first objective of the study, which seeks to ascertain whether poverty, insecurity, inflation, hunger and hardship positively predict the need for a new living wage in Nigeria, a null hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H_{01}: Poverty, insecurity, inflation, hunger and hardship do not positively predict the need for a new living wage in Nigeria.

To ascertain the concern addressed by this hypothesis, respondents were presented with questions 5–9 of the structured questionnaire. The responses to these questions were used to generate the data required for testing the hypothesis. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4 INSECURITY, INFLATION, POVERTY HUNGER & HARDSHIP THE NEED FOR NEW LIVING WAGES

S/N	Statement	Degree of acceptance				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Agree
5.	Can new minimum wage local policy reduced inflation, insecurity, hunger, hardship and poverty in Nigeria?	10(9.1%)	15(13.6%)	5(4.5%)	30(27.3%)	50(45.4%)
6.	Bad policy, coupled with poverty, inflation hardship and hunger and insecurity properly high demand for minimum wage in Nigeria	5(4.5%)	10(9.1%)	15(13.6%)	50(45.3%)	30(27.3%)
7.	High cost of living is as a result of poor minimum wage paid to workers	20(18.1%)	30(27.3%)	5(4.6%)	35(31.9%)	20(18.1%)
8.	Low local food production is as a result of inflation, hunger, poverty, insecurity and hardship	25(22.8%)	35(31.9%)	20(18.1%)	18(16.3%)	12(10.93%)
9.	Does Inflation, hardship, poverty insecurity and hunger as negative effect on paralyses the minimum wage	5(4.5%)	15(13.6%)	10(9.1%)	40(36.3%)	40(36.3%)
10.	Inflation, insecurity, hardship, hunger and poverty are the major challenges of minimum wage	10(9.2%)	40(36.3%)	Nil	45(40.9%)	15(13.6%)

Source: Field work, 2026

In order to realistically ascertain whether socioeconomic challenges have a positive predictive effect on the need for a living wage in Nigeria, the responses to Questions 5–9 were analysed. The results of these responses are presented in Table 4.

Step 1: The average responses from the above analysis were determined based on the respondents who agreed and those who disagreed with the statements.

Table 5: Insecurity, poverty, inflation, hardship and hunger positively predict the new minimum wage.

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	30	27
Agree	80	73
Total	110	100

Source: field work, 2026.

The table above shows that, out of the 110 respondents sampled, 80 respondents (73%) believe that inflation, hardship, poverty, insecurity and hunger can positively predict the need for a new living wage in Nigeria. This finding therefore does not support the formulated null hypothesis. In contrast, the remaining 30 respondents (27%) expressed a contrary view, thereby supporting the null hypothesis. The Z-score test for proportions was therefore applied to statistically determine whether the observed difference was significant, as presented below.

$$Zc = \frac{\bar{x}-p}{S/\sqrt{n}}$$

where
n = Sample size
s = Standard deviation
bar{x} = respondents support H0
P = Probability that H0 is true
Z = is the score calculated
The hypothesis was tested base on the formula by 0.5 (5%) Significance level

TABLE 6

Alternative	Frequency	Percentage	$(x-x)^2$
Strongly Agree	80	27	1600
Strongly Disagree/neutral	30	-40	-1600
Total	110	0	3200

Source: field work, 2026

Table 7: Socio Economic challenges positive predictive effect on living wage

Alternative	Frequency mention	Percentage
Accepted Disagree	90	82
Un-accepted	20	18
Total	110	100

Source: field work, 2026

The table above shows that 90 (82%) of the respondents responded positively, indicating that socioeconomic challenges have a positive effect on the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria, while 20 (18%) expressed a contrary view. This finding implies that socioeconomic challenges have a positive effect on the demand for a new minimum wage in Nigeria. However, the statistical test of the socioeconomic challenges using the Z-score test for proportions, as stated earlier in the study, indicates a negative predictive effect on the new minimum wage. The corresponding standard deviation computation is presented in Table 8.

Alternative	X	x-x	$(x-x)^2$
Accepted	90	39	1521
Un-accepted	20	-39	-152

Source: field work, 2026.

This implies that, the socio-economic challenges have positive predictive effect on new minimum wage since Zc < Zt resulting to economic rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of alternative hypothesis

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship between poverty, insecurity, hardship, inflation and hunger and the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria. The empirical analysis generated two major findings that warrant further scholarly discussion and interpretation.

i. The findings show that insecurity, poverty, hardship, hunger and inflation positively influence the need for a new minimum wage in Nigeria. This finding was supported by the socioeconomic analysis using the Z-score test for proportions, which demonstrated the positive influence of insecurity, hunger, inflation, hardship and poverty on the perceived need for a new minimum wage. The finding is consistent with the socioeconomic evidence reported by Nwokowa (2023) and Olawale (2023), who observed that hunger, hardship, poverty, inflation and insecurity have increased in the context of weaknesses in government policy frameworks. Similarly, Otu (2026) highlighted the socioeconomic importance of a living wage, particularly in the context of naira devaluation, fuel subsidy removal and the need for higher pay in response to changing economic conditions. These findings suggest that the demand for a new minimum wage is not merely a labour-market issue but a response to the broader deterioration in workers' economic wellbeing.

ii. The findings further indicate that socioeconomic challenges significantly predict the economic trajectory and need for a new living wage for workers. The Z-score proportional analysis provides support for this finding and resonates with the conclusions of previous studies by Eze (2022) and Akinyemi (2023), who affirmed that minimum-wage effectiveness is often constrained by systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, insecurity, poverty, inflation, hardship, hunger and technological limitations. Other challenges include the attitude of government personnel, ineffective administrative structures, environmental constraints and limited access to critical infrastructure. These conditions may weaken the capacity of government and employers to implement wage policies effectively.

The findings also point to additional challenges associated with minimum-wage implementation, including reduced competitiveness, limited impact on poverty reduction, inflationary erosion of wages, job insecurity, regional disparities, expansion of the informal sector, low compliance and weak enforcement, as well as increasing operational costs. These factors demonstrate that increasing the minimum wage without addressing the broader economic and institutional environment may limit its ability to improve workers' welfare. The effectiveness of a new minimum wage therefore depends on complementary measures aimed at stabilising prices, improving productivity, strengthening institutions and ensuring effective implementation.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The implications of the findings are primarily contextual and socioeconomic. First, the results suggest that the living wage is closely connected to government policy, workers' earnings and poverty reduction. Failure to effectively implement minimum-wage provisions can undermine the economic potential of workers and may contribute to reduced employment opportunities, constrained consumer spending and weaker business activity. These conditions can reinforce widespread socioeconomic stagnation and deepen the vulnerability of low-income households.

Adeboye and Yusuf (2023) and Esekpa, Ekarika and Uzu (2024) identified institutional and socioeconomic challenges that can affect the effectiveness of wage-related policies. These challenges may have consequences for employee turnover, absenteeism, labour mobility, market conditions and the interaction between demand and supply, with further implications for poverty and inequality. Other constraints include inadequate frameworks for processing workers' demands, weak institutional capacity, poor communication between employers and workers, weak trade-union leadership and inadequate negotiation skills.

Ajaero and Festus (2026) argued that a living wage is expected to help lift individuals out of hardship and improve work motivation, thereby reducing socioeconomic gaps and disparities in living standards. However, these objectives may be undermined by inflation, insecurity and job losses. Poverty is also unevenly distributed and is not confined to a particular geographical area. Okafor (2010) observed that insecurity, inflation, hardship, hunger and poverty remain important socioeconomic challenges in Nigeria.

In this regard, economic growth remains fragile and is substantially influenced by government policy direction, institutional stability and infrastructural investment. Weak government intervention in the provision of public goods, peacebuilding and infrastructure has contributed to economic hardship and strengthened demands for improved wages as workers struggle with inflation, poverty and hunger. The findings therefore imply that minimum-wage reform should be integrated into broader economic and social policies rather than treated as an isolated wage intervention.

Finally, the findings indicate that the absence of a dedicated and effective policy-review mechanism continues to hamper the effectiveness of living-wage initiatives. Weak collaboration between government and labour unions, inadequate institutional coordination and limited mechanisms for responding to changing economic conditions can create persistent disagreements over wage determination and implementation. A sustainable wage policy therefore requires regular review, effective social dialogue and stronger collaboration between government, employers and organised labour.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the socioeconomic nexus between insecurity, poverty, hardship, hunger and inflation and the need for a new living wage in Nigeria. The analysis indicates that insecurity, inflation, poverty, hunger and hardship positively predict the need for a new living wage. The findings further suggest that, although minimum-wage and living-wage initiatives exist, their effectiveness is constrained by poor leadership, institutional weaknesses, mismanagement, insecurity, poverty, inflation, hunger and hardship.

The study further affirms that labour leaders remain important actors in wage-related initiatives and negotiations. However, disputes and conflicts between government, states and trade unions can create additional financial and administrative burdens. Strengthening mutual interests, sharing experiences and promoting good practices and appropriate technologies can contribute to more effective wage-policy implementation.

Overall, bridging the gap between workers' earnings and the rising cost of living requires renewed commitment to poverty reduction, inflation management, improved security, reduction of hardship and hunger, strategic policy enforcement and institutional reforms. A sustainable minimum-wage policy must therefore be supported by broader economic measures that protect the real purchasing power of workers and promote inclusive socioeconomic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the effectiveness of minimum- and living-wage initiatives and contribute to the reduction of insecurity, inflation, hunger, hardship and poverty in Nigeria, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- **Establishment of dedicated wage-policy institutions:** Government should establish or strengthen dedicated mechanisms for addressing workers' wage demands at the local, state and federal levels. Such mechanisms should facilitate timely assessment of economic conditions and workers' welfare.

- **Improved government–worker communication:** Effective and transparent communication channels should be established between government and workers to promote dialogue, reduce misunderstandings and facilitate timely responses to emerging wage-related concerns.

- **Strengthened government–labour collaboration:** Government agencies and labour-union leaders should promote joint initiatives for wage determination, implementation and periodic review. Such collaboration should be based on mutual interests, transparency and evidence-based negotiation.

- **Payment of a realistic living wage:** Government should ensure that wages are periodically reviewed and adjusted in line with inflation and prevailing living costs. Providing workers with a realistic living wage can reduce economic hardship and may help minimise excessive industrial disputes and strikes.

- **Integrated socioeconomic interventions:** Minimum-wage reform should be accompanied by measures addressing inflation, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty and insecurity so that increases in nominal wages translate into meaningful improvements in workers' real living standards.

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