



THE CHALLENGES OF CRIME: A MENACE FOR RURAL AGRICULTURE

Olagoke, O. O., Adefalu, L. L., Aderinoye-Abdulwahab, S. A.

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ilorin,
Nigeria

Correspondence contact details: olamigoke16@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Crime is a menace that affects everyone, and it equally threatens national security. Crime becomes more worrisome when we consider its impact on the agricultural sector which provides food, employment and contributes significantly to national output. The immediate challenges of crime in agriculture include inhibition of production as occasioned by terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, cattle rustling, destruction of crops by herdsmen; while corruption and other crimes, albeit indirectly, also impact negatively on agriculture. The Nigerian government will need to address the trend of pervasive insecurity occasioned by crime in order to keep on track the national agenda of self-sufficiency in food production. This paper therefore examined the challenges posed by crime on rural agriculture. It dwelled on a theoretical review of literature relating to the crime discourse and submitted that the socio-economic implications of these crimes, especially on agriculture are grave. It is suggested that possible solution to tackle the crime perpetrated by all forms of anti-social activities of kidnapping, banditry and associated crimes will be to improve the living conditions for rural families while recommending a reorganization of the nation's security network.

Keywords: Banditry, Insecurity, Unemployment, Corruption, Food Production.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture, though acknowledged as the bride of the Nigerian economy, has remained in the hands of rural resource-poor farmers who in spite of their misery of low productivity, still have to grapple with the menace of crimes especially in the rural areas. As aptly captured by Eneji, Babagario and Eneji (2019), the development of the agricultural sector is Nigeria's surest path to the achievement of growth and sustainable development, however, the wave of insecurity in the country portends great danger along this path to success. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2018), agriculture remains the largest sector of the Nigerian economy, employing 36.5 percent of the entire labour force. The fact that farmers who produce the bulk of food crops that feed the nation live in rural areas puts premium on the need to fight the scourge of crimes to stop further decline of the already bad economic outlook of the rural communities.

Crime is a violation of law and order which heightens sense of insecurity and can frustrate hard work. Crime, though undesirable, is an inevitable phenomenon in human societies and existence (Durkheim, 1893). As declared by Iyer and Topalova (2014), one of the issues that hinder the development of the agricultural sector in developing countries is crime. It causes emotional and psychological pain regardless of the caliber of the person in question, erodes wealth and goodwill, damages infrastructure and discourages both domestic and foreign investments (Metu, Kalu & Maduka, 2018). Crime abounds in both urban settings and rural areas but of note is the seeming ineffectiveness of law enforcement agents and their disproportionate presence in the cities relative to the rural areas where more hands are employed in primary production. Crime has disrupted food production as farmers have had to abandon their

farms and farming and there is no better time than now to address the menace of crime on rural agriculture.

This paper assessed the challenges of crime on rural agriculture in a bid to lay bare its effects on rural agricultural production. Specifically, the paper identified major crimes that affect agriculture, the causes, their effects on rural agriculture and made recommendations to address the challenges.

Theoretical concept

This paper viewed crime from the perspectives of the Broken Windows Theory and also leaned towards the Deterrence angle in the Rational Choice Theory.

Broken Windows Theory (BWT) and Rational Choice Theory (RCT)

The name Broken Windows was derived from an experiment conducted by Philip Zimbardo in 1969, he deliberately abandoned an automobile in a crime prone neighborhood where it remained untouched for long. Until he returned to smash a part of the automobile before several other damages were meted on it. The theory posited that big crimes are preceded by relatively smaller crimes that go unpunished and send signals of indifference and lack of enforcement of extant laws. As said by Okoli (2019), crime thrives in contexts where there's little deterrence. This implies that crime festers when unchecked until it becomes colossal and destroys everything in sight. While the BWT apparently blames the indifference of stakeholders for the proliferation of crimes, the deterrent perspective of the RCT stipulates that crime comes from an individual's rational choice after comparing cost and benefits of crime. People consciously choose crime and their choice is influenced by the same factors that shape appropriate behaviour (McCarthy & Chaudhary, 2014). The emphasis therefore is on community policing and zero tolerance for crimes



which sadly appears to be lacking in Nigeria so much so that rural agriculture is being affected.

METHODOLOGY

The historical research method was adopted for this paper. The sources of data for the review included journals, publications and books, and other contemporary sources that discussed challenges of crime on rural agriculture.

Causes of crime

The causes of crime are complex and interrelated. They include: low or lack of education, unemployment, poverty and economic deprivation, parental neglect, low self-esteem, boredom, alcohol and drug abuse among others.

Quality education is imperative in the survival of individuals. Unfortunately, little attention is given to education as there is paucity of quality schools and other social amenities that could help the youths develop their potentials; and this increases the number of school drop-outs who may end up as criminals in the society. According to the National Bureau of Statistics reports of February and March 2020, Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at about 23 percent as at third quarter of 2018. This has correlations with the high rate of crime and criminality in both rural and urban areas (Ucha, 2010) as unemployment will result in poverty and poverty can fuel crime.

Poverty can limit education, bring low self-esteem and push victims to drug use. According to Maiyo and Jyoti (2011), poverty is not simply the absence of financial resources, it is also the lack of capability to function effectively in society. The level of poverty coupled with low level of education contribute to the high level of crimes such as *Boko Haram* invasions, cattle rustling, banditry, kidnapping, rape, militancy, unrests and other crimes that have suddenly become prevalent across all parts of the country.

Parental neglect is common with busy parents, broken homes with stranded children and polygamous homes where children become independent too early in life. According to Kauka (2018), the educational role played by the family unit is fading because parents have become too busy for their children. Economic pursuits have robbed parents of the responsibility of moral and religious education of their children. Economic hardships especially in third world countries are denying the parents of quality time with their children, while radical feminism and excessive belief in women's rights is creating an imbalanced and sometimes 'fatherless families' especially where full time housewifery is touted as idleness (Kauka, 2018). Many of the youths, out of boredom, have gone into drugs and this is also complicit in the increasing wave of crime in the society.

Major crimes and their effect on rural farmers

Boko Haram Insurgency: The *Boko Haram* insurgency is more or less an umbrella crime with elements of banditry, kidnapping, rape, murder, arson and a host of other dastardly vices with dire consequences for peace and agricultural production. The insurgency has displaced more than 3 million persons across the nation and has rendered about three-hundred thousand people as refugees in the neighbouring countries (Lenshie & Yenda, 2016). Consequently, food and cash crop production have been hampered especially in southern Yobe, Borno and northern Adamawa States where land has been under-cultivated, harvests impaired, herds seized and crops destroyed.

In addition, there is also great difficulty in the distribution and marketing of farm produce. This is because commercially important roads have been sabotaged by militants, commuters have been ambushed, valuables stolen, and passengers killed. In Borno State, which is the epicenter of the menace, many of the youths hitherto engaged in agriculture have moved to the State capital for safety and for jobs such as motorcycle riding. Crimes have displaced many farmers from their communities and those who managed to stay have abandoned farming due to insecurity (Enobi & Johnson-Rokosu, 2016; Asiru, Agada & Kolade, 2018). This desertion has led to a significant drop in the population of indigenous farmers, increase in cost of farming and cost of farm implements (Babagana *et al.*, 2018). Also, the Brookings Institution in Washington reported a 76% drop in the production of grains such as corn, cowpeas, rice, sorghum and millet in the northeast region in 2015 relative to the four years before 2009 (Kah, 2017). Clearly, the food sector is being stretched to the limits by the *Boko Haram* insurgency.

Kidnapping: Kidnapping is the act of taking people against their will sometimes for ransom, rituals or other motives. It is a heinous crime often deployed by insurgents and has potential for transforming into other felonious offenses, such as physical violence, rape and murder (Bello & Jamilu, 2017). The kidnap of the 250 students of a secondary school in Chibok, Borno State in April 2014 heralded large scale abduction of people in Nigeria. In recent times, kidnapping has spread to all parts of the country and has ceased to be a problem limited to the rich. Poor people including farmers are now at risk especially with the new wave of kidnappings for money rituals. Kidnapping has become lucrative for unscrupulous criminals who abduct for ransom and has remained one of the greatest drawbacks to investment in Nigeria (Ngwama, 2014). It was recently reported on *AgroNigeria* News that members of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN), Oyo State chapter, protested the series of kidnapping of farmers in the state by unknown armed men. The farmers further

lamented that kidnappings bring grave concerns as they now operate in distress and fear of being the next victim (Samuel, 2020).

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in 2019, also revealed the frustrations of farmers who were unanimous that if governments failed to check the spate of kidnapping and banditry, food production in the Northwest region might be affected by as much as 50–70 percent (Ekezie, 2019). The farmers who cannot afford personal securities like the rich are at the mercies of the criminals.

Herder-Farmer conflicts: the herdsmen and farmers' clashes in Nigeria have suddenly become more frequent probably as a result of the relative insecurity in the north and the increased migration of herdsmen down south in search of greener pasture for their herds. The farmer/herder conflict is a combination of the crime of trespass and wanton destruction of crops as animals are herded to graze freely on farmers' crops. There are allegations that the herdsmen are of Fulani extraction from both within and outside Nigeria, who have chosen to graze their animals on farmers' crops with impunity. The farmer-herder conflicts have also resulted into large scale displacement of people from their native lands. This has constituted hindrance to crop farming and cattle herding activities in the affected states, resulting to reduced productivity and rising food prices. Attacks and reprisal attacks have become more rampant with over 1,000 people reportedly killed between 2015 and the first quarter of 2019 (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020). The loss of potential annual revenue from livestock and crops occasioned by violent farmer-herder conflicts in the North Central agricultural zone since 2016, is estimated to be about \$14 billion (Mercy Corps, 2015).

Banditry: this is organized crime typically involving threat or use of violence. Bandits extort, rob, and kill people. Between 2014 and 2019, the degree of rural banditry in Zamfara State alone drew the attention of regional and national security agencies. Governor Abdulazeez Yari of Zamfara State reported in the Premium Times of 10th September 2018 that, 2,385 people have been killed, over 6,000 persons injured, while over 25,000 cattle were rustled and more than 3,000 hectares of arable land have been destroyed by the activities of the bandits in the last 8 years. Ekezie (2019) also reported the displacement of more than 10,000 households, mostly peasant farmers in Zamfara, while in Kebbi, the hub of rice farming in Nigeria, no fewer than 350 farmers had been forced to abandon their farms by the criminals. In Zamfara, the hotbed of banditry, the State chapter of Rice Farmers' Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) envisaged 50 percent reduction in rice and other farm produce in the forthcoming farming season because of the activities of these criminals (Ekezie, 2019).

Cattle rustling: cattle rustling is a criminal activity that is notably deployed by bandits. In most cases as it would appear, rustlers tended to act with glaring impunity (Aderinoye-Abdulwahab, Fasanya, Kareem & Dolapo, 2019) and this has had significant impact on the livelihood of rural farmers and the general economy of the nation. Commercial farms and traditional herders in Kaduna State reportedly lost over 7,000 cattle to rustlers in 2014 as reported by Ahmadu Suleiman, the chairman of the Kaduna chapter of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBA) (Bashir, 2014). According to Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020), more than 64,750 cattle were stolen and at least 2,991 herders killed in states across the north-central zone in 2013, while 1,135 people were killed in Zamfara State alone between the years 2011 up until 2015. Members of the dreaded *Boko Haram* are now reportedly involved in cattle rustling, many livestock farmers including the non-nomadic ones are reportedly discouraged of rearing livestock because according to the farmers, the presence of herds of cattle is an added attraction for *Boko Haram* attacks (Babagana *et al.*, 2018).

Rape: rape is non-consensual sexual intercourse and it is regarded as a violent crime that dehumanizes the victims and devalues their sense of self-worth. An editorial of the Vanguard Newspaper, on the 18th of June 2020 declared that rape in Nigeria has become a crisis and a nationwide phenomenon with as many as 799 suspects arrested in 5 months (Okogba, 2020). Rape is a handy crime for insurgents, bandits, kidnappers and armed robbers and has become so rife that even farmers are not spared. Earlier on the 17th of August 2017, the same Newspaper had reported the rape of two women farmers on their farms in different incidents by suspected herdsmen in Akure. The rape of the women was protested by the Ondo State Youth Coalition (OSYC), and in their words 'herdsmen are trying to make farming impossible for our people who are now afraid to go to their farms' (Johnson, 2017). Rape may hamper the involvement of women in agriculture and this will adversely affect the 43% contribution to farm labour supply by women (FAO reports) especially in the area of weeding and harvesting.

Corruption: corruption is defined as dishonest or fraudulent conduct which typically involves bribery. In Nigeria, corruption is a central problem and the agricultural sector is not exempted (Ani, Olajide & Onyebuchi, 2019). Corruption may burden the farmers with costs such as higher prices of agricultural inputs and bribery in the distribution of subsidies (Anik & Bauer, 2016). Corruption in the form of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds have been identified as the reason for the failure of many previous agricultural intervention programmes in Nigeria (Ozoani, 2019). As observed by Nkombo (2018), corruption in agriculture can



have negative effects on credit availability, input supplies, subsidies and the development of agribusinesses. The author further reported that the Nigerian Government spent \$5bn in four decades on farm input subsidies but only 11 percent of farmers received fertilizer, resulting in low yields and low profits (Nkombo, 2018). This underscores the way corruption can harm the agricultural sector and it puts pressure on the need to address it.

Suggested solutions to crime and criminality in Nigeria's agriculture

The primary responsibility of every government is the protection of lives and properties of her citizens. To combat crimes and criminality, the government at all levels should provide security to farmers in rural communities. Experts in agriculture agree that the progress made in the agricultural sector of the country, especially in food production may be eroded because of crime and criminality in rural areas (Musa, Shabu & Igbawua, 2014). The following measures among others, can help to address the issue of crime and criminality on the livelihood of rural families:

I. Effective Policing: is one of the ways to address the issue of crime and criminality in rural areas. Effective policing will be enhanced by expanding the capacity of security agencies through recruitments, training and retraining, provision of adequate tools and proper motivation of men of the security agencies. The security agencies need better and sophisticated communication equipment that will help them in detecting, preventing and controlling crimes (Metu *et al.*, 2018). The realization that the conventional police cannot do it alone has brought about regional security outfits like the *Amotekun* of the Southwest Region and the vigilante groups of other regions who are all expected to operate within the ambits of the law.

II. Disarmament of herders and establishment of cattle ranches: there is a need for the security agencies to organize a nation-wide disarmament of all unauthorized arm carriers especially indigenous herders and ethnic militia men. There is also a need to tighten security at our rather porous borders as, this will curtail the influx of foreign herders into Nigeria as recently suggested by Abdullahi Ganduje, the governor of Kano State. This will give respite to the rural farmers who are confronted by the armed herders. The Federal Government, in consultation with other stakeholders such as States, Local Governments, MACBA, Farmers' associations, host communities and security agencies, should establish ranches in keeping with best agricultural practices. This will require that the country keeps to the Maputo declaration of allocating a minimum of 10% of national budget to agriculture. Kah (2017) suggested immediate, well-targeted welfare packages for households whose livelihoods have been affected in the north-east region of Nigeria.

This will deter indigent members of such households from joining criminal gangs.

III. Provision of social amenities in rural areas: there should be conscious effort at provision of the necessary infrastructure such as electricity, potable water, good roads, schools, basic health facilities, decent shelters and more importantly, create opportunities for economic development in the rural areas. This will ensure gainful employments for the hitherto idle youths, reduce rural-urban migration and reduce the lure for crime. Ngwama (2014) suggested an equitable distribution of national resources to promote national prosperity.

IV. Job creation and poverty reduction: poverty and unemployment are significant elements that may lure young adults into crime (Badiora, Okunola & Ojewale, 2016). According to Aliyu (2012), the *Boko Haram* momentum is sustained by the huge reservoir of vulnerable unemployed youths in the country. The author concluded that simple measures such as provision of gainful employment opportunities, reviving the economy, and addressing the lop-sided class structure in the country would go a long way in addressing this menace. In the same vein, Etim and Nwagboso (2019) made a case for youth empowerment that is not politicized, job creation, youths' re-orientation and resource control among others as ways to check criminality.

V. Anti-corruption war and need to reform institutions in Nigeria: there is a need to rejig the current war against corruption. This will require a strong will and concerted effort among the three arms of government. The executive arm must allow the independence of the anti-corruption agencies such as the EFCC and the ICPC, the legislative arm must work hard to block the loopholes in the constitution that are exploited by criminals while the judiciary needs drastic reforms to ensure speedy dispensation of justice.

CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by rural farmers as a result of insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling and other crimes are enormous. This is undeserved, given the strategic importance of the rural sector to the nation's economy. Hence, there is a dire need for concerned stakeholders and government to curb and tackle the enablers of crime which include: poverty, unemployment, corruption and the ineffectiveness of the institutions so as to make it unappealing. A healthy, prosperous and transparently managed agricultural sector that is shielded from niggling crimes guarantees enhanced productivity, improved livelihood of rural farmers, economic growth and most importantly better security.

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