

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING FARM THEFT, CROP DESTRUCTION, AND RELATED CRIMES IN AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

**Oladele Adelere Adeleke¹, Richard Abayomi Aborisade¹, Obatunde Bright Adetola¹,
Comfort Oyinlola Oyafunke-Omoniyi¹ & Abdullateef Adeniyi Onabanjo²**

¹Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

²Department of Sociology, Hallmark University, Ijebu Itele, Ogun State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author Email: oladele.adeleke@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

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Abstract

Agricultural insecurity is a major problem in Nigeria's rural communities, as it negatively impacts on agriculture, the economy and food security, thereby causing disruptions in agricultural activities, lowering agricultural productivity and thus reducing the livelihoods of the people in the rural areas. The problem of farm theft, crop destruction and crime have been on the rise in the Southwest and has had a devastating impact on the lives of farmers and the peaceful coexistence of the region. This paper examines community responses in relation to the strategies that can be deployed on the ground in response to rural agricultural insecurity. Using qualitative research design, Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with five stakeholders, while one in-depth interview was administered to the conventional security personnel per community to gather detailed insights on existing and community-driven strategies. The data collected for the study were thematically analysed. The study revealed that theft and crop destruction are greatly endemic, devastating, and has negatively affected the psychic of most vulnerable farmers. The study showed that current crime prevention strategies in these areas naturally rely on conventional law enforcement methods that are limited in scope and efficiency. The study recommends that there is a need to develop a formalized structure involving NSCDC, Police, OPC, vigilantes, and traditional authorities for rural surveillance, intelligence-sharing, and joint patrol operations. The study further recommends that every rural area, ward or village should set up inclusive security committees with representation from farmers, women, youth, traditional leaders, and local security outfits, meeting monthly to assess threats and coordinate responses.

Keywords: Farmers' livelihoods, farm-related crimes, community-driven strategies, indigenous knowledge, participatory governance.

Introduction

Agriculture continues to be an important economic activity and livelihood source in all countries of the world and is especially important in developing nations, where a substantial rural population is reliant on agriculture for income, food security and employment. As one of the most agrarian regions in the country, Southwest Nigeria is heavily dependent on agriculture, which contributes to the livelihood of the majority of its rural population. The region is known for its diverse farming practices, including the cultivation of crops such as cassava, yam, maize, cocoa, and plantain, as well as livestock farming. Consequently, crops and farm produce that are targets are growth enablers in 2018; such that, FAO (2024), reported agriculture as the pillar of rural economies in Nigeria and accrued 22.35 percent to the GDP. It also reported 70.8 million hectares of land area for maize, cassava, rice, guinea corn; with rise in rice production to 4 million tons and cassava to 59 million tons in 2018, making Nigeria the world's second largest producer. Accordingly, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) reported that a significant percentage of the rural population is employed in agricultural-related activities, with farming being a primary source of income.

But despite its prominence, currently, over 40 percent of crops, 25 percent of cattle, and 35 percent of fish are either stolen or destroyed. Over 165 farmers lost their lives, while more than 47 percent abandoned their farmlands, with over 26.5 million Nigerians at the risk of food crisis in 2025 (Ibiwunmi et al., 2024). This has led to abysmal soaring food prices, with food inflation in May 2024 at 34.19 percent as against 22.79 percent in May 2023. Crop theft, illegal grazing and crop destruction by herders, livestock rustling (animal theft), and vandalism of farm infrastructure have escalated over the years (Ajuwon, 2024). Illegal logging and deforestation, land grabbing and illegal encroachment, as well as arson and bush burning have also increased significantly (Ajuwon, 2024). Furthermore, Ajuwon (2024) posits that pesticide and chemical sabotage, theft during transit or post-harvest, fraudulent agricultural inputs, and illegal mining on farmlands have escalated over the years. In the same vein, Adeleke (2022) postulated that criminal activities have become momentous challenges in all regions of Nigeria, particularly in the Southwest. These activities have resulted in declining agricultural productivity, weakening local economies, and worsening poverty levels (Adeleke, 2022). They have also undermined the economic stability of rural

farmers, food security, agricultural sustainability, and rural development (World Food Programme, 2024).

These criminal activities not only result in direct economic losses for farmers but also contribute to increasing strains and conflicts within rural communities. The destruction of crops, particularly cash crops like cocoa, reduces export potential of the past, and hinders the region's ability to contribute to national income (Adeleke, 2022). The attendant results of destruction and stealing of arable crops such as yam, cassava, maize and so on led to food scarcity and hike in prices (Adeleke, 2018b, Adeleke et al., 2024; Aghogho, 2024 Ajuwon, 2024). The financial impact on farmers can lead to cycles of debt and poverty, pushing many out of farming and into informal or alternative livelihoods that often fail to provide sufficient income (Ilesanmi & Odefadehan, 2022, Iliya & Achoja, 2024).). Furthermore, persistent criminal activities erode social cohesion in rural communities, increasing tensions between farmers, herders, and other stakeholders, sometimes resulting in violence and ethnic conflicts. The trend has been attributed to increasing poverty, unemployment, the growing number of herders seeking grazing land for their livestock, inadequate conventional security architecture, and the reluctance of local authorities to address the problem effectively (Magda et al., 2023; Uwenbor, 2024). In some cases, it has also led to organized criminal networks targeting farm produce for resale in urban markets.

While this trend continues unabated, the existing response mechanisms for farm theft, crop destruction and other related agricultural crimes in Southwest Nigeria have proven to be inadequate (Adams et al., 2024). Conventional security approaches, such as reliance on law enforcement agencies, have struggled to effectively combat the menace due to a lack of resources, insufficient manpower, and slow response times (Katja & Tinkara, 2023). Moreover, the informal nature of many farming practices and the absence of accurate data on crime patterns complicate the formulation of targeted interventions (Adeleke et al., 2024).

Another challenge is the lack of operative collaboration between local communities, law enforcement agencies, and governmental bodies. Existing agricultural extension services could possibly play a role in raising awareness about security threats and best practices for safeguarding farms. However, these services are often underfunded and inefficient (Adeleke, 2022). Also, the fact that farmers and herders are battling it out constantly over land and grazing rights makes any efforts at resolving the issue even harder. This has often led to a

situation where both parties view each other with suspicion, making cooperative solutions difficult to implement. More importantly, conventional interventions like Anchor Borrowers Programme and National Food Security Council are fraught with corruption and proved ineffective (Ijomah&Eyieyien, 2024, Uwebor, 2024).

As a pathway to current horrendous experience, this research intends to investigate and scale-up positive outcomes from integrated community-based approach as alternative to all earlier policies that seem ineffectual. The proposed components include community participation /inclusivity in monitoring and evaluation, cooperative security strategy, and home-grown conflict resolution. The study also emphasizes rural resilience to achieving sustainable environment. An integrated community-based approach would involve local farmers, community leaders, law enforcement agencies, and relevant government departments working together to design and implement effective strategies that address the root causes of these issues. The broad objective is to explore the effectiveness of community-driven approach to addressing farm theft, crop destruction and other related offences in Southwest agricultural communities, Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to identify the existing community responses and strategies used to mitigate farm-related crimes, and also co-develop community-driven strategies with local stakeholders to improve farm security.

Review on the Limitations of Existing Security Measures to Curb Crime in Rural Areas

Farm theft, crop destruction and other related offences in Nigeria are deeply rooted in the socio-economic conditions of rural areas where agriculture remains a vital source of livelihood (FAO, 2024). The rural economy in Nigeria is characterized by small resources, low levels of education, and inadequate infrastructure, land disputes and communal conflicts which exacerbate criminal tendencies that make farmers vulnerable (Katja & Tinkara, 2023;Ibiwunmi et al; 2024). In many rural areas, security measures aimed at curbing crime have been put in place to address various challenges, including theft, property/crop damage, and violence. However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these measures remains limited, often due to a range of socio-economic, logistical, and systemic factors. One of the most significant limitations of security measures in rural areas is the often-limited presence of law enforcement agencies (Adeleke, 2018abc; Okereke, 2024 and Agbogbo, 2024). Rural areas are typically vast, with dispersed populations, which makes it difficult for police forces to maintain consistent and comprehensive patrols. The physical remoteness of rural areas,

combined with poor road infrastructure and manpower shortages, make it challenging for law enforcement agencies to respond quickly to crimes (Adeleke, 2018c). Surveillance gaps, communication issues, lack of funds and community trust, delayed justice, corruption and bias, limited public awareness and education on security (lack of knowledge, cultural attitudes); economic vulnerabilities and inequality (poverty and desperation, resource imbalance); cultural and social factors (informal justice systems. resistance to external authority) and insufficient focus on preventative measures (limited early warning systems, neglected social programs) (Adeleke, 2018c).

The reliance on formal law enforcement to combat the risk has been criticized for its ineffectiveness in rural contexts and many rural areas in Nigeria are underserved by security agencies, leading to delayed responses and limited deterrence against agricultural crimes (Ibiwunmi et al; 2024). An assessment of these extant scholarly works reveals that while some are based on mere exposition, they equally focused on devastating nature, peculiarity of community with emphasis on individual and conventional security mechanism. These limitations have led to call for alternative approach that is more attuned to the realities of rural life.

Community-Driving Approach in Curbing Rural Crime

A community-based strategy to control rural crime involves a coordinated action between the police, citizens, and the local government, as well as other stakeholders. The goal is to foster a sense of collective responsibility for safety and security, address the root causes of crime, and develop sustainable solutions that work within the unique socio-economic and cultural context of rural areas (Clark, 2026). The framework for implementing this approach effectively include community engagement and mobilization, establish community trust, community representation, community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, and awareness campaigns (Adeleke et al., 2024). More importantly, strengthening local law enforcement capacity includes increased police presence, improved training and skills, enhanced rural infrastructure, and improved coordination between agencies (Adeleke et al., 2024). Consequently, addressing the socio-economic root causes of crime includes poverty alleviation programmes, job creation and economic development, improved education and skills development, and social services (Agbogbo, 2024). Furthermore, the use of technology includes surveillance and monitoring, community reporting platforms, mapping, and intelligence sharing (Adeleke et al., 2024). Strengthening legal and justice systems includes

improving access to justice, strengthening prosecution and enforcement, alternative dispute resolution, and rehabilitation programmes (Ijomah&Eyieyien, 2024). However, promoting social cohesion and community responsibility includes community policing, building social networks, encouraging collective security practices, promoting peace-building, youth engagement, cultural events, skills development activities that promote unity within the community, and regular monitoring (Ijomah&Eyieyien, 2024).

Potentials of a Community-Based Approach in Enhancing Agricultural Security

Agricultural security is decisive not only for the strength of rural economies but also for food security, livelihoods, and wider national development (Adeleke, 2022). In many rural areas, agricultural theft, vandalism/destruction, land disputes, wildlife poaching, and other forms of rural crime pose substantial dangers to farmers and their livelihoods. A community-based approach to enhancing agricultural security is proposed for this study to address these challenges by leveraging local knowledge, fostering collaboration, and creating sustainable solutions. This study reviews the potentials of community-based approaches to enhance agricultural security, whilst considering the following: One of the primary strengths of a community-based approach is its ability to build trust and foster collaboration between farmers, local authorities, law enforcement, and other stakeholders. In rural areas, where traditional law enforcement might be distant or under-resourced, a community-based approach enables local people to take active ownership of their agricultural security amidst vast local knowledge of the terrains, collaboration with law enforcement (Clark, 2026); reducing crime through community monitoring via watch over each other's property and reporting suspicious activities; addressing socio-economic indices of agricultural crime (economic empowerment, youth engagement); enhancing social cohesion and collective responsibility (fostering a culture of mutual support, emphasizing the concept of solidarity that focuses on mutual success and security); integration with traditional and indigenous knowledge (traditional dispute resolution, deep understanding of local ecosystems); empowerment through education and training (crime prevention education, legal empowerment) and better Crisis Response and Recovery (Post-Crime Recovery, Resilience Building).

Theoretical Perspective

This study was based on the Community Empowerment and Participatory Security Framework, which was mainly inspired by the participatory development drive of Robert

Chambers (1997) and the community governance ideas of Elinor Ostrom (1990). Security is seen not only as the prerogative of the top-down official approach of law enforcement, but as a people-centered process, demonstrating the importance of local knowledge, community involvement, mutual responsibilities, and co-operative efforts between the people and security institutions. This strategy underlines self-help, inclusive and locally-responsive strategies to security issues. It also considers communities as more than just passive receivers of protection but as more of an agent of peace, safety, and resilience. (Nazuri et al., 2025, Pittway, Biggs, Dantas, 2025). Using the framework in this research engagement will assist in explaining the mechanisms and reasons in which the rural communities in Southwest Nigeria are being structured to effectively address the farm related crimes in the absence/inadequacy of formal state security structures. It places emphasis on community empowerment in agricultural crime prevention via development of vigilante patrols, farm watch groups, cooperatives, empowerment over threats they face such as crop theft, illegal grazing, livestock rustling and so on (Heaton et al., 2024, Kirby, 2025). This will enable the farmer to design a participatory security as a functional practice that go beyond surveillance, but includes community education, conflict resolution, and restorative justice, often rooted in cultural values.

By a way of preference, this contextual analysis stresses that security efforts are more operative when they are locally legitimate and trusted; which state security agencies often lack due to corruption, delay in response, or absenteeism. More importantly, empowerment and participation increase social capital, the trust, cooperation, and shared norms that bind communities. This is vital in most of the rural areas studied due to the prevalence of weak formal institutions. Shared vigilance, solidarity among farmers, collaboration such as collective farming, market access, and disaster response will help to reduce crime. Therefore, this framework assists in understanding how local knowledge, self-organization, and inclusive engagement can empower Southwest Nigerian communities into effectively addressing farm-related crimes. Such grass-root approach will seal up desperate security gaps, bounce back, and help establish the basis of more sustainable rural development. However, the sustainability of victory in the long term lies in the associations, institutional aid, the acknowledgement of the essence of governance systems.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design because it sought to explore and understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and responses of agricultural communities to farm theft, crop destruction, and other forms of agricultural insecurity in Southwest Nigeria. The interest is to explore community-based methods of curbing these crimes and improving security in the rural areas; and the research methodology is used in an effort to help provide a comprehensive insight on the problem. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the selection of both the study areas and participants. More importantly, rural communities in Southwest Nigeria that face momentous challenges with theft, crop destruction and other related offences. This design provided an insight into the effectiveness of the community-driven approach in curbing theft, crop destruction, other related offences and improving security over time. It equally provided practical recommendations for addressing theft, crop destruction and other related issues, to empowering rural communities through, locally-driven solutions.

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling method to select the rural communities of Southwest Nigeria as it allowed the researcher to intentionally choose communities with the experience of farm theft, crop destruction and other forms of farm crimes. This technique was seen as suitable to the qualitative aim of this study, as it enabled the selection of informative participants and communities that could give detailed information about the causes, experiences and community reactions to agricultural insecurity. This resulted in a direct relevance of the collected data in the context of the research goals and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon that was studied.

Criteria used for selection of study areas are: (a) community with documented cases of theft and crop destruction from local authorities like police, and community leaders indicating frequent incidents of theft and crop destruction, (b) areas with existing but ineffective security or community monitoring structures; (c) communities with predominantly agrarian economies. (d) willingness to participate on the part of the community gate-keepers like traditional/community leaders/rulers, chiefs, and local heads.

To ensure topographical variety and the representation of diverse socio-economic contexts, this study purposively selected twelve communities across the three states, ensuring representation from different senatorial districts and local government areas (LGAs) where agricultural crimes are reported to be prevalent (Agbogbo, 2024). In Oyo State, from Oyo south senatorial district, Idi-Ope, Temidire and Omi-Adio were chosen; from Oyo north senatorial district, Ipapo and Igbope were chosen. In Ondo State, from Ondo north senatorial district, Igbotako and Ibulesoro were picked, from Ondo south senatorial district, Ipogun and Ilu-Titun were selected. In Lagos State, from Lagos west, Ago-Owu and Agbowo were picked; from Lagos East, Ajido and Akarakumo were selected.

Participants and Sampling

The participants included in this study have been residing in the area for at least 3 years, with direct or indirect experience about crop theft, destruction and other related offences. In each community, at least five main informants were purposively selected among stakeholders, with one police officer in each community with a focus on stakeholders' diversity. The total participants were forty-two altogether; with thirty participants among the stakeholders, and twelve police officers (gatekeepers).

S/N	Participants	Number selected
1.	Farmers	12
2.	Oodua People's Congress (OPC) Leaders	6
3.	Unregistered Vigilante Group Heads	6
4.	Heads of Local Hunters	6
5.	Chiefs/Traditional Leaders	6
6.	Elders	6
7.	Youth Leaders	6
8.	Pastors/Imams/Traditionalists	6
9.	Police Officers	6
10.	National Civil Defense Service Corps (NCDSC),	3
11.	South Western Security Network that is called Amotekun (SWSN)	3

Data Collection Techniques and Analysis

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with fifty-four (54) stakeholders, while twelve (12) in-depth interviews were administered to the conventional security personnel per community to gather detailed insights on existing and community-driven strategies. Also, field observations were made in each community to discern farming practices, community interactions, security arrangements, and cultural activities. All responses were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis; wherein themes emerged in this manner: the existing community responses and strategies used to mitigate the crimes, and the developed potential community-driven strategies for improved farm security with local actors.

Findings

The interview data were analysed thematically to share or identify the emerging themes or patterns from the participants' answers on community actions to tackle agricultural insecurity. Among the themes that were identified in analysing the responses and strategies already exist to curb farm theft, crop vandalization and other related farm crimes in the rural communities of Southwest Nigeria was one of the themes. The contributions highlighted the different mechanisms both indigenous and community-based being used to protect the agricultural activity and ensure rural security. This theme is presented in the following subthemes.

Theme 1: existing community responses/strategies. This predominant theme reflected participants' descriptions existing responses/strategies put in place to prevent, apprehend and curb criminal acts in their respective communities. Their narratives are disaggregated and discussed under these subthemes: vigilante groups, cooperative farmers watch, local hunters, traditional fines, sanctions and curses, youth engagement in watch and surveillance, mediation and conflict resolution, information sharing and quick communal response and collaboration with the conventional security system.

Subtheme 1a: youth engagement, vigilante groups, cooperative farmers watch and local hunters. Participants gave different accounts of community efforts in preventing and apprehending offenders via the use of community-led security as a response to limited formal policing, such as: indigenous knowledge (hunters) to monitor and trace threats, rotational farm surveillance, vigilantes and OPC to restore a sense of order, early warning systems among farmers using informal communication, youth engagement in security, collaboration with hunters and bush tracking skills. One of the chiefs has this to say:

We were forced to form vigilante units since the police are not omnipresent. The youngsters relieve others on duty at night to patrol farm and paths. We also collaborate with the local hunters who are familiar to the terrain and can trace invaders. Through these groups, there have been less cases of theft and intrusion despite the fact that they operate with little equipment.

IDI/Male/73years/Chief/Ibulesoro/Ondo State

The reaction of the chief demonstrates the fact that rural communities are not mere victims. They are defending themselves through the help of vigilante groups, OPC, cooperative surveillance and local hunters to defend their communities. Nonetheless, all these efforts must be supported with material reinforcements and training, collaboration with law enforcement, and responsibility in delivering justice so that their efforts are no longer a waste.

Subtheme 1b: conventional fines, penalties and curses. Many of the respondents mentioned collective responsibility and the effectiveness of conventional sanctions including fines, communal labour, or compensation, curses, spiritual sanctions, charms, ritual protection, social stigma and fear of the ancestral were very powerful, and utilized as moral checks. They also observed that these were the traditional ways of fostering accountability. However, there were some doubts about the weakening of the authority of these traditions and extinction of cultural convictions among contemporary young people. This respondent had this to say:

We would call on them before the elders in the times when someone used to steal what was on a farm or when someone would leave cattle to be able to destroy crops. They were fined, either with money or with livestock or communal labour, when guilty. In extraordinary situations we use ancestral curses, too. These traditions held the masses in check, as they were afraid of being punished spiritually and faced humiliation in the presence of the community. But these days, other people, particularly the youths no longer have fear of these traditions like they used to do. ***IDI/Male/71years/Chief (Baale)/Idi Ope village/Oyo State***

An aged respondent revealed that:

In our days no one had dared steal the farm of a fellow. Should you be found out, you would pay a fine and words would be placed in your family name. Through spiritual methods as well, such as laying charms or calling on the gods to punish the wrongdoers, we used them. Most crimes were deterred just by their fear of these things. However, nowadays, no one respects such practices. Some go even as far as laughing at them (***IDI/Male/67years/Elder/Ipogun/Ondo State***).

The chief and the elder interviewed indicated that there was a common belief that the fines, sanctions, and spiritual deterrents that existed in the past, formed the foundation of rural justice and deterrence. Such practices, closed communal harmony, were the available systems instead of formal regulatory norms, and generated the internal accountability by the means of communal beliefs and values. They have, however, also recognized that their influence has been diluted by the decreasing faith in old power and spirituality, particularly among the young. Cultural education, communal agreement, and construct based on a combination of tradition and contemporary justice framework might be needed to revitalize these systems.

Subtheme 1c. mediation and conflict resolution. All the members placed much emphasis on dialogue-based resolution as against formal legal action, restorative justice based on dialogue, family participation and symbolic restitution as frequent solutions to ensuring social harmony, peace relationships and harmonious collective integrity instead of punishment as principle underlying community-owned solution that would conserve relationships. This participant had it as follows:

Whenever we have a quarrel between farmers, or between herders and farmers, we invite both parties to a conference. We are not quick to the police. We hear both sides, refer to older people and attempt to calm things down. In this manner, we are spared of the protracted grudges or violence. We also request the offender to pay the compensation or do a symbolic apology at times. It is not only justice, but peace. Generations have been held together in our ways,'.

IDI/Male/68years/Chief/Omi-Adio/Oyo State

Central to the management of the issue of rural offence the chief gave support to the mediation and the use of traditional conflict resolution techniques to deal with crop theft, destruction and other related offences. These measures are grounded from a cultural base, restorative and geared toward peace and cohesion, and not retribution. However, in order to make these practices work in evolving times, communities might require having fusion systems between traditional practices and assistive formal systems, particularly in more serious or frequent offences.

Subtheme 1d: exchange of information and immediate response of masses. Every one of the respondents also believed in early warning system using both modern (phones) and traditional mechanisms (gongs), as one of the strategies to promote collective vigilance and responsibility. The systematic approach includes, surveillance, whistles or mobile telephones to transmit distress signals, sometimes, children and village residents also help in

transmitting messages in an effort to encourage rapid response, solidarity and mutual defense between farmers and shared concern about the safety of the community and production. One of the farmers thus said:

I sometimes text my neighbour or the youth leader in case I hear some commotion in my farm. In other instances, we whistle at other people to attract their attention. People respond fast. We know that when you assist only your neighbour to-day, to-morrow he will assist you. Not the farm of one man, it is the village as a whole that is safely off. **IDI/Male/56years/Farmer/Temidire Village/Oyo State**

A chief said this:

In the community, we have informed people to report about any suspicious activity as soon as it happens as it can be strange faces, cattle roaming, and attempted theft. As soon as somebody raises an alarm other are fast in their response. We base our information on the word of mouth, phone calls or other traditional information such as the gong. This warning mechanism has assisted us to respond promptly and retrieve stolen agricultural equipment or produce before it goes away.

IDI/Male/61years/Farmer/Akarakumo/Lagos State

Both the chief and the farmer emphasized on the role of information sharing and rapid response as a community strategy as a strong measure of preventing and mitigation of crop-related offences at the grassroots. Such systems are: community-owned and resource-light, flexible to varying degrees of technology access, and reliant on solidarity, trust and collective vigilance. The communities might also be enhanced with: better communication equipment (e.g. walkie-talkies or community alert app), coordinated emergency response plans and practice of coordinated surveillance and de-escalation instruments in order to further reinforce this system.

Sub theme 1e: working with the traditional security system. This issue had divergence views and the chief was in support of selective collaboration, this is by seeking police involvement and escalation or deterrence in case of severity; farmers held that logistical gaps, delaying response of conventional force, lack of trust in the police owing to corruption or bias, physical distance may impede effective collaboration. OPC and vigilantes see police as backup, not primary responders, and that their roles as first responders during emergencies as supplementary forces, not a substitute; though lack of follow through by the police was expressed, but emphasized cooperation over confrontation with conventional authorities, and sought for structured partnership and legal reinforcement. This participant says:

We work with the police whenever the case is serious or beyond our control. After settling minor disputes traditionally, we involve law enforcement for

repeated or violent offences. We also inform the DPO (Divisional Police Officer) about suspicious activities. We have local teams of police officers at times. In reality though, they tend to be sluggish in their reactions or require logistics first before providing.' **IDI/Male/68years/Chief/Igbotako/Ondo State**

A different respondent commented that:

We don't work against the police, we complement them. As we apprehend suspects, we turn them over to the authorities. There are those police officers who are thankful of our activities, and there are those who feel we are offending them. Before any major operation we always keep them informed. But we shall have respect to each other, not coercion.

IDI/Male/48years/OPC Leader/Omi-Adio/Oyo State

The leader of vigilante leader had this to say:

We call to the police when a case is beyond the means of us such as where there are weapons involved. But we are the swiftest to react. We at times would be taking suspects to the station only to hear them get out on top and that is demoralizing. We should have improved coordination and the police should be serious with our work.

IDI/Male/45year/Vigilante Leader/Ipogun/Ondo State

Chiefs, OPC/vigilante leaders and all gatekeepers embrace cooperation with the conventional security system although they have difficulty in trusting, coordination, and institutional barriers. Their feedback revealed that they were willing to collaborate to help the entire community stay safer, that formalized relationships were necessary, and that people wanted the police to be more responsive and respectful. In a bid to improve these outcomes, it is recommended that government and police authorities should establish community policing frameworks, provide logistics and legal clarity to vigilantes/OPC groups, and train the parties in joint response protocols and evidence handling.

Theme 2: co-develop potential community-driven strategies.

The final principal theme echoed the perceptions of the participants regarding co-develop potential community-driven strategies. These were separated and discussed in the following subthemes: community security committees, participatory farm mapping and surveillance zones, farm watch schemes and rotational night patrols, village alert and rapid response system, inter-group dialogue and peacebuilding forums, youth skills training & agribusiness inclusion, local bylaws and culturally accepted sanctions, collaborative engagement with Police & NSCDC, OPC and Vigilante leaders.

Subtheme 2a. community security communities. All the participants advocated for inclusive representation, emphasized legitimacy, authority and demanded for farmers' representation

and real influence. They all appealed for proactive engagement with constant dialogue and feedback among formal and informal security actors. To top it all, emphasis was laid on action-oriented planning with material, logistic support and inclusion of youth beyond security roles. One of the opinion leaders provided more insight on this:

Forming a community security committee is a welcome idea. It should include the elders, youths, women, farmers, herders, and we local security men. But it must be respected. It should not be just for show. If it is active and backed by the law, it will help coordinate everyone's role.

IDI/Male/48years/OPC Leader/Omi-Adio/Oyo State

All stakeholders support the formation of community security committees as a practical, inclusive, and community-driven strategy to improve farm security in rural areas. Their responses reflect strong demand for collaborative and inclusive structures; need for role clarity, mutual respect, and resource support, and a shared interest in building trust-based, sustainable partnerships with conventional security forces.

Subtheme 2b. participatory farm mapping and surveillance zones. The entire community stakeholders supported boundary clarification and mapping, respect for traditional authority. continuous inclusion and communication, community-police partnership, structured participation, coordination and training, intelligence and quick response, empowerment, real-time response system, integration of informal and formal security systems. A police officer, had this to say:

Community participation strengthens intelligence gathering. When we map farms and designate zones with locals, it becomes easier to respond quickly to threats. But we need accountability and training for those involved.

IDI/Male/52years/Police officer/Ipogun/Ondo State

The leader of OPC, asserted thus:

We know this terrain better than anyone. Local realities will be captured with mapping strategy. Surveillance zones must be backed with action, when alerts are raised, responses must follow. We can help bridge traditional and modern security. ***(IDI/Male/48years/OPC Leader/Omi-Adio/Oyo State)***

From the responses of these gatekeepers, there will be a need for designing participatory workshops involving all stakeholder groups to co-create maps and define surveillance zones, creation of clear operational guidelines and legal frameworks for police, NCDSC, SWSN, vigilantes, OPC, and youth participants, procurement of communication infrastructure (e.g., walkie-talkies, WhatsApp groups, local warning systems), entrenchment of monitoring and

feedback loops that allow constant review and adjustment of mapped zones and patrol routes, and recognition of traditional authority and ensure interventions align with cultural norms.

Subtheme 2c. farm watch schemes and rotational night patrols. All the respondents identified value in early-warning systems but sought need for coordination and accountability amidst risk at night patrols without training/equipment. They all prefer rotational patrols to reduce fatigue with the provision logistical support (e.g., lighting, communication, stipends). They highlighted existing experience in night patrols, but with the synergy between the locals and the conventional security architecture. A vigilante leader commented thus:

Our informal watch over the farms and our areas is already in progress. When farm watch is organized and upheld with definite roles and backup, we will be able to traverse greater territories. Patrols at night are of more service when in shifts, and we want torches, phones, and allowances. We are driven by support of the community(*IDI/Male/51years/Vigilante Leader/Ilu Titun/Ondo State*)

To work, this will require the creation of a multi-stakeholders coordination structure, involving the police, OPC, vigilantes and community representatives; training and operational resources of patrol teams to be based on a night patrol team dedicated to communication, safety, and fundamental conflict deflection skills; community-approved guidelines to establish roles, patrol schedules, and reporting lines under farm watch schemes; rotating incentive model (e.g. food stipends, community recognition, small grant) to keep the spirits of volunteers high; and appropriate documentation and reporting frameworks that will make the night patrols feed their intelligence information into broader security planning.

Sub theme 2d: village alert and rapid response system. The community paternalists protested against abuse and misuse, overlapping paternity, role mystification. They all called for proper coordination, respect for protocol, real-time, simple, accessible alert tools, verification of alerts/protocols, clear roles and collaboration with police. While some communities emphasized digital communication (WhatsApp, SMS). An Akarakumo based farmer and hunter stated thus:

At times we have crops lost at night. It might be useful to have a decent alarm system to call an ambulance in case of an emergency. However, it should be easy; not all of us are techy-savvy. A bell or phone call tree will be better than nothing. We want to be involved in designing it.’
(*IDI/Male/48yrs/Farmer and Hunter/Akarakumo/Lagos State*)

This submission was also supported by another participant:

‘We can be first responders if trained. With WhatsApp or SMS alerts, we can mobilize quickly. But we need guidelines to prevent panic or vigilante abuse. Also, the system should empower youths with roles, not just call us when there’s trouble.’ *(IDI/Male/38years/Youth Leader/Temidire/Oyo State)*

For efficiency, there is need for designing a multi-channel alert system (WhatsApp, SMS, phone tree, community bell) that can work with both digital and non-digital users; creation of a verified responder list including youth teams, OPC, vigilantes, and trained community liaisons; training of community focal persons on threat assessment, escalation, and non-escalatory response tactics; establishment of a joint operations protocol between police, OPC, vigilantes, and traditional leaders; monitoring and penalties for false alerts; ensuring that community-wide sensitization and simulations are tested before full implementation.

Subtheme 2e: inter-group dialogue and peacebuilding forums. The field experience revealed that a quite sizeable number of the participants supported regular, inclusive forums for conflict prevention, revival of traditional conflict resolution, equal representation of groups, action-oriented outcomes not just talk, communal values and dialogue as major ways to reduce fear and improve security. One of the chiefs, commented thus:

Conflicts often arise from misunderstanding; we have been settling conflicts in this community in the spirit of communal living. A regular dialogue forum where farmers, herders, security groups, and community leaders come together can help build trust. But it must be respectful and led with cultural wisdom. If we revitalize it properly, people will listen and come with open minds.’. Youths, farmers, herders-we all need to listen to each other again.

(IDI/Male/67years/Chief/Ibulesoro/Ondo State)

A youth leader responded in this manner:

Youths are often left out of peace talks, yet we are the ones caught in the middle of farm conflicts. If you want peace, include us from the start. We can act as peace ambassadors if trained, but not as spectators. Real dialogue means all voices matter. *(IDI/Male/37years/Youth Leader/Agbowo/Lagos State)*

From the above submissions, the following are vital: establishment of regular, rotating community dialogue forums involving farmers, herders, youths, elders, women, and security actors; empowering of traditional leaders and elders to serve as facilitators, but ensure inclusion of all groups in decision-making; training of youth leaders and local actors as peace ambassadors, equipping them with dialogue and mediation skills; ensuring that dialogue forums lead to measurable outcomes, such as signed agreements, local peace pacts, or

surveillance cooperation; documenting resolutions and monitor follow-ups to build accountability and long-term trust; and use of local languages, storytelling, and cultural practices to deepen understanding and participation.

Subtheme 2f: youth skills training and agribusiness inclusion. The gatekeepers from all field sites submitted that youth engagement will reduce rural crime and insecurity, especially if agribusiness programmes and orientation are genuine, sustainable and not hang on political gimmicks. Despite their concerns about aging farming population; they suggested generational shift in farming mindset, mentorship and cultural guidance, modern and technology-driven for the youth, empowerment with long term assessment, inclusion of youth in programme design and leadership.

A chief elaborated thus:

If our youths are meaningfully engaged in agriculture, crime will reduce. Skills training in agribusiness can transform idle hands into productive citizens. As traditional leaders, we are ready to mobilize land and support for any youth-focused farm programme that is sincere. *(IDI/Male/67years/Chief/Igbope/Oyo State)*

One of the clergies commented in this manner:

We need young people to take over farming from the old people. But youths won't come unless they see agriculture as a business, not punishment. Training in marketing, processing, and new methods will make them stay. It also improves security if they see a future here. *(IDI/Male/56years/Pastor/Igbope/Oyo State)*

Analysis of this research endeavour revealed that there is need for development of youth-centered agribusiness training programmes that combine farming with entrepreneurship, processing, and digital tools; involvement of traditional leaders and elders in land access, cultural mentorship, and programme oversight; inclusion of youth in planning, leadership, and benefit-sharing of agricultural development schemes; training on farm security goals, by creating ownership, cooperatives, or local farm watch groups run by trained youths; facilitating access to tools, funding, and markets; promotion of intergenerational knowledge exchange, blending indigenous and modern approaches.

Subtheme 2g: local bylaws and culturally accepted sanctions. Most of the stakeholders interviewed advocated for community ownership of bylaws, adaptation of traditional sanctions, in form of revival of traditional justice systems to today's context, and must be more effective and enforceable than imposed state laws. They further suggested for clear, consistent, fair and restorative sanctions. This participant had this to say:

Local bylaws are essential because they reflect the community's values. When properly discussed and agreed upon, they work better than external laws. Our sanctions must be fair, well-publicized, and supported by all segments of the community. *(IDI/Male/72 years/Chief/Igbotako/Ondo State)*

Also, one of the youth leaders submitted in this manner:

We don't oppose bylaws, but they must not target youths unfairly. Involve us in drafting them. If sanctions are just and include rehabilitation, not just punishment, we will support them. Teach us the meaning of the customs behind them. *(IDI/Male/42/Youth Leader/Ibulesoro/Ondo State)*

It is indicated from the field experience that, the participants sought for inclusive community dialogues to co-develop and publicly validate local bylaws on farm security; blend traditional sanctions (e.g., cleansing rituals, community shame) with restorative approaches (e.g., community service); document bylaws, explain them in local languages, and circulate through local meetings, town criers, and churches/mosques/shrines; train youth leaders and elders on fair enforcement and peaceful conflict resolution; create local enforcement committees involving chiefs, elders, youth, women, and religious/traditional leaders; and use cultural media and storytelling to reinforce the moral and communal values behind the sanctions.

Subtheme 2h: the inter-agency cooperation with police and other security officers: The reactions of all stakeholders emphasized that the collaboration approach on solving farm theft, crop destruction, and other crimes needs to be community-based. Although there are distinct strengths and perceptions among the participants, the effectiveness of such strategies lies on the systematic guidance, trust, and adequate support systems. Formal security institutions integration with construction of indigenous community structures is the best practical route towards the achievement of sustainable rural security in Southwest Nigeria.

A policeman said so:

We acknowledge the importance of the collaborative interaction with the rural stakeholders but the interaction should be through institutional legal constraints like: intelligence sharing, joint patrols, community policing programs,

institutional authority and accountability (*IDI/Male/52years/Police officer/Ipogun/Ondo State*)

Based on the above answer, it can be stated that the constitution mandate of the police is to ensure law and order. Although they admit that they are limited in terms of manpower, logistic, and ability to reach the rural areas, they are aware of unofficial actors working beyond the law. This statement was perhaps informed by the previous experience with the local security network and the rural populace with the police, thereby influencing their level of involvement.

The leader of Oodua People's Congress (OPC) had this to say:

We highly believe in localized security measures, where operations will be developed by the community with the help of the government. We are calling to incorporate indigenous information, cultural network, and grassroots intelligence network in formal security actions. (*IDI/Male/48years/OPC Leader/Omi-Adio/Oyo State*)

The above can be deduced to imply that the OPC position is based on their expansive understanding with local topography, customs as well as social fabrications. The OPC members usually have an insider knowledge, which helps them to pick up suspicious actions early enough. They consider centralized policing not effective to deal with the localized crimes in the rural areas and notarial crimes like farm robbery and land disputes. The OPC priorities highlighted by their leader demonstrated that ground-up security architecture is a channel of curbing agricultural crimes to achieve a long-term food security.

The vigilante head, like the leader of OPC opined thus:

We strongly align with collaborative engagement with the conventional system, but such must be complementary and not based on master-servant engagement, because we are positioned as immediate responders and protectors of rural communities and farmlands. For us to function effectively, we must be well trained and be backed up with resources. (*IDI/Male/51years/Vigilante Leader/Ilu Titun/Ondo State*)

From the above, vigilante's advent is a response to gaps in conventional policing, predominantly in isolated agricultural areas. They are first to be reckoned with in the defence against farm theft and crop destruction and other related offenses due to their propinquity and persistent presence. However, their efficiency is guarded by inadequate training, lack of resources, and absence of formal recognition.

A farmer had this to say:

We have been consistently advocating for collaborative security arrangements that will pave way for constant protection of farmlands and rapid response to incidents of theft or destruction. This arrangement must include inclusivity; wherein, we stakeholders will be included in decision-making processes.
(IDI/Male/56yrs/Farmer/Temidire Village/Oyo State)

It is inferred from the above that as primary victims, farmers experience direct economic losses and threats to livelihood. Their daily exposure to risks must have prompted to seek for effective security strategies that is community driven. They are often possessed valued firsthand information about crime patterns and occurrence, but are usually excluded from formal security planning.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that theft and crop destruction are greatly endemic, devastating, and has negatively affected the psychic of most vulnerable farmers. Hence, this is in tune with FAO (2024), that projected; Nigeria loses over \$9billion annually to farm theft and crop destruction, while, NBS (2024), reported that more than 82million Nigerians live on less than \$1, based on Nigeria's ranking in the UN Crop Destruction Index, due to ineffectual policy thrust. Hence, the study is a testament to the earlier proclamations.

The study showed that current crime prevention strategies in these areas naturally rely on conventional law enforcement methods that are limited in scope and efficiency. These geographic secluded natures of most rural societies and the lack of sufficient police numbers and resources, limit the capacity by law enforcement to deter and react to criminal behavior reasonably. The respondents claimed that most of the time, the time wastage in responding to distressing locations and transportation difficulties contribute to the thriving of criminal acts, resulting in frequent losses among farmers and this brings about an insecurity feeling to the community. The study further corroborated the earlier submissions of Adeleke (2018c), Uwebor (2024), Modise (2026).

This study also uncovered that community-driven approaches are both practical and applied security architecture tools for farm security in the Southwest, Nigeria. Thematic analyses of stakeholders and community gatekeepers interviewed produced several core insights as exposed thus: In all areas studied there is strong community trust in local structures; such

that the chiefs, elders and youth leaders advocated for high legitimacy, that will make them ideal coordinators of bylaws, surveillance efforts, and conflict mediation. They equally sought for local bylaws and culturally sanctioned penalties such as spiritual taboos, communal shaming, or symbolic rituals to be enshrined and applied appropriately to serve as strong deterrents against farm crime. The finding is in tune with the existing scholarly works of Katja and Tinkara (2023), Kirby (2025), Clark (2026).

The field engagement also revealed that collaboration already existed between the Oodua People's Congress, vigilante groups, local hunters, farmers and the South West Security Network (Amotekun), but still requested for more coordination mechanisms and training to boost their efficiency. On the other side, the police stressed the need for structured integration to ensure legality and control. In all communities studied, there is a missing link in youth engagement; the stakeholders stressed the prominence of engaging youths not only as patrol members but also as agro-entrepreneurs and peace ambassadors. They all identified with empowerment through agribusiness training and inclusion in dialogue meetings as a twofold strategy for reducing youth-driven crime and improving farm security. The review of the existing literatures also supports these findings, especially in the engagement made by Heaton et al., (2025), Nahuri et al., (2025), Piitway et al., (2025).

In the way of the above, a sizeable number of the participants subscribed to inter-group dialogue forums in a bid to reduce tension. They further posited that communities with regular platforms for discussion between farmers, herders, and security actors reported lower levels of violence; in such a way that discourse will be tailored to pre-empting misunderstandings and foster a sense of shared responsibility for security. Also, submissions made Udemadu et al., (2023), Adebimpe, et al., (2025), Modise (2025) are in tandem with this study.

In some communities that are closed to the cities and borders; their respondents advocated for a bridge in technology and communication gaps. While most of them have strong interest in rapid response systems and digital alert tools, they lack the infrastructure or technical literacy to implement them. Hence, hybrid prototypes such as, combining traditional methods like town criers, community bells with mobile-based communication were seen as more

practical. The works of Adebimpe et al., (2025), Ochieng et al., lay credence to this noble finding in this study.

The fieldwork exercise revealed that the opportunity to use technology in helping prevent crimes in rural communities has not been well unravelled or implemented in the Southwest part of Nigeria. There is a lack of emerging technologies (mobile applications, geo-fencing, GPS tracking, surveillance drones) that could provide promising capabilities in real-time surveillance and early criminal detection, because of resource constraints, corruption and insufficient accessibility. Such technologies are not very popular, so agricultural communities have no resources to secure their assets effectively, or how to report on an incident fast. Adeleke et al., (2024), Clack (2026) have identified all these in their distinct Scholarly engagement towards professing way out for rural criminalities.

Summarily, the findings accentuate the need for a hybrid rural security model; where community-led efforts are integrated, supported, and regulated within state security frameworks, drawing on both cultural capital and institutional strength. Clear evidences of the above finding revealed in the works of Uwenbor (2024), Clark (2026).

Implications for Research

This study opens numerous paths for further academic inquiry into rural security and participatory governance: From the realm of contextual security prototypes, the field engagement highlighted the need for more grounded, ethnographic, and proportional research on mixture security systems that blend conventional policing with traditional institutions and community-based actors. Moreover, the future studies could explore ways through which power dynamics, especially involvement of youth, traditional leaders and stakeholders can shape community participation in rural security ingenuities. The outcomes of this research endeavor revealed that trend analysis and impact-driven research is necessary to quantify the extent to which participatory security tactics influence farm output, migration trends. Also, there is need for multidisciplinary research into the integration of digital alert and surveillance technologies in rural community.

Implications for Theory

This study contributes to the ever-expanding discussions in the theory of community-based security and the paradigm of participatory governance. It brokers theoretical views that real

rural security cannot be the prerogative of the state institutions alone, but that it can be co-produced by a plethora of actors who can be found within social and cultural networks. The research engagement imposes to reclaim that role of customary institutions and customary laws in commanding perpetrators and the extent of local legitimacy in improving compliance and enforcement in situations where only a limited range of the state exists. Based on community empowerment and participatory security framework that does not consider security as a top-down problem of law enforcement personnel, but as a collective problem of producing local knowledge, networks and initiatives; the results are a bottom-up, inclusive and locally-driven problem of dealing with security problems. It considers communities not as passive consumers of protection but as an active contributor to achieving peace, safety, and resilience.

Implications for Policy

The research conclusions are therefore categorical, to make sure that the policy thrust involves the recognition and control of the actions of the vigilante groups, Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and other informal actors which shall become subordinate to the still-awaiting approval community policing system, and control mechanisms. The security agencies, which are familiar to the community dwellers, and the local government that close to them should have in place procedures on how to coordinate with the traditional rulers and religious leaders in ensuring peace and enforcing rules within the community. Youth agricultural involvement should be viewed by the three levels of government and other development partners as an economic policy and also as a preventive measure in security intervention.

Conclusion

This study has determined that the reality of farm security in Southwest Nigeria is under a harsh knotting and weaving particularly with socio-cultural realities, institutional flaws and historical friction. On the other hand, local based strategies on the basis of communal validity, involvement, and cross group cooperation provide a tenable way to find sustainable solutions. Until now, these grassroot efforts are scrappy with an absence of formal recognition, capacity-building, and integration with state structures. The problem of rural insecurity thus requires both a heightened constructions of institutions but more importantly a conscious attempt to understand the importance of defining security as something that is shared, co-created by both the state and society.

Recommendations

- a) Develop a formalized structure involving NSCDC, Police, OPC, vigilantes, and traditional authorities for rural surveillance, intelligence-sharing, and joint patrol operations. This form of institutionalize community policing networks must evidently define roles of all actors; wherein transparent complaint systems should be established to build trust.
- b) Every rural area, ward or village should set up inclusive security committees with representation from farmers, women, youth, traditional leaders, and local security outfits, meeting monthly to assess threats and coordinate responses. Invest in communication networks for quick reporting and response, with a joint patrol team involving vigilantes and security agencies.
- c) While employment, skills development programmes and agribusiness will address root causes of crime, policy thrust should focus on integrating youths into formal and informal security structures such as vigilante groups and South Western Security Network; of which youth-led reconnaissance and intelligence initiatives should be encouraged.
- d) There should be synergy between third tier/ local governments, traditional institutions, and the need to entrench culturally respected bylaws and sanctions, translate them into local languages with massive advocacy.
- e) Provision of solar-powered communication devices, basic surveillance cameras, and farm-alert apps adapted to low-literacy settings to strengthen local early warning systems.

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