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The Role of Agricultural Economy Cooperative Societies in Combating Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of agricultural cooperative societies in combatting the menace of insecurity in Nigeria. The country is recently grappled with various forms of crimes and violence such as terrorism, armed banditry, and ethnic conflict among others. Therefore, the widespread of violence and insecurity in the country has negatively affected social and economic growth of the country. The insecurity has severely disrupted the livelihoods of Nigerians mainly the rural dwellers, it eroded trust among different Nigerian communities, and has exacerbated extreme poverty in the country. Against, this background, this study highlights the ways the cooperative societies in the country can contribute in enhancing community cohesion, promoting economic empowerment, providing social support. Among other things, this study also attempts to facilitate collaboration with security agencies. By the affective utilisation of the cooperative societies, the insecurity in Nigeria can be redress and eradicated to the minimal level. The societies can mobilize resources and foster resilience within the Nigerian people. The findings explicitly reveal that the potentials of the cooperative societies in addressing the insecurity have not been effectively utilised the need for a comprehensive approach to involve the cooperative societies in tackling the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria. However, the recommendations suggest for strengthening cooperative structures by the government through the involvement of the cooperative societies in promoting economic opportunities, and enhancing community engagement to create safer environments in the country.

Keywords: Insecurity, Agricultural Economy Cooperative Societies, Economic Empowerment, Social Support

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria has recently become alarming and it has adversely affected any aspects of life in the country. The menace clearly manifest in social instability, economic crises, and overall quality Nigerian lives. Therefore, the country bedevil with multiple forms of security challenges such as terrorism, banditry, ethnic conflicts, and kidnappings that have been escalating for a decade. The Global Peace Index has ranked Nigeria among the least peaceful countries in the world. This development has come as the result of the high levels of violence and crime disseminated in the country (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). This prevailing insecurity in the country does not only threaten the safety of the Nigerian citizens but also it undermines the social cohesion of Nigerians and the economic growth of the country.

The social effects of insecurity are profound. Communities experience a breakdown of trust and cohesion, leading to increased fear and anxiety among residents. Educational institutions are often targets of violence, resulting in school closures and a significant decline in educational attainment for children in affected areas (UNICEF, 2022). Furthermore, women and children are disproportionately affected, facing heightened risks of gender-based violence and exploitation in conflict zones (Amnesty International, 2021). Economically, insecurity stifles growth by disrupting livelihoods and deterring investment. Farmers are unable to cultivate their lands due to threats from armed groups, leading to food insecurity and increased poverty levels (World Bank, 2022). The cost of living rises as supply chains are disrupted, and businesses face increased operational costs due to the need for enhanced security measures (International Monetary Fund, 2023).

In light of these challenges, cooperative societies have emerged as a potential solution to combat insecurity. By fostering economic empowerment, building social cohesion, and promoting community engagement, these organizations can play a crucial role in enhancing security and stability in Nigeria. This paper will explore the multifaceted role of cooperative societies in addressing insecurity, examining their impact on social and economic resilience.

Overview of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria has reached alarming levels, manifesting through various forms of violence and instability that threaten the nation's social fabric and economic development. The country faces a multitude of security challenges, including terrorism, banditry, ethnic conflicts, and kidnappings, which have escalated significantly in recent years.

Boko Haram Insurgency

Boko Haram, an extremist group operating primarily in northeastern Nigeria, has been responsible for thousands of deaths and widespread displacement. The group targets civilians and security forces, leading to a humanitarian crisis that has left millions in need of assistance. According to the United Nations, since the onset of the insurgency, over 43,000 people have died, and millions have been displaced, with many living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (United

Nations, 2023).

Banditry and Kidnapping

In northern Nigeria, armed groups engage in banditry, which includes stealing livestock and attacking communities. Kidnapping for ransom has become a common crime, instilling fear in the population and disrupting daily life. The rise of these criminal activities has made many areas unsafe for residents and has deterred economic activities (Eze, 2022).

Farmers-Herders Conflicts:

Tensions between predominantly Muslim herders and mostly Christian farmers have escalated into violent clashes, particularly in the Middle Belt region. These conflicts are often fueled by competition for land and resources, exacerbated by climate change and desertification, which have reduced available grazing land (Ogunleye, 2021).

Ethnic and Religious Violence:

Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious landscape has led to tensions and violence, often exacerbated by political factors. Clashes among different groups can result in significant loss of life and property, further destabilizing affected regions (Oladipo, 2022).

Militancy in the Niger Delta:

Although less pronounced than in previous decades, militant activities in the Niger Delta continue, with groups attacking oil facilities and demanding greater local control over resources. This has implications for national security and economic stability, given the region's importance to Nigeria's oil production (Ibe, 2023).

Methodology

The methodology for the article centers on a qualitative research design to assess the role of agricultural economy cooperative societies in combating insecurity in Nigeria. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the relationship between cooperative societies and community resilience, social cohesion, and economic empowerment. Data was gathered through a combination of primary and secondary sources, including interviews with cooperative society members, local community leaders, and security agency representatives. Additionally, a review of existing literature and reports from credible organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, and Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, was conducted to contextualize the findings. A thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and draw insights from qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. The study's framework is rooted in Social Capital Theory and Collective Efficacy Theory, which emphasize trust, reciprocity, and collective action as pivotal in addressing insecurity. By triangulating data from multiple sources, the methodology ensures validity and reliability, offering a

robust analysis of cooperative societies' contributions. This approach also highlights the untapped potential of these societies, providing actionable recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders to strengthen their roles in fostering stability.

Results and Discussion

Economic Effects of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria has far-reaching economic consequences that hinder growth and development. The persistent violence and instability have disrupted various sectors, leading to increased poverty, reduced investment, and overall economic decline. Below are some of the key economic effects of insecurity in Nigeria:

Disruption of Livelihoods: The widespread of crimes and general insecurity in Nigeria has significantly disrupted the local economies primarily agriculture, which is the most important economic sector of the Nigerian population. Most of the farmers are forced to abandon their farmlands as the result of prevailing threats from bandits, Boko Haram among other armed groups. These unintermittant attacks of the rural dwellers that produce crops in the country greatly lead to fall production food crops among other agricultural produce. Therefore, these proliferations of insecurity in Nigeria have not only disrupted food supplies and food insecurity but also lead to rising of food prices among other essential commodities. World Bank (2022) reported that the agriculture in Nigeria has suffered tremendous losses in recent years amounting to billions of naira. In addition, insecurity in the country exacerbated food scarcity and inflation.

Increased Poverty Levels: The economic decline resulting from insecurity has led to increased poverty levels across the country. As businesses close or relocate due to safety concerns, job losses become rampant. A report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicates that the unemployment rate in Nigeria has surged to over 33%, with insecurity being a significant contributing factor. This rise in unemployment has pushed many families into poverty, making it difficult for them to meet basic needs.

Inflation and Rising Prices: Insecurity has also contributed to inflation, particularly in food prices. The disruption of supply chains due to violence leads to shortages of goods, driving prices higher. For instance, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) reported a 20% increase in food prices in regions heavily affected by insecurity (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This inflationary pressure disproportionately affects low-income households, further entrenching poverty.

Reduced Foreign Investment: The persistent insecurity in Nigeria has deterred foreign direct investment (FDI). Investors are hesitant to commit resources to a country where the risk of violence is high. A study by Chuku et al. (2019) found that the level of FDI in Nigeria has declined significantly due to security concerns, with many potential investors redirecting their capital to more stable environments. This decline in investment stifles economic growth and limits job creation.

Increased Spending on Security: The Nigerian government has had to allocate a significant portion of its budget to security measures in response to the rising levels of violence. This diversion of funds limits the resources available for essential services such as education and healthcare. According to the International Monetary Fund (2023), Nigeria's security expenditure has increased by over 50% in the past five years, straining the national budget and hindering development efforts in the Country.

Impact on Infrastructure Development: Insecurity hampers infrastructure development, as construction projects are often halted or delayed due to safety concerns. This lack of infrastructure investment further limits economic growth, as poor roads and inadequate facilities hinder trade and commerce. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (2022) reported that insecurity has led to a

backlog of infrastructure projects worth billions of dollars, which could have otherwise stimulated economic activity.

Social Effects of Insecurity in Nigeria

Insecurity in Nigeria has profound social implications that affect individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole. The persistent violence and instability have led to various social challenges, including fear, displacement, and the breakdown of social cohesion. Below are some of the key social effects of insecurity in Nigeria:

Fear and Anxiety: The pervasive nature of insecurity has instilled a sense of fear and anxiety among the populace. Many Nigerians live in constant fear of violence, kidnappings, and attacks, which affects their mental health and overall well-being. According to Ngwoke (2023), the daily threat of insecurity has led to a culture of fear, where individuals feel unsafe in their homes, schools, and workplaces.

Displacement and Migration: Insecurity has resulted in significant internal displacement, with millions of Nigerians forced to flee their homes due to violence. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that over 3 million people are currently displaced within Nigeria due to conflicts, particularly in the north-eastern region affected by Boko Haram insurgency (UNHCR, 2022). This displacement disrupts communities and leads to overcrowded living conditions in refugee camps, further exacerbating social tensions.

Breakdown of Social Cohesion: The rise in insecurity has led to a breakdown of social cohesion within communities. Trust among neighbors diminishes as people become suspicious of one another, fearing that anyone could be involved in criminal activities. This erosion of trust can lead to increased social fragmentation and conflict within communities, as highlighted by Wojuade and Alayande (2021).

Impact on Education: Insecurity has severely affected the education sector, with schools becoming targets for attacks and kidnappings. Many parents are reluctant to send their children to school due to safety concerns, leading to increased dropout rates. A report by the Nigerian Education Ministry indicated that over 800 schoolchildren were kidnapped between December 2020 and March 2021 alone (Falaju, 2021). This disruption in education has long-term implications for the country's human capital development.

Loss of Community Identity: As communities are disrupted by violence and displacement, there is a loss of community identity and cultural heritage. Traditional practices and communal activities that foster unity are often abandoned, leading to a decline in cultural cohesion. This loss of identity can have lasting effects on the social fabric of Nigerian society (Ngwoke, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the role of cooperative societies in combating insecurity in Nigeria draws on two primary theories: Social Capital Theory and Collective Efficacy Theory. These frameworks provide insights into how social networks, community cohesion, and collective action can address insecurity and foster resilience within communities. Social Capital Theory posits that social networks and relationships are crucial for the functioning of society. According to Putnam (2000), social capital refers to the connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from these connections. In the context of insecurity in Nigeria, cooperative societies can serve as a vital source of social capital by enhancing

trust and collaboration among community members. - Trust and Reciprocity: Cooperative societies foster trust among members, enabling them to work together towards common goals. This trust can lead to increased community vigilance and collective action against threats, thereby enhancing security (Fukuyama, 1995). - Networking and Support: These societies create networks that provide social support, allowing members to share information about security threats and coordinate responses. Such networks can enhance community resilience by mobilizing resources effectively in times of crisis (Woolcock, 2001). - Empowerment and Participation: Social capital enables individuals to participate actively in community decision-making processes. When people feel empowered, they are more likely to engage in initiatives that promote security and stability (Bourdieu, 1986). Collective Efficacy Theory Collective Efficacy Theory, developed by Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997), emphasizes the role of social cohesion and mutual trust in enabling communities to achieve common goals. Collective efficacy refers to a community's ability to control the behaviour of individuals and groups within that community, significantly impacting crime rates and overall safety. - Shared Goals and Norms: Cooperative societies often foster shared goals among members, which can lead to collective action against insecurity. When community members are aligned in their objectives, they are more likely to take proactive measures to enhance safety (Sampson et al., 1997). - Community Engagement: High levels of collective efficacy encourage community members to engage in proactive behaviors, such as neighborhood watch programs and collaborative efforts with law enforcement. This engagement can lead to a reduction in crime and an increase in overall community safety (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001). - Social Cohesion and Resilience: A sense of belonging and connection among community members fosters resilience. In times of crisis, communities with high collective efficacy are better equipped to respond effectively to threats and to support one another (Sampson, 2006).

The Role of Agricultural Economy Cooperatives Societies in Combatting Insecurity in Nigeria

Agricultural Economy Cooperatives play a significant role in addressing insecurity in Nigeria by fostering community cohesion, enhancing economic stability, and providing social support systems. Here are several key ways in which agricultural cooperatives contribute to combatting insecurity: 1. Enhancing Community Cohesion: Cooperatives serve as a platform for community members to come together, fostering social ties and trust among individuals. This sense of belonging is crucial in areas plagued by insecurity, as it encourages collective action against threats. When community members are united, they are more likely to share information about potential security risks and collaborate on safety initiatives. For instance, the numbers of cooperative societies often organize community meetings where members discuss local issues, including security concerns. This collective engagement not only strengthens relationships but also empowers individuals to take proactive measures to enhance their safety. Research indicates that communities with strong social ties are better equipped to respond to and mitigate security threats, as they can mobilize resources and support quickly (Sampson et al., 1997). By promoting social cohesion, cooperatives help create a more resilient community that can withstand the challenges posed by insecurity. 2. Economic Empowerment and Stability: Economic instability is a significant driver of insecurity in Nigeria, as high unemployment and poverty levels can lead to desperation and crime. Cooperatives contribute to economic empowerment by providing members with access

to resources, training, and markets for their products. By pooling resources, cooperative members can invest in income-generating activities, such as agriculture, crafts, or small businesses, which can improve their livelihoods. This economic stability reduces the likelihood of individuals resorting to criminal activities as a means of survival. Furthermore, cooperatives often provide training and capacity-building programs that equip members with skills necessary for sustainable livelihoods. For example, agricultural cooperatives can help farmers improve their production techniques, leading to increased yields and income. This economic empowerment not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to the overall stability of the community, making it less susceptible to insecurity (Woolcock, 2001).

3. Providing Social Support and Safety Nets: Cooperatives often function as social support systems, offering members a safety net during times of crisis. In regions affected by insecurity, individuals may face sudden economic hardships due to violence or displacement. Cooperatives can provide financial assistance, food distribution, or other forms of support to affected members, helping them cope with the immediate impacts of insecurity. Additionally, the collective nature of cooperatives allows for shared resources, which can be crucial in times of need. For instance, during periods of conflict, cooperatives can organize community efforts to provide shelter, food, and medical assistance to those affected. This social support not only alleviates the immediate impacts of insecurity but also fosters a sense of solidarity among community members. By ensuring that individuals have access to essential resources, cooperatives help mitigate the adverse effects of insecurity and promote resilience within the community (Putnam, 2000).

4. Facilitating Collaboration with Security Agencies: Cooperatives can act as intermediaries between communities and security agencies, facilitating communication and collaboration. In many cases, local security forces may lack the necessary information about the specific security challenges faced by communities. Cooperatives, with their established networks and local knowledge, can provide valuable insights to security agencies about emerging threats and community concerns. This collaboration can lead to more effective security interventions tailored to the unique needs of each community. Furthermore, by fostering a relationship of trust between community members and security personnel, cooperatives can encourage individuals to report crimes and suspicious activities without fear of retribution. This increased cooperation can enhance the overall security situation in the area, as communities feel more empowered to engage with law enforcement and contribute to their safety (Morenoff et al., 2001)..

Conclusion

Insecurity in Nigeria presents a multifaceted challenge that impacts social cohesion, economic stability, and overall community well-being. The various forms of violence—ranging from terrorism to banditry and ethnic conflicts—have not only disrupted livelihoods but also eroded trust among community members. In response to these challenges, cooperative societies have emerged as a vital mechanism for fostering resilience and combatting insecurity. By enhancing community cohesion, promoting economic empowerment, providing social support, and facilitating collaboration with security agencies, cooperatives play a crucial role in building safer environments. Addressing insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that leverages the strengths of cooperative societies while also addressing the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to instability. Through collective action and community engagement, Nigeria can work towards a more secure and prosperous future.

Recommendations

- i. **Strengthen Cooperative Structures:** Government and non-governmental organizations should invest in strengthening the organizational structures of cooperatives to enhance their capacity to address security concerns effectively. This includes providing training on governance, management, and conflict resolution.
- ii. **Promote Economic Opportunities:** Create policies that support the development of cooperatives in various sectors, such as agriculture, crafts, and services. Access to microfinance and credit facilities should be expanded to empower cooperative members economically.
- iii. **Enhance Community Engagement:** Encourage active participation of community members in cooperative activities and decision-making processes. This participation fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which is critical for building trust and resilience.
- iv. **Facilitate Partnerships with Security Agencies:** Establish formal channels of communication between cooperatives and local security forces. Regular meetings and collaborative efforts can enhance information sharing and improve community security strategies.
- v. **Implement Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate communities about the benefits of cooperatives and the importance of collective action in addressing insecurity. This can help mobilize support and increase participation in cooperative initiatives.
- vi. **Support Social Safety Nets:** Develop programs within cooperatives that provide social safety nets for vulnerable members, particularly during crises. This could include emergency funds, food distribution, and psychosocial support services.
- vii. **Encourage Research and Data Collection:** Invest in research to better understand the dynamics of insecurity and the role of cooperatives in mitigating these issues. Data-driven approaches can inform policies and program designs that effectively address local security challenges.
- viii. **Facilitate Access to Technology:** Leverage technology to improve the operations of cooperatives, including communication, resource management, and market access. Training on digital tools can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of cooperative initiatives in combatting insecurity.

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