

Rural Crime in Africa:

Notes of a Webinar held on 8 May 2024

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Abstract

The Rural Crime in Africa webinar, held on 8 May 2024, brought together leading scholars, practitioners and researchers to explore the complexities of rural crime across the continent. Organised by Willie Clack and moderated by Wendell C. Wallace, the event highlighted key themes, including the typologies of rural crime, challenges in data collection, police-community relations and the need for policy-driven research. The presenters, Emmanuel Bunei, Witness Maluleke, Cecili Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren and Willie Clack, examined issues including livestock theft, victim neglect and law enforcement effectiveness. Discussions underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, evidence-based policymaking and fostering trust between farmers and police. A recurring theme was the need to document and consolidate research through scholarly publications, as advocated by Wendell Wallace. The webinar reinforced the urgency of addressing rural crime through comprehensive research, victim-centred strategies and enhanced governance. By fostering international collaboration and promoting knowledge exchange, the event contributed to a deeper understanding of rural criminology in Africa. Moving forward, the insights shared will serve as a foundation for developing innovative solutions to improve safety and justice in rural communities across the continent.

Keywords: rural crime; Africa; victimisation; policing; collaboration

Introduction

A webinar held on 8 May 2024, focusing on rural crime in Africa, was a unique opportunity that brought together a panel of esteemed scholars, practitioners and researchers, each with their invaluable insights and experiences, to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of this critical issue. Organised by Willie Clack, an Executive Member of the International Centre for the Study of Rural Crime (ISSRC), and moderated by Dr Wendell C. Wallace from The University of the West Indies, the webinar provided a platform for these experts to share their knowledge and engage in insightful discussions and presentations.

The webinar featured a diverse range of speakers, each offering unique insights into rural crime in Africa. Dr Kyle Mulrooney provided a comprehensive overview of rural criminology's global dimensions, setting the tone for the event. Presentations by Dr Emmanuel Bunei, Prof Witness Maluleke, Ms Cecili Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren, and Mr Willie Clack delved into specific aspects of rural crime in Africa, showcasing the breadth of the topic.

Dr Wallace's moderation facilitated engaging discussions and reflections and fostered a sense of community among the participants. The discussions touched upon critical topics such as data collection challenges, police-farmer relations, the role of media, and the translation of research into policy. Dr Wallace also advocated for developing scholarly works to explore rural crime in Africa, highlighting the importance of consolidating research findings and fostering collaboration among scholars from diverse backgrounds. This emphasis on collaboration underscored the collective effort and shared responsibility in understanding and addressing rural crime.

What follows below is a summary of the Webinar. The Webinar itself can be viewed in full on the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9rVpXyZ9EU&t=1s>

Opening

Prof Mahlogonolo Thobane Criminology Society of South Africa (CRIMSA)

Prof Thobane expressed gratitude to those who had significantly contributed to the discourse on rural safety and community well-being. Africa's unique criminological landscape, deeply rooted in its rich history and diverse cultures, had often been overshadowed by dominant Western paradigms. However, through platforms like this webinar, we aim to shine a light on Africa's rural criminological perspectives and methodologies, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the complexities of crime and justice on the continent.

Prof Thobane warmly welcomed esteemed Executive Members of the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime (ISSRC), whose dedication to advancing research in this field is commendable. Their insights are invaluable in shaping our collective knowledge.

Moreover, her appreciation also went to criminology research fellow academics for their tireless efforts in paving the way for innovative approaches to rural safety. Their commitment to scholarly inquiry enriched our understanding of rural communities' complexities.

Prof Thobane sincerely thanked law enforcement officers from Australia, New Zealand, and especially South Africa, for attending and their unwavering commitment to ensuring rural areas' safety and security. Their courage, dedication and expertise have been instrumental in safeguarding communities.

Furthermore, Prof Thobane acknowledged the media's vital role in amplifying voices and fostering dialogue on rural safety issues. Their efforts in informing and engaging the public had been pivotal in driving positive change.

Lastly, Prof Thobane recognised the importance of students and emerging scholars in shaping the future of rural research and safety initiatives. Their enthusiasm and fresh perspectives have been crucial in addressing evolving challenges in rural communities.

The collective contributions of all these individuals and organisations form the backbone of efforts to promote rural safety, foster community resilience and build a brighter future for all.

Introduction to the Webinar

Dr Kyle Mulrooney University of New England Australia
Past- President, International Society for the Study of Rural Crime

As a past President of the ISSRC (International Society for the Study of Rural Crime), Dr Mulrooney addressed the audience, focusing on rural criminology and its global dimensions. He highlighted the importance of understanding rural crime and justice in a broad and global context, emphasising the concept of access to justice and the challenges rural communities face due to the tyranny of distance. His speech underscored the need to consider access to services beyond criminal justice, including healthcare and social services.

Furthermore, he emphasised the global perspective of rural criminology, advocating for a shift from a focus on urban areas to a more balanced consideration of rural spaces worldwide. Dr Mulrooney highlighted the uniqueness of different rural communities and the necessity of understanding local nuances in crime patterns and justice responses. The speech celebrated the diversity and inclusiveness of the ISSRC, encouraging involvement from academics, practitioners and individuals living in rural areas globally.

Overall, his remarks set the tone for the event, emphasising the importance of a broad and global approach to studying rural crime and encouraging engagement with the ISSRC to further this endeavour.

PRESENTATIONS

Rural crimes in Africa: Typologies, current state, challenges and opportunities

Emmanuel Bunei

Research Associate

Centre for Rural Criminology

The University of New England

Armidale, NSW

AUSTRALIA

The presentation on rural crimes in Africa was thorough and multifaceted, comprehensively exploring the topic. Emmanuel Bunei began by contextualising Africa's diversity, highlighting its 54 states and four major regions, with over 50 percent of the population residing in rural areas. He underscored Africa's growing global significance, projecting that by 2050, a quarter of the world's population will live on the continent.

Dr Bunei outlined the importance of focusing on rural areas and communities due to their vulnerability to various forms of crime, particularly livestock theft, which he has extensively researched. He discussed the current state of rural crime research in Africa, noting significant contributions from countries like Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya while recognising emerging studies from Ethiopia, Tanzania, and others.

The typologies of rural crimes in Africa were elucidated, encompassing livestock theft, maritime piracy, religious extremism, wildlife crime, farm attacks and the illicit trafficking of small arms. Dr Bunei emphasised the evolving nature of these crimes, from traditional practices to highly organised enterprises driven by economic, political and cultural factors.

Moreover, Dr Bunei delved into the trends shaping rural crime in Africa, including the rise of black-market syndicates, increased organisation of criminal activities, and the multifaceted purposes driving these crimes beyond mere financial gain. He highlighted the interconnectedness of rural crime with corruption, political exploitation, and resistance to formal laws.

In discussing rural policing, Dr Bunei explored the complex landscape of formal and informal policing strategies, highlighting challenges such as community resistance, lack of evidence, and the preference for informal justice mechanisms. He also addressed the emergence of illegal policing groups and the role of corruption within law enforcement agencies.

Dr Bunei provided insights into the methodologies employed in studying rural crime in Africa, including mixed methods approaches and interdisciplinary collaborations. He acknowledged challenges such as defining rural crime concepts and obtaining comprehensive criminal statistics, particularly in countries with limited resources and infrastructure.

Finally, Dr Bunei identified opportunities for future research, advocating for expanding studies beyond dominant countries, cross-national collaborations, exploration of armed forces' roles in rural crime and interdisciplinary approaches to address the complex dynamics of rural crime in Africa comprehensively.

Emmanuel Bunei's presentation offered a comprehensive understanding of African rural crime, encompassing its diverse manifestations, underlying drivers, policing challenges, research methodologies and opportunities for addressing this critical issue.

Social Sciences Researchers on Dearth of 'Scientific Knowledge' For Policing Stock Theft in Africa: A South African Rural Criminologist Critique

Witness Maluleke

Associate Professor, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Humanities, University of Limpopo
SOUTH AFRICA

The presentation on stock theft in Africa, particularly in South Africa, provided a comprehensive overview of the issue, emphasising the need for collaboration and deeper research. It began by highlighting the significance of addressing stock theft as a major rural crime in Africa, challenging the perception of a lack of research in this area and stressing the scattered nature of existing studies. Delving into the realities of stock theft, especially in South Africa, the presentation underscored its growing prevalence and the profound economic, emotional, and physical impacts on livestock farmers and rural communities.

Acknowledging the efforts of various local and international networks, led by figures like Mr Willie Clack of the University of South Africa, Dr Maluleke emphasised the importance of collaboration in addressing rural crime. These networks aim to enhance collaboration and understanding of stock theft, fostering knowledge-sharing mechanisms and promoting joint efforts among stakeholders. Furthermore, he provided examples of research studies on stock theft in South Africa and other African countries, ranging from community involvement in policing to the economic impact on victims and the overall magnitude of livestock theft.

Methodologically, Dr Maluleke outlined a qualitative research design involving interviews and thematic content analysis, which engaged 113 participants. This approach addressed the perceived lack of scientific knowledge on stock theft and provided deeper insights into the issue. Identifying key themes, such as the need for improved collaboration among African scholars and the importance of understanding stock theft within African rural

contexts, Dr Maluleke proposed recommendations to address these themes. These recommendations include forming deeper forums for collaboration, revisiting research resources and enhancing law enforcement strategies.

In conclusion, Dr Maluleke emphasises the importance of supporting quality research on rural crime in Africa and advocates for joint intelligence gathering and stakeholder collaboration. He calls for establishing an African rural crime hub, drawing parallels with initiatives in other regions like Australia's setup for rural criminology. Overall, the presentation underscored the urgency of addressing stock theft in Africa through comprehensive research, collaboration and strategic interventions to protect rural communities and livelihoods.

Livestock Theft and its victims: Forsaken entities, disregarded consequences, and a need for recourse

Cecili Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren

Senior Lecturer (School of Criminal Justice)
Department of Criminology & Security Science
University of South Africa
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Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren's presentation comprehensively examined the multifaceted issue of livestock theft and rural crime, particularly emphasising the often marginalised victims. Drawing from her ongoing PhD research, she skillfully navigated through various aspects of the topic, shedding light on the challenges faced by individuals and communities affected by these crimes.

One of the key points discussed was the systemic neglect of victims within the criminal justice system. Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren elucidated how victims of livestock theft, often farmers and rural workers, encounter significant hurdles when attempting to report incidents to law enforcement. These challenges include long distances to police stations and a lack of responsiveness and follow-up from authorities. The presentation highlighted the frustration felt by victims who must navigate bureaucratic processes only to see little to no action taken on their cases. This neglect not only perpetuates a sense of vulnerability among victims but also undermines their trust in the justice system.

Moreover, the presentation delved into the profound emotional and psychological toll that livestock theft and rural crime exact on victims. Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren painted a vivid picture of the distress and trauma experienced by farmers who come across scenes of mutilated and injured animals, often left to suffer by perpetrators. Through her research findings, she underscored the urgent need for holistic victim support that addresses not only the financial losses but also the mental and emotional anguish endured by those affected.

In addition to discussing the challenges victims face, the presentation also interrogated the systemic failures within the criminal justice system that perpetuate injustice. Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren elucidated how prosecutors and magistrates sometimes prioritise reasons not to prosecute rather than seeking justice for victims. This phenomenon, she argued, contributes to a culture of impunity that emboldens perpetrators and further marginalises victims. The presentation's incisive analysis urged for systemic reforms that prioritise victim-centred approaches and ensure accountability for perpetrators.

Furthermore, the presentation advocated for increased awareness and training within law enforcement and judiciary personnel to handle cases of livestock theft and rural crime better. Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren highlighted the importance of understanding these crimes' unique dynamics and challenges, including the intimate relationship between farmers and their animals. She emphasised the need for specialised units and protocols to address these crimes and effectively provide meaningful support to victims.

In conclusion, the presentation served as a compelling call to action, urging stakeholders to recognise and address the plight of victims in livestock theft and rural crime. Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren's nuanced exploration of the topic underscored the urgent need for systemic reforms, victim-centred approaches, and increased awareness within the criminal justice system. Through her research and advocacy, she illuminated the voices of those often forgotten and marginalised, seeking to restore dignity and justice for victims of these crimes.

Navigating Farm Crime: Relations Between Farmers and Police in Rural South Africa

Willie Clack

Senior Lecturer (School of Criminal Justice)
College of Law University of South Africa
SOUTH AFRICA

Willie Clack presented his research on the relationship between farmers and the police in rural South Africa, particularly focusing on farm crime and victimisation. His study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the police in meeting their constitutional duties and the public perception of police authority, social order, and democratic values.

Mr Clack provided an overview of South Africa's demographics and the challenges faced in measuring and reporting farm crime accurately, such as underreporting and police anonymity in rural areas, the lack of consensus on the number of farmers in South Africa, and the controversy surrounding this issue. He then delved into the existing literature on the relationship between farmers and police, citing studies dating back to 1988 and highlighting the work of various researchers in this field. He emphasised the importance of procedural justice, distributive justice, police effectiveness, and lawfulness in assessing police legitimacy.

Methodologically, Mr Clack explained that he used a questionnaire adapted from a regional study and distributed it to South African farmers via various channels. He faced challenges such as respondent reluctance and internet availability in rural areas. Despite these challenges, he received responses from 991 farmers across the country. In terms of findings, he revealed that many farmers had been victims of crime, with livestock theft being the most prevalent. Fear of crime was widespread among farmers, impacting their reporting behaviour. Many cited distrust in the police and fear of retaliation as reasons for not reporting crimes. Perception of police fairness and effectiveness was generally low among farmers, reflecting a lack of trust in law enforcement.

Mr Clack concluded by discussing the implications of his findings, including the need for further research on the fear of crime and its impact on rural communities and the importance of considering police perceptions in understanding the dynamics of farmer-police relationships. He expressed gratitude to the farmers and police officers who participated in his study and emphasised the significance of addressing farm crime for the well-being of rural communities and economies.

Moderation and Discussion

Wendell C. Wallace

The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Following the presentations, Dr Wallace facilitated a discussion on rural crime in Africa, engaging various presenters and participants. Here is a summary of his contributions and the responses to the questions asked:

Introduction and Recap: Dr Wallace opened the session, acknowledging the presenters and commending their insightful presentations on rural crime in Africa and the importance of their research.

Audience Engagement: Dr Wallace encouraged audience members to take notes and prepare questions for the discussion section, emphasising the topics' relevance.

Question on Data Collection: He asked about the challenges of data collection and availability in rural crime research in Africa. Panellists Mr Clack and Dr Bunei responded, addressing issues such as the criminalisation of stock theft, challenges in capturing data on cattle rustling, and efforts to redefine and capture such crimes in official records.

Improving Police-Farmer Relations: Dr Wallace raised concerns about the disconnect between police and farmers and solicited suggestions for improvement. Panellists, including Dr Maluleke and Dr Bunei, emphasised the need for mutual trust, effective response to reported crimes, and collaboration between law enforcement and communities.

Media's Role and Trust in Police: Ms Doorewaard-Janse van Vuuren highlighted the role of media in shaping public perception of police effectiveness and suggested the need for intermediary voices to bridge the gap between communities and law enforcement.

Transforming Research into Policy: Dr Wallace discussed the challenge of translating academic research into actionable policies. Panellists emphasised the importance of political will, engagement with policymakers, and proactive dissemination of research findings to drive policy change.

Reflections on Implementation: Mr Clack underscored the gap between planning and implementation in policy execution, stressing the need for effective governance and political support to address this issue.

Academic Advocacy and Engagement: Dr Bunei emphasised the importance of proactive engagement with policymakers and the media to ensure that research findings effectively influence policy decisions. Dr Wallace emphasised the need for sustained collaboration among scholars in Africa and other regions of the Global South. They highlighted the shared nature of challenges encountered by rural communities across different geographical contexts, suggesting that these challenges serve as a universal denominator. By fostering ongoing partnerships and knowledge exchange initiatives between scholars from diverse backgrounds, Dr Wallace envisioned a collective effort to understand better and address rural crime worldwide. This collaborative approach could lead to the development of more comprehensive strategies and solutions sensitive to local contexts while contributing to global advancements in rural criminology.

Book on Rural Crime in Africa: Dr Wallace also advocated for developing an edited book or a series of single-authored books dedicated to exploring the nuances of rural crime in Africa. Recognising the distinct challenges and complexities of rural crime within the African context, Dr Wallace stressed the importance of scholarly works that delve deeply into this topic. Such publications could significantly contribute to rural criminology by consolidating research findings and diverse perspectives. They could offer valuable insights into the unique dynamics of rural crime in African communities, informing evidence-based policies and interventions tailored to address these issues effectively.

Overall, Dr Wallace facilitated a dynamic discussion highlighting key challenges in addressing African rural crime and underscored the importance of collaboration, trust-building, and effective communication between researchers, policymakers, and communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the webinar on rural crime in Africa served as a pivotal platform for illuminating the multifaceted nature of this pressing issue. Through insightful presentations and engaging discussions, scholars, practitioners and researchers provided comprehensive insights into the challenges, dynamics and implications of rural crime across the African continent.

Key takeaways from the webinar include the recognition of Africa's diverse landscape and the significance of understanding rural crime within a global context. Presenters underscored the urgency of addressing rural crime's impact on communities, livelihoods, and the overall socio-economic fabric of the region. They highlighted the need for collaborative efforts, data-driven approaches and victim-centred strategies to effectively combat rural crime and promote justice and security in rural areas.

Moderated discussions further emphasised the importance of addressing data collection challenges, enhancing police-community relations, and translating research into actionable policies. Dr Wallace's advocacy for scholarly works dedicated to rural crime in Africa highlighted the necessity of consolidating research findings and fostering collaboration among scholars to inform evidence-based interventions and policy frameworks.

Overall, the webinar shed light on the complexities of rural crime in Africa and underscored the importance of collective action, interdisciplinary collaboration, and stakeholder engagement in addressing this critical issue. As we move forward, building upon the insights and recommendations shared during the webinar to develop holistic approaches that promote safety, security, and well-being in rural communities across the African continent is imperative.