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**Kidnapping phobia among peasant farmers and threats to Agri-tourism in Ekiti East  
Local Government Area of Ekiti state, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*Kidnapping has become a cankerworm to almost all sectors of Nigeria especially the tourism sector. This research work discusses kidnapping phobia among peasant farmers and threats to agri-tourism in Ekiti East LGA of Ekiti State, Nigeria. The objectives are to examine the cases of kidnapping of peasant farmers in the study area; analyse the case of selected victim of kidnapping in Ekiti State; look into efforts made by security agencies in tackling the menace and discuss the effects of these kidnapping cases on agri-tourism in the study area. Interview was conducted on three (3) victims of kidnapping and a narrative analysis was done on the content of the interview. 50 copies of questionnaire were administered on randomly selected respondents and the data collected were coded and analysed using SPSSv23. The results were presented in tables. The study found out that Ekiti East LGA has become haven for kidnappers and this has resulted in high kidnap cases in the area, the study also found out that security agencies are not doing well enough and also, locals serve as informants for kidnappers in the study area. The study recommended that local security personnel should be co-opted because they understand the terrain of their communities and also, locals should be sensitized on preparedness in case of eventualities. This will in a big way serve as relief for patrons willing to visit farms and ranches for agri-tourism.*

**Keywords:** Agri-tourism, Ekiti State, Farmers, Kidnapping

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**1. Introduction**

Nigeria has had and continues to experience diverse manifestations of militancy and violence, resulting in the emergence of a thriving industry centred around the practice of kidnapping individuals in exchange for ransom. In the last two decades, Nigeria has faced an unprecedented danger to its peace, mostly due to the rise of terrorist organisations and the increasing incidence of abduction, particularly for ransom (Ahmed & Abanimebon, 2021). Nigeria's current situation has placed it in an unfavourable position within the international world. Violent militants have globally heightened the influence of kidnappers and violent

crimes, resulting in a jump in the incidence of kidnappings perpetrated by militant organisations (Ahmed, Zubairu, & Aliyu, 2019). However, after the rise of militancy and abduction in Nigeria, there has been a significant increase in instances of militant engagement in the south-west part of the country (Aghedo., & Osumah (2015).

It is an illegal and illicit activity in which individuals are forcibly kidnapped and taken to an unknown location, with the intention of extorting money from their loved ones. Nigeria was ranked unfavourably on the worldwide ranking as one of the most inhospitable and unstable countries to reside (Ottuh & Aituf, 2014). Some of the factors that contribute to this



tendency include the acquisition of money through illegal activities, the removal of political opponents, and the practice of human sacrifice or ritualistic performances. The issue of kidnapping has gained significant attention and is being widely discussed in both public and private forums, given its high occurrence in Nigeria (Cheserek, 2017).

Throughout history, the occurrence of kidnapping in the Lagos metropolitan has increased due to factors like as unemployment, poverty, corruption, inflation, moral decay, pessimism, and dissatisfaction among the youth. According to Tzanelli (2006), kidnappers select their victims depending on their capacity to pay the ransom.

Bashir (2019) contends that there have been more than fifteen documented instances of abduction and kidnapping in communities. It is observed that community residents often provide confidential information to security agents promptly after such incidents occur. However, it is surprising that security authorities have been ineffective in preventing or apprehending the individuals responsible. Therefore, many of the villagers have reached the conclusion that the state's security system is inadequate, resulting in the inability to address the conflict from its early stages. Onovo (2009) said that the increase in crime in many locations might be attributed to politicians celebrating fraudsters (quoted in Ngwama, 2014: 138). The erosion of society values is seen in the glorification of corruption, when individuals of dubious integrity are appointed to governmental posts. Consequently, the problem of abduction gained significant attention in 2006, and since then, governments at all levels have made efforts to pass legislation prohibiting it. In states such as Lagos, Ekiti, and Rivers, the punishment for abduction varies from 21 years to life imprisonment, with the intention of discouraging similar incidents.

The atrocities committed by the herders may be attributed to ethnic cleansing, porous borders, governmental intervention, and environmental and climate change. These factors have collectively led the herders to prioritise the value of their livestock over human life (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Fada and Matthew (2015) found that social disputes had a detrimental impact on tourism, leading to decreased tourist arrivals, reservations, average length of stay, and average room occupancy. They further proposed that peace is the most favourable ally of travel and tourism, whilst conflict and insecurity are among its most detrimental adversaries. Given the prevailing instability in Nigeria, the tourism infrastructure and destinations are likely to suffer the most, as visitors would likely avoid visiting the area to avoid the heinous actions of the herdsmen.

In his 2022 publication, Bello asserted that Nigeria's predicament stems from a significant portion of its people having a low intelligence quotient (IQ) and being primarily preoccupied with basic survival rather than striving for greater ambitions. This mindset is motivated by the need for nourishment, regardless of whether it is acquired through lawful or unlawful methods. Hence, the capacity of individuals to manipulate religious and ethnic differences directly affects the well-being of many individuals. Nigeria lacks a cohesive standard for any area. We wholeheartedly welcome and respect all religious beliefs and practices, celebrating them with great enthusiasm. In the realm of academia, we adhere to and value diverse learning approaches, a principle that is equally applicable in Nigeria. In Nigeria, we uphold and acknowledge every culture, irrespective of its favourable or unfavourable attributes. Instead of actively working to overcome crises, we use them to earn money. Some individuals have already been assimilated into international bodies such as the United Nations, the



African Union, and ECOWAS. Within these organisations, they participate in activities such as commerce, using coercion through blackmail, and taking advantage of others while using religion, ethnicity, and patriotism as a front.

According to Kwaghga (2018), the security situation in southwest Nigeria is a considerable problem as it might worsen the preexisting instability in rural areas. The substantial repercussions might have a profound effect on rural tourism. The reluctance to visit and travel through any of the southwestern states would greatly affect the number of visitors participating in agri-tourism and other forms of tourism. If the current frequency of farm raids in this area is not diminished, it might potentially result in a drop in both the number and the standard of farms that will be available for agri-tourism in the near future.

## **2. Literature Review**

Kidnapping has emerged as a widespread security concern in Nigeria, impacting several areas, including Ekiti State. The phenomena, propelled by economic, political, and social causes, has resulted in pervasive apprehension among rural populations, namely peasant farmers. The ramifications for rural lives and local economies have been thoroughly highlighted in relation to this issue (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). Rural farmers in Ekiti East Local Government Area are experiencing increased unease as a result of the risk of abduction. The worry of being kidnapped not only interrupts their daily routines but also impairs agricultural production. Okoli and Agada (2014) found that the apprehension of being kidnapped has resulted in decreased agricultural activities, as farmers choose to avoid working in isolated regions where they perceive themselves to be more susceptible.

The growing agri-tourism industry in Ekiti East LGA, which takes advantage of the area's agricultural history and beautiful

scenery, is facing a substantial risk due to insecurity. Agri-tourism has the potential to provide an economic boost for rural areas. However, the fear of kidnapping discourages both domestic and international visitors from participating. Adetunji and Oloruntoba (2013) examine the vulnerability of tourism in rural regions to security issues, particularly the negative impact of abduction cases on tourist arrivals and financial earnings. Nigerian security forces have employed many strategies to prevent abduction, such as heightened patrols, intelligence collection, and community policing efforts. Notwithstanding these endeavours, the efficacy remains variable, with several rural regions nevertheless encountering elevated degrees of insecurity. Eke (2020) emphasizes the obstacles encountered by security personnel, including insufficient resources and corruption, which diminish their capacity to successfully combat the problem of kidnappings.

Multiple case studies conducted in Ekiti State offer a more comprehensive insight into the problem of abduction. A research conducted by Adebayo (2019) investigated particular cases of abduction in Ekiti East, providing a comprehensive account of the ordeals faced by the victims and their family. This study unveiled the psychological and economic burden on impacted people and communities, underscoring the necessity for stronger security measures and support networks.

Kidnapping has socio-economic ramifications that go beyond immediate cash losses and have lasting implications on the society. According to Igbinovia (2014), the ongoing risk of kidnapping causes farmers to move from rural areas to cities in search of safer conditions. This movement worsens the already declining agricultural production and rural development. The exodus of local communities further diminishes the viability of agri-tourism, since it decreases



the accessibility of genuine cultural encounters that entice visitors.

The objectives of this study are to examine the cases of kidnapping of peasant farmers in the study area, analyze the case of a selected victim in Ekiti State, investigate the efforts made by security agencies to tackle the menace, and discuss the effects of these kidnapping cases on agri-tourism in the region.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in one of the prone parts of the Ekiti State for kidnapping using the mixed study research design. Ekiti East LGA was selected for the study. This area was selected due to its recent activities of incessant kidnapping of inhabitants on the ways to their farm and their agrarian characteristics (Emmanuel, 2021). Qualitative data were retrieved by target participants using interview method. The three (3) participants interviewed were victims of kidnapping and in some cases, families of victims of kidnapping. For

anonymity’s sake, no names or pictures were taken. Content analysis was done by bringing out the themes in the interviews conducted. Narrative analysis was used to explain the various contents of interviews of victims. Also, 50 copies of questionnaires were administered randomly within the Local Government Area to investigate more on the subject matter which were all retrieved. The quantitative data retrieved were coded and analyzed using SPSSv23. The result was then presented in tables whilst the Mean of various pointers was looked into to identify variables of high impacts for the study.

4. Results and Discussion

This research work looked at the phobia created for farmers as a result of kidnapping cases especially in Ekiti East Local Government Area of Ekiti State. There are as many cases as possible in the study area. The Table below shows some selected few of these cases:

Table 1: Recent Cases of Kidnapping in Ekiti State Nigeria

Table with 4 columns: S/N, DATE, CASES, Source. It lists 13 kidnapping incidents with their dates, locations, and the source of the news report.



Table 2 below shows the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents.

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demography	F	%
<b>i. Sex of Respondents</b>		
Male	21	42
Female	29	58
<b>ii. Age of Respondents</b>		
15 years and below	01	02
16-30 years	17	34
31-45 years	19	38
46-60 years	10	30
61 years and above	03	06
<b>iii. Occupation</b>		
Civil/Public Servant	22	44
Farming	15	30
Artisan	07	14
Student	06	12
Others (Specify)	02	04
<b>iv. If occupation other than farming, do you have a farm?</b>		
Yes	31	88.6
No	4	11.4

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2022

In the table 1 above, 58% of the respondents are females while 42% are males. This implies that more females engage in farming than their male counterpart. Since females have more fear than males, this will in a real sense affect agricultural tourism because fear for being kidnapped on their way to their farmlands. Also, most of the respondents falls between the age of 36 to 40 which is the active and responsibility age for most people. These set of respondents are believed to participate more in farming because of more responsibilities especially from the family. Also, while most respondents accounting for 44% were either civil or public servants, 88.6% of them still have farms that they work on especially on weekends. By implication, almost all respondents have farms they work on. This in fact can be said to be a major justification for this research work.

Table 3 below shows the effects of kidnapping on farming.

**Table 3: Kidnapping and Farming**

	F	%
<b>i. How often do you go to farm before incidences of kidnapping</b>		
Rarely	2	04
Moderately	10	20
Often	23	46
Very Often	15	30
<b>ii. How often do you go to farm before incidences of kidnapping</b>		
Rarely	10	20
Moderately	34	68
Often	4	08
Very Often	2	04
<b>iii. Are you close to anyone who is a victim of kidnapping</b>		
Yes	37	74



No	13	26
<b>iv. Were you traumatized as a result of the incidence</b>		
Yes	49	98
No	1	02

Source: Fieldwork 2022

In the table 3 above, kidnapping became rampant some years back in the study area, especially on ways to farm. The frequency of respondents on farmlands reduced as a result of cases of kidnapping along roads of farmland. Many farmers left their farmlands in deteriorated states because of phobia for their lives. According to Ladan and Mutawali (2021), any form of violence that leads to insecurity in rural areas where the majority of the people are farmers is bound to affect food security anywhere in the world. In situations where agriculture is affected, agritourism will be affected as well.

Table 4 below shows the efforts of security officials in handling kidnapping in the study area.

**Table 4: Security Official and Kidnapping**

	SA	%	A	%	D	%	SD	%	$\bar{x}$
Security Officials are supporting in combating the threats of kidnapping in the study area (SOS)	02	04	21	42	25	50	02	04	2.44
The firearms of kidnapers are better than that of security officials (TFK)	07	14	15	30	16	32	12	24	2.34
The kidnapers work on the basis of information from locals (KIL)	15	30	24	48	08	16	03	06	3.02
Most farmers are neglecting their farms for fear of being kidnapped (FFK)	20	40	25	50	04	08	01	02	3.28
Kidnapping cases in Ekiti East has affected tourism activities in the region (KTA)	17	34	22	44	09	18	02	04	3.08

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The table above examined the efforts of security officials in reducing the cases of kidnapping as it affects agritourism. The table shows that efforts from security officials are not enough in combating kidnapping in the study area. While many may think that kidnapers have better firearms arms than security officials, this research is in contrast to this thought. Over 56% of the respondents disagreed that firearms of kidnapers are better than that of security officials. To this end, it has also been established from the results of this research that local people serve as informants for kidnapers and this has even worsened the situation. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2022) noted that there are four forms of informants which are: a member of the public, a victim of a crime, a member of an

organized criminal group and police officers themselves. Especially, in cases of organized crime like kidnapping, any of the group above can serve as informants for the kidnapers thereby making their operations easy.

Most farm owners now neglect their farms because of phobia for kidnapping, these thus resulted in increase in prices of food stuffs; the lower the quantity, the higher the price. And since, no farm, no agritourism, consequently, kidnapping menace has thus affected the development of agritourism in the study area. This is further shown in the mean of each of the indicators which are SOS:2.44, TFK:2.34, KIL:3.02, FFK:3.28 and KTA:3.08. All the mean are above average which implies that all the indicators are relevant to this study.

From the qualitative research, three victims/family of victims (V1, V2, V3)



were interviewed on the cases of kidnapping in the study area. A narrative analysis was done to further understand the subject matter. V1 who is a victim of kidnapping on the road to his farm narrated as follows:

*“I was on my way back from the farm with my wife when I noticed that some people surrounded me, I begged that they release my wife because no one would search for money for my release. The kidnapers who are Fulanis were conversant with the bush path as we trekked for days. While we were trekking, myself and other kidnap victims, the kidnapers flogged us and molested us. While they are contacting our family members, we stay unfed throughout a day sometimes, the only time I was fed was with Garri and ground water. In some instances, they steal crops from nearby farm and feed themselves with it. It was a terrible experience and I can’t pray for such for my enemies. I spent almost a week in their den before I was released after collecting ransom of 2 million naira”*

**V1 (Fieldwork, 2020)**

When interviewed on the impact of impacts of security officials on the case and how they waded into action for rescue, he narrated as follows:

*“They cannot do more than their power; this country is in a mess than what security officials can handle. They tried their bit but it is like it is an organized crime, to me, I believe some security officials are working with them because I was told by my son that the kidnapers called and told him about involvement of security officials immediately, he left police station to complain. I was convinced as well that there is*

*someone giving the information because I was given an inventory of all what I have”.* **V1 (Fieldwork, 2020)**

From the narrations of V1, it showed that kidnapping in Ekiti East LGA is more of organized than random. When asked if he still have the mind to go to farm after the incidence, he said;

*Emi Ke, lehin gbogbo ohun ti won foju mi ri”* **(Fieldwork, 2020)**

Meaning “I can’t go to farm for now, after all I have seen in previous days” V1 had many crops in the farm that couldn’t receive his attention because of the trauma experienced when he was kidnapped. This actually affected the growth and development of agritourism in the study area.

**V2** is a palm-wine tapper not actually a victim of kidnapping but was dealt with by kidnapers. He narrated his story:

*“I was on the palm tree when some group of people with AK-47 rifles saw me and ordered me to come down from the tree. I even thought I was about to be kidnapped but to my surprise they didn’t but I was beaten and battered, after which I was warned not to come to my farm again. It was an experience I can’t forget for the rest of my life”* **V2 (Fieldwork, 2020)**

When interviewed if he will be willing to go to farm again for the purpose of tapping wine, he said:

*“Wine-tapping is my only source of livelihood, I have no option that to go but this time around, I have visited some native doctors for charms that can help in such dangerous situations”*

**V2 (Fieldwork, 2020)**

**V3** is a child of a kidnapped victim and he narrated:

*“Being the first son of my parents, I took decisions to get a loan using my dad’s land as*



*collateral before we could pay for his ransom. Since then, feeding has not been easy, all crops on our lands had spoiled and we are afraid to go there because of kidnappers.* **V3 (Fieldwork, 2020)**

Agritourism or agrotourism involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch (Wikipedia, 2022). Farmers that are even afraid to go to their farms will find it hard to entertain visitors. Kidnapping has thus affected agritourism in a negative way especially in rural areas that rely on agriculture and in turn expecting visitors for the purpose of agritourism.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research work has examined the impact of fear of kidnapping on farmers in Ekiti East LGA bearing in mind its impact on Agritourism. Having interviewed victims of kidnapping and getting information using questionnaire; it is no gainsaying that kidnapping has a real negative effect on agricultural tourism and farming. On the basis of this, the following recommendations were made:

Local security personnel should be equipped because they understand the terrain of their localities, other security agencies should be mandated to support their efforts, this will help in providing adequate securities especially for patrons willing to visit ranches/farm for agritourism. Security networks across the state at large should be strengthened and state policing should be encouraged since the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies are only answerable to Federal Government. Rural people should be sensitized on security protocols so as to enhance their preparedness in case of eventualities.

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