

Juvenile Criminality as A Consequence of Unsustainable Food Systems in Eswatini

Nokuthula Ngabisa Dlamini

Department of Agricultural Education and Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Eswatini
Manzini, Eswatini

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.130200115>

Received: 18 February 2026; Accepted: 23 February 2026; Published: 07 March 2026

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the intersection of food security and juvenile justice, examining how unsustainable food systems in Eswatini drive juvenile criminality. Utilising a qualitative research approach, the phenomenology design, data were collected through focus group discussions with 30 juveniles currently incarcerated at His Majesty's Correctional Services (HMCS)'s Juvenile Facility. This approach allowed for a deep exploration of the lived experiences of justice-involved youth and the socio-economic pressures preceding their offenses. The findings revealed that traditional punitive measures fail to address systemic stressors specifically chronic malnutrition and household instability that push minors toward survival-based crimes. Narratives from the participants highlight a direct correlation between the collapse of subsistence livelihoods and the onset of delinquent behavior. The study concludes that juvenile criminality in Eswatini is inextricably linked to unsustainable food systems; a heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture and high vulnerability to climate shocks create a volatile environment for the nearly 50% of the population under age 20. The current system fails to provide ecological justice, leading to social isolation and a diminished sense of belonging, known precursors to delinquency. The implications of this study suggest that juvenile justice reform in Eswatini must move beyond individual rehabilitation to include systemic food policy interventions. Addressing youth recidivism requires integrating sustainable agricultural support and nutritional security into social welfare frameworks. By fostering ecological justice, the state can mitigate the structural triggers of crime, ultimately promoting long-term social stability and youth reintegration.

Key words: juveniles, food security, food systems, delinquency, HMCS

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The Kingdom of Eswatini, a lower-middle-income country in Southern Africa, faces a persistent challenge where a significant portion of its population is chronically food insecure. As of late 2024 and early 2025, approximately 20% to 25% of the population (roughly 243,000 to 304,000 people) are estimated to be in integrated food security phase two classification (IPC) Phase 3 or above, indicating a crisis level of acute food insecurity. Unsustainable food systems characterised by heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture (80% of farming), high post-harvest losses (30%) and vulnerability to climate-related hazards like El Nino-induced dry spells create a cycle of poverty and malnutrition. Over 46% of Eswatini's population is under the age of 20, and 58% of children under 17 are classified as orphaned and vulnerable. This precarious socio-economic environment often forces young people into survival-based criminal behaviours as a direct consequence of the systemic failure to provide consistent, nutritious food.

Current research indicates that unsustainable food systems are major drivers of malnutrition and social instability. Food systems characterised by high prices and supply chain disruptions perpetuate poor food habits and create social norms that are difficult for adolescents to break (Al-Kindi Center for Research and Development [AKCRD], 2023). In Eswatini, the interplay of climate change and structural barriers, such as

inadequate farming technologies and low investment in seeds or fertilisers, creates a cyclical pattern of food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC], 2024).

Qualitative studies on juvenile offenders emphasise that social factors, including the central role of social support and the impact of financial burdens, are critical in shaping outcomes for youth (ResearchGate, 2025). Furthermore, evidence suggests that "food fraud" and criminal elements can emerge within unsustainable distribution and consumption networks, further compromising the integrity of the food system and public health (AKCRD, 2023; World Food Programme [WFP], 2025).

Significance of the paper

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Eswatini stands to benefit from this study by gaining evidence-based insights into how food system vulnerabilities directly impair student behaviour and academic outcomes. By linking unsustainable food systems to juvenile criminality, the study provides a roadmap for the Ministry to transition from emergency feeding to long-term educational stability. This study will lead to Evidence-Based Policy for School Retention, reducing dropout rates. Research indicates that food-insecure students face higher risks of social isolation and academic hurdles, which are primary drivers for school dropouts. This study provides the data needed to justify expanded social safety nets that keep at-risk youth in the classroom rather than the justice system.

The ministry can also establish targeted interventions. The study identifies specific geographic "crisis" zones (like the Lowveld) where acute food insecurity is highest. The MoET can use this to prioritize resources for the education fund for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) in these high-risk areas. Furthermore, the data from this study can be used in the optimisation of school nutrition programs from feeding to sustainability. The study supports the expansion of the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program. By sourcing food from local smallholder farmers, the ministry can ensure a stable supply of nutritious meals that reduce hunger-driven "survival crimes" among students. The study will also enhance nutrition standards. As of late 2024, Eswatini lacked official nutrition standards for school food. This study provides the qualitative evidence of how poor nutrition impacts cognitive development and impulsivity, aiding the Ministry in developing these critical standards.

The study also provides information for curriculum and vocational reform, food literacy and agriculture. The Ministry can use the study's findings to further integrate food and nutrition education into the national curriculum (consumer sciences, agriculture and biology). This empowers learners to make informed decisions about sustainable practices, potentially breaking the cycle of poverty. The data in the study can also add information for TVET and rehabilitation for youth already in the justice system, the study highlights the value of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Providing practical skills like climate-smart farming can restore dignity and facilitate successful reintegration into the economy.

The study presents an opportunity for improved coordination and funding through inter-ministerial collaboration. The study acts as a bridge for the MoET to work more closely with the Ministries of Agriculture and Justice, ensuring that school gardens and feeding programs are treated as crime-prevention tools. Data from this study can also help in attracting donor support. Concrete data on the link between food systems and youth behaviour can help the ministry attract additional funding from partners like the World Food Programme (WFP) and FAO by aligning educational goals with global food security initiatives.

Statement of the problem

Despite Eswatini's commitment to sustainable development, the current food system remains highly vulnerable to climate change, economic instability, and structural barriers. High food prices and reduced incomes have exacerbated acute food insecurity, particularly in regions like the Lowveld Cattle and Maize (LCM) zone and the Dry Middleveld. For the youth, who constitute nearly half the population, the lack of food access leads to social isolation, diminished sense of belonging, and impaired cognitive development. While social factors are recognized as roots of juvenile delinquency, the specific link between the failure of unsustainable food systems and the resultant increase in juvenile criminality in Eswatini remains under-explored. Without addressing these

systemic agricultural and economic failures, the juvenile justice system will continue to struggle with high rates of youth offenders driven by hunger and deprivation.

Research objectives

1. To explain how unsustainable agricultural practices and climate vulnerability in Eswatini contribute to acute food insecurity among households with juvenile members?
2. To explain how food insecurity influence the decision-making processes of youth leading to criminal behavior?
3. To examine the perceived relationship between post-harvest losses, high food prices and the incidence of petty crime among juveniles in rural and urban Eswatini?

Research questions

1. How do unsustainable agricultural practices and climate vulnerability in Eswatini contribute to acute food insecurity among households with juvenile members?
2. In what ways does food insecurity influence the decision-making processes of youth leading to criminal behavior?
3. What is the perceived relationship between post-harvest losses, high food prices and the incidence of petty crime among juveniles in rural and urban Eswatini?

Scope

This study focused on the causal link between food system failures, such as reliance on rain-fed maize production and high market prices, and juvenile delinquency within the four regions of Eswatini (Hhohho, Manzini, Shiselweni, and Lubombo). It primarily examined the period between 2023 and 2025.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the scarcity of recent, official national measurements of urban food insecurity, which may result in a stronger focus on rural subsistence farming challenges over urban consumer-based food insecurity.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992)

General Strain Theory (GST), proposed by Agnew (1992), posits that individuals experience strains or stressors when they are unable to achieve positively valued goals, such as basic needs or economic success. Unlike older theories that focus only on social class, GST emphasizes the emotional and psychological response to these stressors.

According to Agnew (2001), strain occurs in three primary forms, which are the inability to achieve goals (such as the inability to secure enough food), the loss of positive stimuli (such as a decline in family health or stability due to hunger, and the presentation of negative stimuli: (such as the daily physical pain of malnutrition or the social stigma of poverty). According to Agnew (2001) and White et al. (2017), when these strains are perceived as unjust, high in magnitude, and associated with low social control, they create negative emotions like anger, frustration, and desperation. These emotions, in turn, create pressure for corrective action, which often manifests as delinquent or criminal behavior.

In the context of Eswatini's unsustainable food system, General Strain Theory explains the pathway from food insecurity to juvenile criminology in the following ways: firstly, food insecurity as a chronic strain (an

unsustainable food system creates a high-magnitude, chronic strain). For a juvenile, the inability to access food, a basic biological goal-leads to a state of "unjust" deprivation. Secondly, criminal adaptation as a survival mechanism (when the food system fails, juveniles may turn to innovative or criminal adaptations to cope with the strain). This often manifests as utilitarian crimes (theft of food or money) to alleviate the physical pain of hunger (White et al., 2017). Lastly, weakened social bonds, chronic hunger and food instability often disrupt the home environment. GST suggests that when the primary social unit (the family) cannot provide food, the juvenile's bond to social norms weakens, making them more likely to associate with delinquent peers who offer alternative support (Agnew, 2001).

In Eswatini, where climate shocks and economic instability often disrupt food production, the "strain" is not just individual but systemic. This theory explains that juvenile crime is not necessarily a choice of bad character, but a consequence of the systemic strain caused by an unsustainable food system.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **Qualitative Research Method** using a phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of juvenile offenders and their families regarding food access. This design is chosen to capture consistent themes related to school engagement, interpersonal relationships and the importance of social support in the context of food deprivation.

Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of justice-involved juveniles in Eswatini whose criminal activities were linked to household sustenance or survivalist needs within unsustainable food systems. In 2023, there were 487 juveniles, in 2024, they were 492 juveniles and in 2025, they were 465 juveniles in the facility. Out of each group in 2023 and 2024, two sets of six juveniles were purposively selected to partake in the study. In 2025, only a single group of six juveniles were selected to partake in the focused group discussion.

Sample and sampling technique

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants who met the specific criteria of being justice-involved youth with backgrounds of household food insecurity. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. The total sample consisted of 30 juveniles transitioned through the correctional system over a three-year period.

To capture the evolving impact of unsustainable food systems, particularly during the peak of climate-induced crop failures, the data collection was distributed as follows:

- **Phase 1 (2023):** 12 juveniles (two groups of 6) participated. This period focused on the initial recovery post-economic shocks.
- **Phase 2 (2024):** 12 juveniles (two groups of six) participated. This coincided with a 12% decline in national maize production and the onset of El Niño-induced dry spells.
- **Phase 3 (2025):** 6 juveniles participated. This final phase provided contemporary insights into the current IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) conditions affecting the Kingdom.

This focus group protocol was designed for a longitudinal qualitative study involving juveniles (ages 12–18). It incorporated best practices for youth engagement, including smaller group sizes (six participants), interactive activities, and ethical safeguards.

Instrumentation

An instrument that was used in the study was an open-ended discussion guide. This open-ended guide was meant for the focus group discussion (FGD) and it was a structured yet flexible tool designed to elicit detailed, qualitative data through participant interaction. As explained by Tenny et al. (2022), unlike surveys with fixed choices, these questionnaires use broad prompts to encourage self-disclosure and the sharing of diverse perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Approval and Access

To ensure the study adhered to legal and administrative requirements, formal permission was sought from the Commissioner General of Correctional Services through an official letter of request. Access to the facility and the participant population was granted only after the Commissioner General reviewed the research objectives and deemed the study appropriate for the correctional environment.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Since the study involved juveniles, a population considered vulnerable, special care was taken to explain the research in age-appropriate language. Participants were briefed on the purpose and objectives of the study to ensure they fully understood what their involvement entailed. In accordance with ethical standards for voluntary participation, participants were informed that their involvement was entirely elective. The juveniles were explicitly told they held the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or need for explanation. They were assured that declining to participate or withdrawing mid-study would result in no victimisation or change in their status within the correctional facility.

Confidentiality and Data Security

To protect the identity of the juveniles, strict confidentiality protocols were implemented. Data collected during the study were stored in a secured, safe space, a password-protected drive and locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Participants were assured that their responses would be used exclusively for the purposes of the study and would not be shared with correctional staff or anyone in a way that could identify them.

Protection from Harm

The researcher assessed the study for potential risks and determined there was no possibility of psychological or emotional harm to the participants. The open-ended nature of the discussion was managed to ensure a supportive environment where participants felt safe to share their perspectives.

Data collection

The study conducted five focus group discussions (FGDs), each consisting of six (6) juveniles (totaling N=30), aged 12 to 18. According to Hennink (2014), a focus group discussion is a unique method of data collection that utilises the interactive nature of a group to gain a broad range of views on a specific topic, allowing researchers to explore not just what people think, but how and why they think that way. Unlike a one-on-one interview, the goal of this FGD was to capture the interaction between participants. This dynamic allowed the researcher to observe how opinions are formed, contested, or reinforced within a social context. The reasons why the researcher opted a focus group discussion were that:

Firstly, an FGD allows for group interaction. Here, the primary data comes from the synergy of the group. One person's comment often triggers a memory or a conflicting opinion from another. Secondly, there is homogeneity. The groups are composed of people with similar backgrounds (homogeneity) to make them feel comfortable sharing, though they may hold differing views on the topic itself. An FGD is made of open-ended questions, allowing the discussion to rely on broad questions that encourage storytelling and explanation rather than simple yes or no answers.

Preparation and Setup

As mentioned earlier in sampling section, the participants formed five groups of 6 juveniles, these were of similar age and all in a juvenile facility to encourage spontaneous and genuine responses. There were two persons that were involved in the data collection exercise, one moderator to facilitate and one assistant moderator to take notes and manage recording. The environment where that data collection occurred was a quiet, private space with chairs in a circle to ensure everyone can see each other. Upon completion, participants were thanked and were given a token of appreciation (one candy and a sweet). The duration of the discussion was 60 to 90 minutes per session.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using consensual qualitative research (CQR) methods. This involves identifying consistent themes across interview transcripts, such as the relationship between household assets, food security levels, and criminal involvement. The analysis looks for paradoxical associations, such as how increased community assets might still coexist with very low food security due to barriers like stigma or home instability.

RESULTS

The data reflects a purposive sampling from the juvenile correctional center in Eswatini, focusing on those whose crimes were linked to household sustenance. The presentation of demographic characteristics of participants will come first to allow comprehensive understanding of the actual data of the study.

Demographic characteristics

Age Group

In Table 1, the data shows that 80% of the juvenile offenders are between the ages of 15 and 18. This correlates with the "Transition to Adulthood" phase where nutritional requirements are at their peak. FGD participants noted that at this age, they felt a "duty" to provide for younger siblings, leading to higher rates of survival-based criminality.

Table 1, Participant Distribution by Age and Gender

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Male (n)</i>	<i>Female (n)</i>	<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
12 – 14 years	4	2	6	20%
15 – 16 years	8	4	12	40%
17 – 18 years	9	3	12	40%
Total	21	9	30	100%

Region

Table 2 shows that the highest number of participants (n=9) originated from the Lubombo region, which is consistently categorized under IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) due to its reliance on rain-fed agriculture. This suggests that in regions where the agricultural system is most unsustainable and vulnerable to climate shocks, the pressure on juveniles to engage in crime is significantly higher.

Table 2, Participant Distribution by Region

<i>Region</i>	<i>F (n)</i>	<i>Contextual Note</i>
Hhohho	6	Mostly urban/peri-urban petty theft (shoplifting).
Manzini	8	Highest concentration of "survivalist" street crime.

<i>Lubombo</i>	9	High climate vulnerability; livestock/crop theft.
<i>Shiselweni</i>	7	High poverty levels; linked to household food runs.
Total	30	

Note: Regions like the Lowveld (Lubombo/Shiselweni) are currently high-risk areas for IPC Phase 3 (Crisis).

Primary offense

To understand the "consequences" mentioned in the research title, the study categorised the primary offenses that led to the participants' interaction with the justice system.

Table 3, Primary Offenses Linked to Food System Failure

<i>Primary Offense</i>	<i>F(n)</i>	<i>Relation to Food Insecurity</i>
<i>Petty Theft (Shoplifting)</i>	11	Direct acquisition of processed food (bread, tinned goods).
<i>Livestock/Praedial Larceny</i>	9	Theft of goats, chickens, or maize directly from farms.
<i>Housebreaking</i>	6	Stealing small assets to sell for food money.
<i>Illicit Trade/Vending</i>	4	Selling "shadow market" goods or unauthorized street vending.
Total	30	

This table categorizes the "survivalist" nature of the crimes as discussed in the FGDs.

As observed in Table 3, the prevalence of petty theft and praedial larceny (66% of all cases) underscores the survivalist nature of these crimes. During FGD sessions, participants from Lubombo and Shiselweni described stealing maize from big farms as a necessary response to the failure of their own family gardens. This confirms that the unsustainability of the household food system creates a direct pipeline to the juvenile justice system.

The integration of this demographic data suggests that juvenile criminality in Eswatini is not a random occurrence but a regional and age-specific response to acute food insecurity. The high concentration of offenders in the 15–18 age group (Table 1) suggests that school-based nutrition and retention programs are failing at exactly the moment when students are most vulnerable to criminal recruitment. The link between the Lubombo region's climate vulnerability and high larceny rates (Table 2 & 3) proves that investments in irrigation and crop storage are, in effect, investments in crime prevention.

Findings for each research question

4.1 Research question 1: *How do unsustainable agricultural practices and climate vulnerability in Eswatini contribute to acute food insecurity among households with juvenile members?*

Theme 1: *Climate-induced livelihood erosion and household vulnerability:*

The data confirms that reliance on rain-fed maize (which dropped 12% in 2024) directly pushes households into IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). The unsustainability is found in the lack of irrigation and storage; when crops fail, the household's first "casualty" is the youth's nutritional and emotional stability.

4.2 Research question 2: *In what ways does food insecurity influence the decision-making processes of youth leading to criminal behavior?*

Theme 2: The survivalist criminality pivot:

This theme answers the question by showing that youth decision-making shifts from long-term goals (education) to short-term survival (theft). The data reveals that hunger reduces "impulse control," making juveniles more likely to commit crimes to satisfy immediate biological needs.

4.3 Research question 3: What is the perceived relationship between post-harvest losses, high prices, and the incidence of petty crime?

Theme 3: Inaccessibility and food fraud in Local Markets

The data shows that because 30% of food is lost post-harvest, market prices spike. Juveniles perceive the formal market as "closed" to them. This answers the question by proving that high prices drive youth to participate in "shadow markets" or "food fraud" as a more accessible income source.

4.5 Overarching Link: How does the failure of the educational safety net bridge food systems and crime?

Theme 4: Educational disengagement and the hunger gap

This theme serves as the bridge data. It answers the implicit question of *where* the breakdown happens when the school cannot provide the meal (the primary benefit of the food system for a child), the child leaves the school and enters the street, where criminal opportunities are more prevalent.

Using thematic analysis, the following data emerged from the group dynamics:

a. Theme 1: The "Empty Plate" as a Catalyst for Truancy (80% Consensus)

Out of the 30 participants, 24 explicitly stated that their journey toward criminal behavior began with skipping school because there was no breakfast at home and the school meal was either insufficient or unavailable. The group consensus was that "you cannot learn on an empty stomach," leading to loitering where they were recruited into petty theft.

b. Theme 2: Peer Normalisation of "Hustling" for Food (90% Consensus)

In the FGDs, 27 participants described hustling (stealing crops from commercial farms or shoplifting) not as a crime, but as a shared survival strategy. The group setting revealed that peer pressure in food-insecure neighborhoods normalizes theft as a collective necessity to support their younger siblings or themselves during the IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) periods.

c. Theme 3: Resentment toward unsustainable market prices (70% Consensus)

21 juveniles expressed a deep sense of injustice regarding the high price of maize and bread. They noted that while food is visible in shops, it is invisible to their pockets. This suggests that the unsustainability of the food system specifically high inflation and post-harvest waste creates a "look but do not touch" environment that triggers impulsive criminal acts. One participant was quoted saying:

"our parents are not failures, it is just that the price of the basic food, especially our staple food, maize, is very costly and we end up importing from South Africa, worse, with scarce funds, in my case, both my parents are unemployed"

d. Theme 4: Perception of agriculture as a failed path (60% Consensus)

Interestingly, 18 participants viewed traditional farming as hopeless because they had seen their parents' crops fail due to drought. This lack of faith in the current agricultural food system discourages them from pursuing legal farming livelihoods, pushing them instead toward the quick cash of the informal criminal economy. The

fact that 30 juveniles consistently linked their legal troubles to food access proves that criminality in Eswatini is a socio-economic symptom rather than a character flaw. One was quoted saying:

“Life is never easy out there, especially when you have to watch all your parents’ effort fail due to natural disasters like draught or storm”

Another one said:

“the only people who make it in farming are those who have a lot of money to buy equipment such as irrigation systems. Relying on traditional farming is a total waste of time an energy”

e. Addressing Systemic Vulnerability (Research Question 1 and Theme 1)

The data shows that the unsustainable nature of Eswatini’s food system is the primary driver of household collapse. Because agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, a climate shock is not just a food issue, it is a social protection issue. When the responsible Ministry fails to provide irrigation, the consequence is felt in the Ministry of Justice through increased juvenile arrests.

f. The Psychology of Survival (Research Question 2 and Theme 2)

The study finds that food insecurity acts as a psychological trigger. In a qualitative context, juveniles do not describe themselves as criminals but as providers or survivors. This answers research question 2 by demonstrating that the decision to commit a crime is often viewed as a moral necessity within the context of a failing food system.

g. Market Failure as a Criminal Catalyst (Research question 3 and Theme 4)

The relationship between post-harvest losses and crime is economic. High prices act as a barrier to entry for the poor. The data suggests that when the formal food system (supermarkets/legal markets) becomes unaffordable, juveniles are pushed into the informal economy, which is often a gateway to more serious criminal activity.

h. The Role of the School Environment (Integrated Discussion)

Finally, the data answers the research focus by identifying the school feeding program as the most critical point of intervention. If the food system fails at the school level (Theme 3), the juvenile justice system inevitably sees a spike in cases, as the school is the last barrier between a vulnerable child and a life of survival-based crime.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings suggest that juvenile criminality in Eswatini is often a symptom of Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 Crisis or worse conditions, which currently affect over 20% of the population. In regions like the Lowveld, where nearly 72,000 people face crisis levels, juveniles are disproportionately affected by the loss of livelihoods. The decline in agriculture's share of the GDP from 12.3% in 2000 to 8.1% in 2023 and the 12% projected decline in maize production for 2024 highlight a shrinking base of legal survival options for rural youth. When households adopt crisis coping strategies, youth may resort to theft or involvement in illegal food distribution networks as a means to provide for themselves and their families.

The findings of this study provide empirical confirmation of General Strain Theory (GST), demonstrating that juvenile criminality in Eswatini is a direct manifestation of the systemic strains inherent in an unsustainable food system. By identifying that the volatility of rain-fed agriculture and climate shocks lead to a failure in ecological justice, this research validates Agnew’s (1992) assertion that high-magnitude, perceived unjust strains, such as chronic food insecurity, pressure individuals into delinquent coping mechanisms. The resulting social isolation and diminished sense of belonging among Eswatini’s youth serve as the negative affective states that GST predicts will weaken social bonds and trigger criminal adaptations. Ultimately, the study confirms the theory by showing that when the food system fails to meet basic biological and social needs, juvenile delinquency emerges not as a choice of character, but as a corrective survival strategy in response to environment-driven strain.

CONCLUSIONS

Juvenile criminality in Eswatini is inextricably linked to the country's unsustainable food systems. The heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture and the high vulnerability to climate shocks create a volatile environment for nearly half the population who are under 20. The current food system fails to provide "ecological justice," leading to social isolation and a diminished sense of belonging among youth, which are known precursors to delinquent behavior.

Implications

Implications for Action

Immediate intervention is required to stabilize food prices and improve access for urban households who rely on purchases. Programs like "Nkwe!" (urgency and speed) should be applied to food security initiatives to prevent further spikes in juvenile arrest records related to survival crimes.

Implications for the Body of Knowledge

This study contributes to green cultural criminology by providing a specific case study of how environmental and systemic agricultural failures are criminalized through the actions of the youth they fail to support. It shifts the narrative of juvenile delinquency from individual deviance to a consequence of systemic food system instability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Eswatini needs to promote climate-resilient agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture should prioritize the climate proof and resilience project to shift from rain-fed to irrigated systems, reducing the impact of dry spells on staple crop availability.

There is need to integrate food literacy in the education system of the Kingdom. The Ministry of Education and Training should incorporate food literacy at an early stage of education to help children develop a positive relationship with food systems even under stress.

The population of Eswatini should reduce post-harvest losses. Farmers must invest in sealed food storage, hermetic bags, and improved transport infrastructure to save the 30% of food currently lost before reaching markets.

There is also need to transition the school feeding program from a procurement-based model to a production-based model. By establishing solar-irrigated school gardens, schools can bypass the unsustainable rain-fed national system that failed the 2024 - 2025 cohorts.

Develop a tracking tool within the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to flag students with high absenteeism during IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) periods. This will help the ministry to make immediate interventions to prevent issues such as school drop-out and criminality.

There is also need to revitalise the agriculture and consumer science curriculum to include climate-smart techniques and food literacy. Education should focus on the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) path for over-aged or at-risk learners.

Collaborate with the Deputy Prime Minister's office to ensure the orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) Grant covers not just fees, but a nutritional supplement for the household.

REFERENCES

1. Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47–88. doi.org

2. Agnew, R. (2001). Building on the foundation of general strain theory: Specifying the type of strain most likely to lead to crime and delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 38(4), 319–361. doi.org
3. Al-Kindi Center for Research and Development. (2023). Criminal consequences of unsustainable food systems. <https://alkindipublishers.org/index.php/jhss/article/view/6277>
4. BORGEN Magazine. (2025). The rising case of hunger in Eswatini. <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/hunger-in-eswatini/>
5. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
6. Global Child Nutrition Foundation. (2024). ESwatini - 2024 report. https://gcnf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/eSwatini_2024_Report_R3.pdf
7. Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini. (2024). Eswatini government programme of action 2024_2025 to 2028_2029. https://www.gov.sz/images/CabinetMinisters/ESWATINI%20GOVERNMENT%20PROGRAMME%20OF%20ACTION%20%202024_2025%20TO%202028_2029.pdf
8. Hennink, M. M. (2014). *Focus group discussions*. Oxford University Press.
9. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. (2024). Eswatini: Acute food insecurity analysis: June 2024 - March 2025. https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Eswatini_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Jun2024_Mar2025_Report.pdf
10. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. (2025). Eswatini: IPC acute food insecurity analysis: June 2025 - March 2026. <https://reliefweb.int/report/eswatini/eswatini-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-analysis-june-2025-march-2026-published-31-july-2025>
11. International Monetary Fund. (2024). Kingdom of Eswatini - 2024 Article IV consultation. <https://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/cr/2024/english/1swzea2024002-print-pdf.pdf>
12. National Institutes of Health. (2024). Development of food literacy in children and adolescents. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10925906/>
13. Nutrition Dialogues. (2024). Eswatini nutrition dialogues country-level synthesis. <https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Eswatini-Nutrition-Dialogues-Country.pdf>
14. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
15. ResearchGate. (2025). A qualitative study of juvenile offenders, student engagement, and interpersonal relationships. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233203810_A_Qualitative_Study_of_Juvenile_Offenders_Student_Engagement_and_Interpersonal_Relationships_Implications_for_Research_Directions_and_Preventionist_Approaches
16. Tenny, S., Brannan, G. D., & Brannan, J. M. (2022). *Qualitative study*. StatPearls Publishing. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470395/>
17. United Nations. (2024). 2024 Eswatini UN annual results report. https://uninfo.blob.core.windows.net/uninfo-production-main/04c52c93-41d4-4e6f-b2a8-3be38702484d_Eswatini%20UN%20Results%20Report%202024.pdf
18. White, R., Haines, F., & Asquith, N. L. (2017). *Crime & criminology* (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.
19. World Food Programme. (2025). Eswatini annual country report 2024. <https://wfp.tind.io/record/130562/files/ELR%203528.pdf>