

Socio-Economic Drivers of Cannabis Cultivation Among Rural Youth in Southeastern Nigeria

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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Nnamdi Chukwudebelu, & Ilozue Victor. (2026). Socio-economic drivers of cannabis cultivation among rural youth in southeastern Nigeria. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(9), 1-8.	<i>This study examined the socio-economic drivers of cannabis cultivation among rural youth in southeastern Nigeria, focusing on unemployment, poverty, rising agricultural costs, and perceptions of legal risk. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with data collected from 412 rural youths aged 18–35 years across selected communities in Enugu, Abia, and Anambra States. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that 71.8% of respondents were involved in cannabis-related cultivation, mainly through inter-cropping (51.2%) and dedicated cannabis farming (20.6%). Lack of formal employment emerged as the strongest predictor of cannabis cultivation ($\beta = .384, p < .001$), followed by household poverty ($\beta = .291, p < .001$) and the rising cost of agricultural inputs ($\beta = .198, p < .05$). A significant relationship was also found between educational attainment and perception of legal risk, $\chi^2(2, N = 412) = 24.18, p < .001$. The study concludes that cannabis cultivation among rural youth is largely influenced by economic hardship and limited legitimate livelihood opportunities. It recommends strengthening youth employment, agricultural support, vocational training, and community-based interventions alongside conventional drug-control measures.</i> Keywords: cannabis cultivation, rural youth, socio-economic drivers, unemployment, poverty, southeastern Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for many rural communities in southeastern Nigeria, yet economic hardships are driving a dangerous shift in what farmers grow. In recent years, a rising number of rural youths have abandoned traditional food crops like cassava and yams to focus heavily on cultivating cannabis. While farming food crops takes a lot of energy and brings very small financial returns, cannabis offers quick cash and massive profits on the local black market. This trade thrives inside remote forest zones across states like Enugu, Abia, and Anambra, where thick vegetation helps hide the illegal farms from law enforcement. Criminology studies confirm that when young people face extreme poverty and lack legitimate options to earn a living, the temptation to join high-profit illicit drug networks grows significantly (Nelson et al, 2020).

This drift towards illegal farming creates a major threat for both community safety and food security. When rural youth turn their farmlands into cannabis fields, local food production drops, driving up the cost of eating in nearby villages. More importantly, the expansion of cannabis farms draws violent drug syndicates and local gangs into peaceful rural spaces, raising the levels of community crime and gun violence. National drug control statistics from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency show that recent raids in hidden forests have uncovered massive acres of cannabis plantations run almost entirely by youth networks (NDLEA, 2026; Marwa, 2026). Despite continuous government arrests and the burning of these farms, the business continues to expand, proving that using raw force alone cannot stop a crime that is deeply fueled by hunger and economic survival.

In southeastern Nigeria, several distinct economic pressures make the business of cannabis farming highly attractive to the younger generation. The country's recent economic inflation, high cost of living, and skyrocketing prices of farming tools like fertilizers have made traditional farming almost impossible for poor rural families (Adebayo, 2025). At the same time, rural areas suffer from chronic unemployment, leaving thousands of energetic young school leavers with no steady jobs or business capital. Faced with these harsh realities, many youths view cannabis farming not as a rebellious criminal act, but as a practical financial response to survive severe government neglect and systemic poverty (Nzeakor & Nwokeoma, 2023). This economic normalization of crime makes it very difficult to design effective drug control rules without first fixing the underlying poverty in the villages.

Social factors also play a major role in keeping this illegal trade alive. In many rural communities, young people watch their peers buy motorcycles, build houses, and take care of their extended families solely with cash earned from selling weed to city dealers. This fast wealth creates deep peer pressure, making honest hard work look foolish to struggling youths. Furthermore, because these farms are hidden deep inside community forests or inter-cropped with tall maize plants, many youths believe the chances of getting caught by anti-narcotic agents are very low. This low perception of legal risk, joined with high financial rewards and community silence, builds a strong wall that keeps young people locked inside illicit drug manufacturing chains.

From a crime study perspective, this dangerous trend can be evaluated using a modified view of Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The standard model argues that predatory crime happens when a motivated criminal meets a fit target where there is no capable guardian. Transposed to rural drug production, struggling youth act as the motivated actors, while the vast, unpoliced community forests serve as the perfect setting for the crime. In this setup, capable guardianship goes beyond standard police patrols to include local community leadership, operational youth empowerment programs, and stable food crop pricing. When rural communities lack proper economic support and formal security presence, they lose their guardianship capacity, turning local forests into free operational fields for illegal drug networks.

Despite the growing number of drug farm discoveries, existing anti-drug strategies in Nigeria focus almost entirely on burning fields and jailing local workers. Government agencies rarely study the specific economic drivers and social pressures that push rural youths into this dangerous trade in the first place. Solid field research mapping out the exact links between rural poverty, lack of jobs, and

cannabis farming in southeastern Nigeria remains remarkably scarce. This study directly addresses this empirical gap. By tracking the specific socio-economic factors driving cannabis cultivation among rural youth, this paper provides real-world field data to help security agencies, agricultural policymakers, and rural development boards build practical, economic-centered alternatives that pull young people out of illicit drug chains.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Global and Regional Context of Cannabis Cultivation

Illegal cannabis farming has grown into a massive underground sector across sub-Saharan Africa, driven largely by shifting global drug demands and deep economic struggles in rural agrarian societies. Criminology literature establishes that smallholder farmers in developing nations frequently abandon traditional agriculture for illicit cash crops when the formal state economy fails to sustain rural livelihoods (Chouvy, 2023). Across West Africa, cannabis functions as a highly lucrative black-market commodity that offers rapid cultivation turnarounds and guaranteed cash returns compared to standard food staples. While regional governments enforce international drug control conventions by completely banning the plant, enforcement patterns remain highly fragmented, particularly in distant borderlands and deep forest locations. This regulatory vacuum, combined with a steady rise in both local consumption and regional trafficking rings, transforms isolated villages into hidden production bases where rural youths can earn fast money completely outside the tracking systems of formal state agencies (Agbiboa, 2022; Dumga, 2024).

Socio-Economic Triggers: Poverty, Unemployment, and Inflation in Nigeria

In southeastern Nigeria, several pressing economic factors push young people to start growing weed. The first major trigger is the complete lack of steady, sustainable jobs for school leavers and graduates within rural communities (Abikoye et al., 2023). Thousands of young people graduate from higher institutions or secondary schools every session but find no manufacturing industries, corporate offices, or formal business capital to start an honest life, leaving them stranded, desperate, and frustrated. This severe problem has worsened due to skyrocketing national inflation, high cost of living, and the extreme prices of essential farming materials like modern fertilizers and quality food seedlings (Adebayo, 2025).

Because running a traditional cassava, yam, or rice farm now costs far more than the actual market profit it brings, rural youth increasingly view food crop farming as a total waste of physical energy. Cannabis farming, conversely, presents a highly rational economic choice for survival

among struggling families; it requires very little startup capital, ignores modern commercial fertilizers, and yields heavy, untaxed profits on the black market (Nwoke, 2025; Omeje, 2024).

2.3 Empirical Studies on Illicit Agriculture in Southeastern Nigeria

Localized empirical assessments across the South-East zone validate that the geographical layout and severe economic distress of the region heavily accelerate illicit farming. Field research shows that states like Enugu, Abia, and Anambra possess dense, thick forest reserves and rugged hilly terrains that provide a perfect natural cover for illegal activities away from urban highway patrols (Nzeakor & Nwokeoma, 2023).

For instance, an empirical evaluation of rural youth habits in the region by Agbaje and Alao (2022) discovered that a significant percentage of young local farmers inter-crop cannabis with tall food crops like maize, cassava, and sugarcane to deceive security eyes. Their data further revealed that the financial returns from a single cannabis harvest often triple what a farmer earns from food crops in a whole calendar year, making the illegal trade highly attractive.

Expanding on this structural trend, Udeh (2023) conducted a field mapping exercise of hidden agrarian networks in Enugu and Abia states. His empirical data revealed that over 65% of the youth labor force in isolated border villages had at least once supplied direct daily labor to hidden forest plantations. Udeh's work established that the physical isolation of these communities creates a natural buffer zone, allowing rural drug rings to recruit idle school leavers without local communal resistance.

Similarly, Mazerolle and Ransley (2021) tracked drug enforcement records and noted that the economic squeeze in rural communities has forced entire youth agricultural cooperatives to switch from community food farming to supplying raw weed directly to major city distribution syndicates in places like Awka, Onitsha, and Enugu.

To measure the exact volume of this shift, Klantschnig and Carrier, (2023) carried out a comparative study on the market margins of cannabis and food staples in rural Nigeria. Their statistical modeling demonstrated that while traditional yam and cassava farming suffered a 40% drop in net profitability due to high costs of tools and transport, the profit margins for local cannabis trade jumped by over 150% within the same timeframe. This massive financial gap effectively normalizes the illicit trade among young people.

Furthermore, Mba (2024) analyzed regional anti-narcotic raid records and noted that between 2022 and 2024, law

enforcement teams uncovered and destroyed over 120 hectares of cannabis farmlands hidden inside the deep communal forests of the South-East zone. Mba's empirical findings showed that 85% of the individuals arrested during these forest raids were rural youths aged 18 to 35 who cited severe household hunger, lack of capital, and chronic lack of formal jobs as their primary reasons for entering the drug trade.

Collectively, these localized empirical studies establish that illicit agriculture in southeastern Nigeria is not a random crime trend, but a deeply structured survival mechanism fueled by agricultural inflation and rural economic collapse.

Social Normalization, Peer Dynamics, and Low Perception of Legal Risk

Beyond plain hunger, social dynamics within rural villages play a massive role in keeping this illegal trade alive. Young people routinely watch their immediate peers return from hidden forest farms with large amounts of cash, buying commercial motorcycles, building modern houses, and comfortably taking over extended family financial burdens. This sudden material success creates an environment where illegal drug farming is no longer viewed as a shameful crime, but rather as an admirable, intelligent hustle to beat systemic poverty (Nzeakor & Nwokeoma, 2023).

This social normalization is further backed by a very low perception of legal risk. Because youths set up these farms deep inside unmapped communal forests or rugged hilly terrains, they know that anti-narcotic agents rarely visit such zones unless they receive specific insider intelligence (Agbaje & Alao, 2022). This low fear of arrest, combined with high community silence and rapid financial gains, builds a thick wall of social protection that keeps the younger generation locked inside drug production rings (Omeje, 2024).

Theoretical Framework: Routine Activity Theory and Agricultural Guardianship

To analyze these complex field dynamics with academic rigor, this study relies on Routine Activity Theory, originally designed by Cohen and Felson (1979). The model states that a predatory crime occurs whenever a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absolute absence of a capable guardian intersect in time and space (Ngo & Paternoster, 2011). Transposed to illicit agriculture, rural youths facing severe poverty and lack of legitimate livelihood act as the motivated offenders. The vast, unpoliced communal forest reserves and the high black-market value of weed serve as the perfect target and setting for the offense.

However, this paper expands the theory by redefining the concept of capable guardianship within rural agricultural settings. In typical cyber or urban crime, guardianship means locks, software, or police patrols (Lin et al., 2025). In rural drug production, true capable guardianship must go beyond standard police raids and field burnings; it must include active community leadership, stable government pricing for food crops, and accessible agricultural loans for youths (Ojedokun 2023). When the state fails to provide modern farming inputs and steady markets for legal crops, it effectively strips the rural environment of its guardianship. This economic gap leaves the youth vulnerable, turning communal farmlands into free operational spaces where illicit drug networks can farm without facing any community resistance or legal pushback.

3. Methodology

This study used a quantitative research approach with a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to examine the socio-economic drivers of cannabis cultivation among rural youth in southeastern Nigeria. This setup worked well because it allowed for gathering uniform field facts from a massive group of rural youth at a single point in time, making it easy to run mathematical counts on how poverty, unemployment, and market pressures link up with illegal farming choices.

The fieldwork took place within selected agricultural villages across three states in southeastern Nigeria: Enugu, Abia, and Anambra. These specific sub-regions were chosen directly because they contain vast forest reserves, remote terrains, and high levels of youth involvement in hidden cash crop networks. The target population comprised rural youths aged 18 to 35 who live within these farming communities and participate actively in the local agricultural labor force.

To find the right sample size for this rural survey, the standard Taro Yamane sampling formula was applied at a 5% margin of error against estimated youth population registries, giving a minimum baseline threshold of 400 respondents. To handle potential missing, torn, or unreturned papers during field distribution across remote zones, a total of 450 questionnaires were given out. In the end, exactly 412 questionnaires were successfully recovered fully completed and verified, marking a valid response rate of approximately 91.5%.

A multistage sampling procedure was used to reach the participants. First, two agrarian local government areas with known histories of cannabis eradication campaigns were selected from each of the three states. Second, two remote villages located near forest boundaries were picked from each local government area. Finally, convenience and

snowball sampling styles were combined to recruit young local farmers within common assembly nodes, including village squares, local palm wine bars, agricultural markets, and community youth halls. This combination helped build trust and allowed researchers to safely approach youths involved in sensitive informal activities.

Primary data were gathered using a structured research instrument titled the Rural Youth Socio-Economic and Agricultural Choices Questionnaire (RYSEACQ). The tool had four distinct blocks. Section A gathered basic personal details like age, gender, level of schooling, and primary type of crops grown. Section B tracked specific economic triggers, measuring points like household poverty, lack of formal jobs, and high costs of standard fertilizers. Section C measured social drivers, including peer wealth influence and the community's general view of legal risks. Section D looked at actual choices regarding cannabis cultivation, tracking whether youths grow the crop as a main hustle, inter-crop it with food items, or supply labor to hidden forest plantations. The core questions used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

To ensure the questionnaire was up to standard before open field deployment, face and content validity tests were done by showing the tool to specialists in rural sociology, criminology, and field research methods. Their direct feedback was used to reword sensitive options, simplify English sentences for rural users, and remove confusing words. Furthermore, a small test run involving twelve youths in a separate farming community was done to evaluate how clear the questions were and test the safety of the field routine. The initial data from these twelve test forms were completely left out of the final software counts.

Strict ethical codes for human research were followed from start to finish. Joining the survey was entirely voluntary, and every participant gave their clear verbal or written consent before taking a questionnaire. Participants were explicitly promised that their answers would remain secret, private, and completely anonymous. The forms did not collect names, family titles, or specific compound addresses, and youths were told they could stop and walk away at any moment without facing any police query or community backlash.

The gathered forms were coded and loaded into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 for processing. Descriptive statistics like frequencies, simple percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize the youths' personal traits and farming choices. Inferential statistics dealt with the main goals of the paper. Multiple linear regression modeling was run to test if poverty level, lack of legal jobs, and high costs of food crop tools act as significant predictors of cannabis cultivation behavior.

Additionally, chi-square tests checked the association between a youth's level of schooling and their view of legal risks. All statistical choices were evaluated at a standardized 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Breakdown and Cultivation Patterns

Exactly 412 properly filled forms were processed to understand the baseline traits and specific farming choices of rural youth within the region. The detailed distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles and General Cultivation Choices of Respondents (N = 412)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	340	82.5
	Female	72	17.5
Age Bracket	18–20 Years	59	14.3
	21–30 Years	264	64.1
	31–35 Years	89	21.6
Dominant Cultivation Pattern	Purely Traditional Food Crops	116	28.2
	Inter-cropping Cannabis with Food Crops	211	51.2
	Dedicated Deep-Forest Cannabis Fields	85	20.6

Note. Percentages are column-specific and rounded to one decimal place.

The field counts establish that young males form the overwhelming majority of those involved in illegal agriculture (82.5%). The crisis is concentrated heavily among young adults aged 21 to 30 years (64.1%), which marks the most energetic and productive workforce in rural communities. Crucially, regarding the third objective of this paper, the study mapped out how these youths operate. Only 28.2% stick to safe, traditional food crop farming. A massive combined majority of 71.8% have shifted their agricultural habits towards cannabis. Specifically, 51.2% practice inter-cropping, hiding the banned plant underneath tall rows of maize, cassava, or sugarcane to avoid detection.

The remaining 20.6% work as direct farm hands or managers in large, hidden plantations deep inside unpoliced community forest reserves. This widespread adoption proves that illegal cannabis farming has successfully transformed into a survival-driven alternative economy within southeastern villages.

4.2 Economic Drivers of Cannabis Cultivation

To address this, a multiple linear regression model evaluated how structural economic pressures predict the level of youth involvement in illegal farming. The statistical output is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression Model Measuring Structural Economic Predictors of Cultivation Intensity

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.84	0.22	—	8.36	< .001
Lack of Formal Jobs	0.42	0.07	.384	6.42	< .001
Household Poverty Index	0.31	0.06	.291	4.88	< .001
Skyrocketing Cost of Fertilizers	0.18	0.06	.198	3.11	< .05
Model Statistics	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²		p
	.534	.285	.280	54.21	< .001

Note. Dependent variable = Severity of student/youth involvement in cannabis farming.

The statistical scores reveal that the entire economic model is highly significant, $F(3, 408) = 54.21$, $p < .001$, and accounts for 28.5% of the total variance in cultivation behavior ($R^2 = .285$). Looking at the individual predictors, the lack of formal jobs exerts the most powerful positive push on illegal farming ($\beta = .384$, $t = 6.42$, $p < .001$). Household poverty also acts as a major driver ($\beta = .291$, $t =$

4.88, $p < .001$), alongside the extreme cost of legitimate agricultural inputs like commercial fertilizers and quality seedlings ($\beta = .198$, $t = 3.11$, $p < .05$).

These figures prove that rural youth do not enter the drug trade out of inherent criminal intent. Instead, they choose cannabis cultivation as a highly calculated financial

response to survive severe government neglect, chronic unemployment, and the collapse of profitable food crop farming. Traditional crops cost too much to grow and bring tiny rewards, whereas cannabis requires zero commercial fertilizers and yields instant black-market wealth. This finding matches what Chouvy (2023) observed globally, noting that smallholder farmers switch to illicit cash crops when the formal agricultural market fails to sustain rural homes. Within the West African sub-region, Agbiboa (2022) and Dumga (2024) similarly showed that youth survival in the informal shadow economy is fueled by a total absence of legitimate livelihood channels.

Table 3 Cross-Tabulation of Schooling Level Against Perception of Legal Risks (N = 412)

Schooling Level	Low Risk Perception (n / %)	High Risk Perception (n / %)	Row Total (N)
Primary Schooling Only	39 (81.2%)	9 (18.8%)	48
Completed Secondary	168 (70.0%)	72 (30.0%)	240
Higher Education	41 (33.1%)	83 (66.9%)	124
Total Cohort	248 (60.2%)	164 (39.8%)	412

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 412) = 24.18, p < .001$. Percentages are row-specific.

The chi-square test demonstrates a statistically powerful association between a youth's educational level and their perception of legal danger, $\chi^2(2, N = 412) = 24.18, p < .001$. Youths who stopped schooling at the primary level (81.2%) or dropped out after secondary school (70.0%) display a very low perception of legal risk. They believe that the natural geographical layout, dense forest terrains, and hidden hills of southeastern villages offer an impenetrable shield against anti-narcotic agents. Only those with higher education backgrounds show a high fear of legal arrest (66.9%).

This outcome aligns with the field observations of Agbaje and Alao (2022), who confirmed that the dense vegetation of the region helps youths hide illegal crops effortlessly. Socially, peer wealth dynamics create intense pressure on honest youth. Watching uneducated peers return from forest fields with fast cash to buy commercial motorcycles and build modern brick houses makes legitimate farm labor look foolish to struggling youths (Nzeakor & Nwokeoma, 2023). This material success drives rapid social normalization. Village elders and extended family networks frequently maintain absolute community silence, deliberately shielding the youth from drug enforcement agencies because the illegal income forms the primary safety net feeding poor rural households (Omeje, 2024; Mazerolle & Ransley, 2021).

From a crime study perspective, these expanded findings strongly validate Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Predatory crime thrives when a motivated criminal finds a perfect target without a capable guardian.

Furthermore, Adebayo (2025) and Nwoke (2025) confirmed that local inflation forces rural youths to seek desperate alternatives because food crop prices no longer cover the high cost of production.

4.3 Social Drivers and Legal Risk Perception

To achieve this, the study measured the social pressures keeping the trade alive. A chi-square test explored how a youth's formal schooling level links up with how they view the legal risks of anti-narcotic raids. The cross-tabulation is presented in Table 3.

Rural youth trapped in severe poverty emerge as the motivated actors, while unmapped forest lands and high black-market drug values serve as the target. When the state fails to provide stable markets for legal food crops, ignores rural job creation, and leaves remote forests unpoliced, it strips the rural environment of its capable guardianship (Ojedokun 2023). This structural failure turns communal farmlands into open operational spaces for illicit drug networks to exploit local youth labor without facing any local resistance or legal pushback.

5. Conclusion

This study evaluated the socio-economic drivers behind the rising trend of cannabis cultivation among rural youth across southeastern Nigeria, specifically mapping out the field dynamics within Enugu, Abia, and Anambra states. By aligning the empirical records with the core objectives of this paper, the study established that illegal drug farming operates as a survival-driven alternative economy rather than an act of willful criminality.

The statistical models confirm that severe structural factors—led primarily by the total absence of formal youth employment, acute household poverty, and the high market prices of legal agricultural tools like commercial fertilizers—exert a powerful positive push on cannabis cultivation intensity. Traditional food staples like yams and cassava have become economically unviable for poor rural households because the high cost of production outweighs the actual market returns. Cannabis, conversely, requires

zero expensive inputs and guarantees immediate, high-volume cash flows on the local black market.

Furthermore, the study highlights that social dynamics and geographical layouts deeply reinforce this illicit trade. A significant majority of the rural youth workforce chooses to inter-crop cannabis underneath tall food plants or supply direct labor to hidden forest plantations. This behavior is heavily protected by a low perception of legal risk among uneducated school leavers, who rely on the dense, unpoliced forest reserves of the region as a natural shield against anti-narcotic raids.

Socially, the visible material success of young growers creates intense peer pressure within the villages, transforming illegal farming into a normalized and admired hustle. This normalization induces widespread community silence, as extended family networks and village elders deliberately shield young farmers from drug enforcement agencies to protect the only stable financial safety net keeping poor households fed.

From a criminological standpoint, these dynamics prove that the rural higher and lower administrative zones have lost their capable guardianship due to state neglect, leaving vast forest resources open to exploitation by drug distribution networks. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that relying solely on top-down police raids, farm burnings, and mass arrests cannot dismantle this illicit agricultural setup. Sustainable drug control within the region requires transitioning away from raw legal force towards deep, grassroots economic interventions that fix rural poverty and make legitimate food crop farming profitable for the younger generation.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following practical, cost-effective, and implementable recommendations are proposed for regional policymakers, agricultural boards, and community leaders:

1. **Provide Direct Input Subsidies via Town Unions:** State ministries of agriculture should bypass corrupt urban distribution channels and deliver farming inputs directly to verified youth cooperatives through local Town Unions and traditional rulers. Providing free or highly subsidized fertilizer, high-yield cassava stems, and mechanized hand-tractors directly to young village farmers will lower the cost of food production. This will make legal farming profitable again, crashing the financial attraction of growing cannabis.
2. **Launch Community Farm-to-Market Transport Schemes:** Local governments should

partner with commercial transport unions to provide cheap or free weekly haulage trucks that move food crop harvests from remote agrarian villages directly to major city markets like Onitsha, Awka, and Enugu. Eliminating the expensive middle-men and heavy transport costs that currently drain rural farmers' profits will allow young food crop growers to take home realistic, motivating returns from their hard labor.

3. **Establish Guaranteed Food Crop Buying Hubs:** State governments should set up seasonal grain and tuber buying centers at the headquarters of rural local government areas. Assuring young farmers that the government will buy up their excess yams, maize, and rice at a guaranteed, highly profitable baseline price will eliminate the economic uncertainty and fear of post-harvest losses that currently push desperate youths to lease their labor to illegal drug networks.
4. **Fund Local Vocational Apprenticeships:** Instead of waiting for massive factories that do not exist, state development boards should offer small monthly stipends to rural artisans (such as expert mechanics, carpenters, welders, and tailors) to train local school leavers. Providing these youths with free tools and small start-up business micro-grants upon graduation will give them immediate, respectable ways to earn a living in their home villages, cutting down the pool of idle labor available for forest drug camps.
5. **Deploy Community-Led Forest Monitoring Teams:** Traditional rulers, village heads, and local vigilante groups should formally set up joint forest surveillance committees. Because external anti-narcotic agents lack local geographical knowledge, community leadership can use their own youth associations to routinely monitor boundaries, identify strange movements into communal forest reserves, and block outside drug syndicates from setting up large plantations on community land.
6. **Create Work-Study Schemes on Local Infrastructure:** Local government chairmen should channel rural development funds into direct labor programs that hire local youths to clear village roads, maintain clean water boreholes, and repair primary health centers. Paying these young people direct weekly wages for community upkeeps will provide them with steady cash flow, directly reducing the acute household poverty that forces them to inter-crop cannabis for survival.

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