

Step 4: Section Summaries (English)

Title: Introduction and Research Question

Short description: This section introduces the study's purpose, focusing on how scarcity influences trusting behaviour.

Abstract:

Trusting behaviour is a key element of cooperation, which is essential for economic performance. However, scarcity—particularly food scarcity—may reduce trust due to increased personal risk in cooperative interactions. The study investigates this phenomenon by examining how seasonal food scarcity affects trusting behaviour in rural Tanzania. Through a quasi-experimental approach, researchers measure changes in trust before and after the harvest. The findings contribute to the broader literature on poverty and economic decision-making, emphasizing the behavioral impacts of scarcity.

Title: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Short description: Discusses previous research on trust, scarcity, and economic behaviour.

Abstract:

Prior research has established that trust correlates with economic success, yet trust also involves risk, particularly in environments where resources are scarce. Theoretical foundations from behavioural economics suggest that scarcity may heighten the cost of trust, thereby reducing cooperation. The paper builds on existing studies that explore the impact of poverty on decision-making, self-control, and risk aversion, emphasizing how food scarcity influences cooperative behaviour at the individual level.

Title: Empirical Setting – The Singida Region

Short description: Provides background on the study's location and socio-economic conditions.

Abstract:

The study takes place in Singida, a semi-arid region in central Tanzania where most residents depend on subsistence farming. The economy is highly seasonal, with food scarcity peaking before the annual harvest. Due to limited financial and storage infrastructure, many households experience temporary shortages, leading to fluctuations in social and economic behaviour. Historical accounts suggest that scarcity disrupts social cohesion, making Singida an ideal case study for investigating the relationship between food security and trust.

Title: Experimental Design and Methodology

Short description: Describes the experimental setup and data collection methods.

Abstract:

The study employs a modified trust game to measure trusting behaviour among farmers before and after the harvest. Participants decide whether to invest in a cooperative exchange, knowing that the return depends on the reciprocation of another player. To establish causality, the study incorporates randomized elements, such as a scarcity prime (making participants' resource constraints more salient) and an ingroup/outgroup distinction. A multi-stage sampling process ensures that the selected participants represent the broader rural population.

Title: Results – Food Scarcity and Trusting Behaviour

Short description: Presents findings on how scarcity influences trust.

Abstract:

Results indicate that trusting behaviour is significantly lower during the lean season compared to the post-harvest period. Statistical analyses confirm that food scarcity mediates this effect—when scarcity is accounted

for, the impact of the harvest on trust becomes insignificant. These findings suggest that scarcity, rather than seasonal factors, is the primary driver of reduced trust. Additional robustness checks, including instrumental variable regressions, further support the conclusion that food insecurity negatively affects cooperative behaviour.

Title: Additional Analyses and Experimental Conditions

Short description: Explores variations in behaviour based on psychological and social factors.

Abstract:

Two additional experiments examine whether the effects of scarcity are amplified by psychological salience or social identity. Results suggest that when scarcity is made mentally salient, trusting behaviour decreases further. Additionally, trust declines more sharply when participants interact with outgroup members, reinforcing the idea that scarcity increases in-group favoritism. However, some difference-in-difference analyses lack statistical precision, indicating that these effects may vary in magnitude.

Title: Mechanisms Explaining Behavioural Changes

Short description: Investigates possible reasons for trust reductions under scarcity.

Abstract:

The study explores whether scarcity alters trust due to changing expectations or shifts in preferences. Analysis of expected returns suggests that participants do not perceive lower trustworthiness in others across seasons, meaning their beliefs remain stable. However, scarcity may influence risk aversion, making individuals less likely to take cooperative risks. Self-reported measures of altruism and risk-taking suggest that scarcity-induced stress might explain why people behave more cautiously during lean periods.

Title: Discussion and Conclusion

Short description: Summarizes findings and discusses policy implications.

Abstract:

The study provides strong evidence that food scarcity reduces trusting behaviour, which has important implications for economic cooperation in resource-limited settings. While trust is essential for overcoming hardship, scarcity paradoxically undermines the very mechanisms that foster resilience. These findings align with broader research on poverty and decision-making but contrast with studies suggesting that adversity strengthens social bonds. Policymakers should consider interventions that mitigate seasonal scarcity to prevent economic and social fragmentation.

Title: References and Supporting Information

Short description: Lists sources and supplementary materials.

Abstract:

The final section provides references to key studies cited in the paper, as well as additional materials such as appendices, data sources, and methodological details. The authors acknowledge contributions from various institutions and detail the replication package for further analysis.