

Cattle Rustling and Sustainability of Nomadic Grazing in Nigeria: A Case Study of Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nomadic grazing has been one of the commonest forms of livestock rearing in Nigeria. This form of livestock management has thrived successfully over the years in the past and sustained many economic activities including local production of dairy products and meat, export in hides and skin, local leather works and tannery among others. However, nomadic grazing as a form of livestock management is increasingly threatened in recent times by a lot of challenges which include frequent clashes with crop farmers and its attendant loss of lives and properties and cattle rustling. This study appraises the challenges of cattle rustling on the sustainability of nomadic grazing in Nigeria using the case of Taraba State, Nigeria. Data used consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data was generated from a field survey carried out in the State, particularly local communities that have been plagued by incidents of rural banditry and cattle rustling. This was complimented by extensive desk review on the topic. Interviews were conducted face to face basis using structured questionnaire. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study reveals that about 1,758 cows were loss in the State to cattle rustling between 2012 to 2019 based on interaction with cattle herders and additional 1,462 cattle loss was reported to the Ministry of Agriculture Jalingo. Other reported incidence estimated that 64,750 cattles were stolen in 2013 and at least 2,991 herders killed in the North Central States of Nigeria. Findings of the study reveals that there is a general dearth of available statistical data that can be used to ascertain the extent of the menace of cattle rustling, the number of casualties among herders and number of cattle lost to cattle rustlers over the years. The study findings reveal that most of the cow theft cases took place in remote rural communities and forest with no security presence, poor transport and communication networks. Hence, many were never reported nor captured by media reports. Only a handful of cases were reported mostly to the Nigerian Police Force station and noted by the State Ministry of Agriculture. The study reveals that cattle rustling are main trigger in attacks by herders and crop farmers. Many nomads have been completely stripped of their cattle. Many affected heads of household's have abandoned their families, leaving women and children behind to cater for themselves. The study concludes that cattle rustling are a great threat to pastoral nomadism in Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommends the establishment of ranching and strengthening of security operations in the State and country.

Keywords: *Armed Banditry; Cattle Rustling; Nomadic Grazing; Sustainable Grazing*

Introduction

Nomadic grazing has been one of the commonest forms of livestock rearing in Nigeria. Nomadic grazing is mostly practice by the Fulani ethnic group. It is a type of livestock management that involves the movement of large herds in search of pasture and water. Nomadic grazing over the years took different forms which involve seasonal movement of animals from the drier northern parts to the shores of the

Lake Chad (extreme Northeast Nigeria), movement from the drier northern parts to the wetter southern parts and movement of animals from mountain top to the valleys. This form of livestock management has thrived successfully over the years in the past and sustained many economic activities including local production of dairy products and meat, export in hides and skin, local leather works and tannery among others. However, nomadic grazing as a form of livestock management is increasingly threatened in recent times by a lot of challenges which include frequent clashes with crop farmers and its attendant loss of lives and properties and cattle rustling. Many state governments in Nigeria have come up with anti-open grazing laws which made it illegal to practice nomadic grazing in these states. The Federal Government of Nigeria's attempt to implement RUGA policy which is aimed at settling the nomadic farmers met with stiff resistance by many State Governments and citizens leading to temporary suspension of the policy.

It has been observed that there is absence of descriptive literature on the current situation and much existing materials are old and out-dated. This according to Blench [1] explains the need for case studies, systematic research and careful situation analysis to underpin future planning. While there is a general dearth of available statistical data that can be used to ascertain the extent of the menace of cattle rustling, the figures put forward by Okoli and Okpaleke [2] situate the number of casualties among herders to be over 300 with over 60,000 cattle lost to cattle rustlers just in the year 2013 alone across 6 states in the Northern part of the country.

In the light of the above, it seems that nomadic grazing as a form of livestock management is no longer sustainable again in Nigeria in the face of increasing human population, expansion of crop farming, increasing conflict with crop farmers and armed banditry among others. There is therefore the need to examine the challenges posed by cattle rustling on the sustainability of nomadic grazing in Nigeria and the prospects of cattle ranching as an alternative. This study appraises the challenges of cattle rustling on the sustainability of nomadic grazing in Nigeria using the case of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Description of the study area

Taraba state is located between latitude 6°25'N to 9°30'N and longitude 9°30'E to 11°45'E. The State has tropical continental type of climate and Sudan Savannah type of vegetation. The State has land area of about 60,291 km² with an estimated population of over 3 million people projected from the 2006 population census. The State is located in the southernmost part of North east region of Nigeria. It is bordered on the west by Nassarawa and Plateau States, to the north by Bauchi and Gombe states and by Adamawa State to the northeast. The state also shares its south western boundary with Benue State. Taraba State is bounded on the south and south east by the Republic of Cameroon (an international boundary). The State consists of undulating landscape dotted with mountainous features.

The Mambilla mountain region of the State provides a tsetsefly-free grassy highland area that is highly suitable for cattle rearing. It is one of the areas with the highest concentration of livestock population in Nigeria. It has been observed that over six million heads of cattle exist on the Mambilla plateau in the 1980s [3,4]. The guinea and derived savanna zones provide much more adequate grazing during the dry season. In terms of their nutritive value they are at best only at the short period at the beginning of the rains when the plants are still young and succulent. As the rainy season progresses they grow coarser and provide less roughage. The luxuriant growth of the grasses also reduces the proportion of leguminous plants in the community which further lowers the nutritive value of the grasslands. The State has all breeds of animals including cattle, horse, donkeys, sheep, pigs, rabbits and poultry such as chickens, ducks, guinea fowls, doves, pigeons etc. Taraba state is a multi-ethnic society sharply divided along religion, ethnicity, culture and language; leading to different contexts of conflicts involving the Jukun, Tiv, Kuteb and Chamba [5].

Materials and Methods

The data used in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data was generated from field survey carried out in the State, particularly local communities that have been plagued by incidents of rural banditry and cattle rustling. Multi-stage sampling

method was used in collecting data for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select areas in the State that are most affected by cattle rustling/raiding especially in the northern and central senatorial districts of the State. The selected senatorial districts were used as study clusters (first-stage cluster sampling). Thereafter, LGAs and communities within the cluster, were selected at random (second-stage cluster sampling). Then, random samples within each community were selected (third-stage cluster sampling), from which interviews were conducted by use of a structured questionnaire. Livestock herders were asked questions about their herd composition, experience with cattle rustling and how it has affected them. A total of 45 cattle rearers were interviewed. Data generated from the field survey was complemented by extensive desk review on the topics of cattle rustling and rural banditry. Secondary data relevant to the study were also obtained and used in the study. Such data include information from multiple policy documents (from national and state institutions such as Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMA&RD) and National Livestock Production Research Institute. The desk review provided insights into the global and domestic dynamics of the problem of cattle rustling based on existing information, and from policy-oriented conferences and workshops. Media tracking and records of cattle rustling and rural banditry incidences provided further sources of information. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Conceptual framework

Cattle rustling

Cattle rustling are a situation whereby individuals or groups plan and organize themselves to steal livestock from pastoralist or grazing fields using force for commercial purpose. "A Cattle rustling is the act of forceful raiding of livestock from one community by another often leaving behind destruction of property and loss of lives" [6]. Cattle rustling occur when 'a group of individuals plan, organise and steal livestock forcefully from another person or from the grazing field or kraal for the purpose of commercial gain. Cattle rustling are also being recognised as a form of transnational organised crime.

Historically, cattle raiding has undergone fundamental changes in terms of causes, effects and content [7]. Osamba observed that varying old tendencies of raids have survived while new ones have also emerged. Today, cattle rustling have taken new and complex dimensions. This development is attributable in part to shrinking resource base, which has provoked a desperate struggle for survival in which restricted movement was the creation of demographic pressures [7]. Cattle rustling has also been observed to often constitute a communal response to natural calamities [7].

Cattle rustling are becoming increasingly serious challenges to livestock production in Nigeria and most countries of Africa. The challenges of cattle rustling in recent times has assumed wide dimension both in scale and violence. It has been increasingly linked to organised criminal and terrorist groups as a source of income [8]. Although cattle rustling has been seen over the years as cultural practices among nomadic communities, the problem has assumed wider dimensions that leads to the commercialization and internationalization of the practice.

East Africa has a long history of cattle rustling. In recent times, the problem of cattle rustling is fast spreading into West and Central Africa, particularly in countries like Nigeria and Cameroon [8]. Since the 1990s, there has been a surge in cattle rustling incidents in most parts of Africa; and the actors and weaponry involved are becoming increasingly sophisticated largely, as a result of the proliferation of small/light arms on the continent. In Kenya, for example, the majority of cattle raiders' guns originated in Somalia and South Sudan [8].

It has been observed that progressive occurrence of cattle rustling involving armed bandits in Nigeria has been a major cause of the attacks by herders in farming communities. At the moment, Zamfara State in the northwest region of Nigeria is the major hotspot for cattle rustling activities, despite the amnesty programme granted by the State Governor in 2017 for cattle rustlers to lay down their weapons.

The North eastern Nigeria’s experience with cattle rustling, now extending throughout the Lake Chad Basin, also involves Boko Haram. The extremist group has begun to rely on cattle rustling activity as a major source of financing. The insurgent group frequently raid cattle in northern Cameroon and transport them via middle men to markets in northern Nigeria. The group’s activities in this regard have had a drastic impact, such that major cattle markets in Borno state have been temporarily shut down to ensure that Boko Haram does not exploit the livestock trade.

Over the last decade, cattle rustling have grown in scale and organisation in several northern states where large bandit groups operate with unwavering boldness. Although cattle rustling is common in the northern part, the epicentre of these criminal activities are the Kamuku forest in Kaduna, Falgore forest in Kano, Dansadau forest in Zamfara and Davin Rugu forest stretching through Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States.

Result and Discussion

The incident of cattle rustling started in Taraba State as far back as 2010 or much more earlier. Many of the cow theft cases took place in remote rural communities and forest with no security presence, poor transport and communication networks. Hence, many were never reported nor captured by media reports. Only a handful of cases were reported mostly to the Nigerian Police Force station and noted by the Ministry of Agriculture. A few of the reported cases of cattle rustling in the State are presented in table 1.

S/N	Communities/LGAs	Persons affected	No. of Cows Stolen	Year of incidence
1	Iware/Ardo Kola	Arma Yau	214	2019
2	Runde/Ardo Kola	Group of local farmers	25	2019
3	Kankwana Pamanga/ Bali	Balarabe Pamanga	122	2019
4	Kankwana/Bali	Mallam Ibrahim	3cow /4 sheep	2019
5	Gandanbana/Bali	Alhaji Yau	26	2019
6	Hauwan Mata /Bali	Ardo Gagare	171	2019
7	Dankolo/Gashaka	Mallam Dadi	16	2019
8	West of Bali town/ Bali	Alhaji Kantu	28	2019
9	Ngada, Gazabu Barkeji/Bali	Alhaji Yaabe	48	2019
10	Obadiah, South of Osuwa/Bali LGA	Alh. Jaye, head of Fulani (Ardo)	16	2018
11	Obadiah, Gazabu - Osuwa/Bali LGA	Borgu Usman	180	2018
12	Taraba State University	Main Campus	53	2018
13	Gadan Bature	Alhaji Ali	178	2017
14	Kararawa (Takalafiya ward)/ Bali	Alh. Baba and Haladu	216 (189 was recovered after heavy gun battle near Dan Anicha)	2017
15	Bakin Dutse/Ardo Kola	Hassan Adamu	100	2014
16	Bakin Dutse/Ardo Kola	Hassan Adamu	95	2013
17	Bakin Dutse/Ardo Kola	Hassan Adamu	100	2010
18	Gadan Kura/Ardo Kola	Hon. Stephen Gbana	55	2013
19	Gidan waya/Ibi	Yakubu Agbezee	70	2012
20	Garbabi/Gashaka	Yushau Ahmed	30	2012
21	Gazabu/Bali	Yunusa Bala	11	2012
	Total		1,758	

Table 1: Cattle rustling incidence in Taraba state.

Source: Field Interview, 2019.

Table 1 shows that there are about 1,758 number of cows’ loss to cattle rustling between 2012 to 2019 from the interaction with key informants in the study area. The reported cases of cattle rustling in Taraba State is presented in table 2. The table 2 shows there were about 1,462 cows reported as stolen by cattle rustlers from the report of Ministry of Agriculture, Jalingo.

S/No	Community affected	No. of Cow loss
1	Abbare/Kunini - Lau LGA	256
2	Donga	265
3	Zango Akabi Ardo Kola	86
4	Pantinapu Yorro LGA	320
5	Takalafiya Bali LGA	251
6	Kungana Bali LGA	67
7	Tella Gassol LGA	217
8	Total	1,462

Table 2: Reported cases of cattle rustling.
 Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Jalingo.

Other reported incidence estimated that in 2013 more than 64,750 cattle were stolen and at least 2,991 herders killed in states across the north-central zone [9]. From 2011 to 2015, bandits, cattle rustlers and other criminals killed 1,135 people in Zamfara state alone, according to the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Vigilante groups formed to combat bandits (variously known as Yan Banga, Yan Sa Kai and Kato da Gora) have compounded insecurity in some areas where the arrest and summary execution of rustlers sometimes has invited massive retaliatory violence. Elsewhere, vigilantes have turned into predators themselves, extorting cash and cattle from herders as “protection levy” [9].

In January 2016, the chairman of a local cattle association in Borno State, Nigeria estimated that 200,000 head of cattle had been stolen, though not all could be attributed to Boko Haram [9]. The group reported that the overall estimates of Boko Haram’s accumulation vary from a few million dollars to upwards of US\$20 million. A 2016 Financial Action Task Force noted that the group stole €13 million worth of cattle during two-large scale incidents in northern Cameroon alone, although this is on the high end of estimates [9].

Methods of cattle rustling

Methods of cattle rustling have evolved in other ways, too. Raids have increased in scale as commercial farms are approached in a more predatory, organised manner; and cattle rustling are marked by high levels of violence. An Al Jazeera report from August 2017 stated that, since late 2016, Baringo County in Kenya has witnessed ‘thousands of livestock stolen and dozens of people shot or killed’ [10].

Rustlers’ activities are now characterized by the use of modern weapons, and their operations are both trans-locational and trans-national [2,11]. Available evidence also suggests that cattle rustling have not only metamorphosed into an immensely sophisticated and efficient organized crime, it is now also motivated by both ‘subsistence’ and ‘commercial’ imperatives [12].

Causes of the increase in cattle rustling

Sociocultural factors causing cattle rustling

1. Cattle rustlers were youths of pastoralist extraction. Reasons adduced for involvement include drugs abuse, absence of education and good moral upbringing.

2. There are documented instances of pastoralists who resort to rustling after losing cattle to disease, inclement weather, and violence [13]. Cattle rustling has the impact of creating a desperate cycle of continuous raids as each group in the area sees it as a means for re-stocking” [7]. According to Ocan [14], initially cattle raids among the pastoral communities were a result of attempts by various groups to maximise herd sizes in order to ensure communal survival [7].
3. Envy - improved technology in cattle rearing by urban residents brings about envy by Fulani cattle rearers in the bush.
4. Bokolo issues - few cows with many people to share. This makes them to go into cattle rustling to meet their needs.
5. Drug abuse - some drug addicted people take to cattle rustling to meet up their drug needs.
6. Most of the cattle being reared by some Fulani are owned by big men in the cities/towns and a typical Fulani man is not happy about that so, he organizes for rustling.

Sperling and Galaty [15] questioned the relationship between livestock owners and herders, stating that relationship between livestock owners and pastoralist has become monetary and can lead to a decline in the level of commitment that the herders will put into herding. Recent studies indicate that the relationship in ownership and practices of herding regarding entrusting of cattle, the numbers of herds owned by labor rich herders are determined by the level of diligence of labor cattle herders.

The trends and peculiarities associated with cattle rustling vary in different parts of Nigeria. In the North-Central geopolitical zone, especially in Plateau, Nasarawa, Benue, and Taraba States, the problem of cattle rustling and rural banditry is framed around wider identity issues, including ethnic differences, ethnicity (minority/majority divide), religious difference and the indigene/settler split; these are linked to struggles over land and water resources [13].

Effects of cattle rustling in Nigeria

1. Cattle rustling are a great threat to the survival of pastoral nomadism. Many nomads have been completely stripped of their cattle.
2. Cattle rustling has affected pastoral nomadism - the threats caused by the increasing numbers of human deaths and livestock losses due to cattle rustling and other organised raids have greatly affected pastoralists’ mobility and/or their migratory decisions as well as herd size, thereby undermining their asset base and livelihood sources [16].
3. Cattle rustling has gender implications as it affects the economy of Fulani women who depend on local dairy products (cheese, oil and other dairy products call Fura da Nono in local language) [17].
4. Many heads of household’s affected by cattle rustling have abandoned their families, leaving women to engage in excessive labour to cater for the families.
5. Cattle rustling greatly affect farming activities through reduction in number of animals used for traction and decrease in quantity of manure, which lead to reduced crop yields [13].
6. Cattle rustling contribute to low crop yields.
7. Cattle rustling led to collapse of many schools and clinics in the rural areas.
8. Cattle rustling has pauperised many pastoralists.

It has been observed that cattle rustling is one of the major reason for the increasing hostility between the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers. For example, previous studies [2,18,19] have extensively documented attacks on Fulani herdsmen in a bid to rustle their cattle, and in some cases many of the herders were killed. While there is lack of statistical data that can be used to ascertain the extent of the menace of cattle rustling, the figures put forward by Okoli and Okpaleke [2] situate the number of casualties among herders to be over 300 with over 60,000 cattle lost to cattle rustlers just in the year 2013 alone across 6 states in the Northern part of the country.

As a result, the modern-day cattle rustlers “operate with modern weaponry and their operations are marked by trans locational” [20]. There have been cases whereby cattle rustlers were apprehended and paraded, and they turn out to be members of both the Fulani and the host farming communities in the Northern part of Nigeria [18]. Cattle rustling has the tendency to adversely affect nomadic livestock herding by its perceived threats and the insecurity generated by it [21-24].

Conclusion

This study has examined the challenges of cattle rustling on the sustainability of nomadic grazing in Nigeria using the case of Taraba State, Nigeria. Findings of the study has revealed that there is a general dearth of available statistical data that can be used to ascertain the extent of the menace of cattle rustling, the number of casualties among herders and number of cattle lost to cattle rustlers over the years. The study findings reveal that most of the cow theft cases took place in remote rural communities and forest with no security presence, poor transport and communication networks. Hence, many were never reported nor captured by media reports. Only a handful of cases were reported mostly to the Nigerian Police Force station and noted by the State Ministry of Agriculture. The findings of the study show that there are about 1,758 number of cows’ loss to cattle rustling between 2012 to 2019 from the interaction with key informants and 1,462 cows reported as stolen by cattle rustlers from the report of Ministry of Agriculture, Jalingo. The study also revealed that in 2013 more than 64,750 cattle were stolen and at least 2,991 herders killed across the north-central zone of Nigeria, while 1,135 people in Zamfara state alone were killed by armed bandits and cattle rustlers between 2011 to 2015. The study reveals that cattle rustling are main trigger in attacks by herders and crop farmers. Many nomads have been completely stripped of their cattle. Many affected heads of households have abandoned their families, leaving women and children behind to cater for themselves. The study concludes that cattle rustling are a great threat to pastoral nomadism in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Establishment of Ranches.
2. Full implementation of open grazing prohibition law in the State.
3. Strengthening of security.

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