

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL THREATS OF CATTLE-RUSTLING TO NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

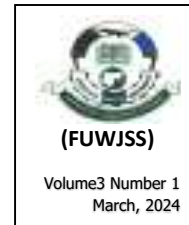
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Abstract

This study assesses the threats of cattle rustling to national security in Nigeria. In recent years, the incident of cattle rustling has systematically increased and heighten tensions which have resulted to the cycle of violence attacks; thereby leading to the loss of cattle to rustlers and the severe reduction of peasant income among herders and farmers' communities. Through a systematic literature review, this study analyzed how cattle rustling activities in Nigeria significantly contribute to insurgency which threatens national security in Nigeria. The study's findings recognized that the basic causes of cattle rustling in Nigeria are socio-economic and cultural in nature. The study concludes that cattle rustling pose a great threat to national security in Nigeria. The study recommends that there is need for a multi-dimensional framework which strengthens grassroots security within principles and practices of neighbourhood-watch, peace-building and conflict prevention.

Keywords: Cattle, rustling, violence, herdsman, peace-building

Introduction

In Nigeria, then and now, human history cannot deny that had confrontations it from time immemorial. In fact, Odunayo (2021:22) avers that handling cattle husbandry were commonly called cowboys, herders or rearers, who traditionally were observed to have been moving from one place to another purposely in search of greener pasture. This movement has evidential consequences on herders and farmers that often manifest notorious and bloodthirsty conflict through the act of stealing farm animals such as cattle and destroying farm crops. Consequently, the rustling activities include stealing, killing, kidnapping and destruction of farmland,

particularly in Edo State, Benue State, Ondo State, Plateau State, Imo State, Borno State, Katsina State, Niger, Sokoto and Adamawa State. Before now, cattle rustling usually break-out in the Northern region, but in recent times, it has spread to the southern geographical zones of the country.

Ofeimun (2015:25) explains that “after ten years in the grazing reserves, the proponents insist the herdsmen would become indigenes. This is the intriguing part that they are not just insisting on the rights of citizenship but with to create their own towns within other towns that once belonged to other clans and ethnic groups. In a way, it amounts to using threats of impending attacks on Kalashnikor-wielding herdsmen to seek a veto over territories that once belonged to known ethnic groups. It has provided added reason for many communities which feel unprotected by regular national security personnel to resort to self-help unions in order to feel safe.

Meanwhile, Okodili (2019:42) further maintained that herdsmen in Agba-la Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State fought over missing cattle with many sustaining injuries. Therefore, knowing that cattle is the livelihood of herdsmen, the conflict between the herdsmen and farmers has been going on for several years because of several attempts to play down the mortal challenge which cattle rustling is, has been the greatest undoing of an effort to degrade their security threat in Nigeria. Omolehin (2021:29). Further reveals that “no fewer than nine persons were killed, with many injured at Rarah village of Rabbah Local Government Area in Sokoto State after armed bandits attacked the community”. The incident occurred and also left many injured while the assailants rustled about 500 cows.

Obviously, the country's security architecture has been mesmerized by the coordinated attack on farmland and properties through incessant cattle rustling and banditry. Moreso, activities of cow theft have worsened the poverty level that engendered it and deprived them of their livelihood and property. As a result of insecurity, Nigeria has lost almost everything to food security, and there is no society that can be developed without security. The implication of this is that the herders have been living and doing their business; the cattle rustlers now terrorized their communities in Nigeria. The reality of the insecurity pervading the community has dawned on us to act. Cattle rustling is phenomenal; the herdsmen have the conviction that cow theft are perpetuated by farmers because usually rayed about destroying farmlands during grazing of course, the situation might not be the case.

The security threat of cattle rustling is a product of unresolved contextual issues among herdsmen and farmers across Nigeria. This ugly phenomenon had dire for the country especially in terms of large number of cows theft and negative impacts on national food security. In this regard, rustling violent noticeable in herdsmen which occurred in many parts of the country. The Nigerian States bleed in both physical and emotional generations of Nigeria which have become a quotient of conveying human suffering. Oninisi (2019.7) reveals that armed men abducted four cattle breeders in Adamawa in Gurin town in Fufore Local Government Area of Adamawa. Of course, the victims were grazing with their cattle when kidnappers killed the herders, leaving cattle to wander. Nevertheless, it is crucial to dispel the erroneous impression disseminated by certain interest groups over open grazing land and ranching. Albert (2010:96) further explained that the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and Yoruba farmers usually start whenever the livestock belonging to the Fulani stray into a farm owned by the Yoruba people and another trample on farm products or eat them up. This sometimes would lead to violent conflicts.

The contemporary spate of violence and destructive action linked to cattle rustling beg for attention, such as gender based violence, killing, kidnapping, and armed banditry. Another fundamental trend is climate change. The climatic change also constitutes a great challenge also by putting much pressure on farmland, and this provoking complexities of violent values are the result of rampant drought and failure in this regard; the rustler kill herders and farmers are kidnapped, and sexually abuse women in the process that exemplified catalogue insurgency and ethnic, religious conflict. Similarly, most often, herdsmen migrate into the Savannah and rain forests of the North Central, and Southern States and move into regions where there is high populated growth which has heightened pressure on farmland, increasing the frequency cattle theft and crop damage.

Thus, this paper examines the causes of incessant cattle rustling in a different part of the country and as well as its consequences on economic growth while activating grassroots security architecture, reforming livestock management practices, addressing the environment and cross-border movements of both cattle rustler and armed herdsmen. However, in the absence of a community-based dialogue mechanism, herdsmen are taking matters into their own hand, further aggravating violence and insecurity while depleting peasants' income in Nation-state. Moreso, rustling activities have

resulted in the theft a huge of number of cows, the death of people and the destruction of communities which has become a major internal security concern in Nigeria. Therefore, to achieve enduring security in the country, greater efforts must be made to eradicate cattle rustlers because successive governments appeared to have paid lip service in their approach towards curbing this menace.

Theoretical Framework

This study considered the Frustration-Aggression theory in explaining the framework of cattle rustling, which is the act of stealing cattle that become extreme violence with an unimaginable dimension that include killing, cow theft, kidnapping, human displacement and sexual abuse. Gurri (1970:24) addresses frustration-aggression theory as "the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, between what is sought and what seems attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result. Furthermore, Davies (1962:6) presented an argument that where expectation does not meet attainment; the tendency is for people to confront those held responsible for frustrating their ambitions.

In addition, it is important to note that the Governor of Borno State claimed that there is a direct link between cattle rustling and Boko-Haram insurgency, stated that "our security agencies have reasonably established that most of the cattle being trade at the markets (in Borno State) were direct proceed of cattle rustling perpetrated by insurgency and were sold at prohibitive costs to an unsuspecting customer, through some unscrupulous middlemen who use underhand ploy(s) to disguise the transaction as legitimate deliberately. The money realized from such transaction(s) would then be and channelled to fund their deadly activities Ogbeche, (Daily Post February 6, 2016). The cattle rustlers destroyed farm crops, preventing the farmers/herdsmen from accessing their farms and cattle and even their homes and forcing them to flee for their lives.

Furthermore, the outcome of any systemic factors, killing, banditry, kidnapping and sexual abuse, if it is not well handled, would metamorphose into social unrest insecurities and within the human social enclaves. In relating the theory to this study, the persistent conflict between herders and farmers by either overlapping responsibilities or the encroachment of one force upon the other, generates a competitive devastation. Oluwaseun (2016:51) reported a "top fortunate circumstance along Owo Expressway some years ago, about 10 NYSC members, who were

returning home after the one-year compulsory service to fatherland lost their lives in a ghastly auto-crash caused by cattle rustling.

Research Methodology

The descriptive-analytical method of secondary data collection was adopted for the study.

Fundamental Causes of Cattle Rustling in Nigeria

The cattle rustling poses a great threat to national security through their activities of cow theft, killing, sexual abuse and sacking of communities. Therefore, there is a need to understand the basic causes of cattle rustling in Nigeria, which are more socio-economic and cultural.

Cultural Orientation: Fulani cultural lifestyle has been their nomadic pastoral practice for decades; meanwhile, Njoku (2016:51) stated that “the herdsmen are easily found on the highway, bushes and farms as they move about in search of pasture”. Over time, these herdsmen have had issues with the farmers and residents while trying to feed their cattle. They have been accused of deliberately moving their cattle into the farm to feed and destroy crops. This is a fundamental cause of cattle rustling in Nigeria. Moreso, the refusal of nomadic pastoralists to give up an old tradition that has become antiquated in modern times. The Editorial 2021; 13 opined that after their February 2021 meeting, the Northern Nigeria Governors Forum (NNGF) aligned with the view that the system operated by many herders in the country was no longer sustainable and should be stopped. They resolved to aggressively sensitize herdsmen on the need to adopt ranching as acceptable. However, the cattle herder insists on that old mode of pastoralism that made the life of a cow more important than that of a human being. However, nomadism may have been a way of life for centuries, but we are in the 21st century, and there is a better way to manage livestock enterprises. Nevertheless, the little herder is dangerous because he hid a weapon in his cloth that he used to transverse the length and breadth of the forest to feed cows. Sekoni (2021:12) asserts that Nigerian, across geographical and culture, would be deceiving themselves if they pretended not to see the danger in any attempt to disrupt the lifestyle and culture of Fulani people through demographic changes that include settling Fulani herdsmen in forest reserves designed to protect whatever is left of the regions of rainforest area. Nevertheless, rustlers wipe off the indigenes, and take over their ancestral lands, and cows, rename the village and

make them their permanent home; this have been seen in Zamfara, Birnin Gipari, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue and Taraba states herder and farmers that could be conceptualized as cultural neighbours through the activities of trade and grazing. Nweze (2017:1) averred that effect of these changes have brought about pastoral conflicts, which have led to various degree of crime associated with herdsmen in the country.

Poor Security Architecture: The failure of security agencies to check the movement of cows within the Nigerian States and international borders has contributed to cattle rustling. In this regard, herdsmen with cattle on major highways, no security will stop them. Abati (2016) reported that “a few years ago, there was a head-on collision between a cow and an aircraft at the Port Harcourt International Airport. Rather than get the herdsmen arrested, airport staff, including the security agents on duty were busy scrambling for a share of free meat. Moreso, the proliferation of small arms and ammunition on our porous border allowed herdsmen to move across West African countries to enter Nigeria unchecked, wielding dangerous weapons. Madugba (2015) view that cattle rustling has apparently taken a new dimension in Nigeria state as the perpetrators are now heavily armed and carry out their attacks from the thick forest in Nigerian states like Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna and Kebbi. They storm different villages, especially at night, killing, stealing cows and other domestic criminals. The Editor (2022:10) affirmed that the forest in several states across the country where these terrorists (bandits/rustlers) attack from and run back to after operations are well known. But the surprise is that our military forces know these places, as confirmed by Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna State, but they have been reluctant to invade these forests to smoke out the terrorists or for rescue operations; they only react after every operation.

Climate Change Phenomenon: In Nigeria, the dry season migration begins in the north as herdsmen travel with their livestock down the South in search of pasture and water to avoid seasonal diseases and drought. Moreso, ensuring food security in the face of climate change when is the most about challenge facing mankind. Nigeria, with the level of hunger and high cost of living, are often making highly vulnerable to climate change and low capacity to adapt. This often affects food production and availability, access quality, utilization and stability of the food system. After about six months, with the onset of the rainy season and farming in the south, they travel back

to the north. This migration from Northern to Southern settlement fear and suspicion often results in cattle rustling; Nigeria is most exposed to adverse effects of climate change, which directly links to conflict as result of environmental degradation. Of course, that makes herders' lives are worse in global warming and climate change, depleting household income, poor harvest and the menace of desertification and deforestation. Therefore, climate change poses great challenges to society through increased coastal flooding, reductions in water supplies, increased malnutrition and increased negative health impacts. Asiabaka and Onwremadu (2013:169) noted that climate change could affect agriculture in general ways, including productivity, agricultural practices, environmental effects and distribution of rural space at all. Climate change is not only a functional threat but also a common phenomenon, playing out in our eyes.

Poverty: The World Bank (2000) reported that poverty is an outcome of more than economic process but also include social and political processes that interact with and reinforce each other. The economic mismanagement, poor leadership, rampant corruption, insecurity and ineffective policies are largely responsible for the widespread poverty in the land. Cattle rustling has a national reflection of people's standard of living. Similarly, hunger contributes to various negative outcomes and violence. Food insecurity implies people not having regular access to adequate nutrition, which could link to the behavioral patterns of the herders. Then, with alarming unemployed youth, the growth of the population poses a serious security threat to the country, apart from rustling attack on cattle herders, engaging in armed robbery, abduction, raping, killing and destroying crops. Moreso, Ande (2016:50) reported that attackers looted foodstuff and livestock in the village before razing the villages Densane, Wonamo, Dwajam, Tabongo and Noyine of Geire Local Government area of Adamawa State.

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons and porous borders: The proliferation of small arms, light weapons, and porous borders posed serious security threats to this country, Nigeria. The development has widened security gaps across Nigeria. The cattle rustlers used sophisticated weapons for cows' theft and raiding of farmland, and of course, it land exposed Nigeria's security institutions to be ill-equipped and ill motivational force. Nigerian borders are close to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin, among others has a porous border which allows supplying prohibited goods into the country, including

ammunitions. Aliu (2016:50) stated that herdsmen are being accused of robbery, killing, rustling and kidnapping particularly in Akoko-Edo, Etsako and Owen axis of Edo State. The police in Igara, headquarters of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, affirmed that a Fulani herdsman had led a butcher into the forest to engage him to sell ram. In the process, the butcher was abducted and killed by the cattle rustlers. For that simple reason, these weapons that are being used for acts of cattle rustling, terrorism, kidnapping and banditry in the country comes in through our porous border.

Consequences of Cattle Rustling across Nigeria

This persistent cattle-rustling activity across Nigeria has diverse consequences on the citizens leading to poor harvest, unemployment, insurgency, ethnic and religious conflict and rural/urban movement. The effects of violence manifest the destruction of properties and livelihood of peasant herders and farmers that contribute to the sustainable economic development of a Nation. In fact, the desperation for herdsmen's survival makes a large number of people vulnerable to being lured to the activities of criminal intent on creating anarchy and insecurity.

Poor Harvest: The effect of cattle rustling in Nigeria, is devastating and worrisome when considering the movement of agricultural products and goods for trade that are no longer possible in the fear of deadly attacks. The farm products that serve as Nigerian foreign exchange products are destroyed like cash crops, maize, yam, cocoyam, beans, rice, cassava, watermelon, vegetables, which leads to depletion of economic growth and household income of farmers in the process of rustling. However, reprisals attacks lead to killing of cows which has great effect on livestock production in Nigeria. Consequently, nomadic cattle rearing, which has been part of the national economy since the advent of Nigeria has suddenly become synonymous with banditry kidnapping, sexual abuse, killing, and other forms of violent crimes. The rustlers invade farms where the cattle trample and eat up valuable crops, reducing peasant farmer household income. Meanwhile, cattle rustlers often visit these communities at night or on market days when most of the farmers have gone to sell their farm produce. Meanwhile, cattle rustling thrives in a shadow economy, where her operation is practised in the black market with untaxed wealth, and the transaction reduces the herdsmen's income. The country will depend largely on imports to meet up with local consumption due to farmers' inability to

control the effect of cattle rustlers. Agbo (2022:22) reported that the effects of climate change on agricultural production are exacerbated by the fact that around 70 percent of Nigerians are smallholder farmers with relatively low-level technologies. Moreso, extreme climate events such as flooding, heat and drought have led to soil degradation, resulting in low crop yield. If left unchecked, climate change will increase the livelihood of severe, pervasive, and irreversible impacts on ecosystems.

Displacement of homes and loss of properties: The cattle rustlers in various communities are rendering farmers and herders homeless which includes loss of lives and properties. Then herders and farmers are suffering the consequences of migration of people from rural to urban areas across Nigerian borders, which leads to security challenges which involves deadly attacks by setting ablaze houses and investment opportunities in the villages. Moreso, violence has no human face as thousands of lives are displaced by cattle rustling, has created internally displaced persons camps in Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, Plateau, Enugu, and Abuja seeking for shelter. However, the internally displaced persons across the nation state victims of cattle rustling, of which has given rise to extreme poverty in Nigeria that has led to change of livelihood of herdsman. Often, cattle rustler demands money from farmers before allowing them to plant or have their crops harvested. Cadre Harmonisé (2022) projected that about 19.4 million people, including 416,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 21 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), are expected to be in a food crisis or worse between June and August this year. Furthermore, revealed that about 14.4 million people, including 385,000 IDPS in 21 states and FCT, are currently in a food crisis or worse through May 2022.

Gender-based violence: The rustlers involve in sexual abuse such as rape, kidnapping, and killing and children also get killed by cattle rustlers. Women and girls are vulnerable to sexual harassment and economic stagnation. The consequences of these actions, the farmers and herders have reduced their family participation in agricultural sector production and investment.

Gender-based violence also involves killing, rape and kidnapping by cattle rustlers who have assumed a more dangerous proportion than any security threat in Nigeria.

The Un General Assembly, in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, the term violence against women (UNECOSO, 1999:53) was defined as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in or its likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Insurgency: Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East and Nigeria banditry in North-West in Nigeria have been linked to cattle rustling activities which has become an organized crime in Nigeria. In fact, most cows are traded in exchange for the purchase of small arms and light weapons through unscrupulous businessmen. The possession of these arms by non-state actors has set in motion chains of security challenges, increasing invasion and conversion of forest reserves to cattle rustling. For insurgency, it has widened the gap of insecurity spaces for cattle rustlers and terrorism. Hence, the forest reserve has increasingly become a base for insurgency. Criminal and cattle rustlers operate with impunity killing, rapping, kidnapping, and setting ablaze properties in the process. Alebelewe (2012:14) stated that in Kaduna State Forest, which envelopes Birnin-Gwari Local Government Area, banditry was as far back as 15 years ago known for their trademark highway robbery and cattle rustling. They used to block the Buruku, Birnin-Gwari axis of the Kaduna – Lagos Road, rob travellers of their hard-earned possessions but rarely killed. The group became more dreaded when they began the mad rustling of cattle around 2001.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From this study, atrocities of cattle rustlers have pervaded the farmland and communities. Nevertheless, justice and fairness constitute the foundation for peaceful coexistence in human society. Finally, rustler’s victims are taken into the forest to be dehumanized beyond human compulsion against the ubiquitous menace of killing, kidnapping, cow theft, sexual harassment and farmlands destroyed at will. Then the rising case of insecurity is fast eroding the development plan because there can be no development without peace and food security which is a noble intention of the government. The ethnic-religious prejudices being fueled by cattle rustlers through their toxic politics and the manipulation of our

difference with the unguarded pronouncement of non-governmental institutions that simply promote discord based on petty prejudices and incoherent policies for selfish interest and therefore, there is an attention in order to foster rapid economic growth and development.

This study proffered solution to cattle rustling activities from the perspective of national security and developmental strategies to capture peace-building mechanisms that will integrate job seekers into agricultural and pastoral practice. Of course, people are barred from carrying out their farming business activities along the cattle route, and even thousands of hectares of land have been abandoned as a result of cow theft in Nigeria. The recommends appropriate legislation and amendment or alteration of the constitution for state community police to enhance grassroots security mechanisms. Community policing should be encouraged while the localizing of herdsmen/clashes of farmers through a grassroots security mechanism approach because conventional security agencies are overstretched. The grassroots/community security outfit would help in gathering intelligence capable of the strengthening security of the country. Expanding the numerical strength of forest guards and overhauling the security architecture of Nigeria's forest reserve, then the forest which these cattle rustlers have taken over are located in virtually all the states of federations. Mapping out or establishing cattle grazing routes in each state of the federation and would enhance the livelihood of herdsmen and farmers. The government, in conjunction with community leaders should jointly plan and execute an enlightenment and re-orientation campaign to educate herders on the benefit of harmonious and peaceful co-existence. The religious leaders and the media should treat cattle rustlers as a national security threat and desist from attaching unnecessary religious and ethnic sentiment to this phenomenon. Nevertheless, Nigeria's borders are too porous; more resources, human and security logistics should be directed towards a wholesome policing of our borders to check unregulated foreigners in our country. Concerted effort should be made to provide nomadic education to herders to enable them to contribute positively to the nation's building by embarrassing cattle ranching and sedentary, which helps to reduce cow theft. Also, the government should implement strategies in the emerging climate change policies. Hence, the country remains highly exposed to the effects of climate change especially on food security. The government should put in place policies that will substantially curtail and eliminate the illegal sales of cows and uncultured milk production through the transformation of livestock production

system in Nigeria along the market-oriented value chain; by that, ensured employment opportunities for herdsmen.

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