

ASSESSMENT OF PASTORALISTS' RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE TO CATTLE RUSTLING IN SELECTED COMMUNITIES IN GUSAU, ZAMFARA STATE

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Abstract

Cattle rustling is identified as a major security concern undermining animal production in Zamfara State. Emerging studies depict a more disturbing situation of rural banditry associated with cattle rustling that affect human security and livelihood. This study assessed the pastoralists' response and adaptive mechanism to cattle rustling in selected communities in Gusau, Zamfara State. The study was conducted in five major settlements namely Damba, Kuraje, Sabon Gida, Kwana and Gidan Marake, Bulunku and Mareri. Two settlements (Kuraji and Bulunku) were purposely selected for data collection, due to the high prevalence of cattle rustling in these settlements. Qualitative approach to data collection and results synthesis was adopted for the research. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews were the instrument used for data collection. The study find reveals that pastoralists in the selected communities were forced to device ways/adaptive mechanism to cattle rustling which includes; transfer of the cattle to a new location in the early hours of the night, information sharing on the movement of the rustlers, negotiations with rustlers' kingpins, migrations and reduction of livestock holdings among other measures. Conclusively, the pastoralists receive little or no attention from the government as they are left to fend for themselves against rustlers.

Keywords: Pastoralists, Response, Resilience, Cattle Rustling, Selected Communities

1.1 Introduction.

Livestock rearing is one of the major component of agricultural activity performed by more than two third of the world's rural populace due to its benefit as a pathway out of poverty (Bashir, 2014). It is the major component of agribusiness that is making significant impact on the level of income of many rural household in Nigeria, in addition to serving as sources of farm power and manure, Pastoralist makes substantial contribution to the economy of developing countries. In terms

of supporting their own households and supplying animal protein (meat & milk) to villages and towns but this production is hampered by cattle rustling (Abdulrashid *et al*, 2018).

Cattle rustling is an age-old and deeply-entrenched feature of pastoralist livelihoods which fostered competition between groups that found themselves in harsh and delicate environment (Samuel, 2014). The practice dates back to ancient history; the first recorded cattle raids were said to have been conducted over seven

thousand years ago (Blench, 2003). Cattle rustling in Africa have in recent years grown both in scale, magnitude and are increasingly linked to organized crime as the terrorist groups made it as a source of income. Cattle's raiding is the act of stealing cattle; referred to as doffing in Australia and the perpetrators known as the doffers (Bashir, 2014). In North America, cattle theft is dubbed rustling while an individual who engages in it is a rustler. Cattle rustling occur when a group of individuals plan, organize and steal livestock forcefully from another person or from the grazing field for the purpose of commercial gain (Abdulrashid et al, 2018). Cattle rustling is associated with rural banditry that causes the destruction and loss of both the pastoral and farming communities' entire livelihoods. Cases of cattle rustling alongside human killing have been observed in many places around Gusau metropolitan. It is againsts this background that this research assesses the pastoralist response and resilience to cattle rustling in selected communities in Gusau, Zamfara State.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Does cattle rustling prevails in the selected communities in Gusau?
2. What responses do pastoralists adopted to the menace of cattle rustling in the selected communities in Gusau?
3. How do these responses influence livestock production in the selected communities in Gusau?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are to;

1. To identify the prevalence of cattle rustling in the selected communities in Gusau.
2. To identify the responses adopted by pastoralists to resist cattle rustling in the selected communities in Gusau.
3. To examine the impact of the responses to livestock production in the selected communities in Gusau.

1.4 Research Methodology

This research focuses on five major settlements namely; Damba, Kuraje, Sabon Gida, Kwana and Gidan Marake, Bulunku and Mareri. Two settlements (Kuraji and Bulunku) were purposely selected for data collection, due to the high number of cattle and majority of the inhabitants are pastoralists. Qualitative approach to data collection and results synthesis was adopted for the research. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted within the two settlements. The ages of respondents widely ranged from about 35 to 65 years for both men and women; with men aged around 40 years and women of about 50 years. The interviews featured mostly older people because youths were rarely met in the settlement at the time of data collection.

Interview (KII) was also carry out with the head and elderly men in the community and all of them (fulbe) as the (sullubawa) refused to grant interview. An analysis of the views and key information expressed by the respondents was used to determine similarities and differences in views and perceptions. Dominant views were extracted and the wider implications of respondents' perceptions, views and understanding were put to context. This enabled a good comprehension of ongoing

responses adopted by pastoralists to mitigate cattle rustling in the selected communities.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Livestock's Raising in Nigeria

Raising livestock is not an exclusive preserve of Fulani; in Nigeria alone, 14 other ethnic groups, including the Shuwa, Kanuri, Kanembu, Arabs, and Touareg, are in some way involved in it (Blench 2003). Fulani own approximately 90 per cent of the livestock and contribute about 3.2 per cent of the country's GDP (Köster and de Wolff 2012). Livestock rearing is one of the major component of agricultural activity performed by more than two third of the world's rural populace due to its benefit as a pathway out of poverty (Bashir, 2014). It is the major component of agribusiness that is making significant impact on the level of income of youth in Nigeria, in addition to serving as sources of farm power and manure, Pastoralist makes substantial contribution to the economy of developing countries. In terms of supporting their own households and supplying animal protein (meat & milk) to villages and towns but this production is hampered by cattle rustling (Abdulrashid *et al*, 2018). Fulani view cattle herding not necessarily as a delightful endeavour but as a profitable vocation that is taxing, strenuous, and exhausting: provision of milk and beef, the opportunity to breed cattle and beautify stock, and as carriers and sources of income. In addition to being working capital, the cattle represent a social-security guarantee and inheritable assets for the herder's family, particularly for his offspring. So central is the herd as pastoral capital that, aside from functioning as a means of production, storage, and transport, and a way to

transfer food and wealth to the Fulani. Its size indicates the social status of the individual or family and evokes an unspoken dictum to strive to increase the herd. The pastoral system is patently both masculinised and youth-dominated, with women relegated to the background and owning little stock. A woman with six cows is considered wealthy, while a male with 20 cows is seen as poor. A man's lifelong ambition is governed by the aspiration to maintain healthy stock and increase his herd's size to the best of his ability and by any means. Pastoralism as an economic enterprise is perceived as a prosperous vocation and, thus, mere possession of cattle singles Fulani out as affluent, thereby raising the prospect of predation from less-endowed individuals, communities, and rustling cartels (Olaniyan, Francis, and Okeke-Uzodike 2015). The growing menace of cattle rustling is one of transformation from the already known Fulani cultural practice of testing a person's personal bravery and prowess at bloody warfare involving various groups and actors

1.5.2 Cattle Rustling

Cattle rustling is an ancient and deeply-entrenched feature of pastoralist livelihoods which fostered competition between groups that found themselves in harsh and delicate environment (Samuel, 2014). The practice dates back to old aged history; cattle raids are said to have been conducted over seven thousand years ago (Blench, 2003). Cattle rustling in Africa have in recent years grown both in scale, magnitude and are increasingly linked to organized crime and a source of income. Cattle's raiding is the act of stealing cattle; referred to as doffing in Australia and the perpetrators known as the doffers (Bashir,

2014). In North America, cattle theft is dubbed rustling while an individual who engages in it is a rustler. Cattle rustling occur when a group of individuals plan, organize and steal livestock forcefully from another person or from the grazing field for the purpose of commercial gain (Abdulrashid et al, 2018). Academics, practitioners and journalists increasingly refer to it as a form of organized crime.

Africa has a long history of cattle rustling; however the crime is also increasingly being reported in the West and Central Africa particularly in countries like Nigeria and Cameroon.

The incidence of cattle theft in the past decade is commonly seen in northeastern Nigeria particularly in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe and Bauchi (Okoli and Agada, 2014). The conception of cattle rustling as an organized crime, among other things, presupposes the level of sophistication and criminal efficiency that characterizes its contemporary manifestation. In this regard, it has been observed that cattle rustling have evolved implications' (Daily Trust Editorial Feb. 05 2014). In its apparent dynamics of sophistication and degeneration, cattle rustling have been associated with spiral violence in different part of the world

1.5.3 Cattle Rustling in North-West Nigeria

Rural banditry and cattle rustling has over the last decade grown in scale and organization in several northern states of Nigeria, where large bandit groups operate with mounting audacity. While this occurs throughout the north, the main theatres have been the Kamuku forest in Kaduna, Falgore forest in Kano, Dansadau forest in Zamfara and Davin Rugu forest stretching

through Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States. Cattle theft was reportedly alleged to be a major source of funding for Boko Haram in the north east. The loss is hard to estimate: many thefts, especially those occurring in remote villages or forests with limited state security presence, go unreported. One report 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. From 2011 to 2015, bandits, cattle rustlers and other criminals killed 1,135 people in Zamfara State alone. 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 (International Crisis Group Report, 2017: 252).

In Zamfara State Cattle rustling gave birth to armed banditry; a scenario that accentuated the significance of cattle rustling and banditry as a fundamental security challenge in the State. In most cases, the bandits and rustlers destroy communities, kill and maim herders, and in some cases kidnap and rape women and girls before dispossessing of their herds, (Okoli, 2014). The forest areas in Zamfara State especially Mashema bordering Niger Republic and Birnin Gwari in the southern border have serve as base for the bandits and their weapon armory. The activities of these miscreant have pose a threat to public safety and security in the state and the situation goes with repercussion that do not potent well for both rural and urban communities.

Cattle rustling and banditry have been a major security challenge in Zamfara State since 2010. It has claimed lives and led to

loss of properties worth billions of naira, (Olayaku, 2014: Adeniyi, 2016). It has emerged as criminal enterprise whose footprints can be found in economic, social and political spheres, and this had which led to the declaration of the state as the major hotspot for armed banditry and cattle rustling in Nigeria in 2017, (Oseriemen, 2017). Media reports indicate that no part of Zamfara State is free from their activities, (Murtala, 2018) and the report of Nigeria watch on violence of 2018, ranked Zamfara as the second most dangerous state after Borno due to the menace of armed banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling. According to Sama'ila (2019), cattle rustling and armed banditry affected nearly five hundred villages and towns, thirteen thousand hectares of land and two thousand eight hundred and thirty five thousand people killed between 2011 and 2018. It also estimated that there are at least eight thousand armed bandits and cattle rustlers operating in Zamafa State, despite different military actions, (Chukuma, 2019).

The report of Zamfara Emergency Management Agency indicate that 12 out of 14 local government areas of the state are affected by the menace, and Zurmi, Maru, Tsafe, Birnin Magaji and Anka local Government areas top the list of worst affected, where over 30% of their respected population experienced the effect of bandits attacks (FEWS NET, 2018). Similarly, the report of National Bureau of Statistics on corruption in Nigeria, indicate that 38.3% of crimes recorded in the country, emanate from Zamfara State as result of rampant attacks by bandits and cattle rustlers. In 2018, kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling and extra-judicial killing top the list of

major crimes in Nigeria. Out of 3,425 fatalities caused by criminal incidents, banditry resulted in 930 cases, with Zamafara State having 714 cases, (Nigeria Watch, 2018). Murtala, (2019) citing from Momale, (2017) concluded that the series of attacks on villages in Zamfara State since 2014 by the bandits are reprisal and vengeance against the extra-judicial killings by local vigilante groups. Large expense of ungoverned space and little government presence in most rural areas of the state has aid and make the bandits and rustlers to thrive despite effort to put to an end to their activities (Chukuma, 2019).

Economic activities were brought to a standstill, farmers no longer have access to their farms, markets were force to shutdown and travelers were not safe. Trading activities and functionality of markets across the state were reduced to 25% to 50% depending on the magnitude of the activities of the bandits and rustlers in the area (FEWS NET, 2018). In his research on the repercussion of cattle rustling in Gusau local government area, Muhammed (2017) concluded that cattle rustling had succeeded in disrupting the economic activities and resulted in fall of trade and businesses due to fear of indiscriminate attacks while on transit to and from markets, especially rural weekly markets.

1.5.4 Livestock Production in Zamfara State

Livestock farming is only second to crop cultivation in Zamfara State, livestock have many functions. Milk is both consumed and sold; livestock are sold for cash income; rams are slaughtered for meat during certain religious festivals, and new animals are purchased as a safety net

against harvest failure or simply as a place to bank money. Manure is used to fertilize fields and oxen provide draught power to pull a plough or to transport goods. In Zamfara, both Fulani and Hausa farmers are cattle keepers although Fulani herds tend to be larger. Furthermore, milk sales are more common amongst Fulani herdsmen. Amongst the Hausa, cattle are kept for their draught power rather than for breeding (or milking). Amongst the Hausa, only the better-off typically consume and sell fresh milk. Milk production peaks for 3-4 months during the rainy season (June-September) then continues, with lower yields, for another 2-3 months. The rainy season is when livestock are near the villages. Milk yields (for human use) range from 1-2 L per cow per day of which half is typically sold. Camels are not very common in Zamfara. Nonetheless, this situation is changing as camel rearing is beginning to spread south from the LGAs bordering Niger Republic (the central and southern LGAs of Zamfara State). In every poor household, the household head typically does not have any livestock. However, very poor women typically have a few sheep and goats of their own as well as poultry (hens, ducks, or guinea fowl). These animals are kept to generate cash income when needed. Sahelian goats (a popular breed in the state) produce less milk than the Sokoto red breed but are still favored because a breeding female can give birth to 3-4 kids. One problem affecting small stock is disease. The state is notably free from Tse-Tse flies which affect cattle. However, the livelihood zone is prone to Paste des Pettis Ruminant (PPR), a disease that affects small stock. Every year, according to the State Agricultural Development Program

(ADP), a single household will typically lose 2-3 goats from PPR. With support from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the state government implements an annual vaccination campaign to try to prevent outbreaks of PPR. Despite this effort, the disease is considered as significant problem. A second problem affecting livestock production, as reported in some places, was access to fodder. Groundnut leaves (amongst others) are used as livestock fodder and leafy fodder was scarce.

Table 1: Distribution of livestock by species and local government, 2024

LGA	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Donkeys	Camels	Horses
Anka	2,240,000	16000,000	3,000,000	529	655	700,000
Bakura	65,400	19,500	55,700	7,900	310	3050
Birnin Magaji	28200	46520	53720	951	426	2300
Bukkuyum	1,900,000	1,600,000	2,000000	2010	90	4000
Bungudu	65000	127000	140,000	1680	18	2650
Gummi	900,000	600,000	800,000	350,000	120,000	70,000
Gusau	900,000	700,000	850,000	450,000	230,000	89,000
Kaura/Namoda	220,000	340,000	380,000	250,000	320	60,000
Maradun	980,000	1,150,000	1,700,000	950	200	5,800
Maru	5,500,000	7,200,000	6,100,000	3,100	90	5100
Sminkafi	42000	173000	302,000	568	192	2120
Talata/Mafara	912,000	200,000	292,000	121,000	7,200	110,000
Tsafe	32,000	191,080	385,000	348	27	1,680
Zurmi	2,800	29,000	26,000	3,000	20	3,000
TOTAL	12,888,220	13,276,100	15,23,420	742,036	129,548	969,700

Source; Bureau of Statistic, Zamfara State, (2024)

1.6 Result and Discussions

1.6.1 Prevalence of Cattle Rustling in Selected Communities

The study explored the prevalence of cattle rustling in various settlements in the study area. Cattle rustling for 2025 alone are quite instructive as reflected in the table 2. The investigation revealed that, of the 20 incidences of cattle rustling in the selected communities, there is one thousand and five 1005 rustled cattle, three lives were lost and about seven 7 people were injured

due to the cattle rustling incident. Although the identities of the victims were not revealed during the investigation, it is believed that most of the victims were pastoralists. However, there is need to recognized that, to some extent cattle rustling intersect with other forms of rural banditry which appeared to acquired a dynamic of their own when compared within the wider context of the challenges of human security, climate change and reduced capacity of the state to perform its routine governance task.

Table2: Prevalence of cattle rustling in the selected communities

Settlement	No. of occurrence	No of cattle rustled	No. of people killed	No people injured	No of cattle recovered
Kuraje	3	350	1	2	70
Mareri	3	125	0	2	45
Gidan Marake	0	0	0	0	0
Bulunku	6	420	2	3	30
Damba	6	30	0	0	0
Gidan Kware	2	80	0	0	0
Total	20	1005	3	7	145

Source: Field Survey, 2025

1.6.2 Pastoralists' Response and Resilience to Cattle Rustling in the Selected Communities

Pastoralists response and resilient to cattle rustling was determined through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and presented in table 4. The prevailing situation of cattle rustling and its negative impact in the area is presented in table 3. With respect to occurrences of cattle rustling over period of time, 70% of the respondents identified the period between 11:30pm and 1:00am as the time when rustlers usually attacked. So by the virtue of this experience, pastoralists in the communities transfer their cattle to a new destination every day as soon as the sun set to avoid rustlers. This adaptive mechanism helps pastoralists a lot in confusing the rustler so that there is no certainty on the part of the rustlers in terms of meeting their target which consequently reduce excessive raid

by the rustlers. Similarly, some respondents argued that information or intelligent sharing has significantly contributed to maintaining their cattle. Although, the nature information sharing is not clearly detailed by the respondents, it is widely perceived that there is security collaboration between neighboring communities in the interest of brotherhood between the herding and pastoral communities in the area so that any suspicious movement are reported so that necessary action could be taken before the arrival of the rustlers. However, another respondent narrated that when bandits learned of the new device ways, they begins to rustle the cattle at grazing fields. This situation is very serious and most frighten one as no one can afford to keep hundred of cattle without feed. The circumstance made the pastoralists in the community with no option but to begin grazing along the major roads, plots of

lands and in the sparsely populated residential areas.

Table 3 Pastoralist responses to cattle rustling in the selected communities

Responses	Response expatiation
Night transfer of cattle	By experience, pastoralists in the communities understand that rustlers do visit mostly in the night around 12-1 am. So, as part of the adaptive measure to cattle rustling, they carry their herds and move to other places in the neighbouring settlements to avoid being robbed. They usually move as the sun set before even 8:00pm and come back as early as possible and intermitantly change places
Sharing information	Pastoralists in the communities synergize with other people in the neighboring communities. When ever suspected rustlers are seen, information is disseminated across the pastoralists' communities which enable the pastoralists to prepared against the rustlers
Avoiding bushes and grazing fields	Cattle rustlers use to attack pastoralist in the designated grazing field. Thus cattle rearers in the communities are now avoiding such places and instead graze their cattle along the major roads, undeveloped plots of lands and near farms
Migration	Although, cattle rearers in the communities are sedentary, the phenomenon made them to move to other parts of the country where there is relative peace. So in this case, members of a household are divided into two. One group will migrate with the cattle and spend some time, usually a year then come back and the other group substitute them.
Negotiation with bandits	In the FGD sessions, respondents admitted that there is negotiation with bandits sometimes. However, they refused to make further comments on how but a key informant alleged that, the negotiation is monetary, cattle contributions and sometimes allowing their children to join gangsters
Security deployment	When there is suspected movement, pastoralists act with speed of light to request for security deployment in the axis which in

	many time help in sending away the rustlers.
Sedentarilisation	A transhumant household are now force to settle in one place

Source: Field Survey, 2025

1.6.3 Influence of Pastoralists' Response to Cattle Rustling on Livestock Production in the Selected Communities

During the FGD, several points were raised including the impact of the responses on livestock production in the study area; these views were analyzed and presented below;

1. Pattern change in animal husbandry

The responses adapted by pastoralist in the communities influences changing in the trend/pattern of cattle rearing in the communities, as many cattle now are seen grazing in the plots of lands, residential areas and along the roads instead of the usual designated grazing fields. This increases risk of car accidents on the major roads, farmers versus herders clashes and increases diseases contamination on the parts of the cattle.

2. Decreases animal productivity

Due to the poor nutrition as a result of inadequate pasture and water couple with cattle transfers to a safe place reduces the quantity and quality of animal products such as milk meat and butter.

3. Decrease in livestock holding per house hold

The adapted responses have affected the livestock holding of many household in the community as household with large number of

cattle find it difficult to rear and get full control, coupled with the fear of being rustle, thus, they find a way to reduce the holding.

4. Decline of social relations

The changing trend of animal grazing near farms and along major road create dispute between herders and the farmers, a situation which is very new in the area. Also, people are skeptical and do not want to see herders around their settlement due the fear of kidnapping and sometimes hate speeches follows.

5. Increase sedentrisation

Increasing sedentarisation of pastoralists' households, thereby transforming nomadic pastoralists to sedentary agro-pastoralists, but with an increasing migration of livestock.

1.7 Conclusion

Cattle rustling and the associated kidnapping for ransom is the major security concern among pastoralists in the study area which has devastating effects to the sustainability of the pastoralists' livelihood in the area. Thus, necessitating livestock' holders to device a coping strategies to resist the cattle rustling. The strategies were effective as it ensures the survival of livestock holding in the community. However, the responses came with consequences of decreasing livestock holding, animal productivity and increasing financial spending of individual

households. There is little or no efforts made by the government in ensuring the protections and security of the livestock farmers in the community as pastoralist are left to fend for themselves against cattle rustler.

1.8 Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. There should be an effective policing along strategic routes especially along the rail line axis which serve as the super highway for the rustlers in transporting themselves and the rustled cattle.
- ii. Road construction along the route and provision of security light will play a vital role in safeguarding the pastoralists and their livelihood from the rustlers in the community
- iii. Government should deploy security personnels in the community for a front response to distress calls from the pastoralist settlement.

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