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Communities as Victims of Inter-Cattle Rustling Gangs in the Northern Regions of Kenya and Uganda

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Abstract:

Cattle rustling remains a deeply rooted issue in the Northern regions of Kenya and Uganda and encompasses a complex and multi-faceted problem with far-reaching implications for victimized communities. This issue, originating from tribal tensions, territorial disputes, economic incentives, marginalization, and climate change, demands a comprehensive investigation. This study aims to shed light on the intricate dynamics of inter-cattle rustling attacks, delving into the temporal patterns, distinct attack characteristics, and their societal impact. In this context, the research objectives include determining patterns and trends of these attacks, assessing their impacts on affected communities, and proposing measures to enhance the protection and empowerment of these communities. The study employed a mixed methods research approach, which involved a target population of approximately 400,000 individuals from the Pokot and Sebei communities living along the Kenya-Uganda border. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, and a review of existing reports and records. The study identified distinct temporal patterns of inter-cattle rustling attacks, with attacks occurring most frequently during specific timeframes, such as early morning, late morning, afternoon, and late evening. This temporal pattern offers insights into the strategic considerations of the attackers. In addition, the study revealed that attacks exhibit distinct characteristics depending on the time of day. In the morning, attacks are marked by swiftness, a "grab and run" mentality, and a readiness to eliminate opposition. Afternoons see a shift in focus, with caretakers becoming the primary targets. Evening raids are conducted with stealth and aim to drive stolen animals across the border. Further, the attackers, known as "Morans," were found to be well-prepared and armed, with a high level of coordination, particularly in morning and evening attacks. Their identity adds to the complexity of the confrontations. The impact of inter-cattle rustling attacks goes beyond economic losses, resulting in the loss of life, displacement of communities, closed schools, and the disruption of community centers. Entire sections of communities are forced to relocate, upending livelihoods and contributing to a sense of desolation. The attacks traumatize victim communities, with children, in particular, bearing a heavy psychological burden, especially in the brutal morning confrontations. This psychological impact further erodes the social fabric. Based on these findings, the study recommends implementing community-based resilience programs, establishing psychosocial support services, engaging in conflict resolution and mediation efforts, strengthening security measures, promoting sustainable resource management, providing economic opportunities, and facilitating cross-cultural dialogues. These recommendations are expected to contribute to the development of more effective policies and interventions. In summary, this study contributes valuable insights that can inform evidence-based policy development to address the multi-faceted challenge of cattle rustling and its diverse implications for the affected communities in the Northern regions of Kenya and Uganda.

Keywords: Communities, cattle, rustling, rustling, cattle rustling

1. Background of the Study

Cattle rustling, once deeply rooted in cultural traditions, has undergone a significant metamorphosis, now orchestrated as a highly organized criminal enterprise by both local and international criminal networks. This transformation has been facilitated by the proliferation of weaponry, as noted by Gumba, Alusala, and Kimani (2019). What was previously a customary method of wealth and power redistribution within communities has been co-opted by criminal enterprises and capitalism, presenting a substantial socio-economic and political threat. The repercussions of this evolution are starkly visible in the expansive and arid landscapes of northern Kenya and Uganda, where a persistent conflict characterized by inter-cattle rustling attacks has left a profound impact on the communities residing in this historically volatile terrain, as observed by Kimokoti (2022).

Greiner (2013) indicates a substantial transformation in the practice of inter-cattle rustling among the pastoralists of northern Kenya over recent decades. These conflicts have become increasingly entangled with politicized disputes revolving around administrative boundaries, the quest for exclusive land access, and the endeavors to establish or safeguard ethnically homogenous electoral support bases. Furthermore, the act of livestock raiding has evolved into a

potent, dangerous, and highly adaptable political tool. A study featured in *Africa Spectrum* underscores the prevalence of cattle rustling as a significant criminal activity in Nigeria, with the northern region bearing the brunt, as reported by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (2020). This surge in rustling activities has led to the massive theft of cattle, loss of human lives, and extensive property damage.

While the prevailing violence encompasses a spectrum of egregious transgressions, such as ruthless killings, acts constituting 'ethnic cleansing,' illicit marketing networks, highway banditry, and even ordinary petty theft, it is consistently categorized and denoted as 'cattle rustling' or 'cattle raiding' (Taylor, 2022). This broad categorization often promotes the conflation of more recent acts of violence with age-old, customary, and ritualized raiding practices, imbuing them with a cultural essence and character, thus implying their intrinsic connection to these societies (Straight, 2009). Notably, there is an emerging trend in framing cattle raiding within the context of environmental security discussions, depicting it as an almost inevitable response to the effects of climate change (Schilling et al., 2011). Both of these approaches tend to strip raiding of its political dimension while overlooking substantial shifts within pastoralist communities and their evolving interactions with broader political developments in Kenya.

Schilling, Opiyo, and Scheffran (2012) further emphasize that issues of territoriality have become primary arenas of contention in the region. Sedentarization, rapid population growth, the fragmentation and privatization of formerly communally utilized pastures, the expansion of wildlife conservation areas, and the growing significance of agriculture all contribute to mounting land pressure, both within and among communities (Kariuki, Western, Willcock & Marchant, 2021). Additionally, Marigat (2023) reports a surge in cattle rustling in Uganda's Karamoja region since 2019, resulting in numerous fatalities and livelihood disruptions.

In the same vein, inter-cattle rustling exerts a profound and multi-faceted impact on the well-being of communities in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda. In terms of physical consequences, inter-cattle rustling frequently precipitates violent conflicts, resulting in injuries, fatalities, and the forced displacement of individuals from their homes (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). In some cases, bandits with automatic weapons storm herders' settlements and farms with the mission of killing people and pillaging cows. Additionally, affected communities may grapple with malnutrition and food insecurity stemming from the loss of their livestock, a pivotal source of sustenance and income. More still, psychologically, the toll is considerable as inter-cattle rustling engenders significant distress within these communities. The trauma associated with the loss of livestock, homes, and loved ones can manifest in conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Gumba, Alusala & Kimani, 2019). Economically, the ramifications are severe, with a pronounced adverse effect on the livelihoods of those affected. Losses in livestock translate to a decline in income and a diminished standard of living (Ojo, 2020). Moreover, the economic burden extends to encompass substantial expenditures, including medical bills, funeral costs, and property damage. Socially, the impacts of inter-cattle rustling resonate widely. The conflicts have the potential to fracture social structures and relationships, both within and between communities, precipitating a breakdown of the social fabric (Kingma et al., 2012). Additionally, the affected communities may grapple with stigmatization and discrimination stemming from their association with cattle rustling.

In response to the pervasive inter-cattle rustling conflicts across sub-Saharan Africa, governments, civil society organizations, and international agencies have implemented a range of policies and practices aimed at prevention, mitigation, and resolution. Notable approaches include community-based strategies, wherein organizations collaborate with local communities to identify the root causes of these conflicts and develop preventive measures. An example is the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has successfully applied this approach in Uganda's Karamoja region, resulting in a reduction in cattle rustling incidents (Musoke, 2020). Moreover, peacebuilding initiatives have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and reconciliation among affected communities. The United Nations Development Programme, for instance, has played a pivotal role in supporting such initiatives in the northern regions of both Kenya and Uganda, yielding decreased violence (Taylor, 2022). Law enforcement measures have also been employed by the governments of Kenya and Uganda, with Kenya establishing a specialized police unit dedicated to combating cattle rustling in its northern regions. Similarly, Uganda has deployed security forces to the Karamoja region in response to cattle rustling.

Therefore, inter-cattle rustling along the Northern Kenya-Uganda border represents a multidimensional issue with deep historical, economic, social, policy and security ramifications. This conference paper endeavors to shed light on a complex and multi-faceted issue that has marred the lives of countless individuals and has far-reaching implications for the social fabric of the affected regions.

1.1. Problem Statement

In the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda, a deeply entrenched issue revolves around inter-cattle rustling attacks, which have given rise to a complex and multi-faceted problem that deeply intersects with victimology. Rooted in tribal tensions, territorial disputes, economic incentives, and the intricate dimensions of marginalization and climate change, the problem is multi-faceted. It encompasses the physical, psychological, and socio-economic impact of these attacks on victim communities, revealing the ripple effects of violence. Understanding how these communities respond to the inter-cattle rustling attacks and the coping mechanisms they employ is integral, as it provides insights into their resilience and adaptive strategies in the face of repeated victimization. Moreover, the societal and communal consequences, marked by eroding trust between communities and the potential for conflicts among different tribal groups, underscore the societal dimension of victimization. These aspects converge to create a complex web of challenges that necessitate in-depth exploration, seeking not only to comprehend the intricate dynamics but also to pave the way for potential solutions and interventions to alleviate the suffering of these communities and restore peace in the region.

1.2. Objectives

- To determine the patterns and trends of inter-cattle rustling in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda
- To assess the impacts of inter-cattle rustling on the physical, psychological, economic, and social well-being of the affected communities in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda.
- To recommend ways to improve the protection and empowerment of the communities as victims of inter-cattle rustling.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Patterns and Trends of Inter-Cattle Rustling

Inter-cattle rustling is a multi-faceted and pervasive challenge documented across various regions in Africa. Recent research published in *Africa Spectrum* underscores the severity of this issue, particularly in Nigeria, where cattle rustling has emerged as a significant criminal activity, with the northern region experiencing the most pronounced impact. The repercussions of these rustling endeavors have been dire, encompassing large-scale cattle theft, loss of human lives, and substantial property devastation (Abdulrashid, Saifullahi & Amir, 2018). A comprehensive study by Olayemi et al. (2012) estimates a staggering financial toll, revealing that inter-cattle rustling in Nigeria resulted in an estimated economic loss of \$13.7 billion during the decade spanning from 1996 to 2006. This financial burden extends to encompass considerable expenditures, including medical expenses, funeral costs, and property reparations.

Inter-cattle rustling frequently serves as a catalyst for violent conflicts, yielding injuries, fatalities, and the involuntary displacement of individuals from their homes. The movement of animals across international borders is conducted discreetly, often in small numbers, to avoid suspicion. Cattle are sometimes camouflaged to conceal their true color, and documents are falsified to simulate legitimate transactions for export (Kaimba, Njehia & Guliye, 2011). Moreover, the disruptive influence of inter-cattle rustling extends to the social fabric of communities. It can foster mistrust, animosity, and resentment among different social groups, particularly when the perpetrators of these acts evade accountability. Furthermore, it has the potential to erode the traditional norms and values governing cattle management and ownership.

The findings from the Independent publications (2023) highlight the significant impact of inter-cattle rustling in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda. As of January, the UPDF's Third Division in Moroto reported the recovery of 8,464 animals taken by cattle raiders. In addition, a recent article from *New Vision* reported that the UPDF has recovered 112 guns from former cattle raiders in Karamoja region. The situation has been marked by violent confrontations, resulting in the death of 195 warriors and the arrest of 293 individuals. On the government side, three UPDF officers and two Local Defence Unit (LDU) soldiers lost their lives in these battles. Additionally, 68 guns, 813 rounds of ammunition, and one 82 mortar bomb have been seized. Various other items were recovered, including nine mobile phones, 42 bundles of bows and arrows, three pairs of binoculars, and several UPDF plain uniforms.

The prevalence of cattle rustling, especially in June, has escalated the issue. During that month alone, 11 guns were recovered, 594 animals were returned, 58 warriors were arrested, and 68 warriors lost their lives in confrontations. Furthermore, 188 rounds of ammunition and one 82 mortar bomb were found. Maj. Mugisa, a spokesperson for the UPDF, underscores that cattle rustling has taken on a commercial dimension, with raiders orchestrating thefts for sale. This commercialization has posed challenges for the recovery of stolen animals.

The findings also align with recent research conducted by the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2022) on cattle raiding in East Africa. The study indicates that a growing demand for cattle across eastern Africa has exacerbated the problem. The practice of cattle rustling has evolved into a complex transnational organized crime driven by economic interests and facilitated by the use of small arms and light weapons. Several factors, including political involvement, businesses supplying meat to urban areas, and high levels of unemployment, have reshaped the traditional aspects of cattle rustling.

The study underscores the imperative need to address this issue comprehensively to prevent further harm to both human and animal populations. Collaborative efforts between governments and local communities are essential in formulating strategies aimed at mitigating the incidence and consequences of cattle rustling. These strategies may encompass heightened security measures in affected regions, provision of support to impacted communities, and the promotion of harmonious coexistence among diverse social groups.

2.2. Impacts of Inter-Cattle Rustling on the Physical, Psychological, Economic and Social Well-Being of the Affected Communities

Within the affected communities, the impact of cattle rustling is deeply felt. Cattle play a multi-faceted role, serving as a source of livelihood, financial security, and sustenance for the residents. Losses incurred due to cattle rustling affect not only economic well-being but also social and cultural aspects. The testimonies of community members underscore the profound impact of this issue and the urgent need for dialogue and conflict resolution to restore peace and stability in the region.

The tangible repercussions of inter-cattle rustling are indeed substantial, yielding a profound toll that encompasses physical injuries, loss of life, and the involuntary displacement of individuals from their habitual abodes. The anguish stemming from the forfeiture of livestock, residences, and dear ones can manifest as debilitating psychological conditions, including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kaimba, Njehia & Guliye, 2011).

Furthermore, the economic burden imposed by inter-cattle rustling extends its formidable reach, encompassing considerable financial outlays. These expenses encompass medical bills, funeral expenditures, and the costs associated with property restitution. A comprehensive study conducted by Olayemi et al. (2012) provides a sobering estimate, revealing that the prevalence of cattle rustling in Nigeria between 1996 and 2006 incurred an estimated financial loss amounting to a staggering \$13.7 billion.

Inter-cattle rustling has also demonstrated its capacity to disturb the intricate tapestry of social structures and relationships within and between communities. It has sown the seeds of mistrust, enmity, and bitterness among divergent societal factions, particularly when those responsible for these acts remain unaccountable. Furthermore, the perpetuation of these activities has the potential to erode the time-honored norms and values that traditionally regulate the stewardship and possession of cattle.

The psychological toll inflicted by inter-cattle rustling is undoubtedly profound, casting a looming shadow of distress within the communities it affects. The psychological anguish arising from the forfeiture of livestock, residences, and loved ones may precipitate psychological conditions, including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kaimba, Njehia & Guliye, 2011).

In response to this multi-faceted challenge, governments, civil society organizations, and international agencies have implemented an array of policies and practices. These efforts are directed towards prevention, mitigation, and resolution of the issue. Notable among these approaches are community-based strategies, wherein organizations collaborate closely with local communities to discern the underlying causes of these conflicts and formulate proactive measures (ICRC, n.d.). An exemplar of such initiatives can be found in the endeavors of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Uganda's Karamoja region, where they have harnessed community-based methodologies such as community dialogues, community policing and community compensation in their commitment to addressing the challenge of cattle rustling (ICRC, n.d.).

2.3. Conceptual Framework

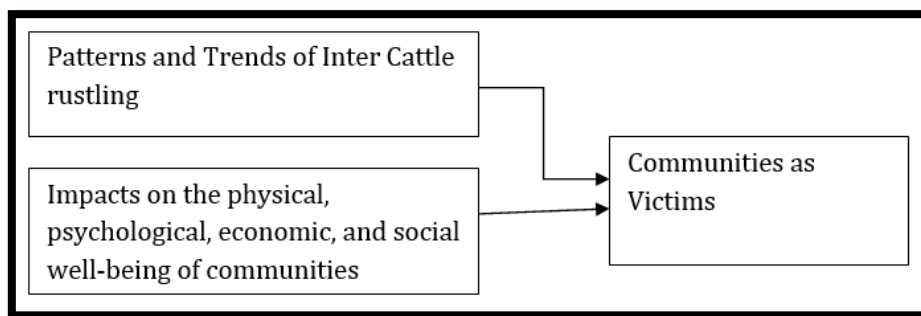


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Data and Methodology

This project adopted a mixed-methods research approach, which facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon. It shed light on the patterns, trends, and impacts of inter-cattle rustling on the communities in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda. Additionally, it contributed to evidence-based recommendations for interventions and policy enhancements in the region.

In regards to the population and sampling, the study focused on the Pokot and Sebei communities in the northern regions of Kenya and Uganda that had been affected by inter-cattle rustling. In this regard, the target population is about 400,000 members of the two communities living along the Kenya-Uganda border. To ensure a representative sample, a stratified random sampling approach was adopted due to the diversity of these regions. Stratification was based on the historical prevalence of cattle rustling within specific regions. Within each stratum, a random selection of communities was made. In this regard, groups of individuals to be considered for interviews include peace committees, administrative organs, civil society groups, women and the youths, all from the two communities. Apart from the youths, the study targeted respondents aged 60 years and above to get a clear picture of the chronology of events that transpired in the region. Twenty members would purposively be selected from each group, making a total of one hundred respondents. Interview schedules were used to collect the data from the respondents.

The study utilized a range of data collection tools and qualitative methods to address the research objectives comprehensively. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including community leaders, law enforcement authorities, and representatives from civil society organizations. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the impacts of cattle rustling on the affected communities, offering a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The topics covered included aspects such as the frequency, locations, methodologies associated with cattle rustling incidents, and changes observed over time. In addition, focus group discussions were held with community members to explore the social impacts of cattle rustling. These discussions delved into the dynamics of community relationships and cohesion in the context of recurring rustling incidents. Further, existing reports, academic studies, and official records related to cattle rustling in the study regions were reviewed to supplement primary data, providing additional context and background information.

The qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and thematically coded. Themes related to the physical, psychological, economic, and social impacts of cattle rustling were identified and analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives.

4. Findings and Discussions

At the heart of this enduring conflict lies a confluence of socio-cultural, economic, and geographical factors, with the Pokot tribe emerging as a central figure, consistently blamed by neighboring communities for these pervasive attacks. The accusations reverberate through the region, underlining the profound tribal dynamics that permeate this dispute. The ongoing hostilities have left a deep mark on the communal psyche, revealing a fracture in the social bonds that have historically held these communities together.

These attacks, as our research demonstrates, occur with a disconcerting regularity, showcasing a brazen disregard for the sanctity of time. While they can unfold at any hour, certain timeframes emerge as distressingly frequent. The early morning hours between 4-5 am, the late morning hours from 9-10 am, the afternoon between 12-3 pm, and the late evening from 9-11 pm are highlighted as the most common windows during which these attacks transpire. This temporal pattern offers valuable insights into the strategic considerations of the perpetrators and the communities' vulnerability.

The diversity of these attacks is staggering, as they exhibit distinct characteristics depending on the time of day. In the morning, they are marked by swiftness, a "grab and run" mentality, and a readiness to eliminate any opposition encountered. The attackers, often numerous and well prepared, challenge the victim communities' ability to respond effectively, given the element of surprise. Afternoons see a shift in focus, with caretakers becoming the prime targets, raising the alarm for help. These attacks often occur when the grazing fields are distant and the community is engrossed in their daily routines. The evening raids, however, are conducted with stealth, as small groups aim to drive stolen animals across the border. These criminals fail in their mission only when intelligence is shared, and traps are set.

The perpetrator's identity as "Morans," well-prepared and armed, adds to the complexity of these confrontations. Their readiness and coordination give them the upper hand, particularly in the morning and evening attacks, and further complicate the response from victim communities.

The impact of these attacks has left a profound impact on the communal psyche. Beyond the loss of animals, they result in the loss of life, displacement, closed schools, and shuttered community centers. Entire sections of communities are forced to relocate, upending livelihoods and contributing to a sense of desolation. The victim communities are often traumatized by these attacks, especially children who experience the morning attacks. The attackers are described as gangs without tribal affiliations, indicating that they form loose coalitions based on geographical knowledge and available resources. The attacks erode trust between communities and may incite conflicts between different communities. These tensions are further exacerbated by the involvement of multiple tribal groups in the attack gangs.

Children, in particular, bear a heavy burden during these attacks, particularly in the brutal morning confrontations, which leave families fighting for their very survival. Their safety becomes the primary concern for victim communities.

This conflict is not unidirectional. Rather, it is a two-way menace, ensnaring both the communities as victims and the attackers.

Ultimately, the ongoing inter-cattle rustling attacks erode trust between communities and carry the potential to incite conflicts between different tribal groups, further complicating the delicate social balance in this region. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of this deeply rooted problem, elucidating the patterns, consequences, and underlying dynamics of these attacks, thus laying the foundation for a more informed discourse and potential solutions to this protracted conflict.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals that the inter-cattle rustling conflict in the region is a complex and enduring problem driven by a confluence of socio-cultural, economic, and geographical factors. The Pokot tribe is consistently blamed by neighboring communities for the pervasive attacks, highlighting the deep tribal dynamics at play. These attacks occur with disconcerting regularity, with distinct temporal patterns and characteristics. The perpetrators, known as "Morans," are well-prepared and armed, further complicating the response from victim communities.

The impact of these attacks is far-reaching, resulting in loss of life, displacement, closed schools, and shattered community centers, with children bearing a heavy burden, especially in morning confrontations. The conflict is not one-sided, ensnaring both communities as victims and the attackers themselves. Trust between communities is eroded, and there is the potential for conflicts between different tribal groups, further destabilizing the delicate social balance in the region.

This study underscores the need for a more informed discourse and potential solutions to address the deeply rooted problem of inter-cattle rustling attacks, emphasizing the importance of understanding the patterns, consequences, and underlying dynamics to work towards a resolution.

6. Recommendations

- i. Implement community-based resilience programs to help victim communities cope with the trauma and social disruptions caused by the attacks.
- ii. Establish support services, including counseling and mental health resources, for victims, with a particular focus on children who bear a heavy psychological burden.

- iii. Promote awareness campaigns to inform the communities about the dynamics and consequences of inter-cattle rustling attacks. This can help foster a sense of unity and understanding between different tribal groups.
- iv. Encourage the reopening of schools and community centers to provide children with a sense of normalcy and access to education.
- v. Engage in conflict resolution and mediation efforts that involve various stakeholders, including tribal leaders, community representatives, and law enforcement, to find peaceful solutions to the conflict and reduce tensions.
- vi. Strengthen security measures in vulnerable areas, especially during the high-risk times identified in the study, such as early morning and late evening.
- vii. Enhance law enforcement efforts to combat the activities of the "Morans" and criminal gangs, with a focus on coordinated responses to morning and evening attacks.
- viii. Promote sustainable resource management and livelihood diversification to reduce the incentive for cattle rustling.
- ix. Provide economic opportunities and vocational training to affected communities to decrease their dependence on livestock.
- x. Facilitate cross-cultural dialogues and community exchanges to promote understanding and trust between different tribal groups.
- xi. Encourage initiatives that bring together members of different communities for joint activities, fostering connections and reducing stereotypes.
- xii. Establish early warning systems to alert communities during high-risk times, enabling them to be better prepared and potentially thwart attacks.
- xiii. Encourage intelligence-sharing and cooperation between communities to combat the stealthy evening raids.
- xiv. Support further research and data collection on the conflict, victim experiences, and the modus operandi of the attackers. Sharing this information can help develop more effective strategies and interventions.
- xv. Invest in long-term conflict transformation programs that aim to address the root causes of the conflict, including historical grievances, land disputes, and resource scarcity.
- xvi. Advocate for government and international intervention to facilitate peace negotiations, provide humanitarian aid to victims, and ensure the enforcement of laws and regulations that can deter the attacks.

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