

Nature and Causes of Cattle Rustling among some Pastoral Communities in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper is based on research conducted in two Districts in Kenya namely; Baringo East and Marakwet East in the Kerio Valley region. The objectives were; to investigate the causes and socio-economic effects of cattle rustling on the Pokot and Marakwet communities. The research utilised both primary and secondary data collection methods. The sample size was calculated at two hundred and twenty respondents representing both communities. The results show cattle rustling has numerous causes that include; the availability of guns, commercialization of cattle raids, political incitement, poverty, traditional values, illiteracy and women. Some socio-economic impacts of cattle rustling included; migration, change of livelihoods styles, eroded cultural values and adoption of education and farming. The paper recommends that government and all stakeholders should develop Kerio Valley region through building schools, construction roads and market to improve the literacy levels and provide alternative livelihoods to pastoralism.

Keywords: *conflicts, raiding, underdevelopment, rural communities, pastoralism*

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in the North rift region of Kenya are thought to be part and parcel of a pastoral culture and livelihood of resident communities. More so conflicts between Marakwet and Pokot communities are deemed to be resource based resulting from competition over pasture and water. A cattle rustling is the act of forceful raiding of livestock from one community by another using guns and leaving behind destruction of property and loss of lives. This concept should be understood alongside cattle raids which involve stealing livestock from one community by another without destroying property or killing people. Throughout the paper cattle rustling is used interchangeably with conflicts among the Pokot and Marakwet.

Traditionally both communities practiced cattle raids with neighbouring communities, using crude weapons such as; sticks, spears, bows, arrows and clubs. These raids are practiced as means of reciprocity, for poor families to acquire livestock and restock particularly after droughts or epidemics. However, in 1990s this cultural practice transformed itself and is now referred to as 'cattle rustling', with the main weapons used being guns. Prior to 1990 cattle raids are meant to steal livestock, by scaring away their owners, but cattle rustling involves destruction of property and murder. Cattle rustling have become a commercial

entity along the boundaries of pastoral communities and stolen livestock are never recovered. The actors in cattle rustling involve politically linked and power wielding personalities sometimes not pastoralist. The cattle rustling menace has left the Marakwet and Pokot to bear the brunt of destruction and murder. It is interesting therefore to enquire what went wrong to a culture of reciprocity that turned violent. Thus this study aims at establishing the nature and causes of cattle rustling among Marakwet and Pokot communities in northern Kenya.

Proliferation of illegal weapons among Pokot and Marakwet had increased the severity of cattle rustling. Before 1990s, Marakwet relied primarily on their traditional weapons (clubs, bows, poisoned arrows and swords) whereas Pokot used sticks, spears, bows and arrows (Kipkorir and Welbourn, 1973). The causes of conflicts are blamed on Pokot aggressors who invaded Marakwet pasture/grazing lands along Kerio River. As Pokot raids intensified, Marakwet people were forced to purchase firearms to counter attack their neighbouring Pokot. Interesting to note is the fact that the gun suppliers to Marakwet are the very Pokot, they intended to contain. It is estimated that there are 1,000 illicit arms in the hands of Marakwet warriors and about 3000 in the hands of Pokot. The first gun is

reported among West Pokot in 1976, East Pokot in 1979 and Marakwet in 1993 (KHRC, 2001).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study was carried out in two districts in Kenya namely; Baringo East and Marakwet East occupied by Pokot and Marakwet respectively. Two divisions affected by cattle rustling were identified randomly from existing District development records. The study areas were; Tot and Kolowa divisions along Kerio Valley area. Each division was further subdivided into three clusters and one cluster randomly selected as study sites. Households in each cluster were identified and numbered creating the sampling frame. The sample size was calculated and determined at 220 households, the starting point was blindly selected from the table of random numbers. Systematic sampling was used to identify the respondents, in each case the head of household or spouse was to respond to questionnaire. In each cluster, every third household was selected to respond and in cases of deserted homesteads, the next household was automatically selected. The respondent in each household was the father/mother or eldest son/daughter aged between 18- 70 years.

The study design was organized in three phases; first was reconnaissance survey and identification of research enumerators. This took a period of one month and involved identifying sample frame, training research enumerators, courtesy calls to district leaders and general familiarization with the people and their cultures to establish research ethics. The second phase involved interviews with respondents, key informants, non-participant observation and focused group discussions. This stage took a period of six months. The third phase was reviewing secondary data relevant to the study topic from various sources and research monitoring. This was a continuous process throughout the entire research period.

The study utilized social science research methods as stipulated by Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) and Kothari (1990). They include; structured questionnaires, non-participant observation, group discussion and key informant interviews. Six group discussions were conducted with women, youth and community elders from Pokot and Marakwet communities from 2008-2010.

Research quantitative data was coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science [SPSS], while qualitative data was sorted, summarized and interpreted according to set objectives, hypotheses and theories to compliment quantitative data. Findings are presented using frequency tables and graphs showing percentages. Inferences are drawn

from the data to determine relationships of various factors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper discusses the findings of the study, its implications and provides a conclusion on the nature and causes of cattle rustling among pastoral communities in Kenya.

Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Respondents’ age ranged from 18 – 55 years. Ages 18-24 years are 10%, 25-34 years are 26%, 35-44 and 45-55 years are 24% each whereas those above 55 years are 16%. Table 1 shows education levels of respondents. Education levels ranged from no formal education, primary, secondary and post secondary education. Respondents without formal education represented 34%; those with primary education represented 34%; those with secondary education are 26% and respondents with post-secondary education are only 6%.

Table 1: Education levels of respondents

Levels of Education	Frequency	Percentage
None	76	34
Primary	74	34
Secondary	57	26
Post-secondary	13	6
Total	220	100

These findings implied the Pokot and Marakwet are less educated with majority having attained primary/ basic education. Due to this fact they could not value higher education for their children and made little or no investment in child education. The respondents attributed this fact to few schools found within accessible distance. The Pokot people still practice nomadic lifestyles and move from one place to another, making it difficult for them to attend and complete school.

Table 2, shows income and occupation of respondents cross tabulation. On income 38% earned between Ksh. 500- 1000 per month (approx. US\$ 7-114), whereas 31% earned below Kshs 500 in livestock keeping. Thirty-one percent (31%) of respondents are livestock keepers whereas 24% are agro-pastoral. When income and occupation data is cross tabulated respondents in formal employment earned more than Kshs 2000 per month (18%). Farming respondents earned below Ksh 1000 [12%].

Table 2: Occupation and income cross tabulation

Occupations	Income in Kenya shillings [Kshs/ Month]						Total	%
	None	Below 500	500-1000	1100- 1500	1600- 2000	Over 2000		
None	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
Livestock	0	28	35	3	2	0	68	31
Farming	0	10	12	3	1	0	26	12
Agro-pastoral	0	29	19	2	0	2	52	24
Formal employment	0	0	5	2	4	30	41	18
Business	0	2	12	6	0	8	28	13
Total	5	69	83	16	7	40	220	100
%	3	31	38	7	3	18		

Those respondents who reported being in formal employment are staff of NGOs, CBOs, Church Organizations and Primary school teachers. Those respondents who reported practicing business are mainly running retail shops, operating local butcheries and hotels. This category could be referred to as self-employed. These findings imply that Pokot and Marakwet had low incomes, hence could not meet their basic needs of food, educating their children nor live in decent homes. The little income is only enough to provide food for survival. The findings also imply that after the Marakwet lost their livestock to cattle rustlers, they have resorted to farming and abandoned livestock keeping. The Pokot on the other hand, due to the harsh environmental conditions which do not allow cultivation have continued with livestock keeping as their main occupation.

Causes of cattle rustling among Pokot and Marakwet communities

The respondents were asked to identify causes of conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet. Table 3 shows causes of conflicts identified by respondents. The prevalence or massive use of guns in cattle raiding is identified as the major cause of and persistent violence between the Pokot and Marakwet. Availability of guns represents 38% whereas traditional values accounts for only 8%. Prior to the introduction of the gun, the Pokot and Marakwet used traditional weapons such as bows and arrows to raid. Traditionally, both communities observed raiding rules including; theft of livestock, capture women and children, but there was no murder or destruction of property. Captured women and children are integrated into winning community through socialization. Field reports indicated from 1960-1980s, only six murder cases are reported that involved individual differences and not as a result of cattle raiding.

Table 3: Causes of Cattle Rustling among Pokot and Marakwet

Type of Cause	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Availability of guns	98	46
Commercialization of cattle raids	49	23
Political incitements	26	12
Poverty	19	9
Traditional values	12	6
Illiteracy	6	3
Women	4	1
Total	214	100

Access to illegal firearms is blamed on the porous Kenyan boundaries in the north with Sudan; to the east with Somalia; and to the west with Uganda and the resistant armies of John Kony. The presents of conflicts in these countries encouraged the free movement of arms into the hands of Pokot who sold to Marakwet. The market price of used AK 47 and G3 Rifle was reported at Kshs 30 – 60 respectively. Ammunition was also readily available at Kshs 500 (Cheserek, 2007).

Politicians also assisted communities to acquire guns and ammunition, and guaranteed markets for stolen animals while provided food and transport for the raiders to targeted areas and back. Poor leadership has also contributed to conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet. Commercialization of raided livestock is another cause of conflict between Pokot and Marakwet accounting for 23%. Commercialization here refers to the ready market or cash for stolen/raided animals. Unscrupulous business people with good links to politicians and senior government officials were reported to have organized and supervised cattle rustling for individual gain. They purchasing stolen livestock at low prices and fetching high profits by selling them in major urban centres and international markets. These activities implied raiding had become a source of livelihood to those who owned guns and a

means of making quick wealth for the politically connected.

Traditional values such as dowry/bride wealth and ‘*sapana*’ are identified as factors that encouraged the youths to participate in cattle rustling accounting for 6%. Among Pokot in particular, it is reported that bride wealth is as high as 20 – 60 cows and 10 – 40 goats for one to get a wife. This figure is not uniform because it is pegged on the beauty, character and education level of the girl.

Among Marakwet on the other hand, bride wealth is standard at four to five cows, one bull and five goats for a wife. In some cases the figure is down to three cows for men from poor families. Again among Pokot, the dowry is paid at once while among Marakwet, dowry is staggered over a life time. This factor alone is responsible for the high turnout of raids conducted by Pokot men.

Sapana (a Pokot male traditional rite of passage to elder hood) was reported to encourage cattle raiding. During *sapana* ceremony, the man spears his favourite bull and serves meat to his friends and other elders, after which he is officially introduced to the elder hood club and is allowed to participate in community matters as an elder. Those who have not served *sapana* meal have no say in community matters. Thus *sampan* encouraged the young adults to acquire bulls by whatever means so that they too could respect in society. Women are identified to escalate cattle raiding because; they celebrated successful rustlers with song while using mockery against those who did not participate in raids. The women regarded highly men with huge herds of cattle, while those without are seen as cowards. The women always had songs for each occasion when raids are conducted.

Table 4 shows the seasons when conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet occurred. Rainy season represents 59%, April- August showed 17%, January – March showed 10%, September – December showed 8% while dry season had only 5% cattle rustling. Table 5 shows seasons and ethnic cross tabulation responses whereby Pokot respondents reported 29% conflict during rainy season, 23% in January-March, 22% occurred between April- August, 16% occurred September-December while 10% occurred in dry season. The Marakwet respondents on the other hand reported 87% conflicts occurred during rainy season and 13% in April –August season. There are zero raids reported among Marakwet during January-March, September-December and during dry seasons.

Table 4: Seasons of Cattle rustling among Pokot and Marakwet

Seasons	Frequency	Percentage
January- March	23	10
April- August	37	17
September - December	18	8
Rainy season	131	59
Dry season	11	5
Total	220	100

Table 5: Season of cattle raids and ethnic responses

Seasons	Ethnic Groups					
	Other		Pokot		Marakwet	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
January-March	0	0	23	23	0	0
April-August	1	10	21	22	15	13
September-December	2	20	16	16	0	0
Rainy season	6	60	29	29	98	87
Dry season	1	10	10	10	0	0
Total	10	100	97	100	113	100

These findings imply that among Pokot, cattle rustling can take place any season of the year, whereas the Marakwet consider most cattle raids to occur in rainy season. These findings agree with Nunow (2000), who states that among the Somali people raids are conducted after a dry season to recover livestock lost during the rainy season. The respondents classified conflicts based on the following; ethnicity, resource competition, political incitement, cultural belief and all the above. Ethnicity represented 29%; political incitement represented 16%; resource competition represented 7%; cultural belief and practices represented 10%; whereas all-above represented 38% (refer table 6 below).

During dry seasons both communities, particularly Pokot reported being faced with other social problems such as lack of food which they are unwilling to combine with raiding. The respondents reported that their priorities in dry season are to meet basic needs of food for the whole family and fight epidemic of diseases. They also reported that wet seasons are good times to replenish stock lost during dry season. These findings agree with Adano, Witsenburg & Dietz [2004] that suggested herdsmen are more violent and ethnic conflicts, especially armed raids took place during wet seasons. Their explanation that raiders attacked during wet years because of high grass, strong animals, dense bush to hide in and the availability of surface water, which makes it easier to trek with animals, seems plausible. Furthermore

livestock can be a burden during droughts and all parties profited from cooperation in a situation of drought. These findings also support the scarcity – causes violence paradigm, since years of severe drought are times of higher scarcity giving rise to violence in the next wet season to restock and replenish livestock.

Table 7 shows classification of conflicts on ethnic basis where 41% Pokot classified conflicts as ethnic based, whereas 19% Marakwet think so. Twenty-seven percent (27%) Pokot classified conflicts as political based whereas only 4% Marakwet think so. More than half Marakwet [57%] classified conflict as based on all above; that is ethnic, resource competition, political and cultural. Other tribes and Pokot classified 10% conflicts as based on resource, whereas Marakwet put the same at 4%. It is interesting to note that respondents from other tribes did not see cattle raids as cultural based. This implies that cultural practice alone may not lead to cattle raids among Pokot and Marakwet.

Table 6: Classifications of Cattle raids by respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity	65	29
Political incitement	34	16
Resource competition	15	7
Cultural beliefs	21	10
All the above	85	38
Total	220	100

Table 7: Classification of cattle raids by different ethnic communities

Categories	Ethnic Groups					
	Other		Pokot		Marakwet	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Ethnicity	3	30	40	41	22	19
Political	4	40	26	27	4	4
Resources	1	10	10	10	4	4
Cultural	0	0	3	3	18	16
All the above	2	20	18	19	65	57
Total	10	100	97	100	113	100

Social and Economic Impacts of Cattle Rustling on Pokot and Marakwet Communities

The respondents identified that cattle raids have both negative and positive socio-economic impacts on their livelihoods, politics and environment. The socio-economic impacts are identified as;

- Migration from ancestral land into new and safer areas of the districts, sometimes outside the districts. Due to the migration families and clans cohesion was disrupted. Family members lost touch with each other particularly with regard to social activities such as cultivation, traditional ceremonies and unity. Migration also separated spouses and reduced procreation among the communities. Women in Marakwet community moved into the escarpment and highlands leaving their husband along the Kerio Valley to protect livestock and guard community against attacks from Pokot, similar effects were felt among the Pokot.
- Migration into new areas not known to the respondents led to infection from new diseases. These diseases affected both the people and their livestock leading to death and loss of livestock. The diseases spread quickly due to lack of health centres and veterinary services. It was estimated that 4,000 people died and up to 14,000 livestock were stolen.
- Migration left the people homeless and with no food. Each episode of cattle rustling led to displacement of respondents who were forced to camp in churches. The Marakwet, who cultivated food crops along Kerio River, abandoned their farms due to insecurity. As a result, they lacked access to basic social amenities such as water, maternity facility and medicine for the sick. Thus, affected families suffered from water related diseases such as typhoid, diarrhoea and dehydration in children.
- Between 1990- 2002, the number of orphans reported in the study area increased from 95 to 1204, whereas number of widows increased from 24 to 86 within the same period for both communities.
- Orphaned girls opted for early marriage between 14–16 years old in order to gain protection and security against harassment from male chauvinist. Between 1990 and 2002 the number of HIV/AIDS cases rose from 0- 12 at Tot dispensary as a result of rape and force sexual activities among women and girls. The number of disabled and gun-injured people increased, making them a liability to both communities. Women and girls were raped during raids leading to increased cases of HIV/AIDS in both communities.
- Women took up more roles during conflict than before to free men to attend cattle rustling related activities. Women took care of children, the elderly, fetched water, cooked food and cared for livestock; while men attended to raiding and its related training sessions. Widows were particularly affected because they became sole breadwinners for their families. Women from both communities lost access to herbal medicine collected from

bushes, for fear of attack by the 'enemy'. It should be noted that both communities depend highly on traditional herbs to cure diseases rather than attend health dispensaries and clinics. The lack of herbal medicine led to high mortality rates among children and pregnant mothers.

- Conflict resulted in dishonest, fear, tension and disobedience to cultural norms particularly among the warriors from Pokot and Marakwet. This developed further into hostility between the two communities leading to few inter-marriages and disruption of common cultural ceremonies associated with marriages and circumcision. Among East Pokot, it was reported that some boys missed out on circumcision rites that was normally performed by Marakwet circumcisers.
- Owning herds of livestock among the Marakwet became a security threat. Among the Marakwet, cultural values placed on large herds of livestock changed and is replaced with farming and zero grazing as a source of livelihood. Taking children to school became an important investment that paid dividends through formal employment.
- Communal herding was embraced rather than individual herding. This strategy benefited families without guns. Community cohesion and unity was intensified, with community members as far as Eldoret, Nakuru, Kapenguria and Nairobi, assisting in times of conflict through cash donations to food and other basic requirements for displaced families. The Pokot warriors are reported to seek reinforcement as far as Uganda whenever they organized cattle rustling.
- The acquisition of guns by both communities led to increased incidences of crime whereby young warriors looted shops and stole property. This is very common among the Marakwet than the Pokot.
- Conflicts led to thirteen primary schools along Kerio Valley to be abandoned because people fled to the escarpment where they built makeshift schools. Non-Governmental Organizations, Community health centres, Shops and Markets were closed for fear of insecurity. As violence increased professionals left the area for fear of insecurity. These included teachers, health workers, social workers and businessmen.

Some quotes from respondents regarding the positive impacts of conflicts on the community;
“Gained knowledge on self defence and war tactics”
“Identification of heroes”
“Minimized idleness”
“Raiding became a social activity”.
“Boosted community economy in wealth”

“Trading centres opened in the interior of community”

These findings of the study imply that conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet are multi-faceted and required multi-faceted approach to resolve all identified issues hence the concept of systems theory (Burton 1968). Top on the list is poverty reduction; illiteracy among the two communities and developing markets for pastoral and agro-pastoral products in Kerio Valley.

Suggested Conflict Resolution Mechanisms to Cattle Rustling in Kenya

Although Kenya is prominently present and active in the international and regional initiatives on conflict resolution, the government has achieved very little in terms of controlling trade in illegal arms in northern region and Kerio Valley. In Kerio Valley, the government had deployed General Service Unit (GSU); Anti Stock Theft Unit (ASTU); Administrative Police [AP] and Regular Police in five trading centres along the valley. These centres are; Arros, Mogil, Chesongoch, Liler and Tot with the responsibility of providing security to the people and their property. This approach had three weaknesses; one the officers lacked coordination particularly when a raid occurred, second is that officers are less armed compared to cattle rustlers who had sophisticated weapons and thirdly is whether the security officers should shoot at raiders who are citizens [Kimenju et al. 2003]. These weaknesses made the security officers insufficient in curbing cattle raids and its associated impacts to Pokot and Marakwet people.

The government also organized occasional security operations in the North Rift aimed at confiscating illegal arms from citizens. However these operations have failed because residents are intimidated in the process. The government has also used tactics of declaring amnesty to those willing to surrender guns, while using threats and ultimatums to others. Whenever such security operations are carried out the residents are physically abused, molested and ripped of property. These government tactics have only served to create more hatred and despise for government security personnel in the Kerio Valley. Cattle rustlers who get forcefully disarmed ended up upgrading their weapons into sophisticated ones.

The issues that underlie the conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet has earlier identified are linked to underdevelopment, illiteracy, poverty and inequitable distribution of resources. Any measures that are set to resolve these conflicts should address these underlying issues either in introducing or reducing them. The triggers of these conflicts are identified as the easily accessible guns,

commercialization of cattle raiding and political incitement. The gun market should be demolished from source. Politicians who incite their votes to raid other communities should be arrested and charged in court. The government should invest in conflict resolution between Pokot and Marakwet and stop relying on NGOs to bring peace in Kerio Valley. There is urgent need for all stakeholders to develop the Kerio Valley area through construction of Schools, Roads, Markets and awareness creation on alternative forms of livelihood other than pastoralism.

CONCLUSION

The conflicts between Pokot and Marakwet are more than just cattle raiding. They qualify as internal wars, and should be treated as such for it to receive clear attention of government. For a decade (1990- 2000) these wars are down played to revolve around pastoral traditions and cattle thefts when in real sense they involved confrontations between political powers seeking to gain roots among communities living in north western Kenya. The area where Pokot and Marakwet inhabit is remote and has been clearly under-developed. This marginalization has made the Kerio Valley a jungle, with no positive influence from outside. To resolve these conflicts the government should invest heavy in initiating developments projects along the Kerio Valley to bridge the gap between Pokot and Marakwet. Kerio Valley area is remote compared to other parts of the country with similar environmental conditions. In particular an all weather road networks should be constructed between Biretwo and Kainuk to easy transport and communication. The government in liaison with development partners should develop markets for livestock products and farm produce for the residents of Kerio Valley. This area is rich in honey and other horticultural crops that should be exploited to facilitate income generation for both communities. Education services should be improved such as; access to schools and training centres to improve literacy levels of the people. This region is good for touristic purposes that should be cultivated to encourage local and international tourism. Policy makers should focus on the integration of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms into resolving cattle raids among the Pokot and Marakwet.

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