

POLICY BRIEF

Rural Banditry and Social Conflicts in Plateau State



BACKGROUND

In the last two decades, Plateau state has faced different forms of conflicts, with both rural and urban manifestations. Patterns of killings, destruction and displacements associated with rural banditry and other forms of violence have become a dominant feature of daily life in most rural communities of Plateau State. Armed robbery, vandalisation of pipelines and oil theft, cattle rustling, overnight attacks on sleeping communities by armed groups, and rape are fast becoming the major features of rural violence.

A major dimension of conflict in the state is the violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen. Competition over access and control of land and its resources sometimes escalate into violent confrontations. The majority of the people of Plateau State live in rural areas and are dependent on subsistence-based livelihoods, with agriculture as their primary source.

For most households, the cultivation of small plots of land, coupled with few livestock, defines their agrarian lives. While farmers are concerned about food production through land as a factor of production and source of livelihood, herdsmen on the other hand are in dire need of pasture for their animals.

In most parts of the state, the patterns of violent confrontations between farmers and herdsmen stem from encroachment in farmlands, struggle over grazing space, cattle rustling and other forms of violence. This situation continues to pose serious security threats to the lives and livelihoods of the people, amidst the inability of security agencies to adequately provide them the much-needed security.

The security situation in Plateau state is increasingly being shaped by rising incidences of cattle rustling [(Jos south, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Wase and Langtang Local government Areas (LGAs)]. These incidences have increased distrust

among and between communities and provoked aggression. Violent attacks and counterattacks between sedentary farmers, youth groups and criminal elements and pastoralists have escalated the existing inter-communal tensions and distrust. Organized criminal elements whose network appears to be beyond state control are linked to the increasing incidence of cattle rustling in Plateau state.

Generally, the contention between farmers and pastoralists is basically economic. The majority of conflicts therefore relates to access and control over economic resources. This struggle over land and its related resources is also fueled by climate change and changing demographics across the central Nigerian region – growing population, rapid urbanization, desertification and increasing migration from the northern parts of the country to central Nigeria.

VIOLENCE, CRIMINALITY AND DISPLACEMENTS

Violence has also led to deaths, displacements, disruption of livelihoods and the economy, to weaknesses associated with policing and justice administration; and has given rise to a climate of insecurity and impunity. It has further contributed to criminality, rural banditry and conflicts across the state. All these issues are organically linked to a thriving underground, but informal economy.

The rustling of cattle in the rural areas of Plateau State has become a major security challenge that has continued to fuel violent conflict and insecurity. As a criminal enterprise that is fast holding community under siege, this illegal activity has been viewed as part of an underground economy that is deeply attached to the political economy of some agrarian communities.

¹. Kwaja, A.M.C (2014) Blood, cattle and cash: Cattle rustling and Nigeria's burgeoning underground economy, West Africa Insight, Vol.4, No.3.

Rural banditry in Plateau state is largely traced to the increasing challenges of poverty, employment, exclusion and the poor exploitation of the natural resources of the state.

This has deeply affected the structure of the rural economy and created condition for social conflict and violence. These conflicts have, in turn, continued to undermine rural productivity and livelihoods, and consequently deepened poverty and exclusion.

Incidence report indicates growing cases of deaths and destruction. In 2009, 83 deaths were recorded, which doubles the 2008 figures. The deaths were spread across different states of the federation, with reports from Plateau state in June, July and December 2009 indicating the highest occurrence per month. In 2010, fatalities related to cattle grazing dropped to 39, based on reports from Plateau state in April, July and October.

In 2011, there was an increase in the killing of cows as a result of cattle related conflicts. The same year, Plateau state reported several incidents in January, February, May and August. The highest incident was in February and June 2011. Out of the 15 reported cases in the year, Plateau state accounted for the highest number of occurrence (4 incidents). The conflicts were a result of farmland invasion by pastoralists, which led to attacks and reprisals from both sides. A total of 115 deaths were reported in 2013, which were spread across the country in 12 months.

² See Olayoku, P.A. (2014). Trends and patterns of cattle grazing and rural violence in Nigeria (2006-2014). Nigeria Watch Project. IFRA-Nigeria working papers series No 34.

³ Olayoku, P.A. 2014, Ibid

⁴ Ibid

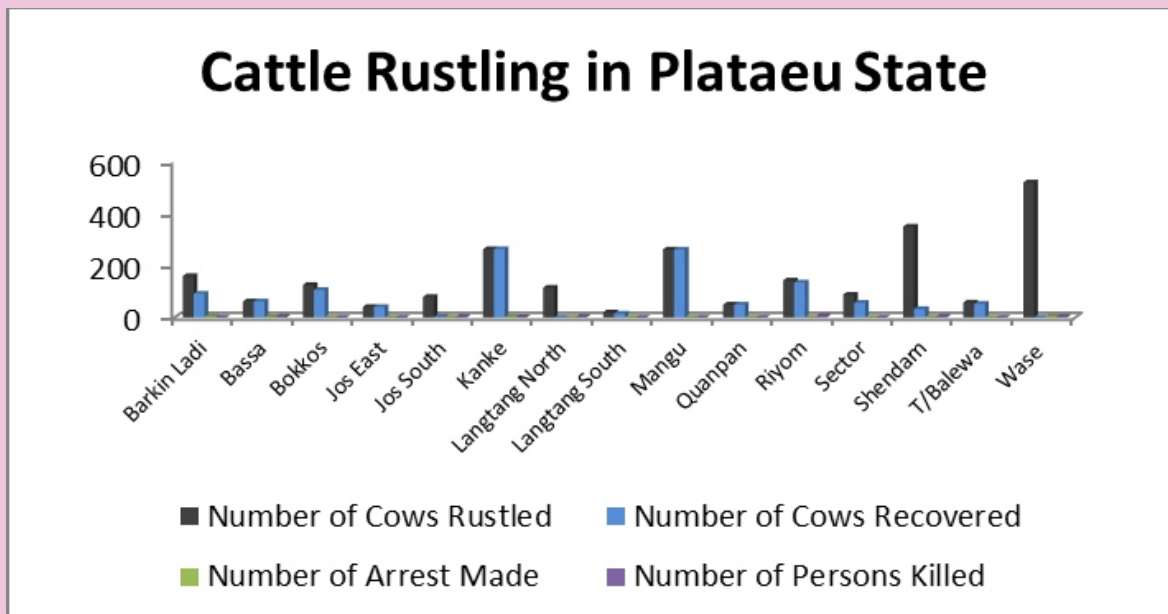
⁵ Ibid

The ethno-religious identity of actors as highlighted from the analysis is quite significant in understanding this phenomenon. States in northern Nigeria, especially Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi recorded more fatalities—83 out of 111.

These locations are majorly populated by ethnic minority groups of Christian faith, whose identities contrast with the Muslim Fulani's, who are often portrayed as aggressors. These minority groups perceive themselves as marginalized by the Hausa/Fulani Muslims. Therefore, rural banditry is sometimes blurred by the historical conflicts between these groups.

The study indicates that cattle rustling are indeed a frequently recurring crime and occurs across the state. A total of 2,337 cattle were rustled while just 18 persons were killed. It is also important to note that 1,171 of the cattle rustled were recovered (leaving a net loss of 1,166 heads of cattle)—yet only 6 arrests were made. The single most significant incidence was the loss of 300 cattle in Yelwa-Ibi road, in Shendam LGA, in March 2014. No arrest or recovery was made following the incidence. In other cases, the total cattle rustled was immediately recovered. It was the case with the 200 cattle rustled and recovered in Made village, Mangu LGA, in October 2014.

Figure 1: Aggregate of Cattle Rustling (Jan-Oct, 2014)

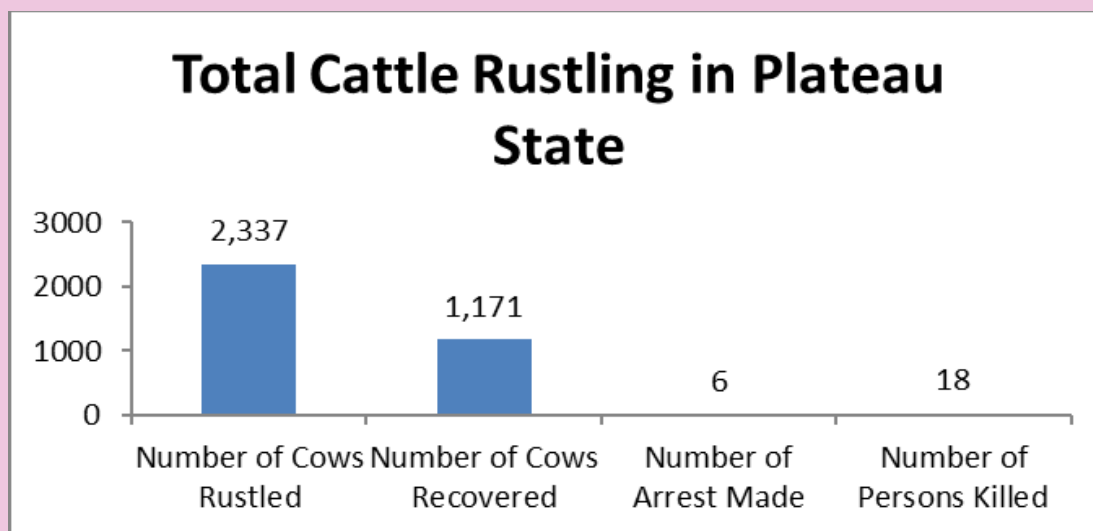


Source: Field Work

When the table above is compressed and reported as an aggregate by location, we see congruence between the rates of rustling and recovery of cattle in some LGAs such as Bassa, Jos East, Kanke, Mangu, and Quanpan. In these areas, the recovery of rustled cattle was possible largely due to community vigilance, namely in terms of the activities of vigilantes. There were

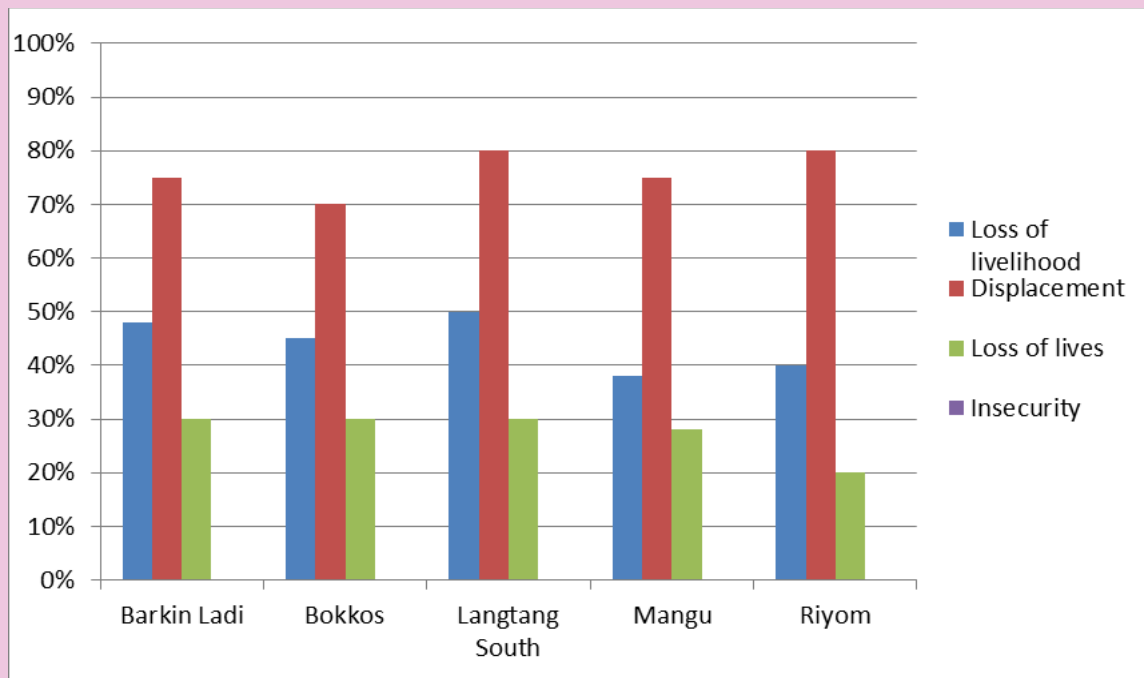
low recovery rates in the case of Wase, Shendam, Langtang North, Jos South, and Barkin Ladi. In Wase for instance, 520 cattle were rustled, but none was recovered.

Figure 2: Cattle Rustling in Plateau State (Jan - Oct 2014)



Source: Field Work

Figure 3: Effects of banditry and conflicts on women and children in select LGAs



Source: Field Work

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The rustling of cattle for economic gains represents the primary drive for rural banditry, which has increasingly been fuelled by a climate of fear, violence and insecurity. This phenomenon has been a threat to the lives and livelihoods of local populations. The inability of the State to appreciate the phenomenon and effectively respond to the challenge is contributing to fostering a climate of impunity.

Rescue/punitive robbery is alarming; it is most frequent in Riyom, and least frequent in Barkin Ladi. Its frequency and spread presupposes that people in Plateau State (across 5 LGAs) are resorting to self-help and perhaps consider themselves obliged to respond to either their own or their communities' experience of self-help, through rescue missions or punitive robbery.

The study found that rural banditry is a self-reinforced circle which is triggered, either by one or more of the following types of robbery: contract, pre-planned, opportunist and snap robberies; and then

perpetuated through a rescue/punitive robbery. It stands to reason that even the rescue/punitive robbery might not offer the end of the scenario, but provide the impetus and alibi for future incidences of rural banditry, and thus reinforcing the deadly circle of rural violence.

This finding has important implications, especially when we reflect on the role and place of the State in the management or escalation of rural banditry and social conflicts in Plateau State. Available evidence shows that when the State is able to *rapidly* and *effectively* respond to incidences of rural banditry, it reduces the propensity for resorting to self-help. State intervention that is rapid, yielding result and convincing communities that crimes are not being treated with impunity would be important to breaking this circle of rural banditry.

From the experiences of the five local governments covered in this study, rural banditry impacts on communities in three different

ways: Increased spending on security institutions, unemployment in the community and reduction in trade and investments.

The study revealed that displacement is the single most recurring and severe effect of cattle rustling and social conflicts across the 5 select LGAs in the state. This is followed by loss of livelihood ahead of loss of lives. This finding suggests that women and children are impacted the most. They are more vulnerable to displacement and consequent loss of livelihood.

The rustling of cattle has become a major security challenge in Plateau State. The issue has become more visible and severe over the recent years, and has also been compounded by cases of communal violence in the state. There appears to be a relationship between cattle rustling and communal conflicts in Plateau State. Although the causality of these phenomena is yet to be determined, cattle rustling is gradually becoming a mask for communal violence.

The consequences of rural banditry manifest in several ways, which have to do largely with state capacity, namely in terms of its presence and control over rural communities. The inability of the State to effectively respond to conflicts and violence has led to an expansion of the frontiers of banditry. Despite the ubiquitous character of the State, it has largely failed to show presence in most rural communities—either in social service provisioning, or in ensuring security of lives and property. This has undermined the state capacity to respond to insecurity.

The study also established that there is a nexus between state response and rural banditry. It was observed that one experience of rural banditry very often leads to a further attack, in the form of a self-help rescue mission or robbery attack on the perceived perpetrators of the first attack as a punitive measure. This 'circle of rural banditry' is self-reinforcing and self-perpetuating and requires strong state action in the form of

rapid and effective response to all trigger incidences of rural banditry to avoid the possibility of the onset of a fresh circle.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Responding to challenges of rural banditry will require strong policy responses. Some of the policy recommendations we came up with include the following:

1. Develop a strong community approach to conflict management. Responses to challenges of rural banditry have been largely state-centric or formal. There are limited institutional mechanism for mobilising community resources and action to end the phenomenon. It is therefore important to develop a strong policy driven community approach to security management. This will not only guarantee ownership of the process, it will also allow people to deal with their context specific experiences. Such approach should ensure effective women's participation and protection of vulnerable groups from violence. This effort will also

require building synergy between state and non-state actors. The role of civil society in managing conflicts of this nature is very important. Entrenching these in the communities will go a long way in engendering recognition, inclusion and participation.

2. Develop a systematic early warning system and response mechanism:

Although it is important to make concerted efforts to contain cattle rustling in the long run, short term policy and strategic interventions must seek to increase the level of rescues and recovering of stolen cattle. Communities and pastoralists in areas such as Wase would be reassured when some of their stolen cattle are recovered. Also important, is the need to match recovery rates with rates of arrests and prosecution of offenders to guide against the increasing culture of impunity. When individual offenders are punished, there is less likelihood that victims would ascribe the responsibilities for the crimes on the communities of the perpetrators, thus lessening the likelihood of reprisal attacks.

3. Regulatory policy on Small Arms and Light Weapons: The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the state is part of the growing privatization of violence, which has created a condition whereby non-state entities are in custody of weapons outside of state control. In fact, there is a strong link between the emergence of criminals and the proliferation of arms. As these entities operate outside of state control, tracking this network of criminals become increasingly difficult. The absence of a robust mechanism for monitoring the illicit production and distribution of SALWs remains a major security challenge in Plateau State. Efforts should be made by governments, at all levels, to address this challenge.

4. Designate cattle routes and grazing reserves: most grazing reserves and routes have been badly encroached by population pressure, urbanisation and climate change. There is a need for governments, at the state and local levels, to re-examine these challenges with a view to

addressing them in an effective way. This will mitigate the clashes between farmers and herders. However, such a strategy will require a national policy on pastoral reserves. The development of such a policy document should include state governments, local governments, civil society groups, community leaders and the National Boundary Commission.

5. Modernisation of pastoralism: there are a lot of lessons to be learnt from Southern Africa, East Africa and Europe to develop a semi-nomadic pastoralism. This requires effective management of pastors and minimal movement of pastoralists, which also enhances the security of animals and helps build a sustainable symbiotic relationship between pastoralist and sedentary farmers.

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Views expressed are those of the authors
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