

The Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to the Prevalence of Cattle Rustling in West Pokot County, Kenya

Benson Kibet Chombus., Andrew Mung'ale Nyongesa, PhD

Kenyatta University

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ABSTRACT

Cattle rustling persists as a critical socio-economic and security issue across West Pokot County which damages local lives and economic stability together with social relationships between communities. Traditional livestock hijacking among pastoralist populations has transformed into an armed robbery activity caused by financial misfortune and resource disputes along with deficient government management procedures. Multiple efforts failed to stop cattle rustling from persisting as a threat against peace along with development and social strength of the region. The development of sustainable solutions requires understanding of what drives this particular practice in the first place. The research zone in this study investigates what economic and social aspects drive cattle rustling occurrences among West Pokot communities. The research analyzes how livelihood dependency affects poverty and unemployment alongside resource scarcity to explore its relation with cattle rustling for identifying long-lasting intervention solutions. The study implemented a convergent parallel mixed-methods design because it integrated quantitative and qualitative methodologies to achieve thorough analysis. Through 300 questionnaires and in-depth key informant interviews and focus group discussions the researchers collected their data set. The research team analyzed quantitative data through SPSS whereas qualitative data received thematic code analysis. During this research investigation the team followed ethical principles which featured both informed consent protocols as well as confidentiality practices. The study revealed that pastoralism acts as the main income source for 54.0% of the population who remain at great risk from economic disruptions. The economic impacts from cattle rustling included both the loss of livestock which affected 31.0% of households and income reductions impacting 28.7% of respondents. Other employment opportunities were scarce while inadequate law enforcement coupled with grazing territory disputes made the cattle rustling situation worse. Cattle theft would continue because local cultures held cattle as important signs of financial power, societal ranking and community belonging. The authors find that economic insecurity and resource competition together with cultural traditions serve as the main forces behind West Pokot's cattle rustling incidents. The recommendation for resolving the issue includes economic diversification along with better security standards and sustainable land management and policy reforms through community peace initiatives. Long-term development and economic stability together with peace depend on resolving the root socio-economic factors.

Keywords: Cattle rustling, socio-economic factors, pastoralism, resource conflicts, livestock theft, community security, economic diversification, conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Cattle rustling exists as an organized or opportunistic theft process which remains a vital socio-economic problem together with a security challenge for sub-Saharan African pastoralist communities. The practice previously functioned as part of traditional rituals through which young men acquired social standing while attaining wealth according to Okoli and Okpaleke (2014). Cattle rustling has developed into an economic business that uses violent tactics due to financial challenges and resource competition alongside ineffective governance institutions during the past two decades (Kratli & Toulmin, 2020). The livestock issue reaches its peak in West Pokot County of Kenya since animals form a core component of the local economic system together with its social origins and traditional value structure. The persistent activity of cattle rustling in West Pokot resulted in economic decline and social displacement in addition to continuous fighting among communities

while causing general economic decline which makes this issue crucial for academic research (Bunei, Rono, & Chessa, 2016).

The expansion of commercial activities in cattle theft in West Pokot County makes these crimes more prevalent since raided livestock is frequently transported to outside markets and beyond national borders (Mkutu, 2019). Cattle rustling underwent modernization into a sophisticated operation through criminal networks that possess advanced weapons and transportation methods (Yusuf & Shittu, 2022). The increasing value of rustled cattle has created an attractive new way of life because many people face poverty and joblessness and struggle with limited grazing areas (Bonareri, 2022). Population growth together with droughts caused by climate change has increased both pasture and water competition between communities according to Schilling et al. (2018).

Cattle rustling in West Pokot produces extensive negative socio-economic effects on affected communities. Cattle rustling leads affected communities into multiple long-lasting impacts which include food scarcity and both regional economic disruption and reduced educational access and social solidarity breakdown (Yazan & Bukenya, 2020). Cattle rustling insecurity creates development obstacles in the area by discouraging agricultural and infrastructure investments according to Eaton (2010). A shortage of viable economic opportunities leads young men to engage in cattle raiding activities which subsequently sustains the pattern of criminal activity and disorder in the region (Matiko & Hamasi, 2022). Understanding the fundamental elements of cattle rustling as well as developing community-based solutions requires analysis of socio-economic conditions because these become critical to reducing this impact.

Most academic investigations of cattle rustling in Kenya examine police actions together with security measures (Mkutu, 2019; Mazuri et al., 2022). Military and police operations deployed to fight livestock theft have shown limited success in solving the fundamental socio-economic sources of the issue (Bashir 2021). The academic evidence shows that areas with widespread poverty and abundant unemployment and resource limitations face greater risks from cattle rustling attacks so local community-based economic development initiatives can help protect livestock more successfully than security strategies alone (Kimokoti, 2022). Insufficient empirical research exists about the socio-economic factors shaping West Pokot County's cattle rustling ecosystem therefore a fundamental information void demands investigation by this study.

The study investigates the role of socio-economic aspects which affect cattle rustling incidents in West Pokot County of Kenya. The research investigates the effects of poverty along with resource scarcity and unemployment and cattle rustling commerce together with deficient governance structures in preserving cattle rustling activities within the region. The study's findings will support the creation of evidence-based policies which strengthen community stability and provide sustainable conflict resolution systems.

Theoretical Framework

The philosophical basis describes how socio-economic elements drive cattle rustling activities in West Pokot County. The research bases its foundation using Conflict Theory together with Social Capital Theory. The economic inequalities and limited resource competition alongside historical inequalities between social classes according to Conflict Theory drive cattle rustling incidents yet Social Capital Theory demonstrates that community unity and trust may enhance or diminish the issue. These analytical models help identify rustling origins so researchers can create solutions which base themselves on economic development and community bonding practices. The research combines multiple theories to establish a fair comprehension of cattle rustling incentives as well as potential solutions for intervention strategies.

Conflict Theory

According to Conflict Theory which Karl Marx (1867) initially established society remains perpetually conflicted because various groups battle over scarce resources. The theory states that powerful structures of society create systems which prioritize elite benefits yet cause disadvantages for underprivileged groups and consequently generates conflicts and violence (Marx & Engels, 1978). At West Pokot County people from unprivileged groups utilize criminal livestock theft to secure their survival through economic and resource-based conflicts. Growing industrial activities in cattle rustling show that economic differences together with

insufficient alternative employment choices create violent conflicts between neighboring groups (Mkutu, 2019). The economic strain facing communities encourages criminal organizations to participate in cattle theft for profit while also using it to survive.

The sustenance of conflict depends heavily on power disparities and poor governance institutions according to Conflict Theory principles. West Pokot and several other pastoralist areas demonstrate weak state presence because owners of inadequate law enforcement combine weak judicial systems with nonfunctional conflict resolution tools (Bonareri, 2022). Lack of governance leads to cattle rustling becoming more prevalent because the criminals can commit their crimes with minor risk of punishment. Sectional population groups view the state as supporting specific demographic or financial groups which intensifies their hostility towards each other (Bashir, 2021). According to Conflict Theory's premise social disruption along with criminal activities develop when society excludes people from enjoying economic and political structures (Dahrendorf, 1959). Government inaction toward fighting cattle rustling leads to two negative effects which include the continued cycle and reduced public confidence in official institutions that compels communities to pursue different governance systems.

Social Capital Theory

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Integrating Conflict and Social Capital Theories

This study merges Conflict Theory with Social Capital Theory to offer complete knowledge of cattle rustling activities in West Pokot County. The combination of Conflict Theory provides understanding on how economic struggles along with resource battles and deficient government systems lead to cattle rustling incidents. Social Capital Theory uses the analysis of community trust together with social networks and collective action to establish how these elements can enhance or deteriorate the problem. The combination of these theories demonstrates a clear necessity to establish dual approaches which will resolve economic disparities with alternative rural income strategies and poverty reduction programs and strengthen social cohesion by implementing community policing programs alongside educational and reconciliation measures. A complete solution for protecting cattle Rustling in specific areas comes from addressing theories which focus on economic opportunities and community relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design to study socio-economic aspects that drive cattle rustling throughout West Pokot County through both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. The research includes all local community participants including pastoralists and elders together with law enforcement staff and government administrators. The researchers calculated their sample size to 384 participants through the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling method to achieve a representative participant group. Handpicked participants known as chiefs and peace committee members alongside security personnel were chosen by purposive sampling. At the same time, the stratified random sampling approach selected households based on sub-county diversity.

The data collection process incorporated structured questionnaire surveys which collected statistical information on social economic variables from respondents about their income levels together with their work status and resource availability. The semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) delivered important qualitative information about community understanding and methods for conflict management. The researchers utilized SPSS to run descriptive and inferential statistics on quantitative data that they displayed as table presentations and graphs along with percentage distributions. They analyzed qualitative data through thematic approaches. All the ethical requirements regarding consent preferences and privacy of participants along with their free will to join were followed throughout the study. This research obtained two key approvals through Kenyatta University's Ethics Review Board and from the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation through their research permit (NACOSTI). This research combines quantitative and qualitative methods to develop well-informed recommendations for public actions that target cattle rustling from both policy and community perspectives.

FINDINGS

Social-Economic Factors

In this section, we aim to address the research objective of assessing the socio-economic factors contributing to the prevalence of cattle rustling in West Pokot County, Kenya. By examining various socio-economic indicators, including poverty levels, access to resources, employment opportunities, and income sources, the researcher sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying drivers of cattle rustling within the county. Through analysis and interpretation of data, we uncovered insights that informed targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the pervasive issues and promote community safety and development against cattle rustling.

Source of Income

In this subsection, the focus is to find out from respondents the main sources of income within West Pokot County, Kenya, and their implications on the prevalence of cattle rustling. The analysis delves into primary livelihood sources such as pastoralism, agriculture, trade, and other economic activities. The objective is to identify correlations between different income sources and the occurrence of cattle rustling, shedding light on potential vulnerabilities or economic disparities that may contribute to this phenomenon.

Table 1: Primary Source of Livelihood

	Frequency	Percent
Pastoralist	162	54.0%
Agro-pastoralist	80	26.7%
Petty Trade	24	8.0%
Casual Labor	34	11.3%
Total	300	100.0%

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

The main sources of livelihood among the respondents in West Pokot County, Kenya are displayed in Table 1 which shows that the major economic activities that define the relationship of the community to cattle rustling. The findings of the data show that more than half of the respondents indicated that they are pastoralists (54.0%) which may be an indication of the region being more reliant on animal keeping. This percentage portrays the key importance of pastoralism in the economy of West Pokot County and further underlines the extent to which livestock has integrated into the valued social sphere of the people. The high percentage of pastoralism point to the fact that pastoralism is still a dominant source of livelihood in the county despite diversification to agricultural farming and other economic activities. The traditional ways of life in the county has a high contribution to the conservation and sustenance of pastoralism. Therefore, there is need to conserve the culture of pastoralism and integrate it with modernity. The culture must continue to play a critical role to in addressing the challenges facing pastoralism such as cattle rustling.

The other groups of 26.7% respondents indicated that they were agro-pastoralists. This is an indication that some respondents have diversified pastoralism to agro pastoralists. The adaption implies there is an orderly and consist change due to different factors including environmental and even market volatilities as observed by Azad *et al.*, (2019). Further, pastoralism is estimated to be resilient and has possibility of withstanding shocks related to revenue source which is often the case in many counties.

The findings show that petty trading among the population was relatively low at only 8.0% and casual employment at 11.3%. This means that the residents in the county were relatively poor because there were few livelihood options for diversification from pastoralism and agro pastoralism which were more dominant in the county but affected by cattle rustling among other challenges. The lack of diverse sources of incomes in the county was one of the causes of the escalation of cattle rustling in the county. Thus, distribution of livelihoods was central to explaining the problem of cattle rustling in the county.

In general, the pastoralist community's cattle are not just commodities through which wealth is accumulated, but rather wealth, identity and respect (Abdi 2022). Thus, it is easy for these communities to lose their cattle through theft since cattle are highly valued; and cattle theft is not only an economic crime but a cultural one as well. By this, the authors define increased economic requirements for cattle and social importance leading to the likelihood of the loss of these animals bringing social consequences such as status loss and susceptibility to poverty. This entails the development of culturally sensitive and appropriate strategies with significant need to protect animals and secure them for their owners.

Previous studies concerning similar settings in West Pokot County, indicate that cattle theft is primarily inspired by economic gains, grudges, and competition for scarce resources such as pastures and water (Azad *et al.*, 2019). From a cultural activity aimed at restocking cattle after droughts, famine, diseases or raids in the past to more vicious commercialized cattle rustling in the present times, has basically made the community poor, dependent on relief aid and basically beggars. The incidents of cattle rustling pose a direct danger to the county economic development but also leads to the contraction of poverty rates and cycles of reprisals. It leads to inter-community conflicts and vulnerability in the community.

The findings indicate that it is possible to examine any strong plan which will counter cattle rustling to embrace socio-economic context – and further, living patterns – of West Pokot County. The strategies should focus on the improvement of cattle rustling and social development. In the long run, an integrative strategy providing for a set of security measures based on economic development will be the only way to solve the problem of cattle stealing and improve the situation in the pastoralist communities.

Impact of Loss of Income on the Occurrence of Cattle Rustling

In this section, the focus is on analyzing the influence of different economic activities in West Pokot County, Kenya. This analysis aims to understand how different economic activities influence the vulnerability of communities to cattle rustling. By examining the relationship between individuals' main sources of livelihood and the prevalence of cattle rustling, valuable insights can be gained into the socio-economic factors contributing

to this phenomenon.

Table 2: Impact of Primary Income Source

	Frequency	Percent
Reduced income	86	28.7%
Loss of livestock/assets	93	31.0%
Decreased market opportunities	52	17.3%
Increased security costs	56	18.7%
Others	13	4.3%
Total	300	100.0%

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

As evident from findings presented in Table 2 above, West Pokot County is highly affected by cattle rustling; 31.0% respondents admitting to having lost livestock or other assets to armed raiders, thereby confirming a negative social effect on the pastoralist communities. This figure presents how much stock this industry has in asserting and maintaining the ethnic, class, and livelihood security of these people (Abdi, 2022). Within pastoralists communities, cattle are not only economic commodities but also identifiers of social relationship and ethnic identity. Concerning relocation, the loss of animals literally means a change of lifestyle, their integration into marriages and other ceremonies where cattle are crucial. This loss is not only a production loss, but also means a threat to their social and economic structure, as it makes clear that any activities related to cattle rustling require complex solutions.

Additionally, the analysis of cattle rustling effects in relation to unemployment, discussed in Abdi's (2022) dissertation, reveals the issues inherent in the concept of cattle rustling. As much as unemployment limits the ability of persons, families and communities to produce and acquire income and resources, theft of cattle is a far deeper crisis which destabilizes not only economic relations but also destroys cultural identity and unity. The unpleasant experience associated with these losses may compromise the stability in communities for years, creating more poor and insecure citizens. This goes a long way in supporting the argument made in this paper about the need to avoid compartmentalized thinking when dealing with the issue of cattle rustling since economic and cultural issues are usually well merged.

The conclusion drawn from the study together with Agullah's (2021) perspective on the involved radical organizations and organizations economic repercussions demonstrate the complexity of cattle theft and the necessity for integrated approaches toward tackling it. Supporting the economic productivity of the project concerns for the pastoralist communities; therefore, options other than pastismal agriculture require to be explored. This could include jobs creation or opening up ventures that would offer extra income to the families in event of loss, through for instance small scale farming, handicrafts or eco-tourism. Further, increasing market opportunities for access for the pastoralist can also increase economic diversification and flow hence a means of making the most of their produce instead of relying so much on stock.

In as much as the security measures so needed to solving this problem, it is the same that requires improving the law enforcement hence developing community early warning systems. These systems can assist to quickly react on theft and enhance the popularity of law enforcement agencies among citizens (Agullah, 2021). Moreover, encouraging leadership of the conflicting communities to engage in dialogues can act as a channel of solving definite conflict and injustices, which mostly leads to cases of cattle theft. When economic development and security approaches are synchronized, it will be easier to develop a comprehensive framework to prevent and

reduce the effects of cattle rustling thereby fostering long-lasting durable peace among pastoralist communities in West Pokot County.

To support these findings, the interview and focus group discussions with pastoralists provide rich narratives. These qualitative observations add a human face to understand the phenomenon of cattle rustling and complement the quantitative data obtained. From the interviews with the respondents, I came to understand that cattle theft touches on issues that are deeper than monetary, cultural and even, emotional issues that are associated with pastoralist communities. Although there is statistical data, which explain this phenomenon, it is useful to dissect it with the help of personal experience in order to understand this phenomenon and determine the factors that support it. Participants in focus groups of the younger generation described the psychological consequences of numerous cattle raids.

"It's not just the economic loss," explained a young pastoralist. "When our cattle are taken, it feels like our whole world is shaken. We lose our pride, our ability to provide for our families, and our hope for the future." (Code 003, Kacheliba, March 2024)

This profound cliché captures the essences of the struggle between the severed financial security on one hand, and the ethno-cultural identity on the other. It also brings out the fact that the death of cattle is not a mere condemnation loss but also a social-cultural disaster to the folks. With these aggressors themselves dealing with these traumas as young people, their testimonies are a valuable impetus to the need for community healing. One young pastoralist articulated this by saying,

"When we lose our cattle, it feels like losing a part of ourselves; it's not just animals to us but our history and future." (Code 003, Kapenguria, May 2024)

This scenario raises the need for a better appreciation of how the economic assets and cultural values are interlinked in the societies involved in pastoralism, thereby implying one needs to apply strategies cutting across the two domains. When listening to life stories of these individuals, it is established that their accounts have a richer understanding of the consequences of cattle rustling. They are not simply valuable animals: cattle embody capital, prestige and protection against adversities that commodity exchange entails. Livestock theft destabilizes established ways of life and gender relations, and erases punitive sentiments that are generational. One participant reflected,

"Our cattle are the heart of our community; their loss tears apart our connections and the way we celebrate life." (Code 004, Sigor, April 2024)

This is not only the misfortune of a particular person; being a disruption of not only the whole community, but also changing traditional cultural principles and standards. This cross-connectedness is therefore about developing a social perspective to cattle rustling as opposed to an economic perspective. This view supports the calls for changing the approach from an individual level treatment that does not consider social and economic factors. Also, supporting the work done It was identified that dealing with the problem of cattle theft means that a more complex approach should be focused on the assessment of economic and emotional states. It is worth to stress that the voices of the community must be incorporated into the process of designing interventions. The qualitative data collected amplifies a dire necessity of intervention approaches that include the psychological and cultural aspects. Considering community in this process ensures that the interventions developed suit the communities' needs, needs that are culturally appropriate, and which directly address the problems of cattle rustling.

Accepting community's role in the development of these interventions can go a long way to improve their success and durability. In this sense, meaningful interventions must be oriented not merely on rebuilding the economic structure but on the emotive where people's lives were impacted. By following the spirit of co-development, the voices of the people and a deep appreciation for their experiences are captured in an effort to come up with more relevant programs and projects that conform to local social settings and values. This all rounded approach is critical in the process of rebuilding broken dignity, pride and hope in the pastoralist society so as to build the necessary resilience against the effects posed by cattle raiding. Further, involving these regional

actors in these acts will assist in the development of trust as well as ensure that the details of the solutions being offered are known and accept by the community. Any joint venture that seeks to assist communities form bottom up is likely to offer a solution to the problem of cattle rustling and possible general degeneration.

Household's Economic Status

While economic status, including income levels and asset ownership, certainly influences vulnerability to cattle rustling incidents, the phenomenon is far more complex. Cultural significance plays a pivotal role, as cattle are deeply embedded in the social fabric of pastoralist communities, symbolizing wealth, status, and identity. Historical grievances over land, water rights, and injustices also fuel tensions between communities, often leading to retaliatory raids. Moreover, governance challenges such as weak law enforcement and corruption create environments where rustlers operate with impunity, complicating efforts to deter crime effectively. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, while important, may not always address underlying grievances or prevent future conflicts, perpetuating cycles of violence. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to combating cattle rustling must integrate economic, social, cultural, and governance strategies, ensuring that interventions are contextually appropriate and sustainable for long-term peace and stability in the region.

Table 3: Household's Economic Status

	Frequency	Percent
Very Poor	72	24.0%
Poor	54	18.0%
Middle-class	105	35.0%
Well-off	30	10.0%
Very Well-off	39	13.0%
Total	300	100.0%

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

Table 3, provides crucial insights into their financial well-being and its implications for cattle rustling prevalence. According to the data, a substantial portion of households classify themselves as middle-class, encompassing 35.0% of respondents. This distribution aligns with findings from various sources, including analyses by Back (2020), which suggest that moderate economic status can heighten vulnerability to crime due to economic pressures. Moreover, significant segments of households categorized as very poor (24.0%) and poor (18.0%) underscore the economic disparities within the region, echoing observations by Bashir (2021) and Bedigen (2020) on the pivotal role of socioeconomic factors in shaping susceptibility to cattle rustling incidents.

Voices from the community provide poignant insights into the intersection of economic status and cattle rustling. As one respondent highlighted:

"I lost all my herd of cattle to cattle rustlers in 2020 and I have never recovered from the loss. Indeed, I am 'very poor' and I cannot provide for my family. My wives and children are engage in Manuel labors to enable us have a meal a day. Livestock gave me status in this community, now I am empty shell. We sometime depend on well-wishers and bursary to pay school fees for my children." (Code 005, Kacheliba, March 2024)

Such a loss goes beyond issues of just economy, but also brings out issues of social order and the future of generations. With reference to their income and educational prospects, the respondent is implying that it's not just 'the lost livestock', but cattle rustling perpetuates a cycle of poverty that may affect generations. It also widens the existing gap when families cannot afford to put money into education because they lost their livestock

and many future opportunities. These narratives reflect the imperative calls for remedies to address economic vulnerability and supporting appropriate intervention strategies as experienced and understood by such households. A respondent stated that the previous governor established a program for paying school fees for school going children and college student. The program enabled them to take their children to school but they were unable to feed them due to poverty caused by cattle rustling (Code 006, Mnengai, March 2024). This is compounded by the need to shift from a single issue approach of education programs, which should at the same time be complemented by economic support that makes such programs sustainable and effective within these communities. Also, perceived community factors provide insight into what constitutes torque producing options. A community elder shared:

"Our economic status influences how we perceive and respond to cattle rustling. It's not just about wealth; it's about our cultural identity and survival. We need sustainable solutions that empower us to protect our livelihoods while fostering peace and cooperation among communities." (Code 007, Lelan, March 2024)

It means that economic security of various families and cultural identity of the population as a whole are interdependent concepts where the loss of cattle as an indicator of essential elements of existence is presented not simply as a disruption on the economic level, but as a strike on the very spirit of cultural solidarity. The flow of analysis between the economic issues and the cultural aspect demonstrates that curtailing cattle rustling cannot be accomplished by a single strategy of security enhancement, but it has to incorporate social education as well as reconciliation amongst the affected parties. Moreover, encouraging contacts between leaders of two competitive communities can be useful to soften conflicts and develop trust. Given this it is possible to incorporate these voices into policy and intervention frameworks to make sure that an intervention approach or policy intervention has to be effective also has to be culturally informed and informed by the community. Use of such an approach can help to bring communities together and lead to sustainable solution finding process for the future of the pastoralist societies besides finding ways of economic revival and social transformation. Also, the emphasis of the community-led approach is to return self-governance and decent options of social functioning to characterize how the industry may favorably impact the lives of pastoralist people and give them a voice.

Grazing Land Accessibility

Grazing Land Accessibility significantly influences cattle rustling in West Pokot County, impacting pastoralist livelihoods. This section examines grazing land availability and access, assessing spatial distribution and tenure. Insights from literature on land tenure, resource management, and conflict dynamics elucidate the relationship between grazing land access and cattle theft.

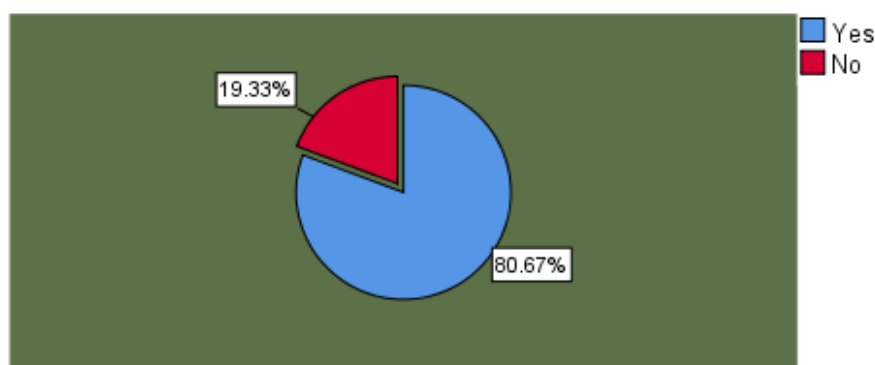


Figure 1: *Grazing Land Accessibility*

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

It's important to critically evaluate the information presented in Figure 1 regarding the accessibility of grazing land in West Pokot County, especially in light of contemporary challenges such as climate change, land use changes, and demographic shifts. While the figure indicates that 80.7% of respondents have access to grazing land, several factors affect the accuracy and sustainability of this access over time.

Firstly, the issue of fencing and privatization of land has indeed become increasingly prevalent across many regions, including pastoralist areas (Bonareri, 2022). This trend has restricted traditional access to communal grazing lands, leading to conflicts and reduced grazing opportunities for community's dependent on livestock. Secondly, environmental factors such as droughts, climate change impacts, and land degradation has severely affected the availability and quality of grazing land. Extended drought periods have diminished pasture productivity, forcing pastoralists to move farther in search of suitable grazing areas or rely on less productive lands.

Thirdly, population growth and settlement expansions can encroach upon traditional grazing areas, limiting space for pastoralist communities to sustain their livelihoods. As settlements expand and land use changes occur, the competition for resources intensifies, potentially exacerbating tensions and conflicts over grazing rights. Lastly, periodic famines or food insecurity crises can further strain access to grazing lands as communities may be compelled to sell or move livestock due to lack of fodder or water resources, disrupting traditional grazing patterns.

In light of these complexities, while Figure 1 provides a snapshot of current access levels to grazing lands, ongoing monitoring and adaptive management strategies are crucial. Policies and interventions should consider these dynamic factors to ensure sustainable management of grazing lands, preserve traditional livelihoods, and mitigate conflicts related to access and use of natural resources in West Pokot County and similar regions.

Employment Opportunities

Employment opportunities play a vital role in shaping the socio-economic landscape of West Pokot County. The Figure below presents data on various employment opportunities available to residents:

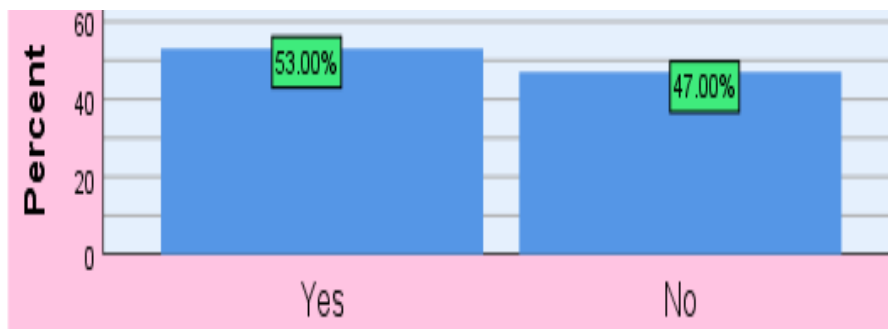


Figure 2: Employment Opportunities

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

The employment opportunity presented by the data in Figure 2 explain the level of job availability among the respondents in West Pokot County. In more detail, 53.0 % of the total respondents out of the total sampled population were in a position to access employment opportunities whereas, 47.0% of the sampled respondents out of the total sampled population were unable to access employment opportunities. This is invaluable because it means only slightly more than half of the respondents are either working or the results demonstrate how important their employment is to their quality of life. This is in line with a study by Borgen (2022), who pointed out that employment in rural areas is key in developing the social economy of the area, as well as promoting stability within that region.

Nevertheless, site-specific numbers are sometimes misleading when compared to reports from the county and/or the national government in a given fiscal year despite the fact that the former bear tremendous growth potential. For example, a respondent observed that

There are many young men and women who are trained but they are unemployed. There are many young people walking around with brown envelopes. Every time there is a job opportunity in the county government and national government, the applications are many. On the day of interviews, those young people are full in this town. (Code 008, Ortum, May 2024)

But the ability to access employment arguably does not tally with employment quality or reliability. Some of the employment positions are temporary or seasonal, or paid low wages, and, therefore, such involvement together may not enhance the prospects of long-term economic security for families. For instance, a respondent stated that

Most of the pastoralist who have lost their livelihood through cattle rustling have been reduced to paupers. Some of them are illiterate and they have moved in urban centres to wait for relief aids, beg from well-wishers or to do menial jobs like watchmen, cleaners and other casual works that earn them very little to sustain them and their families (Code 009, Weiwei, May 2024)

Consequently, while the appearance of the overall employment opportunities stands much higher in relation to the respondents it can actually camouflage problems associated with job stability and the economy. That reality in West Pokot County, because some of the young people who are engaged in commercial cattle rustling are poor people, illiterate but skilled with guns, who are hired to endanger their lives still livestock and they are paid very little. This makes them vulnerable to any form of manipulation and abuse.

In addition, the higher percentage respondents that indicated lack of access to employment (47.0 %) is a problem which when compounded exacerbates other social economic problems. This gap shows that more than quarter of the population is still in the category of those who cannot find a job as it may be due to absence of proper education, inadequate skills or lack of adequate employment opportunities. Hence, such persons might be at high risk of involvement in other income generating activities such as stealing cattle as a means of living. Thus, it is necessary to get down to the analysis of the over-arching qualitative dimensions of these identified findings, meaning the respondent experiences and difficulties when understanding the numeric values of the statistics presented above.

While there are reported opportunities, many respondent's express frustration over the quality and sustainability of these jobs. For instance, one respondent noted,

"The jobs available are mostly seasonal and low-paying, making it hard to support a family throughout the year. One has to engage in hustling to make ends meet for the family." (Code 010, Marich, March 2024)

This statement can be regarded as reflecting the perceptions and attitudes of many people living in the community towards the problem of unavailable, stable employment. The problem with these jobs especially of seasons is that they do not offer the kind of continuity that is needed in providing for the needs of the family on a daily basis. Instead, most often they lead to financial insecurity, which creates difficulties for an individual in terms of the basic needs and necessities of life such as food, education and health. Sustainable employment opportunities are lacking and thus make the instabilities and anxiety in the community higher than usual due to the fluctuating unpaid farming jobs.

Another respondent emphasized this concern by stating,

"Even though there are jobs, they are not enough to meet the needs of everyone in our community." (Code 011, Kisheunet, March 2024)

This raises the most pressing problem of job deficit specially to meet the demands of a rising population. There may be jobs out there; however, these jobs are not able to provide employment to the growing number of unemployed persons. Because there is an imbalance in supply of jobs than the needs of the community, residents feel helpless which results in frustration or even exclusion. Whenever people believe that they cannot land a decent job or their inputs to the economy are not appreciated, they develop hopelessness which compels them to seek other and most often unlawful ways of making a living.

They also contain a sharp contrast of the available employment opportunities and the current socio-economic conditions that families in West Pokot County experience. The researcher notes that such an economic insecurity leads some people into cattle theft to earn an extra buck for their families. Though considered and researched as a criminal act, cattle rustling may seem like a feasible outlet for such people, who feel that they have been

economically entrapped. This trend shows the appearance of many cattle rustling cases and their relation to job instability in the particular area. He said that without a possibility to find another job, people might engage in activities that endanger the community's well-being.

DISCUSSIONS

The research results indicate economic reliance on herding practices as the main reason which drives the high frequency of cattle theft in West Pokot County. Livestock constitutes the fundamental economic foundation as well as cultural heritage of the studied community according to the survey results where pastors made up 54.0% of respondents and agro-pastors accounted for 26.7% more. According to Abdi (2022) and Bashir (2021) animal herds in pastoralist communities are more than economic goods because they stand as indicators of social prestige and economic safety. When thieves steal livestock it damages the economic structures of these communities to the point of financial crisis and in some cases leads to retaliatory raids by affected individuals. The research indicates that the available income alternatives beyond livestock which include petty trade and casual labor amount to only 8.0% and 11.3% respectively which underscores the economic risk factors. Kimokoti (2022) identified that pastoralist areas lack enough sustainable alternative income options which drives poverty rates up as well as creating enduring cycles of insecurity thus requiring pastoral communities to build diversified incomes to reduce their dependency on cattle.

The situation of cattle rustling leads to considerable economic losses since 31.0% of survey participants identified livestock and asset loss as their most significant financial challenge. The research results match Yazan & Bukenya (2020) who claim economic uncertainty promotes pastoral communities toward enduring harmful survival practices including coordinated livestock theft. Qualitative breakdown shows cattle theft induces psychological stress among victims who experience emotional trauma leading to personal identity loss because of stolen livestock. People express the critical role cattle play in societal position and economic sustainability with statements like "When we lose our cattle, we lose our future" (Code 003, Kapenguria, May 2024). The hardships caused by cattle theft negatively impact family financial condition since 42.0% of study participants declared their status as poor or very poor. Bashir (2021) and Bedigen (2020) have independently discovered that families stuck in poverty because of livestock loss require relief assistance for survival or must pursue unstable informal job opportunities.

The research findings validate existing economic research about cattle rustling yet provide advanced in-depth qualitative understanding of how people impacted by this crime truly experience it. Cattle rustling extends beyond being a purely economic offense because this study explores the social and emotional aspects of the crime demonstrating that it directly affects cultural identity. According to Eaton (2010) the successful resolution of cattle rustling needs extended solutions beyond mere security-focused measures because it needs comprehensive economic development and peacebuilding measures alongside governance reforms. The research concludes that programs addressing employment needs and resource allocation and security improvement should adapt to match pastoralist communities' socio-economic environment. Sustainable solutions for overrun cattle require implementing programs for increased income generation as well as consolidated local peace initiatives alongside policies to boost economic resistance in susceptible regions.

CONCLUSION

This study established that social and economic elements form an essential connection that maintains cattle rustling in West Pokot County. West Pokot County suffers from economic shocks primarily because pastoralism stands as its primary economic activity while offering minimal prospects for income diversification. The residents who made the switch to agro-pastoralism form a minority group while most families continue relying on their livestock as their primary means of existence since alternative economic opportunities are scarce. Rustling events cause economic loss by decreasing household income and damage social networks due to the cultural importance of livestock as both an economic asset and cultural identifier for social status. The region's weak economic situation together with its prevalence of poverty drives ongoing livestock theft followed by retaliatory attacks that cause sustained insecurity in the area.

The act of cattle rustling creates extensive psychological distress together with severe social consequences throughout the targeted communities. Losing livestock creates more than financial difficulties because it causes bodily harm to cultural identity and householder security and self-respect. People from various households have sunk deeper into impoverishment because of restricted access to schooling and basic needs yet unemployed young men join cattle raiding as their only lifeline. The lack of pasture territory and environmental challenges have enlarged resource-based disputes and produced even more difficulties in this problematic situation. The continuation of cattle rustling remains probable because local communities along with policymakers lack suitable economic alternatives and effective security solutions.

RECOMMENDATION

West Pokot County needs three effective actions for cattle rustling control: economic development together with improved security measures and targeted community involvement. By supporting agribusiness together with vocational training and small enterprises individuals can decrease their dependency on livestock theft. At the same time more robust law enforcement and community police activities will prevent theft. The implementation of peacebuilding programs along with educational activities and responsible land management systems will create tensions while providing options other than criminal behavior. The stability of West Pokot County can be strengthened by implementing policy reforms and regional cooperation programs along with social protection systems. Public knowledge programs should work to prevent rustling and sustained research together with monitoring will help create effective interventions. Strategic deployment of these measures will build peace and economic resistance and drive long-term development across the area.

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