

The Role of the Church in Curbing Cattle Raiding in Pokot Community

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the role of the Church in curbing cattle raiding in the Pokot community. The study established that cattle rustling had various causes contributing to its persistence and had brought various effects to the society. The researcher used a descriptive survey design, drawing respondents from the departmental programmes of local churches within the affected area. The target population comprised pastors, church elders, teachers, church women, and church youth. Using a systematic sampling procedure, the researcher sampled 50 respondents drawn from the local churches, with each church represented by at least one participant and larger churches contributing a greater share of between three and seven respondents. Questionnaires were administered to collect data, of which 46 were returned, representing a 92 per cent response rate. The researcher formulated objectives geared towards establishing the role of the Church in curbing the vice. The findings identified seven possible roles the Church may play in addressing cattle raiding. All respondents (100%) identified prayer to God for intervention and evangelising the community as the foremost roles. Planting more churches in the affected areas was identified by 91.3 per cent of respondents, while 86.9 per cent pointed to teaching Biblical values to church members. Establishing more schools to enlighten the young generation was identified by 78.2 per cent of respondents, encouraging communities to love one another by 73.9 per cent, and the Church working with the government in enlightening society by 65.2 per cent. The study therefore recommends that the Church prioritise prayer and evangelism as its foremost interventions, while intensifying efforts to plant more churches, teach Biblical values, establish schools, and collaborate with the government to enlighten the Pokot community and curb cattle raiding.

Key terms: Cattle raiding, church intervention, conflict resolution, evangelisation, peacebuilding.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Cattle raiding is a practice that has become a challenge in Baringo County and the country at large. Bandits from some communities have made innocent women, children and security officers their prey. Pokot land has become insecure due to the vice, thus making the church weak in fulfilling the Great Commission of the Lord (Matthew 28:18–20) due to fear of being killed. The vice has troubled local and national leaders. In Baringo County, for example, the practice has become disastrous, with insecurity caused by persistent cattle rustling and banditry affecting the volatile borders of AIC Loiwat DCC, Baringo North, Tiaty and Baringo South Sub-Counties. Development projects and investments funded by both governments and development partners may be lost due to insecurity. County projects in education, roads, agriculture, water and irrigation and other areas of development focus have not started and will not take root in troubled areas if the warring communities do not agree to end their feuds once and for all (Baringo County Government, n.d.).

The church has brought changes to Africans in the spiritual, educational, health and agricultural sectors. The church still has the ability to bring gradual change even to such an evil practice as cattle rustling. The researcher concurs with Mugambi (1995), who wrote that the church remains an influential and sustainable social institution, especially in rural areas. He further stated that the pulpit can become a central oral medium for the transmission of new ideas and changing attitudes (Mugambi, 1995, p. 225). Mugambi and Magesa (1990) wrote that, as the rule of God is witnessed in Africa, the church must confront concerns that contradict the rule of God throughout the continent. Cattle rustling is one of the problems which the authors describe as a contradiction to the rule across the continent.

Missionaries who live in the affected areas tend to migrate to other peaceful communities because they fear they might be killed along with their children; therefore, the church has to take responsibility to address the situation. The practice has also caused some neighbouring communities to associate cattle raiding with the Pokot people in general, even though the vice is carried out by specific individuals and groups involved in raiding rather than reflecting the conduct or character of the wider Pokot population.

The problem of cattle rustling has troubled past government regimes and is still a problem even for the current government. Despite the government's effort to eradicate the vice, it seems to be very hard to curb. The church has been a transforming agent in society, and this study therefore sought to investigate its role in transforming communities from the practice of the vice.

Cattle rustling has been practised both locally and internationally. Some communities in the country have experienced unrest due to the vice. The government has fought tirelessly to curb the vice but has never been able to. Schools have been closed, while people have lost their lives and property. The church has, for many years, practically changed the worldview of humanity on life, and the researcher therefore thinks that the church has the capability of eradicating the vice.

Though measures have been taken by the government to end the menace, it has remained persistent in the Pokot community and other parts of the country. The church for a long time has remained an instrument of change in society. The study therefore investigated the role of the church in curbing cattle raiding in the Pokot community (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

The purpose of the study was to determine the role which the church can play in curbing cattle raiding in the Pokot community. The study sought to enable the church to know its role in ensuring that peace is enjoyed by the affected communities within the country. Also, the study purposed to stir the government and other Non-Governmental Organizations to fight against the vice since the church has the potential power to bring change and deal with the vice. The study was guided by the objective: to find out what the church can really do to bring the vice to an end.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of the Church in Curbing Cattle Raiding

Cattle rustling has been practised for a long time, and the time has come for the church to check the kind of theology they embrace in Pokot, the affected area. A civil society acting on community security reported that churches and faith organisations have grassroots networks that could be tapped for sensitisation, information dissemination and monitoring. They would also be effective for grassroots advocacy. The report further says that religious leaders have status in communities, and their followers and the community at large take their messages seriously. Many communities look to churches and mosques for alternative solutions (Conference Report, 2003, pp. 8–10).

Political theology and theology of dialogue tend to bring social issues and African traditional beliefs to the same level as Christianity (Ngewa et al., 1998, p. 15). The social issues here include practices which are not in line with Biblical doctrine, such as cattle rustling, which affects the community. The church exists to witness about the love of God and glorify Him. The researcher agrees with Gehman (2005), who analyses that the Christian Church should seek to understand the appeal of traditional religion and evaluate this in a Biblical perspective (p. 13). Christians may allow some practices to continue because they are part of their culture and ignore them instead of condemning them with the strongest terms possible.

It has reached a time when Pokot elites, politicians and spiritual leaders should view things differently. Cultural practices like cattle rustling need to be reinterpreted from a Biblical perspective. Kibui (2010) commented that all security agencies and relevant line ministries should collaborate with each other and with key education stakeholders to ensure that cattle rustling is promptly and effectively resolved so that pupils can continue with their education without fear (p. xiii). One of the relevant line ministries and key education stakeholders is the church. The church has the potential to play the biggest role in curbing cattle rustling.

Furthermore, Haselbarth (1976) notes that the life of churches can radiate beyond the church when a community and a state are secretly transformed by the "salt of the earth" (p. 24). Teaching the Biblical doctrine brings transformation, just as Torrey (2010) writes that the man who takes up the teaching of the Bible, and does it in an interesting way and in the power of the Spirit, is bound to get a hearing and to do great good (p. 31).

The Christian church has a legitimate role. McMinn and Foster (1990) observes that when Christians claim communist agents are behind the lyrics in rock music, people tend to overgeneralize and stop listening to other legitimate Christian concerns (p. 30). Roy and Getz (1970) discussed that theological foundations should take a turn towards innovation and reformation (p. 31). Carl (1990) observes that high-commitment church congregations are a mountain of energy determined to move the world by faith; they often articulate clearly the meaning of membership and the mission of the church (pp. 146–147).

The church, from the quotations above, shows that it has a role to play in bringing transformation, though gradually. The researcher agrees with O'Donovan's (2006) observation that the church has a great privilege and responsibility to pray for itself and the world; he says no other community in the world has such a privilege or responsibility (p. 180).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, drawing respondents from the departmental programmes of the local churches and combining this with quantitative analysis of the data collected through questionnaires. As Kombo and Tromp (2006) explain, research design is the structure that holds the various elements of a research project together, serving as a basic plan to guide data collection and analysis (p. 70). The descriptive survey approach was chosen to ensure that the information gathered was both equitable and reliable. Questionnaires were used as the primary tool for collecting data, since, as Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) notes, they are a common and effective means of obtaining important information about a population (p. 71). In this case, that information came from pastors, teachers, church elders, church women and church youth, who completed questionnaires containing open-ended items to be answered either by ticking a box or filling in a written response.

The target population for the study was drawn from AIC Loiwat DCC, whose believers numbered approximately 750. Serem et al. (2013) describe the target population as the portion of the population that is accessible to the researcher (p. 35), while Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) more broadly define a research population as a large collection of individuals that can be accessed for study purposes (p. 10). The District Church Council was served by eight pastors in total—three trained and five untrained (elders)—and encompassed nine local churches, two boarding primary schools and one newly established day secondary school.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to respondents before they participated, and they were assured of confidentiality; their identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms such as A or B. The DCC chairman was asked to inform church leaders of the study in advance, and participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents free to decline any question they did not wish to answer. In practice, however, every respondent answered all the questions in the questionnaire.

A systematic sampling procedure was used to select participants, in line with Mugenda and Mugenda's (1999) description of sampling as the process of selecting a subset of individuals to represent the larger population from which they are drawn (p. 10). Serem et al. (2013) similarly notes that this method gives all potential participants an equal chance of being selected (p. 36). Respondents were drawn from the nine local churches making up the Loiwat District Church, with a total sample of 50 individuals. Every church contributed at least one participant, and larger churches contributed more, ranging from three to seven respondents each. The District Church Council chairman assisted the researcher in accessing church members and identifying individuals willing to take part in the study.

The research instrument consisted of questionnaires tailored for pastors, church elders, church women, church youth and teachers, with items designed to directly address the study's research questions and objectives.

For data collection, the researcher first obtained an introductory letter from the Dean of Theology to facilitate access to the study area, given the critical nature of the issue under investigation. A further letter was written to secure consent from the District Church Council Chairman to conduct the research within his area of jurisdiction, since the problem being studied was considered a matter of national concern. Respondents were given two weeks to complete their questionnaires, and the researcher arranged convenient times and locations with the sampled population for collecting the completed forms.

Once the data had been collected, it was sorted, edited, entered, processed, classified, cleaned, organised, checked and interpreted for completeness and internal consistency in relation to the specific research questions. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) describe this process of data analysis as one of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of information gathered (p. 203). The findings were ultimately presented through a combination of essay narrative, bar charts, pie charts and tables.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher gave respondents a week to read through and complete the questionnaire, reinforcing assurances of confidentiality throughout. Kombo and Tromp (2006) define validity as a measure of how well a test measures what it is intended to measure, and reliability as a measure of the consistency of results produced by a test (p. 97). Due to constraints of time and distance, the researcher was only able to follow up with four respondents to review the typed data and confirm its accuracy; these respondents accepted the analysis and expressed satisfaction with how their ideas had been represented. In total, 50 questionnaires were distributed and 46 were returned, yielding a response rate of 92 per cent.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of the Church in Curbing Cattle Raiding

The study sought to find out what the church can do to bring cattle raiding to an end. According to the responses, seven definite ways were identified through which the church may address the practice.

Table: Possible Ways the Church May Employ to Curb Cattle Raiding

Possible role of the church	Frequency	Percentage
Pray to God to intervene	46	100%
Evangelising the community	46	100%
Plant more churches in the affected areas	42	91.3%
Teaching the members in the church	40	86.9%
Establish more schools to enlighten young generation	36	78.2%
Encourage communities to love one another	34	73.9%
The church should work with the government in enlightening the society	30	65.2%

The findings show that all the respondents, with each receiving 100 per cent, identified prayer and evangelising the community. Planting more churches in the affected areas was identified by 91.3 per cent of the respondents, while 86.9 per cent pointed out teaching members in the church. Establishing more schools to enlighten the young generation was identified by 78.2 per cent of the respondents. In addition, 73.9 per cent identified encouraging communities to love one another, while 65.2 per cent highlighted the need for the church to work with the government in enlightening the society.

Prayer

Praying to God to intervene in the issue was identified as the major role the church may use to bring the vice to an end. All respondents, representing 100 per cent, identified prayer as a possible way of addressing cattle raiding. One respondent (PA) mentioned that, "it is only through prayer that people who rise to raid their neighbor can change". The Bible exhorts Christians to pray so that God, in his sovereignty, brings intervention on issues where human beings are not capable of controlling.

Prayer therefore occupies a central position in the role of the church in addressing cattle raiding. The emphasis is on seeking God's intervention in an issue where human beings are not capable of controlling.

Evangelisation

All the respondents identified evangelism as another possible way the church may use in ending cattle rustling. Hundred percent of the respondents agreed that the church can change the attitude of the raiders through evangelism. One respondent (PB) said that "we know of some who stole frequently but they got saved through evangelism and they are helping in transforming the society". Another respondent commented that "if only the church could recognize the power in evangelism, they could have made the vice a forgotten issue".

The love of God goes beyond human ethnicity and tribalism, and Christians should have the same attitude. Christians should therefore be aware of their mission in the community, understand it clearly and inform the community to build a healthy relationship with the neighbours.

Planting More Churches

Planting more churches in the affected areas was identified as another way of minimising cattle raiding. Missionaries together with the existing churches in Pokot should plant more churches and encourage children to go to school so that the practice of cattle raiding may be minimised. Ninety-one point three per cent of the respondents proposed that planting more churches in the affected areas helps in curbing the vice. One respondent (PD) commented that "the church brings the light to the world" and praised the work done by missionaries in the community as a great improvement as compared with the recent past.

Planting churches therefore forms part of the wider role of bringing light to the community. The presence of the church in the affected areas is linked to the transformation of the society and the minimisation of cattle raiding.

Teaching Church Members

Eighty-six point nine per cent of the respondents pointed out that teaching members in the church, apart from evangelising the unbelieving, is one of the ways the church can use to bring the practice to an end. One respondent (PE) declared that "Christians should be taught about the disadvantages of cattle raiding and children will understand".

Teaching moulds character and instils moral values in the inexperienced. Mbiti's view on culture, as quoted by Jean, elaborates that "culture is the way of life that has been worked out in response to human teaching which is expressed in physical forms, human relations and provoked mind by great realities of human life" (Jean, 2002, p. 84).

Establishing More Schools

Seventy-eight point two per cent of the respondents declared that establishing more schools to enlighten the young generation is one of the ways the church may employ to bring the practice to an end. One respondent (PF) responded that "children are very receptive to teaching; therefore whenever they are told such practice is evil they will never practice it".

Learning institutions are presented as instruments for changing attitudes and practices, establishing new civilised ways and developing good morals. The Bible teaches that "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Encouraging Communities to Love One Another

Seventy-three point nine per cent of the respondents noted that encouraging communities to love one another is another possible way the church may use to bring cattle raiding to an end. Love covers multitudes of sin (1 Peter 4:8). God, who created human beings, is said to be Love; therefore, those who love each other are his children.

The Pokot community looks like an isolated community due to a few cattle raiders. The church ought to inform them that they are good like other human beings, and they must discourage stealing and teach against cultural practices which promote the vice. Christians can share God's love with stoic cultural pastoralists who view Christianity as something that belongs to children and women who are poor.

Church–Government Collaboration

Sixty-five point two per cent of the respondents highlighted that the church should work with the government in enlightening society. This is one of the ways the church may use to control the vice. Salter (2009) explained that when a person becomes a Christian, he or she replaces natural, cultural and learned habits with new ones, just like when a person joins university, lifestyle, mode of dressing, language and level of education change (p. 304).

The church in Pokot and the neighbouring communities should sensitise the community about the gradual transformation brought about by Christianity. A criminal person should realise the love of God and forgiveness of sin which Christians preach and, with time, may encounter Christ. Saul in the Bible, who was a murderer but changed to be a preacher called Paul, is given as an example of this transformation (Acts 9).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The church has a big role in eradicating the vice which has become a problem. The major roles of the church include praying to God to bring intervention, evangelising the society, teaching the church on biblical principles, planting more churches in the affected areas, establishing learning institutions to enlighten the young generation, encouraging the communities to love each other and the church working with the government in enlightening the society.

The church must be concerned with the responsibility of eradicating evil practices like cattle rustling. This can be done through prayer, establishing more schools because they are few, planting churches in the interior to bring the light of the Word, evangelising the unreached and teaching the believers their role in ensuring there is peace. Christianity must condemn evil practices in society.

Recommendations: The church should organise peace and prayer meetings in the area, as it works for all people. The church should also mobilise for the building of more schools since there are very few; only two primary schools in a District Church of nine Local churches. The community should be informed to embrace politicians who are concerned with nation-building and promote peace.

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