Victimisation of Elderly and Widows by Armed Stock Thieves at the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE:

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

Stock theft is reportedly **escalating, disturbing** and **destructive** in the **Eastern Cape (EC) Province of South Africa**, **affecting all related sectors of farming communities**, such as the commercial farmer, stud breeder, smallholder to an emerging farmers, who own only small (Few) herds of livestock. **The Elderly and Widows in the EC villages live in fear of armed stock theft thieves**; this ever-increasing scourge against Widows and elderly seems to be **uncontrollable** in this province, this formed the crux of this study.

Individual crime levels in South Africa, estimates **844 000** incidences of theft of personal property occurred in 2020/21, **affecting 732 000** individuals aged **16 years and older**. The number of **affected individuals represents 1,8%** of the population. About **31% (30,5%)** of individuals who experienced theft of personal property reported some or all incidences to the police, which is a 7,7 percentage point decrease compared to the previous reporting year 2019/2022. **Theft of personal property has consistently been the most common crime experienced by individuals in South Africa** (Victims of Crime Survey, 2022). **Lockdown period/regulations** presented an increase in the theft of agricultural commodities, such as livestock. Stock theft remains extremely high in the EC Province.
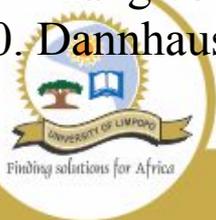
INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION CONTI ...

The EC Member of Executive Committee [MEC - Weziwe Tikana-Gxothiwe] (in Dayimani, 2020), reveals that **5636 animals were stolen between March 27 and June 22 2020**, with about **228 people arrested**. This is due to the inability of farm watch patrols to take place during lockdown, van der Walt (2020). It is established that the stolen animals were worth a combined amounted to **R17.197 million** in the EC. News24, 2020). Ludolph (2022) highlights that stock theft not only **costs EC R1.4 billion** a year, it also affected them economically, as well as their health and wellbeing, while **many of the victims are Widows and elderly livestock farmers**. Statistically [2021], stock theft increased in the EC and it remains a challenge to effectively address it in the province. This province occupy **Six (06)** of the **Ten (10) hotspots** in the country, as follows, Tom (2021):

1. **Qumbu - EC (320)**
2. **Sulenkama - EC (319)**
3. Taylors Halt - KwaZulu-Natal [KZN] (283)
4. **Mthatha - EC (281)**
5. **Bityi - EC (265)**
6. **Mount Frere - EC (243)**
7. **Maluti - EC (228)**
8. **Tsolo – EC (208)**
9. Amangwe - KZN (203)
10. Dannhauser - KZN (188)

2. METHODOLOGY

❑ **Study approach and design:** This study adopted qualitative research approach, with an aid of non-empirical research design: Systematic review. this form of research design identifies, describes available research literature 'using systematic and explicit accountable methods and pre-specified formalised tools for searching and integrating literature (Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2012:5 and Punch, 2014:108).

❑ The **data collection** method was supported by the citation of seminal news reports (Documentary sources), by closely focusing on EC Province, restricted to 2018-2022. Furthermore, one can ask questions of documents in the same ways as one might ask questions of research respondents (Matthews & Ross, 2010:282).

❑ For **data analysis**: The keywords/phrases were used to filter info relevant to reach data saturation of the research problem, while applying **Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)** to **identify the Four (04) study themes** to respond and verify the objective of this study, by reducing data into themes and transcribing of verbatim expressions from the reviewed collected data. This was applied to present honesty reporting relating to the consulted literature, Liamputtong (2013:246).

3. KEY STUDY THEMES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

❑ **Widows and elderly as stock theft target:** Women [Widows and elderly] living in Nyanisweni village in Qumbu in the EC Province are target of ruthless stock theft and living in fear that their Kraals will be empty in the morning.

❑ **Targeted livestock:** Sheep, Cattle, Goats and Horses.

❑ *Modus Operandi (MO)***:** Heavily armed thieves pounce on them, targeting homes of vulnerable Widows and elderly, sometimes they are stolen while they are watching Television (TV). This province accounts for more stock theft than any other province in the country. Usually, young boys between the ages of 14 and 17, work as group and are heavily armed and dangerous. Thee syndicates of elderly men buy the stolen livestock like Sheep for between R200 – R300. Wool and meat are sold separately, sold in neighbouring towns and provinces like KZN Province.

❑ **The stock theft effects on victims (Widows and elderly) and policing:** The financial, emotional and psychological scars the victims are left with are too much to bear, as their worthy livestock are often lost without a trace. Ineffective policing of stock theft is highly witnessed in the EC Province.

❑ **Empirical illustrations:**

Widow of 67 years old [She was asleep when her 86 Sheep were stolen in 2018] shared the following verbatim expression *"When I woke up the next day, there was nothing inside the Kraal. Only One – 01 Sheep managed to come back, and we tried to trace the direction it came from, but nothing came from that."*

Another **Widow (57)** shared the following – **Lost 2 Cows, 4 Goats and 19 Sheep** *"I am very hurt. My whole life has been turned upside down . I am a Widow and trying to make a living , then people just come and take the little we have. It is unfair. We are afraid because we do not see any help coming from anybody. We are scared because we cannot fight the thieves. We are defenceless."*

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KEY STUDY THEMES AND ILLUSTRATIONS CONTI ...

Emotionally, this was also shared: *"I was so traumatised. I had lost thousands of rands from those Sheep. These animals are our livelihoods. We can sell them for R2 000 to R2 500 each. So imagine how much money you lose if you have 83 Sheep stolen in just One night. Not to mention the fact that several of them were pregnant at the time they were stolen. We expected to get 10 Lambs from those."*

For policing: The local police never bother to track down the thieves, but only try to assist in finding the stolen Sheep – searches that usually lead to dead end. *"All they do (the Stock Theft Units from Qumbu, Katlop and Sulenkama police stations) is to help you to look for Sheep, but not the suspects."*

"Even when stolen Sheep are found in someone's else's homestead, police just take the Sheep back and leave the person who is in possession of the stock (The alleged thief) behind."

Another Widow (52), who lost 12 Cows revealed the following frustrations: *"They were paid as part of Lobola in December and were stolen in February. So it means my Daughter's Lobola was lost, just like that. It really pains me whenever I think of this ... government should really investigate this issue of stock theft, especially in Qumbu, because these thieves are so brazen. They steal with impunity. Our livestock are stolen daily, but you will never find the thieves or find anyone being arrested for the theft."*

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE IDENTIFIED STUDY THEMES

This study recommend the use **of conventional methods with latest technologies, such as Radio Frequency Identification [RFID] (Botswana and Swaziland - Livestock Identification Trace-back System to monitor the entire national cattle population – Three digital tagging systems / Electronic Identification - Injected microchip, Digital ear-tag and Reticular bolus),** Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi), Wireless Sensor Node / Network (WSN), ZigBee for livestock monitoring and Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) technology for investigation, policing and evidence value. A single use of these methods cannot effectively combat stock theft.

For example; the Find Me Cattle (R3200 = 1:20 – Move in groups), Sheep, Goats (R1750 = 1:10 – Move in isolation) and **Find Me Cattle [Three – 3 years battery lifespan (R250-300 Cattle – R150- 200 – Sheep and Goats) – Use solar panel to charge]** as introduced by 'Find Me Security Technology,' who are also willing to do a presentation to the South African Police Service (SAPS) and other relevant stakeholders on some of the latest technologies to combat stock theft. **Alarms for Kraals in rural areas and the Super Sensor (Planted underground) to detect any weapon within a specific location.**

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE IDENTIFIED STUDY THEMES CONTI ...

❑ **High level of corruption**: In particular, police are found to be working in cohort with criminals to steal stock, especially cattle, goats and sheep. Stock theft cases fall because of inability to identify stock conclusively. If livestock can be legally identified, it will be possible to prove ownership and improve traceability. **The law enforcers should be provided with resources to effectively prevent, adjudicate and disrupt stock theft syndicates**. The effective use of **modern technology to fight stock theft, using social media,** such as the Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and other online tools, they can be great methods for communicating with citizens and reporting of stock thefts. Farmers should be empowered and encouraged to register with social media technologies.

❑ **Tightening security checks at slaughter houses and livestock movement** may dissuade, scare and discourage offenders from taking advantage of situations. **Enhancement of research and intelligence on stock theft** - The information gathered through intelligence and scholarly research such as causes of stock theft, changing dynamics of stock theft, perpetrators of stock theft, risk factors; financial and communication trails between relevant stakeholders may help in devising new ways of combating stock theft.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE IDENTIFIED STUDY THEMES CONTI...

Having a **close and concerted partnership-based collaboration, interaction and information exchange.** The integrated approach should include a number of stakeholders such as farmers, law enforcers, business communities; different government institutions and research institutions. Governments, law enforcers and farmers should treat livestock theft as a serious criminal activity and that all those who carryout or support should face the force of the law.

This study recommends that more SAPS STUs members be trained specifically in the use of various technologies and each SAPS STU in the EC Province selected areas should have a **designated technology experts** working closely with the local livestock farmers and relevant forensic laboratories across the country for effective DNA evidence analysis. **The police incapacity and inadequate response:** Police who are deployed to handle stock theft cases have adequate skills, knowledge, experience and equipments For example, some even do not even know the **nature of rural areas or different breeds of Cattle**. This also includes **good vehicles to traverse rural areas and modern communication systems**. Furthermore, **farmers have reported calls not being answered and a lack of understanding amongst police on rural related issues.**

5. COCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Integration procedures - Every animal is unique, and stock handling can leave distinct marks on individual animals. These two facts can be used by law enforcement officers to prosecute stock thieves effectively - Every animal is unique and will have [Some] permanent marks from being handled over the years. These can all be used for identification purposes to link stolen livestock to their owners' herds," an expert witness on stock theft cases reveals.

The evolution of stock theft - Some thieves slaughter animals immediately for their own use, others slaughter animals for the purpose of selling the meat, while still others steal livestock to build their own herds or sell stolen livestock at auctions). **With 87% in livestock theft is highly organised and only 13% is for survival.**

Lack of witness and definite evidence to sustain and prosecute suspect of stock theft, relating to proving ownership of the stock. Investigators, prosecutors and Magistrates handling stock theft issues should have profound knowledge of livestock, livestock theft and rural.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS CONTI ...

Reporting of stock theft - Farmers are reluctant to report stock theft and testify against thieves in courts. Costly to attend court proceedings in terms of time and money often through lengthy proceedings. Keeping the peace and not to accuse someone in the community. reduce barriers that impede farmers from effectively participating in criminal justice system such as the costs of pursuing and prosecuting stock thieves; corruption, language difficulties, among others. Possibly a **RURAL CRIME UNIT** may be formed within the local police stations.

Therefore, it is also concluded that **all prominent Anti-Stock theft stakeholders** should highly consider **undergoing educational courses** and **trainings** based on the **effective use of conventional, technological and resources advancements** in combating stock theft in the villages of EC Province. Moreover, **the intelligence-led operations** should be exercised to monitor well-known syndicates across the policing areas of EC Province. **This require a radical, new approach, involving closer collaboration, interaction, and information exchange of all relevant role-players** to efficiently protected the Widows and Elderly, this will strengthen enforcement response and reporting techniques.

THANK YOU