

Understanding The Principles of Pastoralism In Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines pastoralism in Nigeria, highlighting its historical roots, sustainable land use practices, livestock management techniques, cultural significance, challenges, government interventions, and future prospects. Pastoralism is deeply embedded in ancient traditions, with communities relying on livestock for sustenance and trade. Sustainable practices like rotational grazing support the viability of grazing lands, while techniques such as selective breeding are crucial for livestock management. Despite its cultural importance—symbolizing wealth and status—pastoralism faces significant challenges, including climate change, poor policies, land encroachment, and conflicts with crop farmers. Government efforts, such as veterinary services and grazing reserves, aim to support pastoral communities. Nonetheless, the concept of pastoralism remains poorly understood in Nigeria, and a lack of synergy between humans, animals, and the environment hampers productivity. The article calls for collaborative efforts from pastoral communities, government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society to enhance the sustainability and productivity of the system.

Keywords: Pastoralism; Pastoralists; cattle herding; Nigeria.

Introduction

Pastoralism is a traditional lifestyle centered on herding of livestock, particularly cattle, for sustenance and trade. It involves moving of animals in search of feeds and water, especially in regions with seasonal climatic changes and scarce resources (Hayatu *et al.*, 2018). Over the years, pastoralism has been an integral part of livelihood and culture of communities in Northern Nigeria. Pastoralists are a group of vulnerable and marginalized individuals who are misunderstood because of their social conservatism, resilience, migratory patterns and courage (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2015). Pastoralists (mainly *Fulani*), rely on cattle for food, clothing and trade and their life style is linked to their environment and natural cycles. Their conservative nature could be due to limited contact with larger society thus, mostly perceived as trouble makers and cause of violent conflicts (Suleiman *et al.*, 2015).

In Nigeria, the development of grazing lands for livestock can be traced to the establishing of traditional grazing reserve (*Hurmi*) around the towns and villages throughout Northern part. However, population growth, industrialization and increasing demand for food have necessitated the need for more farmland. This resulted into continuous reduction of the available grazing reserves, and their connecting routes

(Burtali), causing the decline of the carrying capacity of the remaining grazing reserves in the country. Furthermore, an attempt to restore the potential of the existing reserves around Kano and Katsina states by the government, through sowing of improved seeds failed, because of encroachments (Kalla 1991).

Despite the vital role of pastoralism in the provision of food, income and raw materials, pastoralists face a serious challenge in their socio-economic development. This article delves into the system of pastoralism in Nigeria, shedding light on historical context, land use, livestock management, cultural significance, challenges, government interventions and future prospects.

Historical Context

According to Blench (1994), the history of pastoralism dates back to the dawn of human civilization and is closely tied to the *Fulani* people, who are integral to livestock herding. Originating from the Senegambia region, the *Fulani* have spread across approximately 20 states in West Africa, the Sahel, Western Sudan, and the Central African Republic. Their socio-cultural identity in these regions is significantly influenced by the Jihad of 18th and 19th centuries. As the largest nomadic group in the world, *Fulani* are basically pastoralists herding cattle, sheep, goat and camel and trading, and most often keeping away from local agricultural population (Johnson and Taofik, 2017)

In Nigeria, pastoralism started over a thousand years ago. It established a traditional livestock system that contributes positively to the country's economy, food security, and cultural heritage. While pastoralism provides economic benefits and cultural heritage in the country, it faces challenges such as poor policy implementation, conflicts and climate change and scarcity available resource. In response to the challenges, Nigerian government and other stake holders have put in place initiatives to support and modernize the sector (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2015).

Land Use

Rangelands or grazing reserves are lands on which indigenous vegetation is predominantly grasses, forbs legumes and shrubs that are grazed or can potentially be grazed by livestock and can be used as natural ecosystem for livestock and wildlife production (Hayatu *et al.*, 2018). The government of Nigeria, under the National Livestock Transformation Plan, intends to modernize livestock farming through ranching and sustainable management of grazing reserves. This initiative, with support from private investors, targets selected states to alleviate farmer-herder conflicts and enhance livestock productivity (Davies *et al.*, 2016). Nigeria has 415 grazing reserves across 21 states, with 140 officially gazette and are primarily located in northern states namely: Adamawa (31), Bauchi (27), Borno (15), Yobe (17), Taraba (9), Sokoto (8), Zamfara (6). Other states such as Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, and Kebbi, have fewer reserves while the southern region has only two (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2015).

To ensure sustainability of the efforts, Federal Government and International Agencies like United State Agency for International Development (USAID) provided staffing, technical and financial supports for the protection and improving grazing reserves, stock routes for a better understanding of pastoralism in the country (Davies *et al.*, 2016).

Livestock Management

Central to pastoralism in Nigeria is the efficient management of livestock as it entails the rearing of animals under extensive management system, a system that involves regular herd movement between pastures across the range lands (Abdulatife and Ebro, 2015). Pastoralists have deep knowledge of animal husbandry, livestock health management and nutrition. Through selective breeding and careful management, they maintain healthy and productive herds in order to maximize their economic returns (Ademola *et al.*, 2020). For instance, the practice of 'catch-up growth', (a system of feed restriction) during feed shortage, is a management tool for improving the performance of young animals. However, the strategy may affect the performance of older animals, thus reducing their earnings (Ouali *et al.*, 2023). During critical feed shortage, they consider migration and selling of dry animals, supplement lactating cows, kids and lambs with improved pasture and conserve feeds (Abdulatife and Ebro, 2015).

According to Ademola *et al.* (2020), mobility is essential for herding but can be challenging and stressful, leading to decreased performance and livestock losses. Increasing settlement, changing policies, security issues, and climate change have significantly reduced mobility and disrupt traditional pastoral practices. These threaten pastoralists and their ability to rely on indigenous knowledge and skills for survival.

Cultural Significance

At a time when pastoral communities are facing a multitude of crises such as drought, shrinking of natural land resources and conflicts, it becomes necessary to provide key understanding of their production systems, values, potential, constraints and the challenges they need to overcome and ensure sustainability.

Pastoralism is more than just an economic activity but a life style, deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of *Fulani* herding cattle, sheep and goats in their communities and in many cases, keeping away from local agricultural population (Johnson and Taofik, 2017). Pastoral life style alleviates poverty through marketing of livestock products, production of farm labour and input, tourist services and market chain linkages (Abanikanda *et al.*, 2016).

Livestock ownership is a symbol of wealth and social status, while traditional practices such as payments dowry and other social ties reflect the importance of livestock in social relations (Hayatu *et al.*, 2018). Pastoralism provides various services to agricultural sector for increased yields, environmental benefits and financial investment opportunities for rural populations that have no access to banking and savings system. It also provides job opportunities to many people in Nigeria (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2015).

The pastoral cattle provides for subsistence purpose, social satisfaction, domestic fuel and farm power. To cattle-crop households, cattle ownership is a safety net against droughts and other disasters that could result poor crop yields (Suleiman *et al.*, 2015). In Nigeria, cattle value chain generates substantial tax to the national revenue. They are also the most important species in terms of biomass and investment value and source of meat for nationals (FAOSTAT, 2015).

Challenges

Despite its significance and resilience, pastoralism faces numerous challenges, with climate change, resource depletion, insecurity, and conflicts. Therefore the need to adopt innovative strategies such as diversifying livelihoods, engaging in agro-pastoralism, and advocate for land rights.

According to Abugu, and Onuba, (2015). One of the major challenges of pastoralism in Nigeria is climate change, it causes shortage of rain fall and drought and the lesser the rainfall, the more severe the drought and intense competition for scarce resources. Since Nigeria lack adequate strategies to handle the effects of climate change, migration remains an alternative in the country. Depletion of range resources due to climate change impact negatively on pastoralism and lead to intense competition. This result into conflicts with crop farmers, as it is the case in the North, Middle-belt and South Eastern parts of Nigeria today (Sanchi, 2023).

Pastoral movement is another serious challenge faced by pastoralists' globally. The relationship between climate change, increase in herd size, land use and population growth is very complex. The climate change cause depletion of pasture and water resources, increase in herd size demand for increase pasture and water points while the population growth creates rising demand for food and industrialization, all these requires land (Abugu, and Onuba, 2015). The shrinking of available grazing reserves and cattle route in Nigeria makes it difficult for pastoralists to feed and water for their animals thus affecting the productivity of the system (Suleiman *et al.*, 2015).

Land policy is a vital tool in determining the rights, protection, transfer of wealth and ensuring food security. It also ensures orderliness and legal framework for which transfer, acquisition and uses occur without vices or anti-cultural dispositions and conflicts. Owing to their migratory nature, pastoralists have limited access to land (Adeleye *et al.*, 2020). Lack of sufficient grazing reserves and cattle routes in Nigeria makes cattle herding very difficult and suggests a critical review of land use and ownership and (Abanikanda *et al.*,

2016; Akintunde, (2015)). This suggests the need to revisit policies and allow direct contact with pastoralists not their representatives. This could uplift socio-economic status of pastoralists, national economy, improve food security and reduce the rate of crop-herder's conflict in the country.

Government Interventions

According to Suleiman *et al.* (2015), Nigerian government and other stakeholders have initiated several programs to support pastoralism as a system. These include Cattle Colonies which aimed at providing a centre for the sales of cattle and beef products, the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlement programme in order to station the pastoralists. However, the RUGA policy has failed due to poor implementation, allegations on pastoralists as trouble makers and misperceptions by some policy makers who viewed it as a means of conquering, Islamizing, Fulanizing or colonizing people (Apikins, 2020).

In Nigeria, the National Livestock Transformation Plan (LTP) was a plan to provide veterinary services, create livestock marketing board and integrate pastoralists into formal economies while peace-building initiative aimed to reduce crop livestock clashes. The Land Resource Management Policy (LRMP) is to address land issues such as ownership and tenure system, recognize communal grazing rights and promote sustainable rangeland management (Davies *et al.*, 2015). The Climate Adaptation Policy aimed to addressing climate change impacts, such as drought mitigation, water resource development and subsidies for fodder and water during drought periods, Education and Health Services policy provided mobile schools and health clinics for nomadic populations and improve infrastructure in pastoral regions. Other initiatives (by NGOs) includes Emergency Relief Program, Advocacy and Awareness and Community based projects etc. (Apikins, 2020). Many of the above initiatives fail to reach those directly engaged in pastoral activities, thus indicating a gap between policymakers and the pastoralists themselves.

Future Prospects

From the above discussions, there are quite unwavering socio-ecological relationships and the tendency towards a semi-permanent or permanent settlement for pastoralists in Nigeria. On the assumption that this is generally desirable, it is necessary to find ways and means of maintaining its continuity. Realizing this requires introduction of long term measures based on research outcomes, targeting the improvement of livestock industry, to develop new breeds with quality traits for better performance and disease resistance, improve grazing management and material facilities, establishment of dairy collecting point and processing facilities in areas where *Fulani* are concentrated, as well as provisions for modernization and improvement when necessary.

Conclusion

Pastoralism in Nigeria remains underdeveloped due to reliance on traditional practices and a lack of integration between local knowledge and modern innovations. Addressing these gaps is essential for enhancing livelihoods and resource use efficiency.

Recommendations

To promote the resilience and sustainability of pastoralism, pastoralists, collaborative efforts from pastoralists, government, NGOs, and civil society are crucial. This includes investing in infrastructure, fostering climate-resilient practices, enhancing conflict resolution mechanisms, integrating traditional knowledge with modern methods, and securing land tenure rights for pastoralists. These steps are vital for supporting the cultural heritage and economic development associated with pastoralism in Nigeria.

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