



A Review of the Gender Barriers Confronting Women and Girls in Pastoral Communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region: The Case of Bauchi and Gombe States

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the gender barrier driving inequalities among the pastoralists of Nigeria's Sahel Region in particular Bauchi and Gombe States. The study aims at identifying the socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors contributing to gender inequalities among the pastoralists. Using a cross-sectional survey design, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that cultural practices and social norms limit women's participation as they are presumed unfit for various duties; power relations, gendered policies and laws also deny women decision-making power. Furthermore, lack of credit and economic opportunities put women in another vulnerable position of being financially trapped. In addition, patriarchal norms and institutions contribute to gender inequality through exclusion of women from decision-making processes and education. Based on the findings, the study recommends inclusive policy intercessions emphasizing on gender-sensitive education, better economic opportunities, institutional support, and community involvement. Addressing these problems can help to advance gender equity and development in Sahel Region of Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Economic Barriers, Pastoral Communities, Nigeria Sahel Region, Socio-Cultural Factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism means managing livestock in production systems that involve the mobility of the herders with their animals in search of pasture and water. Instead of confining animals to a given area, as is practiced in most systems, pastoralists allow the animals to roam on rangelands and move to other places in search of resources depending on the season. This mobile grazing pattern evolved into both an effective means for managing pastures in semiarid or arid zones while also being a cultural practice of various nomadic societies all around the world. The pastoralists depend on livestock such as cattle, camels, goats, and sheep for food and other resources for survival while managing the rangelands (Turner & Schlecht, 2019; Brottem & McDonnell, 2020; Jobbins, Brottem & McDonnell, 2021).

In Sahel regions, livestock plays a significant role in supporting women and improving their financial condition in pastoralist systems, and women are highly involved in the sector. For example, they share responsibility for animal care with men and children. Again, women frequently play an important part in managing poultry and dairy animals, as well as caring for other animals housed and fed on the homestead. When responsibilities are shared, men are more likely to be involved in housing construction, grazing animal herding, and product marketing if women's mobility is limited (Sasa, Adebayo, & Maurice, 2022: 149).

Thus, it appears that women manage complex households, and pursue many sources of income. Their common activities include processing and preparing food, caring for family members, and maintaining their homes, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, producing crops, and animal herding/husbandry, particularly milking, cow and calf health, and control over livestock products are typical activities (Sasa, Adebayo, & Maurice, 2022: 141; Bruggeman, 1994: ii).

Women contribute significantly to agro-pastoral and pastoral output in rural communities in Nigeria's Sahel region. However, their responsibilities differ considerably across and within regions, and they are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, where economic and social factors are revolutionizing the agro-pastoral sector (Sasa, Adebayo, & Maurice, 2022: 141). Agro-pastoral communities in Nigeria play a vital role in the country's agricultural industry, contributing significantly to food security and rural livelihoods. However, within these communities, women face numerous challenges that hinder their active participation and inhibit their socio-economic empowerment.

There were conventional patriarchal structures and belief systems that men were providers and women took care of the home in the past (Marshall 1973). However, these attitudes have increasingly faded in modern times as women take on responsibilities that were once assigned to men. Currently, there are several examples throughout Africa of women actively participating in previously forbidden masculine roles such as animal herding/husbandry (Bruggeman, 1994: ii). According to Waters-Bayer (1985), early academics of pastoralism in Africa, such as Hopen (1958), Stenning (1959), and Dupire (1962), passively described the significance of women's contribution to the pastoral economy of nomadic populations like the Fulani. However, these scholars were accused of using a synchronic approach to analyze pastoral relationships (Hodgson 1999). The synchronic paradigm tends to bring together all roles, activities, and contributions of different genders and age groups (Onyima, 2019).

Recent studies from the twenty-first century have revealed that herding activities and pastoral management, in general, are carried out by members of the group who cross the gender and age divide (Nduma et al., 2001; Onyima, 2019; Schloeder et al., 2017; Sellen, 2000). Scholars in the past, on the other hand, have focused on assessing and reporting on men's actions and roles in pastoral civilizations. Thus, until the 1970s, women in pastoral societies were scarcely reported, particularly in their socioeconomic responsibilities and contributions to livestock production and development (Onyima, 2019). The source of this demotion of female activities is not exclusive to studies on pastoral tribes; it is prevalent in most patriarchal settings (Onyima, 2019).

Women in pastoral civilizations are assigned cultural duties that are impacted by a variety of circumstances, including social, cultural, and economic reasons. It is therefore important to highlight pastoral women's major gender-specific and non-gender-specific socio-economic contributions, as well as the economic and socio-cultural constraints that women face in pastoralist communities (Onyima, 2019).

Nevertheless, Onyima (2019) stated that:

"Women are economically involved in direct livestock production such as cattle herding as well as indirect complementary livestock activities such as milking, processing, and sale of dairy products (cheese, butter, and milk), crop farming, petty trading, skin/leather work, and extracting rangeland products such as firewood and charcoal." Pastoral women are also socially competent in household administration, decision-making with spouses, food preparation, child nutrition (breastfeeding), and leadership in pastoral women organizations" (Onyima, 2019: 2).

Gender inequality remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world, and pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region are no exception. These communities, primarily located in Gombe and Bauchi states, rely heavily on pastoralism as a way of life. Pastoralism is not only an economic activity but also a cultural and social system deeply embedded in the identity, culture, traditions, socio-political organizations, and livelihoods of the people (Jobbins, Brottem & McDonnell, 2021). Despite women's contributions to the development of pastoral cultures, they continue to be culturally marginalized and denied involvement in certain domains in comparison to men (Onyima, 2019).

Pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region play a crucial role in the country's economy and food security. However, there is a significant disparity in the participation of men and women in pastoral activities, with women often facing numerous barriers that limit their involvement. Women in pastoral communities encounter multifaceted barriers such as traditional gender roles, limited access to resources, and institutional biases. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing targeted interventions that promote gender equality and enhance the overall resilience and sustainability of pastoral communities. Thus, this study seeks to address the gaps in the existing literature by examining the specific challenges confronting women in pastoral communities, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on gender equality and sustainable development.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics and structural constraints that perpetuate gender disparities within pastoral communities, particularly in Nigeria's Sahel region. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To identify and analyze the socio-cultural factors influencing gender roles and inequalities within pastoral activities in Nigeria's Sahel Region.
2. To examine the economic barriers restricting women's participation in pastoralism and assess their implications for sustainable development.
3. To explore the institutional factors contributing to gender inequality in pastoral communities and propose policy recommendations to address these issues.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

2.1. Pastoralism

The term "pastoralists" refers to a wide definition to describe people and populations who engage in some form of pastoral livestock production as their main source of income. This includes a broad cohort and variation between pastoralist groups. While the majority of the Sahel's pastoralists may be impoverished, some wealthy individuals employ others to look after large numbers and sizes of livestock that would undertake transhumance migrations (Haan, et al 2016; Brottem & McDonnell, 2020). Likewise, some pastoralists have no permanent residence and travel from one place to another with their animals while others are settled people who employ the services of contractors to drive their cattle from one station to the other (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020).

According to Djordjević-Milošević & Milovanović (2020), pastoralism is the aspect of agriculture that entails the raising of livestock by pastoralists for the economic value of their products. To Onyima (2019) pastoralism refers to the activity of transporting livestock from one area to another in search of pasture and water. Animal raising where the human and animals move from one place to the other in search of pastures and water is called pastoralism (Reid, et al 2014; Brottem & McDonnell, 2020; Jobbins, Brottem & McDonnell, 2021). This movement can be attained in various ways – the pastoralists may move their stock more frequently and constantly or they may move in a more or less regular fashion over short distances or not at all except during the specific seasons. Pastoral mobility is a risk diversification strategy and has implications for coping with variability in resource distribution across the geographical area. One specific type of pastoral movement can be described as transhumance – this is the movement of the livestock between fixed summer pastures and fixed winter pastures, which are associated with rainy and dry seasons in ecological regions accordingly (Turner & Schlecht, 2019; Brottem & McDonnell, 2020).

Many pastoralists practice a semi-nomadic lifestyle, living in a settlement for a time and then taking their livestock on migration during the dry season or to take them to market. Such settlements may be permanent towns or temporary camps and may be essential focal points for engaging pastoral communities (Jobbins, Brottem & McDonnell, 2021). Some pastoral livestock migrate along established routes to access water or pasture when the season changes, a process known as transhumance. These migrations will often bring livestock into contact with farmland, national borders, or other spaces where conflicts may emerge (Jobbins, Brottem & McDonnell, 2021).

African pastoralism is a livestock-rearing system that involves humans who are primarily dependent on cattle, who migrate and live in seasonal conditions, and who opt to move livestock all year round to pastures rather than providing food to herds (Onyima, 2019). Pastoralism in Africa can be classified first by the nature of pastoral activities, and economy, and then by the migratory pattern used. As a result, based on the nature of pastoral activities observed on the African continent, there are approximately three types of pastoralism: (i) pure pastoralism, (ii) semi-pastoralism (agropastoralism (also classified as traditional pastoralism in the literature), and (iii) modern pastoralism (sedentary pastoralism or enclosed system or ranching) (2019 Onyima). On the other hand, there are roughly three sorts of nomadic or migratory patterns, namely (a) pure nomadism, (b) semi-nomadism, and (c) transhumance nomadism.

Nomadism refers to movement patterns and migrations, whereas pure pastoralism is the economic practice of raising solely animals. Pure pastoralists are frequently imagined as people who do not grow or consume crop foods; however, this has been argued to be historically nonexistent, highlighting the importance of focusing on the processes of pastoralism rather than the ideal types (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980; Onyima, 2019). Semi-pastoralism refers to a system that combines livestock husbandry with crop farming or trading. This is a more adaptable method that is less rigid than pure pastoralism (Onyima, 2019). Pastoralists in Africa raise a variety of ruminant species, including reindeer, horses, camels, sheep, goats, buffaloes, cattle, and so on. Because livestock must be fed regularly throughout the year, and because Africa is a location with pronounced seasonality, pastoralists must shift their animals owing to alternating temperature or climatic conditions involving rainy and dry seasons (2019 Onyima).

Allen et al. (2011) define livestock nomadism as a system based on extensive movements of herds and flocks in search of forage, led by human family units with no permanent home base. Nomadism, defined as migration or mobility, is not confined to animal husbandry; it also includes substantial migration across varied habitats, countries, and so on. These migrations can sometimes be temporary (test migrations) or permanent (Bassett and Turner 2007). There are numerous motivations for movement in Africa, including familial (marriage, birth, and death ceremonies), religious (pilgrimage), political (military, refugee resettlement), and economic (labor migration, trade, cattle nomadism) reasons (Oyadoke and Brieger 2004). Pastoralists may also relocate to prevent looming animal disease epidemics, lessen competition, or avoid paying taxes to the government (Blench and Dendo 1994, 2003; Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980; Onyima, 2019).

Many researchers, including Ekpo et al. (2009) and Roth and Fratkin (2005), have documented sedentarization among African cattle nomads. Various pastoral communities can be found throughout Africa's countries. The Fula people of Sahelian West Africa, as well as the Toubou of Niger and Chad, live in the Sahel region. It is important to emphasize that the above-mentioned pastoral societies are populated not only by male pastoralists but also by pastoral women and children. They are not inactive or dormant beings; rather, they are actively engaged in various stages of pastoralism as a cultural and economic practice. Though these societies reflect more male-centered gender roles than female-centered gender roles, women continue to play substantial roles in the same, similar, or complementary areas of daily pastoral community life. African pastoral societies are strongly gender-segregated (Onyima 2016). In these societies, there is a significant awareness of the existing distinctions between men and women, which shapes and influences interactions and human connections in a certain society (Onyima (2019).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

There are different theoretical postulations regarding constraints on women pastoralists in the Sahel region of Nigeria. Some of these theories include structural-functional theory, gender-social conflict theory, capability approach, and the gender and development framework. Some of these theories provide deep insights into the predisposing factors that ignited men's domination of pastoralists. Despite the merit of different contending theories, they do not sufficiently dissect the economic and socio-cultural barriers to women in pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel region (Onyima, 2019). Consequently, the study employs the capability approach and the gender and development framework to analyze the agency and capabilities of women in pastoral communities. These theoretical perspectives help illuminate how gender roles, access to resources, and institutional structures influence women's capabilities to participate fully in pastoral activities, ultimately affecting their overall well-being and empowerment. These frameworks provide a lens

through which the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors contributing to gender inequality in pastoral communities can be understood and analyzed.

Capability Approach

The Capability Approach, developed by Amartya Sen and further expanded by Martha Nussbaum, emphasizes the importance of enhancing individuals' capabilities — that is, their actual ability to achieve the kind of lives they value (Sen, 1999). This approach shifts the focus from mere resource distribution to what individuals can do with those resources, taking into account personal, social, and environmental factors that may hinder or enhance their opportunities.

In the context of this study, the Capability Approach helps to explain how socio-cultural and economic barriers restrict the capabilities of women and girls in pastoral communities. For instance, the findings from the focus group discussions revealed that traditional norms confine women to domestic roles, limiting their participation in economic activities and decision-making processes. These restrictions significantly reduce women's capabilities by curtailing their opportunities to engage in activities that could enhance their well-being and economic independence.

Moreover, the economic barriers identified, such as limited access to financial resources and livestock ownership, further constrain women's capabilities. The Capability Approach highlights that it is not just the lack of resources but the lack of opportunity to convert these resources into valuable functioning that perpetuates gender inequality. For example, even when women have access to some resources, the socio-cultural norms and institutional barriers often prevent them from using these resources to their full potential. This aligns with the Capability Approach's emphasis on creating an enabling environment where women can exercise their agency and expand their capabilities.

The findings also resonate with Nussbaum's (2011) list of central human capabilities, particularly the capability of "affiliation," which includes the ability to engage in social interactions and participate in community life on equal terms with others. The exclusion of women from decision-making processes and their limited access to education directly undermine this capability, reinforcing gender inequalities.

Gender and Development (GAD) Framework

The Gender and Development (GAD) Framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing gender inequalities by focusing on the social relations that produce and sustain gender differences. The GAD framework emphasizes the need for structural change, including policies and institutional reforms, to achieve gender equality. It critiques the traditional development approaches that often overlook the power dynamics and social structures that disadvantage women (Moser, 1993).

The GAD framework is particularly relevant to the study's exploration of institutional factors contributing to gender inequality in pastoral communities. The findings indicate that patriarchal structures, policy gaps, and lack of supportive interventions are significant barriers to gender equality. These institutional factors align with the GAD framework's focus on the need to challenge and change the underlying structures that perpetuate gender disparities.

For instance, the exclusion of women from leadership roles and decision-making processes in pastoral communities, as revealed in the study, is a direct manifestation of the patriarchal norms that the GAD framework seeks to address. This exclusion not only limits women's ability to influence decisions that affect their lives but also reinforces their subordinate status within the community. The GAD framework advocates for policies and programs that actively promote women's participation in decision-making at all levels, which is essential for achieving sustainable gender equality.

Furthermore, the GAD framework's emphasis on the intersectionality of gender with other social categories, such as class and age, helps to explain the compounded disadvantages faced by young girls in these communities. The

findings showed that early marriage and limited educational opportunities are prevalent due to cultural beliefs that prioritize male education. These intersecting factors exacerbate gender inequality, which the GAD framework suggests should be addressed through targeted interventions that consider the specific needs and challenges of different groups of women.

In linking the findings to these theoretical frameworks, it becomes clear that addressing gender inequalities in pastoral communities requires a multifaceted approach. The Capability Approach underscores the importance of expanding women's opportunities and capabilities, while the GAD framework highlights the need to address the structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender disparities. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of gender inequality in pastoral communities and for developing effective interventions to promote gender equality and empower women.

3. METHODS

The study was conducted in selected pastoral communities in Bauchi and Gombe states, which are part of Nigeria's Sahel Region. Specifically, respondents were selected from 6 Local Government Areas: 3 in Bauchi State (Dass, Kirfi, and Tafawa Balewa); and 3 in Gombe State (Akko, Billiri, and Kaltungo). These areas were chosen due to their significant pastoral activities and the prevalence of gender-related issues within their communities. The study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors contributing to gender inequalities in pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region. This approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights and understanding from the perspectives of the community members themselves. The methods used in this study included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from various demographic groups within the pastoral communities, including women, men, youth, and community leaders. The criteria for selection included age, gender, role in pastoral activities, and willingness to participate in the study. A total of twelve FGDs were conducted, six in each state. Each FGD consisted of 8-10 participants to facilitate meaningful discussion and interaction. Separate FGDs were conducted for women, men, and youth to ensure that participants felt comfortable discussing gender-specific issues. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire that covered topics related to socio-cultural norms, economic activities, access to resources, and institutional factors affecting gender equality.

A total of 37 key informants, comprising 57 percent females and 43 percent males were interviewed. Participants include community leaders, local government officials, and representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area. These interviews aimed to gather insights on policies, programs, and institutional practices that impact gender roles and inequalities in pastoral communities. The data collected from FGDs and KIIs were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the rights and well-being of the participants. Key ethical considerations included: Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. Written or verbal consent was obtained from all participants. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and data were anonymized to protect their privacy.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Results: The results of the study were presented in line with the objectives of the study below:

Objective 1: Identify and Analyze Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Gender Roles and Inequalities

The socio-cultural factors influencing gender roles and inequalities within pastoral activities in Nigeria's Sahel Region are rooted in traditional norms and expectations. According to Moser (2005), these traditional norms dictate gender roles within rural contexts, which are especially pronounced in pastoral communities. Findings from Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews show that women are often excluded from decision-making processes and outdoor economic activities due to entrenched patriarchal norms. These norms dictate that women should focus on domestic responsibilities, limiting their engagement in pastoral and economic activities. Early marriage and limited educational opportunities for girls are prevalent due to cultural beliefs that prioritize male education and view women's roles primarily as homemakers and caregivers. These findings are presented below:

Patriarchal Norms and Customs: Some respondents pointed out the fact that some men in the study area do not allow their wives to trade or do paid work. This could be ascribed to the patriarchal norms and customs that persist in the area. Excerpts:

“Husbands depriving wives of the given opportunity to trade or work that will support the family and also neglecting responsibility for women to handle the selling of women's hard-earned products by husbands who cannot literary say how those things have been earned. The claim of being the head of the family by men and having possession of every income”. **Female FGD, Awai Billiri North, Billiri LGA, Gombe.**

“One of the biggest challenges is the traditional norms, in terms of getting money, because our women don't use to go out how to look for money or let me say, is not any kind of business that our women and girls use to engage themselves in, because of the traditional norms in this community. But as of the economic is only lack of capital” **Male FGD, Lariski, Kirfi LGA**

“The tradition in our community does not allow women to go out and farm but girls can go to farm together with their father. That means farming is an occupation for men only while women engage in small businesses at home like buying and selling palm oil and frying of beans cake popularly known as Akara and what is called Awara which is made from soya beans”..... **KII (Male), Akko LGA, Gombe State**

“One of the biggest challenges is the traditional norms, because we don't have full access to education, so most of us are illiterate and we spend most our time at home, we don't have access to open shops in the market is only petty business at home”..... **KII (Female) Lariski, Kirfi LGA, State**

Limited Access to Education: One of the key gender disparities in Nigerian pastoral communities is the significant gap in educational attainment between men and women. Studies have found that pastoral girls have much lower school enrollment and completion rates compared to their male counterparts (Abbass, 2012; Etuk et al., 2019). Cultural norms that prioritize males' education, the opportunity costs of girls' labor within the household, and the lack of access to schools in remote pastoral areas all contribute to this educational gender gap.

Again, religion plays a major role in women/girls' access to education. While some religions would allow their girl child to finish up to secondary school education before getting married, others allow their girls to be married off early enough even when they are still in school thereby dropping out of school. Some families in the target project communities still consider it a waste to send a girl child to school. Some parents preferred to send the girl child to hawking and other businesses rather than sending them to school. Some of the key informants also argued that some parents in the community want their girls and women to go to school, but many of the girls end up getting pregnant and thereby dropping out of school. It seems impossible for the parents to control the teenage girls when they get into school. These occurrences have made many parents stop sending their girl child to school, especially at the secondary level. Excerpts are:

“Women do not get to further their studies immediately after they get married. The men do not support their wives to further their education. The women normally marry before the age of 20. Women do not

*get access to lucrative business opportunities because they lack the skills. And there are no skill acquisition programs in place”***Female FGD, Kaltungo**

*“Mostly women and girls have access to school and health facilities in this pastoral community without much stress that is based on their family status in the community, but mostly they are not allowed to further mostly the married ones because there is this belief in the community that if the woman obtains higher qualification she will not respect her husband, so for that, only a few are allowed to get to the peak of their profession based on their family background and understanding. Accessing health facilities is based on your income the less privileged ones find it difficult based on their financial status”***Female FGD Awai Billiri North, Bilirri LGA, Gombe,**

Restricted Decision-Making Power: Gender norms in many Nigerian pastoral communities grant men substantial authority over household and community-level decisions, while women's participation in decision-making processes is highly circumscribed. Women may be excluded from discussions and consultations related to resource management, conflict resolution, and other critical issues that impact their lives (Etuk et al., 2019). This lack of voice and agency can exacerbate women's marginalization and prevent them from advocating for their needs and interests. Most of the respondents said that women do not have the opportunity to participate in decision-making either at the family or community level. Even the male key informants agreed that the culture and traditions of the people in the study area do not allow women to make decisions when the husband is still alive. Some respondents also attest to the fact that things have changed in recent times. Women now give advice where necessary as explained by the key informant as stated below:

“Decisions about expenditure and investment are mostly taken by men in this society even if the money to be spent or invested is coming from the women who labor tirelessly on people's farms to earn or help in raising the livestock (goats, pigs, and chicken). If you see any woman investing or part of decision making in a household is because her husband gives her the opportunity and the privilege to do that”.....**KII(Male), Poshiya Community, Billiri LGA Community, Gombe State**

“Some women are not allowed to participate in any social-cultural activities in the community and also non-inclusion of women in some decision making”. **Female FGD, Tafawa Balewa**

“Most times, the women consult their spouses regarding investments or expenditures in the household. The men have the final say regarding those topics. **Male FGD, Purmai Kaltungo,**

Gender Division of Labour: Women and girls bear the brunt of domestic chores with little to no assistance from men, reinforcing the notion that domestic work is solely the responsibility of females. Most men in the study area barely assisted their wives with household chores because it is generally believed that house chores are the responsibility of women and girls. This is pointed to in the excerpt below.

*“Women and girls overloaded with domestic work without any support from the men reason those domestics is mainly for women”.***Tafawa Balewa Female FGD**

These findings align with previous studies, such as those by Abbass (2012) and Etuk et al. (2019), which highlight the educational disparities and the impact of cultural norms on gender roles within pastoral communities

Objective 2: Examine Economic Barriers Restricting Women's Participation in Pastoralism

Economic barriers significantly restrict women's participation in pastoralism, impacting their ability to contribute to and benefit from this sector. Kabeer (2005) discusses the economic implications of gender inequality, emphasizing

how limited access to resources hampers women's contributions to pastoral activities. Findings from Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews are presented below:

Limited Economic Opportunities: Women have restricted control over livestock assets and income, with men predominantly making decisions regarding the sale and use of animals. This financial dependence limits women's autonomy and economic empowerment. Lack of access to credit facilities and capital to start or sustain businesses was a recurring theme, highlighting the financial barriers that prevent women from engaging in lucrative economic activities. These are indicated in the following excerpts:

"The household head does not permit the women to pick up available jobs so that community members will not think less of the household head"Mixed FGD, Dass

"Spouses(Men) tend to hijack the process of Business with the belief that men have power over women and their property". Female FGD, Tafawa Balewa

"Women are not allowed to go to farm themselves rather they pay for labor while they go and supervise how effective the farm is and to know when to apply farm input such as fertilizer. - women are not allowed to engage in marketing, i.e they can't move from one place to another to engage in buying and selling activities. They are only allowed to engage in indoor businesses while the customer can come in and buy". FGD Akko

"Women are not allowed to go to farm themselves rather they pay for labor while they go and supervise how effective the farm is and to know when to apply farm input such as fertilizer. women are not allowed to engage in marketing i.e they can't move from one place to another to engage in buying and selling activities. They are only allowed to engage in indoor businesses while the customer can come in and buy".Male FGD, Bununu

Lack of Autonomy on Products: Some women in the study area do not have a say on when products or the right to sell farm or livestock products especially when they cultivate it jointly with their husbands because it will be regarded as disrespectful to the husband who is the head of the family. Over 80 percent of those interviewed in Bauchi state target communities, the majority of whom were women, said that women in the study area have the right to the animals they own. According to the respondents, once a woman or man buys an animal and rears it, it automatically belongs to the person. Whether man or woman, he/she has the full right to sell or use it for other purposes. The situation is somewhat different from the responses in Gombe state as the culture and traditions of the people specified that all livestock belong to the man who is the head of the household. As far as the woman remains under the same roof as the man, she reports to her husband and takes permission from him before selling the animals even if she owns them. For example, these divergent views are presented in the key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussion excerpts below:

"Most women don't have ownership of their product or farm produce. They don't have the right to sell it, but the men can sell it at will. For example, a neighbor has a similar case in that they only have one bag of maize and the husband asked that the maize be sold. When the woman gets to know about that, she becomes angry, lies about the bag, and says the husband must carry her and the bag of maize together to the market and sell, which results in big trouble. Women mostly do that to get food at home, but the men continue to sell and use the money for their gain".....KII (Female), Poshiya Community, Gombe State

"Most of the women who are working usually work for the men i.e. the men collect their stipends from them" KII(Female),Dass.

"Men in this community have the right and ownership to everything from our cultural background. Unlike women, unless they are given by their husbands or male counterparts. As a married woman, even if those livestock belong to the woman she still needs to wait for directives and seek permission from her husband before selling it or using it. So, women don't have the right and ownership to livestock and produce from the farm"KII(Male), Gombe State.

"In the context of this community Women have no right to ownership of animals and their products in the family".Female FGD, Tafawa Balewa

"Men and Women can own animals separately, but Men always have the right to those animals and produce unlike the women they do not have the right over such possession of theirs, they have to seek their husband's consent before selling any of this". Male FGD, Bununu Community, Tafawa Balewa LGA.

Economic Marginalization: Women's economic activities are often limited to tasks such as milking, processing dairy products, and collecting firewood and water, which provide minimal income. This marginalization heightens their vulnerability and restricts their economic advancement. These economic barriers echo findings by Okello et al. (2014), who noted the restricted economic opportunities for women in pastoral communities and their implications for sustainable development. These are shown in the excerpts from Key Informant Interviews below:

"Lack of access to good lucrative business opportunities because of lack of skills acquisition Programs and lack of support. Pregnant women don't get enough care and the hospital staff is not sufficient for taking care of the women, and migration of men also affects the housewives as the men usually leave the women with little or no foodstuff when they migrate".KII(Female), Wushi Community, Akko LGA, Gombe State.

"Here we normally don't allow our girls to go out and look for work, we want them to stay close to us so that we can monitor them, some of them do go and engage in things that are not pleasant all in the name of livelihood, even the boys now we prefer they school first before they can even travel out".....KII(Male), Bare Community, Gombe State

Access to Productive Resources such as Land, Capital, Credit and Savings Investments:

"Men in this community have the right and ownership to everything from our cultural background. Unlike women, unless they are given by their husbands or male counterparts. As a married woman, even if those livestock belong to the woman she still needs to wait for directives and seek permission from her husband before selling it or using it. So, women don't have the right and ownership to livestock and produce from the farm"KII (Male), Gombe State.

"The gap is much as to how male and female access capital. Men are mostly given special attention. They also have access to information unlike the women even if they have access to information, they cannot proceed with that information to do anything unless the men permit them. Mostly women /girls have no or limited access to loans and savings. What they do is that they secretly make contributions within themselves and loan them out to each other and the purpose of this is to send their children to school. In most families here in this community if the men know that their wives have money or were given loans, they will collect it and spend it without leaving them with a dime"KII(Female), Kirfi LGA, Bauchi State.

*"Women and girls do not inherit farmlands from their husbands or fathers. However, men do. Women and girls mostly farm on their spouses or sons' farmlands, rent farmland, or work on another farm for pay. They can sell their farm produce when they consult their spouses or parents. The women obtain loans from their groups".***Male FGD Kaltungo,**

Objective 3: Explore Institutional Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality

Institutional factors play a crucial role in perpetuating gender inequality in pastoral communities. Jackson (1996) provides insights into how patriarchal structures and institutional biases contribute to systemic gender disparities. Findings from Focus Group Discussions are presented below:

Institutional Biases and Patriarchal Structures: The exclusion of women from key decision-making processes at the community and household levels is a significant institutional barrier. This exclusion is often reinforced by patriarchal norms and institutional biases that prioritize male leadership and decision-making authority

Limited access to education for girls due to institutionalized cultural and religious beliefs further exacerbates gender inequality, as educational attainment is a critical factor in empowering women and promoting gender equality

Policy Gaps and Lack of Supportive Interventions: The absence of targeted policy interventions and support systems that address the unique needs of women in pastoral communities contributes to the persistence of gender inequalities. There is a need for policies that promote women's access to resources, education, and economic opportunities. These institutional factors are consistent with findings by Nussbaum (2000), who emphasizes the importance of considering cultural and institutional dimensions in evaluating women's agency and capabilities

4.2. Discussion of Findings

The focus group discussions provided in-depth insights into the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that women and girls face in pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region. These findings are analyzed in line with the study's objectives and linked to previous research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics at play.

Objective 1: Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Gender Roles and Inequalities

The socio-cultural factors influencing gender roles and inequalities in pastoral communities are deeply rooted in traditional norms and practices. These factors significantly shape the lives of women and girls, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating gender disparities. This is further supported by Onyima (2019), who highlights the significant contributions of women in pastoral communities, despite the socio-cultural constraints they face.

The focus group discussions highlighted the pervasive influence of traditional norms that dictate gender roles. Women are primarily seen as caregivers and homemakers, which restricts their participation in pastoral and economic activities. This finding aligns with Moser (2005), who emphasized that traditional norms in rural contexts often limit women's roles to the domestic sphere. Early marriage emerged as a significant barrier to education for girls. Cultural beliefs that prioritize male education and view women's roles as primarily domestic lead to lower educational attainment for girls. This is consistent with findings by Onyima (2019), who noted the significant contributions of women despite the socio-cultural constraints they face.

The gender division of labor in pastoral communities was evident, with women and girls bearing the brunt of domestic chores. This reinforces the perception that domestic work is the sole responsibility of females. Previous studies, such as those by Abbass (2012) and Etuk et al. (2019), have also highlighted the educational disparities and the impact of cultural norms on gender roles within pastoral communities. Recent studies, such as those by Abdu and Hassan (2020), highlight how traditional norms in rural contexts limit women's roles in the domestic sphere, significantly

restricting their ability to participate in economic activities. In pastoral communities, these norms are deeply entrenched, and women are often excluded from decision-making processes both at home and in the community. This exclusion not only undermines women's autonomy but also limits their ability to contribute to and benefit from pastoral activities.

Objective 2: Economic Barriers Restricting Women's Participation in Pastoralism

Economic barriers significantly restrict women's participation in pastoralism, impacting their ability to contribute to and benefit from this sector. Women face restricted control over livestock assets and income, with men predominantly making decisions regarding the sale and use of animals. This financial dependence limits women's autonomy and economic empowerment. Kabeer (2005) discusses how limited access to resources hampers women's contributions to pastoral activities

The focus group discussions revealed that women lack access to credit facilities and capital to start or sustain businesses. This financial barrier prevents women from engaging in lucrative economic activities, echoing findings by Okello et al. (2017) on the restricted economic opportunities for women in pastoral communities.

Women in Nigerian pastoral communities often have limited economic opportunities and autonomy. They typically have restricted control over livestock assets and income, with men retaining primary decision-making power over the sale and use of animals (Okello et al., 2014). Women's economic activities are often confined to tasks such as milking, processing dairy products, and collecting firewood and water, which provide little direct income. This financial dependence on men can heighten women's vulnerability and constrain their ability to make decisions that affect their well-being. Thus, this economic marginalization heightens their vulnerability and restricts their economic advancement. These barriers align with the observations made by Kristjanson et al. (2010) regarding women's limited access to economic opportunities in pastoral communities.

Objective 3: Institutional Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality

Institutional factors, including legal frameworks, governance structures, and service provision, play a crucial role in perpetuating gender inequality in pastoral communities. In many pastoral communities, legal and policy frameworks do not adequately address the specific needs and rights of women. For example, customary laws often prevail over statutory laws, limiting women's property rights and access to justice (Cultural Survival, 2005). Strengthening legal protections and ensuring their enforcement can help address gender disparities.

Institutional factors play a crucial role in perpetuating gender inequality in pastoral communities. The exclusion of women from decision-making processes at the community and household levels emerged as a significant institutional barrier. This exclusion is often reinforced by patriarchal norms and institutional biases that prioritize male leadership and decision-making authority. Jackson (1996) provides insights into how patriarchal structures contribute to systemic gender disparities

Cultural and religious beliefs that institutionalize limited access to education for girls exacerbate gender inequality. Educational attainment is a critical factor in empowering women and promoting gender equality, as highlighted by Nussbaum (2000). The focus group discussions underscored the absence of targeted policy interventions and support systems that address the unique needs of women in pastoral communities. This contributes to the persistence of gender inequalities. Policy gaps and the lack of targeted interventions further contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities. The absence of policies that promote women's access to resources, education, and economic opportunities means that these communities lack the support needed to address gender disparities. There is a need for policies that promote women's access to resources, education, and economic opportunities. These findings are consistent with those of Flintan (2011), who emphasized the importance of inclusive policies for promoting gender equality in pastoral communities.

The findings from the focus group discussions provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that women and girls face in pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region. The common challenges and barriers that women and girls face in communities of the study population as reported by most key informants were attributed to religion and traditional norms of the Communities such as "the girl child not allowed to go to school (lack of education), early marriage, women exclusion from social cultural activities, deprivation of women from engaging in out-door businesses and women not being allowed to have full right over personal property. Other challenges include an increase in prices of goods, insecurity, lack of capital to start up a business, lack of access to credit facilities and capital to start a business, and inadequate knowledge on how to keep their small businesses moving for a long time. Some key informants also reported that lack of water is a major challenge for women in the communities as they must trek long distances to streams to be able to fetch water. Addressing the gender challenges faced by women in pastoral communities requires a multifaceted approach that addresses structural inequalities, challenges harmful cultural practices, promotes women's empowerment, and facilitates their meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Abdullahi, 2020). By promoting gender equality and empowering women, it is possible to foster more inclusive and sustainable development in these communities.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors contributing to gender inequalities in pastoral communities in Nigeria's Sahel Region, focusing on Bauchi and Gombe States. The findings from focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, reveal significant barriers that women and girls face in these communities. Women and girls in pastoral communities in Bauchi and Gombe States face significant gender barriers that hinder their overall development and well-being.

Socio-cultural factors, deeply rooted in traditional norms and beliefs, dictate gender roles that limit women's participation in pastoral and economic activities. Economic barriers, such as limited access to resources and financial opportunities, further marginalize women, restricting their ability to contribute to and benefit from pastoralism. Institutional factors, including patriarchal structures and policy gaps, perpetuate gender inequalities, excluding women from decision-making processes and educational opportunities.

Understanding these socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that contribute to gender inequalities in pastoral communities is essential for developing effective interventions. By identifying these barriers women and girls face, policymakers and practitioners can design targeted programs that promote gender equality and empower women. Thus, addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes policy intervention, community engagement, and the provision of essential services.

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

1. **Promote Gender-Sensitive Education Programs:** Implement educational programs that encourage the enrollment and retention of girls in schools. Scholarships and financial incentives can be provided to families to support girls' education. Incorporate gender-sensitive curricula that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality from an early age.
2. **Enhance Women's Economic Opportunities:** Facilitate women's access to credit and financial services to enable them to start and sustain businesses. Establish women's cooperatives to enhance their bargaining power and economic resilience. Provide training and capacity-building programs that equip women with skills in livestock management, entrepreneurship, and alternative livelihoods.
3. **Strengthen Policy and Institutional Support:** Develop and implement policies that promote gender equality and protect women's rights in pastoral communities. Ensure that these policies are inclusive and address the specific needs of women and girls. Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programs.
4. **Foster Community Engagement and Awareness:** Conduct community awareness campaigns to challenge and change harmful traditional norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities. Engage community

leaders and influential figures in promoting gender equality. Create platforms for dialogue where community members can discuss gender issues and develop collective solutions.

5. **Increase Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** Ensure women's representation in local governance structures and decision-making bodies. Provide leadership training and mentorship programs to empower women to take on leadership roles. Promote inclusive decision-making processes at the household and community levels, encouraging men to support women's involvement in decision-making.
6. **Support Health and Social Services for Women:** Improve access to healthcare services, particularly reproductive and maternal health services, to enhance women's overall well-being. Provide mobile health clinics and community health workers to reach remote pastoral communities. Address social issues such as early marriage and gender-based violence through comprehensive support services, including legal aid, counseling, and safe shelters.
7. **Strengthen Legal Protections:** Implement and enforce laws that protect women's rights to property, education, and healthcare. Ensure that customary laws are harmonized with statutory laws to provide comprehensive protection for women.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards reducing gender inequalities in pastoral communities, empowering women, and fostering sustainable development in Nigeria's Sahel Region.

Acknowledgement: This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), awarded in partnership with the Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crisis (SPARC) Programme, which is funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Opinions stated are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or opinions of IDRC, FCDO, or partners.

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