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Significance of markets in the pastoral communities in West Africa

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Abstract

Pastoral communities are among people of West Africa who according to major sources originated from somewhere around Senegambia region. They are popularly known as cattle herders and their major occupation and economic dependent is raising and rearing of cattle; that is why they value their cattle more than anything. They could do anything to protect and enhance their survival. They imbibe the habit of roaming about and transhuman movement that could take them to very far area not because of anything but to get available water and feeds for their animals. Pastoralists (*Fulani*) attend markets occasionally, they took market as an important avenue where they meet with each other, friends and colleagues, exchange greetings, share information on various issues with regard to the development of their herds. They also used it to disseminate information and distribute kola nuts with regard to solemnizing of some people's

marriage; passing information of demise of somebody, etc. Thus, they consider patronising of markets very important and reached to the extent that none of them want to be absent. But recently things have changed where they found themselves in danger and threat especially with the surge of cattle rustling and armed-banditry in many parts of West Africa which led to the killing of many pastoralists and their cattle, and rustling large number of them. This resulted for them in reducing going to markets due to fear of attack and this also affected raising of cattle to the extent that many lost their cattle or sold them lavishly so as to escape from being attack or rustling their animals. The paper intends to study and highlight the significance of market to pastoral communities in West Africa, impact of the market to their lives, economic value of cattle to them and the challenges they face and their cattle in many parts of West Africa.

Keywords: Pastoralist, Fulani, Market, Cattle, Milk

Introduction

The word market is, of course, referring to many things and ideas. However, is an institutionalised activity occurring at a definite place and involving the meeting of people at a particular time and place ^[1]. A market in the sense has been defined as an authorised public concourse of buyers and sellers of commodities meeting at a place more or less strictly limited or defined, at an appointed time. This includes those innumerable small places of ad-hoc trading involving a handful of men and women meeting at street corners, in front of compounds or on building sites. Also, market instance could be the whole of any region or place in which buyers and sellers are in such free inter-course with one another and obtain goods and services ^[2]. Pastoralism is an agricultural practice circulated by an extensive livestock breeding including systems where animals and human movement is significant like nomadism, transhumant and semi- transhumant ^[3]. Pastoralism inculcated the habit of transhumant movements. On the course of their journey, they sell their animals at the markets so as to buy food and other basic necessities. They therefore, developed the economies of the people they passed. Markets have been developed into cross-border communication areas ^[4]. Hill opined that the *Fulani* are the main pastoralists of West Africa, and are scattered over the vast area from Senegal and Mauritania in the west Cameroun and beyond in the east ^[5].

Pastoralists (*Fulani* or *Fulbe*) first appeared in the Sahara about 5000 B.C., and are known to have kept both long and short-horned cattle, as well as sheep and goats. Animal husbandry was not indigenous to west Africa, and was thought to have been introduced from Asia via Egypt, though many have been introduced from north Africa which was termed as centre of domestication ^[6]. Fulani myth or legend about their origins has different versions. One version described the Moslem Arab, who is usually identified as Ukubatu Bn Amir (a Companion of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)), he was married to a Sudanese woman called Bajjo Mangu. One day the mother went to the well to fetch water and left her younger child in the care of one of her brothers. On her return she overheard the brother comforting the child in a strange language. She told her husband who predicted that this sign was a sign that the child would be the founder of new people who would not speak Arabic but would nevertheless be the saviours of Islam ^[7].

There are about 120 million pastoralists worldwide, 50 million of these are in sub-Saharan Africa where they constitute 12% of the rural population^[8]. Fulani today could be found in all parts of the Sudan between the Atlantic and the Nile. By far the greatest concentration is in northern Nigeria, where over half of them are to be found. Other places where they are abounded are Senegambia and Futa Jallon, the Middle Niger, the Chad region, and the Cameroun uplands. A few of the more adventurous have even passed beyond Chad to Baghirmi, Wadai, and the Republic of the Sudan^[9]. This paper intends to discuss the significance of markets to the pastoral lives in west Africa so as to explore the dividends of markets attendance which pastoralists gain as well as to discuss the economic value of cattle to pastoralists and their contribution to economic growth of West African societies.

Market Significance

Market is a place where people meet to exchange ideas and observe economic and social transactions. Demand for pastoral dairy products has been identified as the limiting factor to market participation by their consumers due to lack of accessible means to the markets especially in rural areas like roads network. This further influenced different governments to intervene and came out with policies that will increase markets access to pastoralists like establishment of milk collection centres, immunisation and vaccination programmes and improved roads network^[10]. The various local markets of different sizes dotting the savanna land have over the years become an integral part of *Fulbe* pastoral economy and of the savanna economy and society in general^[11]. Pastoralists deemed it necessary or relevant to participate in markets operation as they obtain information on suitable markets where surplus milk could be disposed easily and also what kind of household needs were available as well as information on grazing condition and other relevant matters^[12]. Baba while discussing the importance of markets to pastoralists confirmed that, markets provide pastoralists with an avenue for the disposal of milk and milk products such as butter, ghee, etc. and in return they used the proceeds to purchase their household needs which are not produced by them^[13].

He also emphasised that markets provided them with an important source of information on grazing area and water availability, including knowledge on weather/climatic condition^[14]. According to him, on market days pastoralists do not engage in herding activities; they rather prefer to attend markets gatherings to avail themselves on the vast store of knowledge that is shared among them^[15]. Baba went ahead to explain the significance accorded to markets by pastoralists and stated that:

“Management of the family’s herd demands constant attendance at markets and other gathering places where information is obtained on such vital issues as pasture conditions, rainfall and incidence of diseases”^[16].

It was asserted that because of the importance of market attached to the pastoralists, they usually met with friends and relatives and discussed issues and held conversations particularly with regard to cattle, they discussed them directly or indirectly more than any other topic^[17]. It is in recognition of the importance of markets that *Fulbe* (pastoralists) regarded their attendance as more important. This justified this statement ‘*mi do yiddi yahugo luumo gam mi hebbai habaru duniyaru*’ (‘I like to go the market because I hear the world news’). This clearly indicates how attending markets

has become an important thing to them^[18]. Markets have been regarded by pastoralists as the house for a vast store of detailed information which was vital to them in their pastoral existence. So, markets may be visualised as the centre of series of overlapping circles through which information is circulated and which provide an amassing means of mass communication^[19]. The great attraction of markets to pastoral lives is seen in the fact it is exceptional to find adult men in a camp after his fellows have gone to markets, but this means that they were detained in some tasks and are likely to go later in a day^[20].

Pastoralists spend from three (3) to nine (9) hours in the markets, during which they engaged in long chats with their friends and kin who might have visited the market and camped elsewhere^[21]. They also take opportunity to overhear conversations from their relatives or fellow Hausa counterparts. As *Fulbe* generally have friends not only in their own camps so during the night after they came back to the camps; the type of information which finds its way back to the camps was very considerable^[22]. They obtained valuable information and knowledge on many issues such as the present quality of the pasture lands, the availability of water, whether the traditional routes remain open or whether they have been farmed over. Also, up to date information is also required on the presence or absence of endemic bovine diseases and the number of flies and mosquitoes. They also obtained data on the whereabouts of lions and hyenas^[23]. *Fulbe* living in dispersed homesteads throughout the countryside looked to the markets not only as means of trade but also as an important social centres^[24]. The significance of market to pastoralists reached to the extent that pastoralists deemed it necessary and one of the factors that induce their movement and settlement for searching of near markets so that they could find it easier in mobilising their herds to market for sale and also attending it for other purposes^[25]. Market participation in pastoralists’ lives has high and extreme priority. They took the patronisation of market as a common culture as they were/are many pastoralists that could abandon anything on market days, thereby mobilising everything possible to patronise it. In most rural/local markets one could get large number of pastoralists in the market where they have a designed and isolated space under trees and reside there for exchanging of greetings, hearing of news on many issues and holding of discussions with regard to *pulaaku* among other things. However, market value in pastoralists’ lives has reached to the extent of having a standard position in market operations where in many local markets there is leader of the market who titled as *Luumo* in *Fulfude* language who is saddled with the responsibility of leading and overseeing of market operations and business activities in a particular market^[26].

Pastoralists slept in their bush shelters near their cattle, adult men and women began to spend their days in markets. They could meet their friends and kin; the women would sell their milk and butter and men would gather information necessary for their seasonal pastoral movements. As a result of their patronise to markets they developed close-clan friendships among them and these followed by marriage^[27]. Pastoralists are extremely occupationally specialised group of people. They have a diary industry. Market is important to them because they rely on it to sell their milk to Hausa/other people so as to buy staple food which is mostly corn. They don’t frequently sale their cattle in order to buy food as they regarded such act as an irregular manner; this only happened

in an emergency situation. Even if they intend to sell their cattle, they selected old and diseased animals as well as non-serving bulls which they took to the markets and sold them so as to meet such emergency expense^[28]. *Fulbe* today visit markets and purchase their basic needs such as calabashes, mortar and pestle, water pots (and cooking), bottle gourds, spoons and ladles, sleeping mats, knives, hoes, ropes, axes, needles, turbans, fezzes and straw hats, head-cloths, sandals, spun cotton (for women), etc^[29]. Practically all items they consume and use are acquired through markets. Pastoralists prefer to visit large markets frequently, because they were the ones large number of people attended and were visited by different sorts of people^[30]. If possible, they could visit the market twice in a day and stayed there till night so as to make special purchases (or for other reasons). Women also prefer the larger markets because milk and butter are a sort of luxury and those who can afford them are likely to be found in greater numbers at these markets. In addition, milk, being an energy restorative drink, is sold in considerable quantity to weary travelers. Some may even be sold on the road to an important market and thus lighten a woman's burden^[31].

Almost all transactions are made in cash. This is an advantage to a woman because the values of milk and corn may vary from market to market. A wise woman may thus be able to sell milk at a comparatively low price elsewhere. A man could permit his wife to attend whichever market she chooses especially if they visit the same market on the same day^[32]. Men among pastoralists elsewhere visit the market which they felt they will meet many pastoralists. Women on their parts, patronise the market which they felt that they will strike the best bargain in trade^[33]. Because of the significance of markets to pastoralists encouraged them to establish their settlement/camp near to market places, this for easy moving down to market either to convey their herds for sell or to purchase household wares^[34]. Markets became a propaganda place to pastoralists as they were the places where they will disseminate information among them on several issues. They use markets to propagate new methods of breeding improvement, new ways of tackling diseases, propagating notice for the emergence of new disease. Thus, colonial officers used markets to propagate policies introduced on pastoralists and their animals like payment of taxes, conducting of immunisation to their cattle, etc^[35]. According to source, the importance of *Fulani* women to the pastoral lives cannot be over-emphasised. Men allowed their wives to go to market as I stated earlier. As soon as they sold their cattle they would hand the money to their women who (men) would share the decisions and nature of the family budget with their wives. The big issue in it was that, women have the say on how many cattle and on what prices they would be sold. So, by virtue of their marketing activities, women have complete control in day to day expenses^[36].

According to my informant, pastoralists certainly attended the markets that have a stake with livestock trade. Although they were group of people who might be assigned in a camp to be regularly going to markets weekly on behalf of the others either to convey their products or buy some commodities that were needed; while there were some who were in charge of rearing the animals, those who did not go to the markets except very rare^[37]. One correspondent also stated, actually pastoralists paid much emphasis in attending the markets. There were many *Fulani* who patronise the markets whether they have something to do or not. Some of them attended the market not because of anything but rather

to exchange greetings between their relatives and friends who they could not meet except at the markets. Their women also conveyed milk for sell as there was a designed section in most markets for women^[38]. Pastoralists participated in market activities periodically. They patronised the markets either to sell their stocks, milk, etc. or buy items produced/sold by Hausa people. There were some pastoralists who engaged in livestock trade and took it as their major occupation. There were some who engaged in brokerage activities, thereby selling people's livestock^[39]. Pastoralists took market as an important avenue and patronised it particularly if their camp (*Rugga*) was near the market, they would easily mobilise their people and their stocks down to the markets for sale. However, considering the large number of pastoralists attend the markets has indicated that it was very essential to them as they sometimes go with their children and their wives so that everyone of them will exchange and share ideas on items they brought for sale or on items intended to buy and will get an awareness on the way and manner market operation was conducted^[40].

The significance of market to *Fulani* can never be fully accounted, market played an important role whereby through their interactions with different people in the market *Fulani* began to civilise and know people and vice versa. With this development, pastoralists know and differentiate what sort of people they are supposed to relate with^[41]. Another informant also has confirmed the assertion of people saying that, 'a *Fulani* man prefers to die than misses attending the market on market days. He revealed that it was their meeting point where they related with each other and exchanged greeting. Because they could not mostly meet with each other easily as they were busy at all times taking care and rearing their animals. Similarly, market served as a point where they could share notice about the demise of somebody, condole with the bereaved family if they were at the market. They also, informed their people on the preparation of some people's marriage and they often distributed kola nuts among themselves of a particular marriage^[42]. Pastoralists patronised market and took it as part of their lives, this was because they met people and know the nature and conduct of the livestock trade. Market assist them in knowing themselves as they mostly lived in bushes and forest areas. Through their contact with various people they began to change and rid themselves of any perceived barbaric nature known to pastoralists, they acquired knowledge on the nature of the trade, prices of the livestock which were hitherto only known prior to their frequent visits to market^[43].

Economic Value of Cattle and their Contribution to Economic Growth

Pastoralists value cattle far beyond either their utilitarian or pecuniary worth: cattle ownership it is the issue which binds the pastoralists together as a group within the plural society and with a degree of solidarity which transcends both kinship and claniship^[44]. Cattle are the symbol of membership within a group, the cohesion of whose proud members is maintained by a common body of interests and values^[45]. The owning of cattle in a pastoral society is termed as the basic economic unit. Since owning of cattle normally passes in the male line women do not usually hold cattle as men do. The conviction is that 'men should own the cattle and women should own the milk' (*worbe jei na'i reube jei biraadam*). However successful a man may be as a husband, as he continues to increase his stock^[46]. Loss of cattle was disaster for the

herdsman, as loss of crops was for the farmer. This depicts how cattle become an integral part of pastoralists' life [47]. In Ghana, people owned and reared cattle for sacrificial purposes and for payment of bride dowry. But cattle were not sold, except in time of dire extremity, such as famine and drought [48]. The possession of cattle among the *Fulani* folk is very essential and termed as a prestigious culture as it is according to the nature of *pulaaku* which encourages every *Fulani* man to imbibe the habit of shyness, braveness and ownership of cattle [49].

The gaining of full membership in a society for man is to own cattle. The subsequent status and prestige man could gain in a society depending on the number of his cattle and other social structures of *Fulbe* society. Any man who owns few cattle he has little status in *Fulbe* society, it is also clearly known that man with no cattle at all is rejected by his society and will be deprived from having privileged status in pastoral society [50]. Informant confirmed the significance of cattle ownership to pastoralists emphasising that, cattle were their wealth which they solely relied on them in catering their needs [51]. Cattle to pastoralists are their lives, they fed themselves and shoulder their needs with the proceeds of selling them or other items [52]. Livestock farming and trade strongly contributes to the regional states' GDP in particular in Sahelian countries. It was also one of the main activities that generates revenues in these countries. Livestock were the most traded products that provide job opportunities to teeming population between west African countries. Cattle farming and their trade was a driving force behind regional economic integration. For instance, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, pastoralism contributes up to 15% of the GDP. Products originates from pastoral farming represent the 3rd largest export product [53]. While in Mauritania, cattle and other livestock farming contributes 70% of total agricultural export. In Mali, cattle trade amounted to 44.6 million US dollars in 2006. In Chad, cattle belong to pastoralists makes up one-third of the country's GDP [54].

Pastoralists valued their cattle more than anything, they regarded the cattle as a visible sign of wealth, they refused to sell them except for serious reason and even if they intend to sell they selected the old, lean and sick ones. Because of their nature of loving their cattle and their interest in increasing their number they developed the habit of not settling in one place i.e. they engaged in transhumant movements from one region to another for searching for favourable environment that contains available water and pastures [55].

Problems and Challenges of Pastoralists and their Cattle Due to Insecurity in Some Parts of West Africa

In this section problems and challenges militating against pastoralists and their cattle will be briefly discussed so as not to go out from the scope of this paper.

According to pastoralists and cattle raising people among the challenges they faced was the issue of disease infection to their animals as may people have complained that they don't have any cow as their fathers had lost all their cattle due to outbreak of disease sometimes [56]. Trading activities and functionality of markets across different areas in Sahelian region have reduced to 50% or more than that depending on the magnitude of activities of bandits, rustlers and Boko Haram or ISWAF (Islamic State in West African Frontiers) insurgencies. *Fulani* people could no longer attend the markets which they valued much as many markets were shut down. Therefore, their social and trade transactions have

been cut up. They were not ready to go to the markets as bandits and other insurgents were targeting them at the markets either to kill or kidnap them or both [57]. Cattle rustling and insurgencies had succeeded in disrupting the economic activities and resulted in the fall of business and other trading activities due to fear of indiscriminate attacks while transit to and from markets especially weekly rural markets. People could not attend the markets to patronise them let alone meet one another [58].

The current insecurity has engendered pastoralists and their animals into difficult situation. Pastoralists have reduced patronising the markets as well as the animals that they used to bring were scarce and their price has hiked [59]. Another informant stressed that cattle and pastoralists have recorded setback because of insecurity. They were attacked and killed. Cattle have become a problem to pastoralists; they were the ones that resulted to them into unwarranted situation. Many people among them lost their lives, many have fled from their homes and settled in an unknown place. For instance, a person that had 100 cows might have only 10 now, one that had 50 or more may end up with nothing [60]. With the current situation no group of persons in Nigeria and indeed entire West Africa sub-region that are in danger or being threatening by insurgent like pastoralists. They leave now a days in fear and molestation. There were many places where *Fulani* could not go rather that to take their animals for grazing or patronise markets. This led them to continue going backward losing their stock their kinsmen and relatives [61].

Conclusion

Pastoralists are among the people of west African region. They originated from Senegambia region and could be found in many areas of west Africa. Their main feature was cattle raising which served as their major economic back bone for their survival. They mostly settled in bushes and forest areas. They have the habit of moving from one region and another searching for pasture and water to keep their animals alive and develop faster. Although, the recent insecurity in most parts of west Africa has led the reduction of their transhumant movements.

Market became an avenue where different peoples met to obtain goods and services. Pastoralists viewed the market as an important place where they sell their commodities and purchase some products that were available in the market so as to meet their demands. *Fulani* viewed market as an essential meeting point with their colleagues, exchange greetings, disseminating and obtaining relevant information to the extent that a *Fulani* man might never want to lose attending market.

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