

Blog: How economic empowerment can transform the lives of pastoralists

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Pastoralist women in Nigeria have not been included in the National Women's Economic Empowerment Programme since its inception. Neither are they considered in empowerment programmes that are implemented by local government authorities designed to alleviate the sufferings of rural women. Through engaging with pastoral women, the [Fulbe Development and Cultural Organization](#) (FUDECO) identified that many lacked the income-generating skills which is a key element of achieving gender equality.

In 2021, FUDECO trained 250 women, across Nasarawa state, on income generation skills as part of a project funded by the AYNi grant of the International Indigenous Women Forum. The training covered a wide range of skills such as hair and beauty, Henna makeup (a reddish-brown dye used mainly for skin and hair makeup), and making a range of products including yogurt, doughnuts, palm oil, shoes and bags, room fresheners, perfumes, and detergents, such as liquid soap, bath soap, laundry power and bleach.



FUDECO women award ceremony at Keffi State University. Photo by Umar Abubakar

In this blog, FUDECO shares key insights that we gained from our research evaluating some of the economic empowerment initiatives provided for women pastoralists and how to ensure their sustainability. We also highlight some of the challenges women pastoralists faced before

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becoming financially independent, and what practitioners need to know when designing economic empowerment interventions to support gender equality.

FUDECO used Participatory Action Research (PAR) method/approach to evaluate the impact of the programme as part of the [International Development Research Center \(IDRC\)](#) funded Gender Equality in the Sahel study in partnership with the [Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crisis \(SPARC\)](#)

The women we spoke to and what we learned

One year after the completion of the skills training programme, in 2022 and 2023 we interviewed 150 women of different ages across the research area. Of these, 67.3 percent were married, 24.7 percent were single, and 12.8 were widows. Almost 30 per cent were agro-pastoralists, 17.3 percent were housewives and 51.35 per cent said they earn money by producing and selling cooking oils, body lotions, poultry and offer services such as henna (a dye used to make patterns on hands and feet for beauty by women), making cakes, snacks and hair and beauty. Almost three quarters, 72.7 percent, said they had never been to school, only 5.3 per cent left at primary school and 22 per cent completed secondary school. Unsurprisingly, men that we spoke to in the same communities had a higher level of formal education which underscores inequalities in opportunities for education.



Hauwa Hussaini, a pastoralist woman launches her body lotion products after her training by FUDECO. Photo by FUDECO.

In terms of attitudes towards pastoralist women, only 5.3 percent of women we spoke to agreed that pastoralist women were valued and respected by their families and communities, while 94.7 percent disagreed. 90 % of the women we spoke to said that women can own livestock, but only 14.7% said they can own other properties such as land.

This points to high levels of discrimination and aligns with [other research](#). Only women were trained so we focused our evaluation on women.

Beyond the interviews and numbers, what more did we learn from some of the women?

Feeling valued



“My husband was killed by unidentified gunmen in 2021. I had no source of income but today as a beneficiary of the skills acquisition training in poultry farming (and receiving a certificate) organised by FUDECO in the Keffi Satet University has boosted my self-esteem. I never went to school. But I was part of those trained by FUDECO with a startup capital. I invested in poultry farming and today I have over 50 chickens in my possession. I earned between N50,000 to N100,000 at the end of every two to three months after selling the chickens. I use the money to support myself and my family. I now feel like a valuable member of society. I am deeply grateful to FUDECO, and AYNi Fund for supporting us to generate personal income and to IDRC, SPARC and their partners for enabling me to share my story.” (Rukkaiyatu Adamu, 41 years old, a widow with six children, from Kokona Local Government Area, (LGA))

Being able to pass on the gift

“As a beneficiary of FUDECO skills acquisition, I am also training women on palm oil and soap making. Today, I am a very important person in my family and community because I have a lot to offer.” (Aisha Salisu. 43 years old, divorced mother of five, from Wamba LGA).

Financial independence

“FUDECO taught me how to make detergent, perfumes, liquid soap, room freshener, and rubbing oil. I am proud to tell you that I made N150,000 profit from selling these products in a short period. I invested the profit to diversify into farming and today the business has grown to making a daily profit of an average of N10,000 on a weekly basis. I trained other women on this type of business, and I want to categorically tell you that I have financial independence since my children and other persons close to me are benefitting from the skills, I learned through FUDECO. May almighty Allah continue to support FUDECO and its officials in rendering services to humanity.” (Hauwa Hussein Talatu, from Wamba, married with three children, divorced, with children)



Zubaida Isa a 24-year-old beneficiary of the skills acquisition training said “I produce palm oil from the raw palm kernel nut which I buy a bunch at N10,000 to produce three gallons of oil and then sell each gallon at N6,000 or N7,000 depending on the market price and make a profit of at least N3000. I do these three to four times monthly and when you multiply N6,000 by three, that is N18,000 monthly. Thank you FUDECO, AYNi Fund, SPARC-IDRC and anyone who has effort in making this a reality to us (from Wamba LGA, married with 6 children).

Aisha Salisu & Zubaida Isa produce cooking palm oil: Photos by FUDECO

Supporting the family

“I thank FUDECO, AYNi Fund, and all other NGOs who supported us in one way or the other towards impacting positively on our lives. I can now support my husband with some money and pay my children's school fees as well as other domestic needs since my purchasing power has improved. I want to inform FUDECO that I purchased 5 chicks with the start-up fund and have over 30 chickens in my possession today. Thank you, thank you and thank you.” (Adama Halilu, 36 years old married with three children from Kokona LGA)

Power shifts beyond the family and community

Our research highlighted that the award ceremony, at which the women who took part in skills training were awarded certificates, was a major breakthrough for the women and pastoralists in Nasarawa State University was hosted by the Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor. Suleiman Bala Muhammed, and brought together 600 people, including the Senior Adviser to the President of Nigeria on Gender, the wife of the Governor of the State and the head of gender studies at Nasarawa State University, as well as other governmental, traditional and security leaders. This was a step that was more than symbolic.

In FUDECO, we deliberately decided to bring pastoralist women into such an environment often seen as out of bounds for people like them. By doing so, the women felt valued receiving their certificates and startup capital from the hands of the Senior Advisor to the President of Nigeria on Gender, and in the presence of other dignitaries.



The event highlighted gender equality and provided a different perspective of pastoralist women and pastoralism from what is often portrayed in the mainstream media – as people who are struggling to improve their wellbeing for the development of society. The event was covered

widely by the media including BBC Hausa Service and placed gender equality and the empowerment of pastoralist women on to the national agenda and in a positive light. The Vice Chancellor made the point to the media that “not all pastoralists are doing bad things.” As evidence, one of our trainees, Mrs. Hauwa_Hussaini, informed participants that she earns N5,000 weekly from the sale of her products. She invited local government authorities and community leaders to the launching ceremony of her products in their pastoral settlement known as “Ruga”. After the ceremony she received N200,000 donations to continue with her business.

A strong foundation to build on

Our research evaluated some of the economic empowerment initiatives provided for women pastoralists in Nigeria and we will be making some recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on ways to design and implement sustainable, gender-sensitive economic empowerment initiatives, will be published in 2025. We face several obstacles including difficulties getting to research locations, overcoming cultural barriers and security challenges. We will use the results to conduct advocacy activities with the governmental stakeholders. We will also develop policy briefs to target policy makers on the inclusion of pastoralists in their policy framework and programmes.

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Fulbe Development and Cultural Organisation (FUDECO)

FUDECO is grassroots, gender-responsive nonprofit organization committed to promoting inclusive development, civic participation, and social justice in marginalized and underserved communities in 13 states across Nigeria. FUDECO works closely with local populations especially pastoralist groups, women, and youth to amplify their voices, build agency, and improve access to essential services like healthcare, education, and civic rights.



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