

GENDER EQUALITY, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CITIZENSHIP OF PASTORALIST WOMEN IN BAUCHI STATE.

9 May 2025



FUDECO researchers interviewing women participants.

Photos by Aliyu Sambo & Fatima M. Jibo

“We give birth here. We raise cattle. We feed the homes. But still, the government doesn’t see us. Without ID [National Identity Number], we are nothing in their eyes.” Hadiza A, community member, Tashan Mustapha

Structure

This policy brief covers:

- The structural barriers facing pastoralist women, especially in relation to citizenship, healthcare, education, and political participation.
- The disconnect between government policies and the lived realities on ground.
- Tackling these issues is not only a question of social justice; it’s a matter of national stability, economic development and democratic inclusion.
- Provide actionable recommendations tailored to both state and non-state actors.

Key messages

1. Citizenship is the gateway to gender equality

Without national identity documents, pastoralist women are invisible to the state, excluded from voting, healthcare services, new communication technologies and economic opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pastoralist women in Bauchi State particularly in remote communities like Tashan Mustapha remain among the most excluded communities in Nigeria. They face multiple-layered marginalization: gender inequality, limited access to citizenship rights, deep-rooted social exclusion etc.

Despite their critical roles in managing family resources, ensuring food security, and sustaining peace within families and communities, the women are consistently left behind in decision-making, policymaking, service delivery and civic participation.

Our research revealed that over 70% of pastoralist women in Tashan Mustapha (Toro local government, Bauchi State, Nigeria) do not possess National Identity Numbers (NIN) effectively excluding them from health insurance, owning a mobile phone, banking, and voting rights. Their lived experiences and voices speak volumes.

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2. Social inclusion starts with access

Basic education and healthcare remain inaccessible to many pastoralist women due to location, language, lack of necessary documents and cultural norms.

3. Representation is power

Pastoralist women are absent from local governance and decision-making, yet they are essential to the wellbeing and functioning of families and communities. They are pillars of community resilience.

4. Policy must meet practice

Despite progressive frameworks, implementation gaps leave pastoralist women behind. A targeted, inclusive approach is urgent.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Nigeria's pastoralist communities are among the most mobile, resource-dependent, and culturally resilient populations in the country. Yet, in the shifting sands of policy design, state development programs, and national identity politics, they are often overlooked. In Bauchi State, where agriculture and livestock remain foundational to the local economy, pastoralist women carry a silent burden: doing the work but holding none of the power.

These women manage households, care for livestock, and serve as peacekeepers during resource-based tensions. But they do so without legal identity, without health coverage, and without formal education or representation. Their realities are shaped by a legacy of exclusion, patriarchal norms, and geographic marginalization.

National frameworks such as the National Gender Policy, National Livestock Transformation Plan, and the National Identity Management System (NIMS) hold promise on paper, but implementation rarely reaches the forest-edge settlements and nomadic corridors of Bauchi.

Pastoralist women are often unregistered citizens, living in zones with little to no state presence, and bearing the compounded risk of gender-based violence, child marriage, and economic disempowerment. Their voices are missing in the local councils, state development plans, and donor-funded programs aimed at "leaving no one behind."

This policy brief is aimed at policy makers and influencers in Bauchi State. It was developed through our field research, desk review, community engagement in Tashan Mustapha and surrounding communities in 2024. It seeks to highlight the lived experiences of pastoralist women and provide practical recommendations for inclusive citizenship, social protection, and gender-responsive governance.

Problem analysis/policy issues

While Nigeria has made commendable progress in advancing gender equality and social inclusion on paper, pastoralist women remain systemically excluded from the benefits of citizenship, public services, and representation. In Bauchi State, this exclusion takes multiple forms.

1. Invisibility as citizens

Despite being citizens by birth, many pastoralist women lack formal identification, including National Identity Numbers (NIN), voter cards, or birth certificates. This renders them invisible to the state, unable to access basic services, exercise civic rights, or even own SIM cards under current regulations.

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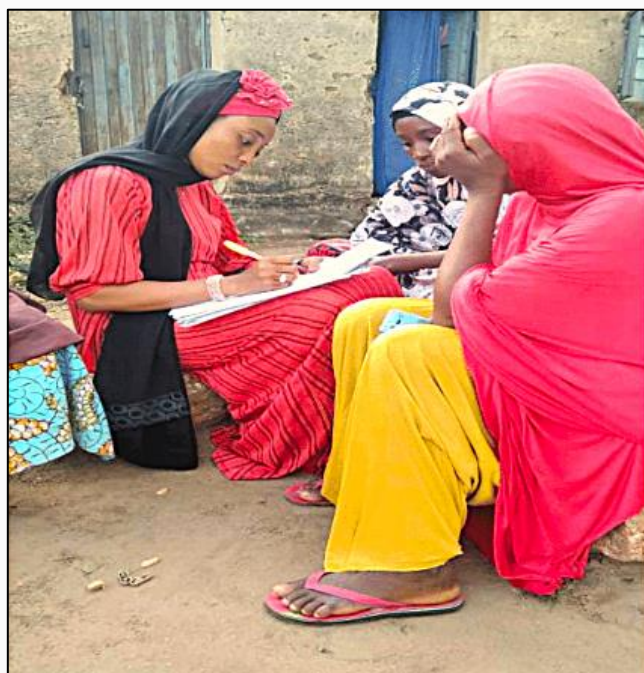
Why it matters: No National Identity Number (NIN) = No voice, no bank account, no SIM Card for a mobile phone, no vote, no benefits. It's a form of state-sanctioned invisibility.

2. Structural gender inequalities

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles limit pastoralist women's mobility, education, and decision-making power. Many are married off early, denied schooling, and excluded from leadership in both formal and informal settings.

Why it matters: Exclusion from education and governance traps women in cycles of dependency and silence.

3. Barriers to basic services



Pastoralist settlements are often in remote, underserved areas with limited infrastructure. This geographic isolation, compounded by language barriers and discrimination, makes it difficult for women to access healthcare, social protection schemes, and financial services.

Why it matters: Services aren't just far; they're culturally and structurally inaccessible.

4. Non inclusion of pastoralist women in policies and programming

Many government and NGO initiatives invoke "gender inclusion" without genuinely engaging pastoralist women in program design or decision-making. Participation is often symbolic, failing to reflect their realities or needs.

Why it matters: Inclusion without voice is performance not policy.

5. Lack of disaggregated data

There is limited data specific to pastoralist women in Bauchi, making it difficult for policymakers to design evidence-based interventions or track progress meaningfully.

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Why it matters: What isn't counted doesn't count.

Bottom line: The exclusion of pastoralist women is not just a gender issue; it's a governance failure. It reflects gaps in policy design, delivery, and accountability. Until these issues are addressed, national commitments to gender equality and inclusion will remain rhetorical.

CASE STUDY

"We are women, but not counted" - Voices from Tashan Mustapha

In early 2024, FUDECO conducted a series of focused group discussions in Tashan Mustapha, a predominantly pastoralist community in Bauchi State. The women in this community painted a strikingly consistent picture: they are Nigerian by birth, yet invisible to the state.

"I gave birth to all five of my children in this settlement. No one has birth certificates. I don't have a NIN. My husband says it's not important—but when my son was sick, the hospital turned us away." Amina, 37, a pastoralist mother of five.

We found in this community that:

- Only two out of 26 women had any form of Nationality Identity Number.
- None were enrolled in any formal health scheme.
- All reported that they had never voted in any local or national election.
- Many girls were married before the age of 15, with zero educational background.

Most women reported speaking only Fulfulde, with no literacy in Hausa or English. This is not due to a lack of agency but a lack of inclusion. The distance from government registration centers, the cost of transport, and language barriers all act as barriers. Even when national programs like NIN registration or voter awareness campaigns reach nearby towns, Tashan Mustapha and its women remain off the radar.

"We only hear about these things after they've passed. We don't have phones. Nobody comes here to us." Hadiza, 42, Fulani elder and traditional birth attendant.

FUDECO's research in this community revealed a demand for inclusion, not charity. The women expressed deep interest in acquiring identity cards, sending their daughters to school, and participating in local decision-making, if only they were given access and recognition.

Our research demonstrates that pastoralist women are not voiceless; they're simply unheard. Their exclusion is not rooted in tradition, but in systems that were never designed with them in mind.

ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

Government and NGO-led programs: A mixed bag

In recent years, several interventions have been designed to promote gender equality and social inclusion in Bauchi State. Some of these have touched on pastoralist communities, but very few have addressed the specific barriers faced by pastoralist women.

1. National Identity registration drives

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The National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) has extended identity registration to rural areas through mobile units. However, these units rarely reach pastoralist settlements, and when they do, the process is often not language-inclusive, culture-sensitive or gender-sensitive.

What is missing?

- Fulfulde-speaking personnel
- Female registrars for conservative communities
- Cultural orientation on the process if National Identity Number (NIN) registration

2. Basic healthcare provision fund (BHCPF)

The BHCPF is designed to provide free or subsidized maternal and child healthcare through primary health centers (PHCs). Some PHCs exist within walking distance of pastoralist settlements, but women face documentation requirements and language barriers that still block access.

What's missing?

- Waivers for undocumented women
- Mobile health teams that reach nomadic zones
- Community health workers from within pastoralist groups

3. Voter registration and civic education by INEC and CSOs

Various campaigns have been rolled out to boost voter turnout and civic participation. Yet, civic education rarely reaches nomadic or semi-nomadic women who are isolated by geography and language.

What's missing?

- Community-led voter education using oral/visual tools
- Engagement of religious and traditional leaders as civic ambassadors

4. Projects by FUDECO and partners

FUDECO researchers meet with Alh. Umar Adamu the District Head (Hakimi) of Toro. Photo by Fatima M. Jibo

FUDECO, in collaboration with local NGOs and women-led associations, has conducted advocacy sessions, mobile outreach visits, and dialogue forums in Bauchi State. These have helped surface local realities and built trust, but lack of funding and systemic support limits the scale and sustainability.

What's missing?

- Institutional buy-in from government
- Replication across LGAs
- Integration into state-level planning and budgeting



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What these efforts show.

The problem is not that nothing is being done. The problem is that what's being done is not tailored to the lived realities of pastoralist women. Most programs treat rural women as a monolith and fail to design with intersectionality in mind ignoring how gender, geography, ethnicity, and mobility compound exclusion

Policy options and recommendations

To close the exclusion gap for pastoralist women in Bauchi State, stakeholders including government, civil society, and development partners must act intentionally across five key policy fronts:

1. Access to identity and citizenship documents

- Deploy Mobile NIN (National identity Number) registration units to hard-to-reach pastoralist settlements using Fulfulde-speaking female personnel.
- Waive documentation pre-requisites (like utility bills or birth certificates) for nomadic populations during NIN registration drives.
- Bundle NIN registration with incentives, such as free health checkups or school materials to encourage uptake.

2. Health and social protection access

- Expand mobile Primary Health Centers with female staff and community health volunteers drawn from pastoralist settlements.
- Create exemptions in health insurance and maternal health schemes for undocumented but eligible women.
- Translate maternal health and vaccine awareness content into Fulfulde and disseminate via radio and market-day events.

3. Civic engagement and political inclusion

- Launch Fulfulde language civic education campaigns using oral storytelling, visual tools, and local radio dramas.
- Train and support pastoralist women as civic educators and registration champions within their own communities.
- Ensure polling units and registration centers are placed within trekking distance of pastoralist clusters.

4. Education and girl-child empowerment

- Promote mobile or tent-based schools for nomadic children with female pastoralist teachers.
- Integrate citizenship education into alternative learning centers in pastoral communities.
- Incentivize delayed marriage through scholarships and school feeding programs targeted at pastoralist girls.

5. Multi-stakeholder coordination

- Establish a Pastoralist Inclusion Desk within the Bauchi State Ministry of Women Affairs & Child Development.
- Integrate pastoralist women's voices into state planning, especially in sectors like health, education, and identity systems.
- Partner with traditional institutions to co-create solutions, not impose them.

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CALL TO ACTION

Without tailored, intersectional policy shifts, pastoralist women will remain unseen, uncounted, and unheard sidelined from the rights and resources they are due as Nigerian citizens. The time to act is now not in future white papers or pilot projects. These women are ready. The question is: are we?

- Government Ministries must institutionalize pastoralist-sensitive approaches across identity, health, and education.
- Donors and Development Partners must prioritize funding for scalable, culturally adapted solutions.
- Civil Society Organizations, especially women-led ones like FUDECO, must be empowered as frontline implementers.
- Community Leaders and Gatekeepers must be engaged as allies, not obstacles, in advancing women's rights.
- If we truly believe that no Nigerian should be left behind, then pastoralist women in Bauchi and across Nigeria must no longer be afterthoughts. Pastoralist women and communities must be counted, heard, and empowered not just as beneficiaries, but as full citizens of this nation.

Conclusion: way forward

Pastoralist women in Bauchi State are not passive victims of exclusion; they are resilient actors, navigating some of the toughest socio-political terrains in Nigeria with strength and dignity. Yet, they remain systematically left out of systems of identity, health, education, and civic participation. The way forward is not more generic rural programming. It is about designing with and for pastoralist women, building systems that speak their language (literally and culturally), that reach them where they are, and that recognize their unique mobility patterns, customs, and constraints. It's time to stop talking about inclusion in theory and start delivering it in practice.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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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This work was carried out by FUDECO 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). This material has been funded by the Canadian government and by UK aid from the UK government. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Canadian or UK governments

