

# KEBBI STATE: CULTURAL BRIEFING

DRAFT: CONFIDENTIAL

Prepared for Pierce Mill Media

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**04 November 2020**

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## ABSTRACT

The present document is a background cultural briefing on Kebbi State, Nigeria. It covers the realities of daily life, religion, the system of markets, food safety and the media landscape.

Keywords: Kebbi State; media; markets; social life; religion

## ACRONYMS

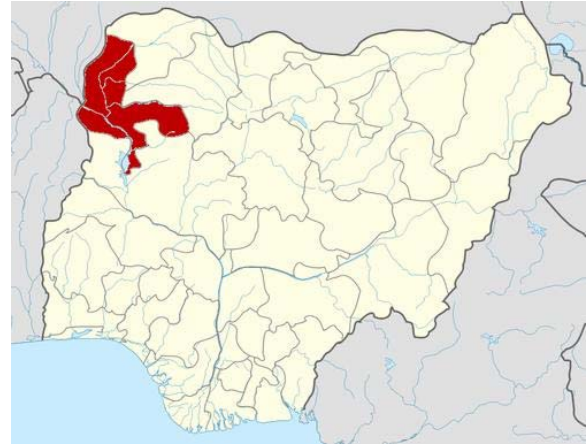
LGA Local Government area

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

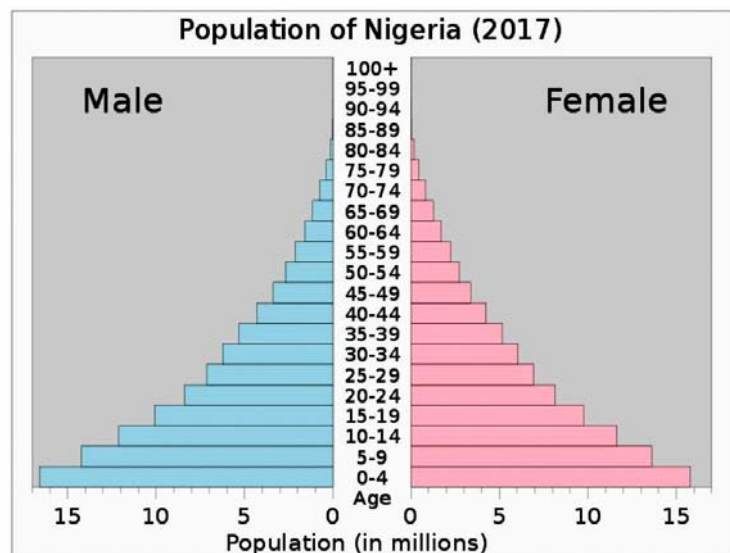
Kebbi State in north-western Nigeria (Map 1) was created out of a part of Sokoto State in 1991. The state has a total area of 36,800 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of 3,238,628 according to the 2006 census. Population growth in Nigeria is usually estimated around 2.6% per annum, in which case, Kebbi State would be approaching 3,400,000. Figure 1 shows the characteristic age/structure pyramid for Nigeria for 2017, showing that the male/female balance is within statistical limits of confidence and that the percentage of children is very high compared with the developed world. For comparison in the United States in 2019, the corresponding percentages in the 0-4 and 5-9 cohorts were around 3%.

Map 1. Kebbi State within Nigeria



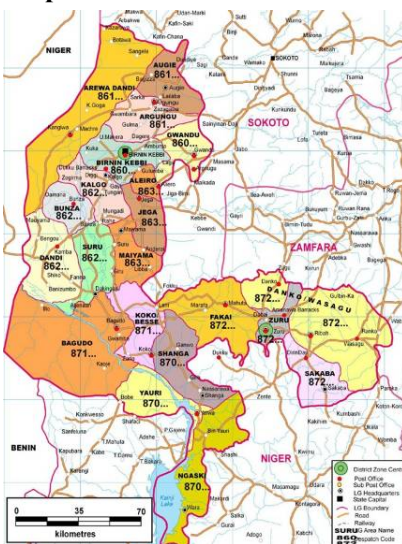
There are 21 Local Government areas (LGAs). The current Governor is Abubakar Atiku Bagudu (APC party). The capital of the State is Birnin Kebbi, which is also the headquarters of the Gwandu Emirate and which had an estimated population of 125,594 in 2007.

Figure 1. Age structure pyramid for Nigeria (2017)



Source: CC

Map 2. Kebbi State LGAs



### 1.2 Geography

The shape of Kebbi State is the result of past political compromises, which accounts for its unusual outline. The southern, subhumid region is generally rocky with the Niger River traversing the state from Benin Republic to Ngaski LGA. The semi-arid northern region is sandy, with the Rima River crossing from Argungu to Bagudo LGA where it joins the Niger. The vegetation is Sudanian in the north, with sparse trees and shrubs in a largely agricultural landscape.

Kebbi State, like all of Northern Nigeria, has a marked rainy season, with all the annual precipitation falling between April and September. This is the season for intensive work on the farm. Communications are very poor during this season, as most roads in Kebbi State are not sealed. The riverine and lakeshore areas have a higher rainfall (ca. 700 mm. annually) and depend largely on rainfed agriculture. The main crops are millet, sorghum,

## Kebbi State cultural background Roger Blench

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irrigated rice and maize. The rise of contra-season horticulture along the edges of rivers since the introduction of small petrol pumps in the 1980s has created a large market for vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, eggplants, potherbs and more recently carrots, cabbages and other irrigated crops. Fishing is a significant component of many livelihoods, although overfishing and the gradually reduced flow of the Niger due to climate change has reduced catches substantially in many communities.

Settled communities keep sheep, goats, donkeys and poultry, as well as cattle and camels for traction. However, the majority of livestock are kept by nomadic pastoralists, the Fulani or FulBe people, who migrate between the pastures further north and the rivers every dry season. The Fulani are the main producers of meat and dairy products reaching the markets. Relations between settled and pastoral communities have deteriorated markedly in recent years due to pressure on land and the cultivation of riverine areas in the dry season. These conflicts are occasionally extremely violent, despite the fact that both parties are Muslims. They are unconnected with broader security issues, such as jihadist raids from Niger Republic.

**Photo 1. Village scene, minority area, Kebbi State**



All communities fish on a small scale, but Kebbi State has several specialised fishing communities, notably the Reshe, Lopa and Laru peoples. These live on and around Lake Kainji<sup>1</sup>, which was formerly noted for its large catches. Overfishing has reduced these, but it remains a rich resource. Smaller fish are sold fresh by the roadside or smoked and taken to the main markets. However, there are specialised entrepreneurs from southern cities who smoke the fish on the shore of the Lake and ship it by truck to urban consumers.

**Photo 2. Kebbi State flooding. September 2020**



Due to extensive deforestation, these river basins are subject to constant damaging floods, the most recent of which was in September 2020 (Photo 2), leading to loss of life, crops and livestock. Food prices typically rise and roads and bridges are washed away. Food security is therefore a major issue in Kebbi State.

### 1.3 Peoples

The state is dominated by the Hausa people, who are Muslim and who constitute the majority of the population. Nonetheless, quite a number of minority languages are spoken, as shown in Table 1;

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<sup>1</sup> Lake Kainji is a relatively recent creation, dating from the construction of Kainji Dam in the 1970s.

**Table 1. Languages spoken in non-Hausa LGAs**

LGA	Languages
Argungu	Dendi; Zarma
Bagudo	Bisā; Boko; Dendi
Birnin Kebbi	Zarma
Bunza	Zarma
Donko-Wasagu	C'Lela
Dukku	us-Saare
Jega	Gibanawa
Ngaski	Lopa; Tsikimba; Tsishingini; Tsukuba; Tsuvadi
Sakaba	Cicipu; C'Lela; Damakawa (†); ut-Ma'in
Wasagu-Danko	us-Saare; Gwamhi-Wuri
Yauri	Reshe; us-Saare
Zuru	C'Lela; ut-Ma'in

Hausa remains the language of wider communication and most of the minorities listed above will speak functional market Hausa. English is spoken in the capital, Birnin Kebbi, and by most educated people, but is not common in villages. The Zuru Emirate in particular is dominated by the C'Lela people, who have their own well-developed language and culture.

#### 1.4 Economic change in Nigeria and the requirement for new surveys

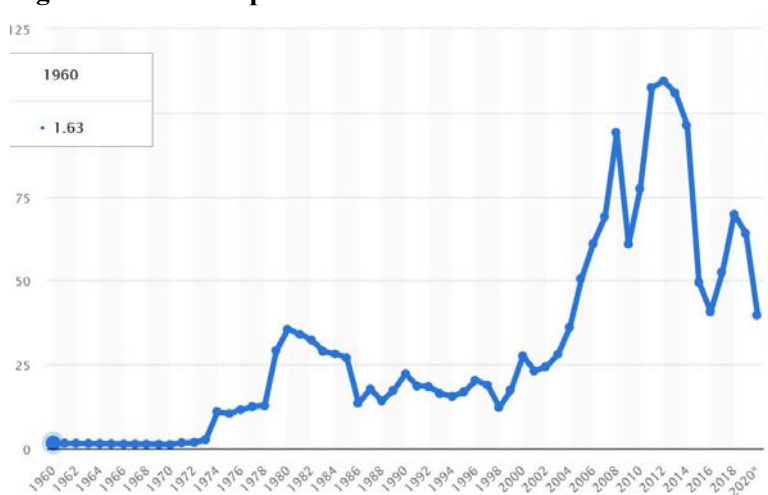
The Nigerian economy has been dependent on oil sales since the 1960s, with income from these constituting a large proportion of GDP. As a consequence, imports have made up a large proportion of deficits in the food supply. The rapid fall in oil prices since 2016 (Figure 2), has led to major declines in government budgets and thus shortfalls in both food and inputs such as fertiliser, as well as raising the cost of transport. The Naira has thus fallen in value, making all imported goods more expensive, which in turn has led to urban protests. The price of food grains is similarly rising in the semi-arid north<sup>2</sup>. In principle, this could benefit local farmers, if the market infrastructure and input supply were significantly upgraded, but sluggish agricultural policy in Nigeria makes this unlikely in the short term.

The significance of this for the project in planning is that almost all published economic information will be radically out of date. It is essential that producers, consumers and traders of all categories on the ground be resurveyed to assess the consequences of these rapid changes for their production and marketing systems.

#### 2. Social structure, power dynamics, major influences and influencers

Nigeria has a system of Federal Government not dissimilar to the United States. The top tier is the Federal Government, situated in Abuja, in the centre of the country. Nigeria is divided into thirty-six states and the Federal

**Figure 2. Crude oil prices 1960-2020**



<sup>2</sup> <http://saharareporters.com/2020/09/11/nigerians-groan-food-prices-rise>



Capital Territory, further sub-divided into 774 Local Government Areas. Unlike many federal systems, the other tiers of government have very little capacity to raise revenue, and thus depend heavily on budget allocations from central government.

Crosscutting the political hierarchy of the Nigerian nation state are the traditional Islamic Emirates. These grew up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup> as a consequence of a jihad which began in Sokoto in 1804. Similar emirates are distributed all across Northern Nigeria and four are located in Kebbi State (Table 2);

**Table 2. Kebbi State Emirates<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Emirate</b>	<b>Also</b>	<b>Main town</b>
Kebbi	Argungu	Argungu
Gwandu		Birnin Kebbi
Yauri		Yauri
Zuru		Zuru

Until the colonial era, following the conquest of Northern Nigeria by the British in 1900, these Emirates exercised military and political power in the region. They engaged in extensive raiding of the minority peoples further south and instituted Islamic systems of justice and civil authority. The British authorities made use of them within a system of indirect rule. It suited the post-Independence rulers of Nigeria to maintain this, and they continued to be paid subsidies. However, all their formal powers have gradually been reduced. Nonetheless, they maintain a considerable amount of goodwill within the local society and are generally consulted in major crises. It is not considered good practice to proceed with projects without first consulting the local Emir. The prestige of the Emirates explains why the Hausa control much of the legislature, as well as the commercial arteries.

However, for most households, immediate authority is represented by Local Government. The LGAs manage schools, minor roads and clinics and are funded directly by the Federal Government. LGA officials are elected every few years, at intervals determined by the State Government. The most recent local government elections in Kebbi State were in July 2017. Chairmen of the Local Governments are usually hand picked party loyalists who may not represent the community. Nonetheless, the LGA is where ordinary citizens can put pressure on authority, usually through personal contact with relatives, for example to maintain roads or repair wells.

Kebbi State is poorly supplied with tertiary institutions. Kebbi State University of Science and Technology (KSUSTA) is a state-owned university in Aliero established in 2006. KSUSTA offers programmes in agriculture and sciences. Many students from the state go elsewhere in Northern Nigeria to pursue their studies.

### **3. Daily reality**

Families typically live in extended patriarchal households, often consisting of large related kin groups in joined compounds, which in turn combine to form villages of 20-50 households. The head of such a patrikin group will usually be the oldest male, unless he is incapacitated. Among the Hausa and other Muslim groups, the men do all the agricultural work and women and children are confined to the village, except for civil festivities such as marriages. Somewhat different social structures can occur among the minorities with smaller households. See, for example, the tHun (Dukkawa)<sup>5</sup>. In some of these minorities women also work in the fields and may go to market. There is increasing pressure on such women to conform to Islamic dress codes. In the larger towns, such as Birnin Kebbi and Argungu, there will be modern housing areas, where civil servants and other wealthier

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<sup>3</sup> Although some claim venerable ancestry

<sup>4</sup> Further historical material on these Emirates can be found in Hogben & Kirk-Greene (1966), Augi & Lawal (1999) and CAPRO (1995)

<sup>5</sup> Described by Prazan (1977)

strata live. These households typically buy much of their food in urban markets rather than growing. Nonetheless, it should be emphasised these represent a very small proportion of the overall population.

Women's work consists above all in feeding the household, looking after children and livestock and processing agricultural produce, for example preparing rice for sale, smoking fish and shelling groundnuts. They often do this sitting together in informal groups. There was formerly a significant trade in handicrafts, pots, baskets etc. but this has reduced with the expansion of imported products such as enamel pots. Electricity in the remoter rural communities is still a rarity, and although grain is usually now ground in community mills, much else must still be done by hand.

Children are required to go to primary school by Nigerian law, but the reality is that many do not. Either the schools are no longer functioning, or teachers will not come to the area, due to poor pay and inaccessibility in the rainy season. In Muslim villages, the boys attend *madrassa* for several years, learning to recite Qu'ranic verses, but gaining little real education. In urban centres, there are more schools and greater incentive to attend. Female children are expected to help with household tasks from the age of five onwards and in particular to look after still younger children. Male children will go to the fields with their father, and if the household has livestock will be expected to guard these and take them for grazing.

**Photo 3. Rural children in Kebbi State**



Source: Author

Islam is long established among the Hausa but also other minorities such as the Dendi and Zarma. It is mainly significant for men, who attend mosque on Friday and who sometimes practise the five daily prayers. Adherence to Islam has important consequences for commerce, as most forms of credit and transaction are based on trust, which operates between Muslims. Financial transactions via smartphones are becoming more common in larger towns, but cash remains the core of the trading system. Larger villages have an established *mallam* (imam elsewhere in the Islamic world) or learned man, who also act as a *qadi*, i.e. a judge to arbitrate disputes. In the towns, the Shariya courts arbitrate civil disputes. In Northern Nigeria, the more exclusively Muslim States are increasingly trying to apply Shariya to criminal cases, which has led to disputes with the Federal Government.

Among the pastoral people, the FulBe, who supply the majority of meat and dairy products to the market, the daily rhythm is somewhat different. Few children go to school, and they are expected to assist in managing the herds from a young age. Historically, household income was based on the exchange of milk products for grain, but in recent years the demand for milk has fallen. This is the consequence of several developments; milk is no longer a prestigious gift to visitors -it has been replaced by soft drinks. At the same time, industrial dairy products, such as tinned and powered milk are freely available and can be stored. At the same time, milk yields have fallen due to poor pasture, and men have concluded it is better left for the calves, since the main source of cash is now the sale of young bulls. Boys are sent out during the day to look after the calves, sheep and goats, while women undertake milking, dairy product preparation and sales. Women used to sell milk independently, but as a more rigorous Islam has spread in this region, milk is often sold to buyers who come direct to settlements.

Apart from pastoral FulBe, there are also urban FulBe, who may not own cattle and who settle in towns and are often religious scholars and traders. Many of these have lost their language and now speak only Hausa. Nonetheless, they are proud of their ethnic identity, and hence the compound term Hausa-Fulani is often used to describe these communities.

Northern Nigeria was formerly fairly safe compared with the large urban centres in the South. However, in recent years, the security situation has changed radically. Fundamentalist Islamic insurgents, similar to those in the Northeast (Boko Haram etc.) are now active in northwest Nigeria, as in neighbouring Niger. Raids on villages, kidnapping for ransom and raids on cattle herds are now disturbingly common, and villages must take steps to protect themselves, often by setting up vigilante groups.

The police and the army are intended to be the main agents in providing security. However, these are Federal bodies and their representatives may have no connection with the local area, and even not speak Hausa. Moreover, as the recent anti-SARS (Special Anti Robbery Squad) protests show, these are not respected by local populations. Hence the rise of vigilante groups. However, the superior weaponry and resources of the insurgents inevitably means they can only respond in a limited way.

#### 4. Business and market culture in Kebbi State

##### 4.1 Trading

Kebbi State remains predominantly rural, with agriculture the main source of livelihood for most households. Rice is probably the main cash crop, reflecting the extensive riverine environments. Local rice is poorly processed compared with imported rice, due to lack of effective destoning and when imports were cheap, these were preferred. However, as prices have risen, local rice has become more attractive.

Especially in towns, markets are composed of a wide variety of different actors. These can be summarised as follows;

1. Professional traders originally from out of the area but who are now resident, for example selling clothes, electronics and other consumer goods
2. Local professional traders, selling bulk grains, spices and other agricultural goods as well as small manufactures. Butchers fall into this category
3. Petty traders selling small amounts of foodstuffs, particularly vegetables
4. Food sellers. Cooked food is often sold by women from out of state, for example Yoruba and Igbo<sup>6</sup>. Small snacks, such as beancakes, are sold by local traders
5. Dairy products, milk, yoghurt and butter, sold by Fulani

Markets typically begin as unregulated and new ones spring up where communities are enlarged. As the sales volume increases, the community appoints a Sarkin Kasuwa, a market leader, to look after the order of the market, settle disputes etc. Sometimes local councils purpose build markets, but often these are only partly in use, as they are wrongly located. Councils try to collect fees from traders, often a source of controversy, as almost no services are provided.

Urban markets are permanent, but still have 'market days' when the great bulk of trade is conducted. Incoming traders arrive from their villages in the morning on pickup trucks, leaving in the early evening. Wealthier traders have stands but many sellers just place their goods on a mat on the ground. On these days, the road is choked with trucks, both bringing market traders and buying staples in volume. Livestock is usually sold at a different location from produce, to avoid

**Photo 4. Handicrafts for sale in the market**



Source: Author

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<sup>6</sup> These ethnic groups are well-known for their established trading culture



problems created by animals escaping. Rural markets circulate, and professional traders follow these circuits, usually with small motorbikes.

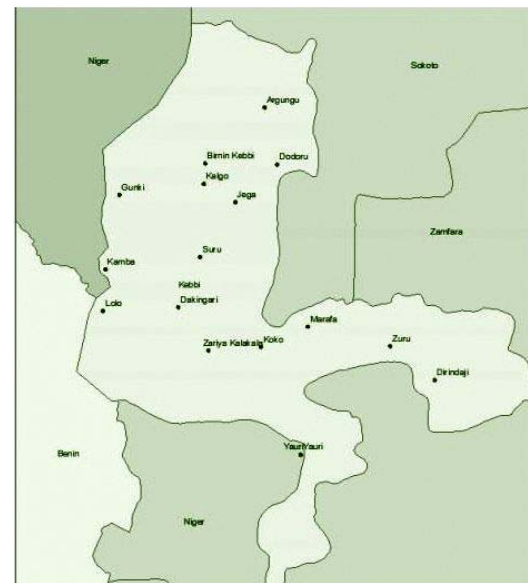
The sale of milk and dairy products by FulBe women is the subject of some controversy. Up to the 1980s, women went unaccompanied to markets to sell their produce. Increasingly rigorous Islam has led to many communities now objecting to this practice, and in many places the women sell to mobile dealers who come to the village. Nonetheless, in some areas, women, now fully covered in Islamic dress, either sell bottles of yoghurt by the roadside, or bring yoghurt and butter to the market. This is tolerated to a greater extent in the non-Muslim minority areas.

Households buy a greater proportion of their food in urban centres, where civil servants and business people live who have no time to tend their own farms. In rural areas, most households are self-sufficient in food and markets as mainly for clothes and small consumer items, such as torches. Even so, they will often get sacks of staples from the rural branch of their household.

The main geographical study of markets in Kebbi State has been conducted by Hatzenbuehler et al. (2018) to try and discover if grain storage and sales could be made more effective. Map 3 shows the markets in Kebbi State they surveyed. The study concluded that standards of storage remain very poor with considerable losses to rats and insects.

The meat trade in Nigeria is on a huge scale, given the population of southern cities and the difficulties of raising stock in ultra-high humidity environments. The nomadic pastoralists provide almost all the beef, but villagers also sell goats and sheep in livestock markets. The animals are typically brought to the market, where they are sold either for breeding or meat. The butchers, who are almost always Hausa, buy individual animals from the sellers, have them promptly slaughtered and then cut them up for sale. Although households may buy chunks of meat for meals, the great majority of the meat is sold as *suya*, a type of local kebab, which is a popular food in every market in the region.

Map 3. Kebbi State markets



Source: Hatzenbuehler et al. (2018)

Professional traders are usually quite high status and rich by local standards. Typically, households sell their harvest as soon as it is ready and prices are low, to the despair of NGO workers. Resentment over high grain prices at the end of the dry season is an annual ritual, but is inevitable. Government sometimes interferes in the operation of the grain market, for example buying up food stocks to underpin resilience in the recent coronavirus pandemic<sup>7</sup>. Traders from out of state are usually already capitalised when they set up operations, whereas local grain buyers are typically from richer families or have come by wealth in another sector.

#### 4.2 Health and safety in markets

Health and safety considerations are minimal in Nigerian markets. Open drains run everywhere and overflow regularly in the wet season. Animal faeces and blood from slaughtered animals is allowed to decompose. Insects are not prevented from landing on displayed food and dogs, cats and mice abound. No precautions are taken with handling meat and dairy products. What few studies have been undertaken on food safety in the region<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This does not always end well. In Jos at the end of October 2020, government food reserves were looted by hungry citizens

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Magaji et al. (2012), Kanya et al. (2015), Gwimi et al. (2015)

have found high levels of infection, such as campylobacter. Sachets of ‘pure water’ are commonly sold in markets, as if these were somehow safer than tap water, but studies have shown these contain high levels of contamination<sup>9</sup>. Boreholes in the state have high levels of heavy metals<sup>10</sup>.

Markets are not very safe places in other ways and market fires are common. The main market in Birnin Kebbi burnt down in 2016, with extensive loss of goods, though fortunately no lives were lost<sup>11</sup>. Robbers occasionally attack markets, targeting the richer traders, in the knowledge that the police will not intervene.

## 5. Media

Nigeria formerly had an extremely vibrant newspaper culture, and papers in both English and Hausa were widely bought and read. *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo*, a Hausa newspaper, was the most widely circulated in Northern Nigeria. However, as around the world, print newspapers are rapidly losing subscribers and few physical newspapers are now sold in Kebbi State. Most consumers can now be observed to read the news on their Smartphones. The most reliable newspapers covering the North of Nigeria are based in Abuja, such as *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times* and *The Punch*.

Radio in Kebbi State is confined to the State-owned Kebbi State Radio and Vision FM 92.9, a private station. Broadcasts are mixed, in both Hausa and English. Complaints on the internet confirm that coverage within the state is quite poor and many people cannot receive transmissions in remoter areas. The same is true of Kebbi State television, which is really only available in large urban centres. Official television and radio in Nigeria strongly reflects policy from the centre; the sort of more diverse media landscape typical of southern states is largely absent in the north. As consequence, state broadcasting is treated with appropriate scepticism. BBC Hausa, which addresses a wider regional audience, is generally trusted and is listened to on shortwave and internet radio.

Formal studies of the effectiveness of media in agricultural extension in Kebbi State are few and far between. Abubakar *et al.* (2009) studied the use of radio in 2008; tellingly, their data does not include the internet or Smartphones. But today, Nigerians are quite media-savvy, and the incidence of ownership of mobile phones is high. However, as maps of mobile phone coverage show<sup>12</sup> Kebbi State is still only covered patchily by major operators such as MTN. Hi-speed networks, such as 4G and 5G, are not present and GSM is still the major cellular network. The use of social media is common and Facebook, Instagram and Youtube are regularly accessed in towns, although there is no empirical survey data to confirm this. WhatsApp is used for messages and phone calls; apart from English, text can be in Hausa and Fulfulde.

Potentially then, social media is a key avenue for influencing farmers and traders for improved practice. However, there are no demonstrations that this actually works. The traditional agricultural extension services are typically locked into past practice and may still distribute leaflets or put up posters. Preachers and recruiters to more fundamentalist strains of Islam are far more likely to be adept at the use of social media.

## 6. Conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from this review concerning the cultural background of Kebbi State are as follows;

- a) The economic landscape has changed rapidly in 2020, both due to falling oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic. It is of little value to undertake activities without a pre-project survey of the current situation of farmers and traders

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<sup>9</sup> Kalpana *et al.* (2011)

<sup>10</sup> Elinge *et al.* (2011)

<sup>11</sup> <https://punchng.com/fire-guts-birnin-kebbi-central-market/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gsma.com/coverage/#681>

- b) Food safety is not a current concern of market traders and there is no official mechanism to enforce higher standards. As far as traders are concerned, this simply implies higher costs without corresponding benefit
- c) Food security is, however, of great concern. Variable rainfall, rapidly climbing input prices and annual flooding are making household hunger an increasing issue
- d) Women and children play little role in making decisions about marketing, due to the Muslim household system where they stay at home. Messages by whatever medium, have to be addressed to men. This may be less so among some of the non-Muslim minorities in the south of the state
- e) Conventional methods of agricultural and health and safety extension, including printed material, radio and television, are unlikely to have much impact, due to poor signal coverage in rural areas. Social media is widely accessed, but there is no empirical evidence for its effectiveness in conveying messages of this type.
- f) In Kebbi State, Hausa is the language most widely understood, and should be used for media campaigns. However, the language of the pastoral nomads who supply meat and dairy products, is Fulfulde, and this should be used to reach this specific audience

Any campaign to improve food safety standards must be based on a realistic assessment of the situation of producers, consumers and traders.

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