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DESERTIFICATION AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS: THE CASE OF GURSULU VILLAGE, YOBE STATE, NIGERIA

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MA Research Report (Development Sociology)

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ABSTRACT

Rural households in the semi-arid region of northern Nigeria have to contend with the problems of low rainfall and desertification in their agricultural practices. They have also to contend with the loss (or non-availability) of natural resources, with inadequate capital and with large household sizes. The research uses the case study of Gursulu village, Yobe State, and was undertaken through review of documentary analysis, of personal observations and of interviews with peasants in Gursulu village, Yobe State as well as with government officials as they design, formulate and implement policies on desertification and livelihoods.

The aim of the Research Report was to understand the livelihood strategies of peasant households in desertified northern Nigeria. The literature review on desertification seems to consider desertification as the severest problem that northern Nigeria faces. However, field work data in Gursulu village reveal that peasant households are more concerned with the problem of low and erratic rainfall.

Furthermore, the research findings show that rural households have evolved livelihoods strategies in the face of their precarious environment. They do not rely

solely on farming for their livelihoods, because farming alone is increasingly becoming incapable of providing adequate livelihoods for households in the Sahel. Hence, they are engaged in an array of livelihood activities to enable them realize their livelihoods. They grow different crops and livestock, and engage in off-farm and on farm livelihoods engagements. More so, they innovate in their farming, with methods such as integrating crop and livestock, and draw upon rich local or indigenous knowledge, such as soil management techniques that tackle the problem of soil decline as a result of land degradation. Lastly they rely on migrant remittances, and favour rearing small ruminants because of their advantages over large ruminants.

The people of Gursulu do receive some government assistance, but it is arguably inadequate, Field data show that the state creates livelihoods enabling policies and intervention programmes such as the followings: provision of farm inputs and implements, linking rural communities with financial service providers, establishment of the Youth in Farming programme, and the provision of extension services for peasants' farmers. Yet peasants do not have adequate access to extension services, finances, subsidies and equipment. The report concludes with some suggestions for improvements in state policy.