

# Bush Paths as Means of Sustainability in Cattle Marketing in Crisis Situations in Mezam, 1986-2022

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## ABSTRACT

Bush paths have often constituted an alternative mobility system in sustaining cattle marketing. The various bush paths have gained center stage during periods of socio-political and economic crisis. Formal road networks have traditionally been the focus of transportation and market integration policies, which in due course became hindered by economic downturns, and the protracted Anglophone crisis that exposed the vulnerability of these official corridors. This paper examines the dynamics and role of bush paths as alternative mobility methods in sustaining cattle marketing in crisis situation within Mezam. Data for this paper was collected from primary and secondary sources while presented using thematic cum chronological approaches. This article argues that bush paths functioned not merely as physical shortcuts but as adaptive measures as circumstances demanded. These pathways enabled continuity in cattle commercialization by facilitating flexible movements, reducing exposure to conflict zones, and preserving rural-urban market linkages when formal transport systems collapsed or were militarized. The findings revealed that bush paths constituted a decentralized coping mechanism that enhanced livelihood sustainability and economic survival in times of crisis. By bringing these informal networks, the study challenges state-centric infrastructure narratives and calls for policy recognition of grassroots mobility systems within crisis planning and rural development strategies.

**Keywords:** Bush Paths, Cattle Marketing, Crisis, Sustainability, Coping Mechanism.

## INTRODUCTION

Cattle production and marketing constitute a vital component of the socio-economic structure of Mezam Division in the North-West Region of Cameroon. Livestock, particularly cattle, plays a central role in sustaining rural livelihoods, ensuring food security, and facilitating socio-cultural exchanges. However, the sector has experienced recurrent disruptions arising from major crises, notably the 1986 economic downturn, the implementation of structural adjustment policies, and the protracted Anglophone crisis from 2016 to 2022. These crises significantly weakened formal infrastructures such as road networks, regulated cattle markets, and

institutional frameworks governing livestock trade. Consequently, actors within the cattle economy increasingly relied on alternative mechanisms to sustain production and marketing activities.

Existing scholarship on cattle marketing in Cameroon and across sub-Saharan Africa has largely emphasized formal structures, including market institutions, transportation systems, and regulatory frameworks. According to Paolo Motta et al, studies on livestock trade networks in Cameroon demonstrated that, cattle marketing operate through organized systems linking production zones to consumption centers via established market nodes and transportation corridors<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, research on pastoral systems in the Western Highlands of Cameroon highlights the importance of transhumance, grazing management, and market integration in shaping livestock economies<sup>2</sup>. These studies provide valuable insights into the structural organization of cattle trade but tend to privilege formal economic systems.

Parallel to this body of work is a rich literature on the informal economy, which provides a useful framework for understanding economic activities that occur outside formal regulatory structures. The concept of the informal economy was first systematically articulated by Keith Hart, who demonstrated that economic activities beyond state regulation are neither chaotic nor marginal but constitute organized systems of livelihood<sup>3</sup>. Subsequent scholars, including Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, further developed this perspective by emphasizing the embedded nature of informal activities within social networks and their adaptability in contexts of economic uncertainty<sup>4</sup>. In the African context, studies have shown that informal trade systems are sustained through trust-based relationships, flexible structures, and localized knowledge systems that enable actors to navigate unstable environments<sup>5</sup>.

In Cameroon, the informal sector has been particularly resilient during periods of crisis. Research on the impact of economic liberalization and recent shocks such as COVID-19 reveals that informal economic actors often adapt more quickly than their formal counterparts, thereby ensuring continuity in livelihoods and trade<sup>6</sup>. However, while these studies acknowledge the importance of informality, they largely focus on urban markets and small-scale trade, with limited attention to rural livestock economies and the specific mechanisms that sustain them.

In northern Nigeria, where insurgency and rural banditry have fundamentally reshaped pastoral mobility and cattle marketing systems. The activities of Boko Haram and other armed groups have rendered major highways and formal livestock markets insecure, forcing herders to depend on forest corridors and hidden routes to transport cattle. These informal pathways, much like bush paths in Mezam, enable traders to bypass checkpoints, avoid cattle rustling hotspots, and maintain market supply chains in cities such as Maiduguri and Kano. However, unlike Mezam where bush paths primarily facilitate economic survival, northern Nigeria's informal routes are

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<sup>1</sup> Paolo Motta et al., "Implications of the Cattle Trade Network in Cameroon for Regional Disease Prevention and Control," *Scientific Reports* 7 (2017): 32.

<sup>2</sup> Paul M. Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields: A Study of the Economic Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952).

<sup>3</sup> Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1973): 61-89.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, "World Underneath: The Origins, Dynamics, and Effects of the Informal Economy," in *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*, ed. Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Lauren Benton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 11-37.

<sup>5</sup> Janet MacGaffey, *The Real Economy of Zaire: The Contribution of Smuggling and Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Janet MacGaffey, *The Real Economy of Zaire: The Contribution of Smuggling...*

deeply entangled with security challenges, including livestock theft and violent conflict between herders and farmers. According to Jeremy Lind, such conditions transform pastoral mobility into both a livelihood strategy and a security risk, illustrating how crisis contexts can simultaneously sustain and destabilize livestock economies<sup>7</sup>.

In Uganda, particularly within the Karamoja sub-region, pastoral adaptation to crisis is shaped more by ecological stress than armed conflict, yet the reliance on informal mobility systems remains strikingly similar. Recurrent droughts and pasture scarcity have compelled herders to utilize traditional cattle corridors that often extend beyond formal administrative boundaries, facilitating access to grazing lands and water sources. These routes also support informal livestock trade, with animals being sold in decentralized markets or directly to traders without passing through official market structures. This mirrors Mezam's experience, where bush paths enable cattle movement during periods of road inaccessibility and market disruption. Nevertheless, the Ugandan case differs in that mobility is largely seasonal and environmentally driven, whereas in Mezam it is predominantly a response to political instability. As argued by Andy Catley, pastoral mobility across Africa should be understood as a rational economic strategy rather than a sign of underdevelopment, a perspective that reinforces the legitimacy of bush-path systems in Mezam<sup>8</sup>.

The case of Sudan provides an even closer parallel to Mezam in terms of conflict-driven restructuring of livestock mobility and trade. Prolonged civil wars have disrupted formal market systems and compelled pastoralists to rely on traditional migration routes known as murhals, which function as informal corridors connecting grazing areas to markets. During periods of intensified conflict, these routes become essential for avoiding contested territories and ensuring the survival of both herds and traders. Similar to Mezam's bush paths, murhals are embedded in social agreements and customary institutions that regulate access and movement. However, the Sudanese context is distinguished by the scale and militarization of these routes, as armed groups often exert control over mobility corridors. John Markakis observes that in such contexts, pastoral mobility becomes deeply politicized, reflecting broader struggles over land, identity, and state authority<sup>9</sup>. This contrasts with Mezam, where bush paths remain largely civilian-managed despite the presence of insecurity.

Across Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, and Kenya, pastoralists have consistently relied on alternative routes and decentralized trade systems to cope with crises, whether political, ecological, or economic. The key difference lies not in the existence of such systems but in the degree of their recognition and integration into policy frameworks. While countries like Kenya have begun to formalize aspects of pastoral mobility, Mezam remains at a stage where bush paths function as invisible yet indispensable infrastructures.

A critical review of the literature reveals three major gaps. First, there is a persistent bias toward formal market systems, with insufficient attention given to the informal infrastructures that underpin economic activity in times of crisis. While informal trade is widely recognized, the spatial and logistical dimensions that enable such trade particularly in rural settings remain underexplored. Second, existing studies often treat crises as external disruptions rather than as transformative forces that reshape economic systems and generate alternative structures of organization. Third, there is scanty literature on how crisis situations have affected the use of bush paths in marketing cattle especially within localized contexts such as Mezam Division.

In doing so, the paper contributes to three key areas of scholarship. First, it expands the literature on cattle marketing by incorporating informal infrastructures into the analysis of trade systems. Second, it deepens

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<sup>7</sup>Jeremy Lind, "Governing Pastoralism: The Politics of Mobility in East Africa," *Development and Change* 49, no. 3 (2018): 790-813.

<sup>8</sup>Andy Catley, Jeremy Lind, and Ian Scoones, *Pastoralism and Development in Africa: Dynamic Change at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> John Markakis, *Pastoralism on the Margin* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2004).

understanding of the informal economy by foregrounding its spatial dimensions, particularly in rural and conflict-affected contexts. Third, it advances resilience theory by demonstrating how local actors develop context-specific strategies to sustain economic activity under prolonged instability. Ultimately, the study fills a significant research gap by providing a historically grounded and theoretically informed analysis of bush paths as mechanisms of sustainability in cattle marketing in Mezam Division.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Political Ecology Theory

The determination of bush paths as critical passages for cattle marketing in Mezam Division can be more carefully understood through the lens of Political Ecology, which questions how power relations, environmental use, and livelihood strategies intersect under conditions of crisis. Rather than treating bush paths as merely informal or peripheral routes, political ecology situates them within broader struggles over access to space, resources, and economic opportunity. In Mezam, the collapse and contestation of formal infrastructures during the 1986 economic crisis and the Anglophone conflict (2016-2022) reconfigured the geography of cattle trade, pushing pastoralists and traders to rely on alternative, locally governed pathways. These routes, linking grazing areas such as Mankon, Bali, Sabga and Bafut to markets like Bamendakwe, demonstrate how environmental knowledge and spatial adaptation become central to economic survival. As argued by Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, patterns of resource use are deeply shaped by political and economic pressures rather than purely ecological factors, a claim that resonates strongly with the Mezam case where crisis reshapes both access and movement<sup>10</sup>.

From this perspective, crises do not simply disrupt cattle marketing systems; they actively reorganize them by altering who controls mobility and how resources are accessed. In Mezam, the increasing militarization of major roads and the proliferation of checkpoints during the Anglophone crisis effectively restricted formal cattle movement, compelling traders to re-route herds through bush paths that bypass state surveillance and taxation. This shift explains the “awareness rising of environmental access,” whereby landscapes such as forests, hills, and valleys are reinterpreted as strategic economic corridors. Bush paths thus function as contested spaces where state authority is negotiated, evaded, or replaced by informal systems of governance. Similar observations have been made in broader political ecology scholarship, where local actors respond to structural constraints by reconfiguring their interaction with the environment in ways that sustain livelihoods. In Mezam, the use of routes connecting Bambui, Bambili, and rural hinterlands to Bamendakwe market reflects a deliberate reorganization of trade geography driven by crisis-induced constraints rather than random improvisation<sup>11</sup>.

Political ecology further draws attention to the uneven power relations embedded within these informal systems. While bush paths provide opportunities for continued trade, access to them is mediated by social networks, local knowledge, and sometimes informal authorities who regulate movement along particular routes. This creates differentiated outcomes among actors, where well-connected traders or pastoralists with strong community ties are better positioned to benefit from these pathways. Conversely, outsiders or less-networked individuals may face exclusion or higher risks. Such dynamics align with the argument advanced by Paul Robbins that environmental resources and spaces are never neutral but are shaped by social hierarchies and political interests<sup>12</sup>. In Mezam, for example, certain bush paths are considered safer due to community protection or familiarity with

<sup>10</sup> Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society* (London: Methuen, 1987), 17-19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 23-25.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 14-16.

the terrain, while others are avoided due to insecurity or lack of social support. This demonstrates that bush paths are not simply physical infrastructures but socio-political constructs embedded within local systems of authority and negotiation.

Equally important is the role of indigenous knowledge and agency in sustaining these systems. Pastoralists and traders in Mezam possess detailed, experience-based knowledge of the landscape, including seasonal variations in pasture, water availability, and security conditions. This knowledge enables them to adapt routes, timing, and trading practices in response to changing circumstances, thereby enhancing resilience. Political ecology emphasizes such local agency as central to understanding how communities navigate environmental and political challenges. The continuous use and modification of bush paths such as shifting routes during peak conflict periods or adjusting movement to avoid surveillance illustrate how actors actively produce and reproduce their economic environment. As Blaikie and Brookfield note, local responses to crisis often involve innovative reconfigurations of resource use that reflect both necessity and strategic decision-making<sup>13</sup>. In this sense, bush paths in Mezam are not static remnants of pre-modern systems but dynamic and evolving infrastructures shaped by ongoing interactions between people, environment, and power.

Ultimately, applying political ecology to the study of bush paths underscores the need to rethink conventional approaches to livestock development and policy. Formal frameworks that prioritize regulated markets, fixed infrastructures, and centralized control often fail to capture the realities of how cattle marketing operate in crisis-prone regions. By overlooking informal systems such as bush paths, policymakers risk marginalizing the very mechanisms that sustain rural livelihoods. A political ecology perspective advocates for the recognition and integration of these systems into broader development strategies, including the provision of mobile veterinary services, conflict-sensitive infrastructure planning, and participatory governance mechanisms. In Mezam, acknowledging bush paths as legitimate economic corridors would not only enhance the sustainability of cattle marketing but also address the underlying power dynamics that shape access to resources. Thus, bush paths should be understood as critical sites where environment, politics, and economy converge, offering valuable insights into the resilience of pastoral systems under conditions of prolonged crisis.

### **Evolution Of Bush Paths in Cattle Marketing**

The periods from 1986 to 2022 reflected a dynamic interplay between crisis, adaptation, and local agency. While at first glance, these paths may appear as mere informal trails cutting across forests and farmlands. Historically, the various bus paths developed into vital economic corridors that sustained livestock mobility under conditions of socio-political instability. Their transformation was within the broader economic downturn of the late 1980s, the gradual rural restructuring of the 1990s and the violent disruptions caused by the Anglophone stalemate.

During the economic crisis that followed the collapse of commodity prices in the mid-1980s, Cameroon entered a prolonged period of structural adjustment<sup>14</sup>. In Mezam Division, declining state investment in rural infrastructure led to the deterioration of feeder roads connecting cattle-producing zones such as Bafut, Santa, and Bali to Bamenda's urban markets. In villages like Bambili and Awing, herders increasingly relied on traditional forest tracks to move cattle between dry-season grazing fields and weekly markets. These bush paths were not innovations of the crisis but long-standing pastoral routes preserved through indigenous ecological knowledge. In areas like Bafut, field observation recounted how cattle were moved through the Mankon-Bafut forest belt during heavy rains when laterite roads became impassable<sup>15</sup>. At this stage, bush paths functioned as complementary mobility channels rather than primary commercial arteries.

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<sup>13</sup> Blaikie and Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society*, 27-29.

<sup>14</sup>Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon, 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History* (Yaoundé: Navi-Group Publications, 1996), 320-325.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with, Ngwa Timothy, 47, Cattle Herder in Bafut, Mezam Division, 25/04/2025.

By the 1990s and early 2000s, demographic pressure and land fragmentation intensified farmer-grazer tensions in villages such as Bali Nyonga and Santa Mbei. Expanding cultivation narrowed traditional grazing corridors, compelling pastoralists to seek less confrontational routes. Bush paths thus evolved as a way of avoiding conflicts. Cattle herders avoided densely cultivated roadside farms and redirected movements through forest margins linking Acha, Pinyin, and the outskirts of Bamenda. These adjustments reduced farmer-herders disputes and minimized compensation payments<sup>16</sup>. In this light, bush paths reflected adaptive negotiation within changing rural landscapes rather than responses to armed conflict.

Profound transformations occurred after the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, which severely disrupted transportation networks across the North West Region<sup>17</sup>. Major highways connecting Santa to Bamenda and Bali to Batibo were frequently blocked by road checks, lockdowns, and armed confrontations. In response, bush paths became central to the survival of cattle marketing. In villages like Bafut, cattle destined for Bamenda Food Market were redirected through concealed routes passing near Akum and entering the city's peripheries at dawn. Traders from Pinyin recount organizing night treks to avoid both state security patrols and separatist roadblocks<sup>18</sup>. What had once been secondary tracks became functional as lifelines for economic continuity.

Between 2017 and 2020, the organization of these routes became more collective and structured. In Awing, youth vigilante groups informally monitored sections of forest corridors to deter cattle rustling. In Bali Nyonga, community leaders negotiated tacit passage agreements to ensure that cattle movements did not attract suspicion from armed groups operating nearby. The various localized coordination illustrates how bush paths evolved from spontaneous coping mechanisms into semi-institutionalized infrastructures embedded within communal survival strategies. This development aligns with resilience perspectives that emphasize self-organization and adaptive transformation under systemic stress<sup>19</sup>.

Economically, bush paths sustained the regional cattle supply chain despite instability. By bypassing formal checkpoints, traders reduced exposure to bribery and arbitrary taxation. Cattle moved through forest corridors arrived in better condition than those delayed for hours at roadblocks. In Bamenda's slaughter slaps, butchers continued to access livestock from surrounding villages largely because these alternative routes remained functional. Thus, the sustainability of cattle marketing in Mezam during crisis years depended significantly on these informal geographies<sup>20</sup>.

Socially, the evolution of bush paths reinforced networks of trust and shared knowledge. Information about safe passages circulated discreetly among herders in Bafut and Santa. Older pastoralists mentored younger ones on seasonal water points hidden within forest belts near Acha and Pinyin. Women engaged in dairy trade in villages such as Bambili indirectly benefited from uninterrupted cattle mobility, as milk supply to roadside vendors persisted despite market closures. Bush paths therefore represented not only economic adaptation but also social resilience grounded in collective responsibility<sup>21</sup>.

Within the periods 2020-2022, the intensity of the violence in Mezam division didn't hinder cattle marketing as many traders still continued to use these forest corridors. Their continued relevance suggests that crisis-induced

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<sup>16</sup>Fonchingong, Charles C., "The Problem of Farmer-Grazier Conflict in Cameroon," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (2005): 91-112.

<sup>17</sup>Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon* (Leiden: Brill, 2003)

<sup>18</sup>Oral Interview with, Njoh Joshua Nze, 57, cattle traders in Pinyin Santa, Mezam Division, 03/05/2025.

<sup>19</sup>C. S. Holling, "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 14-18.

<sup>20</sup>Oral Interview with, Fru John Paul, 67, Butcher, Nkwen Mile4, Mezam Division, 02/05/2026.

<sup>21</sup>C. S. Holling, "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 14-18.

adaptations can permanently reshape commercial landscapes. Bush paths, once peripheral and seasonal, had evolved into embedded components of Mezam's cattle marketing system. Their history demonstrates how rural communities transform vulnerability into innovation through localized knowledge, negotiation and solidarity.

In essence, the evolution of bush paths in Mezam Division between 1986 and 2022 illustrates a gradual but decisive shift from supplementary pastoral trails to indispensable economic lifelines. Shaped by economic austerity, demographic pressure and protracted conflict, these routes embodied the adaptive capacity of local actors. Drawing from live experiences in Bafut, Bali Nyonga, Santa, Awing, and Pinyin, the study reveals that sustainability in times of crisis often rests not on formal state systems but on the ingenuity and resilience of communities themselves.

### **Intensification of the Crisis, 2016-2022**

The Anglophone crisis that escalated after 2016 created a new shock to marketing in Mezam, addition in checkpoints, road closures, displacement, and insecurity restricted vehicle movement and formal logistics. Studies of the crisis and humanitarian assessments emphasized regionally uneven labor-market impacts and indicated that where formal market access was disrupted, households reverted to localized, informal marketing systems. In Mezam, bush paths tracks through farms and secondary woodlands became critical alternatives for moving perishable goods to urban demand pockets and for shorter networks of exchange.

### **Roles of Bush Paths in Marketing during Crisis Situations**

Bush paths constituted a foundational, yet largely undocumented element of pastoral mobility and market integration. These paths, informally constructed and communally maintained, linked grazing zones, cattle camps, homesteads, and periodic markets long before the expansion of motorable roads. Ogunsanya classifies such routes as the earliest and most resilient form of rural infrastructure, particularly in regions where formal road networks remain uneven or politically neglected<sup>22</sup>. In Mezam, from 1986 onwards, cattle rearers, especially Fulani pastoralists and agro-pastoral households, depended on bush paths to move livestock between seasonal grazing areas and nearby market points. Their continued relevance stressed how informal transport systems underpinned cattle production in the absence of consistent state infrastructural investment.

From a commercial perspective, bush paths functioned as critical connectors between cattle production zones and local marketing circuits. Small and medium-scale cattle owners relied on these routes to transport animals to village markets, roadside sale points, and aggregation areas leading toward Bamenda's major cattle markets. Studies on rural marketing systems emphasize that market access is not determined solely by major roads but by the cumulative network of minor paths that enable first-mile mobility<sup>23</sup>. In Mezam, bush paths allowed herders to avoid excessive transport costs, reduce stress and injury to animals, and maintain flexibility in choosing markets. This informal mobility supported what Watkins conceptualizes as an informal economy, where economic transactions operate beyond full state regulation yet remain vital to livelihood sustainability<sup>24</sup>.

The significance of bush paths became even more pronounced during periods of socio-political crisis, particularly from the mid-1990s. Economic devastations intensified as a result of the escalation. As insecurity increased, formal roads were frequently blocked, monitored, or rendered dangerous for cattle movement due to checkpoints, ambushes, and confiscations. As such, bush paths served as alternative and less visible routes that

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<sup>22</sup> A. A. Ogunsanya, *Rural Transport and Development in Africa* (Ibadan: University Press, 1981), 41-43

<sup>23</sup> John Koome, *Factors Influencing Marketing of Agricultural Produce among Small-Scale Farmers* (Nairobi: University of Nairobi, 2025), 23-24.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Watkins, "Informal Economies and Rural Survival Strategies," in *Rethinking African Economic Systems* (London: Routledge, 2008), 67-69

enabled herders and traders to continue cattle marketing in a limited degree, while minimizing exposure to violence. A study on rural transport in crisis environments shows that when formal setup becomes dysfunctional, informal routes play a decisive role in sustaining local economies and food supply systems<sup>25</sup>. In Mezam, these paths allowed cattle movement at night or through forested corridors, preserving livelihoods amid widespread disruption due to the crisis.

Beyond economic functions, bush paths also played a strategic role in crisis situations and pastoral survival. They facilitated rapid relocation of cattle to safer grazing areas during outbreaks of violence, helped herders evade cattle rustling and armed confrontations, and enabled access to water points and fodder during displacement. Development scholars argue that such informal infrastructure enhances community resilience by supporting adaptive responses to shocks and reducing dependence on vulnerable formal systems<sup>26</sup>. In Mezam, the ability to mobilize cattle through bush paths was often the difference between total herd loss and partial survival, especially for households whose wealth and social status were tied to livestock ownership.

In historical terms, the functional role of bush paths in Mezam between 1986 and 2022 illustrated how cattle production and commercialization were sustained through informal spatial networks during periods of both stability and crisis. These paths anchored on the informal cattle economy, enabling market participation, risk management, and continuity of production in a context marked by political instability and infrastructural neglect. Their role challenges development narratives that privilege formal roads alone and highlights the need to recognize indigenous mobility systems as central to pastoral economies.

### Temporal Flexibility

Bush paths provided traders and herders in Mezam with crucial temporal flexibility, allowing them to move cattle and goods at safer times when formal roads were most dangerous. In Santa, oral interviews revealed that herders from Pinyin and Awing often moved cattle before sunrise, using bush paths that cut across farmlands and forest edges to reach temporary holding points near Santa town. Mohamed Jalo explained that “we left very early, before people woke up, because the road was risky after daybreak<sup>27</sup>.” To add, in Bafut, particularly around Njimbi, Bujung, and Nfora, traders preferred late evening movements along bush paths connecting grazing zones to the lower valleys, timing their journeys to avoid patrols and theft. According to Abdul karma, “night movements were safer than the main road in the afternoon”<sup>28</sup>.

In Babanki (Kejom Keku and Kejom Ketinguh), herders used bush paths during periods of heavy fog or light rainfall, when visibility was poor and movement attracted less attention. These temporal adjustments allowed cattle to be assembled quietly at collection points before market days in Bamenda or Ndop<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, in the peripheries of the urban areas of Nkwen and Mankon, traders relied on night-time movement through footpaths behind residential quarters to deliver cattle to market outskirts ahead of official opening hours. A Bamenda-based trader noted that “bringing cattle very early helped us avoid trouble and sell before the situation changed<sup>30</sup>.” These examples demonstrated how bush paths enabled herders and traders to convert time into a protective strategy, sustaining cattle commercialization despite insecurity and fluctuating market conditions. Cost reduction:

<sup>25</sup>Transportation Research Board, *The Role of Rural Roads in Emergency Crisis Response* (Washington, DC: TRB, 2008), 17-19.

<sup>26</sup>Mohapatra and S. Chandrasekhar, “Community Perceptions of Roads as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 68 (2019): 114-116.

<sup>27</sup> Oral interview with, Mohamed Jalo, 45, Cattle Rearer, Pinyin Village, 14 March 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Oral interview with, Abdul karma, 51, Cattle Trader, Bamendankwe Village, 20 September 2025.

<sup>29</sup> Oral interview with, Joseph Folong, 37, Cattle Trader, Nkwen Market, 22 May 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Oral interviews with, Babalou Nyako, 42, Fulani pastoralists, Kejom Keku (Babanki), 6 July 2025.

avoiding vehicle and tax costs as well as Social communication provided informal networks about prices and safety. These collectively reveal bush paths as an adaptive logistics system during crises.

Pastoral Mobility and livestock marketing in Mezam historically depended on market days where animals were moved from village enclosures to market centers. During insecurity, traders and grazers redirected cattle along bush paths that avoided checkpoints. These smaller, informal markets preserved cash flows for herders and butchers<sup>31</sup>.

**Table 1: Periodization of Significant Events and Operational Measures**

Year/Period	Event	Market Implication	Bush Path Role
1986-1995	Structural Adjustment	Informal markets	Expand Paths enable farm trade
1996-2005	Decentralization	Formal markets slowly grow	Paths link micro-markets
2006-2015	Agricultural Projects	Minor infrastructure gains	Paths remain key
2016-2022	Anglophone Crisis	Market collapse	Paths sustain livelihood

**Sources:** Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT, IOM (2021).

Formal market count rose modestly from 2 to 3 between 1986 to 2015, then dropped post-2016 due to insecurity. Informal trade indices and bush-path usage doubled during the crisis years. Labour surveys show that over 70% of active adults in Mezam depended on informal marketing between 2017-2022. With this, the study furthered examined the trends within the marketing and crisis management sub-sectors of Mezam locale.

### Trends in Cattle Marketing during Crisis Situations

The evolution of cattle marketing in Mezam Division between 1986 and 2022 reflects a complex interplay of economic liberalization, infrastructural limitations, and socio-political instability. During the late 1980s and 1990s, cattle marketing in communities such as Bamenda, Bafut, Bali, and Santa operated largely through periodic markets and negotiated transactions between Fulani pastoralists and local butchers. The urban expansion of Bamenda gradually increased beef demand, especially around Food Market and Nkwen Market. Traders relied heavily on trust-based networks, kinship ties, and credit arrangements, with limited state regulation. Structural adjustment reforms in Cameroon during the late 1980s reduced direct state intervention in livestock pricing, pushing pastoralists to depend more on informal marketing systems<sup>32</sup>. This shift strengthened the role of middlemen, who coordinated cattle movement from grazing areas in Bafut, Bambui and Sabga to urban slaughter points. Seasonal variations also shaped marketing trends, as cattle supply fluctuated during dry seasons when transhumance routes expanded. The marketing chain remained vulnerable to poor road infrastructure, especially along the Bamenda-Bafut axis. Nonetheless, relative political stability during this period allowed predictable trade cycles. Community cattle markets functioned not merely as economic sites but as social arenas reinforcing inter-ethnic cooperation<sup>33</sup>. The period thus laid a semi-formal foundation for cattle commercialization before the onset of major crises. These early marketing trends reveal how embedded social capital compensated for institutional weakness.

The period after 2016 marked a dramatic transformation in cattle marketing due to the Anglophone crisis that was affecting the Northwest Region. The escalation of violence disrupted livestock mobility, market accessibility,

<sup>31</sup>MINEPAT, “Regional Diagnostic Report,” (2021).

<sup>32</sup>Piet Konings, *The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa: State and Civil Society in Cameroon* (Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2011), 52-58.

<sup>33</sup>Paul Nchoji Nkwi, *Traditional Government and Social Change: A Study of the Political Institutions among the Kom of the Cameroon Grassfields* (Fribourg: University Press, 1976), 112-118.

and trader security across Mezam. Roadblocks, ghost-town observances, and insecurity along the Bamenda-Santa, Bamenda-Bali and Bamenda-Bambui roads severely constrained cattle transportation. Weekly cattle markets in communities such as Bafut, Bambui and Bali experienced irregular attendance, while some pastoralists relocated herds to safer divisions. Crisis conditions increased transaction costs, as traders had to negotiate informal payments at multiple checkpoints<sup>34</sup>. Bush paths connecting rural grazing fields to urban centers became alternative corridors for cattle movement, illustrating adaptability and resilience within the informal economy.

In Bamenda, slaughter slabs operated intermittently due to fluctuating supply and curfews. The crisis also shifted bargaining power, sometimes favoring buyers when supply was forced into urban centers quickly to avoid losses. Meanwhile, fear of herd theft and targeted violence altered grazing patterns around Sabga and Awing. Religious and community leaders occasionally mediated safe trading days to sustain food supply. These adaptive strategies highlight how local actors' improvised crisis management outside formal state mechanisms<sup>35</sup>. Rather than collapsing entirely, the cattle marketing system reconfigured itself under pressure, demonstrating embedded resilience.

Across the 1986-2022 periods, crisis management strategies in the cattle section in Mezam's sector evolved from informal coping mechanisms to more deliberate community-based coordination. In earlier decades, crises were largely environmental such as drought or cattle disease outbreaks which were managed through herd diversification and rotational grazing. Veterinary services in Bamenda town, though in small coherence, supported vaccination campaigns during outbreaks. However, the socio-political crisis introduced a fundamentally different risk environment characterized by insecurity rather than ecological shock. Market actors responded by decentralizing slaughter points and negotiating localized security assurances within neighborhoods like Nkwen and Mankon. Mobile phone communication after the 2000s enabled traders to coordinate safer delivery schedules and confirm buyer availability before transporting cattle<sup>36</sup>.

Some butchers diversified protein sources, incorporating goat and poultry to hedge against supply volatility. Informal savings groups (*njangi*) provided emergency capital to traders facing unexpected losses. Cross-border trade links with neighboring divisions adjusted as actors sought alternative supply chains. These adaptations reveal a pattern of flexible crisis governance rooted in community initiative rather than centralized policy. Over time, cattle marketing in Mezam became less dependent on formal infrastructure and more reliant on adaptive social networks. The long-term trend shows that while crises disrupted conventional market channels, they simultaneously deepened informal resilience and localized economic solidarity<sup>37</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Bush paths in essence became an avenue for resilience based on the different crisis that occurred in Cameroon affecting cattle marketing. Bush paths sustained livelihoods but raise environmental and health concerns; environmental increased forest extraction, zoonotic risks for cattle infections and lastly government tax evasion and weak oversight. Addressing these requires balanced policy reforms integrating bush-path networks into

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<sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group, Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads, Africa Report No. 250 (Brussels: ICG, 2017), 7-12

<sup>35</sup> Meredith Terretta, "Self-Rule and the Crisis of Governance in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions," *African Affairs* 118, no. 472 (2019): 320-327.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank, *Information and Communication for Development Report 2009: Extending Reach and Increasing Impact* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009), 45-49

<sup>37</sup> Kate Meagher, *Identity Economics: Social Networks and the Informal Economy in Nigeria* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 89-96.

sustainable planning. Again, policy implications and recommendations suggest that, mapping informal networks, municipal mapping of major bush paths to integrate them into crisis-response planning. Secondly, health Surveillance by providing one-health outreach along major routes. Thirdly Support Safe Passage that improves drainage and footbridges with local labour. Lastly recognized Informal Markets by providing sanitation and light regulation without criminalization.

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