



Laconic Appraisal of Socioeconomic Implications of Shehu's Migration in the Early Days of Sokoto Caliphate and Contemporary lessons

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Abstract:

This paper explores the socio-economic impacts of Shehu Usman Danfodiyo's migratory movements and Islamic reform efforts in 19th-century Hausaland. Tracing his genealogy, educational journey, and extensive internal and external migrations, the study highlights how Shehu's advocacy for Islamic revivalism, social justice, and women's empowerment catalyzed significant societal transformations. His strategic educational migrations facilitated the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, fostered community organization, and promoted literacy among women and children. Additionally, Shehu's emphasis on lawful economic activities and adherence to Islamic economic principles contributed to the development of a sustainable socio-economic order within the Sokoto Caliphate. The insights derived from Shehu's migratory and reform initiatives offer valuable lessons for contemporary societies seeking socio-economic development through education, social justice, and religious principles.

Keywords: Socioeconomic, migration, Sokoto Caliphate, lessons

INTRODUCTION

Shehu is popularly dubbed as Usman Danfodiyo, the leader of the Islamic (Muslim) community that led to the 1804 Islamic movement of multidisciplinary impacts that spurred the formation of Sokoto Caliphate (Amanambu & Umuobiala, 2017; Bala & AINU, 2018). Shehu's genealogy is Usman bn Muhammad bn Usman. His genealogy can be linked to Uqba bn Nafi, the companion of the Prophet SAW. Shehu's people migrated from Maratta to Dageel (internally) within the nation of Gobir for educational purposes. Shehu studied from his family (for instance his mother, and his father) and other teachers such as Jibril bn Umar, Sheikh Bandura, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Zamfari, and Sheikh Abdurrahman bn Hammada (Bala & AINU, 2018; Sharu & Dagimun, 2022).

Bala & AINU (2018) indicated that, Shehu begins preaching movements at the age of 20 (1188 A.H/ 1774 C.E) when he intended to restore the nations from un-Islamic and harmful social practices to the right and Islamic practices. He called the people to Islam, good works, faith, and enjoined them to avoid bad customs. Many people trooped to him and augmented him in the spread of that advocacy (Musa & Sule, 2018; Kebbe et al., 2025; Sharu et al., 2026). He paid much attention on the need to empower women against inequalities such as lack of education, and denial of several rights (Bala & AINU, 2018; Kameche et al., 2025; Oladipupo et al., 2025). The objective of this paper is to highlight some of the socioeconomic implications of Shehu's early migratory movements in the past and lessons to tap for nowadays.

2. Concepts of Migration

Migration is a well-known process in human history (Sharu & Abdullahi, 2026; Bashar, 2026ab). In Islam, migration is an aspect of decamping from the lands of infidels to the Muslim land so that people can be able to worship Allah SWT without interruption or hassle (in harmony). It is obligatory to migrate from the land of infidel to the land where religion is allowed if the necessary conditions are found (Musa & Sule, 2018; Kebbe et al., 20025). Muslims in their land (after migration) are expected to practice with zero tolerance to corruption; and must show love, respect, and support each other (Musa & Sule, 2018; Garba & Sale, 2026; Sharu & Bodinga, 2026a). Migration is similarly being reported of Shehu in his migratory educational advocacy as expunged by Bashar (2024):

“Shaykh Usman was born at Maratta in the land of Galmi in the year (1754-1 817 CE). Later, he moved to Degel, which was in the city-state of Gobir, where he started his activities. The inhabitants of the area lived in the darkness of ignorance about Islam. He started preaching and teaching in his hometown, Degel, when he was 20 years old, from where he later travelled within and outside Gobir on preaching tours. The tours took him to Kebbi, Zamfara, Faru, Daura, Illo across the River Niger, and to Zauma. The tours took place at different times with Degel as the base. He stayed in Zamfara for about five years, during which he had the most fertile ground for his missionary activities.”

3. Shehu's migration

Because of the problems affecting the society, Shehu had to engaged in several migratory movements. Abdullahi (2016) lamented on the problems in the Hausaland that are critical in the emergence of Shehu. The author divulged:

“It is important to commence although briefly with the conditions that necessitated the 1804 Jihad so as to enable us appreciate much,

the impact of the Jihad particularly the intellectual side of it. Although there were scholars in Hausaland even before the advent of Shaykh Usman Danfodio, most of them pre-occupied themselves in teaching their very few students, neglecting the mass of people and even their families. Instead of preaching and struggle for Islamic revivalism, most of the Ulama'u before Shaykh aligned themselves with palaces where they engaged themselves with justification of the practices of the corrupt rulers, and legalizing their evils. Therefore there was prevalence of ignorance in the pre-Jihad period. There was little awareness of the pristine teaching of Islam and this was attested by Shaykh Abdullahi, describing their preaching tours to Zamfara”

Therein, Shehu Danfodiyo was reported to be born in 1754 in a famous Maratta village of the Gobir state (near Konni or Galmi) and he passed on in 1817 in Sokoto city after the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate (Sheriff, 2016). Shehu (Usman) was Fulani by clan, a teacher, reformer, philosopher, who had grown-up in the Dagele (Gobir state dominion) in his family that is famous for scholarly activities instead of relying on herding animals only. Shehu's migratory movements started at his early age after he had obtain his early educational background (Shareef, 2005; Amanambu, & Umuobiala, 2017; Sharu et al., 2026). His necessary educational migration from town to town and across various villages and countries (states) was incited by a cause to advocate for reformation and was well-supported by the following features:

- His style of teaching and preaching helped to accumulate a collection of loyal followers that obeyed him
- Some of the contemporary scholars in his age (time) supported his call for reformation through his mass education intervention well-veiled with educational migration from place to place.
- His followers (Muslim communities of Jamaa) are well- organized and trained to pursue different professional works in Islam and economics or political activities that support growth of any society (Sayudi & Boyd, 1974; Chafe, 1999; Sheriff, 2016, Azembeh, 2024), This methods of migration involved taking the preaching or educational interventions directly to the poor and masses, and all other groups (Sheriff, 2016).

Indeed, it is denoted that Shehu spent the whole of his life learning, teaching, preaching and advocating for reformation in the domains (areas) he found himself (Abdussalam, 2016; Adegoke, 2020;). Some disclosed that, he had started preaching at the age of 20. His types of preaching migration include the followings:

- Internal migration- Internal migration involves moving-out of his Dagele home to reach-out to some villages and towns within Gobir nation (state) just to teach and advocate for reformation (Musa & Sale, 2018). Certainly, migration was considered by Muslims

(during Shehu's time) in the past as a way of educating the public, because immigrants play vital roles such as preaching, teaching, and services delivery (Sharu & Abdullahi, 2026). That is in accordance with what the Muslims learnt generally from the migration of Prophet Muhammad SAW to Madina (Khazadeh et al., 2025).

- External migration- This is a kind of external movement whereby Shehu travelled from the country of Gobir to others just for advocacy reasons. He had moved for example to the land of Yabo (Magabchi) for advocacy, then to the land of Zamfara, then to the Kebbi. All the forestated are forced by the pressures unleashed upon the Muslims community by the kings in the region (Sayudi & Boyd, 1974). After considerable momentum of Shehu's educational interventions (movements) the governments (kings) decided to curb the trend and instituted an attack on Gimbana (a Muslim town placed due to migration) established after migration against the maltreatment of Muslim by Gobir. More decrees were instituted to bring more hardship upon the Muslims so that they can renounced their stand, therefore Muslims had to migrate externally out of the Gobir nation to a place dubbed as Gudu (Azembah, 2024; Bashar, 2026b; Sharu & Abdullahi, 2026). Furthermore, the essence of migration was stressed further by Kilickaya et al (2026) as tool for education.

More declarations about Gimbana's migration are stated here:

“Gimbana is a town made through migration of Abdussalam. Gimbana is outside the nation of Gobir, and it is situated near the nation of Kebbi. The reason for the formation of Gimbana was a migratory move conceived by Abdussalam (a Hausa by tribe, and student of Shehu) who was wealthy, but decided to run away from maltreatment meted on him by Sarkin Gobir Nafata. Because of the kindness of Abdussalam a lot of Gobir people decided to join him, and in turn the rise of Gimbana. When Yunfa ascended the throne as Sarkin Gobir, he decided to use the wealth of Abdussalam (to empower his administration) therefore asked him to return to Gobir. Abdussalam sought Shehu's permission on what to implement, but Shehu said “I will not order you to return to Gobir or stay back, because I have no power to insulate you against any consequences”. Therefore, Abdussalam decided not to return to Gobir, and he was ambushed in the day of Ramadan. The Gobir army despised the Islamic books by walking on them. However, Abdussalam and his households managed to run and evade in a village belonging to some Fulani. In this vein, Sarkin Gobir asked them to surrender them, but they said “We will not concede. They are our Muslim brothers and we would never surrender them to you. Uninformed, the Sarkin Gobir rampaged

the Muslims town known as Gimbana. They attacked the city during Ramadan, in the daylight, and killed a lot of people (scholars, and Huffaz) and destroyed Islamic books and instruction (learning) slates (Alluna). Then, they passed through Dagele and proclaimed that, the next attack would be on Dagele. This triggered, some Muslims to snatch the captives from Gobir army and freed them, an action that angered the Gobir more. Later, Shehu asked them to rescind from that, but Sarkin Gobir had already informed that he will attack Dagele” Bashar (2026b).

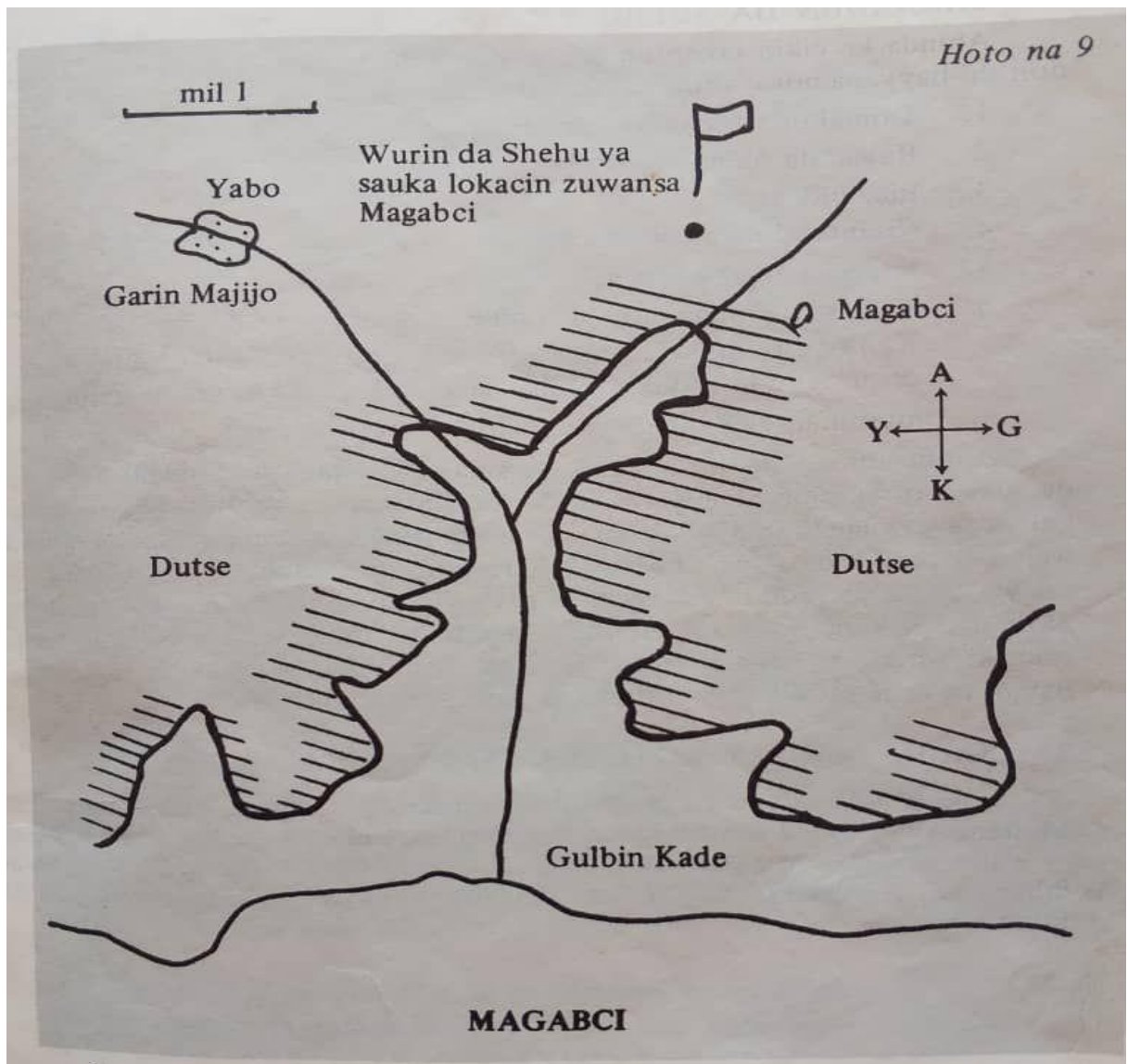


Figure 1 Shehu's external migratory site at Magabchi (Yabo); Source: Sayudi & Boyd (1974)

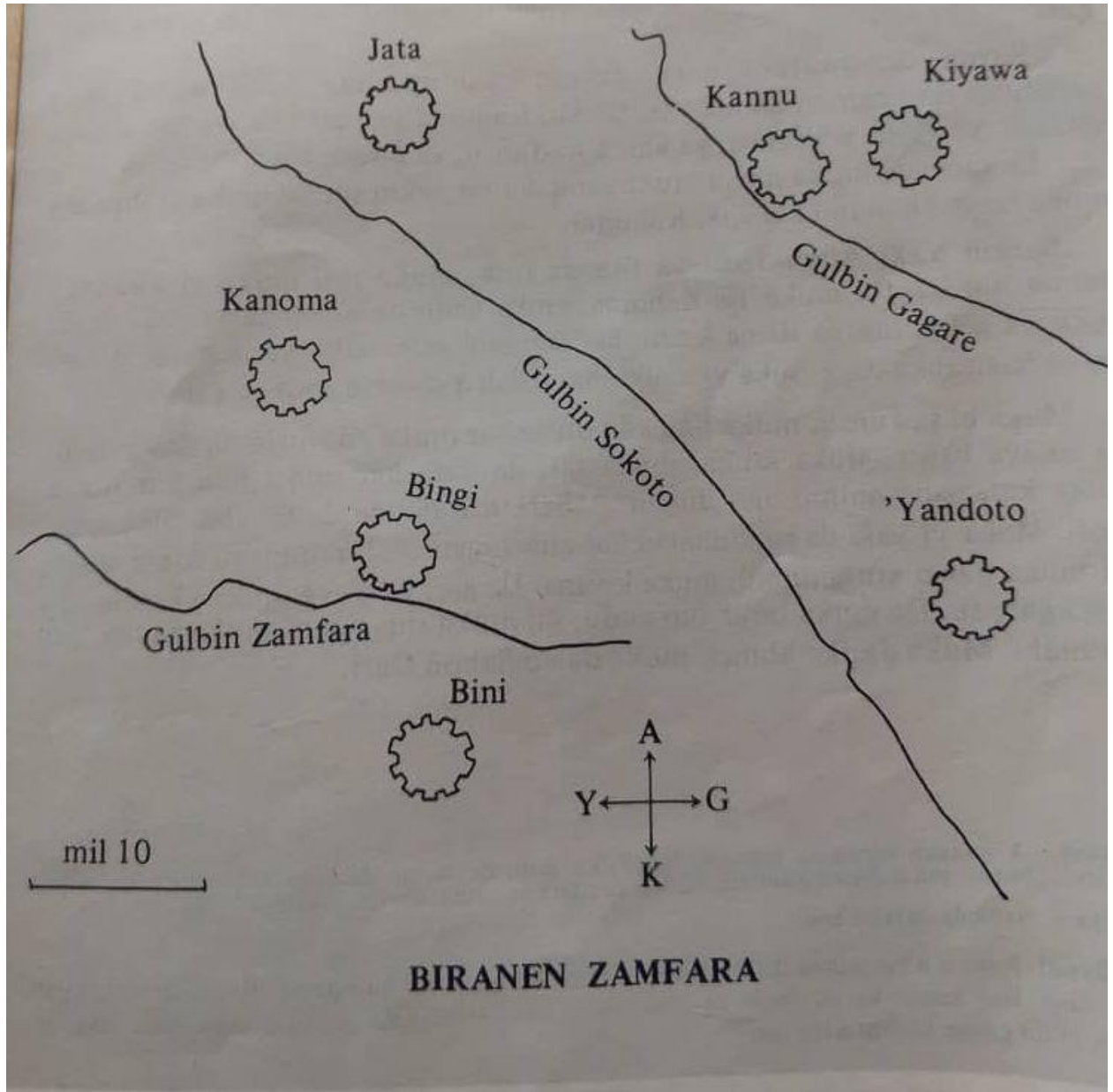


Figure 2 Indicating Shehu's external migratory place of Zamfara; Source: Sayudi & Boyd (1974)

4. Preaching and teaching (calling) as forms of jihad

Shehu Abdulahi described preaching and teaching as form of jihad conducted by Shehu Danfodiyo and his disciples. Abdullahi said:

We stayed together with the Sheikh, helping him to pass the message of religion, and he had visited East and West (everywhere) calling people to accept the religion of Allah. The method utilized was admonishing, preaching, and reciting poems in local language, Arabic, and Fulfulde. This movement attracted people from far and near to his preaching and calling. Shehu called them to follow the right path, Islam and kindness. Therewith, Shehu also instructed them to get

rid of traditions that are in conflict with Sharia. Many of the people accepted this call, and repented. Thereafter, the preaching interventions traverse the whole land. In the first interactions, Shehu refused to go to the kings, albeit some people from places attend to his preaching sessions. Later, when the preaching spreads, Shehu decided to take it to the places (particularly Sarkin Gobir Bawa) and explained true religion of Islam to him. Later, Shehu went to the nation of Zamfara and stayed for about five years while preaching and teaching (Luwa & Musa, 2013; Abba et al., 2017).

5. Shehu's Ideas on women empowerment and education as socioeconomic impacts of migratory movements owing to reformation

Abdullahi (2016) explained the efforts of Shehu to educate women in this manner:

“Fafunwa further expatiate on the education of women where he said that the message of Shaykh Usman worked so well that female education among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria became a matter of pride.”

Thus, Asma'u once lamented on the challenges of women before the essence of Sokoto Caliphate by saying:

They deceive you when they preach obedience to your husband without telling you obedience, which is primary to Allah” (Hanafi & Jibril, 2024).

Likewise, Sarkingobir (2025) tried to disclose the role of mothers in Sokoto Caliphate as follows:

“Life skill and development coaching- The mother serve as a coach to mothers by modeling them according to rightful life kills. The role of mother in this case may transgress to reach –out to outsiders; for instance Nana Asma'u famously established a movement (Yantaru) that delivered educational interventions or open university system to the fellow women in the 19th century Sokoto Caliphate, a system that was copied beyond this period”

Kebbe et al. (2025) described the women empowerment in Sokoto in this manner:

“.....and the use of women agents (Yantaru) was specifically practiced by Nana Asma'u (Shehu's daughter). Yantaru system involved an intervention of teaching women who will be sent to homes (in far and near) to teach their folks. These inventions led by Islamic state (Sokoto Caliphate) empower women (girls) and sired successful folks in areas of education, business, and relevant

life endeavors. Sokoto Caliphate through its policies such as literatures enjoined women to be helpful in teaching the children and in turn guarding the society against devilish acts and ideas. Women in the Sokoto Caliphate helped largely in preparing families and educating the children and in economic practices”.

Thus, according to general tradition of Islam, women and girls are treated as humans with the same essence as men (Gurori & Garba, 2026). Both the males and females are created to worship Allah SWT. Women in Islamic society like the Sokoto Caliphate shall be held in high esteem contrary to the period that precedes the caliphate. Indeed, before the emergence of Sokoto Caliphate, women were relegated; they were maltreated (such as denying inheritance, and lack of education). This encourage Shehu Danfodiyo embark on advocacy for women’s right and it yielded fruits. That is why a lot of women attended school and preaching sessions (without harassment) exclusively meant for women delivered by Shehu or Nana Asma’u (Shehu’s daughter). Nana Asma’u organized a universal system of education that involved systematic training of young girls (that are not matured) and old women in areas of religion, hygiene, home economics, and other things. Consequently, unleashing these trained Yantaru (crowd or educational extension workers) members to reach-out to the villages and towns to teach the womenfolk (that are unable to attend schools due to one reason or the other) (Gurori & Garba, 2026). The essence of Shehu’ Danfodiyo’s advocacy for women right and the gigantic educational intervention of Nana Asma’u was to take education and empowerment to the disadvantaged, distant, far and near, and neutralized inequalities (Ismaila et al., 2016). Ismaila et al. (2026) echoed that, Nana Asma’u Yantaru was initiated whereby, women are provided with home-based education, literacy, and leadership capacity among women folk. Hanafi & Jibril (2024) highlighted some aspects of economic rights of women in Sokoto Caliphate, including the right to own a land, the right to own animal, the right to prepare, process, and sell foods, engagements as agents (for selling or buying), leather works, weaving, mat making, pot making, etc.

6. Child education as socioeconomic impacts of Shehu’s reformation

Shehu was accustomed with child education through his background as stated by Abdullahi (2016) as follows:

“Shaykh Usman Danfodio considered teaching, preaching, and writing as of paramount importance. Therefore the first step for such movement was the acquisition of ample knowledge by the jihad leaders themselves. Starting from his home town-Degel-Usman spent his childhood learning the Qur’an in addition to reading and writing from his father.”

Kaura (2009) reiterated that, the pre-jihad period in Sokoto Caliphate was a course whereby the key actors (scholars) faced problems such as women being denied Islamic rights such as education. And they are very concern about the proper socialization of children. That is why it is reprehensive to give-out marriage to corrupt people, because they can fail to deliver their duties to taking care of children. Oyelami (2025) examined the status of child education as viewed by Shehu Abdullahi. Therewith, the author views this:

“That among the features of education to be accorded to child include, moral training, safeguarding against corruption or bad companion’s, inculcating good character. A child is viewed as someone to be educated at early childhood, post-discernment, and maturity stages. There is no bias between the genders. That is Shehu for instance lampooned those who abhor women or girl-child education (Oyelami, 2025).”

7.Economic impacts

The economic implications or impacts of Shehu’s movement are diversified. Some of them will be illustrated here:

- Opposition to economic evils- During Shehu’s emergence, the nations were mired with various economic frauds such as heavy taxation of the poor, oppression, lack of fairness, unfair taxes, bribery, land racketing, and others. He rise and advocated against the foretasted in writings, and preaching (Islahi, 2008; Rufa’I, 2019; Jada et al., 2025; Bashar, 2026b).
- Following Islamic economic ideas- Shehu’s creation of Sokoto Caliphate was not to follow any constitution rather than Quran and Sunnah, therewith; some of the economic ideas established in the Sokoto Caliphate are Zakat, Waqf, Kharaj, Ganima, and others. These financial interventions generate wealth for the state to create roads, markets, schools, and other projects. The policies also provide social security by sponsoring widows, children’s, education, supporting the poor, and many other relevant aspects (Adam, 2023).
- Value- added economic activities- Shehu and his associates (in the Sokoto Caliphate) advocated for seeking for wealth through lawful ways including animal rearing, farming, industrial activities such as mat making, pot making, weaving, cloth sewing, wood making, healthcare provision, teaching, metal processing, food processing, and many others (Chafe, 1999; Hanafi & Jibril, 2024; Sharu & Abdullahi, 2026).

8. Conclusion

Shehu Usman Danfodiyo's migratory movements, driven by his mission of Islamic reform and social justice, had profound socioeconomic implications that continue to resonate today. His internal and external migrations facilitated the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, fostered educational development, and promoted social cohesion across diverse regions. Notably, his advocacy for women's empowerment and child education led to the emergence of systematic educational systems like the Yantaru, which aimed to bridge gender inequalities and uplift disadvantaged groups. Moreover, Shehu's emphasis on moral integrity and adherence to Islamic economic principles contributed to the establishment of a socio-economic order grounded in fairness, lawful wealth generation, and community support. These historical movements underscore the transformative power of migration as a tool for societal reformation, offering valuable lessons on the importance of education, social justice, and economic integrity in contemporary development efforts.

9. References

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