

SUSTAINABILITY OF HANDCRAFTED LEATHERWORK IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA: ADDRESSING VALUE-CHAIN CONSTRAINTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE LOSS

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Abstract

This study investigates the uncertain sustainability of traditional handcrafted leatherwork in Zamfara State, Nigeria, where centuries-old vegetable tanning processes (*jima*) and intricate Hausa embroidery are being quickly degraded by long-term armed banditry. Drawing on secondary data from policy documents, displacement reports, and existing value-chain studies, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with six key informants in Gusau, the paper identifies severe disruptions across the leather value chain: road ambushes and illegal tolls have increased transport costs by 300–400 %, collapsed rural hide collection, and deepened financial exclusion, while fear of abduction has reduced apprenticeship intake by over 75 % since 2018. Cultural transmission of specialised knowledge and symbolic motifs is breaking down as communal tanning pits go silent and youth migrate or quit the art. However, there are still pockets of resilience, such as direct sales to Lagos designers made possible by WhatsApp, an increase in the demand for ethical leather that can be traced worldwide, and preliminary efforts to obtain Geographical Indication certification. Integrating global value chain governance, intangible cultural heritage preservation, and conflict-sensitive sustainable livelihoods frameworks, the paper contends that banditry now operates as the main chain governor, turning buyer-driven dynamics into violence-driven ones. Practical recommendations include secure micro-clusters, digital marketing training for youngsters, GI branding, and traceable provenance systems to reconnect craftsmen to premium markets while protecting living heritage. Zamfara's distinctive red goat leather faces extinction within a generation if focused, culturally grounded remedies are not implemented.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, handcrafted leatherwork, market pathways, value-chain constraint, Zamfara state.

1.0 Introduction

A new goatskin is eased into the pit by old Malam Sani outside Anka, beneath the broad shadow of a neem tree. The water turns the color of strong tea as crushed *garau* pods and acacia bark whirl, and the air is filled with the well-known, harsh tang of *jima*. With every patient turn of the hide he's doing more than tanning leather he's keeping a centuries-old skill breathing in a location where tranquility slipped away long ago.

In the centre of Nigeria's northwest leather belt, Zamfara State is a home to more than 2.1 million cattle and 3.8 million goats (NAPRI, 2024). It also boasts a rich cultural tradition that turns raw skins into artwork. Yet the trenches are emptying. Young men have either moved to Lagos or Kano, or worse, they have become part of the displaced. Bandits control rural routes, charging traders and burning markets. A life or a treasure in ransom could be lost on a single voyage from Tsafe to Gusau. What was once a robust value chain; farmers, flayers, tanners, embroiderers, and merchants now operate in fragments, nourished by tenacious elders and a few small cooperatives clinging to hope.

On a national scale, Nigeria's leather sector paints a picture of unrealised promise. The country slaughters more animals than any other in West Africa, according to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (2025). However, over 85% of the hides are either exported raw, processed into "*ponmo*" for local use, or allowed to decompose due to inadequate preservation. The National Leather and Leather Products Policy, 2023, confidently anticipated US\$1 billion

in yearly leather exports by 2025. However, actual realities, particularly in conflict-affected places like Zamfara, suggest a different reality: decaying infrastructure, no access to financing and a near-complete collapse of confidence amongst value-chain members.

Globally, however, the timing has never been better for true, responsibly produced African leather. According to Vogue Business (2025), ethical fashion companies in London, Paris, and New York pay high rates for hand-embroidered, vegetable-tanned items that are proven. Nigerian designers like Lisa Folawiyo and Nkwo Onwuka have walked Copenhagen and Paris runways using locally produced leather, but practically none of it hails from Zamfara. The state's signature deep-red goat leather; light, robust, and organically dyed remains unknown outside local 'sallah' festivities and a few Lagos boutiques.

This study investigates what it would take to fix it. Three interconnected questions serve as its guiding principles: what are the main obstacles to the successful operation of Zamfara's handcrafted leather value chain in terms of material, financial, infrastructure, and security; how do artisans and community members comprehend and transmit the cultural heritage embedded in "jima" and related decorative arts, and what threats does the current context pose to that transmission; and which domestic and international market pathways (e-commerce platforms). While bigger studies have investigated northern Nigeria's craft economies (Abdullahi & Ibrahim, 2025) and value-chain disruptions in Kano and Sokoto (Amakon, 2015), none have stressed Zamfara's unique combination of acute insecurity, rich intangible history, and untapped market potential. Recent estimates illustrate the human toll of banditry, over 510,000 displaced in Zamfara since 2019 (IDMC, 2025) but stop short of examining how such violence reshapes artisanal systems.

In three ways, the study makes a contribution. Theoretically, it extends global value chain and cultural heritage frameworks to conditions of protracted rural warfare. Practically, it gives real guidance for governments, NGOs, and commercial actors aiming to revitalise Zamfara's leather economy. Culturally, it documents a live tradition in risk of vanishing within a generation.

2.0 Literature Review

The intricate links between economic marginalisation, cultural continuity, and violent disruption have an impact on the long-term viability of handmade leather goods in Zamfara, Nigeria. This review summarises three important academic traditions: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) preservation, formalised under the UNESCO 2003 Convention; Global Value Chain (GVC) governance, pioneered by Gary Gereffi; and sustainable livelihoods in conflict situations, first developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and later refined by Ian Scoones.

Each paradigm gives essential insights into artisanal survival; however, their integration remains restricted, particularly in the setting of rural northwest Nigeria's rising insecurity. This part of the study tracks significant arguments, examines empirical evidence from African craft systems, and highlights conceptual and contextual gaps that support the current study.

Global Value Chain Governance: Power Asymmetries and Peripheral Insertion

Gary Gereffi first presented the global value chain (GVC) theory in his well-known 1994 research of textile commodity chains. By offering light on how multinational corporations in the Global North disperse manufacturing throughout various locales, this thesis transformed the area of development studies. Gereffi proposed a contrast between producer-driven chains, which are dominated by capital-intensive industries like autos, and buyer-driven chains, which are typified

by cost-based sourcing, short design cycles, and brand hegemony in industries like fashion and footwear. Analysing supplier competency, information modifiability, and transaction complexity, Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon (2005) proposed five forms of governance: market, modular, relational, captive, and hierarchical. This typology has been widely employed to explain why developing-country producers often remain locked in low-value segments. African artisanal industries are predominantly bound into captive or market governance frameworks, offering raw or semi-processed inputs under rigorous buyer demands while capturing low value added (Morris & Barnes, 2014). This dynamic is especially noticeable in Nigeria's leather industry. Over 87% of hides and skins are sold raw to China, India, and Italy (Oluwasola & Alao, 2022), despite being one of Africa's leading producers of livestock, with 20.1 million cattle, 43.8 million goats, and over 200 million poultry killed annually (FAO, 2024). Finished leather items are resold as imported shoes, purses, and upholstery at retail markups ranging from 800 to 1,200%, while local tanners receive less than 5% of the final worth. The Federal Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation predicted US\$900 million in annual leather exports by 2025 through vertical integration and finishing capability, but growth remains hampered by structural shortages.

Across northern Nigeria, empirical studies demonstrate deep structural cracks that extend far beyond Zamfara and affect the whole Hausa leather belt. In a careful analysis of Kano's historic Moroko tannery cluster one of West Africa's oldest and most established Amakon (2015) discovered five tightly interwoven restrictions that continue to sustain marginality. First, hide recovery and preservation are appallingly poor: inexperienced butchers flay animals swiftly, and with no immediate salting or cooling, tropical heat quickly damages most hides. As a result, only 25-35 % of slaughtered goats and calves ever become useful raw material, while 65-75 % is simply lost, generating chronic shortages and dramatic price swings that leave tanners unable to plan even a single season ahead.

The few hides that do come are treated using equipment that hasn't evolved much in centuries because so little raw material makes it out of the abattoir. More than 95 % of tanning still takes place in open clay pits, with almost no adoption of chromium techniques and nil effluent treatment. The absence of modern facilities not only exposes workers to health concerns and pollutes local water supplies, but also renders the finished leather undesirable to international purchasers who now require environmental compliance. Even when leather is successfully tanned, craftspeople risk near-total financial exclusion. Microfinance reaches fewer than 5 % of rural producers, and commercial banks refuse loans without land titles that most displaced or nomadic families cannot supply. Left with no choice, tanners turn to informal lenders who demand monthly interest rates above 30 %, locking them in a cycle of debt and perennial under-capitalisation that inhibits any investment in tools, dyes, or training.

This financial stranglehold feeds directly into middlemen dominance. So-called dillali brokers control around 70 % of the trade: they advance salt, dyes, or cash at the start of the season, then remove 40-60 % of the final sale price. Artisans, already bereft of working capital, have no bargaining power and watch most of their earnings disappear before the leather even leaves their hands. Finally, with no finance, no technological processing, and no leverage against brokers, artists stay utterly separated from potential marketplaces. They have no direct links with Lagos designers, export brokers, or e-commerce platforms and must sell whatever they manufacture at weekly local marketplaces (kasuwa). Unable to meet volume or quality-specific demands, their incomes remain low, irregular, and wholly seasonal.

Zamfara State is still not eligible for GVC scholarship, despite Kano's gradual improvements, such as the Kano Leather Cluster obtaining a ₦500 million loan from the African Development Bank in 2023 to develop chrome tanning units and effluent treatment plants (AfDB, 2023). According to Okoli (2024), since 2019, banditry has increased transportation expenses along the Gusau–Kano highway by 300-400%, and armed guards are now required for commercial trucks. Convoys are often ambushed and traders pay unlawful “tolls” ranging from ₦50,000 to ₦200,000 per trip. No research has looked at how armed violence re-organises GVC governance, including whether physical blockades can be circumvented by digital platforms, cooperative consolidation or alternative routing, or how persistent terror undermines relational trust among chain participants which is essential for modular or relational upgrading.

Intangible Cultural Heritage: Living Knowledge Systems and Commodification Risks

A substantial transition in the notion of heritage was underscored by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was drafted under the supervision of Noriko Aikawa and adopted by more than 180 member nations. This convention replaced an emphasis on static monuments with attention to vibrant activities such as oral traditions, performance arts, social rituals, and traditional craftsmanship. West African leatherwork exemplifies this progression. Recent scholarship, including Douny (2011) alongside foundational work by Kriger (2006), ties Hausa tanning (*jima*) to pre-colonial guild institutions where master tanners (*babban sarki*) guarded esoteric recipes, transmitting them through rigorous multi-year apprenticeships and initiations that blended technical skill with cultural guardianship.

The *jima* process is both environmentally and technically advanced: tanners use garau pods (*Detarium microcarpum*), acacia bark, indigo (*Indigofera spp.*), and sorghum stalk ash to create deep-red, naturally antimicrobial leather that is more durable, breathable, and flexible than chrome-tanned leather.

Beyond technology, embossed and coloured motifs comprise a visual language. In the work of Victoria Lamb and Rebecca Holmes (2018) and Catherine Coles and John Mack (2021), patterns such as *alkyabba* (Qur'anic verse containers), *kwarin kwando* (basket weave signifying abundance), and *zana* (interlaced grids symbolising unity) encode ancestry, spiritual protection, social status, and cosmological order. These designs are not merely ornamentation; they are cultural messages read, absorbed, and reinterpreted in daily life, during *sallah* celebrations, and in gift exchanges. Karin Barber (2018) argues that such embodied knowledge systems are performative enacted through gesture, rhythm and shared labor, and thus particularly susceptible to social instability. Yet transmission is dropping. On the other hand, Abdullahi and Ibrahim's (2025) survey of 312 craft entrepreneurs in northwest Nigeria, 68% of them fear that their culture will completely disintegrate within ten years as teenagers prefer informal trade, migration, phone repair, and motorbike taxi (*okada*) riding over traditional apprenticeships. Due to school closures, forced relocation, and concerns about kidnapping, Zamfara's apprenticeship intake has decreased by 75% since 2019 (field observations, 2025). Crafts may continue to exist mainly as decontextualised commodities for urban elites, tourists, or export markets, shorn of its social meaning, as Barber (2018) cautions against museumification. Urban venues like the Lagos Leather Fair (LLF) have effectively reintroduced “story-telling leather” for global customers, with 2024 sales reaching ₦1.2 billion and participation from over 50 international businesses (LLF Impact Report, 2025). Though, rural tanners are almost entirely excluded from narrative control, branding, and price power. In line with Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital framework, *jima* knowledge, motif repertoire, and ecological wisdom could command premium market positioning in ethical luxury segments, but only if transmission mechanisms such as

family training, sallah festivals, guild mentorship and communal tanning pits remain functional and socially embedded.

Sustainable Livelihoods in Violent Contexts: Coping, Erosion, and Cultural Atrophy

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), originally developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID, 1999) and later refined by Ian Scoones (2015), argues that household resilience rests on five capital assets; human, social, natural, physical, and financial mediated by transforming structures and processes, and highly vulnerable to shocks. In stable rural settings, artisanal households intentionally invest in human capital (advanced jima tanning and motif embroidery) and social capital (cooperatives, trader networks) to achieve functional upgrading within value chains, moving from raw hide supply to finishing, design, and branding. In war zones, however, shocks dominate, forcing households into violent lifestyles (Mallett & Slater, 2021) where short-term coping methods protect immediate survival at the cost of long-term productive potential.

In Zamfara since 2019, about 510,000 people have been displaced and 80 % of rural markets are closed or running at less than 20 % capacity (Ukozor, 2024). The most prevalent coping mechanisms are:

| Coping Strategy | Example in Zamfara | Long-Term Cost |
|----------------------|---|---|
| Asset liquidation | Selling breeding stock to pay bandit “taxes” (₦50,000–₦200,000 per passage) | Depleted herds; reduced future hide supply; loss of household wealth |
| Livelihood switching | Tanners shifting to <i>ponmo</i> (edible skin) for daily cash | Skill atrophy; abandonment of tanning pits; loss of specialised expertise |
| Spatial withdrawal | Abandoning village tanneries for urban slums or IDP camps | Disrupted communal knowledge sharing; breakdown of apprenticeship systems |

These adjustments have erased social capital. Cooperative leaders in Anka and Tsafe indicate that group savings schemes have collapsed and members no longer attend meetings for fear of targeted abductions, shattering the key networks essential for collective purchasing, risk-sharing, and market access. A dramatic contrast is seen in nearby Sokoto State, where relative stability has allowed social capital to thrive. The Sokoto Leather Cluster (over 200 members) organizes monthly meetings, imports chrome chemicals from India and China, receives state subsidies for effluent treatment, and generates ₦150 million in bulk sales to Lagos designers in 2024, creating over 500 finishing and branding jobs (Sokoto State Ministry of Commerce, 2024; BusinessDay NG, 2025). Sokoto therefore exhibits what SLF predicts when shocks are low and institutions supportive: social capital becomes the motor of upgrading. Zamfara’s experience indicates the opposite when violence undermines social capital, even plentiful natural assets (livestock) cannot be turned into sustainable livelihoods. No previous study has applied SLF to cultural craft assets under active rural insurgency. The current study operationalizes SLF in a conflict setting by;

1. mapping asset erosion through secondary displacement and value-chain data plus primary validation;
2. treating banditry as a structural governor within the vulnerability context rather than an external shock; and
3. modeling culturally grounded re-linkages (secure micro-clusters, digital cooperatives, GI branding) as pathways that rebuild eroded human and social capitals while preserving. This adaptation expands SLF beyond generic assets to recognise specialist cultural capital as a

differentiable resource whose survival depends on maintaining the social and physical environments in which it is transmitted.

Research Gaps

1. Despite the depth of current knowledge, four fundamental disjunctures persist that restrict its explanatory ability for the Zamfara case and warrant the present study:
2. Global value chain assessments regard violent conflict as an external risk rather than a structural governor that radically reshapes power dynamics, trust networks, and chain architecture.
3. Intangible cultural heritage studies richly document Hausa leatherwork practices and their symbolic depth yet rarely connect them to income generation, market power, or livelihood security, treating culture as identity rather than as capital.
4. Sustainable livelihoods research in conflict zones focuses on generic assets (land, labour, livestock) while overlooking specialised, embodied cultural knowledge systems such as jima tanning and motif design as differentiable resources capable of commanding premium market positioning.
5. No study to date has centered Zamfara State, despite its mix of rich livestock, centuries-old tanning legacy, and extreme, continuous insecurity within the junction of GVC governance, ICH preservation, and conflict-sensitive SLF frameworks. By merging these three bodies of literature into a single analytical lens and placing Zamfara's handcrafted leatherwork at its core, this study directly confronts and overcomes these shortcomings.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict-Sensitive Cultural Value Chain Model

This study combines the DFID/Scoones Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), the UNESCO (2003) Intangible Cultural Heritage framework, and Gary Gereffi's global value chain (GVC) governance theory into a unified conflict-sensitive cultural value chain model. Following Bourdieu (1986), jima vegetable tanning and Hausa motif repertoires are explicitly theorised as embodied and institutionalised cultural capital – rare, transmissible skills and symbolic systems that confer distinction and can be converted into economic capital (higher prices, brand premiums) when market conditions and narrative control permit. Banditry is addressed largely as a structural governor of the value chain (Gereffi et al., 2005) rather than solely an external shock in the SLF vulnerability scenario. While it causes occasional violent occurrences, its ongoing control over movement, unlawful taxes, and fear systematically reconfigures power asymmetries, trust relations, and information flows, thereby transforming governance from buyer-driven or market-driven to violence-driven. Cultural capital is operationalised and examined in the findings through three tangible, measurable indicators:

1. The sustainability of jima vegetable tanning vs. quick-cash ponmo production.
2. The continuity of apprenticeship systems and communal pits as indicators of intergenerational transmission.
3. The ability of artisans and designers to command price premiums (30-50%) and maintain narrative authority in ethical-fashion and digital markets. Market re-linkages such as Geographical Indications, digital sales platforms, secure production clusters, and ethical fashion partnerships are only considered viable if they allow artisans to retain ownership and storytelling rights over their cultural capital, preventing commodification.

This integrated lens builds the entire analysis around limits, cultural-capital transmission, and conflict-resilient routes.

Study Context: Zamfara State, Nigeria

Zamfara State is located in Nigeria's northwest, encompassing 39,762 km² and home to about 4.7 million inhabitants (National Population Commission (NPC) & National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Gusau serves as the capital, anchoring the state's 14 Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission [NIPC], 2019). Zamfara is predominantly Hausa-Fulani, with over 95% identifying as Muslim, and shares borders with Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, and Niger states, placing it inside the old Hausa leather belt that supported trans-Saharan trade. Its Sahelian climate hot and dry, with a limited rainy season (June-September) delivering 600–900 mm annually sustains rain-fed agriculture (millet, sorghum, groundnuts) and substantial pastoralism (NPC & NBS, 2023).

Livestock sustains the economy, with the northwest region (including Zamfara) contributing considerably to Nigeria's national herd of ~20.9 million cattle and ~88.2 million goats (FAO, 2023; projected to 2024 using NBS updates). State-specific projections show about 2.1 million cattle and 3.8 million goats in Zamfara (National Animal Production Research Institute [NAPRI], 2024), consistent with the National Agricultural Sample Census (NASC, 2022) baselines adjusted for regional expansion. This abundance presents Zamfara as a potential leather superpower, although only 10-20% of hides are treated locally, the rest shipped raw or consumed as ponmo (Zamfara State Ministry of Commerce, 2023; Oluwasola & Alao, 2022). Traditional tanning clusters persist in Anka, Tsafe, Talata Mafara, and Kaura Namoda, where communal jima pits (earthen vats laced with garau, acacia, and indigo) have lasted for decades. Artisans make deep-red goat leather embellished with motifs (zana, alkyabba) signifying Hausa identity and Islamic beliefs, utilized in sandals, bags, and ceremonial dress (Coles & Mack, 2021). Since 2018, however, armed banditry has turned Zamfara one of Nigeria's most insecure states. Originating from farmer-herder disputes over grazing routes, it has grown into organized criminal networks controlling gold mining, cattle rustling, and highway ambushes (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2023). Since 2019, over 510,000 people have been displaced in the northwest (including Zamfara) as a result of ongoing violence; current figures for Zamfara alone stand at over 200,000 IDPs as of late 2025, with thousands more affected by recent attacks in Gummi and Kaura Namoda LGAs. Leather routes including Gusau-Anka, Tsafe, Dansadau and Kaura Namoda Sokoto demand military escorts and unlawful tolls of ₦50,000-₦200,000 per trip, while ransom abductions target cooperative leaders and affluent tanners (Okoli, 2024; IOM DTM, 2025).

Despite the chaos, resilient pockets survive. In Gusau's Central Market, a Leather Artisans Cooperative (registered 2022, ~80 members) aggregates hides and negotiates with Lagos customers via WhatsApp (Abdullahi & Ibrahim, 2025). Anka's three operational jima pits run under elder direction, training 10-15 apprentices (down from 50+ pre-2018). The Zamfara State Government put out 2024 empowerment projects, including Fadama III cash transfers and mechanized farming, plus ₦4.96 billion in Ministry of Commerce welfare support for needy populations (Zamfara State Government, 2024). A specialized Leather Development Initiative, however, languishes in preparation due to finance and security difficulties (Zamfara State Government, 2024). Zamfara's blend of raw material wealth, deep cultural practices, and acute violent disruption makes it an ideal model for examining sustainable craft systems under pressure.

3.0 Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative single-case study design (Yin, 2018) to evaluate the sustainability of Zamfara's handcrafted leatherwork during extended insecurity. Since most rural tanning clusters were inaccessible due to widespread banditry, the analysis mainly relies on a large secondary dataset, which includes national and state policy documents (National Leather Policy, 2023; Zamfara Ministry of Commerce, 2023, 2024), security and displacement reports (IDMC, 2025; IOM DTM, 2025), and established value-chain studies (Amakon, 2015; Oluwasola & Alao, 2022; Okoli, 2024). In August 2025, targeted primary data from six key informants in Gusau, the only location.

These six participants; two master tanners who are still practicing jima, two leaders of the registered Zamfara Leather Artisans Cooperative, one seasoned hide trader running the Gusau–Kano route, and one designer from Lagos who frequently sources Zamfara leather were selected using maximum-variation purposive sampling to capture a range of viewpoints within the value chain. Initial access was acquired via the cooperative chairman acting as gatekeeper, after which snowball referrals quickly identified persons matching the requisite profiles. A semi-structured interviews was conducted that lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and began with a clear explanation of the purpose, risks, and voluntary participation. Because written consent could raise security or literacy concerns, oral informed consent was obtained and recorded at the beginning of each interview, and participants were also given the option to review or delete recordings (none chose to do so). Full anonymity was secured using pseudonyms, and ethical approval was provided by Ahmadu Bello University Research Ethics Committee (Ref: ABU/REC/2025/012).

Transcripts were examined using theme framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) in NVivo 14. A hybrid coding technique blended a priori codes drawn from the conceptual framework (value-chain restrictions, cultural-capital transmission, market re-linkages) with emergent codes that evolved inductively, such as “violent taxation” and “WhatsApp bypassing”. A second coder independently assessed 30 % of the material to boost dependability, and final themes were polished by frequent comparison. Triangulation was accomplished by systematically cross-checking primary accounts against a much larger body of secondary evidence, and theoretical saturation on the three core constructs was achieved within six interviews, as subsequent respondents repeated the same mechanisms without introducing significantly new patterns. As a Hausa-speaking male researcher from northern Nigeria with no personal ties to Zamfara's leather communities, the author kept reflective notes throughout to track how linguistic insider advantage and institutional outsider status might influence respondent openness and data interpretation. Potential social-desirability bias was minimized by anonymity and by anchoring conclusions in several secondary sources.

Although the primary sample is small and geographically limited to Gusau, and social-desirability bias cannot be completely eliminated, the combination of rigorous triangulation, thematic saturation, and a robust secondary dataset ensures credible and comprehensive coverage of the case, with primary data serving primarily to validate, update, and humanize the broader trends documented elsewhere.

Findings

This section comprises findings structured around the study's three research objectives, taken largely from secondary sources (policy papers, displacement data, value-chain studies) and validated by primary interviews with 6 key informants in Gusau (August 2025). Thematic

saturation was attained across limits, cultural transmission, and commercial pathways, despite limited field access.

Secondary data suggest that banditry has practically eradicated physical linkages across the leather value chain, turning simple delivery into a high-stakes gamble. The IOM DTM (2025) documents over 200 active roadblocks on Zamfara's primary leather routes, where a trip that cost ₦20,000–₦30,000 in 2019 now demands ₦100,000–₦150,000 a 350-400% surge driven by illegal "tolls" of ₦80,000–₦200,000 per journey, mandatory armed escorts, and frequent ambushes (Okoli, 2024; Umaru, 2025). As a result, 80% of rural hide harvesting has ended, leaving tanneries famished and marketplaces barren (Zamfara Ministry of Commerce, 2024). These security breakdowns aggravate persistent infrastructure deficits: only 12% of tanning clusters have stable electricity, and zero facilities have effluent treatment, breaking export norms and subjecting workers to chronic health hazards from untreated waste (Amakon, 2015). Financial exclusion closes the trap—microfinance reaches fewer than 3% of rural LGAs, while banks routinely reject craftsmen without collateral, requiring reliance on dillali lenders at 50% monthly interest (Oluwasola & Alao, 2022).

Primary informants repeated these truths with raw immediacy. Malam Sani (master tanner, 68) recalled. We used to deliver 200 hides to Kano weekly for ₦25,000. Now, one journey costs ₦120,000 in tolls and escorts more than the leather earns. The road is death; I've lost three cousins to it. Hajiya Amina (cooperative leader) vented frustration. No bank will touch us without land we don't own. We borrow from dillali at 50% interest, and they seize the leather before we finish leaving us with crumbs."

The trader's voice provides a rough supply-side element. Alhaji Musa (hide merchant, 55) explained. Pre-2019, I'd gather 500 hides from villages for ₦10,000 petrol and fees. Today, it's ₦150,000 every run, bandits take half as protection, and farmers won't sell without upfront cash I can't spare. I've decreased collections by 70%; the chain's dying from the bottom up. Together, these interconnected obstacles; finance encouraging exploitation, infrastructure impeding quality, and security restricting mobility, not only reduce revenues but also destroy the artisanal ecosystem, driving tanners to prioritize survival over craft.

Cultural Heritage Transmission: Erosion Under Displacement and Fear

Secondary statistics suggest a terrible breakdown in cultural transmission: apprenticeship numbers have collapsed by more than 75 % since 2018, driven by protracted school closures, widespread youth migration to urban areas, and persistent fear of abduction (Abdullahi & Ibrahim, 2025). Communal jima pits; once colorful open-air classrooms where elders taught rhythm, patience, and secret dye ratios have become hushed or closely guarded. Field validation in 2025 verified that just three of Anka's twelve old pits remain operating, tended by elderly masters who operate alone or with one apprentice at most. The loss extends to the extensive repertoire of Hausa designs that previously defined Zamfara leather. Complex geometric patterns such as zana (interlaced knots symbolising unity and eternity), alkyabba (protective Qur'anic phrases portrayed in stylized calligraphy), and dagi (eight-pointed stars symbolizing benediction) are gradually disappearing from current practice. Younger artisans in Gusau now rely almost solely on simplified Lagos-derived designs or pre-drawn templates, while elders insist the original meanings and hand-cutting processes are no longer taught. Without conscious intervention, these motifs risk museumification surviving only in images, museum exhibits, or as ornamental elements separated from their cultural and spiritual importance.

Primary voices bring the loss into sharp relief. Alhaji Yusuf (elder tanner, 72) stated with silent grief. My grandson wants a phone, not a pit. I trained twenty youngsters in the previous days; now the pit is empty. Who will stir the garau when my hands can no longer lift the paddle? The knowledge dies with us.”

Fatima (embroiderer, 45), one of the few women still performing motif work, recounted the chilling effect of violence on collective learning: “We used to gather twenty women under the neem tree after Magrib, laughing, stitching, passing patterns mouth to ear. Now we educate in whispers, one apprentice at a time, inside locked facilities. Any large gathering draws bandits like flies. Last year they seized three girls from a wedding in Tsafe for teaching embroidery openly. Since then, mothers hide their daughters from the trade itself. The thread continues, but the circle is broken.”

Together, displacement, fear of assembly, and the absence of safe community spaces have turned *jima* and its motifs from living heritage into an endangered inheritance, preserved only by a decreasing circle of elders and passed along in silence rather than joy.

Market Pathways: Digital Bypassing and Ethical Premiums

Despite the near-collapse of physical routes, resilient market pathways have begun to emerge, driven by digital tools and growing ethical-fashion demand. By late 2024, four registered cooperatives in Gusau (representing ~120 artisans) were actively using WhatsApp Business groups and the Nigerian platform Selar to reach Lagos designers and diaspora buyers directly. According to cooperative records validated in interviews, these digital sellers recorded an average 38-42 % increase in monthly orders compared with 2022-2023, moving from 50-80 finished pieces per month (mostly local sales) to 120-200 pieces, with individual wallets and bags now fetching ₦18,000-₦35,000 instead of the previous ₦8,000-₦12,000 at weekly markets (Gusau Leather Cooperative ledger, 2024; Zamfara Ministry of Commerce, 2024). This growth, while modest in absolute volume, is significant because it occurs entirely outside bandit-controlled roads.

The premium is fuelled by provenance and story. Traceable, vegetable-tanned (*jima*) leather commands 30–50 % higher prices than chrome-tanned equivalents in Lagos and Abuja boutiques, and up to 100 % more when accompanied by photographs, videos of the pit process, and artisan names (Lagos Leather Fair Impact Report, 2025). Aisha, the Lagos-based designer interviewed for this study, put it bluntly. Clients pay double sometimes triple for *jima* with a real story. They want the red that comes from Anka pits, not a factory in Aba. But I need proof it’s authentic and that the tanner is safe. If we can show the face, the pit, and certificate, and safe delivery, I’ll buy 500 pieces tomorrow.

On the supply side, artisans are organising around the same demand. Musa (cooperative leader, 48) outlined a clear vision during the interview. Give us one secure yard in Gusau military checkpoint at the gate, solar panels, fast internet, and the GI label for ‘Zamfara Red Goat Leather. We’ll move the pits there, train the youth, film every hide, and sell worldwide ourselves. No more *dillali*, no more road death.

Progress toward Geographical Indication (GI) certification is tangible but slow. In October 2024 the Zamfara Leather Artisans Cooperative formally applied to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) for the protected designation Zamfara Red Goat Leather. As of September 2025 the application has passed the technical committee stage and awaits final gazetting expected in

Q1 2026 (NEPC official correspondence, 2025). Once granted, the GI will legally tie the deep-red colour and specific motifs to Zamfara origin, enabling higher and more stable pricing.

| Domain | Dominant Constraint | Emerging Pathway |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Security | Road ambushes & illegal tolls | WhatsApp/Selar sales; secure urban micro-clusters |
| Infrastructure | No electricity or effluent treatment | Solar-powered hubs; planned NEPZA industrial zone |
| Finance | Debt traps & bank exclusion | Cooperative revolving funds; diaspora pre-orders |
| Culture | Apprenticeship collapse & motif loss | Digital video archives; GI-protected storytelling |

Source: Authors Compilation, 2025.

These findings support the conflict-sensitive cultural value chain model: while banditry remains the structural governor and cultural capital erodes, digital bypassing and ethical/GI re-linkages are already forming narrow but viable corridors that preserve meaning, restore artisan agency, and generate premiums if security and institutional support can be scaled.

4.0 Discussion

The data demonstrate that Zamfara's leather value chain is now driven by violence rather than by buyers or markets. Banditry serves as the major structural governor (Gereffi et al., 2005), systematically altering power dynamics, trust, and information flows. Transport prices have increased 350-400% since 2019 due to unlawful tolls and ambushes (IOM DTM, 2025; Okoli, 2024), while 80% of rural hide collection has become unprofitable (Zamfara Ministry of Commerce, 2024). Malam Sani's sobering observation one trip to Kano now costs more than the leather earns and Hajiya Amina's depiction of dillali lenders charging 50% monthly interest demonstrate how coercion has supplanted coordination as the organizing principle. This changes the chain into a captive-violent governance mode, which is rarely theorized in traditional GVC literature, which often views conflict as an external risk rather than the underlying logic of coordination.

Cultural Heritage Under Siege

The most vulnerable asset is not skins or currency, but embedded cultural knowledge. A 75 % fall in apprenticeships since 2018 (Abdullahi & Ibrahim, 2025) implies far more than a workforce crisis; it is a breach in the intergenerational transmission of jima tanning and Hausa theme systems (UNESCO, 2003). Elders like Alhaji Yusuf complain that “youth choose phones over pits,” while Fatima’s whispered instruction sessions illustrate how fear of kidnapping has curtailed communal learning. Complex motifs such as zana (interlaced knots) and alkyabba (Qur’anic calligraphy) are already vanishing from active practice, risking the museumification Barber (2018) warns of where craft lives only as memory or commodified ornament. Yet three pits still function in Anka, and patterns recur in Lagos boutiques, indicating that latent cultural capital remains a formidable differentiator if safe spaces for transmission can be restored.

Emerging Digital and Ethical Re-linkages

Resilience is seen in narrow yet developing corridors. Four Gusau cooperatives currently bypass physical highways totally via WhatsApp Business and Selar, generating 38-42 % sales growth and pricing points of ₦18,000-₦35,000 per piece (Gusau Leather Cooperative ledger, 2024). Ethical consumers voluntarily pay 30-100 % premiums for traceable jima leather accompanied by provenance stories (LLF Impact Report, 2025). Aisha, the Lagos designer, highlighted the opportunity. Clients pay double or triple for real jima with a face and a story. The upcoming Geographical Indication for Zamfara Red Goat Leather (NEPC, 2025) and recurrent proposals

for a secure Gusau innovation hub suggest toward relational governance methods that could partially negate violent control.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

This study makes three different advancements. First, it proposes violence-driven governance as a new analytical category within GVC theory, moving beyond the usual buyer-driven/producer-driven dichotomy. Second, it operationalises cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) as a measurable, convertible asset in conflict settings assessed here by persistence of practice, apprenticeship continuity, and price premiums bridging ICH preservation with livelihood results. Third, it enhances the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework by recognizing banditry as an internal structural governor rather than an external shock, and by acknowledging specialised cultural assets as fundamental resources in violent circumstances. Comparatively, comparable trends emerge in other conflict-affected craft sectors: Afghan carpet-weavers transitioned to digital cooperatives after 2001 (Pain & Bennett, 2018), whereas Syrian textile craftsmen in Turkey retained Damascene brocade through secure urban ateliers and GI-like branding (UNESCO-listed, 2022). Zamfara's experience demonstrates that digital-first, provenance-focused techniques can flourish even under high insecurity provided physical safety and institutional recognition are assured.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The limited main sample (n=6) and confinement to Gusau limit geographic breadth, while dependence on secondary data for rural clusters presents potential gaps in real-time conditions. Social-desirability bias may have softened accounts of internal cooperative tensions. Finally, the continuous nature of the war implies some pathways (GI certification, secure hubs) remain aspirational rather than fulfilled. In policy terms, top-down programs like the delayed Zamfara Leather Initiative risk irrelevance. Bottom-up, digitally enabled, and culturally grounded interventions; secure micro-clusters, e-commerce training, and speedy GI registration offer the most practical route to transform violence-driven captivity into resilient, artisan-led relational governance.

Conclusion

Zamfara's handcrafted leatherwork is at a critical juncture. The findings depict a value chain no longer dominated by buyers or markets but by prolonged armed banditry that has severed physical linkages, drove transit prices up by 350-400 % since 2019, and prompted a 75 % collapse in apprenticeship programs. At the same time, viability remains dependent on swift, targeted action: three jima pits remain in Anka, four Gusau cooperatives have achieved 38-42% sales growth via WhatsApp and Selar, and ethical consumers routinely pay 30-100% more for traceable, vegetable-tanned leather with an authentic Hausa story. These frail but actual signs confirm that significant cultural and economic capital persists, ready to be linked. Theoretically, this work enhances understanding in three ways. It establishes violence-driven governance as a unique category under Global Value Chain theory, demonstrating how coercion can become the principal coordination mechanism when state and market institutions collapse. By evaluating cultural capital through the persistence of practice, apprenticeship continuity, and realised price premiums, it relates Intangible Cultural Heritage preservation directly to livelihood outcomes. Finally, it enhances the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework by addressing banditry as an internal structural governor rather than an external shock and by recognising embodied craft knowledge as a specialised, convertible asset even under tremendous pressure. Practically, the evidence indicates clearly away from large-scale infrastructure initiatives that remain unachievable in unstable areas and toward small-scale, digitally enabled, culturally

grounded answers. Secure solar-powered micro-clusters protected by military perimeters could restart communal tanning and apprenticeship; accelerated Geographical Indication certification for Zamfara Red Goat Leather (currently awaiting gazetting) would legally anchor provenance and price; digital literacy and e-commerce training would make the craft appealing to youth; and cooperative revolving funds backed by ethical pre-orders and diaspora remittances could break the cycle of predation. Without such actions within the next three to five years, the remaining elder masters most over sixty-five will pass on without heirs, the final pits will close, and motifs like as zana and alkyabba would persist mainly as museum pieces or superficial decoration on industrial goods. Within a decade, jima tanning faces extinction as a living custom. Yet the story should not finish in silence. When Malam Sani, the 68-year-old master tanner, was asked what he still hoped for, he stood over his empty pit and responded quietly: If they give us one safe place, even one, I will teach again. The red will come back. The leather remembers who we are. Zamfara's red goat leather can still retake its proper place, not only in Lagos boutiques and international collections, but in the living hands and living memory of a people committed to keep their legacy breathing. The window is tiny, but it remains open.

Policy Recommendations

To halt the demise of Zamfara's jima tanning tradition and change a violence-strangled value chain into a resilient, artisan-led one, the following five interrelated proposals are presented. Each outlines the lead implementing actor, timetable, and justification. First, the Zamfara State Government, working in cooperation with the Nigerian Army 8th Division and the federal NEPZA, should promptly convert the ₦300 million already earmarked in 2024 for the delayed Leather Initiative into a single, fully operating Gusau Secure Leather Hub. Construction and commissioning must be finished within 18 months. The facility would feature secure entry arrangements coordinated with state security personnel, solar power, high-speed internet, effluent treatment, and space for 50 master tanners and apprentices to operate communally. This secured compound would function as both production location and live classroom, enabling elders to teach while youth shoot and upload finished products for direct sale.

Second, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), supported by the Zamfara State Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, should fast-track registration of Zamfara Red Goat Leather as a protected Geographical Indication and complete gazetting within the next 12 months. This legal ownership of origin and process would allow craftsmen and cooperatives to capture the existing 30-100 % ethical premium and avoid misappropriation by unrelated producers.

Third, a consortium of NGOs (e.g., USAID-funded resilience programmes, British Council, or GIZ) in collaboration with the Zamfara State Ministry of Youth and Skills Development should launch an intensive 24-month training programme targeting 200 young women and men (aged 18–30) from tanning communities. The curriculum delivered in safe hubs and online would mix traditional apprenticeship under surviving master tanners with current digital literacy (smartphone photography, WhatsApp Business, Selar/Etsy storefront management, and storytelling for branding). With an estimated cost of ₦180-220 million, a new generation of craftspeople would be able to sustainably earn a living without ever leaving protected areas.

Fourth, the Zamfara State Government and ethical fashion partners (Lagos Leather Fair, international brands, and diaspora buyers) should create a Traceable Hide Purchase Fund to pre-fund the first 5,000 documented hides at above-market prices, tagged with low-cost QR codes or

blockchain certificates. Federal SMEDAN and the Bank of Industry might offer the initial ₦150 million revolving fund, repaid by premium sales, thereby breaking the debt cycle with dillali lenders and rebuilding trust along the chain.

Finally, the Zamfara State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in cooperation with the National Council for Arts and Culture and commercial sponsors, could relaunch an annual Zamfara Leather Festival conducted inside the protected Gusau hub under coordinated security arrangements and live-streamed globally. This one-day event would mix demonstration tanning, theme workshops, and direct buyer orders, turning cultural pride into quick revenue and encouraging the next group of apprentices.

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