



Economic Empowerment for Pastoralist Women: A Comparative Look at Program Experience in Uganda, Somaliland and Sudan

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**Economic Empowerment for Pastoralist Women:
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PASTORAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK IN THE HORN OF AFRICA (PENHA)

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1. Introduction

PENHA (the Pastoral & Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa) is a regional NGO, focused on pastoral development, operating across the Greater Horn, with offices in Uganda, Somaliland, Sudan and Eritrea. PENHA has a longstanding commitment to gender equality, with a strong public statement in its Nazareth (Ethiopia) Declaration of 1995, and a series of context-specific studies on gender and pastoralism. Subsequently, different PENHA country chapters pushed for increased attention to gender and efforts to promote social change, often against resistance from those wanting an almost exclusive focus on things such as animal health and water supply. There is now a broad consensus on the centrality of gender in development, but pastoralist women remain under-served by governments and development agencies, the marginalized of the marginalized. In 2007, PENHA undertook a regional Women's Economic Empowerment program, funded by DANIDA. The program covers selected pastoralist communities in Uganda, Somaliland and Sudan.

This paper seeks to draw lessons from program experience in the three countries. It points to the effectiveness of business skills training for women's groups in pastoral areas, when combined with grants for rotating funds that enable women to acquire productive assets and expand their micro-enterprises. While, microcredit may be difficult to implement with partly mobile communities in which women do own land or assets that can be used as collateral, it is increasingly viable in the growing towns and trading centres in and around which pastoralists are living more settled lives. The value of support for women's micro-enterprises is recognized, with significant social impacts through increased household spending on children's health and education, as well as strengthened women's groups that can support a wide variety of activities outside the home. But, the paper also points to the need for efforts at the "meso" level to promote small and medium sized enterprises that can employ significant numbers of women, as well as to work at the macro (policy) level to promote a more business-friendly environment, with supportive transport and communications infrastructure and regulatory frameworks.

2. The Program

There are several components to the program:

- Business Skills Training
- Strengthening Women's Groups, with training in group formation and dynamics
- Start-up Grants – capitalizing revolving funds and providing exotic goat stock and sewing machines
- "Upstream" work with business networks, "meso-level" actors and policymakers

Value Chain Studies conducted in each country aim to identify opportunities for interventions that increase mark-ups (profit margins) for women in existing value chains or enable women to enter new markets.

The program began with Socio-Economic Baseline Studies, intended to inform program design, so that training and other activities are closely tailored to local needs, as well as to provide quantitative and qualitative data for monitoring and evaluation.

With dispersed pastoral populations, distant from economic centres, high transport costs limit regular follow-up by field staff, but the program has made good use of mobile phone networks, which cover most of the program areas and allow frequent updates and information gathering.

The program also aims to:

- Increase women's access to information – with information on new IGAs and regional study tours
- increase access to credit – making women more “bankable” and linking them up with finance providers
- increase women's participation in business networks – locally and nationally

The program will, at a later stage, involve regional exchanges involving pastoralist women and practitioners as well as policy work and analytical outputs.

Importantly, we want to work in an integrated way at several different levels, defining “pastoralist woman” expansively. We are focusing on poor pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women, but we are also working with educated, urban women of pastoralist origin, who have one foot in the pastoralist communities and another in the major economic centres, and are capable of establishing medium and larger scale enterprises that might employ pastoralist women or source goods in the pastoralist communities.

The program provides generic business skills training to over 400 women, all leading members of women's groups with 20-30 members, and provides support for these women to train other group members and in some instances women outside their groups. In each country, training and complementary interventions are tailored to local conditions. A great deal of attention is paid to the quality of the (participatory) training and facilitation. Given the importance of cohesive women's groups, training also incorporates sessions on group management.

2.1 Areas of Operation

Uganda

In Uganda, the semi-arid “Cattle Corridor” sweeps across the country from the Rwanda and Tanzania borders in the Southwest, to the Kenya border in the East.

We are working with:

- The Bahima and Banyarwanda communities of Western Uganda's relatively high-rainfall, semi-arid "Cattle Corridor", living in close proximity to farming communities.
- The agro-pastoral communities of Teso District in the East
- The overwhelmingly pastoralist districts of the Karamoja region in the North-East.

Somaliland

The self-declared Republic of Somaliland is a predominantly pastoral country, with the continent's highest ratio of livestock to people, and close ties to Ethiopia's Region V and the more agricultural Southern Somalia.

We are working in:

- The pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the North-West and those bordering Ethiopia's Somali Region V.

Sudan

In Eastern Sudan's Kassala State, we are working in three localities:

- Galsa (with around 12,000 families)
- Fadayeeb (with around 6,300 families)
- Sursur (with around 250 families)

The pastoralist and agro-pastoralist tribes of the area, composed of the Bani Amir (around 60% of the inhabitants), Hadandawa (around 25%) and other ethnic groups (around 10%), are semi-nomadic and overwhelmingly muslim. There are strong social, economic and ethnic links across the borders with Eritrea and Ethiopia.

3. Our Concept of Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is, in essence, the expansion of choice. It is about liberty as well as enhanced capability. Empowered women are free to choose – they may wish to be housewives, businesswomen, nurses or doctors.

Nick Stern, in his time at the World Bank, emphasized a very broad concept of empowerment, describing it as "the ability of people to shape their own lives, to take decisions that can broaden ... and deepen the lives of themselves and their family. " Pastoralist men also need to be empowered, they may enjoy power over pastoralist women, but they marginalized in society at large, and have low levels of education and knowledge outside of pastoralism. And pastoralist women need to become empowered within harmonious, well-functioning families and societies.

For pastoralist women, empowerment involves several essential elements:

- Education – particularly, basic literacy and numeracy
- Access to information
- Independent incomes
- Human rights and the right to own property

Almost all pastoralist women are economically active, but they need help to develop their income-generating activities into businesses. Women's groups can become cooperatives – scaling up their businesses.

But, most people are not entrepreneurs - in the long run, empowering pastoral women means getting more girls into school and expanding employment opportunities. It will be necessary to go beyond basic literacy and numeracy, paying attention to the quality of schooling available and raising secondary school enrollment rates. More pastoralist women must become teachers and nurses, supporting increased public and private service provision. (There is a strong case here for affirmative action and scholarships for bright girls. Incentives for families might be considered - Brazil's *Bolsa Familiar* may hold some valuable lessons.) Steps must be taken to encourage new SMEs (Small and Medium Scaled Enterprises) in pastoral areas, establishing a more business-friendly environment and, perhaps, adopting a local economic development approach, with business development services.

3.1 Women's Empowerment and Social Change

Women's empowerment involves social change. Many women work and earn incomes, but simply hand these over to their husbands. This is "disempowering" work – extra burdens on women, without any change in status.

In Somaliland and Sudan, and in Uganda, traditionalists and Islamists oppose social change. In the short term, and perhaps even in the longer run, women's empowerment means a loss of power, status and privilege for men. But, women's empowerment is not necessarily a threat to men – it can bring better, more mutually supportive relations between men and women. Ultimately, men can also benefit when women have more choice and opportunity - their societies become more prosperous, more open, and healthier.

However, NGOs and development agencies should not come in as outsiders trying to impose foreign cultural norms. We can have confidence in a set of universal values, and should not shy away from vigorously opposing female genital mutilation and gender based violence, but external actors in particular should cautiously promote social reform, rather than rapid, radical and wholesale social change, and should have a respect for time-honoured social norms. External actors, including African sophisticates, should keep in mind the fact that many/most pastoralist women have led happy lives within their traditional cultures.

PENHA is supporting local women to do what they themselves have decided to do, while engaging in an on-going and open-ended debate with pastoralist men and women about how their society should evolve. The drive for social change must come from within.

In pastoralist communities, where women have little experience of public life, women's groups can play a vital role. One might wonder why it is necessary to train women's groups, rather than individual women who wish to engage in business activities. There is an old African saying, "cross a river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you". Groups give individual women the confidence to undertake new activities they would otherwise find too daunting. They build on and reinforce existing social capital. Groups can manage rotating funds effectively, and group members can act as guarantors for individual loans, enabling individual women to mobilize the funds to expand or start a business. But for this to happen, groups must be cohesive.

And, when women are in groups, it is easier for husbands to allow them to leave their homes to market their products or services. (Fears of infidelity, or the ridicule of their peers, are diminished.) In societies in which it is socially unacceptable for a married woman to go to the market alone, groups increase women's mobility outside the home. This is important because restrictions on women's mobility are a major constraint on their economic participation and because women need to become empowered within harmonious, well-functioning families and societies. Women's groups also help to mitigate women's time poverty. Most pastoralist women are engaged in domestic work and household-based subsistence production. At a given time, several group members who are free can take on a particular task, such as taking products to market, while the others continue with their home-based work. The solidarity of their peers can be of great value to group members. They share experiences and knowledge and this can enhance individual members' confidence.

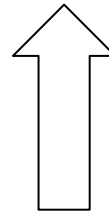
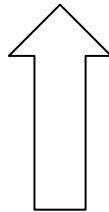
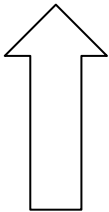
This program is based on a sustained engagement with selected women's groups, over a period of time, with a variety of training and other inputs, under this and other programs, focused on the same groups. Stronger, more capable groups and individuals can then play a role in different spheres of women's empowerment, and become powerful agents for change.

3.2 Women's Empowerment in the Millennium Development Goals – MDG 3

Broadly, there are three major dimensions of women's empowerment: the legal, economic and governance dimensions. These three aspects are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

It is not enough to have modern laws on the books. Customary laws must be brought into line with modern laws and social attitudes must change, so that they support formal laws. Without legal and political rights, women cannot enjoy economic rights.

EMPOWERING WOMEN



RIGHTS & LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

- Legal status
- Land ownership rights
- Policies, laws and customary law
- Strong socio-cultural basis for modern laws

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

- Access to capital – loans & productive assets
- New income-generating activities & businesses
- SMEs & employment
- Education & skills training
- Access to business-related information
- Access to information on new products, processes & appropriate technology
- Access to business networks

GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

- Responsive political representation
- Participation in politics & governance (parliaments & the administrative state)
- Strong women's CSOs & CBOs
- Access to information
- Effective civic education

In our view, women's increased economic independence is supported by, and in turn promotes, accompanying changes in social attitudes. Without social change, income-generating projects with pastoralist women do not bring transformative change, with husbands often sequestering the proceeds, but they do progressively undermine existing power relations.

Social change is, any case, happening. Women are the household resource managers, and, increasingly, they play important roles in livestock management and economic activity outside the household. And there is solid evidence, in different contexts, of the wider benefits of increased women's incomes. Women spend a greater proportion of their independent incomes on things that enhance household welfare – including nutrition, water and sanitation, health care and education than do men, who spend a large proportion of their incomes outside of the household, on cigarettes, on *qat* in Somaliland, beer in Uganda and in many cases to acquire new wives.

However, to a much greater extent than other communities, pastoral societies across the region have restricted women's participation in education, in public life and in economic activity outside of the household. The acuteness of pastoral women's subordination makes the relative benefits of projects such as this one correspondingly larger.

The fundamental rationale behind empowerment initiatives (micro-credit, asset transfers, skills training or market access) is to provide women with the means to exercise their rights and responsibilities in decision-making processes in their communities, to play a fuller role in society and to contribute without restriction, to national development in their respective countries.

We do not believe that women's subordination is an essential constituent of the region's various pastoral cultures. This is supported by the way in which women themselves form groups to improve their situation both economically and socially. While there are questions about the legitimacy of outsiders' efforts to push for social change, we believe that all cultures must evolve, retaining the good and throwing out the bad, and that women's human rights are universal.

This kind of initiative does not challenge the social order head-on and represents an acceptable way, within pastoralist traditions, for women to gain a measure of economic, and thus social, power. Some argue that the approach is too timid, preferring an approach that attacks the power relations that underly women's subordination. But initiatives like ours may stimulate deeper social and cultural change, which must be led by pastoralist women themselves, in dialogue with pastoralist men.

4. The Pastoral Context

4.1 Social and Economic Change – Trends towards Sedentarization and Urbanization

Across the region, the degree of pastoral mobility is going down. More and more, pastoralists live in settlements in and around trading centers and towns. Herders move with the animals to seasonal grazing areas - the women and children mostly stay behind. Much of this is spontaneous or voluntary sedentarization, and not necessarily the result of coercive government policies.

Pastoralism is, however, under pressure – from population growth and pressure on resources (land and water). Many have “dropped out” of pastoralism - becoming underemployed in settlements and towns in pastoral areas. This is “immiserizing sedentarization”, often drought-induced, and associated with much poorer living standards and levels of well- being.

But, there is also a positive side to these trends. The growth of small towns and trading centers brings new opportunities for economic diversification and service provision. To varying degrees, pastoralist communities are becoming more socially and economically integrated.

Many women have been forced into the role of reluctant breadwinner for households that have lost their pastoral livelihoods. This kind of change is not empowering. But, more settled lives also offer women new possibilities for advancement. In this crisis, pastoralist women are responding to new opportunities wherever they can - setting up new income-generating activities and businesses.

One might view these trends, as Paul Collier does, as a natural part of the development process, with people moving off the land and into towns, where increased specialization and the development of human capital accompany higher living standards. This need not spell the end for pastoralism – after all, why should whole communities be defined by a single occupation? Those who can may continue to herd livestock, whether it be for subsistence or for commercial purposes, while others become shopkeepers, nurses, doctors or lawyers. Common property regimes may give way to private land ownership, with mobile pastoralists leasing land, as in Western Uganda. Pastoral systems are in flux, and pastoralists and pastoralist women are in a new situation but they are not passive.

4.2 Obstacles to Business and Economic Development in Pastoral Areas

Economic diversification in pastoral areas faces a number of obstacles:

- Poor transport and telecommunications infrastructure
- Lack of or poor connection to national power grids

- Irregular and seasonal incomes
- Drought, risk and uncertainty
- Remoteness and low population densities
- Very low cash incomes and thin local markets

Another very significant obstacle to progress is the very low level of human capital in pastoralist communities, which waste the talents of women and girls to an exceptional degree.

In each country of operation, there are different, locally specific, challenges in promoting women's economic empowerment.

Women's lack of access to credit is often, though not always, a binding constraint. Micro-finance projects face particular difficulties in semi-arid areas – chief among these are poor transport and communications infrastructure, the geographical dispersion of populations, which make per unit transaction costs very high, and insecurity of land tenure. Pastoral mobility and climatic vulnerability (with highly covariant risks) also pose problems. Despite these difficulties, rural finance can work in pastoral areas, if programs are well-designed. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of finance options for women in these areas.

The constraints mentioned above, together with the thinness of local markets, weak local purchasing power and a low degree of integration with national markets, also make it more difficult for women in pastoral areas to establish profitable enterprises. Their lack of skills, knowledge and access to information also constrain pastoral women. There are, however, opportunities to make progress. There is greater economic activity around trading centers, market towns and by roadsides. When women are organized, informed and equipped with new skills, they can take advantage of these opportunities.

Cronyism and Corruption

The overall business environment matters – business-friendly tax and regulatory policies promote enterprise and job creation, but most countries in the region pursue policies that stifle business. Crony capitalism, favouring the politically connected, is a major feature of the region's economies. The politically connected get tenders and big loans. They often avoid taxes or get crucial insider information. In Uganda, women from the pastoralist elite (Banyankole) have become prominent in business. Cronyism at district and local levels is also a problem.

While cronyism inhibits competition and excludes outsiders, plain corruption has had a major impact on poor pastoralists. In pastoral areas, in Uganda and elsewhere, there have been a series of scandals over local government tenders, particularly for major water supply projects. In general, outsiders and women benefit from freer economies, as collusion and cronyism favours insiders and competition punishes firms that discriminate (Nobel Prize winner Gary Becker's great insight). So, women would tend to benefit from policies that reduce government's direct role in the economy. But, equally, crucial public sector investments in schools, hospitals and

roads, and the provision of basic public goods, such as security, quickly generate new business opportunities for women and others.

4.3 Pastoralist Women's Subordination

Every pastoralist community is different, but they share some basic similarities. Gender inequality is acute and deep-rooted, much more so than in society at large.

Women have:

- very low social status,
- very low literacy levels,
- very restricted roles in public life,
- restricted ownership of livestock (cattle and camels) – the main store of wealth in pastoral economies.

Some aspects of women's subordination are:

- very limited access to education for girls,
- very limited access to training for women,
- very limited access to information – few women own or have access to radios, and so they do not benefit even when there are valuable radio programs in local languages that give market information and access to wider discussions of new ideas and prospective economic opportunities.
- Restrictions on women's ability to travel
- Early marriage – most pastoralist women are married in their (early) teens
- Harmful traditional practices such as polygamy, "wife sharing" (in Uganda) and FGM (in Somaliland)
- The payment of "bride prices", which encourage people to view women as property.

Gender inequality in pastoral communities is acute and deep-rooted, much more so than in society at large. The pastoral economy is based on livestock – camels, cattle, sheep and goats. These are the principal assets and store of wealth. But, across the region, social mores limit women's ownership of camels and cattle. With a rigid gender division of labor, the exclusion of women from ownership of the main store of wealth is central to gender disparity in pastoral communities. But, women generally own small stock – goats and sheep. They also own or have use rights over small plots of land, which they devote to the limited range of pastoral-area crops and to horticulture. Enhancing productivity in these areas offers a way forward.

4.4 Patchy Progress and Change

Constraints on Women's Access to Transport and Communications

The picture is very patchy with respect to mobile phone ownership and network availability, the quality or existence of trunk and rural feeder roads, and women's access to public and private vehicles. All of the above are of significant importance in commercial activity.

In Somaliland, phone networks have only recently been extended to pastoral areas, but women are already making use of Telesom's "Zaad Services" payments and limited banking system. In Uganda, with increased competition between several providers, the use of phone payments systems is widening, with significant benefits for pastoralist communities that are distant from bank branches. In Kassala/Sudan, no such services are available as yet.

In Somaliland, transport availability and costs pose a significant obstacle for pastoral area business people, particularly for women. Most people have to travel, like cattle, on trucks. FGM increases the incidence of complications in pregnancy, and serious cases are loaded onto trucks for transport to hospitals in Burao and Hargeisa – children born in distress on these trucks are sometimes given the name "Safar" ("Journey".) The picture is similar in Western Uganda, although women in closer proximity to major economic centres have better options ("public" taxis and "matatu" minibuses.) Karamoja, in the East, faces unique problems, with endemic insecurity and largely pre-modern social conditions. In Kassala/Sudan, social mores severely limit women's movements outside of the home, for business and other purposes.

Restrictions on Women's Access to and Control over Assets

In pastoral communities, household wealth is held overwhelmingly in the form of livestock and most communities restrict women's ownership to one degree or another. Land ownership is often communal and insecurity of tenure is a general phenomenon. In Uganda, landlessness is a particular problem for pastoralists in the West, limiting women's ability to undertake small-scale crop farming and horticulture, which are significant activities for women across the Horn. In general, land cannot be used as collateral in accessing commercial loans.

4.5 Women's Economic Activities – Microenterprises and New Business Opportunities

There is considerable scope to increase women's incomes through the provision of new stock and through improved breeds, seeds and techniques. Women can become suppliers to larger commercial concerns and can themselves take up processing activities. There is also a range of alternative economic activities that women can undertake – such as beekeeping, juicemaking, dressmaking and a variety of services.

We have observed a widening range of enterprises undertaken by women, who are increasingly taking advantage of new service sector opportunities in growing towns and trading centres.

- Women generally own small stock – goats and sheep.
- Women also own or have use rights over small plots of land – producing cereals, vegetables and fruit.
- Women can increase their independent incomes with new stock of goats and sheep, as well as improved breeds, seeds and techniques.
- Women can become suppliers to bigger businesses and exporters.
- Women can also start processing – producing and marketing milk products (cheese, yoghurt, ghee).
- Women can take up beekeeping, juicemaking and dressmaking.
- Growing trading centers and towns bring new opportunities in services – including hairdressing, catering, and retail shops.
- Public investments in schools, hospitals and clinics provide employment for women and markets for women set up catering and other businesses.

Not all of this new economic activity is entirely benign. Much new women's employment and economic activity represent crisis responses, at times with undesirable social or environmental consequences. In all three countries, women are employed as retailers or participants in the growing charcoal burning business, which, as it grows, is having an increasingly negative environmental impact in pastoral areas. In Karamoja, the frequently observed trade-off between increased women's incomes from beer brewing and the growing social problem of alcoholism has reached a crisis point. In Somaliland, there is an almost equivalent problem of *qat* consumption, and again the *qat* business provides economic opportunities for women, as retail employees.

And we should be cautious about the scope for developing dryland agriculture. In Karamoja, Minister of State for Karamoja Affairs, and First Lady, Janet Museveni pushed for significant investments in farming, only to see widespread drought-induced crop failures in 2007 and 2009.

5. Education and Telecommunications

In the long term, education is the most important part of women's economic empowerment.

In Uganda, Somaliland and Sudan, enrollment and achievement are still much lower than in other communities, but more pastoralist girls are going to school than ever before

There are a number of factors behind the historical neglect of pastoral areas across the region:

- High costs per head of provision in remote, sparsely populated communities.
- Socio-cultural and political marginalization and/or antagonism.
- Seasonal mobility
- Importance of children's labor in herding, fetching water & firewood.
- The difficulty of attracting teachers to pastoral areas
- Low demand for schooling among parents, with modern schooling seen as incompatible with the traditional way of life and girls' schooling seen as a threat to tradition.

But, here again, social and economic change is bringing new opportunities. There is increasing demand for education as parents see that pastoralism can no longer provide livelihoods for all.

In Somaliland and Uganda, education presents a new business opportunity for private providers, and government schools are no longer the only game in town. The growth of pastoral-area towns and trading centers and the trend towards living in and around settlements makes it easier to provide schooling.

The internet, mobile phones and satellite television are making pastoral-area postings more attractive, or less unattractive, to teachers and health workers. NGOs and local governments could collaborate, here, to establish well-equipped resource centres, serving public and private workers, with a cost recovery element. ITC also offers the prospect of delivering modern packages of support for teachers, greatly enhancing the quality of education in pastoral areas. (Similarly, tele-medicine can improve health care.)

Greater access to information is changing attitudes and aspirations in profound ways. Particularly in Uganda, people in pastoral areas are getting increased access to radio, local TV and satellite TV. Bars in trading centers charge entry to watch English Premiership soccer and action movies. Fees, viewing times and male-oriented content limit women's participation. But, in time, it should be possible to expand the range of local language, educational and business-related programming. Pastoral-area schools and women's resource centers could be supported in powerful ways. (In Somaliland, satellite dishes are popping up in rural trading centres, but limited electrical power is a severe constraint. In Kassala, our participants have no access to television.)

6. Results – Increased Incomes and Wider Roles for Stronger Women’s Groups

In our program, we have found that, when working with cohesive women groups, the combination of business skills training and grants to establish rotating funds or purchase productive assets delivers real benefits for poor pastoralist women.

In Uganda and Somaliland, participants have been able to substantially increase their incomes, and have used the additional income to cover school fees for children, medical expenses and, in some cases, to increase personal consumption. In addition, the women involved have gained in terms of personal confidence and the women’s groups have, on the whole, become more active in public life, beyond their function as vehicles for economic activities.

In Sudan’s Kassala State, we have not yet seen significant economic benefits, but the program has built support among husbands and traditional leaders for greater women’s participation in economic life.

It is difficult to identify tangible benefits from business skills training alone. There may be significant intangible benefits, through increased confidence and visibility, and through a public validation of women’s role in business.

7. Evidence

7.1 The Value of Business Skills Training

It is difficult to isolate and assess the impact of our generic business skills training. Participants’ evaluations have been strongly positive, and there has been a tremendous amount of enthusiasm among pastoralist women, for whom such interventions are rare. In follow-ups, months after training, participants indicate that they have become better at managing their enterprises and report increased incomes. But, in the absence of a rigorous evaluation, involving comparison with a plausible control group, we cannot confidently assert the value of our training.

In other contexts, some research has identified significant positive impacts for generic business skills training. Leach et al (2000) examined the impact of training on women’s micro-enterprise development in four programs in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Sudan. The researchers looked at projects and programs providing training in technical as well as business skills. Impact of training was measured against these four indicators: income, access to and control of resources, status, and quality of life, assessing the specific ways in which training helped women to improve and expand their micro-enterprises. The study concluded that poor women

need training to develop skills and self-confidence to allow them to operate and survive in the informal sector. Access to credit is important but not sufficient for the poorest women. There was no straightforward link between training and increased incomes. Indeed, in some cases there was a negative impact, i.e. women who had received training and credit had lower incomes at the end of the project. [These outcomes underscore the point made elsewhere in this document about the inescapable ubiquity of risk and uncertainty.] However, the study concludes that well-designed and well-delivered training can lead to increased incomes as well as enhanced self-esteem and status in the household and community for poor women. Moreover, if training is delivered effectively, it can enhance women's survival strategies and ability to adapt to crises. Another relevant point: women found the experience of *participatory* training to be empowering and liberating.

Very significantly for us, the researchers also found that training in generic business skills was more effective than training in technical skills. This is, intuitively, quite a sensible proposition. In our own experience, one “fad” or another tends to dominate for a period of time, with everybody piling into handicrafts, or vanilla seeds, or exotic goats, or yoghurt making until margins are driven down. Market conditions change, sometimes rapidly. For this reason it is not, generally, advisable to attempt to “pick winners” – pushing women into one particular activity or another.

If women are given training in only one specific technical activity, the value of those skills is likely to diminish fairly rapidly as relatively thin local markets become saturated. This is not to say that such skills training is not necessary or valuable. Rather, one should appreciate the limitations of such approaches, and the “fallacy of composition” problem that occurs when large numbers of people are trained to produce the same product for thin local markets. It is reasonable to suppose that a bundle of transferable business skills will equip poor women to do better over time, adapting to changing market conditions. Yet, there is a high level of demand among local women for training in specific technical skills that they themselves have identified as promising. “Demand-driven” support for beekeeping and exotic goats projects, enhanced by value chain and marketing interventions, naturally complement training interventions.

A recent evaluation comparing projects in Bangladesh and Souther Sudan, published by Oxford University's iiG supports our experience, with significant benefits from the combination of training and the provision of productive assets, but no observable benefits from business skills training on its own. (Bandiera et al, 2010.)

Our program reports provide largely qualitative evidence alongside participants' reports of increased incomes. (Well-known difficulties here are the incentive for prospective beneficiaries to under-report incomes and the natural caginess of business owners about divulging information.)

High illiteracy rates are an important constraint here, and effective training requires skilled facilitators and careful attention to workshop design. Participants are generally a mix of the illiterate, and the semi-literate, with a literate minority. An old but important insight, due to Kaushik Basu, is relevant here – there are two kinds of illiterate, the “isolated illiterate” and the “proximate illiterate”, who lives in a household with at least one literate person. We have found

that literate group members help others to access workshop materials and local language newspapers and publications, and that educated girls increasingly use their reading skills to help out their mothers, in business and in other areas.

7.2 RCTs and the Need for Rigorous Evaluations

One promising approach, pioneered by award-winning economist Esther Duflo and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) as well as MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), is to conduct Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs). This involves the careful design of experimental tests to determine the impact or lack of impact of a particular interventions. So, for a program such as ours, one group of pastoral women would receive training and a suitable control group would not receive training, and the two groups would be tracked over a period of time. If the first group does not perform better than the second, we would have good reason to doubt the value of the intervention.

IPA conducted this kind of assessment for a business skills training project in Peru, finding significant benefits, without resolving the question of whether or not such projects simply identify a self-selecting group of “go-getters” who would in any case be successful. RCTs may not adequately take into account context-specificity and have been criticized from a number of angles. Leading econometrician Angus Deaton has been almost dismissive in his criticism. (Deaton, 2009.)

Nevertheless, for NGOs, RCTs offer a more rigorous way of testing the effectiveness of programs and determining what works in a particular context. This suggests the value of collaboration between NGOs and research institutions on the design, implementation and evaluation of projects in a range of areas.

Across the region's pastoral areas, which are undergoing rapid social and economic change, and are subject to a variety of new interventions, there is an urgent need for this kind of quantitative analysis, alongside in-depth, qualitative analyses that examine and compare local specificities.

This paper is more or less data-free – our own program-generated data is of dubious value and official statistics are, for the most part, severely flawed or non-existent. The routine call for further research is amply justified in this case, but that research should be accompanied by, or tied to, project work such as ours that delivers tangible benefits to people in pastoralist communities, engaging and empowering them as much more than just passive subjects or “beneficiaries”.

8. Concluding Observations

- Support for microenterprise under programs such as ours deliver real benefits. Results include increased incomes for women, with social spillovers and stronger women's groups that play wider roles in society.
- But these micro efforts are not transformational – we must work at the “meso” level, to promote medium and large scale enterprises that can employ large(r) numbers of pastoral women. Promoting women's participation in wider business and social networks is important here – but difficult.
- The overall business environment matters – business-friendly tax and regulatory policies – and a supportive framework for increased regional and international trade.
- Economic empowerment cannot stand alone – it must be accompanied by social change, and legal and political empowerment. But in pastoral societies, with acute women's subordination, we should expect progress to be gradual.
- Illiteracy, restricted access to information and restrictions on women's physical mobility are major obstacles to pastoral women's empowerment. NGOs, working with the private sector, can have a transformational impact here. Mobile phones, satellite TV, mobile video/DVD units, and women's resource centres can be transformational.
- Strengthened linkages and collaboration between NGOs and research institutions on the design, implementation and evaluation of projects in a range of areas, as well as on the documentation and analysis of change in pastoral societies, could substantially improve programs and outcomes.
- NGOs, local governments and the private sector could usefully collaborate and invest in establishing well-equipped resource centres where pastoralist women can find information in languages they understand.

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