Livestock for Livelihoods and Wellbeing of Women Pastoralists in Ethiopia and Uganda

Dr Diana Onyango
Technical Manager for Livestock and Rangelands - Farm Africa

Introduction / Background

The drylands of Ethiopia’s South Omo zone and Uganda’s Karamoja sub-region are home to thousands of pastoralists who migrate with their livestock in search of pasture. Livestock is the main source of livelihood for the communities found in these areas. In both locations, disease, drought, and degraded grasslands have cut the size of herds, so although livestock rearing is common, it is unproductive. Communities living in these regions are faced with other challenges such as high poverty rates and food insecurity, leading to high rates of malnutrition, and stunting in children.

The heavy reliance on natural resources renders this livestock-based livelihood sensitive to climate dynamics such as recurrent droughts seen in the two regions. The regions are faced with constant insecurity, conflicts, and subsequent instability, which further increase the challenges faced by the pastoralist communities.

Rural women in Karamoja and South Omo lack financial skills, credit access and a voice in financial decision-making, which results in them having a low economic status. The women are also challenged with a lack of nutritional knowledge, which contributes to malnutrition, not only in children under five but also in other household members. Women are particularly affected due to limited dietary diversity and persistent gender inequalities.

Methods / Approach

Farm Africa through the Livestock for Livelihoods project aimed to economically empower 10,000 pastoralist women, increase their involvement in household financial decision making and improve household nutrition. The project was designed to ensure that livestock and rangeland systems were productive, sustainable and appropriate for female pastoralists. The project has enabled women to set up sustainable, small-scale goat-rearing enterprises so they can earn an income through the sale of goats and goat products as well as receive financial support by participating in Village and Saving Loans Associations (VSLAs).

Distribution of goats was done using the revolving goat scheme to improve the socio-economic status of the women beneficiaries, provide a source of income from the sale of milk, goat kids and goat hides; and the milk produced from the goats contributed to improved household nutrition, particularly in children under five. Improving nutritional knowledge through the Social Behaviour Change and Communication (SBCC) strategy aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge of dietary diversity. This was done in collaboration with Africa Innovations Institute (AFIRI) in Uganda and the Mother and Children Multisectoral Development Organization (MCMDO) in Ethiopia.

Women were supported to be more economically empowered through access to finance provided by Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and facilitating them to be involved in profitable enterprises in the goat value chain (goat breeding, leather tanning and milk value addition). These activities stimulated livelihood diversification and trade, and contributed to reduced levels of poverty and malnutrition.

Results

10,350 women who benefitted from the goat revolving scheme were able to increase their revenue acquired from the sale of live goats, meat, hides, skins, and milk. The average annual revenue for the women in Karamoja engaged in the project increased from US$9.07 in 2018 to US$46.33 in 2021. Similar results were seen in Ethiopia where the income for women beneficiaries increased from US$38.16 in 2018 at the beginning of the project to US$52.76 in 2021 as a direct result of the project.

There was an overall improvement in the Infant and Young Child Minimum Dietary Diversity (IYC-MDD) and the Minimum Dietary Diversity Women (MDD-W) scores. In Karamoja, the ICMDW increased to 61% from 23% and the MDD-W increased from 13% to 42% while in Ethiopia the ICMDW increased to 41% from 35% and the MDD-W increased from 23% to 32% despite the harsh drought and food insecurity in the project areas during the implementation.

Women’s economic empowerment was strengthened as the women were able to contribute to the household’s income which also gave them a voice in financial decision-making and resource allocation. The Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) scores in Uganda improved from 54% to 75% while in Ethiopia it was from 37% to 44%.

Conclusions / Significance

One of the project’s objectives was to enhance goat rearing for women in pastoralist communities with the aim of increasing income from goat production and this resulted in multiple benefits for the women and their households. These benefits include the enhancement of the nutritional status more so for women and children, the strengthening of the women’s financial bases and economic empowerment as well as the overall improvement of the household’s socio-economic status.

References / Links

1. https://www.farmfrica.org/where-we-work/livestock-for-livelihoods
2. Livestock for Livelihoods – Revolving Goat Fund [https://rb.yv/xSt19]

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