

Women's Groups in Arid Northern Kenya: Origins, Governance, and Roles in Poverty Reduction

by

D. L. Coppock, S. Desta, A. Wako,
I. Aden, G. Gebru, S. Tezera,
and C. Tadecha

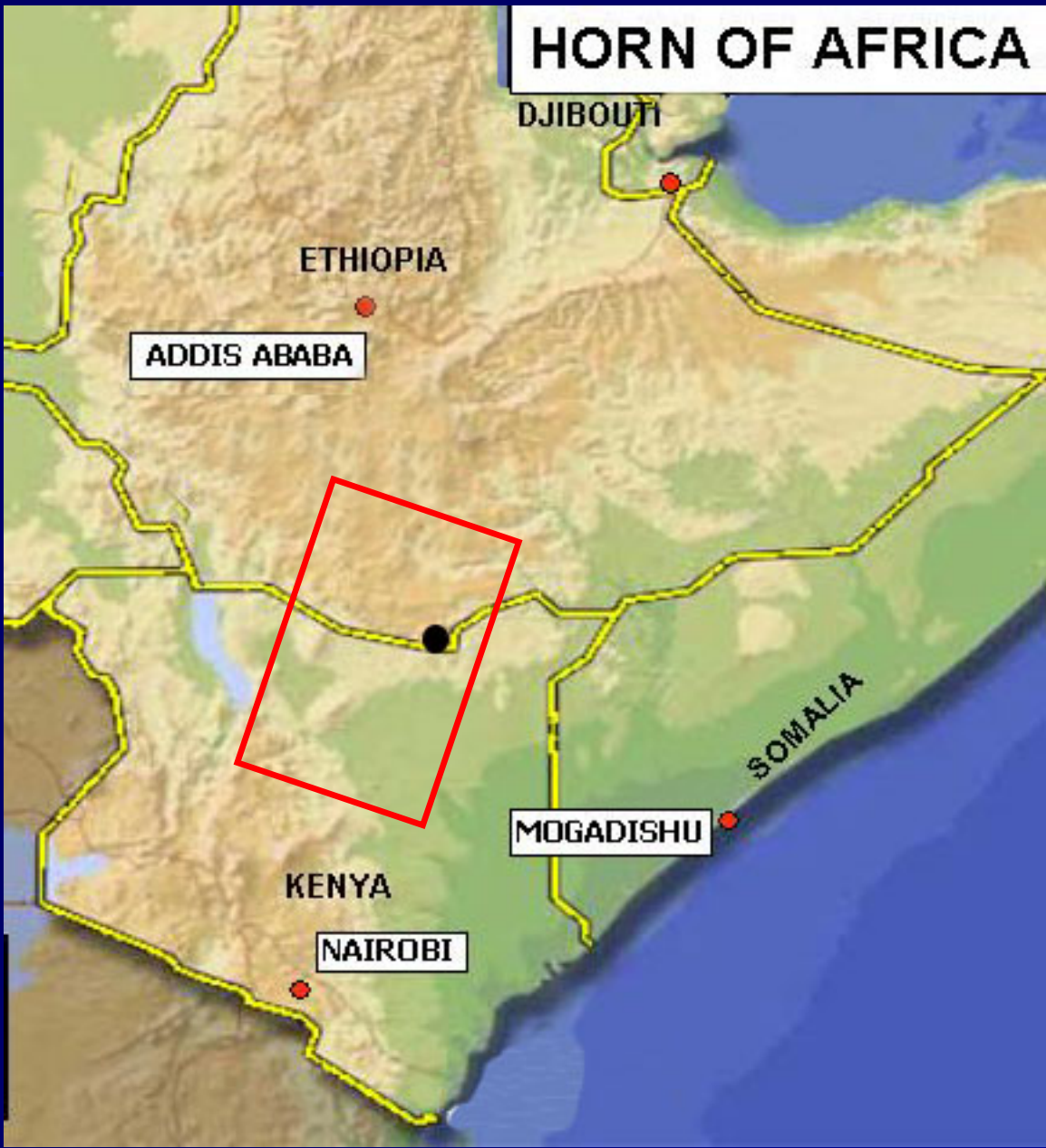
Road Map

- Background and Study Area
- Research Objectives and Methods
- Results and Conclusions
- Policy Implications

Background

- Pastoral risk management focus
- Facilitating opportunistic behavior in the face of ecological and economic shocks
- Income and asset diversification one means to this end

HORN OF AFRICA



DJIBOUTI

ETHIOPIA

ADDIS ABABA

SOMALIA

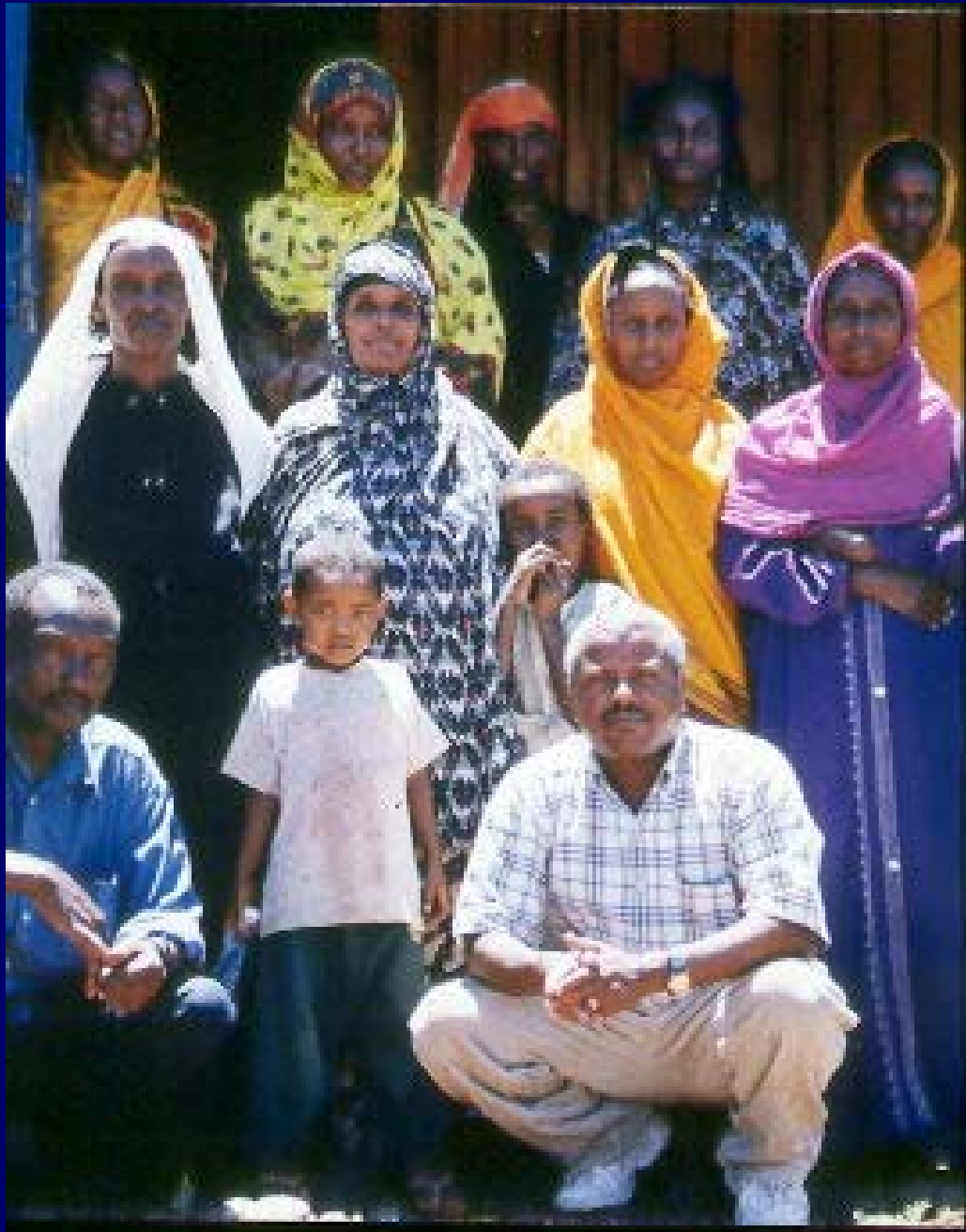
MOGADISHU

KENYA

NAIROBI









UMOJA-WOMEN'S GROUP



Umoja na Maendeleo.

~ Big - G ~

1998 1 12

Objectives

- Exploratory, qualitative study to describe attributes of women's collective-action groups in Moyale and Marsabit Districts
 - How are groups formed and governed?
 - What priority activities do groups pursue?
 - Group roles in drought, poverty mitigation?

Methods

- 16 groups interviewed
- Purposefully selected (accessibility)
- Semi-structured questionnaire
- Review of group records, assets, finances

Results (1)

- Avg group age = 9.7 yrs (range: 2-19 yrs)
- Avg charter members = 24 (range: 7-42)
- Avg illiteracy rate = 85% (range: 60-100%)
- Avg 17% (wealthy), 31% (middle class), 52% (poor), with marked variation

Results (2)

- 80% of groups formed with intent to improve livelihoods of members
- Half of groups formed spontaneously; other half formed as result of GO/NGO initiative (initial inputs variable but modest)
- All groups eventually made partnerships

Results (3)

- Charter members selected from open public meetings; some had activity focus; membership often restricted over time
- Selection criteria include character, need for "team players," special skills or access to resources; applicants voted on; probation

Results (4)

- All groups have written constitutions and by-laws; details memorized
 - Leadership and administrative procedures;
 - Rights and responsibilities of members;
 - Community service philosophy

Results (5)

- Responsibilities include: attending meetings; active participation; labor contributions; regular payments to group accounts; duty to be well-informed
- Privileges include: profit sharing; shared technology; support for children, health, funerals, weddings, asset building, training

Results (6)

- Leaders (“chair ladies”) typically elected every 2-3 yrs;
- Leaders selected based on character, reputation, and “development vision;” most groups had access to leadership training;
- Secretaries, treasurers appointed; minutes kept for meetings;

Results (7)

- All groups have been legally registered with GOK; admin and resource access benefits of registration noted
- Inter-group relations inconsequential

Results (8)

- Objectives included poverty reduction via micro-enterprise development and livelihood diversification
- Initial income earners: farming, dairy, poultry, honey, livestock processing, bakeries, handicrafts

Results (9)

- Initial profits deposited in group accounts; invested in livestock or technology;
- Group accounts grow via other member contributions (*Harambee*) and accrued interest
- Larger disbursements for larger projects (emergency needs for vulnerable people; construction; water rehab; schools; sanitation)

Results (10)

- In older groups, shifts in priority focus over time:
 - From water quantity to water quality;
 - From general education support to education for girls
 - From general health support to HIV/AIDS

Results (11)

- Groups noted complementary roles of micro-enterprise and livestock production
- Livestock production less focused on numbers for traditional subsistence but more on commercialization (fattening, higher turnover)

Results (12)

- Most common recipe for success: Women diversifying to combine commercial livestock activities with small-scale retail ventures (kiosk, hotel, butchery...)
- Successful women can “handle details, keep records, save money, and possess good business sense”

Results (13)

- Overall, the critical cornerstones of collective action have been:
 - Ability to manage micro-finance activity
 - Ability to improve living standards
 - Ability to improve access to education
 - Ability to diversify incomes

Results (14)

- Patterns of group capital accumulation from 2000 to 2004
- Nine groups reported a net increase in capital accumulation for at least 4 of 5 years
- One group reported an increase in only 2 of 5 years

Results (15)

■ Challenges to Group Sustainability

- Drought (early 1990s): Few actions taken
- Drought (1999-2000): Much more action taken
 - Buffer neediest members (food, loans, restock)
 - Promotion of petty trade, emotional support

Results (16)

- What promotes long-term sustainability?
 - Unity of purpose, good leadership, diverse and sound business decisions
 - Ability to secure development partnerships

Results (17)

- What are the greatest threats to groups?
 - Internal (ranked): Negative group dynamics; illiteracy; agitation from men
 - External (ranked): Drought; poverty/resource scarcity; poor infrastructure; political incitement; physical insecurity

Results (18)

- What are viewed as the vital interventions?
 - Ability to secure major funds
 - Ability to build the skills of members
 - Ability to implement key technology and penetrate markets

Results (19)

- The 16 groups listed 63 others that have formed in their areas. Of these 63:
 - 4 were formed in the 1980s
 - 24 were formed in the 1990s
 - 35 were formed after 2000
- Of the 63, only 2 have reportedly failed. The key elements of failure were seen as group dynamics and political incitement

Results (20)

- Future plans for the 16 groups are ambitious and diverse
 - Desire to build homes, halls, shops, schools, and water supplies
 - Desire to purchase vehicles and technology

Results (21)

- What advice do groups have for others who contemplate forming new groups?
 - Focus on good group governance
 - Unity of purpose, dedication of the members, exemplary leadership, value collaboration

Conclusions

- Findings are consistent across large distances.
- People are very capable and partners are having impacts
- Opportunity for co-creation of human, social, and financial capital
- Fills gaps in public service delivery

Policy Implications

- Craft policies that help support grass-roots, collective action in pastoral areas
- Provision of small grants, technology, and training
- Invest in infrastructure, improve security, reduce tolerance for incitement, and expand trade

*Funding for this research was provided by
the*

Global Livestock

Collaborative Research Support Program

(GL-CRSP)



The PARIMA project is a component of the GL-CRSP supported by USAID Grant No. PCE-G-00-98-00036-00 and contributions from participating institutions.