

Assessing transitory poverty among pastoralists of northern Kenya using the stages of progress method

Watete, W.P.^{1,2}, Kogi-Makau, W.¹, Njoka, J.T.¹ & MacOpiyo, L.¹

¹University of Nairobi, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, Kabete

²Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Kenya

Corresponding author: pwatete@gmail.com

Introduction

Assessment of poverty among pastoral households using conventional methods may at times give an inaccurate picture of pastoral poverty. Pastoral areas generally fare very poorly in terms of common standard indicators and are thus likely to be incorrectly labeled as poor (Devereux, 2007¹; Tache and Sjaastad, 2010²). As a consequence of the limitations of conventional methods in accurately measuring the degree of pastoral poverty and establishing the reasons behind pastoral impoverishment, there has been disconnect between external interventions and actual pastoral needs. This study applied the stages of progress method (Krishna 2010³) to establish movement of pastoral households into or out of poverty and reasons for change in two Counties of northern Kenya: Turkana and Mandera.

Methods

A survey study was conducted in Turkana and Mandera Counties. The sample households were targeted from 12 villages in Turkana and 11 villages in Mandera, where 30 households were sampled per village. Household interviews were administered to sample households to obtain data on income, expenditure, dominant livelihood strategies and reasons for change in wealth status.

Using the 'stages of progress' method, focus group participants were asked to identify well known signifying events that occurred around 1993 and 2003 as a basis of recalling households' wealth status during the two periods. The participants were then asked to identify the wealth status of sample households in 1993, 2003 and 2013. Sampled households were placed in four categories depending on how their wealth status changed between 1993 and 2013. Households who were poor in 1993 and had remained poor even in 2013 were categorized as A (remained poor), those who were poor in 1993 but had become rich in 2013 were categorized as B (escaped poverty), those that were rich in 1993 but had become poor by 2013 were categorized as C (embraced poverty) and those that were rich in 1993 and were still rich in 2013 were categorized as D (remained non poor). Reasons for change (or stability) for the sampled households were ascertained from participants during the focus group discussions. Follow up household interviews for a random sample of households in each category was done to validate reasons given during focus group discussions.

Cross tabulations were done to compare households' progress by location and also by livelihood strategy (whether pastoral, agro-pastoral or off-farm). The Kruskal Wallis test

was used to test for significant differences in household progress across locations and livelihood strategies.

Results

The overall poverty level for Turkana County was 71%; computed as the sum of proportion of households that had remained poor (46%) and those that fell into poverty (25%). In the same way, poverty level for Mandera was 58% (33% of households remained poor and 25% fell into poverty).

Performance of households by livelihood strategies showed that 68% and 67% of households pursuing off-farm and pastoral livelihoods respectively could be regarded as poor compared to only 45% among agro-pastoral households (see Table 1).

Table 1. Poverty distribution by livelihood strategies in northern Kenya.

Livelihood	Households				
	Very poor (%)	Poor (%)	Middle (%)	Rich (%)	N
Pastoral	47	20	29	3	202
Agro-pastoral	31	14	53	2	49
Off-farm	19	49	31	2	413
Overall	28	38	32	2	664

Reasons for households falling into poverty were given as loss of livestock (47%), death of male spouse (10%), business declining or collapsing (9%), loss of job (9%), death of father (8%) and payment of dowry (8%).

Reasons given for escape from poverty were diversification (22%), receipt of remittances (16%), employment (16%), business improvement (13%), and receipt of animals as dowry or inheritance (11%).

Discussion

In both Turkana and Mandera communities, livestock holding was regarded as the major determinant of wealth.

The poverty figures obtained through stages of progress method were way below those that were obtained through use of conventional poverty assessment methods. By computing average income earned by households, 95% and 73% of Turkana and Mandera households respectively could be classified as poor as they received an equivalent of less than one dollar per person per day. This observation is in agreement with other studies that have indicated that use of standard proxy indicators such as income and expenditure levels, literacy

levels and access to physical facilities tends to exaggerate pastoral poverty (Devereux, 2007; Tache and Sjaastad, 2010).

Agro-pastoralism seemed to outperform both pastoral and off-farm livelihood strategies. This data may justify the need to support irrigated agriculture in the rangelands of Northern Kenya as an alternative source of livelihood. However, available literature does not seem to support this position as it is replete with cases of failed irrigation projects in pastoral areas (Hogg, 1983; Anderson, 1999) and so promotion of irrigated agriculture in pastoral areas should be done with caution.

Livestock loss following recurring droughts was the major cause of pauperization among the two pastoral communities. The death of the household head (man) almost always signaled the beginning of a household's slide into poverty. Even among the Somali of Mandera County, many households fell into poverty after the death of the male household head. This observation is supported by other studies that show that in Africa death of a male household head exposes the household to the risk of losing assets (Chapoto *et al.*, 2008; Cooper 2008) and that female headed households are generally disadvantaged (Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2005).

In Turkana eleven percent of households that escaped poverty attributed their improved status to reception of dowry after they married off their daughters. This presents a major challenge to girl child education.

Conclusion

Tackling poverty among pastoralists of northern Kenya will involve addressing factors that push pastoral households into poverty while promoting opportunities that have helped households escape poverty. It is recommended that policies that protect and support livestock accumulation be implemented. Such strategies include livestock restocking and livestock insurance. At the same time, livestock diversification should also be encouraged, especially by embracing formal education that may provide skills useful in pursuing non livestock livelihoods.

References

- Anderson, D.M. 1999. Rehabilitation, resettlement and restocking: Ideology and practice in pastoralist development. In: Anderson, D.M. and Broch-Due, V. *The poor are not us: Poverty and pastoralism in East Africa*. James Carrey Publishers, Oxford, Ohio University Press, Athens, OH. pp. 240-256.
- Chapoto, A. and Jayne, T.S. 2008. The impact of AIDS-related mortality on farm household welfare in Zambia. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 59(3):511-547.
- Cooper, E. 2008). Inheritance practices and Intergenerational transmission of poverty in Africa. Working Paper 116. Chronic Poverty Research Centre, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK. 34pp.
- Devereux, S. 2007. Cashing in or cashing out: Pastoralist livelihoods in Somali region, Ethiopia' prepared for the 'Living on the Margins' conference, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 26 – 28 March 2007.
- Hogg, R. 1983. Irrigation, agriculture and pastoral development: A lesson from Kenya. *Development and Change* 14:577- 591.
- Krishna, A. 2010. Who became poor, who escaped poverty, and why? Developing and using a retrospective methodology in five countries. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 29(2):351-372.
- Tache, B. and Sjaastad, E. 2010. Pastoralists conceptions of poverty, an analysis of traditional and conventional indicators from Borana, Ethiopia. *World Development* 38(8):1168-1178.