

Provision of Water: Impact Case Study

Cash for work for the provision of water in Kenya

In 2011, pastoralist households in the arid and semi-arid lands in northern Kenya were recovering from a multi-year drought compounded by post-election violence, high food and fuel prices, and El Niño-related flooding. Depletion of pastures and dry water pans led to poor animal body condition and livestock deaths. Frequent breakdown of boreholes and long queues for domestic water access increased during this period, and competing water needs both for domestic use and for livestock from limited functional water points led to conflict. To cope, out-migration of livestock intensified, reducing access to milk. Food availability and access were further strained due to continued high inflation in food prices coupled with a decline in livestock prices.

As part of the USAID-supported Arid and Marginal Lands Recovery Consortium, Action Against Hunger (ACF) USA was working in the Merti and Garbatulla districts of Isiolo County in northern Kenya, focusing on the protection of key dry-season grazing areas and improvement of access to water for livestock. Following a mapping exercise and the reactivation of dormant traditional rangeland management committees along key migratory routes, a cash-for-work (CFW) programme was established for the rehabilitation and construction of livestock water points that ensured the participation of both men and women who were highly vulnerable as a result of drought-related livestock losses. CFW activities included provision of local construction materials and labour during construction activities. Rangeland management and water committees were also supported with training, and rangeland management plans were drawn up.

According to the final evaluation of the programme, an estimated 186,440 livestock and 40,845 livestock owners benefited from rehabilitated or newly constructed water sources, including water pans, shallow wells, boreholes, water storage tanks, and access points (livestock water troughs), while 1,359 people participated in cash-for-work water point rehabilitation and construction activities. The CFW programme helped households to meet immediate needs while the rehabilitated and newly established water points ensured retention of milking herds near settlements to provide milk for the children, with the surplus taken to market for income. Additionally, the water points and pasture management contributed to continued access to livestock markets within the rangeland, ensuring consistent income to livestock keepers.

The experience of the programme shows that, even in emergency contexts, interventions can and should seek to build and develop local capacities to appropriately manage key livestock assets, such as rangelands and water, using local and indigenous structures, knowledge, and good practice; this is in addition to interventions that provide more classic short-term emergency assistance in, for example, destocking or feed and water distribution. Cash can be an important tool to achieve these ends simultaneously.

Sources: Daniel Nyabera, Muriel Calo and Charles Matemo, personal communication, 2014.