

Karamoja Resilience Support Unit

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Gender, youth and development in Karamoja: *Issues and opportunities*



Introduction

Livelihood systems in the Karamoja sub-region of north-eastern Uganda have undergone substantial changes in the past two decades due to a number of interlinked processes, including disarmament and improved security, the erosion of pastoral-based production for many households, and the expansion of markets. These transformations have brought new social and economic options for many young people at the same time that existing ecological, cultural and political constraints shape the ways in which these opportunities can be realized. This briefing paper presents evidence from data collected by Feinstein International Center, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University under the Apolou Activity on development opportunities and challenges facing young men and women in the region.

Using a mixed methods longitudinal cohort approach, the research aims to understand the ways in which market expansion, including increased commoditization and monetization, have—or have not—resulted in increased opportunities for the population of Karamoja. The findings presented here draw on data from 2018 and 2019. This briefing paper focuses on the experience and perspective of youth with savings, the role of innovation and adaptation within youth livelihoods, and gendered access to markets and decision-making at markets.

Quantitative data collection takes place in 52 villages across the five Apolou Activity districts (Amudat, Kaabong, Karen-ga, Kotido and Moroto), with 10 households per village. The same household and same respondent within the household

are to be interviewed in 2018, 2019 and 2021. The findings discussed in this briefing paper are from a comparison of the baseline (2018) and midline (2019) data. The qualitative component takes place in 24 of the quantitative villages, with four young people (two males and two females, ages approximately late teens to mid-20s) interviewed in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.



Main findings regarding youth and savings, from qualitative data:

- The majority of youth in the study (81%) reported saving cash. The most common means of savings is storing cash in the home (reported by 85% of those who saved), followed by participation in spontaneously created village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) (52%), and mobile money services (30%). Women were more likely to be in VSLAs than men (57% female compared to 43% male), and men were more likely to use mobile money.
- Weekly amounts saved in the VSLAs were low, with most respondents contributing less than Ugandan shilling (UGX) 2,000 (about US dollar (USD) 0.54) per week. Some respondents reported that the low savings rates hindered access to adequate credit and threatened the sustainability of the associations.
- Twenty percent of respondents who were in VSLAs reported having taken loans, with most being less than UGX 200,000 (about USD 54). Respondents used loans to start or improve businesses, fulfil basic household needs, pay school fees or access medical services, in that order. VSLA loans may also help to prevent distress sales of livestock. Some female respondents, who traditionally own fewer livestock than men, have been increasingly investing in livestock through VSLA loans.
- The main barriers to participation in VSLAs were lack of surplus cash to save, the belief that VSLAs were for better-off people and mistrust in VSLA leadership.

Main findings regarding innovation and adaptation within youth livelihoods, from qualitative data:

- Adaptations within livelihood strategies are occurring both in response to opportunities and in reaction to mostly idiosyncratic shocks. Diversification into additional economic activities is the main form of adaptation and frequently entails crossing traditional gendered divisions of labor by both men and women. These include women engaging in livestock marketing and men taking on roles such as selling firewood, chickens or local brew.
- Young people are taking advantage of new and existing technology in response to emerging market opportunities. We see particular growth around mobile phones, including resale and use of phones within existing businesses to expand a client base. Use of existing technology was mostly to intensify and expand

agricultural activities, such as building beehives and use of animal traction to expand fields.

- Youth are expanding into services and catering, although often along gendered lines. Women in the sample were baking and selling bread, preparing cooked food for sale at markets, and opening snack stalls. One young man was working as a security guard outside the sub-region, and another had opened a health clinic.
- A number of young people were intensifying or expanding their cultivation activities, a decision that may have been influenced by the relatively decent 2019 harvest. Respondents were seeking to expand their acreage, diversify their crops (including into cash crops, such as cotton) and dedicate additional effort to farming. Two male respondents were storing crops and selling across the border into South Sudan. Young people were also forming farming groups to share profits and minimize risks in new markets, such as growing vegetables to sell in towns.



- The primary challenges to engaging in more profitable and innovative livelihoods are systematic, including domestic and reproductive labor burdens upon women and the loss of livestock-based livelihoods for many men. Additional challenges include a lack of start-up capital, including lack of credit, land, and basic inputs, and the inability to fulfil educational goals due to lack of fees for secondary or tertiary education. The lack of educational qualification means that a number of youth are unable to advance into better-paying or skilled sectors.

Main findings on household market engagement, from quantitative data:

- Two very different types of wealth exist within the study population: animal-related wealth and farming-related wealth. Most households had farming-related wealth. While the majority of sampled households owned animals, the distribution of ownership was extremely skewed. For example, half of the households owned 90% of the livestock reported in the data. In contrast, the ownership of non-livestock and physical assets, although still skewed, was far more evenly distributed. Importantly, these two types of wealth are not entirely mutually exclusive, with some households holding both kinds of wealth.
- Shifts in market access and decision-making at the market between the baseline and midline data collections imply an increase in women's market participation. The proportion of men who said that their female spouse goes to the market rose significantly from 54% at the baseline to 77% at the midline. In addition, the number of men who reported that their female spouse usually makes decisions about market purchases increased significantly, from 60% at the baseline to 77% at the midline. Importantly, female respondents reported change in the same direction on this indicator.
- The increases in women's market participation were not uniform across the study population, with the main differences based on wealth type. The greater the animal wealth of the household, the significantly less likely the male respondent was to report that his female spouse went to the market or made decisions about market purchases. Households characterized by animal wealth are more likely to pursue pastoral livelihoods, and these findings imply that decision-making around livestock (including purchase and sale) remains largely in the hands of men.

- In examining the purchase and sale of livestock, we found that purchase at the baseline was strongly and significantly correlated with purchase at the midline (Figure 1). This finding means that those households that purchased animals in the first time period were the most likely to purchase animals again in the second time period; those who did not purchase animals in the first time period were the least likely to purchase animals in the second time period, illustrating that few new households have expanded into the livestock sector.
- In addition, we found a strong correlation between animal wealth and cattle purchases, with households with greater animal wealth significantly more likely to purchase cattle. (Farm wealth had no relationship with cattle purchases.) The higher the animal wealth at the baseline, the significantly more likely that the household purchased cattle at the midline (Figure 2). There is no such relationship with our farm wealth proxy, and the same relationship was not observed with either goats or sheep.
- In sum, we see that cattle purchasing is primarily the purview of the households with greater existing

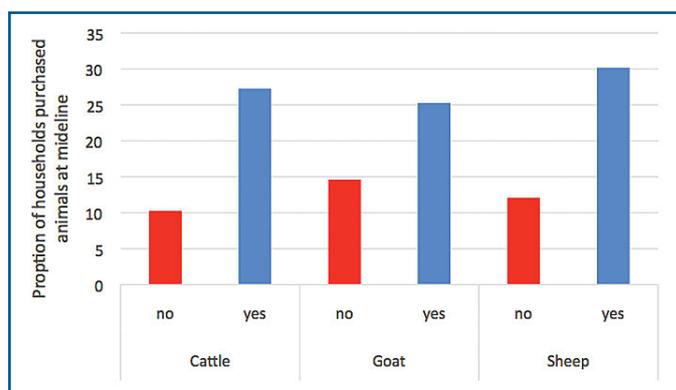


Figure 1. Relationship between baseline and midline purchase by type of livestock.

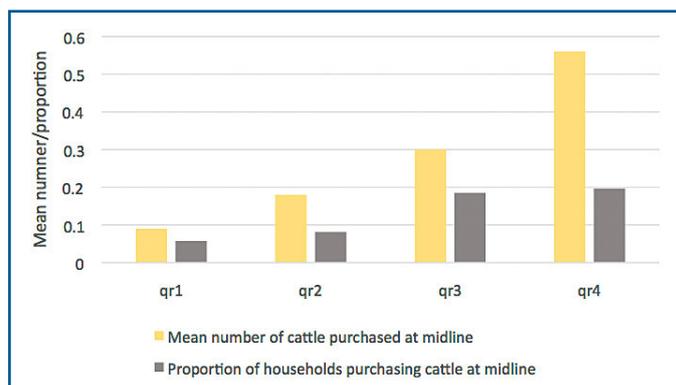


Figure 2. Cattle purchase at the midline by animal wealth quartile at the baseline.

animal wealth. In addition, we see that the same households were buying livestock at the baseline and midline. Taken together, these findings indicate that households that lack animal-related wealth to start with may be locked out of animal purchases, particularly of cattle, later on.

Conclusions

- Youth are saving money, and they are motivated to save. Only half of those who were saving were in VSLAs, nearly all of which were spontaneously created at the village level. The desire to save presents a huge area of opportunity. Programmers and policy makers should focus on facilitation of existing models (as opposed to creating new ones), as well as trainings on leadership, financial management and business skills, as these were all aspects raised by respondents as resulting in failure of or undermining confidence in savings groups. Such programs may improve the sustainability of VSLAs by bolstering leadership and success of investments by borrowers.
- The young people in the study are hard-working, resilient, creative and adaptive; these narratives counter stereotypes of idle youth. Continued support to markets and infrastructure in the sub-region, private sector development, capacity building and youth engagement will further expand opportunities for youth livelihoods. Attention should be paid to potential crowding out of women from typically female sectors if and when they become more profitable.
- Women appear to be increasingly engaged in markets, creating an opportunity for programs that assist women in developing financial literacy, promote savings and investments, and teach marketable skills. However, women's market engagement appears to be lower in pastoral households that have greater animal wealth, which means that programs will need to be tailored, targeted and tested with the cultural parameters in mind.
- The clustering of livestock purchases in only a few already wealthy households, coupled with the existing livestock inequality, has important implications for livestock-related market programming. Such programs appear likely to primarily benefit those who are better off and already own livestock, while having little impact upon poorer households that may be on the verge of dropping out of pastoral production. The ability of poorer households with small ruminants to trade up into cattle appears limited. This finding calls for a need to rethink market-based approaches to ensure they are not overlooking the already marginalized and impoverished, and they focus on interventions that can help the poor to build herd sizes and prevent losses, including drought response, veterinary services and conflict prevention.

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Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU)

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For more information about the KRSU:

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