

PROVISION OF LIVESTOCK AS A CATALYST FOR IMPROVED INCOME GENERATION ON SMALL FARMS IN WESTERN KENYA

Alfred Juma¹
Tim Roberts²

SUMMARY

Many of the Groups supported had humble origins. Some were originally formed by women who got together because of their desperate situation and started “merry go rounds” by which they each contributed a small amount of money each month and then supported members in turn either in a crisis situation or for a particular need - eg school fees.

As they developed self confidence and improved their well being in a small way, so ngos such as SACHKWR have been able to build on their strengths and support them in the next step towards self sustainability. The challenge now is to ensure that as SACHKWR move on and support other communities that they are able to continue on their own with the minimum of outside support. To this end it is hoped that one of the SACHKWR staff will shortly visit Tanzania where the HEIFER International organization has developed one of the most effective “exit strategies” within their African programmes. Based on his observations the programme will be adapted to fit the Kenya situation. This is the immediate challenge facing the SACHKWR team.

Key words: Kenya, smallholders, women’s groups, livestock, pass on, micro-credit

INTRODUCTION

The survival of the small family farm is a problem worldwide. Nowhere is the problem more acute than on the small farms in Africa. Population increases have resulted in fragmentation of land holdings especially in a Country such as Kenya where there is a limited amount of high potential land suitable for arable and intensive livestock production. At the same time there has to be a limit on the migration of people to the towns and cities where job opportunities are limited and huge urban slums have been generated.

Even on small areas of land of 1 hectare or less it is often difficult for the owner to realise it’s full productive potential due to lack of resources. Access to credit facilities is poor or often non existent for the poorest in the community which is a major constraint for development. In recent years, micro credit schemes have attempted to address this problem and one of the most successful of these is the provision in kind, in the form of livestock, which recipients are then obliged to pass on to other members within their community. The Send a Cow/Heifer Kenya (SACHKWR) partnership has initiated such a programme in seven Districts of western Kenya.

AREA OF OPERATION

The SACHKWR programme encompasses a triangular area bordered by Kisumu and lake Victoria to the south, the Uganda border to the west and Mount Elgon to the north. This includes the districts of Butere where the programme has it’s headquarters and covers Vihiga, Bondo, Siaya, Busia, Teso, and Bungoma. The main ethnic groups are the Abaluyha and Luo. Rainfall is higher in the east and diminishes as one approaches the Uganda border. Distribution is well spread owing to the influence of the lake and Mount Elgon, with the driest time being

¹Send a Cow/Heifer Project Kenya Western Region –SACHKWR (e-mail: robtimk@aol.com)

²Send a Cow/Heifer Project Kenya Western Region –SACHKWR



from January to March. Generally the rains are bimodal with two crops per year possible. The population density is highest in the south east with many of the holdings being less than 0.5 ha but as one heads west into the drier country so the farm size increases with some being more than 5 ha. The whole area is suited to mixed farming with some coffee grown on the slopes of Mount Elgon but sugar being the most extensive cash crop. There are two sugar factories – Mumias and Nzoia which have nuclei estates and large numbers of smallholder growers. Unfavourable import practices for sugar have led to cash flow problems, hence late payments to smallholders, which can be months or even years in arrears. There are some jaggeries in areas distant from factories which are supplied by small farmers.

OBJECTIVES

SACHKWR attempts to target the most vulnerable members of the community who do not already own improved livestock and are unable to access normal credit due to lack of collateral. The aim after a careful selection procedure is to empower vulnerable groups/families through appropriate structure training and then to provide technical training according to the type of animal to be received. Following provision of livestock the aim is to reduce poverty and hunger in an environmentally supportive manner so that the Group may stand on their own feet within a reasonable time period. SACHKWR can then move on to assist other communities.

Necessary Attributes for Success

Over 40 Groups have now been supported in this region with varying degrees of advancement. Obviously some communities and/or individuals demonstrate more commitment and enthusiasm than others:

□ Leadership – a vital ingredient is the entrepreneurship and community mindedness of one or more individuals usually the chairperson or other member of the committee. They must have the ability to galvanise the Group into action and lead by example by demonstrating a spirit of caring and sharing. Peer farmer trainer's capacity is being developed through appropriate skill transfer and demonstrations eg. last year 28 farmers were sent to an organic training centre in south west Uganda for two weeks. It is most notable how some had initiated vegetable gardens on their own farms within weeks of their return despite it being the dry season. Others blamed the dry weather for not having done much. The same excuse may be used for lack of fodder, yet one observes a neighbouring farmer with an excellent stand of grass. The hope is that the former will form the core of a sustainable community based extension system which will develop technical and managerial skills within their communities. There will be some form of payment by the Group for their advice. Such a stage has been reached with equivalent programmes in Tanzania . This is a critical time in Kenya where the role of the Government in provision of agricultural extension services to the small farmer is being diminished with the private sector being encouraged to take up the reins.

□ Gender – within Africa as a whole, a marked transformation is taking place with women having a greater say both at national level and in the home. (nb the honour bestowed on Wangari Maathai who won the Nobel Peace Prize last year for her efforts in conservation). SACHKWR tries to target the entire family with the entry point being through the women. The majority of Groups with whom SACHKWR work are women's groups though most have some male members sometimes being as many as 25% of the membership. The income of those women who receive livestock are controlled directly by themselves and subject to shrewd management to meet family requirements and initiate new business ventures. They play a major role in providing food security and ensure that the benefits from the new enterprises are fairly

shared by everyone.

□ Youth groups – it has been encouraging to note that SACHKWR has been approached by young people who have seen the success of nearby women’s groups and wish to emulate their achievements. They are participating in those groups or forming their own. They represent the future continuity of the project as they are generally energetic and healthy and more open to training. Jobs are extremely scarce and many have had to drop out of school at secondary level due to lack of fees. Some are only too aware of the limited job opportunities in towns and cities and recognise that their main hope for advancement is to derive at least some income from the parcel of land which they own however small that may be. Others fall victim to vices such as drug abuse, prostitution, theft, thuggery etc by ending up on the streets. Some other ngos have been addressing this problem already, notably the Maseno Inter-Christian Self-Help (MICH) ngo which is based on a Government farmer training centre from which they have leased some land and buildings. Initiated by another dedicated Kenyan lady trained in agriculture at the Egerton University in Rift Valley with some subsequent teaching experience, Fidelis Wainaina was assisted to make a survey of the “street children” in Kisumu. This revealed that 70% of them originated from the densely populated District of Vihiga where she had done her teaching and where MICH is now located. The objective is to prevent the children running away to the towns by providing them with meaningful vocational training in their home areas.

□ Education – since the new Government came to power in 2003, one of their first tasks was to abolish fees for primary school pupils. Though attendance is not actually free, as parents still have to buy uniforms, text books etc it has meant that almost all children are now able to attend school at least up to standard eight. This will be a great boost for rural development over the long term as literacy rates are increased.

CONSTRAINTS

The normal farming risks apply with weather, politics, market outlets and prices etc. Tradition and cultural practices can sometimes have a negative effect on development also. However the “joker in the pack” is the HIV/Aids epidemic on which it is necessary to dwell at some length as this is no doubt one of the most severely affected areas within the Country. The scale of the problem can be judged by the comment of the Director of an orphanage near Kisumu who when informed that it was the wish of SACHKWR to target vulnerable families including those caring for “Aids” orphans replied that “- but every family is caring for at least one orphan in this area!”

The impact has been most devastating on those of working age resulting in a situation where grandparents and children are left to care for each other.

Under these circumstances SACHKWR relies on collaboration with other organisations which are working directly on the HIV/Aids problem on such issues as feeding and educating the children and carrying out day care etc

SACHKWR has departed from it’s normal mandate of working with Groups and supplying animals to individual farmers by providing support to three organisations which are playing an active part in working with orphans and Aids sufferers:

□ Lusi Community Orphans Project – Lusi is the name of a village located in Bondo District of Nyanza Province very close to Lake Victoria. It is a community of around 370 people of whom 77 are orphans aged from birth to 20 years. This area is quite isolated and has hardly been reached by the larger ngos who work in this field. However Michele Oestertag the energetic wife of a U.N. employee in Nairobi investigated why one of her house servants was continually requesting extra funds, by visiting her home almost 300 miles from Nairobi. Realis-



ing the desperate straits of the community and the fact that the women were doing their best to try to keep afloat, Michele has assisted them to embark on income generating activities including dairy farming, poultry production (eggs and broilers), beekeeping and crafts. SACHKWR has provided 3 cows for the dairy enterprise. The older orphans participate in their management. The plan is for those who's guardians are able (they are all billeted with local families – this is not an institution!) to make land available, then they will be passed on offspring for individual ownership with they eventually passing on to others.

- GRACE – this is a church organisation which acquired a property in Kanduyi near Bungoma town. Being near the Eldoret to Uganda main highway it was originally being developed as a motel but the church took over when the owner went bankrupt and have adapted the facilities to house orphans. Prior to the involvement of SACHKWR they had already embarked on a dairy project with the objective of feeding the orphans who live on site but with lack of support this had collapsed. Thus as the infrastructure was basically all there, it was decided to assist with stock but with good backup. The objective is similar to that of LUSI in that the orphans will return to the land where able, with eventual individual animal ownership. An interesting income raising opportunity here is to bottle water from a very good borehole on the farm for local marketing.

- AGRI (Appropriate Grass Roots Intervention) – though outside the normal area of operation being located around Eldoret about 80 miles distant, this project is of great significance to those working with HIV sufferers. A number of sites averaging 2 - 4 ha. are being developed to produce crops and animal products for feeding live-in patients who are receiving medical treatment (including anti retroviral drugs). The two objectives are improved nutrition, and as a demonstration to those who will recover sufficiently to return to their shambas (farms). SACHKWR provided 3 high producing in calf heifers to one of the units.

Other organisations with whom SACHKWR collaborate include the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) who provide vital support to orphans and their carers.

Marketing

In order to enable those farmers who have increased the productive potential of their farms and now have surplus products for sale the importance of them having access to markets is paramount. Milk can become difficult to market in the immediate vicinity of the farm and therefore there are plans to establish collecting centres with milk coolers in future where there is sufficient production. Heifer Project Kenya already have assisted to establish three such plants in the Rift Valley region, one in Central and two at the Coast. Other organisations such as SACRED and "Farmers Own" (a subsidiary of the "Association for Better Land Husbandry") assist farmers with marketing crops such as maize, sorghum and groundnuts from the region..

Added Value

Some options which are being explored are simple methods of yoghurt production and maziwa lala (sour milk) which is popular with the local people and a good way of utilizing evening milk. The Unungu Women's Group supported by MICH has expanded their groundnut production more than ten fold partly due to the manure from newly acquired dairy goats. They are now investigating the possibilities of producing peanut butter. Others have simple presses for oil crops. Investment in these activities is almost invariably from the income of their animal(s).

Off-Farm Income

Once farmers receive surplus income from their livestock they may launch other off-farm activities, which require some initial capital investment. The ingenuity displayed by many

farmers to increase their income from other activities is to be applauded. Some examples are as follows:

- setting up roadside kiosks to sell household essentials
- purchase, transport and resale of cereals
- using bicycles for people transport (boda boda)
- producing and selling crafts
- renting additional land for increased production
- contract ploughing with teams of oxen
- “catering” for special functions such as funerals, weddings or other special occasions.
- “jua kali” – street manufacture of simple tools, equipment, vehicle repairs etc