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David Layne Coppock
Utah State University

Seyoum Tezera
PARIMA-Ethiopia

Solomon Desta
Utah State University

Getachew Gebru
Utah State University

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Global Livestock CRSP

Successful Implementation of Collective Action and Human-Capacity Building Among Pastoralists in Southern Ethiopia: Lessons Learned, 2001-2008

Seyoum Tezera, PARIMA-Ethiopia; Solomon Desta, Getachew Gebru and D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University
Pastoral Risk Management Project

Research Brief 08-03-PARIMA December 2008

Since 2000 the PARIMA project has implemented pilot risk-management activities among poverty-stricken, semi-settled pastoralists in southern Ethiopia. The goal has been to improve human welfare via collective action and capacity building. Outcomes include progress in income generation, asset conservation, and livelihood diversification. The approach has been unique to southern Ethiopia in that a bottom-up, participatory perspective has dominated. It has focused on the priorities and felt needs of local people rather than top-down development of livestock or agricultural technology. Fifty-nine collective-action groups were created. Dominated by women, they have included over 2,300 members and most groups have been recently merged to form cooperatives. Not one group has failed and many group members have emerged as key leaders of large cooperatives that include a wider variety of recruits. Creating sustainable impacts via collective action and capacity building requires time, patience, and skill—it is not a quick fix. The process of taking raw, illiterate volunteers and transforming them into functional and sustainable groups took two to three years on average. Ten lessons for success are forwarded as guidelines for pastoral development under similar circumstances.

Background

The PARIMA project has operated in southern Ethiopia since 1997. Project efforts to engage semi-settled pastoralists using participatory approaches began in 2000. PARIMA's approaches departed from top-down research traditions because project researchers focused on more of a bottom-up, participatory process that put outreach at the front and sought to empower local people and build stakeholder partnerships. Methods and outcomes of this work are documented in detail elsewhere (Desta et al., 2006; Coppock et al., 2009; Tezera et al., In preparation). The 59 collective-action groups created over seven years have proven to be sustainable and nearly all have been transformed into legally recognized producer cooperatives. This process has involved at least 2,300 pastoralists overall, of whom over 75% have been women. The primary goal of collective action has been defined by the people themselves, namely improving incomes and well-being via capacity building and livelihood diversification. Researchers have also estimated that the total number of direct beneficiaries for this effort may exceed 13,800 people; these include the families associated with the 2,300 group members.

Why focus on people rather than on the traditional pastoral research topics of range livestock, forage production, or dry-land agriculture? There are several reasons, but prominent among them is that team members believe that traditional pastoral production systems in southern Ethiopia are no longer viable due to human population growth, heavy stocking rates, and natural-resource degradation. Options for positive and rapid impacts on human welfare and improved risk management lie more in the realm of human-capacity building and livestock marketing (Coppock et al., 2009).

The step-wise model PARIMA developed for capacity building is shown in Figure 1. Details are covered in Desta et al. (2006) and Coppock et al. (2009). Use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods was the foundation for local identification of priority problems and potential solutions at a wide variety of pastoral settlements; problems were dominated by scarcity of food, water, and money, while local solutions centered on the need to increase incomes and diversify livelihoods. Incentives for the (mostly female) volunteers to organize themselves came from observations of dynamic women's groups in northern Kenya, made during a field tour when Ethiopian women were taken across the border. The successes of the Kenyans were embraced and emulated across the Borana Plateau.

Once Ethiopian collective-action groups were formed, investments were made by PARIMA to build capacity of group members. This involved having partners create short courses and interventions that included training in literacy and numeracy, micro-finance, small-business development, management of group dynamics, and livestock marketing. Efforts were also made to help create a northbound marketing chain linking pastoralists, traders, and exporters (Figure 1).

Findings

Time and Costs Required for Impact. Overall, PARIMA estimates that it takes from two to three years to transform raw, illiterate volunteers into functional and sustainable groups, capable of solving their own problems and undertaking a gradual process of livelihood diversification (Tezera et al., In preparation) This time frame is broken out into several phases, including an establishment phase (three to six months), a growth phase (eight to 12 months), and a maturation phase (12 to 16 months.)

Given suitable logistical support and adoption of PARIMA's capacity building model under similar circumstances as those found on the Borana Plateau, within three years a target community of 13,800 persons could be impacted at an approximate cost of up to US $34 per person (Tezera et al., In preparation). Costs should be less in places having higher population densities; the population density on the central Borana Plateau is probably 10 persons per square kilometer overall, including inhabitants of towns and settlements.

Lessons Learned

1. Emphasize Interventions Starting on a Small Scale. PARIMA began to form collective-action groups by establishing primary cells of five to seven members each for the initiation of savings and loan activities. Five to seven of these cells were then aggregated into secondary groups for a total of 25 to 49 members overall. These secondary groups were the basis for several years of strategic investments; they were later merged to form legally recognized cooperatives. Researchers have observed that small units are adaptable, self-replicating, cost-effective, and more likely to sustain themselves in remote places. By starting small, new associations can be built-up in a step-wise process. Small groups are encouraged to include a few friends or relatives deemed trustworthy; memberships are thus voluntary and new members are carefully screened. Membership is never dictated or top-down. Small groups based on mutual trust have been observed to diffuse in the project area (Coppock et al., 2007b).

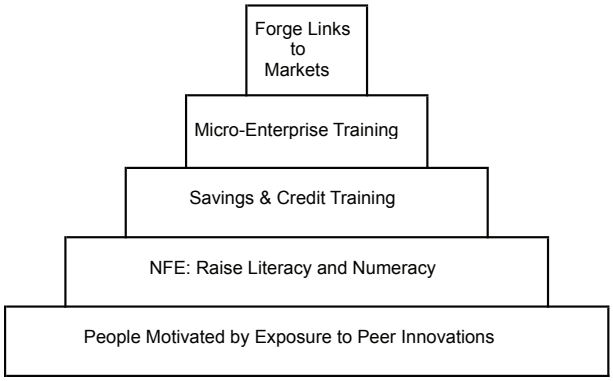
2. Emphasize Authentic Community Participation and Impact. PARIMA used a genuine participatory approach (PRA) that empowered communities to identify their felt needs and develop community action plans (CAPs) to guide their development efforts. In this process, team members acted as facilitators. They did not advance their own agenda. The space created for community participation enhanced a sense of community ownership of the process and increased the local capacity to solve problems. A well-conducted PRA can be a week-long engagement of detailed analysis between facilitators and a community. It takes time and needs to build communication channels and trust. The facilitating agency also needs ready access to ample funds to support CAPs so that a tangible outcome eventually occurs. It is notable that communities also must provide in-kind match to indicate their true interest in, and commitment to, the CAP.

3. Emphasize Genuine Partnership Building. PARIMA worked with many partners to enable impact under conditions where project beneficiaries were widely dispersed and development actors limited in number with scarce resources. Partners learned to share experiences, knowledge, and resources to maximize return per unit of investment. Project partners included governmental and nongovernmental agencies. Sustaining such partnerships is difficult, but necessary. Credit for success must be widely shared to encourage stakeholders to also share ownership of outcomes.

4. Emphasize Women in Development. Team members gave special attention to actively involve pastoral women in all phases of project efforts. Over 75% of members of the collective action groups have been women. Some groups have been organized as exclusively women. Different levels of success have been observed based on gender mix of the memberships. Women-only groups appear to be more cohesive under times of stress, even when they possess a high level of ethnic diversity, including Muslims, non-Muslims, etc. Such groups have demonstrated a high level of mutual respect and support for one another. They also have played significant roles as "peace makers" during times of local conflict. Women have been more creative, responsible, and entrepreneurial than men in terms of their micro-finance and small-business activities. Moreover, women have typically used the proceeds from their investments to improve the well-being of their families and reinvest the balance in productive outlets. Overall, the program has helped to empower women and bring gradual change to the household decision-making structure. Women's position and visibility in the communities has improved tremendously.

5. Emphasize Capacity Building for Communities and Other Stakeholders. Capacity building is one of the key components of the PARIMA model (Figure 1). All training offered was demand driven. Capacity building was conducted for pastoralists as well as staff of partner organizations. Because of the high turnover among government personnel, PARIMA chose to focus more on building capacity of community members. Literacy and numeracy were considered essential for the success of the savings and credit and small-business development activities. A non-formal education (NFE) program for adults and children was conducted in one of the PARIMA sites called Didahara. The program went well and was eventually handed over to the district education office. Another approach followed by PARIMA was to provide a lower cost and more flexible proxy non-formal education program (proxy-NFE) for group members with minimum material support for the teachers who were selected by the

Figure 2. Step-wise process of capacity building for pastoral collective- action groups in southern Ethiopia as created by the PARIMA project. Source: Coppock (unpublished).



communities themselves. All of the proxy-NFE centers enabled significant numbers of community members to begin to read, write, sign their names, and do simple arithmetic. The program has not achieved all the goals as intended, and in part this is due to the limited time of many community members to participate.

6. Emphasize "Peer to Peer" Learning Among Project Beneficiaries. Compared to the pastoral women of southern Ethiopia in 2000, the pastoral women's groups observed in northern Kenya were far better off in terms of asset accumulation, livelihood diversification, and general social welfare. Thus, PARIMA linked both together via cross-border educational tours and mentoring visits to share experiences and transfer knowledge. The first tour to northern Kenya was conducted over 10 days in early 2001 and involved 15 pastoral women and five development workers from across the Borana Plateau. It cost less than US $250 per person to undertake. The impact in southern Ethiopia has ultimately affected many thousands of people. These efforts facilitated "peer to peer" learning that led to quick and lasting impacts on the attitudes of the Ethiopians towards the value of cooperation, market involvement, savings, diversification of income sources, undertaking community investments, and improving natural-resource management. In addition to cross-border tours, numerous in-country tours were organized to take pastoral leaders to the central Ethiopian highlands to observe major livestock marketing facilities, dairy farms, and cooperatives. Because their community influence is greater than that of researchers or extension personnel, outstanding leaders from selected groups were also taken to mentor others.

7. Emphasize Market Linkages and Networking. Creating reliable market linkages and business alliances is important for groups to survive and flourish. Important livestock market linkages that involved 11 collective-action groups and the LUNA and ELFORA export abattoirs were created to facilitate livestock trading. Since 2003-4, hundreds of thousands of sheep and goats, and thousands of cattle and camels, made their way from northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia to markets in the Ethiopian highlands and Gulf States using such linkages. Pastoral groups are also linked to cooperatives in the central part of the country to diversify their market outlets so that they won't be dependent on risky export opportunities. Such initiatives help pave the way for improved use of market information, cell phone technology, and other innovations.

8. Emphasize Respect for Local Culture to Facilitate Impact. PARIMA respects local culture on the Borana Plateau and uses it to facilitate effective implementation of the intervention model. The deep-rooted pastoral culture of the Borana community to reserve grazing, water, and other essential resources for use in difficult times (such as drought) was easily translated into the usefulness of saving money for future use. Similarly, the process of extending and repaying small loans within an agreed time frame was reinforced by the local cultural practices of the temporary loaning of livestock. Other social-support and resource management functions of traditional society have been important in facilitating the implementation of other collective-action processes.

9. Emphasize Effective Management of Internal Group Conflicts. Social conflict among members was consistently observed in the early stages of all groups. Groups bring people together from different personal, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Internal conflicts also can become more prevalent over time as groups become better established and entertain the needs and aspirations of each member. Lack of conflict may also mean that important issues are dormant and the group is not working effectively. If conflicts are not handled properly they can easily cause group disintegration. In one of the northern-most sites, the collective-action groups underwent a series of internal conflicts when they initially failed in a livestock-marketing activity. This resulted in a complete cessation of all group activities for over 12 months. Later, after examining their mistakes, they agreed to use a new approach that involved establishment of a multi-purpose cooperative and including experienced local traders to undertake the livestock marketing activities. Using regular monitoring and evaluation activities (also called action research); PARIMA has kept in touch with all groups on a quarterly basis over the past seven years. By documenting issues and helping mediate conflicts and building trust with all parties, the PARIMA team was able to help groups effectively manage each and every conflict. This also illustrates the long-term commitment needed to promote sustainability.

10. Emphasize Voluntary, Well-Managed Transitions of Groups to Form Cooperatives. Smaller groups should be aggregated to take advantage of scale benefits. Larger associations having hundreds of members can combine more human and financial resources to be successful. However, the graduation of groups to formal cooperatives must be on a voluntary

basis, and the process needs to be carefully managed. If this process is pushed on a non-voluntary basis by outside forces the chance increases that cooperative action will fail. People rushed into cooperatives without adequate training, or an inability of cooperative members to screen new applicants for trustworthiness and talent will undoubtedly contribute to serious problems for sustainability. The registration of groups according to the federal Cooperative Act should provide members with greater access to loans and markets and it can provide a legal basis to help reduce delinquency on personal loan repayments. The downside, however, is that cooperatives can have a higher visibility and hence a greater vulnerability to political hijacking and meddling; there is also a cost for the added layers of bureaucracy. All of the PARIMA groups that have graduated to form cooperatives have done so voluntarily, and they are doing well as of today.

Practical Implications

Since the PARIMA intervention model was novel for the pastoral areas of southern Ethiopia as well as the team members, researchers learned as they worked. Learning by doing and adapting to the local context have been important to achieve lasting success. Each element of the process required time, patience, and skill to implement. Key challenges included overcoming: (1) negative views of policy makers concerning informal collective action; (2) traditional views of pastoral men to discount the potential role of women to take a lead in pastoral development; (3) barriers in the traditional relationships between pastoral producers, traders, and livestock buyers; (4) an illiteracy rate among adult pastoralists of 95%; (5) barriers for cross-border interactions of Ethiopian and Kenyan citizens; and (6) risks of cooperative formation, as above. However, by PARIMA project assessments, most of these challenges have been overcome. Pockets of this destitute and vulnerable community have been transformed into more self-reliant and robust entities.The capabilities of the project beneficiaries are impressive, and PARIMA suggests that this approach be institutionalized, tested, and further modified for a larger area of Borana and Gugi zones as well as other parts of rural Ethiopia.

Further Reading

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About the Authors: Mr. Seyoum Tezera is a PARIMA senior field assistant based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Email: S.Tezerra@cgiar.org. Dr. Solomon Desta is a PARIMA research associate through Utah State University and was based in Nairobi, Kenya at the time of this research. He is now based in Addis Ababa. Email: S.Desta@cgiar.org. Dr. Getachew Gebru is a PARIMA research associate through Utah State University and is based in Addis Ababa. Email: G.Gebru@cgiar.org. Dr. D. Layne Coppock is an Associate Professor in the Department of Environment & Society at Utah State University. Email Layne.Coppock@usu.edu.

The GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) was established in 1997 and conducts research, training, and outreach in an effort to improve the welfare of pastoral and agro-pastoral people with a focus on northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The project is led by Dr. D. Layne Coppock, Utah State University. Email: Layne.Coppock@usu.edu. Work described in this brief was also supported by the USAID Mission to Ethiopia.

The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East and West Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

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