



**Centre for
Humanitarian
Change** | What
Works



WHAT WORKS BRIEF

Mission

The Centre for Humanitarian Change aims to redefine the model for aid in fragile areas using evidence of local models of What Works and by breaking down system-wide barriers to using longer-term thinking and context-specific approaches.

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Empowerment and Water

Among Pastoralist Women in Northern Kenya

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Executive Summary

*When I have water... like now, when it is raining, every other task is simple.
I even get time to rest.* —female respondent, Kurikuri

This study explores questions around women, water and gendered power relations in Maasai and Samburu counties of Northern Kenya. It looks at both water-secure and water-insecure communities. The study is based on the premise that one way that women in patriarchal pastoralist communities are disempowered in relation to men is through the gendered dynamics of domestic and livestock water security. It anticipated that the poor performance of local water security initiatives would be shown to be a factor in women's relative disempowerment.

The study looks specifically at gender roles and responsibilities in relation to domestic water sources and domestic water security. It tries to discern any significant differences between experiences of women who are members of organised groups (for example, income-generating and savings groups) and those who are not.

Key Findings

- At the household level, female responsibility for domestic water is a source of some power, rather than a manifestation of disempowerment.
- Improving women's access to water does not necessarily lead to their greater participation in income-generating activities.
- Women who are powerful can mobilise social, political, financial and knowledge capital to improve their access to water.

This study was funded through a Catalyst grant provided by the REACH programme, which is itself funded by UK aid from the UK government.

REACH

Improving water security for the poor



Methodology

The late-2016 study occurred in five rural communities in Laikipia and Samburu counties. Sites were selected based on perceived water security status.

Standard qualitative research tools were employed, allowing comparison and triangulation: (a) single-sex focus group discussions, (b) semi-structured household interviews, (c) mapping of local water sources, (d) key informant interviews, and (e) interviews and observations at water-collection points.



Key Findings

Women's Empowerment

At the household level, female responsibility for domestic water is a source of some power, rather than a manifestation of disempowerment.

- Women carry full responsibility for domestic water security and management. They exert significantly more control over water collected for household use compared with men.
- A man's access to water within the family home is by consent, not by right. Women can deny their husbands access to water they have collected.

Income Generation

Improving women's access to water does not necessarily lead to their greater participation in income-generating activities.

- Of the assumptions going into the research, the study strongly demonstrated (a) a correlation between female access to income-generating activities and greater domestic water security, but findings did not demonstrate (b) that women would want to invest additional spare time in generating income.
- Findings suggest that women prefer to use spare time for their other caring roles and for recreation.

Watering Livestock

Watering livestock does not enhance women's felt or perceived power relative to other women. Taking care of livestock is an additional burden on women's time and energy.

Gendered Control of Water Sources

Men control water sources, but this has little impact on the quantity or quality of water available for domestic use.

Key Findings (cont'd)

Managing Household Tasks

Meeting domestic water needs requires careful planning and task and resource management.

Mobility and Resource Constraints

Time and energy needed for water collection constrains women from accessing other resources and constrains care practices.

Water Storage

Domestic water storage facilities make a positive difference to female daily life.

Responsibility for Water Collection

The female head of household makes decisions about who will collect water, and when.

Control of Financial Resources

Where payment is required, unless women have sufficient income, they are dependent on their men-folk to provide money for domestic water.

- Social gender norms do not seem to give men the right to control women's independently sourced income. However, few women in these communities have independent income or access to a savings and loan group.

Male Perceptions of Domestic Water Responsibilities

For most women, fulfilling responsibilities for household water is extremely tiring and time-consuming.

- While men are somewhat aware of the physical toil entailed, sharing the burden is not considered an option, and generally, men are not thinking of ways to ease women's burden.

Results of Improved Access to Water

Access to water has improved some aspects of women's lives: reducing the time spent and distances covered for fetching water, reducing waterborne disease and making more water available for domestic use. However, very few improved water supplies exist in these communities.



Conclusions

In the context of the research, empowerment appears to be tied to a woman's ability to command respect or to exercise authority in social, family, business and political circles, which, in turn, gives her access to resources that help improve her household's well-being in terms of water security.

Findings from this study suggest avenues for enhancing water security for households in pastoralist communities by empowering women— access to capital in its variety of forms, improved household water storage, involvement of women in managing water resources, and reduced distances to water sources.

More research is needed to identify the extent to which women's access to different forms of capital (social, financial, political and knowledge) in-

fluences a household's water security.

Women indicated that any time savings from their water collection and other domestic roles are used for recreation and other care-giving roles. These include caring for children and preparing food for the family. This supports evidence that improvements in household water security contribute to improved nutrition and health outcomes for children, but it contradicts the common assumption that water security leads to engagement in economic empowerment activities.

Investment in rural transport could improve access to water. In all five communities studied, the use of motorbikes for water transportation has improved water security for households. Operational research would evaluate the extent that improved transportation contributes to increased household water security.

Key Recommendations

Make water security programming more gender responsive in the following ways:

- ◆ Enhance women's earning capacity in a water economy that is increasingly cash-based.
- ◆ Enhance household water security through better household water storage and rainwater harvesting technologies.
- ◆ Improve household access to water through modern water transportation technologies.
- ◆ Improve existing water-management structures to ensure efficient and equitable distribution of water.
- ◆ Give women (or women's groups) opportunities to manage water supplies.
- ◆ Strengthen water governance so that investment in water-related infrastructure improves access over the long term.

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About CHC

The **Centre for Humanitarian Change (CHC)**, is a humanitarian think-tank based in East Africa and specialising in addressing the challenges of effective assistance to people in fragile areas. Centre for Humanitarian Change has drawn together Kenyan and locally based, international expertise to provide professional research, assessment and learning to strengthen the planning, technical, institutional and management aspects of programming in fragile parts of Africa.

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