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The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



## CASE STUDY: INCREASED ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN IN NORTHERN KENYA'S LIVESTOCK SECTOR THROUGH GRANTS



*Cover photo credit: Mercy Mbuge/ ACDI/VOCA*

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CG	County Governments
IGA	Income Generating Activity
KDDBS	Kenya Dairy Board
REAP	Rural Enterprise Access Program
SME	Small- and medium-sized enterprises
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar
VF	Victoria Foods

# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Deeply ingrained gender norms around livestock ownership and management have historically limited women's participation and decision-making in northern Kenya's livestock sector, which has been traditionally dominated by men<sup>1</sup>. This, coupled with gender-discriminatory business environments, has perpetuated a cycle of restricted access to vital resources and assets for female entrepreneurs, notably access to business finance. Recognizing these barriers to female participation and entrepreneurship in the livestock sector in northern Kenya, the Feed the Future Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity - the Feed the Future Kenya Expanding and Diversifying Viable Economic Opportunities Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by ACDI/VOCA and partners (BOMA, Mercy Corps and Smart Regional Consultant), devised a multifaceted approach to facilitate women's participation in livestock markets and tackle barriers obstructing their entrepreneurial pursuits.



*A livestock trader at Oldonyiro Livestock Market in Isiolo County. Photo credit: Sheila Obi /ACDIVOCA*

In particular, the Activity strategically utilized grants to address the access to finance gap for women, thereby enhancing their participation in the livestock sector and enabling them to diversify or expand their businesses. To optimize the impacts of these grants, the Activity complemented them with additional interventions. These included providing business skills training, imparting knowledge on value addition, and facilitating product development sessions. Through these combined efforts, women were empowered to seize emerging market trends and capitalize on new opportunities within the livestock sector.

<sup>1</sup> ACDI/VOCA. 2019. *Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity. Gender and Youth Analysis Report. Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity*

<sup>2</sup> ACDI/VOCA 2023. *Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity. Case Study: Inclusivity in design and implementation of Kenya Livestock Markets Systems-Grants Portfolio*

The Activity deployed various categories of grants to address challenges within livestock and related sectors of northern Kenya<sup>2</sup>. A breakdown of these grants by the gender of the recipient(s) revealed a notable underrepresentation of women as recipients of large grants. Out of 20 large grants (ranging from USD 15,000 to 25,000), only six were awarded to women-led businesses. The disparity stemmed from the fact that many women-owned businesses operate in the informal sector and face difficulty in meeting the required cost share, thus limiting their eligibility for large grants.

However, the project sought to bridge this gap through alternative grant categories. These included the **Small Sized Grants for Income Generation and Supplementation** (USD 3,500) which benefited 316 female-owned businesses, constituting approximately 72 percent of total recipients in this category. Additionally, the **Small Size Multipurpose Grants** (USD 500) targeted women and girls in groups and community groups, benefiting 5,460 women and girls. Furthermore, the **Small Size Youth Workforce Grant** (USD 500) aimed to enhance youth employability and workforce development for youth aged 18-35. This grant provided partial scholarships to support apprenticeship, vocational, or technical training. The grant supported 124 youths, with 100 of them being women and girls. Finally, the **Cooperative Grant** (USD 92,000-220,000) was tailored to support the development of cooperatives and strengthen member-based organizations. This grant targeted county technical staff, registered members, and management committees.

Throughout the duration of the project, the Activity provided USD 2.5 million in competitive grants to 360 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), comprised of 322 female-led and 38 male-led businesses. These grants, ranging from USD 700 to USD 245,000, were instrumental in kickstarting or scaling up small-scale ventures. These grants contributed significantly to the economic empowerment and self-sufficiency of the women-led businesses supported by the Activity. Additionally, these grants facilitated the leveraging of USD 531,871, further amplifying their impact on the local economy.

This case study is the second of two case studies on inclusivity in the Activity grants portfolio. Whereas the first case study detailed the measures undertaken by the Activity to ensure an inclusive design and implementation of its grants portfolio, this study delves into the tangible impact of Activity grants on facilitating women's meaningful participation in the livestock sector. It examines the role of Activity grants in fostering women's engagement and promoting female entrepreneurship within the livestock sector.

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<sup>2</sup> ACDI/VOCA. 2020. *Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity. Gender and Youth Strategy: A Gender Transformative Approach to Implementing Inclusive Livestock Market Systems Programs*. Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity.

<sup>3</sup> 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy | Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment | U.S. Agency for International Development ([usaid.gov](https://www.usaid.gov))

<sup>4</sup> Gender First - ACDI/VOCA ([acdivoca.org](https://www.acdivoca.org))

<sup>5</sup> Defined as an increase in women's capacity (agency) to choose from existing alternatives (resources) that have the potential to improve their existing situations (achievements). Source: Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30, 435-464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>

# INCREASED WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GRANTS

In northern Kenya, livestock ownership and control are heavily skewed towards men, reflecting entrenched gender biases and inequalities inherent in traditional patriarchal societies. Within pastoralist communities, where livestock serves as a fundamental asset for livelihoods, the limited ownership of livestock by women translates to restricted opportunities for income generation. This perpetuates a cycle of feminized poverty and undermines women's economic empowerment<sup>3</sup>.

In the following sections, we outline how Activity grants facilitated the enhanced participation of women in the livestock sector.

## Expanded Employment for Women



Activity large grants were directed towards established businesses within the livestock sector in northern Kenya, specifically those with the capacity and potential to catalyze impact. These businesses were pivotal in stimulating demand for inputs and services, while also necessitating aggregators and input providers at the supply end. With the support of these grants, recipient businesses made strategic investments in machinery, processing, and storage infrastructure.

The expansion of these enterprises, fueled by the investments facilitated by the grants, resulted in a surge in demand for labor, particularly among women. Consequently, employment opportunities were created for women within the factories, thereby contributing to their increased participation and engagement in the livestock sector.



*USAID LMS support has improved livelihoods for women who depend on milk production.  
Photo credit: Mercy Mbugu /ACDIVOCA*

<sup>3</sup> ACDI/VOCA. 2018. *Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity. Gender Analysis. Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity.*

Illustrating this point is the case of Victoria Foods (VF), a private sector entity and recipient of a USD 143,452 grant from the Activity. With technical support provided by the Activity, VF leveraged the grant to establish both an ice factory and a poultry feed production plant. Prior to the establishment of the ice factory, VF employed five women. However, with the introduction of the ice plant, VF significantly expanded its operations, resulting in the creation of employment opportunities for an additional 20 women. These women were engaged as fish sellers, as well as in fish filleting, and in various roles within the animal feed factory. Specifically, they served as machine operators, participated in feed processing and packaging activities. Through these employment opportunities, VF not only bolstered its own operations but also fostered increased participation of women in the livestock sector.

Additionally, through grants allocated to youth and in collaboration with the county government (CG), the Activity played a pivotal role in enhancing access to education and training for women<sup>4</sup> and youth, thereby augmenting their employability. Specifically, the Activity offered scholarships to 124 youths and 100 women, including some who were already employed by the CG. Notably, 75 percent of scholarship recipients graduated and were subsequently employed by the CG to address staffing shortages in extension services in rural areas, meat inspection, and cooperative management.

Moreover, these grants enabled both youth and select adult CG employees to enhance their skills and service delivery within their communities. Notably, nineteen scholarship recipients (12 male youth, 7 female youth) who trained in animal health established businesses in underserved areas within the Activity counties upon graduation. Monthly bulletins from the National Drought Management Authority and CG reports underscored the significant impact of these trainings and increased employment opportunities facilitated by the Activity. They resulted in improved animal health delivery systems, enhanced disease management, and increased livestock health and productivity. Consequently, better market prices for livestock were achieved, contributing to heightened household income and bolstering resilience against prevalent droughts and other shocks in northern Kenya.

**Abshira Vitamin Cake Bakery, a woman-owned business situated within the Garissa Livestock Market,** was a beneficiary of a small grant totaling USD 2,363 from the Activity. This financial support enabled Abshira to procure modern baking equipment, significantly amplifying its production capacity from 100 to 1,000 cookies per day. Additionally, the grant facilitated the hiring of an assistant to support operations. As a result of these enhancements, the bakery experienced a notable increase in daily earnings, which surged to USD 30, while monthly profits reached up to USD 120. Moreover, the Activity fostered a valuable partnership between Abshira Vitamin Cake Bakery and the Northeastern National Polytechnic. Through this collaboration, six female students were able to acquire essential baking skills, aligning with their entrepreneurial aspirations within the food and beverage management sector. This exemplifies the tangible impact of Activity grants in fostering economic empowerment and entrepreneurial development within local communities.

## Startup Capital for Women-owned or -led Businesses



The Activity also played a crucial role in facilitating the establishment of businesses by women through the provision of small grants. These grants were tailored for individual women entrepreneurs or women organized in groups, benefitting 316 women. These grants empowered women to launch small businesses within livestock markets, including retail shops where they sold various items purchased with the grants such as foodstuffs, Mpesa services,

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<sup>4</sup> Although the scholarships targeted youth, there were a few adult women who were employees of the county government who also benefited from the scholarships. The scholarship provided a platform for them to gain more skills to support in service delivery to the community.



and mobile phone accessories. Furthermore, women grant recipients utilized the funds to invest in refrigeration equipment, enabling them to store and sell cold drinks, as well as kitchen appliances for their food retail ventures. This strategic allocation of grants not only empowered women entrepreneurs but also enhanced the diversity of services offered within livestock market premises. Overall, through these grants, the Activity encouraged women and youth entrepreneurs to provide supplementary services, thereby enhancing the vibrancy of livestock markets in northern Kenya.

Activity grants directed to individual women entrepreneurs also played a pivotal role in enabling them to expand existing businesses within value chains traditionally underrepresented by women in northern Kenya, such as honey and fish production. Historically, beekeeping has been predominantly male dominated in the region. However, with the support of grants and other investments facilitated by the Activity, there was a notable increase in women's interest and participation in beekeeping as an income-generating activity (IGA).

In collaboration with the CG, the Activity spearheaded the establishment of a training center aimed at equipping bee producers with the requisite skills and knowledge in beekeeping. Additionally, the initiative facilitated the training of extension workers by the Kenya Beekeeping Institute, enhancing their capacity to support women in beekeeping ventures. Women grant recipients utilized the funds towards acquiring modern equipment, which, coupled with enhanced technical expertise gained through training, resulted in a significant boost in productivity and honey production from bee farming and processing.

**Aredena Honey, a woman-owned honey company, benefited from a small grant of USD 3,343 provided by the Activity.** The owner of Aredena Honey used the grant to purchase ten beehives, a refractometer, and a 100L honey warmer. The acquisition of these items marked a significant turning point for Aredena, as it substantially elevated production capacity. Previously averaging ten kilograms per season, production soared to an impressive 50 kilograms per season. This substantial increase in output translated directly into enhanced revenue, with earnings escalating from an average of approximately USD 71 per season to a remarkable USD 356 per season. In addition to the tangible support provided by the grant, Aredena benefited from invaluable training sessions and market linkages facilitated by the Activity. These opportunities equipped the business owner with crucial insights into apiary management and quality control while simultaneously broadening her market reach.

Moreover, the Activity played a crucial role in supporting the formation of cooperatives among bee farmers. This collective approach enabled members to aggregate and sell honey in bulk, overcoming individual resource constraints and expanding their market access.

The story to the right exemplifies how tangible support provided by the Activity through grants and capacity-building initiatives effectively empowered women to enter and thrive in the beekeeping sector. This transformation not only challenged traditional gender norms around women's participation in beekeeping as an IGA, but also contributed to women's economic independence and overall well-being.

Further, the Activity issued small grants to organized women groups mostly targeting Rural Enterprise Access Program (REAP)<sup>5</sup> participants. Throughout the project's duration, a total of 1,820 REAP groups, comprised of 5,460 women members, benefited from these small grants. These grants were complemented by additional interventions, including business development training, as well as business coaching and mentorship, aimed at maximizing their impact. Equipped with both financial support and specialized training, these women were empowered to explore new avenues within the livestock sector and diversify their businesses. This concerted effort ultimately enhanced their ability to succeed and thrive in the livestock sector.

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5 Rural Enterprise Access Program (REAP) is implemented by The BOMA project, an Activity Partner

The narrative below exemplifies how the strategic combination of Activity grants and comprehensive business skills training had a transformative impact on women-owned businesses. This holistic approach not only enhanced the competitiveness and profitability of these enterprises but also facilitated women's ownership of livestock assets—a challenging achievement within the patriarchal confines of northern Kenyan society. By providing financial support alongside essential business acumen, the Activity empowered women entrepreneurs to overcome systemic barriers, challenge gender norms, and establish themselves as key players in the livestock sector. This success story serves as a testament to the effectiveness of targeted interventions in fostering gender equality and economic empowerment in traditionally male-dominated domains.

**Rukia Liban, a 33-year-old mother of eight from Malkadaka, Isiolo County, used to struggle financially by selling cigarettes and prepaid phone cards.** However, her life changed when she, alongside two other women, received a small grant of USD 200 to start their livestock business group. Specifically, the women invested the grant in the purchase of goats in Malkadaka for prices ranging from USD 35 to USD 50 which they fattened and resold in the market in Maua for USD 70 per goat, making a profit of USD 20-35 per goat.

After six months, with accumulated profits from their livestock business, participants like Rukia were able to join savings groups which helped them to further accumulate capital, manage expenses, and access even more loans to invest in their businesses. As a result of the increased business profits, Rukia, and her peers invested in a mobile handset to improve efficiency in their transactions and a record book to track sales.

## Improved Business Performance and Income through Technology Investments



Activity grants played a pivotal role in facilitating the adoption of labor-saving and productivity-enhancing technology and equipment by women's groups, thereby significantly boosting their business income. A prime example is the transformation experienced by the Tullu women's group, which, prior to receiving a small grant of USD 3,500 from the Activity, relied on manual harvesting methods for hay, a time-consuming endeavor.

With the grant, the Tullu women's group invested in acquiring a hay cutter and bailer, revolutionizing their hay harvesting and storage processes. This strategic investment resulted in a substantial reduction in the time required for these tasks. Furthermore, the Activity complemented the grant with training in fodder production, empowering the group to establish, harvest, preserve, and trade pasture effectively.

The increase in business income generated by the group had a ripple effect, enhancing their capacity to provide business start-up loans to members. Consequently, members like Fatuma Guyo seized the opportunity to launch personal businesses, such as selling grains, eggs, or engaging in beekeeping. This multifaceted approach led to a tangible increase in women's income, thereby making positive contributions to household food consumption and overall economic well-being.

As Fatuma Guyo, chair of the Tullu Women's Group, attested, "I took out a loan of USD 600 from the group to plant additional hay on my farm. This way, I am assured of healthy family meals and can afford school fees." This testimonial underscores the transformative impact of Activity grants on empowering women and fostering economic sustainability within communities.

The Mount Marsabit Women's Group stands as another compelling example of the transformative impact of Activity grants on female entrepreneurship, particularly within the realm of camel milk production. In northern Kenya, women have traditionally played a central role in milk trade. However, the profitability of their enterprises has been hampered by various challenges, notably limited technical skills, and financial resources to invest in technologies that mitigate milk spoilage and enhance milk quality to command better market prices. Recognizing these obstacles, the Activity intervened to support women in milk cooperatives/groups and individual women

traders in addressing post-harvest losses and improving milk quality. Six women-led groups benefited from the Activity's assistance in enhancing milk value chains.

Prior to the intervention, the operations of the Mount Marsabit Women's Group lacked organization, with individual efforts overshadowing collaborative work. This resulted in substandard milk handling practices and hygiene standards. Moreover, the group grappled with the use of inadequate milk handling equipment that failed to meet Kenya Dairy Board (KDDBS) guidelines. For instance, they relied on plastic containers for milk transportation, rendering the group non-compliant with KDDBS standards.

The support package provided by the Activity to the Mount Marsabit Women's Group proved to be transformative, paving the way for significant advancements in their operations and economic standing. The package of support included an in-kind small grant worth USD 3,500, comprising essential equipment aid such as aluminum containers, chest freezers, and lactometers, along with comprehensive training in proper milk handling techniques. This holistic support package played a pivotal role in reducing post-harvest losses and enhancing milk quality, thereby facilitating the group's transition to commercial milk production and trade. The improved quality and reduced adulteration increased the group's credibility among buyers, leading to a remarkable expansion of their customer base from 30 to around 100 milk traders. With the surge in demand for quality milk, the Mount Marsabit Women's Group saw a substantial increase in their daily milk collection, soaring from 150 to 500 liters. This surge in production translated into significant revenue growth, skyrocketing from USD 3,200 to USD 10,700 per month.

Moreover, the Activity grant empowered the group to invest in milk processing equipment, enabling product diversification into items such as milk, sour milk, and ghee. This diversification not only expanded their product offerings but also bolstered overall profits.

The positive changes in the group's viability and performance attracted new members, with the Mount Marsabit Women's Group witnessing a notable increase in membership from 20 to 60 members, all of whom were women. This transformation not only improved the group's economic prospects but also brought hope to women in the community whose livelihoods depended on milk production.



*Investment in the livestock sector has expanded opportunities for women. Photo credit: Sheila Obi /ACDIVOCA*

## Increased supply of raw materials or by-products that benefited women-owned businesses (trickle-down effect)

The expansion of large private sector manufacturing/processing businesses, facilitated by Activity grants, had a ripple effect that benefited women-owned businesses by increasing their profits. An illustrative example is the impact of investments made by VF, a private sector company and recipient of a large Activity grant, in an ice factory and animal feed production.

With the support of Activity grants, VF established an ice plant, enabling them to process ice flakes to aid their suppliers in preserving fish before delivery to the factory. This initiative led to a significant reduction in pre-factory losses, improved fish quality, and regularized the frequency of fish deliveries. Consequently, VF's capacity to produce fish fillets soared from a monthly average of three tons to an impressive 20 tons. The increase in fish fillet production also resulted in a rise in fish waste, approximately one ton per month, which was diverted into poultry feed production<sup>6</sup>. This generated economic gains for women operating as poultry feed retailers, allowing them to expand their inventory and cater to a wider network of women engaged in poultry production for income generation<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the investments made by VF, facilitated by Activity grants, not only enhanced their own operations but also created opportunities for women entrepreneurs in both the livestock and fish sectors, contributing to their economic empowerment and sustainability.

The increased availability of chicken feeds from VF had a significant positive impact on the performance of women's poultry production businesses in Activity counties. For instance, two women poultry production groups receiving support from the World Food Program became customers of VF animal feed. Previously, these groups had to procure chicken feed from locations more than 300 kilometers away, leading to increased time burdens and production costs. Activity grants to VF resulted in the local increase in the supply of chicken feeds, making them available at affordable prices and with greater convenience to the communities. This enhanced accessibility and affordability of chicken feeds catalyzed the production of poultry, contributing to increased productivity of small-scale poultry production—a sector traditionally dominated by women.

In summary, the investments made by VF using grants from the Activity facilitated the availability, affordability, and accessibility of high-quality chicken feed, thus fostering the growth and productivity of women-led poultry production businesses in the region.

The testimonials<sup>8</sup> below underscore the tangible benefits experienced by women in the poultry industry because of the Activity initiatives, further affirming the positive impact of accessible and quality poultry feeds on productivity and profitability.

"Since I started using these feeds, my layers that were initially laying between zero to one egg per day are currently laying one or two eggs per day per bird," remarked one female poultry farmer, highlighting the remarkable improvement in egg production achieved using VF feeds."

Another female poultry farmer shared a similar sentiment, expressing surprise at witnessing her layers begin to lay eggs even before they reached four months old.

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<sup>6</sup> *Bones from fish filleting are pulverized and supplemented with other ingredients to make animal feeds particularly tailored for chickens.*

<sup>7</sup> *Women are the dominant actors in poultry production in northern Kenya.*

<sup>8</sup> *Feed the Future Kenya Livestock Market Systems Activity 2022 Outcome Harvesting Report.*

The impact of the Activity's large grants to VF on female entrepreneurship in northern Kenya extends beyond poultry production to the fish sector as well. Utilizing the investments from these grants, VF augmented its supply of ice flakes, a crucial resource for women entrepreneurs engaged in fish processing—a value chain activity predominantly led by women. These women processors play a vital role in processing and reselling fish to over 300 women traders within and outside Turkana. The availability of ice flakes from VF's ice plant significantly curtailed post-harvest losses of fresh fish, thereby bolstering the income of women processors.

Moreover, the increased income generated from fish processing enabled some of these women to make significant investments in fishing boats and nets. These assets, previously limited by gender norms around asset ownership, now empower women to expand their economic opportunities in the fishery sector, marking a significant stride towards gender equality and economic empowerment in northern Kenya.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Activity utilized grants as a strategic tool to address significant challenges within northern Kenya's livestock markets. Acknowledging the hurdles faced by women in meeting the requirements of large grants—particularly the small size and informal nature of their businesses, as well as their inability to fulfill cost-share obligations—the Activity aimed to enhance the representation of women and youth in other grant categories, notably small grants and cooperative grants targeting women participants of the REAP program. These grants played a pivotal role in fostering women's meaningful engagement in the livestock sector by tackling key barriers to their participation and entrepreneurship. Notably, they addressed the critical issue of limited financial capacity for business startup and investment, which had hindered the flourishing of women-owned enterprises in the sector.

The Activity adopted a comprehensive approach to promoting female engagement in the livestock sector, going beyond mere sensitization efforts. Their support encompassed interventions addressing not only structural barriers, such as limited access to finance, but also initiatives facilitating women's access to technical and business development skills and services, thereby enhancing their business performance and income from entrepreneurship and employment in the livestock sector.

The holistic impact of the Activity's grants, coupled with other interventions, has been transformative. It has resulted in women accessing new roles in the livestock sector, their involvement in value chain activities previously inaccessible to them (such as beekeeping), and their acquisition and ownership of livelihood-generating assets—such as fishing boats and livestock—that were once out of reach. Furthermore, these grants facilitated the growth and expansion of women-owned businesses within the livestock sector, increased profitability of their businesses, while also creating increased opportunities for the employment of women and youth in various livestock-related endeavors.

In summary, the Activity's multifaceted approach has not only facilitated women's meaningful participation in the livestock sector but has also contributed to broader gender equality and economic empowerment outcomes in northern Kenya. The grants played a crucial role in breaking down barriers, empowering women, and fostering inclusive economic growth within northern Kenya's livestock sector, thereby contributing to enhanced household food and nutrition security, as well as resilience outcomes.



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