



# Understanding the emergence and evolution of pastoral community groups from the perspective of community members and external development actors in northern Kenya

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## Abstract

Whereas there is abundance of information on community groups that engage in income generation in rural agricultural and peri-urban areas, information on community groups in pastoral areas still remains scarce. However, in the recent past, a growing trend of such groups has been observed in the pastoral areas in northern Kenya. This study therefore explores how these groups have emerged since Kenya's independence in 1963 to date, and which factors have contributed to their evolution. A full survey on all income-generating community groups was conducted and different types of interviews were used to elicit the perspectives of members of the community and external development actors.

The findings on the history of group formation show the roles played by different entities over time and reveal how and why various factors influenced group formation. The characterisation of all 153 income-generating groups found in Marsabit South showed the diversity of the different group activities and yielded information on the reasons why usually a combination of different income-generating activities is practised. The collective group activities offer a possibility for income diversification for pastoralists despite labour constraints posed by key domestic and livestock-management tasks. The findings explain why community groups are increasingly gaining importance in pastoral areas, as a means to solve problems and fulfil diverse needs at household and community level.

**Keywords:** community organisations, history of formation, income-generating activities, pastoralists, Kenya

## 1 Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa, since the early 20th century, colonial governments (Hussi *et al.*, 1993; Lele, 1981; Lele & Christiansen, 1989; Porter & Lyon, 2006), African post-colonial governments (Lele & Christiansen, 1989) and donors such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Dorward *et al.*, 2005; Jayne *et al.*, 2002; Porter & Lyon, 2006; Shiferaw *et al.*, 2006) have promoted co-operatives, rural organisations and community groups as an

option for socio-economic development particularly among the rural poor. Community groups have been variedly referred in development studies literature as: membership-based organisations (Chen *et al.*, 2006), local development groups (Porter & Lyon, 2006), grass root organisations or community-based organisations (De Weerd, 2001). The contexts within which these terminologies are used differ (social advocacy, provision of services, income generation, among others) but the meaning of the different terminologies is the same – the use of group-based approach at community level to undertake activities for the benefit of members and by extension the entire community.

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Specific country examples indicate that in Ghana the history of community groups can be traced back to colonial times where traditional authorities and groups based on chieftaincy system were used to pursue commercial interests (Porter & Lyon, 2006). In Kenya, the history of community groups also dates back to colonial and post-colonial times (Bender, 1986; Chitere, 1988; Holmquist, 1984; Ngau, 1987; Thomas, 1988; Winans & Haugerud, 1977). The church, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been instrumental in supporting the emergence and evolution of groups (Coppock & Desta, 2013). Groups are formed for different purposes, for instance natural resource management (Kariuki & Place, 2005; Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2002; White & Runge, 1995), smallholder agricultural marketing (Adong *et al.*, 2013; Asante *et al.*, 2011; Bernard & Spielman, 2009; Coulter, 2007; Markelova & Mwangi, 2010; Meier zu Selhausen, 2015) and income generation (Gugerty, 2007), among others.

The emergence and evolution of community groups has been associated with various factors, which can be categorised as endogenous and exogenous factors, and have also been differentiated into micro (household) and macro (community) level factors (White & Runge, 1995). These factors are context-specific (Markelova & Mwangi, 2010) and have been studied in domains such as natural resource management (White & Runge, 1995) and smallholder agricultural marketing (Meier zu Selhausen, 2015). For community groups whose purpose is income generation, much information is available for the urban and/or peri-urban (Abala, 2013; Fafchamps & La Ferrara, 2012), rural and farming communities (Gugerty, 2007; Jivetti & Edwards, 2009; Kabugua, 2014; Koech, 2014; Molesworth *et al.*, 2017; Place *et al.*, 2004; Shiferaw *et al.*, 2006).

In pastoral areas, substantial information can be found for community groups engaged in natural resource management in Mongolia (Schmidt, 2006; Undargaa, 2017) and in Africa (Nganga & Robinson, 2016). However, fewer examples are found for communal breeding (Ouma & Abdulai, 2009), animal health (Badejo *et al.*, 2017; Leyland *et al.*, 2014) or income generation. For the latter, there are a few such studies for southern Ethiopia (Aklilu, 2004; Coppock *et al.*, 2011) and eastern Kenya (Mutinda, 2017). In northern Kenya, the first study on community groups in pastoral areas was conducted in the frame of the Pastoral Risk Management (PARIMA) project in 2006 (Coppock & Desta, 2013). Other than this, there is only the work of Ngutu *et al.* (2011), who studied livestock marketing activities of two community groups in northern Kenya and the work of Aklilu & Catley (2009), who reviewed one pastoral livestock marketing group in north-eastern Kenya. These groups dif-

fer in objective from informal socio-cultural collective actions or groupings within the community that form part of the pastoral culture whose purpose is to pool efforts to address challenges such as insecurity or pool labour in cultural ceremonies, among other cultural uses.

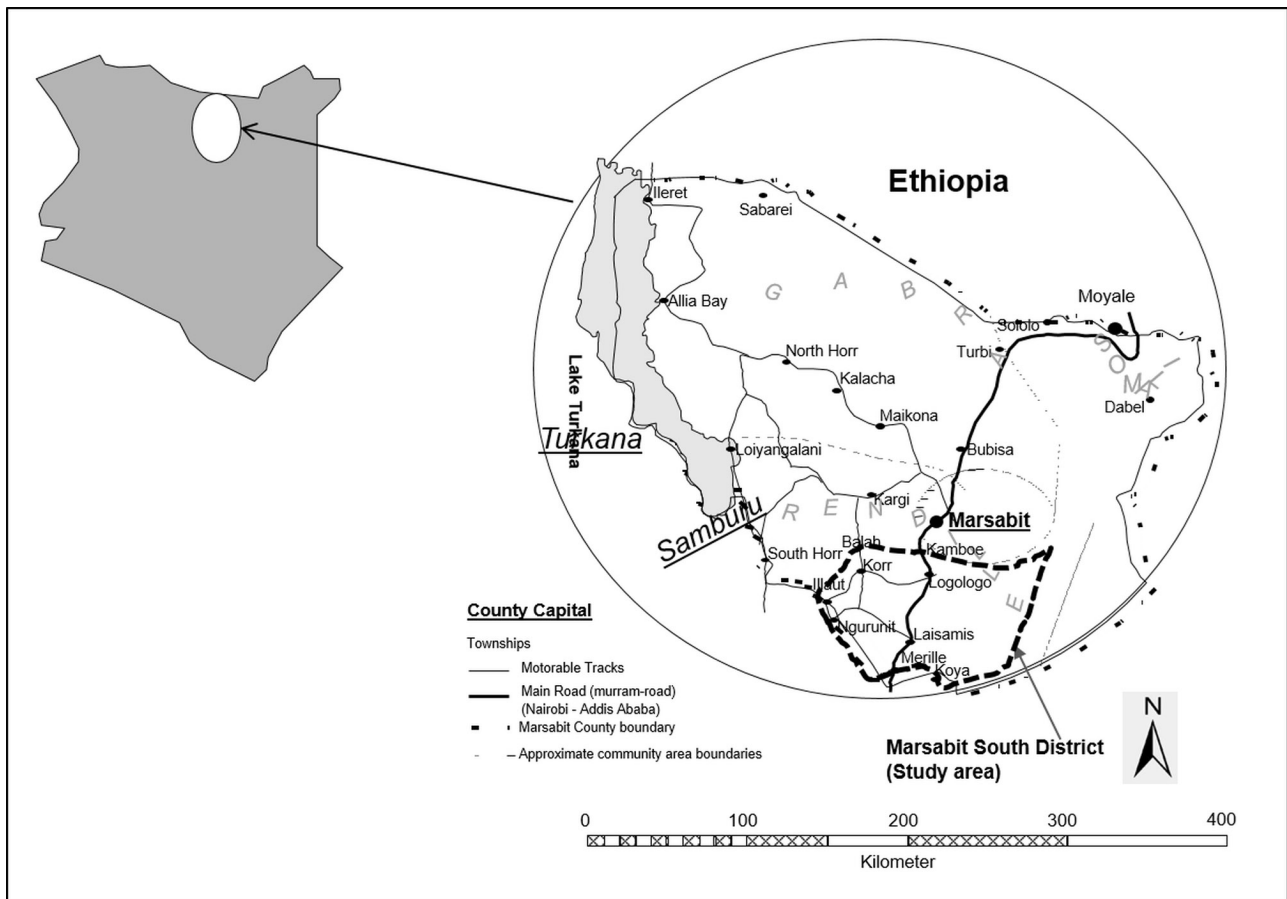
Up to now, no comprehensive historical and situational analysis has been undertaken to understand the diversity and evolution of community groups in the pastoral areas of northern Kenya.

This article follows the conceptual framework used by White & Runge (1995) for understanding emergence and evolution of groups. Using a combination of different kinds of interviews, the article explores in detail why and how pastoral community groups emerge and evolve from the perspectives of the involved actors, i.e. group members and officials, community leaders, and staff of governmental and non-governmental organisations. It specifically analyses the history of group formation, establishes the prevalence and activities of existing groups and assesses factors influencing emergence and evolution of groups. An analysis of the history of groups and of the drivers of group formation serves as a starting point to understand the context within which groups emerged over time and to draw lessons from history for promotion of sustainable community groups in future.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Study area

This study was conducted in Marsabit South District of Laisamis Sub-County, located to the south of the greater Marsabit County. Marsabit South District (Fig. 1) is arid with an annual average temperature of 20.1 °C and average annual rainfall is around 200 mm (County Government of Marsabit, 2014). Laisamis Sub-County has a land area of 20,290.5 km<sup>2</sup> and human population of 65,669 persons, predominantly Rendille/Ariial pastoralists (County Government of Marsabit, 2014). Marsabit South District is prone to droughts and also characterised by high illiteracy and poverty levels, and poor infrastructure (roads, telecommunication, markets, water) (County Government of Marsabit, 2014). On account of the spatial and temporal variation in resources and unpredictable climatic conditions, pastoralism is the dominant livelihood activity and livestock production system in these areas (Krätli *et al.*, 2013). Pastoralists raise livestock for income through sale of livestock and livestock products, and for food (milk, meat), asset accumulation, and cultural obligations (Ministry of Livestock Development, 1991).



**Fig. 1:** A map of the study area in Marsabit County, Kenya.

## 2.2 Data collection and analysis

### 2.2.1 Group identification and selection for narrative interviews

A preliminary list of registered groups was obtained from the Department of Social Services at the Sub-County and County headquarters. All the 10 chiefs and 24 sub-chiefs in Marsabit South District were consulted by the research team to get additional names (including contacts) of both formal and informal groups in their areas of jurisdiction. Staff of six government departments/ministries, four private sector groups, two church organisations and five NGOs that deal with groups in the study area were also consulted to get a list of groups they currently support or have supported in the past or that they know exist in the area. In this study, the term “NGO” includes also bilateral projects supported by governments of other countries e.g. German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

Using a snowball sampling approach, once a group was identified, its members were asked to identify other groups within and outside their area and for their contacts. Three livestock markets (Merille, Ilaut and Korr) were visited to identify existing groups operating in the markets. It was not

possible to capture information on groups that were discontinued or collapsed. The records obtained from government and NGOs, did not show whether the groups were existent or not. Community members in particular were reluctant to disclose information on collapsed groups for fear of being labelled as traitors. Among the existing groups, the oldest were formed in the early 1980s.

The compiled list contained groups dealing with either community social-support activities only (these include activities such as environmental awareness/conservation, girl child education, campaigns against female genital mutilation, HIV/AIDS awareness, promotion of culture and heritage, hygiene and sanitation, and management of community water services), income-generating activities (IGAs) only or both. A total of 153 groups that dealt with only income generation were identified.

In each of the 153 identified income-generating groups (IGGs), a group official was asked about gender composition of the group members, administrative division, geographical location, year of formation, entity involved in formation, registration status, size of membership disaggregated by gender, and types of activities undertaken.

**Table 1:** Profile of groups selected for narrative interviews.

Name of group	Division	Gender category	Geographical location	Year of formation	Current group size
Merille livestock traders group	Laisamis	Mixed	Urban	1998	17
Nairibi Morans	Laisamis	Youth	Rural	2012	20
Natala women's group	Laisamis	Women	Peri-urban	2009	14
Nkupulu women's group	Laisamis	Women	Rural	2009	19
Pambazuko women's group	Laisamis	Women	Rural	2005	15
Salamis women's group	Laisamis	Women	Peri-urban	2007	21
Balah self-help group	Korr	Mixed	Rural	2012	28
Jitto Jille women's group	Korr	Women	Rural	2011	30
Meriki women's group	Korr	Women	Rural	2014	10
Lorugo women's group	Korr	Women	Rural	2008	20

### 2.2.2 Narrative interview with group officials

For narrative interviews, 10 groups were purposively selected from the 153 groups. The main selection criterion was their involvement in the trade of sheep and goats – this was due to the specific interest of the wider study in collective marketing of sheep and goats. Further selection criteria used yielded a sample covering different administrative divisions (Laisamis and Korr), geographical locations (urban, peri-urban and rural) and gender categories (women's groups, mixed-gender groups, men-only groups, and youth groups). The profiles of selected groups are shown in Table 1.

In each group, the interview was done with a group official, either the chairperson or the secretary, to gather information on the history of group formation. Before starting the interview, the interviewee was asked consent for audio recording of the interview. The initial question asked was: “Can you please give us the story of your group from the time you conceived the idea until now?” Further steps of the interview were conducted according to Bauer (1996). The interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes.

### 2.2.3 In-depth interviews with group officials

Using a guiding checklist, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with officials of the same groups involved in the narrative interviews to gather additional information on factors and key personalities/institutions that influenced the emergence and evolution of groups in the study area in the last 20 years. This was the time (between 1996–2015) that the large majority of the existing groups were formed in the study area, including much involvement of NGOs, community elites/leaders and formation of self-initiated groups. For ease of recall of information, reference was made to a major event (the El Nino floods) that took place in the study area in 1997/98. In order to prevent potential response duplication, in each group, the interview was con-

ducted with an official who had not participated in the narrative interview. Depending on the knowledge of a respondent, attempts were also made to gather information on group formation before the 1990s.

### 2.2.4 Key-informant interviews with other stakeholders

Nine chiefs, staff of six government departments/ministries and staff of eight NGOs, church organisations and members of the private sector dealing with groups in the study area were asked the same questions as in the in-depth interviews with group officials.

### 2.2.5 Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was done for the narrative interviews, in-depth interviews and key-informant interviews (Mayring, 2014). The interviews were coded in a step-wise manner according to categories representing key themes (for instance, history of group emergence, drivers of group emergence) and sub-categories (for instance, for history: involvement of churches, for drivers: internal factors such as distance to markets). Data from the survey (on characteristics and activities of existing groups) and some data from in-depth and key-informant interviews (on drivers of emergence and types and weaknesses of external support) were entered into MS Excel and frequencies and proportions were generated.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 History of group emergence and evolution in Marsabit South District in northern Kenya

The analysis of the history of group formation provides a timeline entailing entities that have supported formation and development of groups in northern Kenya from the 1960s to the present day and the type of support provided. Characteristics of groups differ between older and new generation of groups in Marsabit South.

**Table 2:** Historical trends in emergence of and institutional support to pastoral community groups in the study area (1963–2015).

<i>Institutions and personalities</i>	<i>Type of support to groups</i>	<i>Starting period*</i>
Catholic Church	Evangelical services to prayer groups at chapels	1963–1965
	Income generation	1976–1980
African Inland Church	Income generation	1991–1995
Government	Registration of groups in Marsabit town	1981–1985
	Formation of groups	1981–1985
	Women Enterprise Fund; Youth Fund	2002
	Financial support: Uwezo Fund	2013
	Transfer of registration to Marsabit South	2009
Non-governmental organisations	Humanitarian aid; income generation	1991–1995
Community elites	Formation; funding	1991–1995
Ordinary community members	Formation of self-initiated groups; income generation	1996–2000

\* All types of institutional support persist until present.  
Source: Narrative and in-depth interviews ( $n = 10$ ); Key informant interviews.

### 3.1.1 Involvement of churches

In northern Kenya, group formation started just after Kenyan independence in 1963 with first groups initiated by the Catholic Church (Table 2). The Catholic Church organised the Christian community into prayer groups, Catholic women's associations, adult literacy and choir groups with a membership of about 100 members each. These groups were composed mainly of poor households who settled around the Catholic chapels in pursuit of external aid and alternative livelihoods. In addition to evangelism, the Catholic Church provided relief assistance and social amenities (such as hospitals and schools) to these poorer households. Between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, besides promotion of evangelical work through groups, the missionaries (mainly the Catholic nuns) also introduced and supported IGAs in these groups as a way to sustain evangelical connections. The first set of IGAs supported were the sale of traditional artefacts (beadwork) and micro-credit schemes (merry-go-round). Other churches such as the African Inland Church (AIC) started supporting IGGs in Marsabit South in the early 1990s.

### 3.1.2 Involvement of the Kenyan government

Kenyan government involvement in group development in Marsabit South District began in 1978. Riding on the precedent set by the Catholic Church as well as its own efforts to form groups, the government through the Department of Social Services began to formally register groups as a way to attract and maintain recognition by external agencies (churches, government, NGOs and private sector).

Between the early 1980s and 2008, registration of groups by the government was centralized at the headquarters of the parent district (Marsabit town in the then greater

Marsabit District). Registration of groups was moved to Marsabit South District (now part of Laisamis Sub-County) headquarters only in 2009, when the new district was created, but still as a national government function. At the beginning, the government's roles through the Department of Social Services were confined to registration and training in group dynamics and development. Other services such as financial support to groups in the form of loans and grants began in 2002, with priority given to women's groups (Women Enterprise Fund) and youth groups (Youth Fund) and scaled up from 2013 to have one fund that supports women's groups, youth groups and groups of disabled persons (*Uwezo* fund).

### 3.1.3 Support by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and bilateral projects

In Marsabit South District, various NGOs and bilateral projects supported different livelihood activities through groups since the early 1990s but with mixed outcomes. Some of the earlier projects and the group activities they supported include activities on environmental management and sheep and goats trade supported by the German Development Cooperation (formerly GTZ, now GIZ), Arid Lands Resource Management Project (ALRMP) (goat restocking) and Heifer Project International (HPI) (camel restocking). These organisations and projects supported large groups of about 100 members each so as to spread benefits to a wider spectrum of the community. They also targeted mainly the poor and women, with a precondition that all activities must be done collectively by members. Emergence of groups was further influenced by the precondition that any outside support to livelihood activities can only be undertaken through an organised group.

In common with church-supported and government-supported groups, most NGO/project-supported groups malfunctioned soon after external support ended. The malfunctioning was mainly attributed to large size of groups, mismanagement and inconsistent benefits. Some groups adjusted their names, number of members and objectives just to take advantage of the prevailing opportunities of working with an external agency, as illustrated by a government administrator:

*In this Ngurunit area, St. Mary's women's group and Umoja women's group initially supported by the Catholic Church and the African Inland Church (AIC) respectively changed their names to Salama, Saidia and Salato women's groups to target camel restocking supported by the HPI (Chief, Ngurunit Location, 11 July 2015).*

Learning from weaknesses of externally supported groups, some of this older generation of groups were later (in the late 2000s) reorganised by members themselves into small manageable groups of 10–20 people, with a focus on immediate benefits for members. Additionally, these groups adapted their organisational and governance features to the community's socio-cultural norms and practices such as belonging to the same clan, village and age-set, trust and behaviour/conduct of a community member. Instead of group members doing group activities collectively, some groups opted for group loans to support individual members' businesses. Another interesting case is where, contrary to the guideline that women's groups should include only women, some women's groups innovatively co-opted one to three men for difficult tasks such as trekking animals to the market.

#### 3.1.4 Community elites' and leaders' involvement

From the 1990s, having seen the importance of groups, community elites – for instance, some specific primary school leavers, secondary school leavers, primary school teachers and adult literacy teachers – started guiding the community in the formation of groups and fundraising for them. Local political leaders were particularly involved in fundraising for these groups. Groups formed through guidance of community elites/leaders were small (composed of 15–30 members) and performed fairly well as compared to the older generation of groups.

#### 3.1.5 Self-initiated groups

Learning from organisational and governance weaknesses of externally supported groups, in the past two decades, fully self-initiated groups were formed. Usually this

process has been started by a potential group initiator acquiring information from neighbouring existing groups, relatives or friends. The information gathered includes group formation process, activities and implementation procedures, group size, performance, benefits and challenges of group work, among others. The idea to form a group is first shared with close friends to check its utility and then spread to the rest of the community members. Potential members are gradually mobilized under an agreed common felt need until the desired membership size is attained (10–20 members). After formation, the new groups continue to consult with older groups until they are able to stand on their own. Although formed on their own, some of the groups later develop relationships with external agencies mainly for training support. However, in the absence of opportunities for external training, groups seek advice from well-functioning groups (peers) and community elites in case of need. Some community members have a long experience and knowledge of undertaking some of the activities e.g. livestock trade hence are a source of knowledge for groups. In most cases, the person who initiates the group ends up being the chairperson. These self-initiated groups take advantage of the socio-cultural fabric and dynamics of the community to organise themselves and set up their governance structures. Moreover, they take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of existing groups to guide their path towards a conceivably better-functioning model.

#### 3.1.6 Income-generating groups established between 1981 and 2015

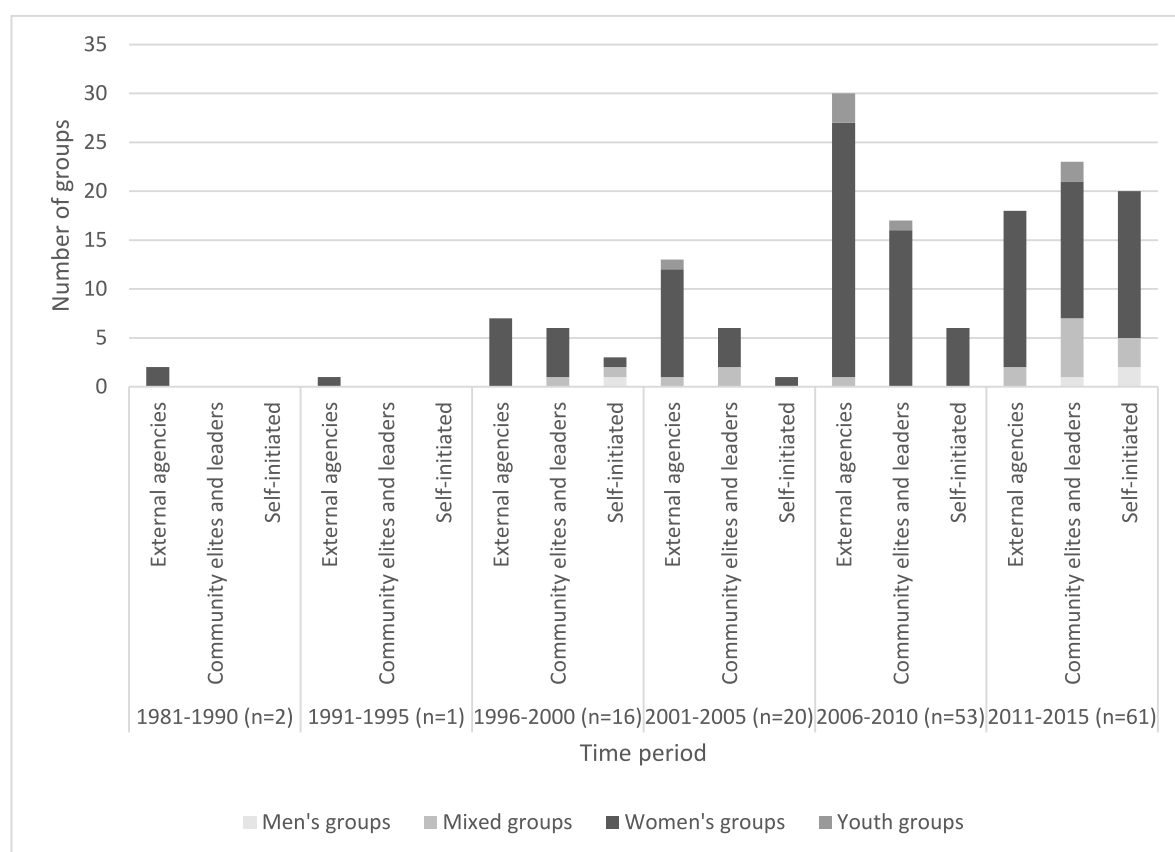
The records from the Department of Social Services as well as the survey of groups conducted in the study area showed that, by 2015, a total of 300 groups in a population of approximately 12,000 households had been established, out of which 153 participated in diverse IGAs. These groups were formed between 1981 and 2015.

Generally, there is an increasing trend of IGGs, with the majority being women's groups (Fig. 2). A remarkable increase over time is seen in groups supported by community elites and leaders and in self-initiated groups.

#### 3.2 Existing income-generating groups and their activities

Most of the surveyed IGGs were registered (130 out of 153), and more than half were found in *Manyattas* (clan-based "villages") (86 out of 153) with the majority being women's groups (69 out of 86). The most common group size was 11–20 members (85 out of 153) with a few cases of groups (7 out of 153) with more than 40 members, indicating a shift towards smaller groups.

These groups undertake two categories of IGAs, i.e. livestock-related and non-livestock activities (Table 3).



Source: Survey (n = 153)

**Fig. 2:** Period of formation of community groups in the study area between 1981 and 2015.**Table 3:** Activities undertaken by income-generating groups (n = 153).

<i>Non-livestock business activities</i>		<i>Livestock-based business activities</i>	
<i>Type of business</i> (n = 18)	<i>No. of practising groups</i> (out of 153 groups)	<i>Type of business</i> (n = 13)	<i>No. of practising groups</i> (out of 153 groups)
Sale of household items	89	Sheep and goat trade	100
Micro-credit	32	Skins trade	27
Beadwork	25	Cattle trade	15
Vegetables	15	Veterinary medicines	9
Rental premises	8	Meat trade (butchery)	8
Honey trade	4	Camel trade	4
Water kiosk	3	Goat breeding	4
Tailoring	2	Milk trade	3
Natural forest products: gums and resin	2	Poultry production	3
Motor vehicle repair (garage)	2	Meat processing	2
Tree nurseries (seedlings)	2	Camel breeding	2
Bread making	2	Fodder production	2
Others: mill (2), fuel (1), gravel/ballast (1), khat/miraa (1), blacksmith (1), motor cycle hire (1)		Leather processing	1

Source: Survey (n = 153)

Overall, most groups practised trade in sheep and goats and in combination with other activities, majorly sale of household items, micro-credit schemes, skins trade and cattle trade. With regard to micro-credit schemes, through further probing of group officials, the groups that did not mention it as an activity ( $n = 121$ ) said that, though they did not practise it in a structured manner, group members and other community members could still ask for loans from the groups.

Reasons for practising a combination of different IGAs were to enhance income generation, to insure against business risks and to achieve sustainability of the group, as group officials explained. For example, groups commonly use part of income from the sale of household items to buy sheep and goats for trade. They do this as a strategy to stock their cash in the absence of formal banking systems and as they wait to replenish stocks of household items. Furthermore, profits from these businesses are often moved to the micro-credit scheme to allow group members and the entire community better access to loans on interest. Hence, an important objective of engaging in IGAs including trade in sheep and goats is to generate money to facilitate (emergency) loans for members and the entire community.

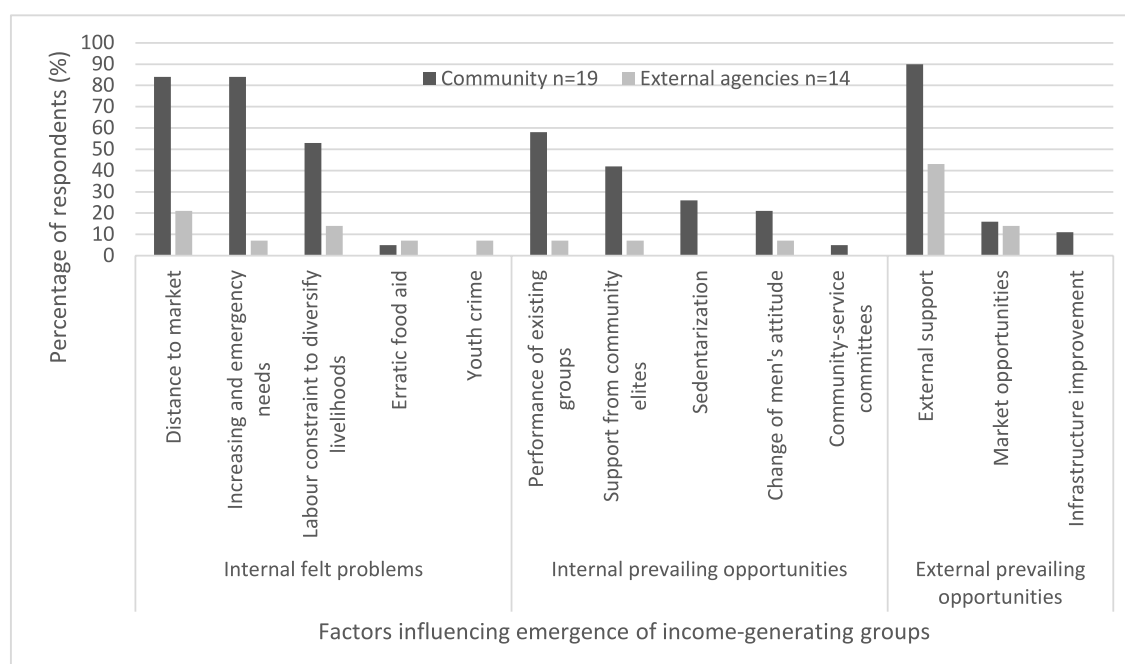
Several factors determine the choice of business activities undertaken by groups or the shift from one business activity to the other. These include profitability, the need to fill the commodity supply gap in the community, seasonality of demand, challenges such as debts, and advice from an external agency.

### 3.3 Drivers of emergence of income-generating groups

It was established from community members (group members and officials, and chiefs) and external agencies (staff of government departments, NGOs, church organisations and private sector) that both factors external and internal to the community have influenced the emergence of the existing groups over time (Fig. 3). Community members provided more factors than the external agencies and indicated the different factors more often: five factors were mentioned by more than 50% of the community members. The community members explained why and how these factors influenced group emergence and continuation, as outlined in the paragraphs below.

#### 3.3.1 Distance to market

In the 1990s, formal livestock and commodity markets were fewer or non-existent in Marsabit South and people moved long distances (> 100 km) to access livestock markets and purchase household items. On account of high transport costs and high capital outlays, it was challenging to acquire household commodities that were highly demanded, particularly in rural villages. In places where formal markets (able to attract many buyers) did not exist and the dominant buyers of livestock were either restaurants in town centres, mobile itinerant traders or rural shopkeepers, groups were formed to increase access to distant markets. As access to distant livestock and commodity markets was costly in terms of time and transport, people pooled human



Source: In-depth and key informant interviews (for community members  $n = 19$ ; for external agencies  $n = 14$ )

**Fig. 3:** Factors that influence emergence of income-generating groups.



and financial resources together to bring services, goods and market outlets closer to the village. However, distance to livestock and commodity markets has reduced in the recent past as a result of the establishment of formal markets in settlements within the community area such as those in Korr and Ilaut, which operate on a weekly and bi-weekly basis, respectively.

### 3.3.2 *Increasing and emergency needs amid decreasing social support*

Droughts, livestock diseases and increasing household needs are putting pressure on the available livestock resources. This makes it increasingly difficult to get emergency support from neighbours, relatives or friends. The situation is especially difficult for single-parent families (widows, divorcees).

Among others, one of the priority needs was (and is) payment of school fees and other school-related expenses because of the increasing number of school-going children. Consequently, parents moved long distances, mainly between villages and town centres, to seek loans from distant traders or relatives to cater for school needs. However, there was no guarantee that the required support would be availed. This situation compelled households to form groups at the village level to access emergency loans for school fees, among other benefits.

Women were (and are) more involved in the search for money to educate children, particularly through groups. Compared to pastoralist men who still prefer children to take up livestock-management roles, women have complied more with the government's advice to take children to school. Other motivating/driving factors include seeing families with educated children leading a better life and the wish to be able to cover the increasing household needs. Single-parent families (for instance widows), particularly those with limited or no support from relatives, have to struggle for the education of their children. Although nowadays there are clan-based education funds, they cater only for some of the school needs for secondary and tertiary education; thus parents still struggle to cover the remaining costs.

### 3.3.3 *Labour constraint to diversify livelihoods individually*

Pastoral livestock-management and domestic tasks require keen attention from household members. Household participation in additional livelihood activities such as an additional business put a strain on the available labour and time, particularly in labour-deficient households. Furthermore, some of these additional livelihood activities are difficult to undertake individually. For instance, the nature of

livestock trade makes it difficult to effectively organise the activities (buying, trekking and selling), particularly when source and destination markets are far apart. Being in a group enables the households to more easily combine business and domestic tasks. The pooling of labour by households to diversify livelihoods becomes particularly useful in the dry season and during droughts, when livestock-management tasks increase, yet household needs such as provision of food are critical and need concerted attention at the same time. During the dry season, livestock are away from home for a longer period and are not easily accessible for sale (i.e. income generation); thus the group becomes a strategic alternative to cover food and cash needs through loans.

### 3.3.4 *Performance of existing groups*

Positive experiences of existing groups including accruing benefits to members and the entire community, and good cooperation between members and officials of a group can influence other people to form or join a group. Other positive experiences include recognition by government through representation and praise at public gatherings as well as winning tenders to supply goods and do construction works. Such positive experiences can also influence a poorly performing group (poorly performing due to misunderstanding, unmanageable large size, little benefits, poor management) to be reorganised into an outfit in which members have more influence on leadership, activities and outcomes.

### 3.3.5 *External support*

External agencies prefer to use groups to deliver livelihood-support interventions so to spread the benefits to the wider community. External support ranges from mere awareness about the group approach to direct support. The types of external support mentioned by chiefs, government staff, staff of NGOs and church organisations, and members of the private sector are shown in Table 4.

When asked what they see as shortfalls of external support provided by their peers, government staff and staff of NGOs, church organisations and the private sector gave their views as shown in Table 4. In addition, community members criticized external support, particularly expressing that they found the training and mentoring inadequate either because the content did not respond to their training needs or because the duration was too short for them to develop the respective capacities. They also pointed to the lack of attention to adult literacy. Groups were divided over the need for external funding – a majority of them approved of it while two of the ten interviewed said it is not necessary. Groups that were against external funding referred to cases of groups that malfunctioned once external funding

**Table 4:** Types and weaknesses of external support.

Types of external support			Weaknesses of external support		
Type	Frequency (n = 23)	Type of respondents *	Weakness	Frequency (n = 33)	Type of respondents *
Training	23	9 chiefs, 6 Govt, 8 NGO	Inadequate training and mentorship	19	<b>10 IGG</b> , 4 chiefs, 2 Govt, 3 NGO
Funding	23	9 chiefs, 6 Govt, 8 NGO	Inadequate funding	10	<b>8 IGG</b> , 1 chief, 1 Govt
Material inputs	5	4 chiefs, 1 Govt	Encourage vested interests and dependency of beneficiaries	4	2 chiefs, 2 NGO
Monitoring/follow-up	4	2 chiefs, 1 Govt, 1 NGO	Inadequate monitoring	11	5 chiefs, 3 Govt, 3 NGO
Link to other service providers	4	4 Govt	Wrong selection of beneficiary groups	8	2 chiefs, 4 Govt, 2 NGO
Registration of groups	2	1 chief, 1 Govt	External agencies prioritizing own interests	4	1 chief, 1 Govt, 2 NGO
Infrastructure development	2	2 Govt	Less attention to adult literacy education	2	<b>2 IGG</b>
Commodity supply contracts	1	1 chief	Inadequate stakeholder participation and coordination	4	2 chiefs, 1 Govt, 1 NGO
Humanitarian assistance during disasters	1	1 chief	Short project duration and poor exit strategies	3	2 chiefs, 1 Govt
Funding proposal development	1	1 Govt	Inappropriateness of some interventions	3	2 Chiefs, 1 Govt
Link to markets	1	1 NGO	Less attention to thorough feasibility studies	3	1 chief, 1 Govt, 1 NGO

\* IGG: officials and members of income-generating groups; Govt: government staff; NGO: staff of non-governmental organisations, bilateral projects and church organisations, and private sector

Source: In-depth and key informant interviews (n = 23 for types- 9 chiefs, 6 Govt and 8 NGO; n = 33 for weaknesses- 10 IGG, 9 chiefs, 6 Govt and 8 NGO)

ended. IGGs were also not spared in the criticism – staff of NGOs (including bilateral projects) in particular complained of vested interests and lack of seriousness of some groups to put external funding to the right use.

External agencies use certain criteria to select groups for support. Over 20% of interviewed external agencies mentioned the following as important criteria: registration status, interest of external agency, vulnerability of potential beneficiaries, gender composition of a group, history of a group handling grants as well as its current performance, and the geographical location of interest to an external agency. Other criteria mentioned include records of business and financial transactions, results of site verification, size of membership, business acumen and interest of the group, duration of group and specific activities, religious affiliation, and having a written proposal. Some of these criteria such as group records and written proposals were viewed by government officials (n = 3) as strict and therefore need to be reconsidered given the high rate of illiteracy among the pastoralists.

## 4 Discussion

In this study, we explored from the perspectives of community group officials and other relevant stakeholders why and how pastoral community groups for income generation emerged and evolved in northern Kenya. We focussed particularly on the history of group formation, prevalence of existing group activities and factors influencing emergence and evolution of such groups.

The detailed examination of IGGs revealed that the emergence of groups was initially externally supported. It was only from the late 1990s onwards that self-initiated groups were formed. The Catholic Church was instrumental in the formation of the first groups in Marsabit South District and this illustrates their involvement in social and economic development in pastoral areas. The Kenyan government's involvement in group affairs in Marsabit South District started only two decades after independence, which is late considering that cooperatives and rural organisations in other parts of Kenya were promoted by the government since colonial times (Chitere, 1988; Thomas, 1988). NGOs used group formation as a strategy to implement their livelihood support

programmes from early 1990s onwards. However, many of those groups malfunctioned after external support ended, as was also observed in Ghana by Porter & Lyon (2006). The malfunctioning was mainly attributed to organisational and governance weaknesses. Interestingly, these weaknesses of externally supported groups informed the formation of self-organised groups with modified characteristics, such as favouring small group sizes of 10–20 people for effective management and adapting their organisational and governance features to the socio-cultural norms and practices in cultural collective activities. These characteristics and the process followed in group formation distinguish self-initiated groups from older generations of groups, particularly the externally supported groups. The shift towards self-initiated groups was also noted among community groups in Haiti (White & Runge, 1995), in Tanzania (De Weerd, 2001) and in Ghana (Porter & Lyon, 2006).

This study also attempted a full survey on community groups that exist in Marsabit South District and contacted 300 groups to learn about their activities. Out of them, 153 IGGs were identified and characterised to get an overview of their distribution by size, gender composition and location as well as a detailed list of their activities. More than 80 % of the groups were found to be women's groups. This is particularly notable given that in pastoral areas activities such as livestock trade are reportedly male dominated. Women being the majority and pioneers of IGGs has also been commonly reported in Kenyan agricultural areas in the highlands (Place *et al.*, 2004) and in urban slum areas (Abala, 2013; Fafchamps & La Ferrara, 2012). More than 50 % of the groups were found in manyattas (clan-based "villages") in the rural areas, indicating that pastoralists see IGGs as a livelihood option complementing livestock husbandry, which is their main livelihood activity. Here, groups were valued for their services with regard to providing greater ease to reach livestock and commodity markets, and loans for emergency needs and for supporting individual members' businesses. Often, these three activities were practised in combination. This was attributed to the potential of this particular combination of activities to: (1) boost income generation for the group, (2) stabilise income in the different seasons, (3) make use of synergies between the activities and (4) reduce business risks. Synergistic effects between livestock and non-livestock business activities have also been reported in other studies (Chen *et al.*, 2006; Coppock & Desta, 2013). The diversity and complementarity of group activities can be related to the common practice among the pastoralists of diversifying livestock herds and species (camels, cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys) to obtain diverse benefits, adapt to variability and cope with droughts (Campbell, 1999; Desta & Coppock, 2004; Little *et al.*, 2001; McPeak, 2005; Sato, 1997). These findings on

the benefits of a diversity of group activities should inform development efforts and strategies.

Dating back five decades, micro-credit schemes were found to be the earliest group activity in Marsabit South District. This can be understood as an effort to complement the traditional social security system among the Rendille community, called the Maal system, which consists of animal loans and mutual help (Ministry of Livestock Development, 1991; Sato, 1997; Schlee, 1991). The main source of the capital used to support emergency and common felt needs of group members and non-members through micro-credit schemes was the profits from the sheep and goat trade. This indicates that the main objective of collective livestock marketing is to build capital for loans and not necessarily to negotiate for better terms of trade for members. This link between livestock marketing and group loan systems in pastoral areas has to our knowledge not been documented before.

The emergence of the above-mentioned group activities was driven mainly by internally felt problems, such as distance to markets, increasing monetary needs, labour constraints to diversify livelihoods in individual households, and erratic food aid. Especially during dry seasons, when livestock is kept far away from homes and labour is needed critically for livestock management, members profit from the groups as they can cover food and cash needs through loans.

In indicating the factors that influenced the emergence of IGGs, the community members were more outspoken, meaning that they are more concerned and knowledgeable of their own situation than the external agencies. Among the factors, external support was mentioned most often both by community members and external agencies. Although important, external support was equally criticized by most actors interviewed, mainly because of inadequate training, funding and monitoring. Groups were divided over the need for external funding. While external development actors identified a wide range of areas in external support that require improvement, community groups were particularly interested in training that responded to their needs. The criteria used to select groups for support such as the obligation to present written records and submit written proposals were criticized as they do not take into account the high illiteracy rate among the population, a pattern that is common among Kenyan pastoralists (Orodho *et al.*, 2013). In rural Ghana, formal requirements such as the obligation to operate a bank account were seen as a hindrance to enlisting potential beneficiaries for external support (Porter & Lyon, 2006). These criteria as well as vested interests of individual government and NGO staff were seen as the origin of improper selection of beneficiary groups by external agencies.

## 5 Conclusion

External support, particularly from the faith-based organisations, has been instrumental in the development of community groups in the pastoral areas of northern Kenya. In the past three decades, a four-fold increase in the number of groups formed was observed, and this was accompanied by an increase in self-organised groups. The latter trend resulted from weaknesses of externally supported groups, which affected their sustainability. The presence of a problem that requires collective action, but also the supportive internal and external environment, drive the emergence and development of groups. Community groups offer a possibility for income diversification for pastoralists despite labour constraints for domestic and livestock-management tasks. To achieve this, groups prefer a particular combination of IGAs, comprised of sheep and goat trade, micro-credit schemes and sale of household items. From the foregoing, community groups are increasingly becoming important in solving felt needs of pastoralists and thus require policy attention. Efforts to promote sustainable community groups should take into consideration lessons learned from the history of group formation as well as insights from the different actors, foremost the views from the community group members.

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