



SYNOPSIS REPORT

Building Resilience and Livelihoods by Transforming Women-Led Livestock Food Systems

DECEMBER 2025

Case Study Findings from Three Kenyan Pastoral Communities: Isiolo (Gotu, Nakuprat) and Kajiado (Nasaru) Counties

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report synthesizes interview-based findings from three case study communities — Gotu and Nakuprat in Isiolo County and Nasaru in Kajiado County in Kenya — to identify context, opportunities and intervention strategies for Heifer International programs to improve women's resilience and livelihoods through livestock-centered food systems transformation.

Across sites, women's low participation in livestock markets is not primarily explained by a lack of willingness or basic skills. In fact, women demonstrate strong Indigenous knowledge and day-to-day competence in breeding, milking, sick-animal care and household-level livestock management. Instead, women face a tight set of structural constraints that determine whether livestock can function as a resilient livelihood pathway: climate volatility (driving body condition and price timing), heavy water access burdens, insecurity (with different forms by location), high recurring costs (especially school-fees and food), weak savings buffers and liquidity discipline, limited mobility and market exclusion and gendered control over land and large stock.

A central insight is that households use livestock for different objectives and interventions must match the strategies to household realities:

- Asset accumulation ("boma strategy"): Holding and upgrading animals over time for long-term security, not frequent buying and selling for cash flow.
- Regular cash ("business strategy"): Frequent buying and selling for small margins that depend on liquidity discipline, market access and low overhead.

When these models are mismatched, especially under predictable cash-pressure (school fees) and shock, women are pushed into distress sales or into fragile enterprises that collapse quickly. Promoting women-led livestock therefore requires a sequenced, bundled approach that:

- Establishes resilience foundations
- Strengthens liquidity discipline and cash flow aligned with expenditure cycles
- Reduces overhead and market exploitation
- Uses collective action models that fit local norms and coordination capacity

Finally, because outcomes are inherently uncertain and can cause harm (e.g., asset loss, backlash, increased violence, elite capture), the report embeds a “proofing process” that stress-tests each proposed intervention against climate timing, insecurity, women’s mobility constraints, household expenditure cycles and group dynamics. This is applied both to the three sites and as an archetype-based guide that may be illustrative for other pastoral areas.

RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION STARTER BUNDLES (12–24 MONTHS)

- **Resilience-first platform:** Women-accessible water improvement, basic animal health and disease control package and simple contingency planning for herd movement.
- **School-fee liquidity tools:** Term-aligned education savings funds (restricted withdrawals or predictable payouts), emergency buffers to prevent distress selling and diversion of working capital.
- **Shoat-first women’s enterprise:** Shoat-first pathways¹ with fast turnover, real-time price information (SMS / WhatsApp) and buyer-to-producer collection and low-cost transport models to preserve margins.
- **Fit-for-purpose collective action:** Strengthen larger groups (approximately 20 members) for savings, safety nets and investment in low-labor rentable assets; promote business activities through households or small teams (2–4, up to 5 members) where inputs roughly match returns
- **Safeguarded market participation:** Build women’s market confidence through accompanied market exposure, transparent pricing systems and mechanisms to reduce post-sale theft risk (especially in Nasaru).
- **Elevate women’s strengths as a food-systems transformation asset:** Recognize and strengthen women’s Indigenous knowledge of local ecology (water and forage), breeding and milk management and early disease detection through peer learning and community animal-health pathways.
- **Community-wide co-benefits framing:** Position women-led livestock as improving household nutrition and school continuity, stabilizing local supply and prices by reducing distress sales and strengthening social cohesion through savings and safety nets — benefits that extend to men, youth and markets. Where relevant, include men in complementary livestock activities to reduce pushback and avoid perceptions of exclusion.

LONGER-TERM INTERVENTION PATHWAYS (2–5+ YEARS)

- **Shaping the market system:** Buyer mapping and contracting; bulk procurement pilots; dry-season offtake and fair-price channels; enforceable norms for quality grading and price transparency.
- **Strengthening the service ecosystem:** Reliable veterinary supply chains and outreach; water systems that reduce women’s time burden; connectivity solutions that keep women linked to distant herds.
- **Gradual gender-transformative change:** Complementary male engagement without male capture; expanded women’s control over decisions and income; robust safeguarding and grievance pathway activities.

¹ Shoat-first pathway refers to a livelihood “pathway” that starts households with shoats (sheep and goats), or small ruminants, grouped together before moving into larger assets or enterprises.

1. PURPOSE AND FRAMING

The purpose of this report is to translate qualitative evidence into practical, context-fit strategies for improving women's resilience and livelihoods through livestock-centered food systems transformation in Isiolo and Kajiado Counties. It is intended to inform program design, prioritization and adaptive management across pastoral and agropastoral contexts.

Women's knowledge as a starting asset: The study identifies women as agents of change and treats women's strategies, economic reasoning and lived expertise as key evidence for designing interventions.

- Women are the primary caregivers for young, sick, weak, lactating and birthing animals, often the first to notice illness and body-condition decline.
- Women hold practical "dual-space" knowledge: they balance childcare and schooling in town with oversight of livestock and milk / food flows when herds are distant.
- Women manage household cash-pressure in real time (school fees, food gaps, hospital bills) and can clearly explain when and why distress sales occur.
- Women's groups in some contexts (e.g., Nasaru) hold strong institutional knowledge — rules, sanctions and escalation pathways that protect collectively owned assets.

Two framing choices shape the recommendations:

1. Women's priorities (what causes stress and what futures women want) are treated as foundational, not secondary. Interventions must align with women's goals: feeding children, paying school fees, building secure homes and accumulating animals as a culturally meaningful wealth strategy.
2. No single intervention will be transformative in isolation. Barriers form a web of mutually reinforcing constraints. Progress depends on sequenced bundles that target high-linkage constraints first (water, vet costs, transport / market access, school-fee liquidity), while gradually reducing deeper structural barriers (gender restrictions, insecurity, infrastructure gaps).

A consistent finding across Isiolo and Kajiado is that women's livestock labor is central but often invisible: Women engage in daily care and management, yet remain structurally excluded from many decisions, profits and formal services.

The report also introduces a "proofing process" to reduce failure and harm by stress-testing interventions against real-world conditions before scaling. This proofing lens is used throughout to check feasibility, risk and safeguarding needs before recommending scale.

2. OPERATING CONTEXT FOR WOMEN-LED LIVESTOCK AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Marriage systems, bridewealth and patrilineal authority are causal mechanisms shaping women's property ownership, mobility and returns from livestock – and therefore, strongly condition what works programmatically. These structures explain why technical or market-only interventions often fail without group-based, sequenced and safeguarded designs.

2.1 CLIMATE AS THE PRIMARY DRIVER OF LIVESTOCK VIABILITY AND MARKET TIMING

In Isiolo and Kajiado's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) environments, climate shapes livestock outcomes through water and pasture availability, animal body condition and the timing of high-price market windows. A bimodal rainfall pattern (short rains around April–May; longer rains peaking November–December) is increasingly unreliable, with reported failures, especially in the November–December season, pushing animals into prolonged stress.

Body condition typically improves only 2–4 weeks after rains begin and shoats recover faster than cattle. The best prices occur in dry-season windows when healthy animals are scarce (roughly February–March and August–October). However, many households cannot maintain body condition through long dry seasons (January–March and especially July–October). When animals are thin, sales are either unprofitable or forced ("distress sales"), especially when school fees and holiday costs hit, inevitably flooding markets, depressing prices and undermining household returns.

For women, who often have limited mobility and access to male-dominated markets and price information, these climate-driven dynamics translate into higher exposure to low prices, exploitation and missed selling opportunities. Therefore, promoting women-led livestock requires pairing market engagement with dry-season resilience inputs (water, feed and fodder feasibility, veterinary disease control and improved security services) and cash-flow tools that make market timing feasible (school-fee funds, savings discipline).

Gender shapes how climate shocks affect households. When water sources fail and herds must move farther in search of pasture, women and girls often travel longer distances to collect domestic water, lose access to milk and small livestock kept near the homestead and face increased time burdens and safety risks, including potential exposure to gender-based violence along longer travel routes.

2.1.1 GENDERED CLIMATE DIMENSIONS

- **Time poverty and water labor increase in drought:** Women shoulder longer trips for domestic water and livestock watering, reducing time for training, markets and enterprise.
- **Herd migration deepens “herd separation”:** As animals move farther in search of pasture and water (often with male herders), family remaining in towns lose access to milk and have less influence over livestock sales.
- **Safety and mobility risks rise with drought and insecurity or wildlife:** Routes to water points and markets become more dangerous, further constraining women’s market participation.
- **Climate-driven price windows reward mobility and information:** Without access to price information, safe transport and savings discipline, women are more likely to be pushed into low-price distress sales.

2.2 LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND MARKET-TIMING MISALIGNMENT

Interviews suggest that pastoralists broadly understand that climate affects livestock prices. However, few can translate this knowledge into action because timing decisions are constrained by weak savings discipline, limited access to formal or informal banking tools and immediate cash needs. As a result, animals are often sold when prices are lowest rather than when markets are most favorable.

Misperceptions further compound this challenge. A common belief across sites is that cattle are inherently more profitable than goats, despite recorded examples where higher-frequency goat trading delivers better percentage mark-ups, faster turnover and lower capital risk, particularly for women. These misperceptions persist because returns are rarely tracked systematically and losses from delayed or distress sales are normalized as unavoidable.

Optimistic expectations that animals will survive and reproduce through increasingly harsh seasons also encourage households to delay sales beyond economically optimal windows. When shocks occur (failed rains, disease outbreaks, or school-fee deadlines), this optimism collapses into forced, low-price sales. The result is persistent misalignment between perceived “best strategy” and what is financially feasible under climate volatility and predictable cash pressure.

Implication for programming: Interventions must therefore go beyond awareness of marketing timing.

They must make timely sales feasible by:

- supporting livestock body condition through dry seasons
- providing liquidity-discipline tools that prevent money leakage and distress sales
- reducing women’s barriers to market access and price information
- using practical scenario-based (“what-if”) learning exercises to surface missed opportunities and correct misperceptions with locally relevant examples

2.3 GENDER ROLES, CONTROL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN-LED LIVESTOCK

Across Isiolo and Kajiado, pastoral gender roles are broadly consistent. Men are expected to control and move with large, high-value stock (especially during dry seasons), while women’s responsibilities are domestically anchored around small stock, milking animals, childcare and household maintenance. Women’s labor is essential to herd survival and food systems, yet it is often undervalued and men’s authority over land and livestock remains a binding structural constraint.

Women’s autonomy varies significantly by social structure and local institutions. Exogamous and often polygynous marriage systems, combined with livestock-based bridewealth, frequently relocate women into male-bonded kin networks, weakening their support systems and making cohesive women’s groups harder to sustain. Patterns of women-headed households also differ: Divorce-driven headship (notably in Gotu) may signal relatively greater female choice, while widowhood-driven headship (more common in Nakuprat and Nasaru) reflects tighter patriarchal control.

Implication for programming: Interventions must work within (or carefully navigate around) slow-moving hierarchies while strategically leveraging legitimate openings. These include women’s groups with legal recognition (Nasaru), locally accepted inheritance protections (some Borana contexts) and culturally resonant framing that presents women’s livestock gains as strengthening household resilience, not a zero-sum loss for men. Because women’s economic advancement can trigger male withdrawal, conflict or violence, programs must pace change (i.e., nudge), engage men and leaders where appropriate and embed safeguarding and grievance mechanisms without undermining women’s autonomy or control over benefits.

3. PLACES AND PASTORAL ARCHETYPES: GOTU, NAKUPRAT AND NASARU

The three case study communities – Gotu and Nakuprat in Isiolo County and Nasaru in Kajiado County – should be understood both as specific places and as pastoral archetypes relevant across Kenya’s ASALs. Each site represents a distinct configuration of security conditions, mobility patterns, market integration, land tenure and group cohesion. Using an archetype lens enables KLMP to translate lessons across the portfolio by asking practical design questions: What conditions must be in place for an intervention to succeed and which enabling factors must be built first when those conditions are absent?

Women's knowledge varies by archetype: Programming can be most effective when it leverages the kinds of expertise women already use in each setting to manage risk, access markets and protect assets in each setting, rather than introducing externally defined models that do not align with local realities.

Methodologically, women were asked what causes them the most stress and anxiety “to the point of losing sleep.” This approach grounds the findings in what women experience as most urgent and destabilizing, rather than relying on externally defined barriers.

The three archetypes highlight distinct forms of women-held knowledge that can be leveraged programmatically:

- **Gotu (mobile, pastoral-leaning):** Women's knowledge of herd oversight across space, coordination with mobile herders and culturally permitted decision-making openings (e.g., Islamic inheritance norms practiced in Borana contexts).
- **Nakuprat (high-precarity, innovation under constraint):** Women's buyer-network and digital brokerage knowledge (e.g., WhatsApp-based marketing and aggregation) that pulls buyers closer to communities and reduces transport and transaction costs.
- **Nasaru (more secure, group-structured):** Women's institutional governance knowledge, including group charters, fines, transparent bookkeeping and escalation pathways through chiefs or local authorities to protect group assets and enforce rules.

Together, these archetypes illustrate that women are not only livestock managers but also risk navigators, market connectors and institutional actors. Recognizing and designing around these differentiated capabilities is essential for scaling women-led livestock interventions safely and effectively across diverse ASAL contexts.

3.1 ARCHETYPE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY	ARCHETYPE	PROGRAMMING IMPLICATION	KEY DEFINING FEATURES
GOTU Isiolo County	Remote / insecurity-constrained pastoral town	Design for safety, low overhead and mobility; start small with quick wins; use groups mainly for savings / buffers / asset ownership; enterprises through small cells / households.	Raiding / border insecurity; high mobility; weaker group cohesion / trust; town-based service and market constraints; comparatively more divorce-driven women headship.
NAKUPRAT Isiolo County	Transition settlement with partial infrastructure gains and high precarity	Start with basic needs and buffers; prioritize short cash-cycle models and ring-fenced funds; support lean digital aggregation / buyer collection; discourage debt-based activities.	Donor footprint and improved access to some services / markets; severe household precarity; business capital frequently diverted to urgent needs; post-project continuity challenges; insecurity / raiding risk remains.
NASARU Kajiado County	Secure / tenure-stable setting with strong collective action capacity	Leverage groups as platform; expand market-facing skills and safe access; consider staged upgrading only when risk conditions are met; optimize dairy where enabling logistics exist. Market confidence-building and asset ideation needed.	Stronger social cohesion and formal women's self-help groups; cattle as wealth symbol; vast geography and infrastructure gaps; insecurity linked to theft / robbery after sales and wildlife conflict limiting women's mobility.

3.2 CROSS-SITE SHARED REALITIES THAT MATTER FOR DESIGN

- Water reliability often matters more than pasture and women disproportionately shoulder domestic water procurement.
- Insecurity and herd movement reduce livestock proximity to homesteads, cutting women off from animals and milk.
- Species strategy differs: Maasai contexts prioritize cattle as long-term wealth; Borana / Turkana also value cattle but emphasize shoats due to resource constraints and insecurity; shoats serve as liquid assets everywhere.

Together, these archetypes illustrate that women are not only livestock managers but also risk navigators, market connectors and institutional actors. Recognizing and designing around these differentiated capabilities is essential for scaling women-led livestock interventions safely and effectively across diverse ASAL contexts.

4. WOMEN'S GOALS, INTERESTS AND STARTING CONDITIONS

Women were asked what causes the most stress and what futures they want to build. This approach captures women's lived priorities and decision pressures — not only perceived “barriers to a project goal,” but what women experience as urgent and meaningful in their daily lives. Interventions that ignore these priorities risk low uptake, rapid collapse or unintended harm.

4.1 WHAT WOMEN SAY THEY NEED MOST (STRESSORS)

- **Gotu:** Town- and system-facing pressures linked to mobility and service access, including insecurity limiting clientele and market participation, movement between town and grazing areas (arjal) and concerns about idle or underemployed youth.
- **Nakuprat:** Immediate household survival pressures, including food security, illness, single motherhood and children's well-being, with little margin for delayed returns or experimentation.
- **Nasaru:** Predictable cash pressure (i.e., school fees), combined with women's mobility and safety risks related to wildlife conflict and theft / robbery during or after market sales.

4.2 WHAT WOMEN SAY THEY ARE WORKING TOWARD (ASPIRATIONS)

- Livestock accumulation as a culturally embedded wealth strategy and a form of long-term security with animals functioning as both “currency” and insurance.
- Livestock business for regular cash where feasible, particularly through shoats, which allow faster turnover and lower capital risk; dairy where enabling logistics exist.
- Children's education, particularly in Gotu and Nasaru and the ability to pay school fees without asset depletion.
- Building or upgrading a house (basic shelter in Nakuprat; a “good” house with amenities in Nasaru) as a visible marker of stability and progress.

4.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR HOW TO FRAME LIVESTOCK INTERVENTIONS

- **Start where vulnerability is highest by stabilizing basic needs;** otherwise, enterprise capital will be absorbed by food, water or medical crises, especially in high-precarity contexts such as Nakuprat.
- **Treat school fees as both a stressor and a goal pathway to opportunity;** education-linked savings mechanisms can reduce stress, prevent distress sales and enable women's preferred futures.
- **Align package design to women's perceived “orientation”;** town- and system-facing constraints in Gotu versus household and domestic stability priorities in Nakuprat and Nasaru.
- **Be cautious with shop-keeping as a livelihood pathway;** shops often function as coping mechanisms rather than profitable enterprises due to credit-taking, low profitability and weak repayment discipline unless demand conditions and governance are addressed.

5. CONSTRAINT WEB AND OPPORTUNITY SPACES FOR WOMEN-LED LIVESTOCK

5.1 THE INTERLOCKING CONSTRAINT SET (DOMESTIC AND MARKET SPHERES)

Interviews point to a set of mutually reinforcing constraints that limit women-led livestock production at the homestead (domestic sphere) and in buying and selling (market sphere). The most consistently cited “big three” are **drought, insecurity and high recurring costs**, especially school fees and food. These pressures are amplified by disease burdens and costly veterinary care, time burdens related to water access, weak infrastructure and transport and poor or exploitative markets.

Gender restrictions shape nearly every pathway: Men's control over livestock, land, income and women's mobility reduces women's ability to translate labor into autonomy and economic security.

Two nuances are decisive for programming:

- **Group cohesion differs significantly:** Nasaru's strong women's groups are an enabling asset; weak cohesion and mistrust in Gotu and Nakuprat make group-based enterprise fragile without governance support.
- **The nature of insecurity differs:** Gotu and Nakuprat face raiding and border conflict that displace herds and restrict mobility; Nasaru faces theft and robbery risks linked to market cash-handling as well as wildlife conflict that limits safe foot travel.

5.2 HIGH-LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITY SPACES

- **Target “low-hanging fruit” that addresses multiple constraints:** School-fee liquidity tools, access to affordable veterinary medicines, solutions to women’s transport and mobility barriers and stronger savings-group governance.
- **Leverage the shoat-first advantage** through lower capital investment, faster turnover, closer-to-home management and lower exposure to exploitation than in cattle markets.
- **Reduce overhead and bring buyers closer to women** through buyer-to-producer collection, aggregation points and digital or phone-based marketing systems.
- **Elevate women’s existing strengths** by positioning women as herd-health and breeding decision leaders and providing practical tools that formalize and expand that expertise.
- **Leverage relevant women’s ecological knowledge** (seasonal water points, forage patches, herd movement signals) for community rangeland monitoring and early-warning actions that protect herds before prices collapse.
- **Strengthen women’s animal-health expertise** (symptom recognition, neonatal care, milk hygiene, treatment practices) through safe veterinary training, access to affordable medicines and clear safeguarding protocols.
- **Pair women’s market knowledge of shoats and milk demand with simple record-keeping and real-time price information** to improve market timing and counter common misperceptions about returns.

6. COMMUNITY-WIDE RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING CO-BENEFITS

Strengthening women’s roles in livestock is not only an equity goal; it is a system-level resilience strategy that can improve outcomes for households, markets and ecosystems when designed interventions are designed safely and grounded in local context. **Likely co-benefits include:**

- Improved child nutrition and household food security through more reliable milk supply, better animal health and reduced distress sales during lean periods.
- More stable local livestock markets as school-fee funds and savings discipline reduce seasonal “flooding” of markets and help households sell closer to peak value.
- Reduced disease burden and better One Health outcomes when women’s early disease detection and care practices are supported with safe veterinary training and reliable access to medicines.
- Time savings and safer daily routines for women and girls when water access improves, freeing time for education, enterprise and leadership and reducing exposure to violence on long journeys to water points.
- Stronger community social protection as women’s savings groups expand direct assistance funds, lowering reliance on high-interest borrowing and coping strategies that degrade natural resources.
- Local employment multipliers (transport, aggregation, animal health services and input supply) that engage youth and men in complementary roles without displacing women’s leadership.

Design and risk-management questions to apply across interventions:

- Women’s mobility and safety: Does the intervention require travel to male-dominated markets? If so, what safe pathways and protections exist?
- Overhead and margins: Do transport and input costs erase profits? Can buyers collect, or can costs be pooled or subsidized?
- Governance and incentives: Who controls the asset and cash? How are decisions made and documented? What prevents elite capture?
- Safeguarding: What backlash risks exist? What reporting and referral pathways are in place? How will staff monitor and respond?
- Exit resilience: What remains when project support ends? Who owns the system and how is it financed?

7. CORE PRINCIPLES FOR INTERVENTION DESIGN

The following design principles distill the evidence into practical rules that can guide selection, bundling and sequencing of interventions across Isiolo and Kajiado.

1. **Resilience foundations before enterprise:** Build the platform (first water access, dry-season feed and fodder feasibility, basic animal health and veterinary care and school-fee liquidity mechanisms) so investments are not immediately eroded by predictable shocks.
2. **Risk-appropriate asset strategy (security and ecology):** Avoid concentrating value in movable livestock in raiding-prone or highly insecure zones; prioritize small stock and / or rentable assets; upgrade to cattle only where security, service access and women’s retained control permit.
3. **Gender and mobility realism and safeguarding:** Design interventions that reflect women’s domestic

responsibilities and mobility constraints; pace change deliberately; engage men in complementary roles without enabling male capture; and embed robust safeguarding and grievance pathways.

4. **Shoat-first pathway for women's market participation:** Prioritize goats and other small stock as the default entry point due to lower capital requirements, faster turnover and reduced exposure to exploitation; treat cattle and camels as second-stage options conditional on security conditions and women's retained control over assets and income.
5. **Financial discipline and cash-flow alignment:** Treat liquidity discipline as a core constraint; create ring-fenced savings, term-aligned school-fee funds, simple record keeping and rules that protect capital from unproductive debt cycles and financial diversion.
6. **Fit-for-purpose collective action (groups versus business):** Use large groups (approximately 20 members) for savings mechanisms, risk-spreading and low-labor rentable assets; promote businesses through individuals or small teams (2 to 4, up to 5 members) whose contributions are roughly proportional to returns and where accountability remains high.
7. **Market systems that protect margins and reduce exploitation:** Support real-time price information, buyer collection, pooled transport, accompanied market exposure and transparent oversight; pilot scalable digital aggregation models (e.g., WhatsApp-based) systems) where conditions permit.
8. **Community-wide co-benefits and systems change:** Investing in women-led livestock strengthen household nutrition (milk and meat), stabilizes local supply and prices by reducing distress sales, improves animal health and disease management and builds social cohesion through savings and producer groups, contributing to more resilient communities and the stronger local food economies.

8. INTERVENTION STRATEGY OPTIONS (THREE STREAMS)

Interventions are organized into three complementary streams that can be deployed as starter bundles and then adapted or scaled over time. Each stream must be tested against local risk conditions and implemented with governance and safeguarding support appropriate to the specific context.

Cross-cutting leverage: Position women as co-designers and technical leaders, building on their Indigenous knowledge of local ecology, herd health, breeding and milk handling, while reducing gendered climate burdens (water access, time burdens and safety risks) so livestock gains translate into household and community resilience (improved nutrition, school continuity, reduced conflict over cash and more stable local markets).

8.1 STREAM 1: WOMEN'S SELF-HELP SAVINGS GROUPS (ASSET-BUILDING AND SAFETY NET)

Goal: Use groups as the scaffolding for resilience — savings discipline, emergency support and protected asset accumulation — rather than pushing large groups into complex livestock businesses.

Core design features:

- Scale Nasaru-style self-help groups (20 or fewer members) with regular contributions split into asset growth (livestock and / or low-labor rentable assets) and direct-assistance funds for emergencies and school fees.
- Ring-fence savings from risky loan cycles; where loans exist, limit to repayable income-generating activities and keep consumption support separate.
- Formalize for trust and durability: self-selected membership, clear group charters and rules, transparent cash handling, rotating oversight, attendance norms and clear dispute pathways (with chiefs or elders involved where appropriate).
- Invest in lower-risk, low-labor income assets (rentable or leasable tools or spaces) where insecurity and climate volatility make livestock accumulation risky.
- Integrate term-aligned school-fee funding mechanisms so education costs do not repeatedly erode productive capital.

What this enables for women: reduced financial stress, fewer distress livestock sales, gradual asset growth and a legitimate platform for market engagement over time.

8.2 STREAM 2: INDIVIDUAL / SMALL TEAM (2–4 MEMBERS), LIVESTOCK BUSINESSES (FAST TURNOVER, CLEAR ROLES)

Goal: Support small, accountable enterprises, often shoat-focused, where roles are clear and returns are proportional to each member's contribution. This stream is designed for quick wins and learning-by-doing, especially in high-precarity settings.

Core design features:

- Favor households or small teams (2 to 4, up to 5 members) where contributions are proportional to returns; clearly define roles (buying, selling, herding, transport, bookkeeping).
- Position women as technical leaders and decision-makers in herd-health and breeding, supported by practical training and safe medicine access; embed safeguards so women retain decision-making authority and control over benefits and are not displaced by male partners.
- Build for seasonality by pairing livestock trading with dry-season complementary income and / or realistic resilience inputs; avoid models that rely on costly fodder with contamination risks unless supply quality is verified.
- Strengthen market timing and liquidity through coaching on boma versus business pathways, price windows, savings discipline and simple bookkeeping.
- Reduce overhead by prioritizing buyer collection, aggregation points, and low-cost transport so margins are not erased.

8.3 STREAM 3: WOMEN'S LIVESTOCK COOPERATIVES (PILOT ONLY; BUYER-LED)

Goal: Explore aggregation or cooperative models where they can demonstrably reduce overhead and increase bargaining power without triggering free-riding, conflict or supply instability.

Core design features:

- Noting that evidence suggests cooperatives are higher risk in remote pastoral settings, treat them as conditional pilots, launching only after proofing governance capacity, supply stability and buyer readiness.
- Secure buyer commitments in advance; clarify pricing and quality standards; and establish transparent profit-sharing and reporting rules.
- Prefer hybrid aggregation models (e.g., small leadership team aggregating from many producers through WhatsApp) over large cooperatives.
- Use cooperatives primarily to reduce transport costs (such as buyer-to-producer collection) and negotiate bulk sales, not to manage year-round operations.

9. IMPLICATIONS BY DISTRICT AND RECOMMENDED BUNDLES

9.1 ISIOLO COUNTY (GOTU & NAKUPRAT): SHOCK-EXPOSED AND INSECURITY-SENSITIVE

Context that matters: Higher shock exposure (drought), inter-ethnic raiding and border insecurity, frequent herd migration away from homesteads and a high share of women-headed households. Women's livestock engagement must function even when men or herds are absent and when holding valuable assets is risky.

Starter bundle (12–24 months)

- **Resilience-first foundations:** Water points accessible to women, strategic supplementation feasibility and mobile animal-health outreach (including common disease protocols and reliable medicine access).
- **Shoat-first pathway:** Goat-focused husbandry and trading support as the primary women-led livestock entry point.
- **Market access that minimizes overhead:** Buyer-to-producer collection, local aggregation days and digital or phone-based marketing with transparent price information.
- **Market training and market conditions updating:** Practical, guided exposure of women to markets, combined with ongoing market-conditions updates delivered through mobile channels.
- **Group form that fits dynamics:** Large groups for savings and buffers; enterprises through small, accountable cells or group-enabled individual businesses.
- **Cash-flow tools:** Term-aligned school-fee funds and emergency buffers to prevent distress sales and capital diversion.
- **Security-sensitive asset strategy:** Avoid concentrating high-value livestock; consider lower-risk rentable assets; maintain women's connection to benefits when herds migrate (for instance, through delegated sales authority and reliable information flows).

Longer-term options (2–5+ years)

- Dry-season offtake and fair-price pilots to reduce catastrophic losses and enable reinvestment cycles.
- Expanded buyer networks and contracting to stabilize demand and reduce middleman manipulation.
- Strengthened veterinary supply chains and women-centered service delivery models that enable timely treatment, disease prevention and women's leadership in herd-health management.

9.2 KAJIADO COUNTY (NASARU): COHESION AND UPGRADING POTENTIAL WITH MOBILITY RISKS

Context that matters: Relatively stronger asset security through group ownership and comparatively lower levels of livestock raiding between neighboring ethnic communities; well-established and formal women's groups; and evidence of complementary household roles (e.g., milk logistics). Constraints remain, including vast geographic distances and infrastructure gaps, women's limited confidence in male-dominated markets, theft and robbery risks following sales and wildlife conflict limits safe movement.

Starter bundle (Kajiado / Nasaru, 12–24 months)

- Professionalize strong groups into multi-variate self-help platforms: Strengthen charters, transparent ledgers and asset-growth ideation support; avoid over-fragmentation ("too many groups").
- School-fee finance without asset depletion: Education funds with timed payouts and matched savings to reduce repeated asset-liquidation cycles.
- Women's safe market participation: Accompanied market exposure, trusted intermediaries and mechanisms to reduce post-sale cash-handling risk.
- Market-linked livestock enterprises: Improve small ruminant (shoat) value chains and expand dairy only where reliable buyers and low-cost logistics exist (milk hygiene, containers, and coordinated collection systems).

Longer-term options (Kajiado / Nasaru, 2–5+ years)

- Staged upgrading from shoats to cattle, conditional on reliable water and feed availability and women's sustained control over income and benefits.
- Buyer-linked aggregation and group-based bulk purchasing of inputs (feed, animal health supplies) to reduce unit costs and strengthen bargaining power.
- Wildlife-risk mitigation partnerships and infrastructure improvements that reduce mobility constraints and improve women's safety when accessing markets and grazing areas.

10. SEQUENCING AND IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

Sequencing is central. Interventions that start with capital or complex enterprises often fail when basic needs, liquidity discipline and dry-season viability remain unaddressed.

A practical ladder is: Stabilize (reduce fragility) → Buffer (protect against predictable shocks) → Connect (reduce overhead and exploitation) → Grow (expand profitable cycles) → Upgrade (build durable wealth where feasible)

PHASE: PRIMARY OBJECTIVE	EXAMPLE INTERVENTIONS	"TESTED" READINESS SIGNAL
1. Stabilize: Reduce immediate fragility	Water access / time burden reduction; basic animal health; simple contingency plans. In areas with high insecurity (e.g., Isiolo differentiate how livestock programs can address insecurity	Women can keep milking / small stock closer and report fewer crisis losses
2. Buffer: Protect against predictable shocks	Education-term savings funds; emergency buffers; ring-fenced group capital	School fee periods no longer trigger major liquidation or debt spirals
3. Connect: Lower transaction costs and exploitation	Price information (SMS / WhatsApp); buyer mapping; buyer collection; safe market access	Women sell with fewer intermediaries and more predictable pricing
4. Grow: Increase returns and reinvestment	Shoat enterprises; small-team business coaching; group asset investments	Repeated profitable cycles occur and capital is reinvested
5. Upgrade: Build durable wealth (conditional)	Staged cattle upgrading / dairy optimization in secure settings; scalable rentable assets	Security, services and liquidity discipline remain stable across seasons

11. THE PROOFING PROCESS AND RISK MITIGATION (DO-NO-HARM BY DESIGN)

Because livestock outcomes are highly variable and interventions can unintentionally increase risk (asset concentration, market exposure, conflict or gender backlash), every activity should be proofed before scaling. Proofing is a practical tool for assessing feasibility, efficacy and implementation priority while adapting lessons for use in other KLMP pastoral areas.

Proofing is used to:

- Stress-test an intervention against mediating barriers (climate, insecurity, liquidity and gender constraints) so it does not collapse under predictable shocks.
- Identify prerequisites (what must be built first) and define what success looks like in each phase.
- Detect harm risks early (e.g., increased gender-based violence, elite capture, unsafe market exposure or debt traps) and build safeguards into the intervention design.

11.1 PROOFING CHECKLIST (APPLY TO EACH PROPOSED INTERVENTION)

- Climate and seasonality: Does the model work in the long dry season? What happens if rains fail, especially in the November–December cycle?
- Animal body condition: What concrete inputs will keep animals healthy enough to reach peak-price windows? Are feed and water options safe, affordable and operationally feasible?
- Insecurity profile: What are the dominant risks — raiding, theft and robbery, or wildlife conflict — and how does the intervention reduce exposure rather than increase it?
- Cash-flow realism: When do financial benefits materialize relative to school-fee deadlines and food needs? Is there a buffer mechanism to prevent diversion of productive capital?

11.2 RISK MITIGATION MEASURES TO EMBED

- Ring-fenced funds: Separate emergency or consumption support from enterprise capital to avoid debt traps and enterprise failure.
- Phased capital release: Link disbursement to clear milestones, especially in high-precarity settings, to reduce diversion risk and support learning.
- Transparent financial management: Maintain clear ledgers, rotating oversight roles and simple phone-based recordkeeping options where literacy is limited.
- Locally legitimate dispute resolution: Establish clear grievance pathways and enforcement mechanisms through recognized authorities (chiefs and elders, where appropriate).
- Safety-first market participation: Use accompanied market visits, buyer collection and post-sale cash-handling safeguards to reduce theft and exposure.
- Norms-aware engagement: Frame interventions around household resilience benefits; engage men and community leaders in complementary roles while safeguarding women's autonomy or control over benefits.

ANNEX : QUICK REFERENCE OF INTERVENTION MENU BY FUNCTION

FUNCTION	EXAMPLE OF INTERVENTIONS	MOST RELEVANT SETTING
Water / Time Burden	Women-accessible water points; storage; governance of access	All (highest in Gotu, Nasaru)
Animal Health Management	Women-centered trainings; affordable medicine access; outreach / mobile services	All (critical in Isiolo)
Liquidity / School Fees	Education savings funds; restricted withdrawals; timed payouts; emergency buffers	All (priority in Gotu, Nasaru; foundational in Nakuprat)
Shoat Enterprise	Goat husbandry and trading coaching; small-team roles; buyer collection; price information	All (especially Isiolo)
Market Systems	Buyer mapping / contracting; aggregation days; WhatsApp marketing; pooled transport	Nakuprat (digital aggregation), Gotu (buyer collection), Nasaru (market safety / skills)
Group Strengthening	Charters; group knowledge; transparency; registration; commitment; dispute pathways; ring-fenced funds	All (strong base in Nasaru; needed in Gotu / Nakuprat)
Upgrading (Conditional)	Shoats transition to cattle; dairy optimization; input purchasing through groups	Nasaru-like secure contexts only

ABOUT HEIFER INTERNATIONAL

Heifer International partners with smallholder farmers to sustainably address hunger and poverty in their communities while caring for the Earth. Since 1944, Heifer has supported nearly 60 million farming households, particularly those led by women, youth and Indigenous populations. Operating in 19 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas, we aspire to collaborate with millions more smallholder farming households by 2030 through farmer-led, regenerative food systems.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report, prepared by Mark Chandler, was based on “Kenya Livestock Market Project (KLMP): Building Resilience and Livelihoods by Transforming Women-Led Food Systems: Case Studies from Three Kenyan Pastoral Communities,” by Dr. Carla Handley (December 2025).



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