

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

TARGETING INDIVIDUALS OR COMMUNITIES?

Learnings from AfriScout on improving pastoralist well-being

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Motivation

Pastoralism is becoming an increasingly precarious livelihood in East Africa due to rapid changes in arid and semi-arid regions caused by climate-related disasters, armed conflict, livestock diseases, macroeconomic shocks and population growth. There is a critical need for innovations that enhance pastoralists' resilience and adaptability.

To this end, the AfriScout programme supports pastoralists through two intervention models: AfriScout Regen (implemented in Ethiopia), which provides intensive, localised grazing support at a community level using an adaptive multi-paddock (AMP) approach; and AfriScout Steward (implemented in Kenya), an app that provides satellite and crowd-sourced information on rangeland conditions to inform grazing and migration decisions.

Purpose

Causal Design conducted a two-year, mixed-methods evaluation to better understand the causal impacts of the two AfriScout models. The evaluation sought to identify the attributable outcomes of AfriScout on pastoralist decision-making and subsequent impacts on rangeland conditions and herd conditions. This brief summarises key findings and highlights learnings from each model for future programme design and for policy-makers.

Approach and methods

Causal Design conducted a cluster-level randomised control trial to compare outcomes between treatment and control groups, and a qualitative inquiry to provide further information on key mechanisms and causal pathways to change. Data was collected in January–February 2023 (baseline) and February–March 2025 (endline).

Findings

AfriScout Regen

AfriScout Regen has had a large and statistically significant impact on almost all outcomes in targeted communities. Significant shifts have been observed in rangeland management, with the establishment of shared grazing plans, rotational grazing and communal grazing. Adherence to grazing plans has led to significant improvements in rangeland conditions, plus subsequent improvements in herd condition and financial and non-financial well-being.

AfriScout Steward

Pastoralists value the AfriScout app and incorporate app information into their migration decisions. Though the evaluation findings are not statistically significant, in qualitative interviews, app users reflected positively on using app information to guide their migration decisions. They attributed using the app to positive outcomes on herd condition, and to subsequent effects on financial and non-financial well-being. High levels of awareness and use of the app further illustrate AfriScout Steward's relevance for pastoralists.

Policy implications

Both AfriScout models have strengths that may be leveraged in different contexts. Their success depends on specific design and contextual pre-conditions as facilitating factors.

AfriScout Regen illustrates the efficacy of collective action on regenerating grazelands. However, this approach is more costly and may not be easily scalable, though may still be more cost-effective than conventional drought-related interventions for pastoralists. Furthermore, AfriScout Regen's success stems from leveraging and building on traditional rangeland management systems in southern Ethiopia.

AfriScout Steward demonstrates the effectiveness of digital platforms for information sharing, particularly when information is co-created and relevant to users. Strong spillover in app awareness and use, due to information relevance and a culture of information sharing, suggests cost-effective scaling. While digital dissemination is easy and low-cost, however, existing digital infrastructures may limit accessibility.

Intervention design and funding must take into account a cost-benefit analysis of each approach (information sharing versus localised advisory support). In particular, programmes should consider local conditions (such as digital infrastructure and existing decision-making processes) in order to best tailor approaches to desired objectives and the needs of pastoralists.

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