



Shifting to an Inclusive Livestock Sector in the Horn of Africa

Early Evidence and Learning from the 2025
Annual Outcome Survey of the Regional
Livestock Programme (RLP)

Governance | Markets | Inclusion | Resilience | Systems Change

RLP is a 12-year market systems initiative strengthening climate-resilient and inclusive livestock trade across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia by improving production systems, market functionality, and enabling policy environments for pastoral and agro-pastoral communities.

This learning brief presents early evidence from the 2025 RLP Annual Outcome Survey in a learning lens, exploring what is changing, why it is changing, and what this means for resilience across the region in a learning frame. Findings suggest that resilience improves where governance, infrastructure, resource access, and markets reinforce each other, and remains uneven where these systems are weak, disconnected, or structurally constrained.



Executive Synthesis

The livestock sector remains central to livelihoods, regional trade, and food security across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, supporting over 20 million people, yet continues to operate under persistent structural stress. In 2025, pastoral households reported exposure to overlapping shocks, including rising food prices (46.0%), drought (36.9%), income loss (36.2%), and livestock mortality (30.4%), underscoring continued system fragility under climate and economic pressure.

WHAT IS CHANGING? Across RLP intervention areas, there are measurable improvements between baseline and 2025 in access to productive resources and system functionality.

Preparedness for Shocks	Pasture Access	Fodder Access	Water Access
59.3%	24.5%	21.4%	37.9%
→ 73.0%	→ 52.5%	→ 43.3%	→ 58.0%

These changes are also visible in production outcomes, with **88%** of households reporting increased livestock production and **85.9%** reporting improved animal health. However, this productive improvement is not consistently translating into income, with only **54.2%** of households reporting income gains and wide variation across corridors (**38.2%–73.9%**). This divergence signals an important shift in system behaviour: production gains are becoming more widespread, but value capture remains uneven and structurally constrained.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING : Resilience is primarily driven by system alignment rather than production gains alone. Where governance systems, resource access, and markets are better aligned, households are more able to convert production improvements into income. Where this alignment is weak, gains remain only partially realized. The binding constraint in the system is shifting. Early gains are driven by improved governance and coordination over shared resources, but these are increasingly constrained by underdeveloped infrastructure and market systems.

WHY THIS IS HAPPENING : This pattern points to a deeper system transition. Early gains are largely driven by strengthened governance and improved coordination over shared resources, but these improvements are increasingly encountering binding constraints in infrastructure and market systems. Weak aggregation, limited price transparency, and low buyer competition are now emerging as key constraints on the system’s ability to convert production gains into economic outcomes. In effect, the system is reaching a new constraint frontier: from production and coordination toward market absorption and value conversion capacity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RLP : The insights and transitions imply that future resilience gains will depend less on expanding production-focused improvements and more on strengthening system coherence at the point where production connects to markets. Where that connection is strong, gains translate into income; where it is weak, they dissipate.

Introduction:

The livestock sector remains central to livelihoods, regional trade, and food security across the Horn of Africa, yet continues to operate under persistent and interacting pressures. Recurrent drought, volatile food prices, livestock mortality, and income instability are not isolated shocks, they shape how pastoral and agro-pastoral systems function, how households manage risk, and how value is created and retained across livestock economies.

Within this context, RLP supports a transition from reactive coping toward more anticipatory and market-oriented resilience by strengthening the interconnected systems that underpin livestock production, trade, and resource governance across cross-border corridors in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia.

RLP operates across five corridors, Afmadow, Galkaayo, Moayle, Wajir, and Tog Wajaale, each reflecting distinct combinations of governance capacity, resource availability, infrastructure access, and market functionality. Rather than representing isolated geographies, the corridors function as interconnected livestock systems where outcomes are determined by how governance, resources, infrastructure, and markets interact under different levels of constraint.

The programme is implemented through a Market Systems Development (MSD) approach, which focuses on enabling shifts in system behaviour rather than direct service delivery. Understanding progress therefore requires looking beyond outputs to examine how relationships, incentives, coordination mechanisms, and market structures are evolving across corridors.

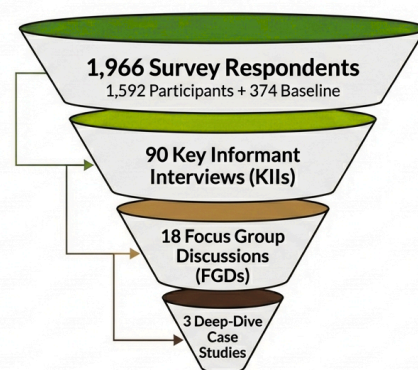
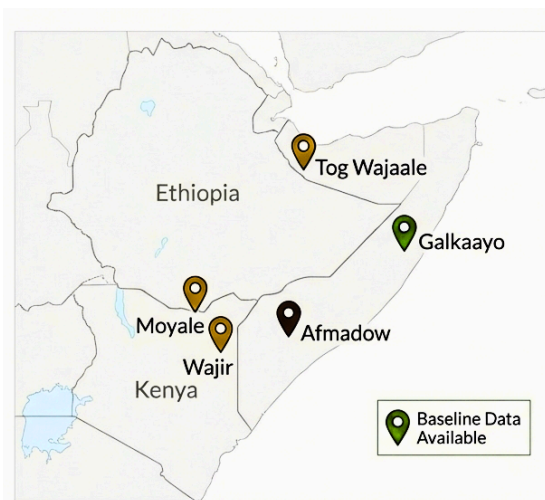
Evidence base and learning frame

The 2025 Annual Outcome Survey reached 1,966 households across five corridors, complemented by 90 Key Informant Interviews, 18 Focus Group Discussions, and 3 deep-dive case studies. Findings should be interpreted as directional evidence of emerging system change rather than attributable programme impact.

This distinction is particularly important in a corridor-based programme where change does not occur uniformly. Improvements in one part of the system may expose new constraints elsewhere, while similar interventions can produce different outcomes depending on the degree of alignment between governance, markets, infrastructure, and resource access.

Purpose of this brief:

1. What has the programme learned about its effectiveness at this early stage?
2. Which systemic and behaviour changes are taking hold, and which remain fragile?
3. Where is inclusion progressing, and where are structural barriers persisting?
4. What should the programme do differently next?



Learnings

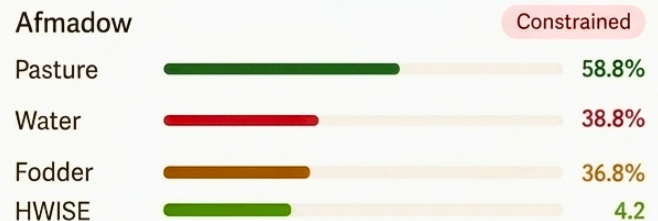
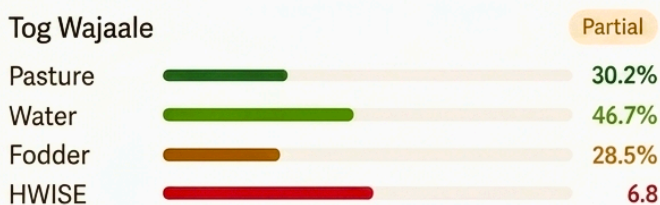
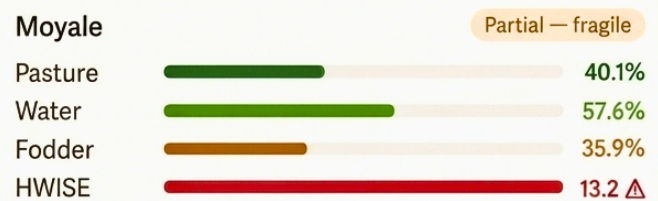
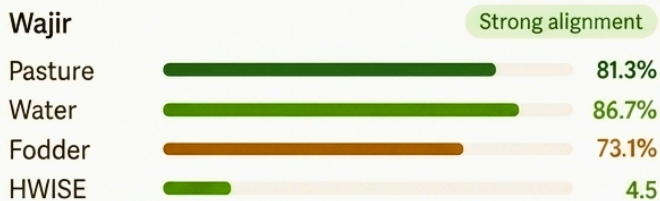
L1 Resilience and Resource Access Are Improving – But Governance Gains Have Limits

Across corridors, improvements in preparedness and access to productive resources point to stronger coordination over grazing, water use, and livestock mobility. These gains are closely associated with stronger local governance and more structured management of shared resources. However, corridor variation also reveals that governance gains alone do not determine system performance. In Wajir, stronger coordination is reinforced by comparatively better water infrastructure, allowing gains to consolidate more effectively.

In Moyale, governance improvements coexist with the highest water insecurity score of any corridor compared to Afmadow and Wajir and the only food consumption score below the programme target, suggesting that income gains there, while real, may be more fragile than the headline figure implies. In Galkaayo, persistently low pasture and fodder access continue to constrain system performance despite signs of improved coordination.

CORRIDOR-LEVEL SYSTEM PERFORMANCE — 2025

■ Pasture access ■ Water access ■ Fodder access ■ HWISE score (lower = better)



Galkaayo — baseline only (2025)

Pasture access 17.2% · Fodder access 12.6% · Water insecurity (HWISE) 12.0. Structurally low resource access constrains system performance regardless of governance improvements.

What emerges across corridors is a shift in the nature of the constraint itself. Earlier limitations linked to coordination and collective resource management are beginning to ease in some areas, but infrastructure and physical resource scarcity are increasingly becoming the factors that determine whether gains can deepen or sustain.

Governance improvements increase the efficiency with which systems operate, but infrastructure and resource availability increasingly determine the ceiling of system performance.

“We now gather as a community to decide where to graze. It makes our animals healthier and our planning easier.” — **Pastoralist, Afmadow**

“Before, pasture would finish quickly. Now we plan and protect it, but water is still far.” — **Participant, Wajir**

Learnings

L2 Production Gains Are System-Driven – Markets Now Constrain Outcomes

Livestock production and animal health outcomes have improved significantly, 88% of producers report increased output and 85.9% improved animal health, reflecting better access to veterinary services, feed, and more coordinated resource management. These are real and meaningful gains.

Yet the economic returns from these gains remain uneven. While production improvements are widespread, only 54.2% of households report income gains, with sharp differences across corridors: 73.9% in Wajir, 60.8% in Moyale, 49.2% in Tog Wajaale, and 38.2% in Afmadow. The variation points to a growing disconnect between production and value realization.

In corridors where aggregation systems are weak, buyer competition remains limited, and pricing mechanisms lack transparency, increased production does not translate into improved producer returns. Instead, market structure increasingly shapes who captures value from expanding livestock supply. The system is entering a new phase in which production is no longer the primary binding constraint, as productive capacity improves, market functionality increasingly determines whether households can convert those gains into stable income.

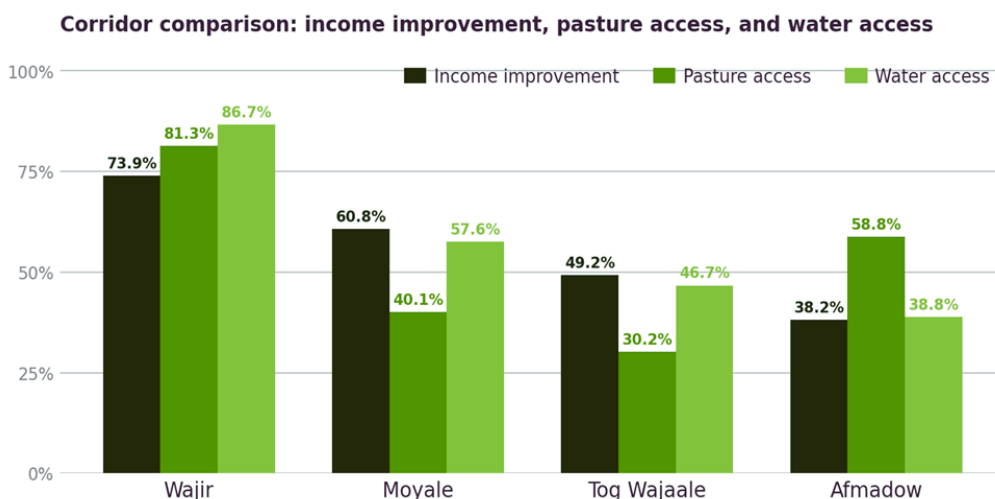
“Animals are healthier now, but we don't always get better prices.” – Pastoralist, Moyale

L3 Income Gains Depend on System Alignment, Not Isolated Improvements

Income outcomes offer a practical way to read how well different parts of the system are working together. The variation across corridors is telling and not random. Wajir (73.9%) and Moyale (60.8%) perform noticeably better than Tog Wajaale (49.2%) and Afmadow (38.2%). What distinguishes these corridors is a combination of factors: stronger access to pasture and water alongside more functional market conditions. In Wajir, pasture access reaches 81.3% and water access 86.7%, compared to just 30.2% and 46.7% respectively in Afmadow.

In Galkaayo, weak resource access, high input costs, and inefficient market structures combine to limit profitability, even where production and sales are ongoing.

The programming lesson is clear: the question is no longer where to intervene, but how to ensure that different investments connect. Where alignment is stronger, outcomes follow. Where it is not, gains remain partial and uneven.



“When markets are working, we benefit. When they are not, production alone is not enough.” – Pastoralist, Wajir

L4 Inclusion Is Expanding – Influence Is Not

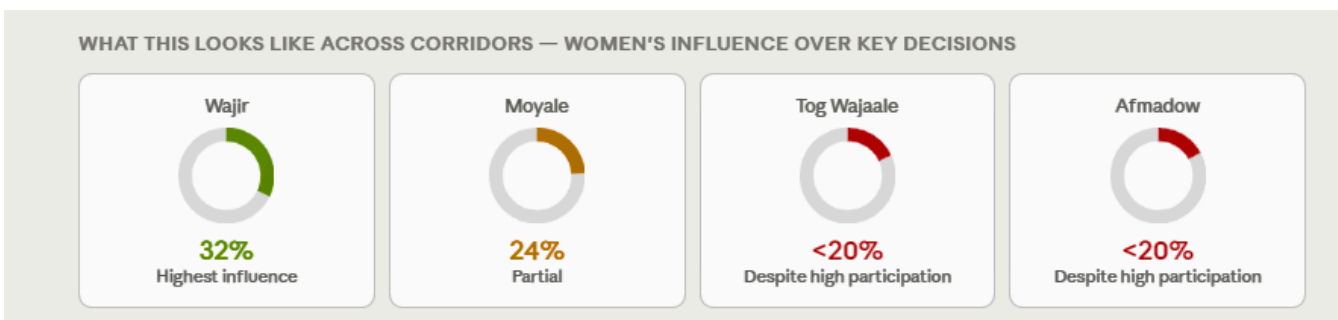
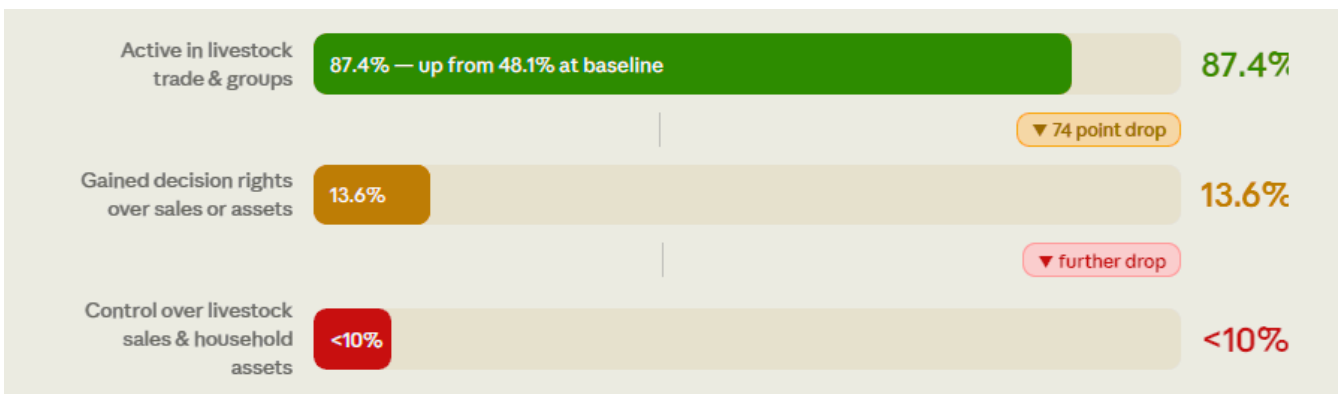
Women and youth are participating more actively in livestock systems across most corridors, women's engagement has risen from 48.1% at baseline to 87.4%, with youth participation reaching 80% in Wajir.

These are significant shifts in presence and visibility within livestock systems.

However, increased participation has not translated evenly into influence over decisions, assets, or market outcomes.

In Tog Wajaale and Afmadow, women's influence over key decisions remains below 20% despite high participation levels. The evidence points to a widening distinction between participation and agency: systems are becoming more inclusive in terms of access and engagement, but social norms, bargaining power, and control over productive assets continue to shape who ultimately benefits. This suggests that inclusion within livestock systems cannot be measured through participation alone.

The Participation - to - Agency Funnel - Women in Livestock Systems



The more significant question emerging across corridors is whether increased engagement is translating into shifts in power, control, and decision-making authority. Participation is a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful inclusion, the limiting factor is now shifting toward the conditions that enable influence: decision rights, asset control, and bargaining position.



“ We are part of the groups now, but decisions are still not equal. I can speak in the meetings, but I cannot decide how to sell the animals,” observed a woman leader in Tog Wajaale.

— A woman leader, Tog Wajaale

L5 Market participation is expanding, but value capture remains uneven

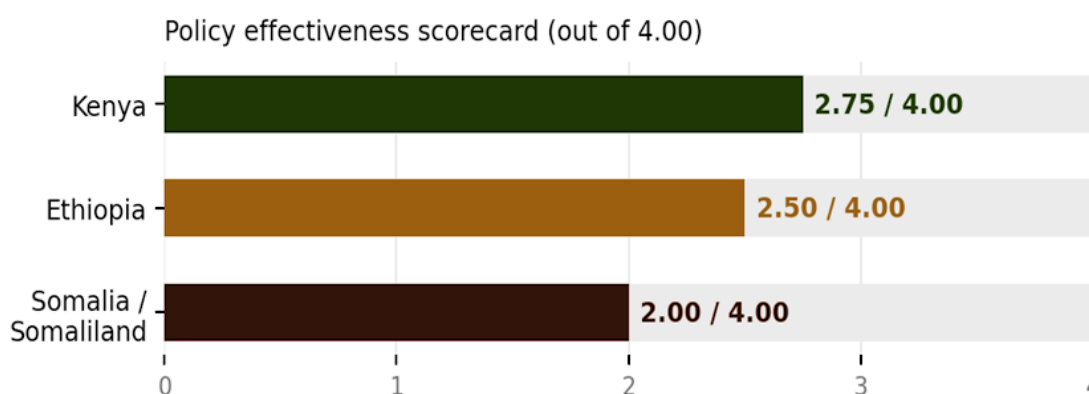
As livestock market participation expands across corridors, differences in value capture are becoming more visible. In corridors where aggregation systems are stronger and producer-buyer linkages are more functional, households are better positioned to capture value from livestock sales. In more fragmented market systems, traders and intermediaries continue to exercise disproportionate influence over pricing and market access.

The result is that market participation is increasing faster than equity within markets themselves. This pattern is particularly visible in structurally constrained corridors where weak aggregation, low buyer competition, and high transaction costs continue to limit producer returns despite increased market engagement. Expanding participation in livestock markets does not automatically produce more equitable outcomes, market structure, bargaining power, and the distribution of information increasingly determine who benefits as systems commercialise.

“We sell together now, but traders still control the price.” – A Producer, Afmadow

L6 Corridor performance is shaped by the wider enabling environment

Differences in corridor performance are not only local – they reflect the influence of the broader policy and institutional environment. Variations in policy implementation, infrastructure investment, regulatory enforcement, and public sector capacity continue to shape how effectively local gains can scale and sustain. Policy effectiveness scores point to a consistent gap between formal frameworks and practical application across all three countries.



In contexts where institutional systems remain weak or fragmented, local improvements struggle to translate into broader system transformation. Somalia's actual agricultural budget allocation of 0.36% against the 10% Maputo Declaration target is the starkest illustration of this structural constraint.

Strategic alarm – Somalia budget gap

Somalia's actual agricultural budget allocation (0.36%) is far below the 10% Maputo Declaration target. Where the enabling environment is fragmented, improvements struggle to scale or sustain. Long-term livestock system transformation depends not only on improving local system performance, but on the extent to which institutional and policy environments support, reinforce, and sustain these shifts over time.

What We Are Learning About Livestock System Change in the Horn of Africa

In RLP livestock trade corridors, livestock system change is emerging as a process of uneven and interconnected system reconfiguration rather than linear progression. As governance systems strengthen, constraints increasingly shift toward infrastructure and markets. As production improves, market functionality becomes more important in determining whether gains translate into income. As participation expands, deeper questions of agency and control become more visible.

- Livestock system change in RLP-supported corridors is non-linear, constraints shift across interconnected system components rather than disappearing altogether.
- Early gains emerge where coordination and collective action improve governance, resource access, and service delivery. As these constraints ease, bottlenecks increasingly appear in infrastructure and market functionality.
- System performance is shaped by the degree of alignment between governance, resources, and markets. Where alignment is stronger, gains are more consistent and durable; where it is weaker, improvements remain uneven and fragmented.
- Markets increasingly determine how production gains translate into income. Value capture remains uneven due to differences in aggregation capacity, information access, and bargaining power.
- Inclusion efforts are expanding participation without consistently increasing agency, particularly for women and youth.
- System improvements can also concentrate pressure on grazing and water resources, creating new environmental and health risks.
- What remains consistent across corridors is that resilience outcomes are strongest where governance systems, infrastructure, resource access, and markets reinforce each other – and weakest where these systems remain fragmented or structurally constrained. Livestock system performance is shaped less by isolated improvements within individual sectors and more by the degree of alignment across interconnected system components.

What We Still Don't Know - Areas for Further Inquiry

How durable are the behaviour changes we are seeing?

The programme is still largely at the 'Adopt' stage of the AAER trajectory (Adopt, Adapt, Expand, Respond). Adoption is not systems change. At least one corridor should test for durability by deliberately reducing facilitation intensity and monitoring what holds.

Are women's gains in voice translating into changed household outcomes, or staying at the level of perception?

This cannot be answered by survey snapshots alone. Longitudinal cohort tracking of specific women across two or three survey cycles would give a real answer.

At what scale do cooperatives begin to shift bargaining power against large traders and brokers?

The cooperative model is the programme's most promising mechanism for equitable value distribution, but the theory of change for when and how it tips the power balance needs to be much more explicit.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The 2025 evidence suggests that the binding constraint in RLP corridors is shifting. Early gains in governance, coordination, and resource access are improving production and resilience conditions, but these gains are increasingly constrained by weak infrastructure, fragmented markets, and uneven system connectivity.

The emerging learning is that resilience is not driven by production gains alone, but by the degree of alignment between governance systems, resource access, and markets. Corridors where these systems reinforce each other show stronger income outcomes, while weak alignment causes gains to plateau. The Afmadow paradox illustrates this clearly: high livestock sales alongside negative net income outcomes.

Future resilience gains will depend less on expanding production and more on strengthening market functionality, infrastructure, and system coherence across corridors. Inclusion presents a parallel systems challenge: participation is expanding faster than agency, particularly for women and youth, indicating that access alone does not shift control over decisions or value capture. The central learning is that livestock system transformation depends on how effectively governance, infrastructure, resource access, and markets function together as an integrated system.

Three priorities follow.

- Market systems must become the primary investment focus: aggregation, price transparency, and buyer competition are the levers most likely to close the gap between production and income.
- Corridors with the deepest structural deficits require targeted infrastructure support.
- And inclusion work must move upstream, from facilitating presence to reshaping the terms on which women and youth engage with markets and institutions.

Progress now depends less on expanding what the programme does and more on deepening coherence across what is already in motion.



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The Regional Livestock Programme (RLP) strengthens resilient, inclusive, and market-driven livestock systems across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Funded by SDC and AFD and implemented by Mercy Corps with IGAD, HELVETAS, and WHH, RLP advances system facilitation, partnerships, and adaptive learning to improve livelihoods and economic resilience.