

Isiolo County: Keeping needy students in school with food-for-fees

Problem statement

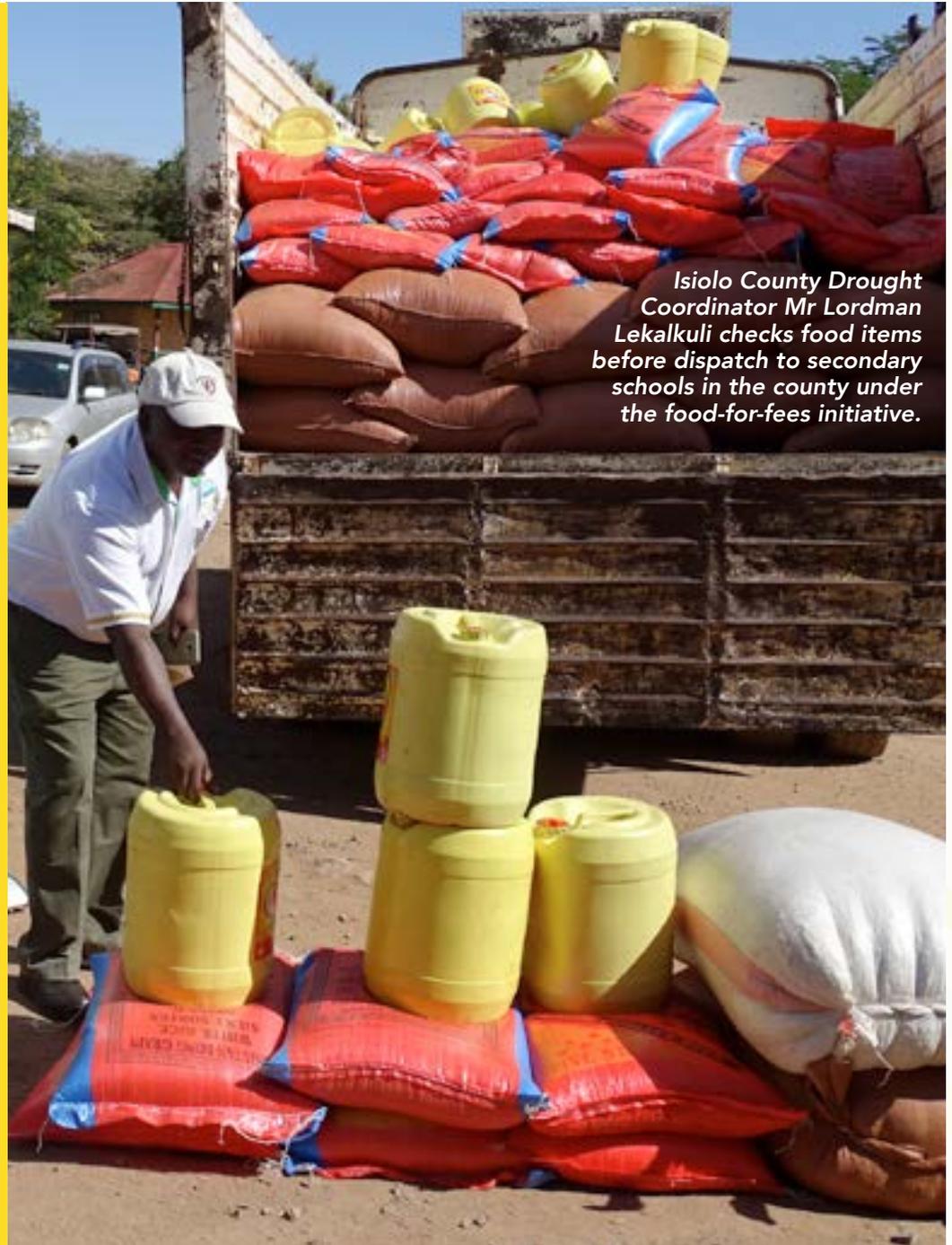
Severe droughts contribute to high school dropout rates in arid and semi-arid areas, disrupting learning and affecting access, equity and retention. Cases of children from vulnerable households dropping out due to lack of fees increase during drought periods as household purchasing power dwindles.

Livestock migrate in search of water and pasture during drought, impacting negatively on their body condition, which in turn affects their market price. In addition, livestock migration leaves pastoralists without access to markets, resulting in loss of income options to support domestic needs, including payment of school fees.

Support in form of school fees subsidies is one of the recommended interventions in the education sector. It is against this backdrop that the NDMA, through European Union support, initiated the food-for-fees initiative.

The intervention is aimed at ensuring;

- Education of pastoralist children is not interrupted during drought periods.
- Minimal school dropouts.
- Increased retention in schools through provision of food in lieu of fees.
- Nutritional support for students.



Isiolo County Drought Coordinator Mr Lordman Lekalkuli checks food items before dispatch to secondary schools in the county under the food-for-fees initiative.

Implementation

The food was distributed to 23 public secondary schools where needy students were identified by the respective bursary committees and approved by the schools' boards of management. The quantity of food allocated per school was determined by the school population and needy students' profiles.

The food consignment was used to offset the equivalent value in school fees for the most vulnerable students identified for support. The value of food allocated per student was translated into bursary (using the prevailing market rates) and used to offset the equivalent value in school fees balances.

A total of **3,450 needy students** from poor and vulnerable pastoralist households have benefitted from this intervention since 2015 at a total cost of **Ksh 24, 592,855**.

Key achievements of the intervention

- Beneficiary schools recorded zero dropouts.
- Reduced absenteeism of students from poor and vulnerable households.
- Reduced distress sale of livestock.
- Schools operated until the end of the term.
- Pastoralists were cushioned from losses they would have incurred had they sold livestock at very low prices during drought.

This drought has nearly brought my school to its knees. I have to weigh between demanding fees and the student being totally withdrawn from school. It is a delicate balance

– *Ms Florence Achacha,*
Principal Isiolo Girls High School



Isiolo Girls High School principal Ms Florence Achacha (centre) and her staff receive food items provided under the NDMA/EU food-for-fees initiative.

Case of Isiolo Girls High School

One of the schools which benefitted from the food-for-fees initiative is Isiolo Girls High School- a national girl's secondary school in Isiolo Town. 80% of the students are drawn from Isiolo County, of whom 50% come from very needy backgrounds. Though the school solicits bursaries from other sources, these are very limited, highly inconsistent and poorly targeted.

The NDMA, with EU support, provided a total of 81 bags (90kg) of maize, 55 bags (90 kg) beans, 70 bags (25kg) rice and 39 jerricans (20 litres) edible oil to the school, benefitting a total of 115 girls, out of whom 34 have benefitted more than once.

The students from poor and vulnerable households are ranked based on the highest fees defaulters and family background (vulnerability to drought) as well as girls that are either totally or partially orphaned.

Impact

- Retention of girls in school by reducing absenteeism and dropouts during drought episodes.
- Increased completion rates and indirectly increased transition rates to institutions of higher learning.

For instance, out of the 34 girls who completed as a result of the support, 5 scored a grade of C Plus and above, attaining qualification for degree level, while 10 scored between C Minus and C Plain, attaining qualification for entry to diploma.

- Food-for-fees has acted as a catalyst for enrolment of needy girls from across the county.