Author's response to reviews

Title: Shamba Maisha: A Pilot Study Assessing Impacts of a Micro-Irrigation Intervention on the Health and Economic Wellbeing of HIV Patients

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

On behalf of my coauthors and myself, I would like to thank you for considering our manuscript, and than the reviewers for their excellent comments. Below you will find a point-by-point response to the reviewer’s comments and concerns. Please let us know if you have any further comments.

- We need a clearer description of the research setting. Did each participant household depend solely on agriculture? Many household groups in Nyanza have diversified livelihoods depending on the circumstances, perhaps engaging in fishing or petty trade, with women and men sometimes doing different activities. Is that the case here? How important was vegetable cultivation to these people and who actually did the work? Was it the person who took the loan or someone different?

Thank you for this suggestion on clarifying our research setting further. During recruitment we assessed the subject’s dependence on farming and seventy three percent (Table 1) reported farming as their main occupation and every one of those farmers also reported farming as their primary source of income (pg 9 – Demographic/Socio-economic factors). Though the recruitment communication was done with the HIV positive subject, the economic outcome measure was total family income and so loans were given to the families of the primary subjects and work was done by the family as a unit (pg 7 – Loan Scheme).

- There is a vast literature on the gendered-aspects of micro-finance that the authors would do well to consult and then provide a more nuanced gendered analysis of their findings. Who actually used the money in the household? We are not told until page 7 that the majority of farmers were male, did they have wives? Did the female farmers have husbands or were they widows? What about the involvement of kin-groups beyond the household? Did they provide labour or perhaps serve as a drain on resources? The numbers may be small, but were there any differences in the challenges faced by women and by men in repayments and in the use of the loan?

Thank you for this comment. We certainly appreciate the vast literature on the gendered-aspects of micro-finance and considered mentioning it in our initial draft, however, limiting the study to the female population made recruitment quite difficult in our initial stages. Given that the study was a pilot, we decided not to separate the subgroups and strongly encourage future studies to do a gendered analysis. Of the twenty-two male farmers only two (both widowers) did not have wives, while four of the females were married and the other four were widows (pg 9 – Demographic/Socioeconomic factors).
Our study did not do a subgroup analysis on what the involvement of kin-groups was beyond the household. The major expense reported by the farmers (71%) was food for the immediate family. The remaining farmers reported school fees and farm inputs as major expenses. Of the fifteen farmers that made the first repayment, seven were women, further supporting the need for a gendered analysis in future studies (pg 10 – Economic Data and pg 12 – Paragraph 3). We present a brief discussion of qualitative experiences of loan repayment for men and women (pg 12 – Qualitative Experience).

- *It would also be helpful to compare the experience with the technology with other assessments of micro-irrigation – in India and Nepal, as well as elsewhere in Africa, rather than referring to the pump as if it were a unique technology.*

We definitely appreciate this comment and have included background information and citations on micro-irrigation programs in India and Nepal. (pg 6 - Introduction)

- *Since the number of analyzable participants was small (less than 30), it would be helpful to further use qualitative analysis to emphasize the feasibility and or importance of including other livelihood approaches such as health and economic outcomes to microfinance loans. For instance, quotes from participants or short cases.*

Thank you for this great suggestion. We have included short vignettes and quotes from our participants on page and agree that they definitely add to the impact of the intervention (pg 8 – Focus Group Discussions and pg 10 – Qualitative Experience).

Minor revisions:

- *Negatively impacts poverty? Suggest negatively impacts poverty alleviation. Since poverty is already negative.*

Done.

- *Use of “an” before the acronym HIV.*

Done where “HIV” was used in reference to a singular subject.

- *It has been argued that not all who have the virus are actually ill, it might therefore be safe to use the “AIDS” when talking about treatment and care.*

Since the pilot study did not do a subset analysis of the farmers based on their CD4 counts, we grouped all participants under the larger umbrella term of “HIV”.

*Under references*

- *KNBS (200???)*
Done. Corrected to KNBS 2008.

- **Indicate date of document retrieval when referring to web-based databases (that is not a journal, paper presented in a meeting that is not bound to change) from http:// as they are frequently updated.**

Done.

Sincerely,

Jay Pandit,
Corresponding Author.