Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 17 January 2010

Reviewer: Janet Seeley

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper which tackles and important topic. The paper is well-written. However, as it currently stands the authors leave us with a number of questions. 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? 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?

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. I realise that the authors all have medical backgrounds but it would be very worthwhile to engage with this literature a little so their paper does not come across as uninformed by people who engage in research on irrigation management, it would be good if they were interested in reading this paper too!

A few references that might provide pointers based on a quick search:


Gakundi, M. (1997). Funding Irrigation Development in Kenya with Special Reference to Funding by the Smallholder Irrigation Scheme Development
Organization.


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.