

Dryland Networks Programme

ISSUES PAPER

Pastoralism, Crisis and Transformation in Karamoja

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Report of a Workshop on "Pastoralism, Crisis and Transformation in Karamoja", held at the Faculty of Science, Makerere University, Uganda, August 14-15, 1992.

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FOREWORD

The Centre for Basic Research began its research programme on pastoralism in Karamoja in May 1989. As it was clear that the many dimensions of the crisis - ecological, social and political - were intertwined, we were convinced of the need for an historical and holistic approach.

To be equal to this task, we decided to put together a research team comprising social and natural scientists. The research process was designed to ensure that individual research in libraries and visits to Karamoja would be accompanied by group discussions. At each step, reflection was followed by investigation which fed into further discussion, reflection, and yet more investigation. The process took more than two years to complete.

Once final papers had been revised following discussion, we began to think of how to feed the results of our research into the wider process of public discussion and policy formulation. We finally decided to prepare for a workshop which would bring together persons from different sectors with an interest in Karamoja: community organisations, Churches, the press, National Resistance Council (NRC) members, teachers, government extension workers, Resistance Council (RC) chairpersons, ministry representatives, foreign NGOs, donor agencies, and researchers.¹

¹ Resistance Councils are democratically elected political and administrative units of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government organised at local through to national levels.

The workshop was originally planned to be held in Karamoja itself. However, it was postponed twice due to circumstances beyond our control. When we faced yet a third postponement, it was decided to shift it to Kampala.

This report is divided into three sections: the programme of the workshop, a summary of the discussions held in various sessions, and the workshop *recommendations*. *The recommendations were initially drawn up by the research team and presented to the workshop for deliberation and revision. The recommendations included here are those made by the seminar participants.*

We have a number of debts to acknowledge. The Ford Foundation funded the research over two years. Makerere University - in particular, the Faculty of Science, Africa Hall and the Senior Common Room - generously allowed us access to their facilities at a reasonable charge. The response to the workshop, from both Karamoja and Kampala, was overwhelming. We are proud to present this record of the proceedings to a wider audience for information and critical comment.

Mahmood Mamdani
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to summarise the proceedings of the workshop on "Pastoralism, Crisis and Transformation in Karamoja". It is divided into three parts:

1. Ecology, History and Social Change;
2. The Karamoja Famine and the Significance of Cattle Raids;
3. The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Karamoja.

Five papers that addressed these topics were presented:

- i) Mahmood Mamdani, P.M.B. Kasoma and A.B. Katende, "Karamoja: Ecology and History";
- ii) Charles Ocan, "Pastoralism and Social Change in Northeastern Uganda: Factors That Have Determined Social Change in Karamoja";
- iii) Ben Okudi, "Causes and Effects of the 1980 Famine in Karamoja";
- iv) Charles Ocan, "Pastoral Crisis in Northeastern Uganda: The Changing Significance of Cattle Raids";
- v) Arnest Wabwire, "An Evaluation of the Role of NGOs in Karamoja".

This report highlights the major points raised by the 105 participants, by summarising the presentations made by the authors of the papers and dwelling in some detail on the discussions that followed.

I. ECOLOGY, HISTORY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A number of the components of the crisis were identified during the course of the workshop.

1. Persistent food insecurity;
2. The destruction of the social fabric of Karamoja society, which has led to the upsurge in the degree of violence;
3. The continuing application of military force against the Karimojong "warlords", and the consequent militarisation of Karimojong society;
4. The changing character of Karimojong leadership, which has ceased to be based on the leadership of elders, and instead revolves around military power.

The first workshop paper sought to unearth the "suppressed truth" of Karamoja against the backdrop of the historical and ecological developments in the area. That "truth", according to Mahmood Mamdani, is based on the relationship between rainfall as a key feature of the ecology of the area, and the continuous struggle by the colonial state to destroy the "mobility" of traditional "non-destructive" pastoralism. Historical examination demonstrates that, as

conditions for a non-destructive pastoralism were undermined, the stage was set for a series of short term survival strategies that finally amounted to a cumulative "tragedy of the commons". The colonial solution - a combination of shutting out pastoral communities from using resources by demarcating them as "forest reserves" in the 1940s and "game reserves" in the 1950s, the forcible destocking of pastoral herds, and the attempted resettlement of pastoralists - set the parameters for the "Karamoja problem". The paper concluded by pointing out that ecological circumstances necessitate that pastoralism must be the mainstay of life in Karamoja, and that the pre-condition of a non-destructive pastoral way of life is the mobility of herds.

Much of the discussion about Mamdani's paper stemmed from the contrast between "modernisation and tradition". Is everything that is modern good, and is everything that is bad, traditional? Clearly, it is wrong to believe that tradition does not change and that there is only one, single, straight and narrow road to modernity.

The modern versus tradition debate led participants to discuss the failure to involve the indigenous peoples of the area in the search for solutions, because the problem had been dismissed as one of traditionalism at best, or "backwardness" at worst. And yet, it is the Karimojong who know their environment best; they know the different kinds of grass, the best sources of water, and they have also developed methods over time to deal with crises and disaster. How can the "Karamoja problem" be solved with a so-called "modern" solution that completely eliminates the involvement of the Karimojong? There is a need to learn from local knowledge and expertise, as well as to make a correct assessment of the problem. Thus, when the Karimojong decide to move their cattle from one place to another, it is

necessary to find out why they do this and gain a better understanding of the rationale of pastoralism.

Some participants argued that "modernisation" of Karamoja could actually produce positive results. However, this must be married to a suitable method of application. The "top-down" approach that consists of ideas formulated by bureaucrats and technocrats will most certainly result in failure, unless "bottom-up" perspectives are integrated into the process right from the start. Modernising techniques must begin with the question: why is the ownership of cattle so important to the Karimojong? As one participant argued, the Karimojong cannot be divorced from their cattle and the two must be considered together. Provided that resources remain scarce for the Karimojong and their cattle, mobility will be a constant factor in their social existence, as it is to their economy.

If peaceful co-existence is to be achieved between the Karimojong and other residents of the area, the Karimojong will have to accept the idea that they do not live on an island, but rather are part and parcel of a wider geo-political and economic entity known as Uganda. With respect to the former, the coercion exercised by the state came under particular criticism - from the colonial period to the present. Evidence of this is found, for example, in the 1961 Bataringaya Report, which advocated the application of force rather than dialogue, for military rather than civil methods of dispute resolution; and for the outright alienation of the Karimojong, instead of their incorporation into the Ugandan mosaic. These attitudes were further reflected in the 1964 Administration of Justice (Karamoja) Act, which jettisoned the normally strict rules on the admissibility of evidence, placed sole discretion in the hands of a single judge, and overturned the time-honoured legal principle of the presumption of

innocence in cases within the district. Indeed, any person who was accused of engaging in a cattle raid, in which someone had been killed, was presumed guilty until they had proven their innocence.

The search for a solution to the ongoing crisis has failed because it does not address the problem of poverty nor appreciate the cultural dimensions of the issue. Of particular concern has been the "Pajero culture" of government officials and NGO workers, who drive around the countryside in smart new 4-wheel drive vehicles distributing handouts while enjoying the fruits of aid themselves and denying benefits of aid to local people.

Several participants were concerned about a number of methodological issues that underlined Mamdani's presentation, and called for a comparison with other pastoral societies, both within Uganda and elsewhere. Drawing comparisons with other areas would help not only in deriving lessons, but also in the formulation of appropriate solutions. Indeed, as one participant pointed out, the crisis under study was not confined to Karamoja alone, but could be witnessed in other parts of the country, particularly in Western (Ankole) region. Here it was critical to appreciate and correctly consider pastoralism in relation to other economies and to pose the question: has there been any serious attempt to transform the economic status of pastoral people?

Finally, several participants pointed out that changes in Karamoja have indeed taken place, relating to dressing habits, the use of salt beef, the development of agriculture, the growth of labour-intensive projects under ILO sponsorship, tree planting and construction. All these reflect a high degree of involvement by the Karimojong in the determination of their own destinies. They also reflect an attempt by people to initiate and extend dialogue, mobilise and educate people,

as well as use novel mechanisms of utilising structures such as the Resistance Councils as principal focal points for change in the district.

In responding to the discussion, Mamdani felt strongly that not much had changed in the transition from the colonial to the neocolonial state, and that unless the lessons of history are appreciated, we shall be doomed to repeat them. When returning to the "modernisation versus tradition" debate, he warned that while we should not romanticise tradition, any attempts at change must be informed by an emphasis on voluntary participation and consideration of the needs of the community. Lastly, there was also a need to refute the linear thesis describing the development of society in which pastoralists are located at the bottom, since such a view is neither true nor useful.

Charles Ocan's paper on social change addressed many of the same concerns raised by Mamdani's paper. Ocan sought to clarify both the methodological framework within which the debate over social change in Karamoja has been conducted, as well as the background factors that have created the crisis. Methodologically, the tendency amongst anthropologists has too often been to focus on form at the expense of substance, which has created the illusion that pastoral societies are unchanging. In fact, Karimojong society has been undergoing dramatic changes and not just due to natural phenomena, such as drought. Transhumance must be distinguished from nomadism so that the different modes of social organisation associated with each can be understood. His study provided two main conclusions. Firstly, there has been a general tendency by the state to treat Karamoja as a war zone and reject the use of democratic methods, so that *ad hoc* policies have led to the overall crisis existing in the district. Secondly, while Resistance Councils provide an

interesting avenue for possibly finding a solution to the crisis, they have not yet been utilised for this purpose.

The ensuing discussion produced insights into the nature of state intervention in pastoral areas, as well as the belief that the Karimojong should themselves put their house in order. This was necessary, as one participant noted, because despite the more or less continuous efforts of outsiders (including relief workers), there was almost nothing to show for this. Many participants felt that although it was essential to understand what is happening on the ground, research alone will not be enough to improve the situation.

Future support activities would need to adopt a two-pronged approach:

- i) The Karimojong must make a much more serious examination of their experiences and find ways to learn from this;
- ii) It was essential to question the motives of external forces (government administrators, NGOs and relief agencies, the Military etc), and not simply to assume that their activities are beneficial to the district.

There may be a need for a reorganisation of structures, for example, by adaptation of the RC system in Kotido, where two parallel types of RC exist to deal with the specific problems of pastoralists: the "real" or "official", and the "kraal" or "unofficial" RC. Furthermore, the Karimojong need to deal effectively with "cattle raids", which have also involved non-Karimojong groups, and included some from neighbouring districts. In addition, there was an urgent need to stop using the Karimojong as mercenaries.

A number of participants took the view that there was nothing immutable about pastoralism in Karamoja and definite steps could be taken to introduce different kinds of production activities. In addition, it was felt by some that there was a need for a more critical focus on the status and function of women as a positive influence in the region. This needed to be combined with a review of the formal education system that currently fails to address the particular needs of pastoral children.

Participants concluded the session by urging a more balanced and critical appraisal of the ecology, history and social structure of Karimojong society. A balance must be found between the need to conserve and to produce from the environment in a sustainable fashion. The use of military force has been counterproductive and must be curtailed, and there needs to be a more fundamental involvement of the people of Karamoja in the transformation of the region. This conclusion set the stage for discussion of famine and cattle raids.

II. THE 1980 FAMINE AND CATTLE RAIDING

Ben Okudi's paper analysed the causes, effects and implications of the 1980 famine in Karamoja. These related to the low rainfall of 1979/1980; poor harvests; inflation brought about by the scarcity of agricultural produce; the 1978/1979 War of "Liberation"; the raids by non-Karimojong into Karamoja, and by the Karimojong into neighbouring districts. Okudi brought out the uneven impact of the famine - there were both winners and losers - the former taking advantage of increased impoverishment in the area to enrich themselves. The state ignored the warnings and outcry that followed once the famine had gained momentum, culminating in a crisis that only abated following action by

the international relief and development agencies, spurred on by the international media publicity that the event attracted. Okudi argued that several issues still have to be addressed in order to prevent a recurrence. These include:

- i) The inadequacy of *ad hoc* responses by the state and other institutions in dealing with the crisis;
- ii) The need for long term solutions focused on sustainability;
- iii) Much greater involvement of the local population in project planning and social transformation.

The ensuing discussion brought to a head arguments about the role of the state in the crisis, with a clear division between those who felt that criticism of the state was justified, and others who felt that such criticism should be tempered by understanding the position of the Ugandan state during the 1980 famine, in terms of the size of the "public purse". If the 1980 famine had recurred in 1992, this would require an expenditure of Shs. 17 billion (approximately 50 per cent of the national budget for Education), in order to provide a minimum diet of 350 grams of maize and 40 grams of beans per day to each individual in Karamoja. Was this possible for a government with a total budget of only Shs. 350 billion? It was also pointed out that international agencies do not have inexhaustible budgets and that "donor fatigue" was beginning to set in.

However, it was also felt that the Karimojong do not preserve their food adequately after harvest, and they consume much of the surplus in feasts and ceremonies.

Against this, it was argued that the crisis reflected a the lack of priority given by the state to environmental considerations. It also reflected a pattern of neglect of oppressed minorities of Ugandan society, such as the Bacwa and the Banabachumbi, to cite only two examples. Although there is a general crisis in Uganda, a place like Karamoja suffers additionally because of its particular context. In terms of the 1980 famine, at that time the government was more concerned about maintaining a good image in front of donors and foreign governments than it was about the plight of the domestic population. The then President denied the existence of any crisis in Karamoja, until Church-related bodies brought in foreign television crews. Reports by field officers of the Ministry of Agriculture were ignored and politicians were so busy fighting amongst themselves, that disaster was almost inevitable. This raised the question: to whom is the Ugandan state accountable? During the 1980 famine, it could be argued that there was in fact no state in existence, given the conditions of war, pillage and plunder at the time. Not only was the armoury at Noroto raided, but the Karimojong quickly realised that the most valuable "legal tender" for their purposes were guns and bullets.

The session then turned to the sensitive questions of security and disarmament in Karamoja, which, it was argued, were the basis for food insecurity in the area and the immediate cause of the famine in 1980. It was felt by a number of participants that there were too many weapons in Karamoja and a duplication of duties between the Armed Forces, the Local Defence Units and several other armed groups. Only a single force was needed, to be deployed on the national border in order to defend the area from raids by the neighbouring peoples of Kenya. Some participants argued that there was an immediate need for the disarmament of all Karimojong. However, others counselled caution, arguing

that it was essential that levels of social welfare be improved, before tackling the politically volatile issue of disarmament.

In the debate on food security, poverty and the selection of priorities, it was pointed out that Karamoja is a net exporter of seeds, and that the revenues accruing from such trade should be utilised to bolster the food situation in the district. The allegation that the Karimojong simply indulge in large feasts rather than storing surplus food was proved to be unfounded. The Karimojong have had a system of food storage in the past. For example, between 1948 and 1952 in Kotido District, food was collected for each sub-county and stored for periods of drought. In 1991, Karamoja even registered a food surplus. With a viable food storage system today, the problem of famine could be eliminated. This would require more positive state intervention to enhance food security in the region.

In his second paper at the workshop, Charles Ocan examined the significance of cattle raids, both within Karamoja and in the outlying areas of the district, including Kumi, Soroti, Lira, Apac and Gulu. Starting with the assertion that the popular conception of the Karimojong revolves principally around the issue of cattle raiding, Ocan sought to demonstrate the social, economic and political aspects of the phenomenon, especially within the contemporary context. Three main reasons were advanced for cattle raids:

1. The need for restocking;
2. Private accumulation;
3. Plunder following social disintegration.

Ocan discussed the origin, development and impact of raids on the Karimojong way of life, and recommended that grazing committees should oversee security and protection of cattle. He also suggested that livestock insurance schemes should be set up to create buffer stocks for restocking by more peaceful means.

In the discussion, some participants asserted that the phenomenon of raiding cattle was not unique to Karamoja, but was a reflection of the social disintegration of Ugandan society. This was manifested in corruption, misappropriation of public funds, and robbery with violence, which exist all over the country. Others cautioned against over-generalisations. Corruption was clearly a social ailment, but there was a distinction in the kinds of corruption found in Uganda. There were those who sought to amass large amounts of wealth, and those who were forced to steal simply to survive. The former exploited access to government resources and the lack of efficient mechanisms of accountability in order to plunder state coffers, while the latter were both limited in their access as well as in the amount of resources they could appropriate.

The main problem with cattle raids was their transformation over the years from a quasi-cultural practice into one with criminal intent, conducted with highly sophisticated weapons. This included the use of semi-automatic weapons and military style control over vast expanses of territory, which indicates external collaboration and assistance, and access to considerable resources.

It was concluded that the most feasible approach to the cessation of raiding did not lie in seeking the complete disarmament of the people of the district. The presence of guns was only part of the problem. Why, for example, had the national security forces failed to control their soldiers who were forced to sell

off their ammunition in order to obtain food and other necessities? It was agreed that the Karimojong should be responsible for their own disarmament, but this cannot be pursued at the expense of removing the right of self-defence for the people of Karamoja.

Participants argued for a more prominent role for women, who had generally been ignored as agents of social change and transformation. Women have, in many respects, been the most prominent victims of cattle raids, and there was an urgent need to involve them more in the process of generating solutions to the problem by positively discouraging men from engaging in such activities. On this note, participants turned their attention to the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the area:

III. THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) IN KARAMOJA

In his paper on the role of NGOs in Karamoja, Ernest Wabwire argued that since colonialism, there had been an attempt to destroy the pastoral life of the Karimojong, and NGOs shared part of the blame for this. In the process of attempting to transform the area, often without a full appreciation of the situation on the ground, they had failed to directly involve those who would be affected by their policies in the formulation of their programmes. This did not mean that nothing good had emerged from NGO programmes. But he argued that it was time to streamline the activities of NGOs to eliminate duplication, and to ensure that their activities were made more meaningful to the peoples of the area.

In the discussion, there was a clear division between those who felt that Wabwire had over-criticised the work of NGOs and those who felt that his assessment was correct. One participant argued that credit had to be given where it was due, especially to some of the foreign NGOs, which had achieved some useful things in the area, despite their obvious ideological leanings.

The discussion then turned to a consideration of the role and function of local, as opposed to foreign NGOs, and the question: are local NGOs merely intermediaries for foreign NGOs, or can they develop a radically different conceptualisation of the issues, giving indigenous priorities pride of place? One participant pointed out that local "NGO-type" activities are widespread throughout Uganda and reflect the strength of the independent organisation and initiative of ordinary people.

Other participants urged extreme caution in dealing with NGOs. It was necessary to establish their actual motives since it was claimed NGOs are financed by international capital, and share similar motives. Their activities are essentially motivated by self-interest and ideas of paternalism and domination. As such, it was argued that ideally any schemes for the transformation of Karamoja must come from within Karamoja itself and not from outside.

A number of local NGOs described their activities in a bid to demonstrate that their work was both developmental and liberating. One of the most prominent, MAPEDI (Matheniko Peoples Development Initiative), has emerged to mobilise the people of the county and turn them away from destructive activities towards more constructive developmental activities. Participants also spoke of WAFKAD (Women Action for Development of Karamoja), which is designed to address the problems of women in the area. Finally, there was the Karamoja

Adult Education Association, which began as an initiative to promote adult literacy and was seeking to utilise resources from within the community itself.

All these initiatives emerged as the result of an effort to seek alternative solutions, using a strategy that directly involves the local people. Such a strategy would not only incorporate local leadership and women, but would also locate development projects where the people actually live.

There was also discussion about the main government agency KDA (Karamoja Development Agency), which had been criticised by Wabwire. It was argued that people expected more from KDA than it was actually able to deliver. Very few of its initial objectives have actually been met, either by the government or by prospective donors. In addition, counter-productive competition has arisen among the NGO community, which has resulted in the running down of KDA. This has led to unnecessary duplication of projects as well as a struggle for limited resources, all of which could be eliminated by better coordination.

This argument was hotly debated by participants; many of whom felt that competition was in fact very healthy, and would likely make it clear who was actually in the area to help the Karimojong, and those who had other priorities. In conclusion, participants reiterated the need for foreign NGOs to directly involve the peoples of Karamoja in the formulation and execution of their programmes. They also called for greater support to local NGOs in which the Karimojong were the both initiators and implementers of programmes.

IV. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The workshop participants concluded as follows:

1. There has been a tendency to treat Karamoja as a perpetual war zone. Policy is seldom made through sustained democratic inquiry, deliberation and popular consultation, but rather is the product of ad hoc decisions taken in response to immediate problems.
2. The majority of people in Karamoja can only be sustained through a pastoral way of life.
3. The mobility of herds and herders is vital to the reproduction of pastoralism as an environmentally and socially viable way of life.
4. The role of local communities in the regulation of access to resources has ensured their sustained reproduction prior to this century. The trend in this century, however, has been to alienate communities from surrounding resources by demarcating them as game, or forest reserves. The result has been a change in the relationship between communities and their resources from an historically productive, to an increasingly predatory one, thereby setting in motion a cycle of ecological destruction.
5. The history of state-people relations in Karamoja has created a crisis of popular confidence in official proclamations. To restore confidence will require immediate practical reforms.

6. These reforms need to precede disarmament, which should be carried out while recognising the right of Karamoja people to self-defence.
7. The communities in Karamoja have a history of being armed. Armed groups defend the community from both neighbours and the state, and at the same time threaten other members of the community during times of scarcity. Over the past two decades, control over local armed groups has shifted from clan elders to warlords.
8. Most foreign NGOs have become increasingly relief-oriented in their work, instead of servicing the normal functions of a healthy community.

Recommendations

The workshop participants made the following recommendations:

1. Reconstituted RCs (Resistance Councils) should be elected from the whole population, not just permanent residents of "manyattas" and urban centres; for this to be possible, RC elections should be held at the time of concentration of cattle in "manyattas", not at the time of their dispersal to grazing grounds.
2. Posts on RCs should be designated to ensure the representation of every age-set, and of women.

3. Grazing Committees ("mobile RCs") should be elected on a territorial basis, and should be composed of members from individual households, whether they own cattle or not.
4. Liaison Committees should be established with neighbours, so as to bring about long term peace.
5. The focus of development policy should be to ensure the sustainability of a non-destructive form of pastoralism in Karamoja. A comprehensive economic programme should thus be formulated to strengthen the pastoral economy through measures designed to address the problem of pastoral destitution, e.g., through restocking, animal health improvement and environmental protection.
6. Land use in grazing areas should be regulated, and land conflicts adjudicated, by Grazing Committees.
7. Local communities should be allowed a say in the administration and use of all "reserves" through their respective Grazing Committees.
8. A livestock insurance scheme should be instituted to ensure a buffer stock at times of crisis, and to guarantee an alternative to raids as a way of restocking cattle.
9. The armed groups should be placed under the control of elected leaders. To do this, local defence forces should be created under the control of Grazing Committees.

10. Reconstituted RCs should have the right to censure deployment of military force by the government. Similarly, popular representation should be allowed on relevant state organs charged with deploying these forces.
11. A systematic development programme should be formulated through consultation among all levels of reconstituted RCs. This programme should also define the priority areas in which foreign NGOs should be invited to focus their efforts. These areas should include both normal productive activities and emergency measures, such as restocking of cattle, establishing a cattle insurance scheme, and setting up famine food stocks.
12. Research should be carried out by locally-based research institutions on an ongoing basis so as to ensure relevant and effective policy formulation.
13. Further recommendations should be developed on the participation of women, the generation of further employment opportunities, formal and non-formal education, and the coordination of foreign NGOs under the Karamoja Development Administration (KDA).

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