



Mitigating conflict in Karamoja through community structures



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Karamoja is a semi-arid region in north-eastern Uganda. It is roughly the size of Belgium and has a population of about 1.2 million people. The region has nine districts and almost as many ethnic groups and clans. Other ethnic groups in neighbouring countries share the same culture and languages, such as the Turkana in Kenya.

Most people in Karamoja combine semi-nomadic livestock keeping with small-scale agriculture. Their way of life (pastoralism) is characterised by seasonal migratory patterns and driven by the search for prime pasture and water for their animals.

Compared to the rest of the country, Karamoja has higher illiteracy and poverty rates and poorer health services. Multidimensional poverty affects 96% of the population, while the national average in Uganda is 55% (OPHI, 2019). This is mainly explained by a lack of investment in infrastructure and basic services in the region.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Security in Karamoja has considerably improved since 2010 thanks to internal and external peace-building efforts as well as an extensive government disarmament effort. But peace is fragile and very much a relative concept; age-old rivalries between ethnic groups often flare up because of the limited availability of pastures and water points, especially during the dry season. As traditional institutions in charge of resource management and conflict resolution are weakening, ethnic groups are less and less inclined to share their already insufficient resources. Violent inter-ethnic cattle raids and thefts are on the rise again, claiming more and more victims because of the proliferation of small weapons from South Sudan, which has been at war for more than two decades.

The social, political, and cultural isolation of pastoral communities has resulted in land management policies and a system of land tenure that are unsuited to pastoralist lifestyles. Now that the security situation has improved and accessibility and economic opportunities in the region have increased as a result, the door is open to 'modern' processes that further jeopardise traditional pastoralist lifestyles and systems. Local communities are unable to secure evidence of ownership rights over the communal land they have used for generations. Key resources like pasture and rangelands are at risk of privatisation, seclusion or destruction. Almost 62% of Karamoja's surface area has been earmarked for mining concessions.

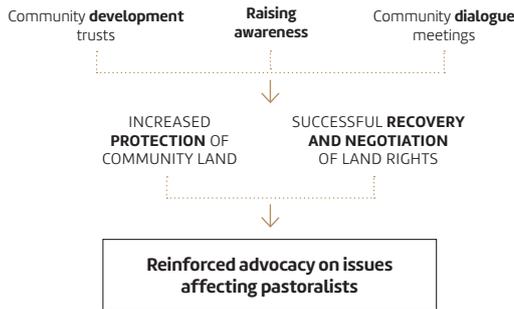
The sustainability of the pastoralist system is based on mobility and flexible land use, to balance complex environmental and socio-economic interests. Insecurity and competing uses of land therefore have a serious impact on pastoralist livelihoods, and result in the loss of livestock and land degradation.

What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

In cooperation with local organisations MADEFO, DADO and KDF, we have developed a holistic approach which ultimately aims to improve food and economic security for agro-pastoralist communities in the region. On the one hand, we address the underlying causes of pastoral vulnerability through **policy and advocacy on land rights**. On the other hand, we support community institutions at the local level to facilitate dialogue between ethnic groups in order to reach **agreements on resource sharing**.

Policy and advocacy

To enable communities to stand up for their rights on issues affecting their lifestyle and livelihoods, we form and strengthen **local institutions**, such as the Rupa Community Development Trust (RUCODET). We train these organisations in topics such as land use planning, mining laws,

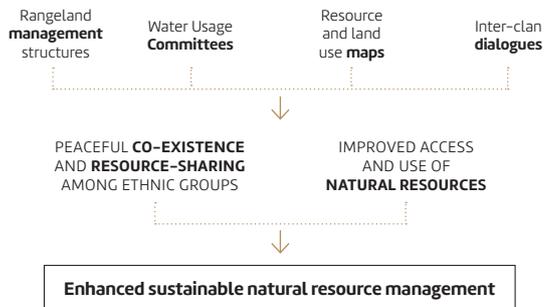


negotiation, compensation and environment so that they can represent community interests at a local level during negotiations with international mining companies.

We also strengthen the advocacy capacities of pastoralist communities so that national policy makers take their interests into account. We **raise awareness** of community land rights and mineral rights and organise **community dialogue meetings** to ensure transparent communication between communities and the bodies that represent them.

Resource sharing agreements

We support and strengthen **rangeland management structures**. Their mission is to organise controlled grazing, mitigate conflicts and help in the recovery of stolen livestock. We train them in conflict mitigation, negotiation skills and group dynamics and help them design **resource and land use maps**. These structures remain vigilant to prevent the infiltration of small arms and support government-led disarmament processes in their respective communities.



To further mitigate conflict over limited natural resources, we restore strategic water points for both humans and livestock. We form and train local **Water Usage Committees** in water point management, hygiene and maintenance. We also support **inter-clan community dialogue** and cross-border meetings in order to build trust and increase confidence between warring parties.



Key figures

- 180** hectares of land recovered since 2018
- 9** conflicts resolved or deterred between 2017 and 2019
- 20** cattle recoveries
- more than **140,000** animals now have better access to water and pasture
- more than **23,000** livestock keepers have sustainable access to drinking water for their herds



Lessons learnt

The results obtained show that setting up and supporting community-driven bodies such as **RUCODET** can make a significant contribution to the defence of livestock keepers' rights in the area and to a more peaceful management of natural resources. **Since 2018, 442 acres of land have been recovered by this trust.** It has also successfully negotiated land rights and won settlements from mining companies. Legal payouts have been used to improve infrastructure and to help pay for the education of the community's youth (including university). The successes of this trust serve as a model for other community institutions in Karamoja.

Rangeland management structures have negotiated **several agreements on resource sharing and various resolutions to deter cattle theft.** As a result, communities now live together more peacefully. **New cross-border markets have emerged,** and other markets have relocated to increase inclusion of the different ethnic groups. Thanks to the production of maps displaying natural resources and migratory routes, they can **manage pastures better and optimise their use.**

Community institutions are best placed to promote negotiation, collaboration and cooperation between communities. However, their patriarchal way of working can marginalize women, who are often excluded from decision-making processes. We therefore actively involve women in peace committees and dialogues, recognizing their crucial role both in the peace process and in resolving livestock raids. As a result, **women are gaining popularity and recognition at the local and national level and are better integrated.**

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