



The HDP Nexus in Pastoral Zones

An integrated approach to face interconnected crises in Karamoja



Extremely vulnerable households receiving monthly unconditional cash grants in times of critical food insecurity.
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Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium (VSF-B), initially established as a development-focused organisation, shifted its approach after a severe food crisis in the Sahel revealed the fragility of purely developmental approaches: years of progress could be quickly undone by environmental or security shocks. In response, the organisation began integrating the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus, first in Niger and across the Sahel, and later across its programmes, particularly in fragile pastoralist regions such as that of Karamoja.

A Complex Context

Karamoja is a semi-arid region in north-eastern Uganda, receiving erratic and unreliable rainfall. It is roughly the size of Belgium and home to about 1.5 million people (2024 census). Due to these climatic conditions, most people rely on agro-pastoralism, an adaptive livelihood system combining semi-nomadic livestock keeping with small-scale farming. As custodians of their landscape, pastoralist communities are experts at navigating the highly variable natural resource availability and have demonstrated remarkable resilience.

Yet despite this adaptive capacity and rich cultural heritage, Karamoja remains one of Uganda's most vulnerable and marginalised regions. Frequent climate shocks, persistent insecurity, and limited access to basic services continue to undermine local livelihoods. Resource-related tensions between various ethnic groups frequently flare up, while cattle raiding has become increasingly commercialised and organised, fuelled by poverty, poor local governance and climate change.

This volatile context deepens food insecurity and erodes trust between communities. When important livelihood assets such as livestock are lost, many households turn to charcoal burning and logging as a last resort, further degrading the already fragile environment. The persisting conflicts in Karamoja are leaving visible marks on the population and their increasingly barren environment. The disastrous numbers speak volumes: in 2022 alone, over 2,000 people died of hunger according to the Daily Monitor, and 41% of the population (more than 518,000 people) faced critical food insecurity as reported by FEWS NET. The conflict led to the loss of large numbers of livestock, with some communities losing up to 80% of their herd.

Karamoja's pastoralist communities are caught in a complex web of humanitarian need, development barriers and peacebuilding challenges. Addressing these interlinked risks requires more than isolated responses. A coherent, integrated approach is essential.

What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

Since 2021, an integrated **Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus** approach has been applied in Karamoja, where overlapping climate, security, and livelihood shocks demand more than siloed responses. The HDP Nexus enables coordinated, flexible action, ensuring that emergency interventions reinforce long-term recovery and peacebuilding. Anchored in strong local partnerships with MADEFO, KHH and DADO and building on established local networks, this approach helped us to respond to crisis while continuing to strengthen resilience and social cohesion.

Building Resilience Before, During, and After Crisis

During periods of stability, efforts focus on strengthening essential systems and structures. Our network of 202 Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) and six private (para-)veterinarians is strengthened to deliver affordable

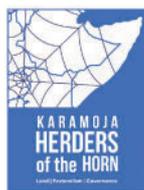
animal health services. Livestock keepers are organised into 27 associations and 3 cooperatives that promote improved breeding, higher productivity, and better market access. Traditional leaders, grassroots institutions and local authorities receive guidance on sustainable resource management, including the stewardship of rangelands and water catchment areas. 83 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are reinforced through financial training, digital tools, and entrepreneurship coaching, expanding access to microcredit and enhancing financial inclusion.

When shocks occur – whether climate-related, economic, or security-driven – these systems shift into emergency mode. Veterinary surveillance is intensified and animal health services are expanded to protect livestock, while access to water for both humans and animals is prioritised. Cash transfers are delivered to the most vulnerable households, helping them meet urgent needs such as food, shelter, and health needs, preserving their dignity and supporting their protection in times of crisis. VSLA members, on the other hand, can often draw on their savings or continue to access small loans. In times of heightened insecurity, these groups are further strengthened through digitalisation, safeguarding assets from looting, theft, and violence. Having built their capacities over 15 years, they now provide in a financial buffer that enables them to absorb shocks and recover without resorting to negative coping strategies.

In response to crisis, stabilisation efforts are also promoted by strengthening community institutions such as Women Peace Forums, Reformed Youth Groups, Peace Committees, Rangeland Management Association, Kraal Leaders and Community Land Associations. These groups are trained and supported to mediate disputes, sensitise communities on peacebuilding, engage in advocacy, and provide trauma healing. During the crises of 2022-2023, we trained and supported 49 community institutions. Together, they engaged in community-level peacebuilding, managed conflicts over grazing land and water points and organised joint livelihood activities across clans. Such initiatives foster trust, reduce tensions, and create shared incentives for peace. This approach helped reduce the frequency of serious security incidents from 34 to 2 per month.

In the recovery phase, attention shifts to rebuilding livelihoods and restoring cohesion. Inter-clan dialogues are facilitated, livestock distributions are organised for restocking purpose and income-generating activities are promoted, to support reintegration for victims of violence and help them regain economic footing. Also, continued conflict management trainings and trauma healing sessions further consolidate peace gains. By embedding peacebuilding across humanitarian and development efforts, VSF-B ensures that recovery reinforces resilience. Innovations like digital livestock branding – introduced to both reduce theft and improve herd management – add another layer of long-term conflict prevention and development.

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Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus approach ↓



Results in 2022-2024

HUMANITARIAN

1,965

vulnerable households received monthly cash transfers of €20–25 for five consecutive months

350

reformed youth households received 2 drought-resistant goats each

DEVELOPMENT

363,478

vaccination doses administered, benefiting 49,846 livestock keepers

102

water points repaired, serving 37,500 cattle breeders

PEACE

49

community institutions trained in peace building

30,000

livestock keepers regained access to secure communal grazing areas and water points

frequency of serious security incidents decreased from

34 to 2

per month

↓
Conclusion

In Karamoja, where pastoralist communities face recurring climate shocks, insecurity, and limited institutional recognition, the HDP Nexus has proven essential. It allows VSF-Belgium to respond flexibly to emergencies while strengthening long-term resilience, working through local community institutions such as community animal health workers associations, women peace forums, and Village Savings and Loan Associations. These structures are deeply embedded in the social fabric and well positioned to manage natural resources, reduce tensions, and support recovery. By embedding local ownership, adaptability, and inclusive participation throughout, the HDP Nexus transforms isolated responses into a coherent strategy for resilience and stability in one of Uganda’s most complex regions.