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The Scramble for Cattle, Power and Guns in Karamoja

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Cover image credits, left-to-right

A rare Karamojong female shepherd (Dyan Mazurana photo credit); in a lawless region, a young man protects his cattle as he takes them to graze (Pastoral Visions photo credit); prized cattle among the Karamojong (Rebecca Smith photo credit); a young warrior dons the skin of a ram to ward off evil spirits of an enemy he has recently killed (Pastoral Visions photo credit).

This report is part of the larger “Livelihoods and Human Security in Karamoja” project that documents and analyzes the current links among human security, insecurity, weapons trafficking, disarmament, and livelihoods in Karamoja, northeastern Uganda. The project uses gender and generational perspectives to produce a more accurate and nuanced analysis. This project is generously supported by the International Development Research Centre, Canadian International Development Agency, Unicef, Uganda, AVSI, Uganda, and the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

About the Feinstein International Center

The Feinstein International Center strives to improve the lives and livelihoods of communities caught up in complex emergencies, war, and other crises. Established in 1996 as part of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, the Center carries out field-based research in complex emergency environments. These include Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Sri-Lanka, Sudan, Uganda and many other areas affected by humanitarian crises.

The Center's research—on the politics and policy of aiding the vulnerable, on protection and rights in crisis situations, and on the restoration of lives and livelihoods—feeds into both its teaching and its long-term partnerships with humanitarian and human rights agencies.

Through publications, seminars, and confidential evidence-based briefings, the Feinstein International Center seeks to influence the making and application of policy in the countries affected by crises and in those states in a position to influence such crises.

Executive Summary

The Karamojong live astride the borders of Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The estimated 1.4 million members of the pastoral and agro-pastoral ethnic groups who constitute what is known as the Karamoja Cluster mostly share a common language and culture. They have long been politically and economically marginalized and exploited. Successive colonial and post-independence regimes have failed to understand the root causes of cattle raiding and arms trafficking in the region or to seek any non-violent responses to endemic violence and anarchy. Sporadic attempts at forcible disarmament have failed abysmally and only served to fuel local antagonisms. Failure to address the ways in which modern weaponry enters the region has meant that as soon as conflict and armed violence subsides in one area it has flared up in others. Serious insecurity including cattle raiding, banditry, and road ambushes, exacerbated by pervasive use of illegal weapons and collapse of elaborate social constraints which used to limit bloodshed, present a significant law and order problem in Karamoja.

This study is the fruit of extensive research by authors who themselves belong to the ethnic groups they study. Primarily focusing on the sub-groups of the Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda, they also interviewed local people and state and civil society actors in neighboring Kenya and Southern Sudan. Their study is part of the Feinstein International Center's work to address the wider regional perspective and ensure a holistic and cross-border approach to conflict prevention, disarmament, demobilization of armed combatants, justice, law and order, and promotion of sustainable livelihoods. The current policy of key international donor governments, the World Bank, the United Nations, and the African Union of addressing the conflicts in Northern Uganda, Eastern Uganda, and Southern Sudan in relative isolation may ultimately guarantee that armed conflict continues in the region. The Ugandan government's search for a military solution to lawlessness in Karamoja is only contributing to greater insecurity and further human rights violations. The problem, argues the authors, is not so much the gun as the lack of governance. This paper offers important insights into how the people of the region assess the reasons for the violence. The authors conclude that policymakers must stop proposing solutions based on ignorance of the ecology, production systems, culture, and livelihoods of the Karamojong.

This study was funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Unicef-Uganda, AVSI-Uganda, and the Feinstein International Center-Tufts University. A number of people provided feedback at briefings conducted in Kampala, Moroto, Washington, and New York and these insights and additions were helpful in finalizing the report. We thank Tim Morris for editorial assistance.

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Editorial Note

The authors are both members of the ethnic groups and communities studied. (See information at the end of this paper). To carry out this research, both sought and received training on study design, ethical considerations, research and interview techniques, and a variety of methods of data management and analysis. Their narrative style and non-linear approach to thinking about the links among the issues presented in their study are reflected in their writing style, which is a (perhaps welcome) departure from the normal report-style writing many academics, policy-makers and programmers may be most familiar with. The rigor of the work, the attention to detail, and the in-depth nature of the information they present, however, sits on par with that of information presented by academic scholars. The editors of this report have maintained much of the character of the authors' language, narrative and writing style, since it is that of the pastoral communities of which they are members and about which they speak.

Study Methods and Sites

This study began in January 2005 and was conducted through March 2007. In carrying out this study, we were trying to better understand the regional weapons trade and within it the role of power, violence, and cattle raiding. During this time period, the authors traveled throughout northeastern, northern and southern Uganda, northwestern Kenya, and Southern Sudan, meeting and talking with a variety of informants.

The communities we interviewed for this study were mainly the Karamojong in northeastern Uganda, in particular the Bokora, Dodoth, Jie, Matheniko, and Pian. In addition, we interviewed the Tepeth and Pokot (ethnic groups that are not Karamojong) in northeastern Uganda. We selected these groups because they are either a) border communities that have been negatively affected by the armed raiding culture of the gun or b) are themselves heavily affected by current military efforts of the Government of Uganda (GoU) to forcibly disarm communities. We also made a concerted effort to talk with and interview the neighbors of the Karamojong so that they could give their side of the story. These neighbors included the Bagisu from Sironko district, the Iteso from Kumi, Bukedea, and Katakwi districts, Langi from Lira district, and the Acholi from Pader and Kitgum districts. In interviewing these neighbors, we also talked with people who had become internally displaced due to Karamojong raids, particularly in Katakwi and Lira districts.

The other equally important neighbors we worked with were communities and leaders from Southern Sudan. These included the Toposa, the Didinga, and the Latuho. Our research in Southern Sudan throws more light on the regional dimension of the gun flow across the Sudanese border. In particular, the livestock traders and gun runners in Karamoja and Southern Sudan were critical informants to this study. In addition, the women in Southern Sudan and other women's groups in Karamoja and Teso proved to be unique and insightful informants.

We also interviewed commanders of the Ugandan military, the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF), members of government-sponsored militia groups, and Karamojong warriors. Finally, we interviewed other stakeholders in the Ugandan capital, Kampala. These included members of parliament from the Karamoja region, the Commissioner of Police in charge of disarmament, the Minister of Karamoja Affairs, as well as international NGOs, church organizations, and various United Nations agencies—including WFP, OCHA, UNICEF, and UNDP. In all, we spoke with over 400 people in Kampala, Karamoja, and neighboring areas.

We used a variety of open-ended semi-structured interview guides to stimulate discussion among individual key informants and focus groups. Because our study developed as we learned more, various interview guides were retired once we hit saturation, while others were honed or refined or new guides generated. Using triangulation to try to confirm or disprove what we were learning, we crisscrossed Uganda, Kenya and Sudan seeking more information to either corroborate earlier testimonies, challenge what we had heard, or gain further depth and perspective on what we were learning. We also relied heavily on direct and participant observation, which in some cases included living among the people we were

learning from. When we had particular issues we wanted to learn more about, or to test new hypotheses, we used focus groups, often made up of traditional male elders, youth, women or representatives of local grassroots groups or civil society organizations (CSOs).

All our data is qualitative in nature. We kept careful notes during most of our interviews. When note-taking was not possible, we spoke into a digital recorder at the end of each day to discuss what people had said and what we were learning. Because we interviewed different groups of people, we sat together at the end of each day to talk about what we were learning, and we also recorded these discussions. All of our notes and recordings were later transcribed. We established a number of codes that we then used to organize and analyze our data.

The governments of Sudan and Uganda—as well as the government of Southern Sudan established by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005¹—have repressive policies towards the pastoral people living within their borders. The Ugandan government is currently engaged in a violent military confrontation against several pastoral populations. Those who have published reports critical of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and its military responses to armed cattle raiding have been arrested and imprisoned. Due to these reasons, and in order to protect our informants, we have not specifically cited who said what. To keep both our informants and their communities safe, while also maintaining rigor and presenting an accurate picture, we have provided information on only what we have been able to triangulate through a variety of sources. In addition, we shared our transcripts with two outside researchers who are working in Karamoja and asked them to review the information to see if they agreed with the materials and resulting findings. These external researchers agreed maintained strict confidence with the data. These researchers reviewed our transcripts and this report and we have taken their comments into consideration in preparing this paper. We are confident that the information we present is accurate, and we welcome any correspondence, questions or comments on this report. Please email: dakabwai@iconnect.co.ke

¹ Signed in January 2005 between the GoS and the SPLM, the CPA ended five decades of civil war and paved the way for establishment of a Government of National Unity and an autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). Failure to implement the CPA led the SPLM to withdraw from the Government of National Unity in October 2007 and the future of Southern Sudan is again uncertain.

The People of the Karamoja Cluster

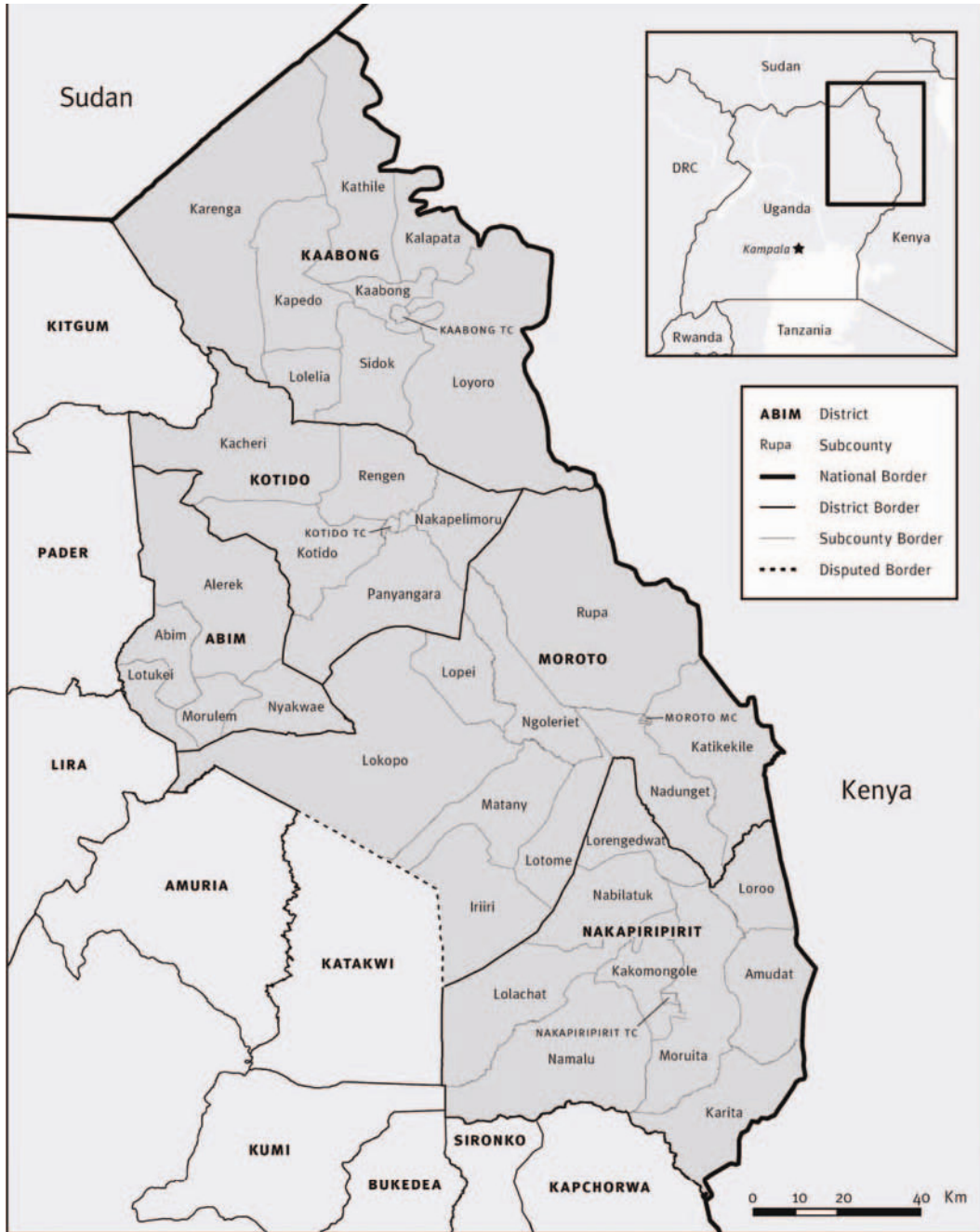
The Karamoja Cluster is a term employed to describe the pastoral and agro-pastoral ethnic groups who mostly share a common language, culture, and land area encompassing northeastern Uganda, northwestern Kenya, southeastern Sudan, and southwestern Ethiopia. The inhabitants of the cluster include nine sub-groups of people who share the same ethnic origin (the Nilo-Hamites or Ateker group), pursue similar livelihood patterns and, to a certain extent, speak languages that are basically similar to Ngakarimojong. The primary focus of this study is northeastern Uganda, although tribes from southeastern Sudan and northwestern Kenya are also discussed. Uganda's Karamoja region covers an area of 27,000 sq. km., 10 percent of the country's land area. According to the Ugandan census in 2002, the population of the region is just under one million.

There are a number of different ethnic groups that live and move within northeastern Uganda, some of which belong to the group collectively called the Karamojong.² These are the Matheniko, the Tepeth and the Bokora of Moroto district—who share the Moroto district with the Tepeth who live on Moroto Mountain and speak their own language—the Pian of Nakapiripirit district (which they share with the Pokot, which are not a Karamojong group), the Jie and Tobur (sometimes called the Acholi Labwor) of Kotido district, and the Dodoth, Nyangia, the Napore, and Iik (sometimes called the Teuso, but not to be confused with the Teso of the Teso region) of Kaabong district. All these groups speak Ngakaramojong at school and in administrative offices. While the Pokot are not a Karamojong tribe, because of their proximity and interaction with Karamojong tribes, they too use Ngakaramojong as a lingua franca. In Kotido district are found the Jie who currently share the district with the Acholi Labwor, who are also known as Tobur. The Acholi Labwor speak their own language but they also use Ngakaramojong in interacting with other groups. Additionally, the Jie split and moved to southeastern Sudan where they now share the county of East Kapoeta with the Toposa. Kaabong district is the home of the Dodoth. The Dodoth share the district with a small ethnic group called the Iik/Teuso, Nyangiya, and Napore, who have nearly become absorbed by the larger Dodoth tribe, and they also speak Ngakaramojong. In the far south and outside the borders of the Karamoja region are the Iteso. The Iteso are regarded as the “sons of the Karamojong” who moved away to more fertile and rainy plains and decided to sedentarize. They speak Ateso which is an Ateker language similar to Ngakaramojong.

In the region of southeastern Sudan we find the Toposa in Kapoeta County. The Toposa have influenced their neighbors the Didinga who are in turn friendly with the Dodoth of Uganda. The Didinga however are a different tribe and are not Karamojong. Then you find the Nyangatom who occupy both southeastern Sudan and southwestern Ethiopia who speak Nyangtom which is an Ateker language. The Nyangtom graze their livestock together with the Dassanetch. The Dassanetch speak their own language but have been influenced by Turkana neighbors. The Turkana broke away from Jie and now live in northwestern Kenya. The Turkana have cultural influence over their neighbors, the Pokot of Kenya.

² For more information on the different groups in the region, see Ben Knighton (2005) and Sandra Gray et al.(2003)

Administrative and Ethnic Maps of Karamoja



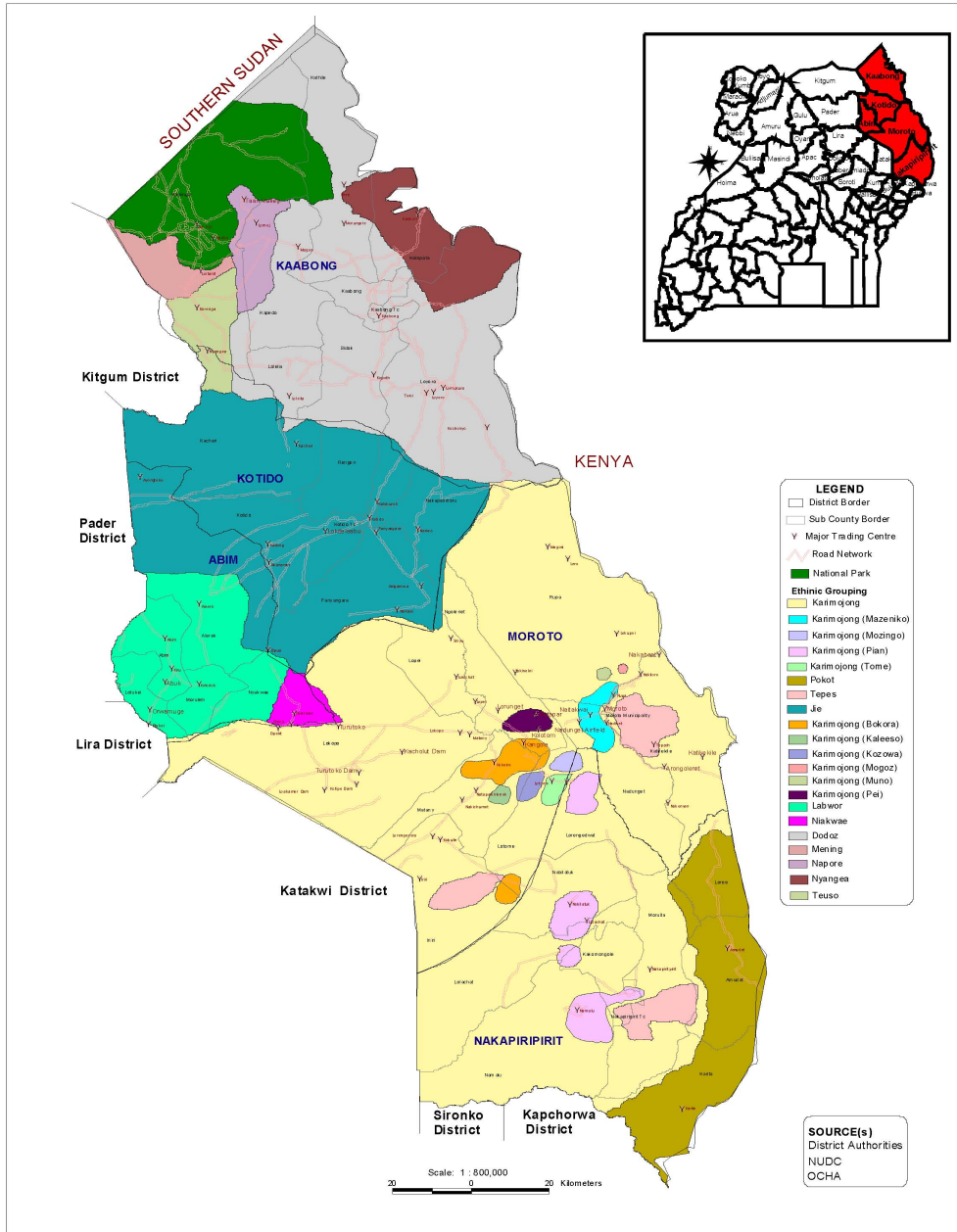
Karamoja Region

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Original map c/o Human Rights Watch <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/uganda0907/index.htm>

KARAMOJA ETHNIC GROUPINGS

November 2006



MAPKARAMOJA_ETHNICITY_200610
Organizations are most welcome to provide information to
OCHA Lira Sub office or mail comment to ocha-uganda@un.org

The boundaries and names shown on this map are liable for changes.
OCHA disclaims liability for any inaccuracies.

Original map c/o United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/LPAA-76LHVF?OpenDocument>

Most of the groups in the Karamoja Cluster are agro-pastoralists, predominantly reliant on livestock rearing as their main source of subsistence and who also cultivate millet and sorghum and supplement their food supply by gathering wild fruits and greens and through hunting and fishing. Agro-pastoralism is the most appropriate and sustainable livelihood strategy throughout much of the semi-arid savannah and mountains of the Karamoja Cluster.³ The entire region receives only sporadic and limited rainfall. The terrain is filled with deep gullies caused by ground run-off after heavy rainfall. It is in such a harsh ecological setting that the agro-pastoralists of the Karamoja Cluster have to scrape a living. The key to survival for communities and their livestock is mobility. Most of the herds move epicyclically, instead of the traditional transhumance, because of the region's erratic and scarce rainfall. However this mobility is often the source of conflict among neighbors and, at the least, requires continuous negotiations for grazing rights among groups.

In the Karamoja Cluster the imported terms *kraal* and *manyatta* are typically used to describe the characteristic settlement pattern. A *kraal* is a collection of 10 to 20 households, including women and children, herding their cattle, donkeys, camels and flocks of goats and sheep together as one grazing unit in order, primarily, to form a more secure unit to counter enemy attacks. A *manyatta* is a settlement enclosed by a fence of thorn bushes in which women, the elderly and young children live. The *kraal* leader can either be a sharp shooter, a seer, or simply a rich generous person or a popular ex-government official, such as a chief or councillor. He inspires the rest of the herders to come together to follow him because of his special skills, wisdom or simply because he is a brave man. A *kraal* leader leads the livestock owners and owns many herds among those that have gathered around him. He helps the other livestock owners to come to a consensus on issues of livestock, range management and evaluation of security conditions in their grazing areas. During the dry season *kraals* may unite into a larger unit called an *arigan*.

³ See, for instance, James E. Ellis and David M. Swift (1988)

Brief History of Weapons and Politics in the Region

Until the GoU launched a violent and determined campaign to disarm them in May 2006 it was common in every *kraal* to see warriors attired with guns. Weapons had replaced the traditional spear and shield as the hallmark of a warrior. Every warrior you would meet in the grazing grounds of Toposa, the Jie, the Matheniko, and the Tepeth was carrying a gun. The Toposa and the Didinga continue to openly display their weapons to this day.

It should be noted that gun ownership and gun-related violence in the region is nothing new. The communities under discussion were already armed by the time Europeans scrambled to control the wealth of Africa. They had previously bartered ivory and cattle for weapons from gunrunners operating from the sprawling gun market in Maji, southwestern Ethiopia. An even earlier source of guns was the Arab and Swahili slave traders coming from the East African coast. In their partitioning of Africa, the British took the area that is now occupied by the members of the Karamoja Cluster and formed the states of Uganda and Kenya, while the Toposa were incorporated into Southern Sudan, and the Nyangtom into Ethiopia.

Early armed violence was the result of raids between and among the Karamojong and their neighbors and the presence of private armies established by competing traders in ivory. Abyssinian merchants competed with Swahili traders coming from the East African and both trained and armed elements of the Turkana, Dassenetch, and Karamojong to protect ivory caravans moving through the Karamoja Cluster from their commercial rivals and local populations that might attack them. These private armies were quite sizable and, in some cases, were deemed to pose a threat to the British who in 1911 sent military expeditions to defuse the tension caused by their presence on the border of Turkanaland, Sudan and Ethiopia.⁴

The presence of these private armies and the fact that the peoples of Karamoja were now well-armed motivated the colonial administration to attempt to pacify the region. British attempts to disarm the warriors met with stiff resistance, and in some cases the British used systemic scorched earth methods.⁵ Forcible disarmament appears to have reduced the incidence of cattle thefts and raids quite dramatically after 1913 as the Karamojong lost most of the weapons they had acquired. From 1921 up to Ugandan independence in 1962, the British imposed very strict rules that made it difficult for the Karamojong to raid their neighbors. In effect, Karamoja was put under military occupation and the region closed to outsiders. A permit had to be obtained from the District Commissioner in Moroto, the regional headquarters, in order to enter the district. The condescending and racist British attitude towards the 'natives' was exemplified by a sign which they erected on the entrance to Moroto town—only removed in 1972—which told visitors coming to gawp at the naked tribesmen of the pristine 'real Africa': "You have reached the heart of Africa."

⁴ See James Barber (1969)

⁵ Ibid.

The British were in need of the military experience the Karamojong had acquired through familiarity with modern weaponry and recruited them during the Second World War. Nene Mburu describes how:

Britain recruited heavily from the Karamojong and Turkana ethnic communities in recognition of their ethno-military culture. During the war with Italy in Ethiopia, Britain deployed many Turkana in the front line in recognition of the community's existing dexterity with firearms and knowledge of their harsh physical terrain. Actually, the 25 East African Brigade that was deployed to spearhead the invasion of Abyssinia was garrisoned at Lokitaung, in Turkana district. Similarly, the Karamojong had served with distinction as Askari for the Kings African Rifles during military campaigns conducted in Africa and Asia. From the 1940s, the two pastoral communities strengthened their raiders using the weapons and skills gained in the colonial wars to revitalize the tradition of dynastic raids and predatory expansion.⁶

The main impact of the British military occupation on the pastoralists was territorial restriction and economic isolation. Despite the occupation, Karamojong raids into Teso, Sebei, and Suk (Pokot) territory continued. Without guns, the raiders returned to using their spears, a practice they maintained until the early 1950s. Competition for available grazing intensified as the British set aside large areas of prime grazing land for wildlife conservation and water development projects. The competition for pasture was exacerbated by a severe drought in 1943. By the 1960s, the pastoralists had resumed raiding across northern Uganda and Kenya.

In 1962 the first government of newly independent Uganda took power. One of the challenges they faced was the menace of Karamojong warriors raiding their neighbors and, to a lesser extent, raiding other Karamojong and non-Karamojong tribes living in the region. However, it should be noted that the main concern of all post independence governments of Uganda has been to protect their neighbors from Karamojong warriors. Though often quite deadly, intra-tribal Karamojong raids rarely rang any alarm bells in the capital city of Kampala, let alone at any of the army bases sited near where the raids occur.

The post-independent Ugandan authorities had some success in restraining the raids, but used brutal methods to confiscate Karamojong livestock and to force them to disarm while their neighbors, the Turkana and Pokot of Kenya, remained heavily armed. The Karamojong thus felt unprotected and extremely vulnerable. When Idi Amin Dada came to power in 1971 the Karamojong were dealt a further blow by a decree they all should wear Western dress, instead of clothing made from livestock hides. The army embarked on constant harassment of Karamojong women who continued to wear traditional clothing. For the Karamojong this was an outrageous attack on their identity and culture, tantamount, they felt, to being told that livestock should not matter any more in their lives. A group of Karamojong who refused to put on modern clothes was separated from those who were clothed and were massacred by Amin's army at Nawoikorot in 1972 as a lesson

⁶ Mburu (2001) p.6

for others.⁷ Amin also issued orders that no Karamojong should be seen with a gun or a spear and set the army and police to try to disarm them.

Unarmed, the Karamojong could not protect themselves against the Turkana, who punished them into submission by taking most of their animals. This forced the Matheniko to beg for peace with the Turkana at Lokiriama in 1973. A peace agreement was accepted by the Turkana and was finally signed by (literally) burying a hatchet in 1978 at Lokiriama. This peace agreement has endured ever since and, in part, accounts for the strengthening of the Matheniko, who have managed to preserve their pastoral identity ever since the Turkana hostilities stopped.

Whatever gains in security in Karamoja the new Ugandan government had achieved were undermined by the insecurity resulting from a series of coups that nearly destroyed the country. For some Karamojong groups, this instability was to prove a blessing in disguise, as discussed below.

As for the Turkana on the border of Uganda and Kenya, the colonial Kenyan government's attempt to disarm them—code-named 'Operation Tennis'—failed to recover any guns.⁸ Turkanaland too was declared a closed district, just like Karamoja. By the late 1950s Southern Sudan had become embroiled in the first stage of the country's five-decade-long civil war. The Toposa and their neighbors in Southern Sudan were restricted in their movements and Christians and animists discriminated against. The Nyangatom of Ethiopia were too far from Addis Ababa to notice much effect or benefit from the Ethiopian state.

Today, as in the past, outsiders and traders, are fearful of crime. Since independence, many people from other areas of Uganda (as well as Karamojong) have been killed in road ambushes laid by warriors. There are many factors behind and explanations for the number of ambushes. Most are thought to be opportunistically perpetrated by frustrated warriors returning from failed raids. It is also alleged that some Karamojong shopkeepers hire the warriors to ambush unsuspecting travelers and rob them of money and valuables which are then used to restock their shops in Karamoja, Mbale, or elsewhere. Another reason commonly given for road ambushes is to settle personal scores.⁹ Others point to the role of the various unpaid militia groups that waylay vehicles in order to survive. Sometimes drunken warriors are said to simply want to prove their manhood by killing. In one tragic case, warriors reportedly wanted to discover the color of Caucasian blood so shot and killed a Catholic nun to see her bleed. This occurred at a site locals now call "Kamusalaba" (which translates as 'a sister was butchered here') on the notorious Moroto-Amudat road. Others allege that powerful political and economic forces want to keep Karamoja as a closed and unsafe region, enabling them to profit by controlling scarcity and

⁷ Mirzeler and Young (2000).

⁸ Mburu (2001).

⁹ For example, a friend of the author's narrowly escaped being killed when a person who had begun a liaison with his wife hired thugs to shoot at his vehicle along the Amudat-Moroto road. He was only saved by the speeding driver who dodged the bullets!

profiting from artificially high prices—a phenomenon known throughout war and conflict zones.¹⁰

The prevalence of road ambushes has scared many Ugandans from other regions from coming to Karamoja and participating in the search for solutions to end conflict and insecurity. Many of those who do come live in fear and their movements are so restricted that they are unable to engage in any serious development activity. We found as we traveled widely for our research that it was much safer to travel and work in Toposaland (in Southern Sudan) and Acholiland (in northern Uganda)—despite the devastation caused by war—than it was in the Karamoja region.

Many are concerned at the absolute lack of law and order and climate of impunity for criminals in Karamoja. A vicious cycle reinforces the region's chronic marginalization. Because its inhabitants feel there is no law and order they turn ever more to dependence on their weapons for security, livelihoods, and status. To many Karamojong pastoralists, it is the gun which enables them to maintain or regain the pastoralist identity which was threatened by decades of confinement in "closed districts". Post-colonial pressures to settle down, reinforced by frequent state seizure of their livestock, condemned many to a sedentary lifestyle which is both anathema to the inhabitants of the region and incompatible with ecological realities. This combination of factors has made the Karamojong especially vulnerable to future droughts and upheavals and fearful of cultural extinction.

In response to these extreme stresses, many Karamojong stopped listening to the outside world, feeling that all outsiders wanted to eradicate their culture and that all attempts to disarm them—by the colonialists and the Ugandan government—have left them at risk from their non-disarmed neighbors and from ill-disciplined Ugandan soldiers and their proxies. The Karamojong took their destiny into their own hands and searched for any methods to own weapons. In the search for materials with which to make homemade guns (*ngamatidai*) they looted schools. Metal tubes that support desks were stripped to make gun barrels and the corrugated iron sheets converted into pans for frying the crystals used to make a potent local brew which sustains warriors. By the late 1970s most primary schools in the region had been damaged.

The Karamojong did not give up, but dreamed of restocking and again owning the vast herds that had been forcibly taken away from them over many decades. They were not in a hurry as they knew *Akuju* (their God) would bless them one day. Their objective was fortuitously advanced by the collapse of the Amin regime in 1979 when some sub-groups of the Karamojong managed to acquire substantial numbers of guns and ammunition. This was their chance of a lifetime. The Matheniko were able to loot the government armory in Moroto, retaining control of the area for weeks until the new government was able to send military forces. Elders recalled how for days they loaded a steady stream of donkeys with guns and weapons taken from the armory and carried them to safe hiding places. The

¹⁰ See Nordstrom (2004).

Matheniko then used these weapons to attack their enemies, particularly the Bokora, raiding their animals and handing them many sound defeats in battle. The Matheniko fondly remember the fall of Idi Amin as a time of plenty, but for the Bokora this was the beginning of a downward spiral in men, cattle, wealth, and power. With their new weapons the Matheniko repeatedly attacked the Bokora, looting most of their livestock. The Bokora are yet to recover from this dramatic shift in power and these losses help explain why many young children leave the district to try to eke a living on the streets of larger cities.¹¹

As the Moroto weapons spread further, the Karamojong continued to arm themselves with new guns which they used to cause havoc among neighboring communities and themselves. By 2006, it was reported that there were 40,000 to 80,000 weapons in the hands of the Karamojong.¹²

Tragically, the amount of weaponry that went into the hands of the pastoralists in the Karamoja Cluster set the stage for armed fights over cattle that resembled in scale some of the battles fought in the region during World War II. For example, nearly 200 people—mostly women, children and the elderly—were massacred in 1992 during cattle raids launched by the Toposa of Southern Sudan against the Kwatela of Turkana of Kenya in the Songot Mountain ranges. Clashes between the Matheniko and the Bokora at Moru Ariwon in Moroto District in 1999 led to 400 deaths and prompted UPDF intervention to separate the warriors. There have been many other such battles resulting in high levels of fatalities throughout the Karamoja Cluster.

¹¹ Stites, Mazurana, and Akabwai (2007).

¹² Mkutu (2006).

The Regional Gun Flow

It is important to understand the various sources of guns and ammunition, how weapons flow among the various players within the region, the weapons markets and how they function, and how the weapons trade is sustained in the area. Guns and ammunition come from myriad related sources. There are a number of established and flexible sources of guns and ammunition in the Karamoja Cluster catering to demands of pastoralists.

Weapons as a Result of the Sudanese Civil War

The struggle for Sudan's Kapoeta and Chukudum counties in the course of the long civil war between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) had a strong impact across the borders in Kenya and Uganda. Whenever either of the two county headquarters fell into GoS or SPLM hands, there would always be an abandonment of arms and ammunitions as the defeated group retreated in haste. The Didinga agro-pastoralists and the Toposa pastoralists quickly learned that these were opportunities to loot arms and ammunition. As border garrisons changed hands repeatedly many guns thus fell into their hands during the decades of war.

One of the last such battles was when the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), the SPLM's armed wing, trounced the GoS's mechanized garrison in Kapoeta on July 9, 2002. The SPLA then captured many arms and much ammunition which were taken to Ikotos County, as the SPLA commander was from Latuho, a town in the county. Respondents also mentioned that the Toposa helped themselves to the light arms and ammunition left by the fleeing GoS soldiers. This defeat reportedly flooded Kapoeta with arms and ammunition to such an extent that bullets became a medium of exchange at shops and market places across the county. The pastoralists reportedly kept most of the guns they acquired for protecting their own animals but gave some to their neighbors and allies, the Dodoth in Uganda.

Deserters from both the GoS and SPLA forces are said to have frequently deserted with their guns and many were then forced by poverty to sell them. Some of the SPLA deserters we interviewed said they had gone as far afield as Kenya in search of a good price for their weapon. They pointed out many soldiers escaped from the garrisons of Kapoeta and Torit with guns, which they then sold to the Dodoth.

We learned from Didinga leaders that the friendship between the Dodoth and Didinga was marked by frequent barter of guns received from both the GoS and the SPLA. The Didinga weapons traders also gave deserters from the GoS and SPLA bulls and heifers in exchange for their guns.

A high-ranking government official in Kapoeta stated that the GoS had been keen on supplying arms to militia groups in order to destabilize the SPLA. The GoS supplied weapons directly to the Toposa and indirectly to militia groups among the Didinga. In Toposa alone, the GoS is reported to have supplied more than 50,000 guns in the 1990s.¹³

¹³ Africa News (Nov. 2001).

Toposaland remains littered with the landmines that both the SPLA and the GoS laid in grazing areas. They continue to take lives and demining is progressing only slowly.

The author witnessed an interesting confrontation in 1989 between Father Longokwo Kinga Toposa (then the Minister of Labor in the GoS) and some Turkana elders during a peace meeting convened by the African Union's InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR¹⁴) in the Kenyan town of Lokichoggio. Turkana pastoralists complained that Longokwo had armed his Toposa warriors to annihilate the Turkana. But Longokwo defended himself saying that he had defected from the GoS to join the SPLA. He said that he had tricked the GoS into sending him 30,000 guns supposedly to arm his Toposa pastoralists to fight the SPLA in Kapoeta. Instead, when the guns arrived, he distributed them to the Toposa to protect their animals from marauding GoS forces and the many other militias in the region. He therefore asserted that he had not armed the Toposa against their brothers the Turkana, but had acted to offer them protection.

A major source of weapons flowing from the north to the Karamojong has resulted from the current friendship between the Didinga of Southern Sudan and the Dodoth of Uganda. The two neighboring communities had been engaged in a series of cattle rustling wars from 1973 to 1992 but several factors drove the Didinga to conclude that peaceful trade with the Dodoth was preferable to raiding their cattle. They had become fed up with the poverty which had resulted from years of unchecked cattle rustling and insecurity had cut them off from their Dodoth relatives on the other side of the border. With every year that passed the Didinga felt they should stop the war in order to reunite with their loved ones. As the civil war raged in Southern Sudan they felt the urgent need to open corridors to Uganda in order to access desperately needed consumer goods, to enable movement of goods and people, and to allow their children to benefit from superior educational opportunities in Uganda. They had seen how minority tribes like the Didinga had been marginalized by the war and had suffered brutal attacks from the SPLA. The Didinga thus felt they had to create a safe escape route to Uganda through the neighboring Dodoth in readiness for further SPLA attacks.

A peace agreement was initiated by women from Lotukei in Southern Sudan. Women played a central role in the peace talks and in 1992 forced their menfolk to accompany them to visit Kathile subcounty in Dodoth territory (Uganda) and to ask for peace. When the Dodoth learned that there were women in the Didinga entourage they agreed to receive them in peace, their presence convincing them the Didinga men were sincerely seeking peace.

The friendship between the Didinga and the Dodoth has been maintained, in part, by a cross-border system of exchanging Dodoth bulls for Didinga guns. Left with no protection after being forced by the GoU to surrender 2,800 weapons as part of a disarmament exercise in late 2001, the Dodoth were almost immediately attacked by the Jie and lost

¹⁴ www.au-ibar.org

most of their cattle and a number of their warriors. Their new Didinga friends came to their aid, providing them with replacement weapons.

The Didinga have also maintained a similar friendship with the Turkana of Kenya, allowing trade in guns and tobacco are sold in a market at Lopiding, Kenya. This market is now forced to operate clandestinely following a crackdown by the Government of Kenya's (GoK) as part of a security operation in April 2003.

Weapons from the UPDF and Their Proxies

A number of informants, including high level district government officials, alleged that Ugandan military commanders sell arms and ammunition to the Karamojong warriors. One government official told us—on conditions of anonymity:

The soldiers are also known to sell bullets to the warriors. The local councilors have discovered that the warriors acquire the Nakasogola bullets. The source of such bullets can only be the soldiers! The army commanders do not like such revelations and they even victimize those trying to disclose such corruption. The local council leaders have a cold relationship with the army commanders in the district. They accuse the local councilors of interfering with security matters.

Other informants alleged that corrupt army officers of the UPDF are involved in the gun trade. Some army commanders openly admitted during interviews that some UPDF personnel posted to northern Uganda to protect internally displaced persons (IDPs) or provide security along main roads are selling arms and ammunitions to the pastoralists. This was corroborated by interviews with pastoralists. For example, in March 2000, a UPDF officer was reported to have sold 18 new guns and cartons of ammunitions to Karamojong *kraals* grazing in Obalanga sub-county, Amuria District. We also heard about UPDF soldiers who duped a group of pastoralists in Karamojong in February 2006. After allegedly receiving 280,000 Uganda shillings (approximately \$165) in cash the UPDF soldiers refused to turn over the guns they had promised, instead beating the pastoralists, stealing their guns and escaping with the money. Other informants talked about army men selling ammunition in the Kotido market, and others reported that UPDF men send their wives (who live with them at their barracks in northern Uganda) into Karamoja to sell ammunition.

The UPDF has trained and armed militias known as local defense units (LDUs) to provide auxiliary support in the war against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). LDUs are poorly equipped, often short of rations and sporadically paid. We interviewed some LDU militiamen who for up to six months had not been paid their promised monthly wage of 60,000 shillings (\$35). As one of our informants reported: "A hungry person is an angry person. It makes it worse when such person is armed with a gun". Another informant who also insisted on anonymity noted that "the irregular pay of the LDUs has forced them to use their guns for raids, road thuggeries, and they even sell the bullets—all these for survival." In some cases members of the LDUs seek to generate income by being employed as military escorts by humanitarian organizations working in the region. Local people and

senior government officials within Karamoja continue to accuse some of the LDUs of selling guns and ammunition and engaging in road banditry.

Weapons from the Democratic Republic of Congo

As events in 2007 indicated, the shaky DRC government is not yet in a position to control all the armed groups jostling for power and wealth. We documented cases of people using public and private transport to cross from the DRC to bring weapons to sell in Karamoja. The porous border of the DRC is likely to remain an uncontrolled entry route for the illegal movement of weapons and ammunition.

Weapons Peddlers

The most straightforward vendors of weaponry are ordinary pastoralists. When he gets access to a new source of guns—through purchase, defeat of an enemy, or unexpected good fortune as military forces abandon their weaponry—a pastoralist first puts aside enough arms and ammunition to protect his livestock against raiders. He then meets the needs of his relatives before selling or bartering the surplus to other livestock owners. Since nearly all the pastoral communities need cattle for marital brideprice, they will often obtain them by crossing borders to exchange looted weapons for cattle. Pastoralists will also engage in banditry—referred to as going ‘gun-hunting’--setting ambushes to kill people on the roads in hopes of acquiring their guns.¹⁵

Shopkeepers and gun peddlers operate more covertly. We found several examples of how they engage in the arms trade. A shopkeeper in Lotukei, Chukudum in Sudan told us of how shopkeepers buy guns from deserters or army commanders. The shopkeeper then exchanges the gun for a bull which he sells for cash which he uses to restock his shop. In the Kapoeta trading center we were told that shopkeepers sell commodities in their shops, while simultaneously operating side businesses through which they barter arms and ammunition for bulls. One particular group of shopkeepers has reportedly created a near monopoly on the trade in bulls. These traders are primarily Dinka and reportedly only Dinka are allowed to reach the main market at Agoro (in Kitgum district in northern Uganda) with the cattle they acquire through bartering arms and ammunition in the grazing areas of the Toposa and Didinga. These traders pass through Ikotos County in Southern Sudan with their bulls as they head towards Agoro market.

After selling their bulls at Agoro, many things happen. Toposa informants reported that these Dinka traders buy consumer goods like beer, *waragi* (a generic term in Uganda for home distilled beverages), and more arms and ammunition. The weapons used to be bought in an open market outside of Agoro market on the other side of the Sudanese border, but informants say that this market has now gone underground.¹⁶ After purchasing consumer goods, excess cash (usually in Ugandan currency) is used to buy heifers from the Latuho, a group in Southern Sudan. These heifers plus the guns are taken

¹⁵ The central importance of ‘gun-hunting’ is described in Ochan (2007).

¹⁶ This information was verified by another Tufts research team working in the Agoro area in March and April 2006, see Stites, Mazurana and Carlson (2006).

to Toposa and Didinga grazing areas and bartered for bulls. The bulls are then driven to Agoro market and the cycle continues.

Our informants further disclosed that the Dinka traders and shopkeepers have in their shops an assortment of guns and ammunition used in the barter trade. Some Dinka soldiers purportedly present themselves as livestock traders but their main enterprise is actually selling SPLM and GoS weapons. Our informants said that when people bargain hard with these army men disguised as traders the soldiers revert to their true identity and respond with force. Other researchers have reported similar findings (Ochan, 2007a). A trader told us that “most of the guns around Toposaland are the SPLM and GoS guns, which are still available in markets and no particular one coming from outside. This is easily identified by the traders and by the Toposa themselves.”

Many informants in Southern Sudan alleged that the gun runners and weapons traders enjoyed tacit or overt support from politicians and officials. The local administration officials we interviewed in Kapoeta and Budi counties were aware of the weapons trade, but claimed to be opposed to the armaments/gun-trafficking business. It is widely reported, however, that some Dinka soldiers and businessmen are able to get away with dealing in weapons under the guise of being livestock traders as they enjoy protection from SPLM leaders, a disproportionate number of whom are Dinka.

Finally, some weapons dealers follow the Karamojong to their dry season grazing areas in Acholi, Lango and Nyangia at the Sudan border and exchange guns for bulls. A well-known and respected *kraal* leader of the Jie spoke to us about how these traders come in to their grazing areas and offer weapons and ammunition to members of his *kraal* in exchange for bulls.

The Weapons Markets

All those of us who have lived and worked in the Karamoja Cluster in recent decades have observed the degree of openness with which gun markets have been able to operate. In northern and northeastern Uganda, weapons markets were held for many years in Lobalangit, Karenga, and Kathile in what is now Kaabong district, as well as in Orom county of Kitgum that borders Pader and Kotido districts. These markets (or markets set up just outside these larger markets) used to sell guns and ammunition. Gun traders brought arms and ammunitions mainly from Sudan to sell to the Karamojong traders or directly to the pastoralists who traveled from as far as Namalu in Nakapiripirit district to these centers.

In addition to these open gun selling centers, there was, as noted above, a periodic gun and ammunition market operating outside the Agoro market. Many informants mentioned Agoro as a key market for gun and ammunition peddlers. Guns sold there were supplied mainly from Sudan, but also included weapons and ammunition from the UPDF which gun traders would purchase for resale in the gun centers of Lobalangit, Karenga, Kathile and Orom. Other researchers with Tufts University working in Orom were told by villagers that in years past arms sellers would come weekly, and sometimes daily, through the area

peddling their wares. The villagers said that sometimes they purchased weapons and ammunition from these sellers. Some villagers reported that in some cases they killed the weapons traders when they realized the traders were selling weapons to the Karamojong tribes who would later attack Orom. Upon killing the weapons traders, they took the weapons and ammunition and used it to arm themselves against both the rebel LRA operating in northern Uganda and Karamojong raiders.¹⁷

With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Sudan and increased efforts by the GoU to stem the weapons flow, much of the weapons peddling moved out of open markets. For example, in Kotido, a member of a grassroots organization working to stop gun violence told us that “since the gun markets have gone underground the only source of getting guns is by gun traders bringing them down to the grazing grounds, like the Acholi gun traders from Agoro market brought their hardware to try and sell to Jie *kraal* leaders who were grazing animals at the border between Kotido and Pader district.” A Tufts university research team working in Agoro in northern Uganda in 2006 was told that the gun market had gone underground after the CPA was signed and the border posts had been manned more carefully. Weapons had become more difficult to purchase.

It is important to point out here that it is not the Ugandan Karamojong alone who benefited from the Sudan guns of war for there was a parallel gun trade between the Didinga of Southern Sudan and the Turkana of Kenya, centered on Lopiding in Lokichoggio, Kenya. This market was dismantled by the Kenya General Service Unit—a unit of Kenya’s police force—in April 2003, but according to informants continues to thrive underground. Reportedly, the gun traders now bypass the roadblock at the point of entry to Lokichoggio by going through the Mogila Range. They then enter Lokichoggio during cover of darkness to conduct business. Guns are usually sold for cash, between 15-20,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately \$235-\$310). Pastoralists looking to buy weapons reportedly get the needed cash by selling off their bulls to livestock traders who are mainly Somalis, but who include some Kikuyu.

¹⁷ Stites, Mazurana and Carlson (2006); Dyan Mazurana, personal correspondence with authors, June 2007.

State Complicity in Weapon Proliferation

The governments of the region have helped facilitate the arming of populations in the Karamoja Cluster. As noted, the GoS armed proxy militias and supplied Toposa and Buya pastoralists in order to destabilize the SPLA. Today the SPLM would like to promote disarmament but have not done so lest the GoS forces return, molest pastoralists, and force them to offer food and livestock to Khartoum's troops. A high-ranking SPLA officer told us the GoS remains annoyed at being tricked by pastoralists and would rapidly launch attacks against them if the GoSS sought to disarm them. Many report that the SPLM is not prioritizing disarmament of pastoralists in case they need them in the event of the collapse of the CPA and resumption of hostilities with the GoS.

For their part, since it came to power in Uganda in 1986 the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) government has deliberately let some of the pastoral groups in Karamoja keep their weapons. NRM officials discovered early in their rule that some Karamojong warriors could be induced to assist in the fight against the numerous insurgencies that erupted against the government of Yoweri Museveni. In 1991 the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) rebel group in Soroti (in the Teso region), under the command of Hitler Eregu, defeated the NRA. But while the rebels were on their way to Kenya to re-supply their forces with weapons, Pian warriors launched a surprise attack at Amaler, intercepting the UPC rebels, killing most of them and taking their weapons. The NRA/M rewarded the Pian for their crucial role in crushing the insurgency by supplying them with more guns.

The Karamojong have always supported the political status quo, at each election voting for the ruling party. Indeed, they voted to remain a colonial state of the British Administration when the country was moving towards independence. The Karamojong prefer the authority they know. They have no enthusiasm for the NRM, but prefer to work with them so long as they derive benefits from the relationship. They have no political ambitions, desiring above all else to protect their cattle and ever ready to exploit any government weakness which may provide an opportunity to gain more livestock.

Prior to attempted forced disarmament, the officially voiced reason that the GoU allowed the Karamojong to keep their guns was that they needed them for self protection against Turkana and Pokot from Kenya, Toposa from Southern Sudan, and against the LRA which in late 1993 was openly armed by the GoS. The GoU strategy proved highly effective and the few LRA incursions into Karamoja were usually quickly repelled by the Karamojong. However the GoU underestimated the perception of the Karamojong on their security needs and the centrality of the weapons markets in the region. Consequently, by 2000 the Karamojong had, through buying, dealing, bartering and raiding increased their arsenal to what was believed to be more than 100,000 illegal firearms.

We are amazed to learn from informants in Lokichoggio and Dididnga that the pastoralists were allowed to market their guns and ammunition in an open market in Lopiding, Lokichoggio. At this market, the Didinga were the main suppliers of the guns and their Turkana allies the main buyers. The Kenyan government, like other governments in the

region, delayed closing an important gun market. In fact, the Lopiding gun market operated openly from 1989 to March 2003 while the Kenyan authorities turned a blind eye. It was not until the Turkana clashed with security forces in the Lopiding market in early March 2003 that the Kenyan government ordered it closed. The Kenyans also introduced militia groups into the area of the Turkana and Pokot.¹⁸ These forces further compromised the security situation by selling arms and, in particular, ammunition to the pastoral warriors and by themselves actively participating in raids.

Because the pastoral populations in the region have rarely organized in any fashion against the state, and most of their raids, killings and violence are internal or against perceived enemies of the ruling state parties, for decades regional governments made little attempt to curb the gun flows into the region. As a result, civilian pastoral populations were allowed to amass firearms which contributed to the acute insecurity in the region. In both Sudan and Uganda the fact that the state is often neglectful of the pastoral populations and has failed to provide adequate law and order through policing, has resulted in a situation in which pastoralists truly are left with little alternative means of protection other than to arm themselves.

One of the situations we learned about was the gun trade that is being conducted by soldiers/security officers in Kapoeta, in Budi county in the Southern Sudanese state of Equatoria. The trade combines moving of cattle from pastoral areas of Toposa, Didinga, Buya, and Latuho to Agoro market in Uganda. The pastoralists for the most part do not see cash in exchange for their livestock but are instead paid with bullets or guns. It was alleged by numerous informants that both the traders and the security officers are Dinka and remain protected by fellow tribesman with positions in the GoSS.

¹⁸ Mburu (2001).

Changes Resulting in Increased Gun Ownership and Gun Raiding

Key factors driving the increased gun ownership and the use of guns for raiding in the Karamoja cluster are the replacement of the spear by the gun, the loss of control over the family gun, the commercialization of cattle raiding, and the failure of governments to provide adequate security to pastoral communities. As a result, pastoralists are convinced that they cannot survive without a gun. If weapons become old, or if they are forcibly removed by state disarmament campaigns, pastoralists must try to swiftly rearm.

Raiding Rules Weakened

In the past, during cattle raiding there were elaborate rules and regulations that had to be religiously adhered to. Raiding was a family affair. People did not go raiding just any how. The views of warriors, elders, seers, and women were taken into consideration before raiding was conducted. This was in part due to the fact that any cattle acquired from such missions were straightway incorporated into the family herd. In the past, guns were rare and families owned a single communal gun. No action could be taken without the approval of the father and mother. These rules and regulations included the performance by the elders of certain rituals before the warriors left to launch raiding missions. Specific rituals had to be performed to welcome the raided animals home and to appease the spirits of the victims who had been killed, lest their spirits came to torment their killers. All those rituals were prescribed by the seers and passed by them to the elders for implementation. Women were involved together with elders in blessing the raiders. Mothers of warriors had an important role to play in offering their sons protection during these dangerous missions. The timing and frequency of going to mount raids had to be discussed by the whole extended family and the final word on whether to proceed or abort a planned mission lay with the elders and the seers.

In these large raids of the past, different members of the *manyatta* had their role in preparing for a successful raid. Women had to cook the food to be carried by their sons and husbands as they raided, which often involved special preparations of meat. Women would take particular care of the hide and wooden cups used by raiders.

It was a convention that the target community had to be forewarned. Messages like this would be sent in advance: “We are coming to take our cattle on such and such day. Therefore, if you are men enough, rise up to defend your animals for we are coming to take them!” Cattle wars were fought outside *manyattas*, with men battling to enter and take animals but the forewarned owners, clad in battle regalia with their dependents safely moved away from the battle grounds, were ready to show their valor and defend their property. During the raids there was usually minimal loss of life. It was considered particularly bad to kill defenseless women, children, and old folk and it was believed that anybody who did so would be tormented. When men successfully returned with seized animals, it was the women who begin the celebration by ululating. Even if their husband and or son came without any animals they would still celebrate because he had come back alive from a dangerous mission.

Today, things have changed and such battles are rare. More often, attacks are secretive and an enemy may attack a *manyatta* and shoot inside it where he knows women, children, and the elderly are sheltering. Today, warriors wage battles that seek to avoid enemy warriors and instead may end up killing children, women, and the elderly. We find it shocking that among some tribes now, without a shred of shame, a warrior can even put scars on his left arm to indicate he has killed a woman!¹⁹ Traditionally, except under extreme circumstances, this would have been deemed unacceptable and a gross breach of custom.

In the past, the main objective of cattle raids was to acquire cattle for payment of bride price, to acquire bulls for prestige dances, or because the male youth wanted to graduate to manhood by performing an act of bravery by going to fight for cattle. Additionally, during natural catastrophes, pastoralists would mount a raid to restock a herd depleted or wiped out by disease or drought. The author often heard statements such as: “We cannot die of hunger here when other men are herding livestock across the escarpment!” He witnessed Turkana warriors and their seer responding to drought by planning a raid across the escarpment to seize cattle from the Dodoth.

Loss of Control of the Family Gun

Guns were initially very expensive and only very rich families in the Karamoja Cluster could afford to buy their sons a weapon to protect their animals. By the 1950s in Turkana and the 1960s in Karamoja, however, it was becoming common for more families to acquire guns smuggled through the porous borders of Ethiopia and Somalia. However, the gun still belonged to the extended family and was squarely under the control of the elders and, by extension, the seers. So tight was family control over the gun that few apart from the elders even knew if a *kraal* had one.

There are still such communities—such as among the Jie where raids cannot take place without the approval of the elders—but in most areas the elders have lost control of cattle raiding. When elders can no longer prevent raiding, it means that the rules and regulations that used to be religiously adhered to are now abandoned. In such cases, things look chaotic and it appears that the youth have taken over, seeking prestige and wealth outside culturally-prescribed boundaries. With their blood still hot, they want to get rich quickly and out-compete their elders by marrying as many wives as possible. Thanks to the ready availability of guns and ammunition, such youth can band together in small groups and raid to acquire cattle for cash, barter or dowry. Preparing for marriage used to involve many seasons of hard work but raiding not only enables warriors to acquire enough bulls but means they have enough left over for lavish celebrations to flaunt their wealth and to dance in prestige!

Commercialization of Cattle Raiding

Nowadays many cattle raids are undertaken for commercial reasons, in which the cattle are not retained by the raider or his family but are sold or bartered as quickly as possible for

¹⁹ Knighton (2006).

goods, cash, or weapons. In part this is a result of elders' loss of control of young warriors. It is also driven by the fact that commercial cattle raids are now reportedly taking place at the behest of politicians and gun and livestock traders.

Freed of traditional constraints on raiding, young men are now more likely to raid in smaller groups—often banding together with less than ten other youth. This is a far cry from the raiding parties of old which sometimes had up to a thousand men together having around 400 guns but including unarmed youth whose role was to drive home the looted animals. The new kind of raiding done by smaller groups of armed men means they are often unable to hide stolen animals from owners seeking to retrieve them or who ask the authorities to help them do so. They thus come under pressure to sell the beasts as soon as possible, regardless of price, so that they cannot be traced. Livestock dealers and government officials told us that prices on market days are often artificially depressed by raiders who spoil markets for legitimate vendors. This occurrence has become so frequent that a new term has emerged—*namorat*—to describe a cow stolen by a group of youths who sell it in a hurry at a cattle market. Since these small groups typically only sell a relatively few cows the money they are paid on the spot is usually shared out among the raiders. Informants told us that such young men then use their cash to go on a day-long drinking spree. In the evening they can be seen staggering back home, firing menacingly into the sky.²⁰

Some shopkeepers lacking capital to restock their shops have watched this development with keen interest. Informants told us that they may themselves organize bands of youth, supply them with bullets and send them raiding. Any cattle they steal are then immediately sold and the shopkeepers pay the youths with alcohol—often the sorghum beer the Karamojong are so fond of—while using the rest of the cash to buy stock for their shops.

Conversely, some warrior/raiders have themselves gone into the shopkeeping business. For example, in Matany town, Bokoro district, it is well known that two of the most prosperous and longest-established businesses on the main street are owned by highly-regarded warriors, both excellent sharpshooters, who use their gains from cattle raiding to finance their shops.

Informants told us that powerful individuals, including some local government officers and politicians, have realized the profits to be made by bankrolling cattle raids, buying guns and employing youth to raid cattle which they then sell. We were told that in some cases these investors hire lorries to transport the cattle and wait at an agreed location for the youth to bring the raided cattle to them. They pay the youth and load cattle onto lorries and take them to market. The author came across such a case in Kangole in 1992. The warriors raided the cattle, arrived at the site to meet the lorry, got the money for the cattle, killed the driver of the lorry, and took the cattle and drove them back into the bush. According to trader and government informants Namalu, because of its hidden position from the rest of Karamoja, has become a major outlet for stolen livestock.

²⁰ See also Mirzeler and Young (2000) p. 424.

In Kenya powerful politicians and individuals are reported to have organized similar raids of Pokot warriors in Turkana for enriching themselves, sometimes even providing transport for the Pokot warriors to raid the Turkana.

Cross-border raids—especially between the Turkana and Pokot, the Pokot and Samburu, the Turkana and Toposa, and the Turkana and Dassennect—have been going on for decades. There have never been any concerted efforts by the governments of the region to mount joint operations to return the stolen property or apprehend the culprits, despite the high toll that accompanies these deadly raids. Many take advantage of this lack of cooperation. For example if the Kenyan authorities attempt to follow the Pokot in response to their raiding they are able to pass cattle they have stolen for safekeeping with their blood brothers the Upe in Uganda, where the authorities could not follow.

The profits to be made from commercial cattle raiding increase the urge to buy more guns from the weapon markets. The presence of powerful business owners and politicians complicates efforts to control weapons flows and disarm civilian populations. A number of our informants, including male youth in both Uganda and Southern Sudan, say disarmament in the long term will not work because there are politicians in all countries of the region who arm warriors to carry out commercial raids while at the same time publicly—and hypocritically—professing their determination to disarmament.

The current rampant commercialized raiding—undertaken without regard to traditional norms—could not have become so entrenched if elders had been able to retain control of the behaviour of youth and the nature of raids. We hypothesize that commercial raiding is more apparent in those tribes in the elders' control and power has waned the most. For example, in Karamoja, much of the raiding that goes on among the Matheniko, Pian, and the Bokora appears to be controlled by the youth or commanded by their warriors. This is suggested by the frequency of stealing small numbers of animals from their neighbors the Teso, Bugisu and Sebei. In addition, intertribal raids are carried out by mainly the youth of the Matheniko, Pian, Bokora and, to a lesser extent, even the youth of the Jie, because with the exception of very recent peace agreements with the Dodoth (in late 2006) the Jie consider the other Karamojong ethnic groups their enemies. It was reported by informants that there are cases in which Matheniko, Pian and Bokora youth can confront their elders and force them to submit, something unheard of in the past. Such is not the case in Jie, Pokot and Tepeth. The youth of the Jie and Pokot in particular and in some sub-groups within the Tepeth still respect the authority of the elders and they continue to wield ultimate decision making power. The author has witnessed Jie elders confronting young warriors for behaviour they deem unacceptable and seen youth immediately back down and conform. Hence, in these three later groups, it is unlikely that raiding is occurring without the elders knowing about it or controlling it.²¹

²¹ See also Knighton (2006).

These days the herding of cattle in the region of the Karamoja Cluster is a risky undertaking. Herders have to be perpetually alert as they tend to their animals. This is because an armed raid can occur at any time of day or night. In fact, some groups could be mounting a cattle raid while others are bracing for a retaliatory attack. Meanwhile some innocent road users are being ambushed by gun-wielding warriors looking to wound and rob travelers to get money to buy more liquor. Or they may be ambushed by warriors who are frustrated after a failed raid and are seeking to nurse their wounded pride by at least getting some money or goods from dead or injured travelers. Places where deadly ambushes have occurred are commonly called *kamusalaba* after the metal crosses placed to indicate the place where a traveler was murdered. The Catholic Church began the practice of putting up crosses at places of extreme danger after the murder of a nun at Natumtak on the Amudat-Moroto road and today they serve as tragic reminders to travelers to take care.

Outside the few town centers, police are non-existent. Under such circumstances, people have come to believe that the need to be perpetually armed, or near armed forces or groups that will protect you, is an absolute necessity, rather than a choice. It is highly risky to herd livestock in this region without a gun or to travel without armed protection. Buses remain the only relatively safe mode of transport as warriors generally fear to attack them lest they kill their own people.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

It is clear that presence of active weapons markets and the use of weapons to engage in self protection, armed conflict and armed profiteering underpin the violence and unrest in the region. This section presents our findings on recent disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs in the region, with a focus on disarmament in Karamoja and, to a lesser extent, Southern Sudan. It shows how since the 1960s we can discern a constant back and forth in which governments arm civilians and create proxy militias to carry out work that police/military forces should be undertaking. The state is then faced with an armed civilian population—that they helped to arm—but which they then seek to disarm.

Raids, Militias and Calls for Disarmament (1960s - 2000)

As we have noted, armed raiding has historically been part of the pastoral economy of Karamoja but became increasingly deadly from the late 1970s.²² Between 1983 and 1994 the Karamojong in Uganda experienced levels of violence unmatched in their remembered history.²³ This was a period of growing food insecurity, drought, and famine.

Various militias and self-defense units were created to try to deal with armed raiding but with varying success. The late 1980s witnessed the disbanding of the militia forces that were meant to protect the Teso, Bagisu, Sebei, Lango, and Acholi people and their cattle from raiders coming from Karamoja. The result was the near complete depletion of all cattle from those neighboring areas by Karamojong raiders. The loss of over 90 percent of cattle from Acholiland had severe economic and cultural impacts. Informants reported the GoU was directly implicated in facilitating the raiding, including through the removal of the militias and the forced disarming of communities that tried to arm themselves to prevent more raiding. It is alleged that vehicles belonging to NRA Ministers and government officials were seen loading and transporting stolen livestock. When all animals were nearly depleted from Teso, Lango and Acholiland, the ethnic groups within Karamoja turned upon each other and raiding battles intensified.

By 1996, with deadly raiding going on nearly unchecked, militias were raised by communities neighboring and within Karamoja. These militias, known as the 'vigilantes', were trained by the GoU army to help protect against raiding. The vigilante fighters were all male and used their own weapons. Women were recruited into the vigilantes to gather intelligence. The vigilantes were charged with protecting the cattle of their villages from raiders. This could include moving with the cattle herders into temporary camps, as well as pursuing and killing armed bandits. The vigilantes received support in food and clothing from some non-governmental organizations.

In 1996 the vigilantes and President Museveni reluctantly agreed to bring the force under the control of the UPDF. The total force then numbered approximately 8,000 men (all women having been expelled when the force came under UPDF control). By most accounts

²² Buchanan-Smith and Lind (2005).

²³ Gray (2000).

this group initially performed well and security improved.²⁴ However, the vigilantes soon began taking sides in the internal cattle raiding and eventually had to be disbanded.

In 2001, the GoU launched a program to disarm the many warriors who had weapons in Karamoja. Attempts to disarm Karamoja were sporadic and only partially successful until 2004 when the GoU began to encourage the formation of militias, this time to fight the rebel LRA.

In June 2003 the LRA launched a series of attacks against the people of Teso. Within weeks, the vigilante militia called the Arrow Boys was re-established, led by former members of the Uganda People's Army, a rebel group. The Arrow Boys successfully fought off the LRA and pushed them out of Teso (and most likely into the Lango sub-region). The Arrow Boys were brought under the command of the UPDF and the GoU which agreed to provide them with training, weapons, food, and wages. A number of the Arrow Boys have been absorbed directly into the GoU army and, to a lesser extent, the police. There were a series of negotiations to discuss the future of the Arrow Boys—whether to remain standing members of a UPDF reserve force, to be deployed to disarm warriors in Karamoja or to be completely disarmed and disbanded. In October 2005, the number of Arrow Boys were reported to have reached around 6,000 troops and had initially resisted GoU efforts to disarm.²⁵ The most recent attacks by the LRA into Teso occurred in October 2005, which the Arrow Boys eventually repulsed. Currently, the Arrow Boys are officially disbanded.

All GoU approaches to the problem of armed raiding in eastern Uganda have focused primarily on security and targeted removal of the weapons. The approaches have repeatedly failed to address and safe-guard against the root causes of why populations are arming themselves. As a result, failed disarmament processes have resulted in increases in violence and active rearming of the communities.

2001-2002 Disarmament

In December 2001, the GoU officially launched a disarmament exercise in Karamoja, with the President himself participating in Bokora district. This involved two phases of voluntary and subsequent forceful disarmament. In building up to the voluntary disarmament process, a wide range of stakeholders and partners were tapped to plan and participate in the disarmament. Numerous stakeholders, with the blessing of the government, helped design and implement the actual disarmament. At the national and regional level, stakeholders included the UPDF, Action for Development of Local Communities, ADOL (a Kampala-headquartered Ugandan NGO with field offices in Karamoja), MPs representing Karamoja, local government authorities, international NGOs, civil society organizations, and Karamojong university students. At the district level, were the resident district commissioners, heads of various departments, churches, international NGOs, and civil society groups. ADOL carried out research at the grassroots level to find out how

²⁴ See Quam (1997).

²⁵ Interview with The Honorable Michael Lotee Lokawa, the Presidential Assistant on Disarmament, May 2005, Kampala.

pastoralists viewed the forthcoming disarmament exercise and they used those findings to inform the government and other stakeholders of the perspectives of the target community. ADOL conducted a workshop that brought all the stakeholders together to discuss local views of disarmament. Our informants viewed this as a very important and useful forum, providing a rare opportunity for primary stakeholders to dialogue with and advise the government.

International and local civil society and churches argued the gun should not be singled out as the main problem, instead submitting that it is lack of governance in Karamoja and failure by the government to address the development agenda which has exacerbated the security situation in the region. They highlighted that the Karamojong have no alternative to protect their livelihoods other than with guns because there is no law and order. They urged greater sensitivity and patience in mobilizing of Karamojong community to accept a peaceful handover of their guns. Encouragingly, not only were grassroots representatives involved but the GoU was represented at the highest level and contributed positively, demonstrating political will to act together with local communities. This favorably impressed the donor community.

An initial peaceful voluntary approach was applied to convince the livestock owners to hand over the guns. The program was initially highly successful, with nearly 10,000 guns voluntarily turned in over a two-month period. Unfortunately, the provision of incentives to those who handed over weapons was not done with sensitivity. For example, households were given corrugated iron roofing sheets, making them readily identifiable as people who had disarmed. In other cases, people were given oxen to plow their land. For the Pokot it is an outrage to see oxen shackled to ploughs, something they see as akin to enslavement and extreme cruelty to animals. In some cases when they encounter such oxen they kill the owners in order to 'free' the oxen.

The initial (albeit short-lived) provision of security to the Karamojong and their livestock gave the people false confidence that the government was committed to long-term provision of security for themselves and their property. This turned out not to be the case. The process did not adequately take into account the reasons why populations were arming themselves and as a result the number of cases of deadly violence and raiding actually increased. The key fault which led to the failure of the program was unbalanced disarmament and subsequent failure to adequately protect those communities that had disarmed. The security arrangement that had been promised to the local communities and their property was never fulfilled as inter-ethnic clashes erupted among the Karamojong. In April 2005 the Presidential Assistant on Karamoja Disarmament informed us that the total number of police officers in the area was a mere 145, far too few to provide adequate protection by any account. Human Rights Watch has pointed out that the ratio of central police officers to population in the regional is only 1:7,300, about one-sixteenth that of the UN standard of 1:450 and one-quarter that of the national ratio of 1:1,800.²⁶

²⁶ Human Rights Watch (2007)

Additionally, the GoU promised to deploy to each county an additional 146 men from local defense militias when people handed in their guns. However, inexplicably, this was reduced to 60 and some counties had fewer than that. Because disarmament was not conducted simultaneously throughout Karamoja, some groups were holding onto their guns whereas others handed in theirs in large numbers, such as the Bokora. The ones who retained their guns set about raiding those that had disarmed. They thus lost all their possessions, from livestock to sauce pans, not to mention the killing of men who tried to defend their livestock and property. These bitter events forced the victims of such raids to rearm themselves. Seeing this, the remainder of the communities refused to disarm and voluntary disarmament came to a grinding halt.

Whatever initial successes had been gained in the voluntary disarmament phase were quickly erased as the military launched offensives against pastoral populations that they accused of not disarming. The program was no longer one of disarmament, but rather one of military operations against civilian populations. To make matters even more complicated, the pastoralists were not comfortable with the non-Karamojong commanders conducting the military operations. They were particularly against involvement of their neighbors in the military forces who they believed harbored hatred and the urge to seek revenge for past Karamojong raids.

Other concerns included the GoU's re-arming of the Pian ethnic group. According to our informants, the GoU, on advice from some local politicians, re-armed the Pian of Lorengedwat in Nakapiripirit district where the Minister of State for Karamoja affairs hailed from. This rearming was particularly triggered by the intensification of the inter-ethnic raids in which some armed groups took advantage of the disarmament exercise to attack disarmed groups. The Lorengedwat were allegedly re-armed by the GoU to enable them to save themselves from the onslaught by the Pokot who had returned with guns they had hidden in the Kadam mountains in Kenya to attack them.

The GoU through the UPDF then proceeded to try and forcibly disarm Karamojong gun owners. However, as forceful disarmament was just getting under way, the LRA intensified their attacks in northern Uganda, spreading from Kitgum, Pader and Gulu through Lira and into Soroti in March 2002. By June 2003, a second round of LRA attacks was launched in Katakwi district, including the abduction of hundreds of children.

In response, the GoU withdrew its forces from eastern Uganda and Karamoja and sent them into northern Uganda to engage the LRA. The vacuum created by the departure of the soldiers worsened the already insecure situation in Karamoja. Several groups that had not handed their guns in immediately attacked their enemies that had begun disarming and this ignited fighting that led to the widespread loss of lives and property. Rapid rearmament occurred among most of the ethnic groups in Karamoja, with young men quickly sent into Southern Sudan to purchase more guns and ammunition. As one informant told us: "After the first disarmament [of 2001-2002] the Jie terrorized the Dodoth, forcing them to create a friendship with Toposa of Sudan in order to re-arm themselves. This enabled them [the

Dodoth] to acquire guns massively from Toposa and Didinga, the neighbors with which they are in lasting peace.”

Additionally, during the 2001-2002 military operation to collect weapons, numerous human rights violations were allegedly perpetrated by the UPDF. We talked with witnesses who reported that during the military operations throughout Karamoja, soldiers harassed Karamojong women, beat people, forced them to perform physical acts as punishment, and stripped elders naked and force them to sit in the direct sun. Furthermore, the way incentives were provided was corrupt. Corrugated iron sheets and cash were given to people who had not disarmed. Informants alleged that persons who helped the UPDF gain entry into communities to disarm them were then rewarded with cash and other benefits.

Disarmament in 2004-2005 and the Run Up to Presidential Elections

The subsequent raids and counter raids that erupted following the failed 2001-2002 disarmament initiative resulted in the government discussing the launch of another attempt at disarmament. However, such talk faced strong resistance from the communities in view of past mistakes. The motivating factor for considering a new DDR was the breakdown of law and order in Karamojong which the thin police force in Karamoja region as a whole could not contain, especially when people had rearmed themselves in earnest. The UPDF was largely absent from the region as they remained in the north pursuing the LRA, which had been successfully repulsed from its incursions into northeastern Uganda by the Arrow Boys militia.

The author was in the region for various stages of the 2004-2005 disarmament talks. These were unilaterally conducted by the military without the involvement of civil society or consultation with the groups to be disarmed. The initiative lacked funding to achieve its mission. The majority of informants in the area within the proposed disarmament initiative were totally opposed to it and it only intensified already deep mistrust of the GoU. To illustrate the approach taken, in May 2005, a hundred *kraal* leaders were called for a meeting with the UPDF. The leaders warned the army not to mention disarmament as it ignites insecurity, but to instead focus on peace initiatives. Nonetheless, the UPDF brought up the issue of disarming which caused angry reactions by the leaders gathered there. One former *kraal* leader stepped forward, a man whose children had been killed and who had lost all 400 head of his cattle in a raid that happened days after he had handed over his weapons to the army in the 2001-2002 disarmament programs. Angrily throwing at the top UPDF commanders the disarmament certificate he had been given after handing over his guns, he cried out, “I am now reduced to a dog by those people who did not hand over their guns to you!”

The general view by nearly all informants we talked with during this period, including member of parliaments, opposition leaders, the neighbors and the Karamojong themselves was that the reason for staging another disarmament was an attempt by the Museveni regime to buy votes from both the neighbors and weaker ethnic groups within Karamojong that were suffering from armed raiding. In particular, informants mentioned Museveni’s goal to change the constitution to enable him to run for a third term, indeed establish an

avenue for him to try and establish himself as President for Life. Our informants said that this represented a further step in a well-established pattern of politically-motivated disarmament without any serious accompanying protection or law and order programs.

When we moved about Karamoja in 2005 and asked the communities that were supposedly targeted for disarmament about the process, the response was that currently there was no disarmament initiative going on. One local leader in Kotido told us: “Recovery of guns is in theory. There is nothing going on. The army has again deferred it for six months while waiting for a new approach which they have now called ‘Community-based Security Services’”.

Military Operations against Pastoralists, 2006-mid 2007

After the Presidential elections of 23 February 2006 the GoU disarmament strategy for Karamoja took on a violent and wholly military character. Government excesses have drawn widespread condemnation not only from locals, but from the international community.²⁷

This new operation began in early May in Kotido district with over a dozen attacks on the Jie, in which hundreds of homes and dozens of *manyattas* were razed to the ground. People were rounded up and detained at barracks, including women and children. By November, the 4th and 5th UPDF divisions had been moved into Karamoja, including attack helicopters, armored vehicles and tanks. By the middle of November, a United Nations source told us that at least 2,500 cattle had been killed by UPDF aerial attacks.

It is questionable whether such operations can legitimately be called disarmament since civilian populations without guns are being attacked by the UPDF and there is clearly a disproportionate use of force by the UPDF against civilians, including those who are armed. Yet the President and Prime Minister stood by as the UPDF introduced what they termed “Cordon and Search Operations.” We were on the ground when these military operations were launched in May 2006 and documented what was occurring in the communities we worked with in Kotido, Moroto, and Nakapiripirit. We interviewed members of communities that had experienced cordon and search operations, we visited sites of these operations, sometimes literally hours after they had been attacked by the UPDF, in which cases the remains of their burning *manyattas* were still smoldering. Along with other colleagues working in the area who were also going out to the *manyattas* and *kraals*, we talked with men, women and children who claim they were beaten, tortured, and abused by the UPDF. In some cases we saw cuts on their bodies or swollen joints allegedly caused by torture. We interviewed eyewitnesses and survivors of dozens of UPDF attacks throughout these three districts. We continued to document the results of cordon and search operations, attacks by the UPDF and government militias, and allegations of abuse and torture through March 2007.

²⁷ See Human Rights Watch (2007) and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2007).

We documented human rights violations allegedly carried out by the UPDF in Kotido, Nakapiripirit, and Moroto districts from May 2006-March 2007. We documented a pattern in which the UPDF and government militias would approach *manyattas*, often between 2 to 4am in the morning, and launch an attack, forcefully searching for guns. Persons in the surrounded *manyattas* would be ordered out of their homes. Resistance was at times met with deadly force by the UPDF and government militias. A number of informants reported that men, women, children, and the elderly had been killed by the UPDF and its proxy militias. Men, women, children, and the elderly were at times beaten in order to get them to disclose weapons caches. Some *manyattas* that resisted UPDF and government militia attacks were then set alight, destroying not just houses but the fences that collectively protect people from raiders and wild animals at night. In Kotido and Nakapiripirit districts, sites we arrived at were still smoldering from fires set by the UPDF the night before.

We also documented reports of men, women, boys, and girls being taken from sites and detained in UPDF barracks. These people would not be released until either their families brought a gun or paid for their release with cattle. The cattle were allegedly sold by UPDF commanders at the local livestock markets. In cases where the family did not have weapons or cattle to bring in, their family member would remain in detention. In detention people reported being beaten and tortured. One woman who had been detained reported that her baby had been crying and was taken from her by a UPDF soldier and used as an instrument to beat her with. Other women reported being forced to sit in the open sun and when water was offered to them by the UPDF soldiers and they tried to drink the soldiers would slap them in the face. Male youth reported being beaten by UPDF soldiers on their joints, especially their ankles and knees, and our colleagues saw their badly swollen and bruised legs. Some male youth reported to us they were no longer willing to enter town centers because they were being arbitrarily detained, beaten, and tortured at UPDF barracks. Some of the people we spoke with in March 2007 were still being held several months later, as the UPDF continued to demand their relatives bring cattle or guns to 'purchase' their release. UPDF barracks are not gazetted to hold civilians, in particular they are not to hold children. At the time of our research, the barracks were not routinely open to inspection by the Ugandan Human Rights Commission or the ICRC.

Throughout all the areas we worked documenting what was occurring during cordon and search, we heard widespread allegations of looting by government forces. Looted items included livestock, cash, weapons, cooking pots and pans, clothes, bed sheets, and food items. Esteemed *kraal* and *manyatta* leaders—whom the author has worked with for years to help bring peace to the area—reported losing large sums of money due to looting by UPDF forces. Some reported losses of 1,500,000 USG (approximately \$880).

Local leaders reported to us that when they were forcibly disarmed by the UPDF and their accompanying militias in 2006 and requested protection for themselves and their livestock, the UPDF commanders told them they were only interested in getting their guns and would not provide any protection to the newly disarmed population. By 2007 this policy had changed, but it mattered little to the initial communities that were hit hard by enemy raiders within a few days of UPDF attacks. A spate of deadly raids immediately followed in

the wake of the 2006-2007 UPDF military operations. For example, we documented that following the forced disarming of Napetet village on 3 June 2006, the Jie raided the village taking 218 head of cattle. Tragically, in this attack Jie warriors killed a prominent *kraal* leader and one of the strongest peace advocates working within Karamoja, Apalobakaluk, who had worked with the author on many occasions to try and bring peace among the warring groups. Likewise, just a day earlier, another prominent *kraal* leader, Apalotwala Amaikori, talked the warriors of his *manyattas* into peacefully turning over their weapons, including weapons from his own home. Offered no protection by the GoU, the village was attacked days later, again by the Jie, who killed Apalotwala's sons and took 130 head of cattle. Apalotwala was lucky to escape with his life. In both cases, there was no attempt to recover the cattle or arrest the culprits.

Significantly, and we **cannot stress this point strongly enough**, the killing of leaders and elders, especially those who were prominent peace makers, only further undermines any efforts to bring peace and stability into Karamoja.

Following reports in June and July 2006 to the Office of the Prime Minister of alleged widespread human rights abuses by UPDF by a number of actors working on the ground in Karamoja, a team was commissioned to go and investigate. The team's report was completed by September 2006 but has not been publicly released by the GoU. The fact that no report has been released and no action taken against alleged violations within the UPDF further infuriated some warriors and leaders within Karamoja. Statements were made by leaders and warriors to the authors that since the UPDF seemed to be able to kill them with impunity, they would not lie like dogs waiting to be killed. Rather, they would prefer to die, as warriors, fighting the UPDF. The failure of the GoU to carry out rigorous and independent investigations, publish the findings of their investigations, or take action against criminal activities by the UPDF and militias only fanned the flames of the conflict. This is tragic as the report could have been an opportunity to cool things down between the forces and open a dialogue on how to proceed in a more peaceful manner to achieve what are actually similar goals—the improved security of the people of Karamoja and their neighbors.

Between July through December 2006, the Jie in particular responded with force when the UPDF attacked them. Most notably, after the UPDF carried out a massacre in Kotido town in late October 2006 during a dance festival, Jie warriors hit back, killing a number of soldiers and attacking the government area of Kotido town itself. Warriors in Nakapiripirit district also fought back. For example, in Kakumongole sub-county, Nakapiripirit District, the military surrounded villages at 4:00 am, fierce fighting took place two civilians were killed, while an unspecified number were injured. In retaliation, the warriors overran and looted Tokora army detachment when most soldiers had gone for another cordon and search operation. The women of the soldiers left behind were beaten by the warriors, in revenge for the ways in which the soldiers had beaten the warriors' wives, sisters, and mothers. The UPDF then retaliated by blocking the Tokora-Nakapiripirit road to public transport, to which the warriors answered by shooting two vehicles they associated with the government. Rumors then spread that the warriors would shoot at any red plate vehicle

(i.e., government vehicles) because they accuse the GoU of refusing to follow their advice, instead using military force against civilians.

By November 2006, MPs from Karamoja were speaking out against the military operation and calling for its cessation. Addressing journalists in Parliament on 9 November, Samuel Abura (Matheniko, the chair of the Karamoja Parliamentary Group²⁸, said that “everyone in Karamoja agrees that the guns must go, but what the UPDF is conducting now is no longer disarmament, but purely a military operation. We are in favour of disarmament, but the exercise has been derailed leading to innocent children, youth, women and aged falling victims of the operation”.²⁹ The following day, UNOCHA in Kampala released a press statement accusing the UPDF of killing civilians and destroying property in Kotido district. In November and December 2006 we tried to visit the *kraals* of several well known Karamojong leaders in Kotido and Kabong districts. We were prevented due to the fact that their *kraals* were being bombed by UPDF gunships. Because of their strength and refusal to bow to the will of the GoU and UPDF, the Jie (in Kotido district) in particular were subject to disproportionate use of force by the UPDF. The UPDF used aerial bombing, helicopter gunships, tanks, and mortars against pastoral populations fighting with guns. In November 2006, an inter-agency assessment of the human rights situation was conducted in Kotido district, led by UNOCHA with representatives from UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Oxfam, Doctors with Africa, CUAMM (an Italian NGO), the Italian Institute for Cooperation and Development, with ECHO as an observer. During the assessment, the team heard allegations and saw evidence of a massacre carried out by the UPDF, mass graves where the bodies were allegedly buried, extra-judicial killings by the UPDF, the burning of *manyattas* and destruction and looting of civilian property by the UPDF, and the use of tanks and mortars against civilian populations. The team also documented and heard allegations regarding warriors’ retaliation and attack on Kotido town, which included the destruction and looting of property in the government section of town. To date, the GoU has not publicly responded to the allegations and observations put forward by the inter-agency team.

The result of the military operations against civilian populations is the increased loss of lives of adults, children, and livestock. Yet there must still be room for dialogue as helicopter gun ships and armored tanks are not the right solution. Without adequate security and a trained and well-manned police force throughout the region, any group that is disarmed and left without protection will be attacked by either other groups inside Karamoja, or the pastoral tribes bordering the region. Given the availability of weapons in the area, men will head to Sudan to rearm themselves for self protection as they cannot depend on the government in remote corners of the country to secure them. The government has never given them protection in the past and there is no guarantee that they will do it now. Diplomats attending a meeting on disarming pastoralists in Kenya,

²⁸ All Karamoja members of parliament sit on a committee charged with responsibility for overseeing development, food security, law and order and disarmament in the region.

²⁹ “Karamoja MPs Want Disarmament Halted,” *The New Vision*, November 9, 2006.

Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan also pointed to the need for state laws and police to protect (not attack) pastoral populations and for development of infrastructure and provision of basic services that uphold, not undermine, pastoral livelihoods. Abdelrahim Khalil, the director of the conflict prevention arm of IGAD, put his finger on the key problem:

*Taking their guns away will not solve the problem. They can get more. There is recognition that national policies have failed. We have not been able to contain conflicts in the region... You need a government presence. People need to feel they are part of the state. And the cultures which encourage armed conflict need to be dealt with using better education.*³⁰

Within Uganda, however, the President, OPM, and UPDF move forward with military operations which result in the deaths of both civilians and UPDF soldiers. Brushing aside allegations of human rights violations, the UPDF 3rd Division Operations and Training Officer Lieutenant Colonel Paul Lokech has said his forces “are determined to get on with our mission, to rid the region of these guns.” He said while it was not certain when Karamoja would be cleared of all the illegal guns, the determination by the army to achieve this is strong. He noted that the UPDF had rounded up members of a homestead, impounded over 1,500 head of cattle and recovered 25 guns in Katikekile, Moroto district. “This village had never surrendered a single gun. They thought they were untouchable but we dared them.”³¹

In his State of the Nation Address in June 8, 2007 President Museveni stated that from January-May 2007 the UPDF had collected 1,203 guns, of which 59 had been handed in voluntarily. He also said that 3rd Division Court Martial has tried 101 “hard core warriors” and sentenced them to between 5-10 years imprisonment.³² He noted that:

*“Recently, while in Karamoja, I asked the 3rd Division Commanders why they did not punish more harshly the rustlers that kill people. I will ask the UPDF Legal Department to advise us on how these rustlers can be punished more harshly.”*³³

In late June 2007, the GoU and UPDF launched communal grazing programs for pastoralists in Nakapiripirit district. The commanding officer of the UPDF 3rd Division, Colonel Patrick Kankiriho, criticized Karamojong leaders who opposed the communal grazing system. He compared them with Acholi leaders who opposed the forced removal of civilians from their villages in northern Uganda into internally displaced camps—a move he

³⁰ Reuters, “Tackle Roots of Deadly African Cattle Raids,” May 28, 2007.

www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSB331348

³¹ Richard Otim, “Uganda: Disarmament Restores Peace in Karamoja,” *The Monitor*, June 11, 2007.

³² For a critique of the use of military courts martial for civilians please see Human Rights Watch (2007).

³³ Ibid.

hailed as a success³⁴ but which the international community and outside observers blame for the premature deaths of tens of thousands of people due to poor sanitation, malnutrition and disease.³⁵ The UPDF also announced that beginning in June in Kaabong district and spreading to Nakapiripirit, Moroto, Abim, and Kotido districts in July the UPDF would apprehend any school-age child found in grazing areas, arrest their parents, and force the children into schools. Colonel Kankiriho declared:

*Now that we have seen the fruits of forceful disarmament, I am going to switch to forceful education for all school going children in Karamoja in order to ensure that the children attain some level of education as a basic human right and this will be used as the basis for development in Karamoja.*³⁶

Due to international pressure, UPDF schemes for forced education have not taken place to date. Despite the Cordon and Search operation approach to disarmament, violent raids continue and raiders continue to ambush and kill innocent travelers on the roads.

³⁴ Nathan Etengu, "UPDF Soldiers Look After Karamojong Cattle." *New Vision* (Kampala), June 21, 2007.

³⁵ The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health in partnership with WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, IRC, *Health and Mortality Survey among Internally Displaced People in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, Northern Uganda*, Kampala, Uganda, July 2005.

³⁶ Nathan Etengu, "UPDF Soldiers Look After Karamojong Cattle," 21 June 2007; David Mafabi, "Army to Force Karimojong Children into School," *The Monitor*, 25 June, 2007.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Margie Buchanan-Smith and Jeremy Lind have noted that:

“The starting point for any aid programming is to understand that the widespread holding of arms is not the issue; rather it is an understanding the use of arms in the wider context of local and regional conflict dynamics. Response to violent conflict, which is driven by security concerns alone, is doomed to failure, including short-term and unilateral disarmament initiatives. Rather, it is the root causes that must be tackled through coherent policies that engage all agencies. Pastoralists must be given a greater voice in the development of any such policies. Helping pastoralists restock or finding alternatives to pastoralism are important to offer an alternative livelihood to living by the gun especially to disenfranchised young men. Positive examples of local level peace-building, must be built on, but above all must be linked to national policy level and supported with real political will. In border areas ... such initiatives can only be successful if they are regional. There must also be greater investment in collecting and analysing trend data that shows the impact of conflict and violence on livelihoods over time, not least to understand and monitor the impact of the various peace efforts. Finally, aid donors have an important role to play in ensuring that their assistance is also geared to tackling the root causes of conflict, but with a long-term commitment and in a coordinated and coherent way.”³⁷

What went wrong with Karamoja? That is the question everybody who has a stake in Karamoja is asking today. Clearly something is amiss in the remote arid region of northeastern Uganda that has ramifications throughout the Karamoja Cluster and beyond. Beginning with the ivory traders the scramble for power and wealth among external forces has led to the arming—and then generally failed attempts at disarming—the pastoral populations. Currently the region is awash with weapons and suffers from underdevelopment, little government presence, a near complete lack of law and order, and widespread insecurity. In a backlash against the chaos of armed raiding and ambushes, there are once again many calling for robust action to sort out the marauding warriors once and for all!

Unfortunately, some of the ‘solutions’ now being put forward by senior officials and presidential advisers reflect the very reasons which made the Karamojong long for the gun as a defense against cultural extinction. The GoU’s agricultural modernization policy pressures the Karamojong to seditarize so that the state can provide agricultural extension services and inputs. They ignore the reality that the Karamojong have all along silently rejected such so-called modernization, seeing settling down as a cultural and economic death warrant. For them mobility is the key to survival as pastoralists. Policymakers need to note that it those Karamojong ethnic groups which still retain their animal herds and who hold most traditionally to the pastoral lifestyle—such as the Jie, Pokot, Tepeth, and Dodoth—who are much healthier and can withstand shocks much

³⁷ Buchanan-Smith and Lind (2005).

better than those like the Bokora who have become more sedentarized and lost many of their animals.³⁸

The current approach by the Ugandan President, the OPM and the UPDF for a ‘military solution’ to the situation in Karamoja is in fact creating more unrest and contributing to greater insecurity and occurrences of human rights violations. Heavy-handed military force is being applied through the use of helicopter gunships, aerial bombing, illegal detention, beatings, torture, killing, and the holding of innocent civilians to extort cattle from the civilian population. Such tactics will fail in the end to successfully disarm the Karamojong for the Karamojong and their neighbors—including the Turkana, Toposa, Didinga, and Pokot—inhabit a region awash with guns, guns that move easily over the porous borders. Nearly all the groups surrounding the Karamojong are armed. The Karamojong say they need to protect themselves and their livestock as the governments of the region have never kept them secure in the past and there is no sign they can now start to do so.

The bombs dropped by the GoU may rattle but not forever, because eventually there will be enough outrage and pressure on the GoU to stop the killing and abuse of its citizens. After the gunships have stopped, the *manyattas* have burned, the men, women and children have begun to physically recover from the abuse and humiliation, the Karamojong will be left feeling less, not more, secure. Mistrust of their country’s government and armed forces is deepening. A recent UPDF proposal that soldiers should remove any school-age Karamojong child not receiving schooling from their parents and homes and forcibly enroll them in schools will unravel the last shreds of trust in the GoU. Not only would this move further estrange the Karamojong but it would be a violation of the Ugandan Children’s Act³⁹, which states that children have a right to live with and be cared for by their parents.

The Ugandan President has urged local leadership to ensure that Karamoja leaders cooperate in the disarmament of their people. However, post-colonial governments (the current government included) have largely neglected the traditional authority of the elders in controlling raids and armed conflict. It is not in the interest of the Karamojong elders to raid their neighbors as it is those same neighbors they will need to negotiate with to gain access to grass and water for their herds. With the changes in raids, especially the growth in commercial raiding, elders, as we have seen, may not know when small bands of warriors cross over to strike against neighboring ethnic groups. This is because in ethnic groups in which traditional leadership is being undermined, the warriors have now become both the decision-makers, as well as the implementers of the actual raids! It is therefore high time that the local and central governments and international stakeholders reconsider strengthening traditional authority. It would be particularly useful to offer support to gatherings of elders whose agendas are peace-making.

A good example of strong traditional authority still exists in the Jie of Kotido district in Uganda. Here youth cannot generally go raiding without the blessing of the elders. The Jie

³⁸ See also Stites, Akabwai and Mazurana (2007).

³⁹ www.law.yale.edu/rcw/rcw/jurisdictions/afe/uganda/frontpage.htm

elders have repeatedly warned the UPDF that forceful disarmament is not the answer, but that rather the emphasis must be on peace-making to come up with solutions to the insecurity of the region. During a UPDF-convened meeting with 100 *kraal* leaders in May 2005 the elders stressed the need to concentrate on peace initiatives and not to talk about disarmament as it ignites more insecurity.

Any approach that primarily focuses on removing or collecting guns from a region with a strong regional weapons trade without first and foremost addressing underlying causes and the factors feeding into the insecurity is doomed to failure.

Comments made by Oxfam in 2002 remain valid:

This global dimension not only of the proliferation of guns in Karamoja, but also of the conflict and insecurity in the region is never adequately canvassed in discussions of the problem. It is becoming increasingly clear, that the global dimension of the problem must be acknowledged and factored into any meaningful search for a solution to the problem. In this connection, the United Nations Organization must wake up to the problem and place it on its agenda. Similarly, at the regional level, the proliferation of guns in Karamoja must be placed on the agenda of such organizations as the East African Community, IGADD and the OAU

It is important to remember that there is no factory for guns in Karamoja, or for that matter in any of the countries of the Horn of Africa. These guns come to the region from outside the continent.⁴⁰

Ending violence is a challenge for all stakeholders in the region. It requires the input of local politicians, elders, and the mothers whose traditional power has in some cases been usurped by youth, as well as those who profiteer from commercial raiding and keeping Karamoja isolated and insecure. Youth have a big stake in the outcome, as it is they who are most cursed by this violence, they who are dying in raids and in government military operations, they who are thrown into poverty and unable to benefit from the ceremonies that should mark their initiations, their marriages and their movements into manhood and womanhood. The Ugandan armed forces have to cool down and the GoU should engage in honest and transparent discussions with elders to come to grips with the roots of the region's problems. Peacemakers and traditional elders must be serious as the problem is large. Peace in Karamoja must be seen as a national priority for Uganda.

As we have seen livestock provide the main motive for bearing weapons. It is thus essential that any state-sponsored disarmament intervention should go hand in hand with policies and programs to improve existing pastoral livelihoods and introduce options for appropriate alternative livelihoods.⁴¹ It is important to shed the mistaken notion behind so

⁴⁰ Oxfam (2002).

⁴¹ See Mburu (2000).

many other earlier responses to try to stop violent raiding in Karamoja—that pastoralism itself is the cause of violence.

The root causes of armed raiding are not the livelihoods pursued by pastoralists but chronic and persistent political marginalization, widespread lack of security and justice intuitions and personnel which leaves citizens feeling insecure, mal-development, mismanagement, ecological crises, drought, crop-failure and, at times, famine. There is compelling evidence that the marginalization and erosion of their cultural identity as pastoralists, violence and the lowered power of women and elders are inter-linked. Support to pastoral livelihoods could help recreate and strengthen positive social relations and roles within pastoral communities. Given the harsh ecological conditions of the region they inhabit, pastoralism is among the only livelihood strategy that works, and works consistently. Other root causes of the conflicts include the current monopolization of national political power by one ethnic group within Karamoja that has often been in conflict with the others groups within the region.

Any attempt to curb the weapons flow will have to be regional and involve neighboring states, most preferably launched under the auspices of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a group bringing together the nations of the Horn and East Africa.⁴² What is likely to work is not to advocate for the complete removal of the gun but to design peace building programs that will involve all players in the region. The gun should not be the target because the moment there is real peace and security in the region then the gun will become less relevant. This message is what the *kraal* leaders have been telling the UPDF: let us search for peace and forget talking about disarmament because disarmament and the way it is carried out brings insecurity.

In our opinion, the most effective players at the moment to help bring peace are the traditional elders. Yet, their authority has all along been sidelined by both colonial and post colonial governments. Efforts that promote the destruction of traditional Karamojong practices and livelihoods also undermine the role of traditional leadership and those leaders' abilities to maintain order in their populations. One of the critical objectives in such a suggested peace program is for the elders to reconcile the people of Karamoja with their land. They have poured a lot of blood to the land such that *Akuju* (their God) has become annoyed and has left them to finish themselves. A key effort would be to support and facilitate the traditional elders to create awareness about the need to reconcile with the land through all age sets at *akiriket* (holy shrines), initiation ceremonies, and other traditional gatherings. Traditional respect for elders should be built on, not undermined.⁴³

Because the Karamojong largely do not participate in formal education systems as they are currently constructed, there is a need to emphasize creative approaches to both formal and

⁴² www.igad.org

⁴³ For example, the UPDF top command in Karamoja has advised the Karamojong to “shun leaders who encourage them to remain tied to the cattle culture” (Etengu, New Vision, 21 July, 2007).

informal education, in ways that are relevant and meaningful for the Karamojong.⁴⁴ Within these efforts, positive messages of peace and the sanctity of human life could be delivered. There could also be continuous awareness-raising in workshops, field days, and regional forums. In particular, cross-ethnic and cross-border meetings are vital to help bring peace and stability to the region. Rather than closing borders and hindering (or in some cases preventing) cross-border movement of people and their livestock, efforts should be made to develop safe corridors and passages for people to move.

Equally important, though expensive, is the de-silting of old dams and installation of new ones. Such efforts would go a long way to relieve the pressure and, at times, deadly competition for water at border areas. Dams are of vital importance at a time when many intertribal raids are so intense because of the scramble for water. The current GoU has allocated money for dams but it appears that corruption has swallowed it and that few if any dams have been built or repaired.

It is important to note that the Karamojong have passed down the rough road to regain their lost glory—their cattle herds—through the barrel of the gun. Any attempt to remove the gun must create a situation that will leave the Karamojong secure with his cattle herds. The Karamojong cannot relive a situation where Turkana or other neighbors persecute them into submission because the Turkana are armed and the Karamojong left with no protection. The arms race in the region is made worse because it is not only the Turkana that are armed but the whole perimeter of the tribes surrounding the Karamojong, starting with the Pokot of Uganda and Kenya, the Toposa and their neighbors the Didinga in Sudan. Understood this way, the gun is seen as an instrument that enabled some people to regain and protect pastoral lives and livelihoods, while others suffered. Any policy that will more comprehensively fulfill those needs—the protection and strengthening of pastoral lives and livelihoods—stands a very good chance of bolstering efforts to peacefully remove guns from Karamoja.

For example, the livestock the Karamojong raided in large numbers from the neighboring districts in the 1980s crossed into Karamoja where the disease control facilities, like dips for tick control, were non-existent. As a result, the raided animals quickly died and contaminated previously unaffected Karamojong cattle, causing many thousands to die. Today, the Karamojong struggle to keep their animals healthy and free of tick-borne diseases that came to them from the cattle they raided from their neighbors. Therefore, the introduction of a policy to control livestock diseases, in particular ticks and tick-borne diseases (i.e., *lopid/lokit Anaplasmosis/Theliosis*), would have a magnetic appeal to the Karamojong. The Karamojong know that their guns are unable to save their animals from these diseases, but a syringe can perform miracles. A community-based animal health program should be launched and must involve the warriors themselves. It should strongly emphasize the need for peace among neighbors in order for their animals to be treated.

⁴⁴ We have written about education at greater length elsewhere, see Stites, Akabwai, Mazurana with Ateyo (2007).

Finally, there are many solutions that have been prescribed to solve the Karamojong dilemma but from the outset most cannot work because the authors are honestly ignorant of the Karamojong, their production systems, their culture and livelihoods, their ecology and the regional context within which they live. What is needed now is a new approach, one in which the GoU and the UPDF are willing to learn from the Karamojong about their own needs and ideas for increased human security and improved pastoral livelihoods, and one in which the GoU works in conjunction with its neighbors to help increase regional security in the Karamoja Cluster.

About the Authors

Darlington Akabwai is a Ugandan and holds a Bachelors degree in veterinary medicine (BVM). He has worked with the Ugandan and Kenyan governments, as well as a number of foreign governments and international NGOs. He first began working in Karamoja in 1972 as a veterinary officer in Moroto District and then as a District Veterinary Officer in Kotido District, where he worked to treat and control livestock disease and foster good relations with the Karamoja pastoralists in order to facilitate acceptance of cattle vaccination and control the movement of livestock and hides. One of the key lessons he learned as a young veterinary officer was that whenever he mobilized the Karamojong pastoralists to assemble their cattle for vaccinations, the Turkana raiders would come and raid them in large numbers leaving the Karamojong (who were armed only with spears) in very desperate circumstances. Another lesson was that it was the elders who decided to release the cattle for vaccinations and hence it was the elders with whom one had to build good relations to help improve the lives, livelihoods, and human security of the Karamojong.

Akabwai helped to establish community-based animal health worker programs (at the time called 'barefoot vets'), and was instrumental in improving local participation in decision-making processes affecting pastoralists, using traditional leadership as an entry point. Akabwai was one of the leaders on the ground who helped ensure rinderpest vaccination coverage (that eventually stopped the disease) and the delivery of other animal services throughout the Karamoja Cluster, working in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda.⁴⁵

From the late 1990s through 2004, Akabwai pioneered an approach for using animal health as an entry point to broker peace among groups throughout the Karamoja Cluster. He learned that the three most common concerns of leaders of pastoralist communities were livestock diseases, cattle raiding, and lack of cattle markets. Reasoning that cattle raiding strongly influenced the other two concerns, he figured out ways to build peace among tribes, including through fostering women's peace crusades. His innovative approaches quickly received widespread support at the local and regional level.

During his several decades of work with pastoral populations, Akabwai has learned that traditional leaders wield the most power in decision-making and have collectively amassed important knowledge on how to survive in harsh ecological and political climates. Yet, he has also learned that most policy-makers in the region have little understanding of the pastoralists, and are unlikely to try and work with, let alone consult, their traditional leaders. Consequently, his work for the last several years has been to work with pastoralists to raise their voices and concerns at national and international levels.

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⁴⁵ For further information, see BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2794981.stm>

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