

## WHO GAINS FROM THE UGANDA-KENYA CROSS-BORDER MOU?

Karamoja marked September 2019 as a historic month, when two Heads of State of the Republic of Uganda and the Republic of Kenya launched a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on sustainable peace and development across border communities of Karamoja, Turkana and West Pokot in Moroto District. The MoU has been signed with a strong emphasis on resource sharing. The main objectives of the MoU are interlinked and focus on creating space for opportunities, collaboration and coordination for peaceful coexistence of communities. The MoU aims to reduce cross-border conflicts by engaging local and county governments in order to respond rapidly to incipient conflict, by eliminating the illegal flow of small arms and weapons, by strengthening community resilience, by increasing surveillance on livestock theft and disease management, and by improving infrastructure, livelihoods and food security.

During the signing ceremony, the Ugandan President Museveni stressed the importance of the MoU for sharing water and pasture, as well as creating wealth, while the Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta focused on water resources, trade and infrastructure. Besides the presidents of the two countries, ministers, donors, members of both parliaments, local government officials and Turkana government officials also attended. Karamoja civil society organisations (CSOs) and international NGOs that contributed through community support and mobilisation included the RiamRiam Group, Karamoja Development Forum (KDF), Dynamic Agropastoralist Development Organization (DADO), Ateker Cultural Center (ACC) Karamoja, Mercy Corps and Welthungerhilfe (WHH). The CELEP members/partners KDF, DADO and WHH were particularly active in mobilising pastoralist groups and other stakeholders.

### *Conflicting situation between Karamoja and neighbouring areas*

Karamoja was successfully disarmed over ten years ago when more than 40,000 guns were recovered from Karamojong warriors, initially voluntarily and later forcefully with the help of the community, CSOs and the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF). Disarmament did not happen in Kenya and in South Sudan; as a result, the Turkana, Toposa and Pokot pastoralists from neighbouring areas in Kenya and South Sudan still possess small arms and automatic rifles. The situation is particularly worrying in the northeastern part of Karamoja, especially Kaabong and Kotido Districts, where armed Turkana are rendering the situation very unstable and insecure for lives, business and livestock mobility. This situation is increasingly testing the capability of the mighty UPDF to protect the property and lives of the mostly Karamojong inhabitants on the Ugandan side of the border. So, even though there is now relative peace and security in Karamoja, additional efforts need to be made to disarm nearby areas in neighbouring countries.

Despite relative insecurity in its border zones, the rule of law was re-established in Karamoja following its disarmament and economic life took off again, attracting all kinds of investors who got involved not only in trade but also in tourism. Since then, it's as if there has been a *gold rush on Karamojong natural resources*, facilitated by local elites and politicians. Ever since disarmament, this situation has been threatening relative peace and security and, most importantly, the livelihoods of pastoralists, who suffer from loss of land rights and human rights as well as from overall environmental destruction.

## ***High hopes...***

Needless to say, we – Karamojong CSOs – had high hopes when, in his speech during the signing of the MoU, President Uhuru Kenyatta welcomed the MoU saying: “*It will help spur development in the region after suffering many years of communal conflicts*” and even added that “*if you cannot trade, you can’t invest, and if you don’t move, you cannot trade*”. In fact, as Karamojong, we actually commend him for becoming the first East African president to visit Karamoja from a neighbouring country. We also applaud the MoU, as it aims to promote peace, end conflicts and promote unity, trade and cross-border resource sharing and management. In the MoU, promises are also made to connect the three countries with infrastructure such as roads from Amudat to Kapenguria, from Kaabong to Kakuma and from Kotido to Moruitit – which are priority trade and security roads – as well as from Kamion to Oropoi), from Komwate to Nawounitos, from Loreda to Turuturu, from Kanadae to Loitanit, from Moroto to Lodwar and from Lodwar to Omarate in Ethiopia, as requested by President Museveni to President Kenyatta. In addition, the MoU promises more water facilities of the same size of Kobebe Dam, able to store 2.3 billion litres of water during the rainy season. This can cater for over 267,000 cattle, when at 70% capacity, for four months during the dry season.

## ***... but will the hopes be met?***

- ***Disarmament in Kenya***

Though initially we were very pleased with the signing of the MoU and the visit of President Kenyatta to our region, we are very displeased at ***the lack of attention to disarmament in the Turkana region***. This is insufficiently mentioned in the MoU, which states: “*to eliminate illegal flow of small arms and light weapons into the region*”. This is not very convincing because of an inadequate stand from the Kenyan Government that indicates nothing in the joint work plan about how this will be achieved. In that sense, the President of the Republic of Kenya did not satisfy the expectations of the Karamojong pastoralists, who wanted him to honour the losses of their loved ones who died in cross-border cattle raids by armed gangs of Turkana on the northeastern side of Kaabong and Kotido Districts of Karamoja. Neither the speeches at the event nor the MoU and work plan indicate any plan or time frame for disarmament or hint sufficiently as to whether the Kenyan Government is willing and committed to disarm Turkana and Pokot pastoralists or whether the Kenyan Defence Force will take full responsibility for doing so. In addition, as this is a cross-border MoU, we would have expected also visits from the South Sudanese President and the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia to discuss cross-border trade. In that sense, the visit of President Kenyatta is not enough to satisfy the opportunities anticipated by the Karamojong.

- ***Financing the MoU***

During the signing of the MoU, it remained very unclear how the action plan embedded in the MoU will be financed. Both Kenyan and Ugandan authorities have yet to commit resources to support the implementation of the MoU work plan. Both governments seem to count on development partners (donors) whose indicators on the sustainability of the programme cannot be detected or established. Everything lies in their hands. UNDP has already agreed to allocate \$950,847<sup>1</sup> as per the joint work plan (2019–2023).

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<sup>1</sup> The Kenya–Uganda (Turkana/West Pokot–Karamoja) Cross-Border Programme for Sustainable Peace and Development Implementation Roadmap: Joint Workplan 2019+(2020–2023)

- ***Rangelands Management and Pastoralism Policy***

Ongoing cross-border conflicts between pastoralists are mainly linked to livestock theft and access to natural resources, not only limited to pasture and water but also extending to markets for pastoral products. These conflicts usually take place during the dry season (when water and pasture are scarce). Turkana and Pokot pastoralists migrate to Karamoja during the dry season and, in doing so, are often involved in conflicts around access to grazing and watering areas for their livestock. Resource sharing between pastoralists is therefore critical in enhancing cross-border peace, which is supposed to be supported by the MoU. This means that Uganda as a country should now effectively pass the Rangeland Management and Pastoralism Policy (RMPP) that has remained a draft after having been transferred from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) to the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). If passed, the policy will enable efficient and sustainable utilisation and management of rangeland resources including water, forests, pastures, and livestock resources (livestock genes for research). In addition, the RMPP will allow for better wildlife conservation and protection of the biodiversity found in the greater cattle corridor of Uganda. Besides passing this policy, this MoU should also call for the passing of the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) Transhumance Protocol, which is designed to support cross-border pastoralism and trade between Turkana, Toposa, Masai, Samburu and Pokot in the four countries of Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania.

It was such a great opportunity and honour for Karamojong, Turkana and Pokot to witness the signing and launch of the cross-border MoU on sustainable peace and development, in the hope that the Governments of Kenya and Uganda would simultaneously inject required resources that can spur financial investment according to the joint cross-border work plan. However, as government commitment to financing the MoU is still very low and some crucial elements have not yet been incorporated, we remain cautious about the possible positive effects of this MoU. For successful achievement of the Uganda–Kenya cross-border MoU and joint work plan, the Kenyan Government should begin a disarmament initiative in its entire country, knowing that it is state failure to have an illiterate and under-empowered community in possession of illegal guns. To be continued...

Loupa Pius, Karamojong youth and pastoralist rights advocate in Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia ([daahman89@gmail.com](mailto:daahman89@gmail.com))

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