

# THE K A R A M O J A PASTORALIST

Stories Of Survival, Resilience and Change

**Mobile Technology  
for Mobile People**



Magazine by





# THE K A R A M O J A PASTORALIST

**Herders during conflict  
resolution at Kanakemer  
kraal, north of Moroto Town**

THE K A R A M O J A  
**PASTORALIST**  
 TEAM 2016 Edition



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# From the editors



**Longoli Simon Peter**  
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**W**e are honoured to introduce the first edition of “The Karamoja Pastoralist” magazine, a biannual publication supported by the Karamoja Development Forum (KDF). KDF is a volunteer-led organization that works for a Karamoja where the needs of its people, particularly pastoralists, are met; their rights to land and critical aspects of economic development are observed; and their participation in development processes is ensured. The goal of the magazine is to make the voices of Karamoja’s pastoralists heard by a wider audience. To this end, we have compiled essays, opinion pieces, and articles by individuals who come from Karamoja, and are acutely aware of life in one of the harshest yet fascinating regions of Uganda.

Although a quick internet search yields hundreds of pieces of writing on Karamoja, what sets this magazine apart is the commentary from herders living out in the rangelands or in villages on the outskirts of town (for example, see “Cows support out families”). As Karamoja emerges from the shadows of decades-long armed conflict, it is critical, in our opinion, to give a voice to the previously voiceless and to shine the spotlight once again on pastoralism. The articles in the magazine will demonstrate the struggles and the successes of Karamoja’s people, for whom livestock still reign supreme.

KDF volunteers have tirelessly recorded indigenous perspectives and

opinions through extensive field visits. They have transcribed the interviews for the benefit of non-Ngakarimojong (local language) speaking audiences. As you will see, we have made a concerted effort at making sure these perspectives remain as linguistically original as possible. Although this is unconventional, we believe that this is just one way to be true to the pastoralist. This also aligns with one of KDF’s main goals, which is to provide a local perspective to understand and address the challenges that Karamoja faces in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In addition, we would like to point out that although the majority of the indigenous voices in this issue belong to male herders, we aim to dedicate the next issue of the magazine to women. We hope to highlight women’s unique role in the pastoralist economy and recount their perspectives, stories, and struggles in a changing Karamoja.

We thank all the contributors for providing us with their perspectives, and we hope that the publication gives you, the reader, a glimpse into the life of a Karamojong herder. The editors and the entire team at KDF appreciate your feedback on content, and welcome you to further engage with us on these issues by sending us an email or joining us on the Facebook forum.

Happy reading!

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**Elders and kraal leaders during  
akiriket at KDF's 'agenda setting'  
conference in Moroto (2015)**





Naitakwae livestock market, Moroto (2016)

## The Pastoralist Information Centre

A few years ago, Karamoja Development Forum (KDF) dreamt of connecting Karamoja's pastoralists among themselves and with other stakeholders. This is because pastoralists inhabit a harsh environment with limited infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication, and health services.

In Karamoja, pastoralists make tough decisions on a periodic, if not day to day, basis in matters of resource access, migration, security as well as market access. To do this, pastoralists have to connect with other stakeholders such as neighbours and resident occupants so as to exploit such critical resources as water, pasture and nutritious livestock feed (e.g. salt licks).

Traditionally, pastoralists in Karamoja share information through *etem/ekokwa* (meeting), *Akiriket* (parliament or elders' council), or sending emissaries to the intended receivers of information in the next kraal, community or group of pastoralists (*Alomar*). Usually, a trumpet or whistle would be sounded in the wee hours of the morning, in case an issue required

the attention of the community. *Etem* or *ekokwa* (depending on the issue) is constituted and chaired by a kraal or village leader.

Recently, and increasingly, Karamoja pastoralists have embraced mobile technology to support traditional methods of communication and information sharing. Kraal leaders and shepherds use mobile phones to communicate with livestock health service providers, to access markets, to locate water and pasture, as well to ascertain the security situation and environmental conditions of places targeted for migration.

Through the support of the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA), KDF established a Pastoralist Information Centre (PIC) equipped with an Interactive Voice Recognition and Recording (IVR) system with the aim of enhancing communication and information sharing through toll free services. Starting October 2015, the PIC was fully functional to enable toll free inbound and outbound calls as well as messaging. Pastoralists are able to call in and speak to a person at KDF about issues affecting them. The PIC is enabled to record the phone call and later retrieve it for further analysis. In case the information is urgent





conversations that can meaningfully influence policy in matters of pastoralism, food security and climate change. Other components of the PIC include the action research team, online platforms (social media and the official KDF website), and focal point persons in kraals and communities who provide information. The action research team is composed of young men and women who visit kraals and communities on a regular basis to interact with members and engage in conversations, conduct interviews, and facilitate focus group discussions. This is done to document and report issues central to pastoralists living out in the rangelands. This information is shared in policy briefs and reports on social media and on the KDF website. In addition, the research team shares the PIC toll free number with herders during these meetings, and distributes plastic stickers that can be attached to the phones for future use.

Additionally, KDF uses audio visual formats to facilitate communication and information sharing. Through the help of volunteers, KDF attends community initiated meetings, documents discussions and contexts, processes these into pictures and videos to prompt discussions on similar issues in a wider context. KDF analyses community discussions to understand and process feedback from community members on issues most important to them. We talk to key kraal and opinion leaders seeking key messages that need to be heard, transform these messages into audio visual formats and use them during community meetings with pastoralists groups. We have screened video messages from key kraal leaders on such issues as livestock health, livestock trade, security, water and land rights information. This is because, pastoralism is a key livelihood supporting a large portion of Karamoja's population and deserves urgent attention in order to ameliorate food security in rural Karamoja.

Over the last year, pastoralists have increasingly appreciated and embraced the set-up of the PIC. Many kraal leaders have used the platform to connect with other individuals, communities, civil society organizations, and service providers. KDF has been instrumental in facilitating this process and aims to continue enhancing these activities to better serve its target population.

*Tebanyang Emmanuel, KDF's Policy Analyst, contributed significantly to this piece.*



and requires reference to a particular stakeholder, KDF makes a decision on how to transfer information to the pertinent person, organization or government body. The PIC also enables mass broadcasting outbound calls on such issues as livestock health, security, and water availability. This is done through a voice call, which is entered into the system and set up to make an automated call to all phone numbers recorded in the system. In case a particular phone number is unavailable or unreachable during the time of the call, the automated call redials three times in an interval of five minutes each before it is dropped.

Besides being an important technological tool, the PIC aims to provide an interactive platform to hold



**Maria Heubuch, MEP, milking a cow in Kotido (2015)**

## Two Members of **European Parliament** visit **Karamojong** pastoralists

**W**hat is pastoralism? How does it contribute to food security and to the overall economy? How do pastoralists deal with climate change? Which policies are in place for pastoralists? These were some of the questions that Maria Heubuch and Norbert Neuser, Members of European Parliament (MEPs), tried to get answers to during their visit to Uganda in October 2015. The visit was organized by VSF Belgium and Coalition for Pastoralist Civil Society Organisations (COPACSO) under the Coalition of European Lobbies on Eastern African Pastoralism (CELEP) in partnership with local civil society organisations.

### **Raising awareness on pastoralism**

The objective of the visit was twofold: first, to influence policies at the European level to establish a coherent framework of European policies (domestic, development and humanitarian) regarding pastoralism. This is done through engaging “champion” MEPs. Second, the mission aimed to raise awareness at the Ugandan level to create an enabling policy environment for pastoralists.

After a conference in Uganda, where the MEPs had the opportunity to exchange with several stakeholders including policy makers, delegates of European embassies and civil society organisations, they arrived in Karamoja for a field visit. Parliamentarians rarely have the opportunity to visit places this far outside their constituency.



The three-day visit offered them a unique chance to experience first-hand what pastoralism is and to witness aspects of pastoralist life described in policy papers.

### **Outside the class room: opportunities and challenges for pastoralism in Karamoja**

When talking about Karamoja, a gloomy picture is often presented. While not ignoring the challenges of the region, we believe that opportunities should not be overlooked. Visiting Kotido's livestock market gives a clear picture of the region's economic potential. On one of the days during the visit, the MEPs woke up before the break of dawn to visit a kraal, where Ms. Heubuch, who is a dairy farmer herself, enjoyed helping with milking the cows. The prolonged drought of 2015 was at its worst during the visit. However, it quickly became clear that despite the drought, the nutritional status of household with livestock exceeded those without. This is because the pastoralist livelihood is better-suited to adapt to climatic variations: indigenous livestock breeds are resilient against harsh environmental conditions and herd mobility enables owners to look for pasture and water, making optimal and sustainable use of their ecosystem. However, the crucial factor for adaptation, mobility, is being threatened by land encroachment. The MPs' interaction with pastoralists also highlighted several other challenges, primarily access to water and lack of veterinary services.

### **What's next?**

The impact of the visit by Members of European Parliament will be visible in the longer term, since policy development and

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**For now, we see our champion MEPs are actively engaged and are very eager to work together with CELEP.**

change is a slow process. For now, we see that both our "champion" MEPs are actively engaged and are eager to work together with CELEP. The visit also earned national publicity by appearing prominently in Ugandan national newspapers and on television.

Some initial positive outcomes are already visible. For instance, the MEPs introduced a pilot project on Participatory Rangeland Management in Kenya and Tanzania, and the importance of protecting pastoralists' land rights has been included in the New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition. In addition, a parliamentary (EU) question on reinforcing pastoralists' formal and informal structures to deal with climate change and food crisis is being prepared.

*Article by Karolien Burvenich, VSF Belgium*

*The visit was organized by VSF - Belgium with the support of COPASCO, Karamoja Development Forum (KDF), Kotido Peace Initiative (KOPEIN) and Dodoth Agropastoral Development Organisation (DADO)*

**Norbert Neuser, MEP, posing with herder in Kotido (2015)**



# Beyond cross-border pastoralism: rethinking national boundaries

Pastoralist communities are regularly accused of engaging in incessant warfare as part of their 'cultural' repertoire. Not only is this thought process simplistic, but left unchallenged, this stream of thoughts may also erroneously lead us to believe that peace may never be realized among these people. Or bluntly speaking, any efforts to reach out to them will be fruitless. On February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I received a request to write about peace as a

precondition for the fruitful mobility of populations (read pastoralists). The aim of the request was to debunk the theory of pastoralist hostility by building an ideological edifice based on the understanding that peace and pastoralism can mutually co-exist, and that the two can be combined to create room for fruitful exploitation of resources.

The aim here is simple: The search for a holistic mode of fighting poverty among pastoralists must commence, and this time around, this expedition



Herders and traders in Kanawat livestock market, Kotido (2015)



must be all inclusive and exhaustive.

This brings us to the centre of our discussion. Here we meet the Turkana of Kenya, and the Karimojong, Dodoth, and Jie of Uganda, who despite their frictions apparently caused by the scramble for scarce resources share many factors in common. Without dwelling greatly on descriptions, it is worth noting that any constructive move to break the barriers erected by post-independence national boundaries will do these communities a great favour.

What immediately comes to my mind is the impact of information on the day-to-day life of these herders. This is one point that is not confined to any single community. The knowledge gap between all pastoral communities and their local authorities forms a formidable barrier that has not only hampered effective communication and peaceful coexistence but also explains the mismatch between government plans and public needs.

To drive home the point, let's take the case of the cross-border disputes pitting the Turkana of Kenya

and the Karamojong of Uganda. The fact that some members of these communities own firearms should not cloud the discussion. I am of the view that the presence of these weapons in the hands of Turkana and Karamojong goes beyond that long-held theory of 'in-built' aggression among pastoralists. Yes, aggression exists, but its reasons are not what have been conventionally touted. At the root of this so-called aggression are economic reasons, and the fear of who controls the scarce resources (water and pasture).

With respect to these scarce resources, there is another equally disturbing question. Knowing very well that the aforementioned groups have had their fair share of confrontations for long, and that official narratives blaming lack of peace on proliferation of weapons have been exposed as lies, what prevents development stakeholders from reinventing their policies? Isn't progress pegged on acknowledging past shortcomings?

Of course, this is not a one-day activity. It is a matter that must first be informed by the social landscape of the said populations and their concept of progress. Simply speaking, development stakeholders are called upon to look at the possibility of legitimizing local knowhow and resources.

For example, migration patterns are guided by age-old rules whose application poses no technical challenges to the local populations.

A study conducted by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) on the issue of community-based mapping of pastoralist resources underlined that: "Participatory digital mapping using satellite imagery and digital earth and other open source Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a practical tool bridging the knowledge and communication gap between pastoral communities and [county] government planners<sup>1</sup>." The study acknowledges the existence of local systems that, if incorporated, would go a long way to create a good working relationship between pastoralists, government bodies and/or development partners.

While this study centered on pastoralist communities living in Kenya's Isiolo County, its findings are widely applicable. They reflect the very reality of the Turkana pastoralists and their Ugandan counterparts.

Hence the question: What can we make of this? »



» I propose that we extend the scope of this 'Isiolo finding' beyond resource mapping. It is simple: a pastoralist's life is not just about mobility. We face a real monster in the name of change. And this change has found its way to pastoral lands. The earlier pastoralists get informed of this reality, the better.

There is an idea attributed to an Indian social activist called Mr. Sanjit "Bunker" Roy that has revolutionized the way development agents interact with the not-so-literate societies. He calls his invention 'The Barefoot College'. It is simply a village-based, community-led platform that seeks to impart knowledge to illiterate rural populations in a manner that best suits their needs. His programs focus on siting water pumps near villages and training the local population to maintain them without dependence on outside mechanics, providing training as paramedics for local medical treatment, and on solar power to decrease dependence and time spent on kerosene lighting.

Evidently, some parallels exist between Mr. Roy's world and our pastoralists. The difficult access to pastoral lands can be dealt with by planting these 'barefoot colleges' among pastoralists. After all, it goes back to what the development community pontificates about regularly. It is sustainable. It is cheap. It is flexible.

Breaking physical boundaries, in my opinion, must go beyond physical mobility. Pastoralist leaders' intellectual mobility must go hand in hand with the demands of their people.

*Lemukol Ng'asike is an architect from Turkana, Kenya. He blogs at <http://lemukolwords.blogspot ug/>*

# We need a connector

*My name is Lokorikebe. It is like this, the government has written/documented issues about Kobebe (dam in Moroto District). I have listened to issues discussed by these men and realized there is nothing wrong. This water is over. You see this dam- it needs a borehole.*

*You can't drink water here if you are thirsty. It is good, my brothers, when you say let us go and hear from them, and so you take our issues to the right place and say they are crying for water, pasture and medicine for animals.*

*And you tell them you met herders in Nabokor all the way to Kobebe crying that they are facing a lot of challenges as I have mentioned.*

**Lokorikebe, kraal leader, Nabokor, North of Moroto Town (2015)**







**I come from Loregeit kraal (North of Moroto).** We know your mission is to come and understand our issues, and then forward it to the responsible people. Help connect us to the service providers within 3-4 days to bring us water, medicine and food. Please get us to those people. We have realized you are simply investigators, finding out how we are here. Please help connect us to the service providers. All pastoralists from different kraals are well represented (in this meeting) and they themselves will tell you where each comes and if you take long you will not be able to get all of them in such numbers together again because the lack of water and pastures here will force us to migrate.

I am also responding and talking about animal diseases and the issue of the Turkana. Please take it seriously. You say that there are NGOs and government offices in charge of providing water, constructing dams, providing animal drugs. What you do is you write down these issues and you take them there.

We are saying that this meeting is now the second of its kind- I am wondering if you have looked through this situation we are facing. If it takes about 10 days we do not think that you can get anybody here. Pastoralists would have spread to other parts of the region like Pokot in Kenya etc. It can't even take 5 days. That is another very important issue to us - water scarcity, take for example if you got thirsty now, there is no water for you to drink here. That is why we thank you for coming for this meeting to listen to us. This is good.



This kind of gathering is very good. We need you people (KDF team at meeting) to act as mediators, to connect us to government. Even leaders who join government do not care about us; they don't come and see us. There are people out there (who should be responsible) but do not want to come. To just come like you have done. When we finish this meeting, kindly document the events that are happening around us. These issues should be the first to be taken to responsible offices in the district and the rest will follow. We have problems with the shortage of water for animals but also for human beings to drink, as well as lack of pasture. You see this place is very dry and there is no water source. This place is far – from the villages and this old man (here) can easily die of thirst on the way. Water sources should be increased and spread to cover all these areas



# On Pastoralism and Resilience in Karamoja

Pastoralism is a subsistence pattern in which people derive their living from raising and tending to herds of large animals<sup>2</sup>. Typically, pastoralists inhabit remote, arid and semi-arid areas that are largely unsuitable for agricultural production. Pastoralist livelihoods are crucially dependent on the herders' intimate knowledge of the surrounding ecosystem and on the well-being of animal herds<sup>3</sup>. Although pastoralism is frequently regarded as outdated and backward, it continues to be the primary source of income for over 200 million people worldwide. Pastoralist production

systems may take various forms and are usually adapted to particular natural, political, social and economic environments<sup>4</sup>. The mode of subsistence is inherently flexible and is characterized by a high level of human and livestock mobility, which allows pastoralists to respond to and cope with risks, namely livestock epidemics, variations in climatic conditions, and related changes in resource availability. During drought conditions marked by pasture unavailability and water shortages, for instance, it is a common practice for herders to migrate to areas with relatively favourable conditions. Once conditions normalize,





they return to the original home areas with their herds. The three main forms of pastoralism are nomadic, transhumant, and semi transhumant, and mobility of livestock and humans in both these systems is heavily reliant on climatic conditions and the availability of pasture and water. Nomadic pastoralists tend to move their livestock and their families to areas of pasture and water as necessary, and do not have a permanent base. Agriculture is seldom practiced in true nomadism. In the transhumant pastoralist production system, individuals and their animals are highly mobile, but the movement occurs between definite seasonal bases. Transhumant pastoralists practice non-sedentary, opportunistic agriculture. Lastly, in semi-transhumant pastoralism, only a part of the herd and the family is seasonally mobile, and families maintain a semi-permanent base where cultivation is carried out.<sup>5</sup>

Karamojong pastoralists have historically relied on transhumant pastoralism for their livelihoods, although opportunistic agriculture is a common practice throughout the Karamoja region. While in the kraal herders' diet consists primarily of livestock products - milk, blood and meat. Women, children and elders who spend most of their time in the semi-permanent settlements rely mainly on sorghum and other crops, both cultivated and purchased. There is, however, a regular exchange of food between herders in the kraal and households in the villages.

Even though pastoralist communities in Karamoja – as well as in other arid and semi-arid contexts – have relied on pastoralism for centuries, governments, development professionals and policy makers have long viewed pastoralism as socially backward, economically inefficient and ecologically unsustainable. However, in contrast to common assumptions, livestock herding is not incompatible with sustainable development and resource use as has been prominently argued<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, pastoralism is a complex social system that draws on the longstanding experience and knowledge of its practitioners, which 'has permitted the maintenance of a sustainable equilibrium among pastures, livestock and people'<sup>7</sup>.

An often-repeated false idea about the pastoralist is that of the 'cattle complex', coined

by Herskovits in 1926<sup>8</sup>, which argues that, pastoralists are singularly and irrationally occupied with maximizing and hoarding cattle for reasons beyond economic well-being. It is now known that instead of 'irrational' hoarding, herd accumulation is one of many ways in which herders buffer themselves against climatic shocks. These and other risk management strategies involving animals and people have allowed pastoralists to survive amidst harsh climatic conditions and to sustainably manage rangeland resources for generations. Research has convincingly pointed out that resilience is, in fact, an inherent strength of pastoralist production systems.



**Women herders at Nabokor kraals prepare wild fruits for consumption (2015)**

Let's look at the concept of resilience in more detail at this point. The Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC, 2015) defines resilience as "the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy, to deal with change and continue to develop. It is about how humans and nature can use shocks and disturbances such as a financial crisis or climate change to spur renewal and innovative thinking. In short, resilience is the ability to cope with change<sup>9</sup>.

The understanding of resilience is fraught



**Herder taking cows to drink in Nabokor kraal, Rupa Sub County (2016)**

with controversy, problematic conclusions and misguided initiatives by development organizations. The 'capacity to deal with or cope with change' has often been understood to imply the abandoning of former practices in favour of entirely new and different ones. A closer look at the definition, however, indicates that resilience refers to society's ability to eventually return to its initial livelihood strategies after a shock; it also refers to utilizing the experience gained in the process to improve its capacity to cope with and recover from similar events in the future.

Indeed, it is risky to assume that adverse changes or disasters stem from the alleged inability of the affected society to 'develop to a higher stage'. For instance, blaming critical food insecurity among pastoralist communities on the population's reluctance to engage in agriculture completely fails to consider the environmental context in which they live and operate. In semi-arid areas where rainfall is erratic and irrigation is inaccessible, crop failure or damage is exceedingly common, thereby perpetuating the problem of hunger rather than solving it. Consequently, food insecurity in pastoralist communities should not be attributed to their supposed lack of interest in agriculture, but rather to their limited capacities to adapt their traditional livelihood strategies to the rapidly changing climatic, economic, social and political conditions. Instead of pushing pastoralists into crop farming and restricting their mobility, a more promising alternative would be to safeguard their access to rangeland resources, strengthen

their capacities in livestock keeping and enhance their ability to cope with greater market exposure.

Indeed, a paradigm shift is required - a genuine and evidence-based re-evaluation of pastoralist production systems that highlights the inherent resilience of this form of subsistence and paves the way for adequate development interventions is urgently required. So far most development initiatives, whether from the Ugandan State or NGOs, have placed a disproportionate level of emphasis on sedentarization and crop farming. However, hardly ever have these projects yielded the desired results - not least because of the lack of interest of target communities in agricultural projects aiming to divert them from their herds on which they have depended for centuries.

If communities' resilience is to be enhanced, interventions should be designed to improve their capacity to successfully overcome disasters and reduce their vulnerability to shocks. In pastoralist contexts, this would mean focusing on restocking as well as strengthening pastoralists' capacity to manage their livestock and adapt to the new challenges arising from the increasing globalisation of rural environments. It is crucial that national and international actors and policy makers recognize the resilience of pastoralism and the essential role it plays in the sustainable development of arid and semi-arid areas such as Karamoja.

*Lopor Innocent Amaese is a KDF volunteer from Lotome, Napak District.*



# Mobile technology for mobile people

I called the boys in the kraal. I will meet them in Naitakwae cattle market on Monday.

In Karamoja, pastoralists are increasingly embracing mobile technology to keep connected as they move around in search of water and pasture. Lousé told KDF the following: "You see, I called the boys in the kraal today. I will meet them in Naitakwae cattle market on Monday. We have to sell some animals so I can pay off the bills here at home." We recently went to visit Lousé at his home in Rupa Sub County, Moroto District.

**Louse Mariko,  
kraal leader,  
making a phone  
call in Rupa Sub  
County (2016)**

Lousé is a young kraal leader from Moruadakai in Nabokor village, north of Moroto town. We first met him when we were on a KDF research project aimed at understanding information sharing mechanisms among pastoralists. Lousé is also a member of the pastoralists' security committee, an informal group of herders responsible for coordinating security issues in Rupa Sub County.

"You see the other day when two run-away soldiers came and tried to steal our cows, we [phone] called the army in Kobebe. They told us the soldiers had been arrested at their 'detach'(base)." Lousé was narrating to us how he used his mobile phone to confirm that the missing soldier, who had allegedly run away with a gun, was in Kobebe.

Pastoralists use mobile technology to connect during social events as well. "My in-laws have just called me. They are coming to promise me some dowry for the marriage of our daughter. I am waiting for them now," Lokwameri, another herder in Rupa told us during our recent visit.

In Karamoja, pastoralism is largely practiced far away from urban centres, and where access to basic services is limited. Some of these lacking services include water, health care, food and proper infrastructure. Mobile technology improves access to some of these services by facilitating communication between people. "When the animals are sick, we make a call to the village so that we can get medicine. Sometimes we send the boys to collect medicine," Lousé told us at his kraal.



**Aluka Nathan, KDF volunteer, engaging herders on mobile technology in Rupa Sub County (2016)**

Mobile  
technology is a  
new invention  
for Karamoja  
pastoralists. The  
region has an  
average literacy  
rate of

12%

### Challenges to mobile technology among Karamoja Pastoralists

Mobile technology is still catching up in Karamoja, a region with under 20% literacy rate. This implies that the vast majority of herders cannot read or write. However, a mobile phone can be used even by those who cannot read or write. "On our part, we carry simple mobile phones for calling each other. We cannot send messages, how can we? We just call. We ask our friends like you to save the numbers in here, and we identify our contacts using images," said Lousé.

Lokorikebe, head kraal leader at Moruadakai wants a phone to connect with others. Before we met him, he had no phone because his child had thrown his phone in the water. "You see, I want to connect



with everyone. I want to know when you are coming so that I am ready. Here in the kraal we have no phone. We rely on our neighbours. Sometimes they are not around. Not everyone has a phone. You have to get me a phone next time you are visiting.”

Although the use of mobile technology holds great promise, poor infrastructure inhibits its full exploitation. Rangelands, where the herders keep their livestock, have unreliable network access, no electricity and no places to purchase airtime from service providers. This limits the use of mobile technology in communities living far away from urban centres. “When I want to make a call, sometimes I find no airtime. We just send a person to deliver the message. Many times this [method] takes longer. But what can we do? Again, you see the network. No network here. We have to go and look for it somewhere. Power is another issue—we cannot charge phones here. We have to send them to the towns far away for charging. This takes a week or so. It is difficult,” said Lokorikebe to KDF.

Therefore, although many more herders in Karamoja have come to rely on mobile phones to connect with their families, the government and civil society organizations,

security personnel, and with fellow pastoralists, phone use only supplements traditional modes of communication (traditional parliaments such as *etem* and *ekokwa*). There is an urgent need for the government, civil society organizations and the private sector to invest in improving infrastructure in rangelands away from the urban centres. This includes improving telecommunication service coverage, electricity provision and road networks. In addition, there is great business potential in providing simpler but durable energy and handset solutions to herders, for example selling phones that have inbuilt solar chargers. Investing in improved mobile technology holds tremendous potential for development of rural Karamoja.



## Louse calls Lomeriile

“Lomeriile, what I am telling you is, my shepherds told me that they were chased away yesterday at the watering point? ...Yes. Okay.

I am also going to escort the cattle a bit so that I can determine the problem at that pond.

Yes.

Look here, tell your boys to go to the pond at Nakulit and dig it up so that we can get clean water for our goats. I was there yesterday and the water has got dirty. My goats are drinking from the other old borehole.

..Yes, yes.

Teba sends you his greetings”



**PIC receiver at Karamoja  
Development Forum Office**



















# Cows support our families

**M**y name is Aleper Peter Naangorlup. The way I am (staying) in this kraal,

I see the cow is good to me. It helps me in so many ways. During planting season (March/April), when it gives birth, it helps me with a balanced diet. I look after it well by protecting it from ticks and other diseases.

When it has given birth and someone visits me, I give him/her fresh milk as food to eat. Also, I can send for my children and

grandchildren in the village to come in turns to drink the milk here in the kraal. That is how the cow is good to me, especially now that there is drought. And if it was those days when the cows were many and the civil conflicts had not ended, we would survive in this drought.

From the cow, I can get milk, blood, and other things. When you have a cow, you can drink some milk, and store some in the gourd and extract ghee from it, which can be melted to form butter on another day. The milk from which ghee is extracted is turned into yogurt which can be consumed immediately or kept for a week or longer in its



sour form. Other milk can be boiled or drank as it is. It is ghee and butter and sour milk that can stay for a long time. During times of hunger like this, it's rare to keep milk because people finish it immediately, especially the sour milk. We can extract fresh blood and mix it with milk, drink it fresh, boil or roast it.

Most of the challenges we encounter while looking after animals have to do with diseases, and looking for pasture and water. The most common animal diseases affect the liver and the lungs. There's also one that makes the animal develop spots on the skin.

Our animals are no longer as healthy as they used to be, so we constantly need medicine to help us take care of them. Medicine is what has kept /is keeping the cow. If you don't have medicine, you don't have the cow. Even with goats - if medicine is over you eat the meat because the animal will die.

Generally, the cattle are fair, save for the ticks that keep "disturbing" them, but those we simply pick and throw on the fire. We don't get much help in fighting animal diseases. When herders realize that the animal is sick we go buy medicine if it is available. They (the government or NGOs) call us for vaccination once in a while. So, we rarely get help save for these vaccination services they bring to us occasionally. In the past, they used to bring a lot of things including different drugs, as well as vaccines and cattle troughs for dipping cows to prevent ticks.

We also have marketing problems. The livestock markets for us are quite far. If you come out here in the bush to buy animals, people might think you are a thief. So, all of us are encouraged to take our animals to the common market - even the nearest one that we can access.

*Aleper Naangorlup is a kraal leader from Moruadakai near Kobebe Dam. The interview was conducted by Martha Angella (former Communications Officer for KDF) and transcribed by Sam Luomo (Research and Advocacy Assistant, KDF)*



**Herders in Rupa Sub County (2015)**

# Conflicts over livestock could worsen climate change effects in the Karamoja Region

**W**hile Karamoja is generally peaceful, and livestock thefts are at an all-time low, occasional thefts, particularly those involving cross-border groups are known to occur, putting a strain on the existing security situation and exacerbating access to scarce resources.

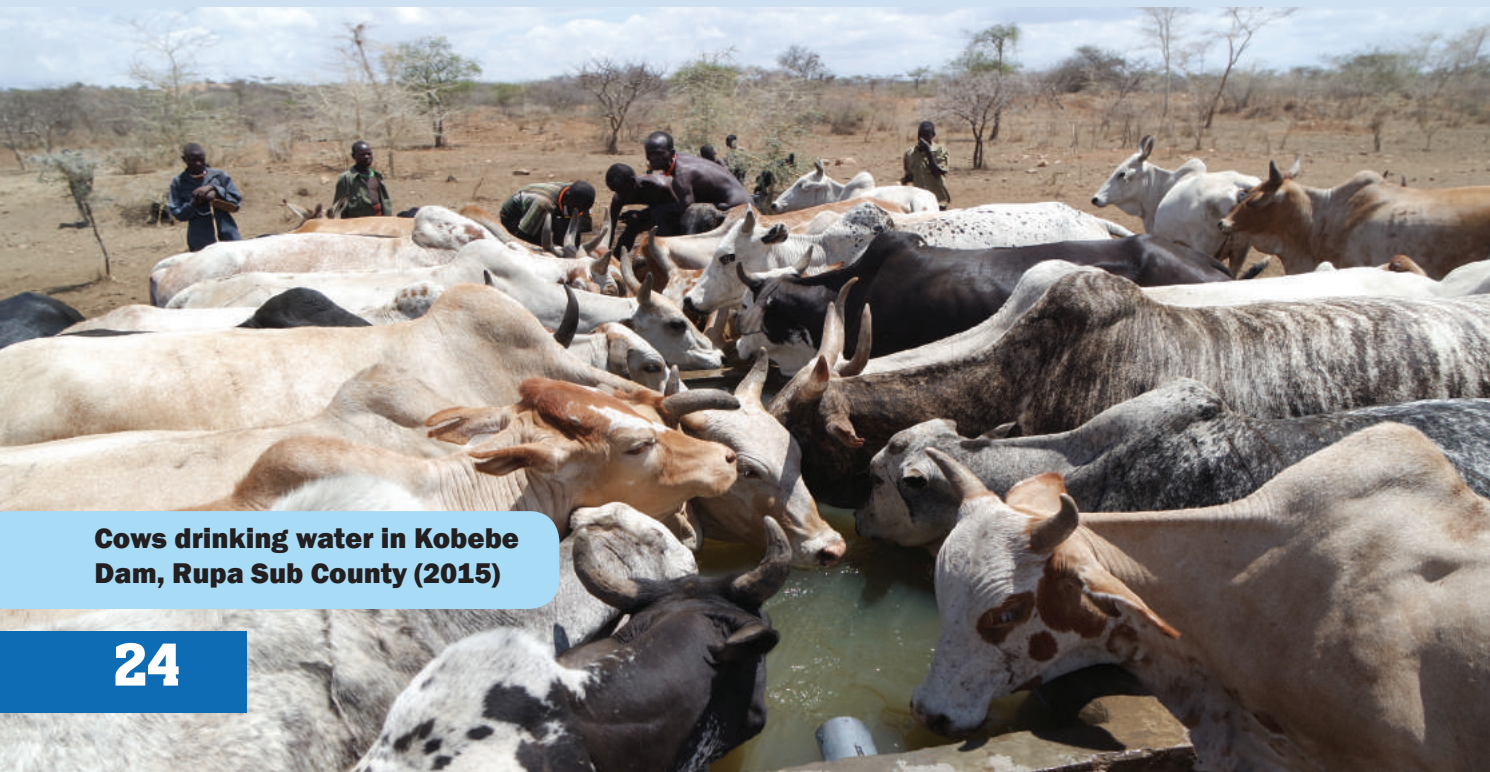
The year 2015 did not end well for herders in Karamoja as low scale livestock thefts became large-scale cattle raids of Jie cattle by Turkana herders in Kotido District. The raids, carried out with the help of automatic weapons, resulted in to the reported loss of about 250 heads of cattle. The District authorities and the United Nations have recorded other such attacks in Kaabong District as well.

The events occurred between the Jie and Turkana

communities around grazing areas in the districts of Moroto, Kotido, Kaabong, all of which, while being in Uganda, also host Turkana herders. These conflicts have led to a panic among the groups due to fear of an escalation of full scale conflicts such as those of the past. In the politics of conflict over livestock, no single incident is treated in isolation, as even a single incident can have a ripple effect in the rest of the region.

## Conflicts are heating up

The El Nino rains of the last quarter of 2015 ensured that more water sources were available for pastoralists in the grazing areas. In the areas of Apule, Kobebe, Kalosarich, and Kotein, among others, small watering points made it possible for drier season grazing grounds to be freed for later use. The grazing area around Kobebe dam in Moroto, for example, was freed up as opportunity was sought elsewhere.



**Cows drinking water in Kobebe Dam, Rupa Sub County (2015)**





**Livestock drinking water in Nabokor kraals, Rupa Sub County (2015)**

However, the conflicts in these areas have forced an unexpected and untimely movement of Turkana herds south to the area of Matheniko (Moroto District). As of the second week of January 2016, Turkana herders were grazing their herds below the Apule river, nearer Lokisilei, Pupu, Ateedeoi and Lobuneit villages in Rupa Sub County.

Fears of conflict are palpable due to the concentration of large herds near smaller dams and grazing areas, which is leading to their exhaustion at a faster rate. Grazing grounds near villages are usually saved by pastoralists for the cattle that are kept in homes for milk while the large herds go to the farther dry season grazing grounds. It is these dry season grounds that are now being threatened with exhaustion.

Will resource scarcity and climate change force cooperation or exacerbate conflict?

In the meetings that we have been part of, the Matheniko community has maintained that they do not want 'asiilio' or 'carelessness' of both the Turkana and Jie to spread. They fear that because of the Turkana moving

closer to the Matheniko, they may be perceived as an alliance and face insecurity from neighboring groups.

In all these conflicts, however, a severance of ties is not an option. Host communities are aware that accommodating visiting herds is both a reality as well as the responsibility of every herder in an unpredictable situation. This access is regulated through several traditional options of managing grazing economics and politics. With increased government presence and relevance, the Kenyan and the Ugandan State, and other actors, in our view, should facilitate dialogues and actions aimed at reaching amicable solutions between the communities.

The herders are keenly aware of the vagaries of their environment, which is becoming increasingly unpredictable because of climate change (not a concept unknown to them). Given the long history of devastating livestock raids of the preceding decades, herders in Karamoja are cognizant of the fact that intergroup conflicts are not only costly and counterproductive, but that they also exacerbate existent environmental problems.

## The situation in Matheniko Moroto

In Nakamarkemer dam, north of Rupa Sub County, a heated community meeting between the Turkana and Matheniko ensued over water resource sharing. It was alleged that the Turkana had moved in close to the Matheniko with huge numbers of livestock to access water from the dam meant for domestic livestock. Represented by their leaders, the Turkana were pleading for access to the same water. The Matheniko fear that the water, if shared, will not be enough to sustain domestic livestock, especially calves. It was agreed in the community meeting to grant the Turkana access for one day, following which they would need to migrate in search of water elsewhere.

The Turkana herders are happy they have been given a day's access to the water. They drive their animals to drink. We go back after the next day and find out that there is no actual watering of animals in the small dam. Even Matheniko cattle are not drinking water from there because the water is being saved for goats, calves, and for human consumption. This is because there is no borehole nearby for access to potable water. The people are generally unhappy that the Turkana and the Jie are in conflict. "When it is time to go to Kobebe" one kraal leader told us, "we will get the Turkana and the Jie to talk and make peace over that water."

The KDF team is very excited to learn about the level of organization of the kraals, the way herders manage their conflicts, and, most importantly, how they enforce their decisions.



Kraal leader at Loregeit kraals, Rupa Sub County (2015)

## A cattle economy in crisis

I met John Logwee, 50, at his home in Acholi Inn on the outskirts of Moroto town on a recent Tuesday. I had previously scheduled to meet him for this interview but had arrived just after his cows and goats had been let out to graze.

We decided to walk two or three kilometres to where his animals were grazing- about three miles away.

We arrived at a weather-beaten field west of Mount Moroto, full of sun-baked grass, and what was left of the sorghum stalks after an abysmal crop season. He told me the grass was good enough for his cows as the dry season is setting in.

Logwee showed me some of his animals that wore ear-tags, and told me that the tags were

installed when government started branding animals with the bolus chip, an electronic metallic device for tracking animals, with the intention of curbing cattle rustling in the region. The technology was copied from Botswana because of its success there.

The bolus chip was unpopular among the pastoralists, and was externally imposed with no positive results – or it did not lead to the recovery of any animals. If anything, he told me, it made cattle rustling more commercial as thieves would sell off the animals with the chips.

“I actually lost one cow to the device, as the heavy metal had gone through the intestine of the cow, causing complications that resulted in its death. The metal is a foreign body, you know,” he said.



The bolus chip project was not a success with some herders in districts like Nakapiripirit who refused to get their cows to swallow the chip because of the stories they had heard elsewhere. One of the reasons for its failure was that like other projects in Karamoja, the herders were not consulted in its implementation. It was largely seen as a project from Kampala and the benefits were not known.

The same month the electronic branding started in 2011, one herder in Namalu Sub County, Nakapiripirit district told me that he was aware of the government's sedentarization efforts, and would resist the electronic branding exercise. No cow was branded in that sub county.

Like many pastoralists, Logwee said he did not know the number of his cows or goats and only knows them by the colour of their hair or their lineage. By my estimate, his cows may have been forty and goats around a hundred. He told me with these animals, he may be one of the richest among the Matheniko now, after the heavy cattle losses of the early 2000s. He could have been among the poor in the decades before the new millennium.

"The cattle are over. There are no animals now. In the past people used to have cows in both kraals and villages, and in thousands. But they are not there now. In the past most people in a village owned cows. Currently it is one or two people in a whole, big village who own a few cows," he said.

The Karamojong on the Ugandan side of the international border have lost more cattle than their neighbours, the Turkana. This, Logwee says, is because the Turkana did not have internal conflicts and, therefore, do not raid amongst themselves. For this reason, he says the Turkana own more cows than the Karamojong.

The Turkana also did not undergo the enforced and at time brutal disarmament process which led to the massive depletion of livestock.

"We lost more cows during the disarmament process than during the raiding decades," said an elder in Moroto Municipality who spoke to me on conditions of anonymity.

The cows were restrained in what were popularly called the 'Protected Kraals' - a single kraal next to the army barracks where all animals from the nearby parishes and sub counties were to remain

during the night, while being herded by the army during the day to protect the animals during the disarmament.

"The cows were confined - restricted to bad grass for the sake of protection at the barracks. If the cows were confiscated by the army, they would not come back. Then there were fears of being imprisoned and falsely accused of owning a gun. If you were imprisoned for whatever reasons, your



**Livestock drug sellers in Panyangara livestock market, Kotido (2016)**

relatives would have to sell cows to bail you out, or if you were accused of having a gun, your relatives would have to get one - even if it meant purchasing it on their own - to 'return' it to the army for you," the Elder said, "This was commonly referred to as 'purchasing people,' so called because you literally paid money to get your relative out of the barracks.

Those kraals were not truly protected. On 28<sup>th</sup> January 2010, Nakapiripirit herders lost an estimated 5000 heads of cattle to suspected Kenyan raiders under suspicious circumstances. A number of such protected kraals 'lost' animals under similar circumstances. Those animals,



like many others lost in similar circumstances in Karamoja would never be recovered.

Animals remained in the barracks under deplorable conditions for extended periods of time, with no recourse to productive pasture. If there was drought, the herders did not have the means of migrating in search of better conditions for the animals. This went on for a total of ten years.

### **Relief came only in 2011.**

As the active disarmament process drew to a close, and a semblance of peace installed, the Karamojong herder would be confronted anew with challenges of the recovery process. The government would become bent on enforcing sedentism, with almost all its livelihoods investment in Karamoja geared toward supporting and promoting crop production. Almost all Non-Governmental Organisations would support 'alternative livelihoods', an NGO working phrase to refer to forms of livelihood other than those related to animals, in which millions of dollars are spent annually. The 'alternative livelihoods' to the NGOs have included vegetable growing, honeybee keeping, other casual labour and petty trades.

"The government does not like the way the Karamojong keep their animals – the numerous herds cause soil erosion and thus need to be confined. There is not a single way the government is helping the herders (in pastoral production)," said Logwee to me.

"We expected the government to leave the Karamojong to freely graze their animals, leave land for animal production and not restrict herds within district borders. Currently, you need to write a letter

to a district official in order to be able to move your animals within Karamoja's districts," he said.

We got up from the shrub tree under which we were sitting. As if to emphasize Logwee's point, his animals had gone within an hour to the area at the foot of Mount Moroto, approximately five miles away, for better grass and water. Referring to the distance his animals had moved, he told me, that nothing illustrates better that mobility is an undeniable factor of cattle production. He told me nothing illustrates that better, saying mobility is an undeniable factor of cattle production.

The Elder, who has been walking with us, goes on to reiterate this point.

"There should be no restriction. Mobility is health, mobility is wealth. Cows should leave from this location, go and eat grass in Nakonyen, then leave that place and go elsewhere leaving that grass and bushes to grow," he said.

Since the beginning of the year, Nakonyen, a big kraal south of Moroto which hosts animals of Tepes and Pokot herders suffered from rampant animal diseases. The reason, according to the Elder, is that the animals stayed in the area longer than they should have without moving to another area.

Logwee and indeed all the herders I have spoken to over the past two years are optimistic about the future of pastoralism in Karamoja. This optimism is based on the peace that they hope continues to be consolidated, and mobility that they say simply cannot be denied them. There also remains the hope that Government and NGOs will relent and redirect support to a sector that better suits their life.

In May this year, I visited the Kraal of Lokuda in





Kotido. At that time the kraal was in Kaileny in Nakapelimoru Sub County, south east of Kotido district. The areas around Nakapelimoru were witnessing conflict between herders and cultivators due to agricultural extension in erstwhile grazing areas.

The owner of the kraal, Lokuda Lobokongole, is a young man of around nineteen years, whose ability to stay in the kraal and head it is one of the manifestations of the relative peace in the region. In Karamoja in the recent past, it was rare to find a young man as kraal leader.

We talked into the night. When I asked him about the herder – cultivator conflict, he told me:

“It is only peace that will save us from this conflict. They are really pressing hard on our grasslands. As long as there is peace, we will not fight as we will move with our cows. Without peace, we shall fight over these resources”. Three weeks later, he told me he had moved his kraal as tensions escalated. He had shifted to Katamanyang in the same Sub County. In Nakapelimoru Sub County in Kotido district lives Lokong Apakoima, an elder of around 60 years of age who has devoted most of his time since the early 2000s to working for peace. He has many painful memories of the tumultuous times

**Keeping  
animals  
is unlike  
cultivation,  
where your  
work is subject  
to vagaries  
of weather.  
Keeping  
cattle is like  
education.  
With  
education you  
are sure you  
will succeed in  
life.**

of disarmament and cattle rustling, which resulted in the death of close family members. He has now joined a peace committee to work towards peace and his weekly routine involves peace meetings, discussions, and crossing to Turkana, Kenya for trade and peace-making.

Lokong Apakoima always has a ready answer on matters of peace and pastoralism.

“Pastoralism is going forward. There is no going back because we now have security. Now that we have got peace and the cows are no longer at the protected kraals, our animals are going to multiply. The trade with neighbours in Kenya is also going well in terms of animal exchange,” he said.

#### **Logwee illustrates his optimism in parallel:**

“With peace, the pastoralists will get more cows. They have undergone shock because of raiding and disarmament, but with these conditions, the numbers of cattle will increase.

“If you look at Moroto town, it is the ‘ex-pastoralists’ who are now providing casual labour, digging foundations for houses. With this peace, the cows will come back. People should better prepare labour alternatives for the future.



**Livestock drinking water at Nakwakwa dam, South of Moroto (2015)**





**Mass livestock vaccination,  
Nadunget Sub County (2015)**

Karamojong are a proud people. They do not like petty jobs,” he said.

When I asked The Elder about the pastoralists doing odd jobs in town, he confirmed what Logwee had told me.

“They have basically lost their masculinity because some of them now run errands for women in town. They are really forced because they need to survive, they are enduring. With time and with our traditional system of sharing animals, figures will swell at the kraals, and there will be less people here[town],” he said.

As we wound up the interview, I asked Logwee how much his animals mean to him. With five years of working on Karamoja issues particularly with pastoralists, I did not expect anything different.

“These animals mean life to me. I am called Logwee because of these animals. They are my home, my children, and my women. They are everything to me. When I am in their midst, like now, I know neither thirst nor hunger. I am just feeling great,” he said. As we joined the main road to walk back to his home, he struck a comparison that continues to elude many government officials, NGOs, and donors.

“Keeping animals is unlike cultivation, where your work is subject to vagaries of weather. Keeping cattle is like education. With education, you are sure you will succeed in life. Your dreams come true with keeping animals as long as there is peace,” he said.

When I went home to Namalu, Nakapiripirit in early October, my taxi stopped at a market in the Sebei district of Kween on the Mbale – Nakapiripirit road. Passengers got out to purchase matooke and fresh milk. When I asked them why they were taking fresh milk to Karamoja, a woman told me that Namalu town now receives supplies of fresh milk every morning from Kween district. Nothing underpins the cattle crisis in Karamoja more than the ‘import’ of fresh breakfast milk.

Just how do you revive a cattle economy in crisis? I am sure the solution is not in growing vegetables.

*Simon Peter Longoli is a journalist and researcher originally from Namalu, Nakapiripirit District. He is currently based in Kampala.*



# Alomar - the pastoralist organisational structure

**A** *lomar* is an organizational unit made up of several *kraals* (*ngawuyoi*). An *alomar* generally led by a man belonging to the older age sets who is not elected per se but chosen unanimously based on particular qualities including his experience, leadership and communication skills, his concern for and knowledge about livestock, his love of people, and the respect he has earned within his community. In the words of Adupa, a herder in Moroto District, the leader of an *alomar* is “a person that cares for people, livestock and everyone [...] and [i]f he speaks in *akiriket* (a council of elders, or a traditional parliament), everyone will listen to him.”

An *alomar* leader's overall responsibility is to ensure the wellbeing and security of the livestock and people in his unit. Specifically, the roles of an *alomar* leader include calling for *etem/ekokwa* (meeting) in case of any issues affecting the residents of the *alomar*; making decisions along with other *kraal* leaders on the movement of herds;

or ascertaining whether the entire *alomar* should relocate; and informing the appropriate external authorities in case of any new issues or challenges.

Once the leader realizes that there is a need for *alomar* to move to another location with greater resource availability, he calls for an *etem/ekokwa* with *kraal* leaders to discuss the matter. Generally, a shift in location needs to be carefully prepared. First, available pastures and water resources as well as thorn bushes for fencing need to be located, and potential security threats have to be assessed and considered. In case there appears an issue affecting the plan to move the *alomar*, the trumpet is blown in the evenings to call for another gathering of men. For example, if a woman within the *alomar* has recently given birth, they may decide to move at a later point so as to allow the new mother to regain her strength.

By virtue of being a highly respected person, the decisions of an *alomar* leader are not challenged. If he denies access to a certain grazing area to protect it for future use, the herders must follow

Women during a traditional ceremony in Pupu Village, Rupa Sub County (2016)



his orders. Should anyone fail to comply with the decisions taken by the leader, they are caned with sticks, asked to explain their indiscipline, and required to slaughter a bull as punishment. The leader of an *alomar* is typically represented by selected people who assume his role during his absence, and assist in locating productive pasture and water resources for livestock herds.

Apalopira, the leader of the *alomar* at Taaba



**Herders in Naitakwae livestock market, Moroto (2016)**

in Nakonyen (south of Moroto) describes the activities in the *alomar* as follows: during the dry season (Nov/Dec – March), a whistle is blown early in the morning to call for an *ekokwa* (meeting) to discuss where to graze the livestock on that day. Responsibilities within their *Alomar* are distributed where one group takes care of small stock (sheep and goats), another of the cows, and the third oversees mapping of grazing areas and water points early in the morning. The persons sent to map available resources will meet with those herding to inform them about where to go for water and pasture.

### **Inter-ngalomarin - communication (ngalomarin = plural of alomar)**

When herding their livestock, shepherds belonging to one *alomar* may meet with shepherds from other *ngalomarin*. These encounters are key occasions for exchanging information and/or increasing one's communication networks. Loru Max, member of an *alomar* in *Kapetakiakine* (between Moroto and Napak Districts) describes the exchange of information as follows: Herders communicate while herding livestock, and exchange their mobile phone contacts. In case an animal gets lost or mistakenly enters another herd, herders inform one another via phone calls to identify the location of the lost animal, and ensure that it is kept safe. Apart from phone calls, visits to other kraals are a crucial way to stay in touch and exchange information. Members of the *alomar* in *Kapetakiakine* may visit kraals and villages in Kangole, Narengemoru or Kautakou (all in Napak District), and at the same time welcome visitors to their own *alomar*. Importantly, courtesy visits to each other's kraals are seen as contributing to maintaining peace and security.

However, communication does not only take place within and between *ngalomarin*, but also between *ngalomarin* and government authorities. In case of issues that require the attention of the (local) government, the leader of the affected *alomar* will contact the responsible Local Council chairperson at the village level (LC 1), who then informs the relevant government officials or authorities. Should there be a problem pertaining to livestock health, the LC 1 will then inform the Community Animal Health Workers who in turn contact the District Veterinary Officer for his attention. In case of a security-related issue, the LC 1 will inform the Local Council at the Sub County level (LC 3) who communicates with the Ugandan army (UPDF). According to the interviewees, the communication networks of *ngalomarin* do not typically include the police because cases of domestic violence, which are the mandate of the police, occur mainly in villages and not in kraals and therefore make contacting the police unnecessary.





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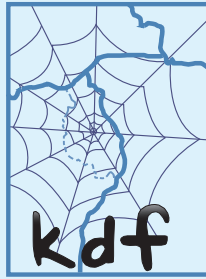
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**Young herder watering sheep and goats at a borehole trough, Pupu village, Rupa Sub County (2016)**





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