



Karamoja Development Forum
Land | Pastoralism | Governance

FOR KARAMOJONG, PASTORALISM IS OUR FUTURE, NOT OUR PAST



Karamojong pastoralists mark akiudakin, a migration festival in January 2019: Karamoja Development Forum

Even for a community accustomed to waking up to some damning newspaper stories, the Daily Monitor newspaper article “Government moves to abolish nomadic pastoralism” of April 29th 2019 sent ripples both on and off social media. In the article, the State Minister for Karamoja Affairs, the State Minister for Agriculture and their technical officials are quoted as asserting that plans are under way to “abolish nomadic pastoralism and embrace agriculture and paddocks” in Karamoja. In doing so, the Ministers confirm their intention to “transform Karamojong from the habit of surviving on handouts to self-sustainability with or without food aid”.

This statement is worrying, in particular for the local pastoralist communities, accounting for the majority of the Karamojong population. Although the Government’s intention to transform Karamojong to self-sustainability is progressive, the move to abolish pastoralism is not in the right direction because it violates the rights of pastoralists. Sustainably developing Karamoja means building on the strength of pastoralists and protecting their interests.

Opportunities and challenges of semi-sedentary livestock keeping in Karamoja

Besides the incorrect use of the term “nomadic” – as what exists in Karamoja are different semi-sedentary forms of livestock production supplemented by both opportunistic and regular crop cultivation – these statements are particularly worrisome, confusing and defy existing law and well-established evidence on the viability of pastoral production in arid and semi-arid environments. In Karamoja, crop farming is not viable in over two thirds of the region, in which only supplementary agriculture – in addition to semi-sedentary livestock keeping – is possible. Semi-sedentary or transhumant livestock production is, in fact, a principal source of household nutrition and income, besides being suited to local ecological conditions.

Nevertheless, Karamojong pastoralists face widespread challenges, particularly with regard to food security. In order to address this

situation, in December 2018, a joint statement of the local governments of Karamoja called for investments in water infrastructure and other investments such as veterinary services to enable increased livestock production. One of the main recommendations of this statement reads: “development plans in Karamoja should ensure that the pastoral way of life of the Karamojong people is maintained for sustainable livelihoods development.”

An enabling policy environment

Until recently, government policies in general have been in favour of pastoralism. Even though there are some specific concerns in the Ugandan legal framework with respect to pastoralism, key laws still guarantee certain rights of pastoralists. Provisions related to land rights, property rights, mobile production and rangelands as enshrined in the Ugandan Constitution and visible in, among others the land act, the land policy, mining and conservation laws, are overall favourable. In 2013 for instance, the National Land Policy was approved in which the Government articulated its commitment to protect the land resources of pastoralists by ensuring that pastoral lands held, owned and controlled by pastoral communities are registered under customary tenure.

Unclear Government position on pastoralism

Notwithstanding the overall enabling policy environment, it has become evident over the years that government actors do not fully appreciate mobility-based pastoral production in Karamoja and the existing enabling policies. In particular in times of food insecurity, policymakers need to understand the dominant food systems and must support these both for recovery as well as long-term sustainability of the region. Statements such as those mentioned in the article calling for the abolition of pastoralism reflect the confusion over the Ugandan Government’s stance on pastoralism and deviates from its commitments to protect the rights of pastoralists. Moreover, in May 2019 at the closing ceremony of the Land Awareness Week in Moroto, Hon. Persis Namuganza, the State Minister of Lands,

informed stakeholders that “all rangelands used by pastoralists must be given priority in order to secure ownership rights as soon as possible”.

Based on recent evidence from different research partners, the Karamoja region is best suited for pastoralist modes of production and these factors are required for it to succeed:

- Mobility of livestock and herders is fundamental to sustain the contribution of Karamoja’s livestock sector to household food security, local and national economy;
- **Grazing areas should be protected** and traditional mechanisms of land use and management, in addition to traditional mechanisms of conflict resolutions require adequate support;
- Livestock based livelihoods require widespread support as viable business because it can thrive to support livelihoods and contribute to the national economy;
- **Participatory, just and equitable** allocation, distribution and sharing of resources within the livestock production system.

We, Karamojong civil society organisations, working with private and public institutions based on the needs of our people, call upon the Government to:

- **Demonstrate its commitment across** all public institutions towards pastoralism and agro-pastoralism by undertaking measures to finalise the proposed rangelands policy and pass it at cabinet level;
- Increase investment in pastoralism that would lead to increased production and productivity through enhanced livestock value chain, water for production, market access and land tenure security;
- In the case of **Karamoja**, take measures to **ensure a transparent and fair extractives sector** to protect the rights of pastoralists; in the short term, request the presidential commission of inquiry in to land issues to **investigate land conflicts** in the region.

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Endorsed by



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