

CONFERENCE REPORT  
**The future of traditional  
societies in Africa**  
THE KARAMOJA REGION OF UGANDA

Date: Thursday November 27th

Venue: Remonstrante church

Coehoornsingel 14

Groningen, Netherlands



university of  
groningen

Report prepared by:  
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### ***About the Karamoja awareness raising campaign across Europe***

The conference took part in the Europe-wide Karamoja campaign that approaches, in an interdisciplinary way, issues of development and sustainability as well as questions of past, current and future relationships and cultural understandings between European and East African societies in the context of globalisation. The conference focused on the case of pastoralist societies in East Africa and especially Karamoja and the Karamoja cluster.

Karamoja is a crisis region in North-Eastern Uganda, bordering Kenya and Sudan with Ethiopia nearby.

The Karamoja campaign is supported by the European Commission, coordinated by the French NGO ACTED together with the Institute for Theory and Research on Cultures and the Arts (IKKK) at Leuphana University Lüneburg in Germany and the Czech NGO PIN and includes seminars and events at universities and schools in 5 European cities (Bordeaux, Geneva, Groningen, Lüneburg, Prague). Awareness raising events and meetings at the EU Commission and Parliament will take place in January 2009 in Brussels.

### ***About the Groningen Conference***

The conference in Groningen followed a first conference that took place in Lüneburg in Germany. Both events offered an unprecedented occasion to bring together some interdisciplinary groups of experts of the Karamoja region, East Africa and of pastoralism worldwide.

In Groningen, several institutions invited African partners to participate to the conference, which drew together representatives from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania. This regional perspective highlighted the importance of cross-border matters within the Karamoja Cluster and broadly speaking throughout pastoral areas of East Africa. Some Karimojonges living in Europe, like teacher Florence Naduk from Groningen, were also present and all stressed the need to break the cycle of marginalization affecting Karamoja as well as other pastoralist communities in the region.

In addition to presentations and debates, special sessions gave rhythm to the conference, e.g. the projection of the documentary film "Land of Thorns: struggling for survival in Karamoja", by Steffen Keulig and Sacha Kagan, and a half-hour live music show by the young Dutch-Ugandan artist Esther Engelhard.

We invite you to consult the full presentations of the conference on our website:  
[www.karamoja.eu](http://www.karamoja.eu)

## ***Acknowledgements***

We would like to express our gratitude to all participants, supporters and helpers, without whom this conference would not have been possible.

These are, first of all, the institutional supporters: The European Commission, which supports the Karamoja European Awareness Raising Campaign, but also all the other organizers that financially supported the costs of conference participants (among which CORDAID, the Institute of Development Policy and Management, the British embassy in Kampala as well as Dutch consulates in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania)

Furthermore, we thank the University of Groningen and more particularly the ECHO-funded NOHA master programme of humanitarian action for their generous availability and support.

Last but not least we would like to mention the volunteering students from the University of Groningen who worked on the conference's organization. Our special thanks to Gloria Dede, Gerber Van Erven, Mariana Gomes Neto, Sietske Goettsch, Anne Faber and Jan Duda.

Yours faithfully,

David Knaute, ACTED

NB: Of course, the responsibility for any shortcomings in this conference report lies with the writers of the report. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the positions of the different organizations whose members participated at the conference.

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## **SESSION 1: Opening (*Kerkzaal*)**

9.30 - 10.00: **Opening**

10.00 - 10.15: **Opening speech by NOHA representative, Bastiaan Aardema**

Bastiaan Aardema, who talked on behalf of the NOHA programme director Joost Herman, introduced the audience to some of the reasons of the implication of the network of humanitarian studies (NOHA) in organizing a conference on Karamoja; among other issues, he stressed the importance for the University of Groningen to promote student-initiated projects related to humanitarian affairs. He then informed the audience of the NOHA-organized conference on humanitarian studies that will take place in Groningen in February 2009 and at which occasion another panel on pastoralism will be organized by the coordinators of the Karamoja campaign.

10.15 - 10.30: **Speech by acting Chief Administrative Office for Moroto, Moses Chuma**

On behalf of the Government of Uganda, Moses Chuma officially opened the conference. He also briefly presented some of the major challenges faced by people of Karamoja.

## **SESSION 2: Presentations on Development and Cooperation in Karamoja (*Kerkzaal*)**

10.30 - 11.00: **Achilles Ssewaya, Makerere University ([assewaya@yahoo.com](mailto:assewaya@yahoo.com))**  
*The dynamics of poverty in Karamoja*

The purpose of this descriptive presentation was to provide an overview of the major problems affecting Karamoja region. The paper shows that multiple problems reinforce each other to create a poverty trap in Karamoja region. The causes of poverty in Karamoja region include; drought, food shortage, insecurity, limited access to social and economic services, and conservative cultural practices. Most of these problems stem from the marginalization of Karamoja region and targeting intervention as opposed to effective planning for the region. The presentation also suggested that overcoming the poverty trap Karamoja experience requires multiple intervention components that build on the existing local resources, using multiple actors at different levels, and phased over time.

11.00 – 11.30 **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Jessica Bowers ([bowers@un.org](mailto:bowers@un.org))**  
*Karamoja: Humanitarian Outlook and Challenges toward Sustainable Improvement*

The Karamoja sub-region of northeastern Uganda, estimated population of one million, is severely impacted by development indicators well below global and national standards in terms of access to basic services. Other contributing factors to the vulnerability of the agro-pastoral communities of the sub-region are high population growth, climate change, cultural segregation, political marginalization and the continuing forced disarmament process by government military forces. Though Karamoja is not a “normal” humanitarian operating environment, responses are being adjusted to address the immediate needs of the vulnerable populations just as other programs are dually being implemented to address the longer-term development needs. This presentation reviewed challenges in development and cooperation, community empowerment, and advocacy in terms of key issues for host governments and the international community to be addressed to fundamentally improve the lives of agro-pastoralist communities.

11.30 - 12.00: **Kagere Deborah, Makerere University ([kageredeb@yahoo.com](mailto:kageredeb@yahoo.com))**  
*Working on the access to HIV/AIDS preventive and treatment services in Karamoja*

Karamoja region was safe from the HIV/AIDS epidemic during the 1990s, by 75% lower than elsewhere in Uganda. However, today the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is 4.5% which is lower than the national average of 6.5% but quite high for a conservative society. The drivers of the

HIV/AIDS epidemic in Karamoja region are complex and diverse. Given that it is a new epidemic in the region, the level of *ignorance* about the modes of HIV transmission and prevention is still high, and stigma is widespread. *Rural-urban migration* is increasingly becoming common, due drought, conflict, poverty, and disarmament. Fearing to lose the gun to government soldiers, men desert their families leaving a woman in charge of a home. In recent years, approximately 200 and 400 females aged 15-49 left for the city to be, increasing the risks of exposure to HIV-infection. The on-going disarmament increases *sexual interaction* as well as undermining awareness campaign especially in rural area.

### **SESSION 3: Regional views on development in the pastoral context (Kerkzaal)**

13.10 – 13.40: **MRG International, Melakou Tegegn ([melakoutegegn@yahoo.com](mailto:melakoutegegn@yahoo.com))**  
*Conceptualizing development in the Pastoral Context*

The pastoral way of life has been subject of discussion and debate for decades now as it did not fit into the schema of the various schools/theories of development. On the other hand, "development" projects attempted in pastoral areas on the basis of "modernizing" them or bringing "modernization" and economic growth have all ended up in a fiasco. The origin of these failures is projecting social change, development and economic growth in pastoral communities from the lens of the dominant discourse on development, which is an integral part of Western epistemology. African governments have hitherto clung to the dominant discourse to define their development strategy, which has hardly worked not only in pastoral areas but at a country level as well. The crucial link in this dilemma is recognizing pastoralism as a viable way of life like any traditional system and able to generate growth and development through wealth accumulation based on livestock marketing. The question now is: will donors and African governments be prepared to do this? Through this presentation, the presenter argued that there is no other alternative particularly in face of an increasing process of climate change impacting heavily on the pastoral livelihood system.

13.40 - 14.10: **Practical Action, W Tuimising ([Willie.tuimising@practicalaction.or.ke](mailto:Willie.tuimising@practicalaction.or.ke))**  
*Pastoralist' Development in Karamoja Cluster: Trans-boundary Perspectives*

The presented paper argued that sustainability of development initiatives within the Karamoja Cluster will be more readily achievable with commensurate attention paid to cross-border perspectives and dynamics. A paradigm shift is imperative if governments, NGOs and other actors begin to embrace trans-boundary development planning as well as resource mobilization; in addition to enhancing synergy and collaboration. Historically, pastoral communities within the cluster lived as one, freely trading together, sharing natural resources (water, pasture, etc), intermarrying and accessing education and healthcare facilities among others. Geo-politics and discriminatory development policies among governments in the region have also exacerbated livelihood insecurity to the extent that today the region is an active theatre of armed, endemic conflict. There's no coherent policy approach to address the threats posed by easy access to small arms and light weapons; joint disarmament efforts; cross-border natural resources management and conservation; land use policies; development funding; and regional cooperation. Pastoralists within the cluster also suffer increasing vulnerability to disasters such as resource based conflicts and ravaging droughts that have decimated livestock and increased environmental refugees.

### **SESSION 4: Presentations on Youth, Gender and Community empowerment in the pastoralist context**

14.50 – 15.20: **Zebra-Crossing, Luisa Natiwi ([luisanatiwi@yahoo.de](mailto:luisanatiwi@yahoo.de))**  
*Mata-Mata: an educational project in Karamoja*

Luisa Natiwi, a native from Karamoja, will present the reason for establishing an educational project in Nakapiripirit District. She will explain the background to the project, its aims, and expose her personal views about development needs in Karamoja, as the founder and director of Zebra-Crossing.

14.50 – 15.20: **The Kids League, Trevor Dudley ([thekidsleague@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:thekidsleague@yahoo.co.uk))**  
*The use of Sports and Games to improve children's lives in Karamoja*

The presentation showed how sports can be such an extremely powerful tool for bringing about social change in African conflict zones and focused on how TKL joined the small band of NGO's prepared to support the children of this region after establishing offices in Moroto and Nakapiripirit in 2006. The challenges and successes were listed and analysed to enable the international community to understand how sports can create sustainable development that can have a real impact on the lives of children and adults within communities in such pastoralist and nomadic conflict zones. Case studies were presented of children from different clans and backgrounds with stories to illustrate such impact. Colourful and memorable photos and video were also showed that gave an insight into the challenges facing the children and how they are overcoming these through sport. It was hoped that this presentation would increase awareness of the plight of the people in Karamoja and lead to significantly greater support and funding being made available to expand such sports programmes further into the rural communities and into other districts. It was also hoped that this presentation would encourage international academics and researchers to link with us to provide opportunities for collaboration as we strive to advocate the use of sports as a vehicle for social change.

14.50 – 15.20: **CORDS, Lillian Looloitai ([nakuyiet@yahoo.com](mailto:nakuyiet@yahoo.com))**  
*Pastoralism and gender: the case of pastoralist women empowerment in Arusha and Manyara regions in Tanzania, East Africa*

Despite an enabling legal framework, there are still gender imbalances and inequalities in Tanzania that prevent the society as whole from realizing its full potential in all social, economic, legal and political development spheres. For example, whereas women owned houses traditionally in some of the societies such as the Maasai, experience has shown that as houses gained more value, ownership changed hands from women to men. Approximately 30% of households in Tanzania are headed by women. Poverty reduction strategies recognize that women in general and female headed households particularly, need to play a strong role if poverty is to become history. Women's access to education is disappointing especially at higher levels. For example whereas school enrolment of girls in primary schools is half that of boys, this drops further in secondary school level to just 17% of total enrolments. As education is a key to gender equity, there have been some initiatives in recent years designed to increase women's access to education at all levels. This paper seeks to unearth some of the aspects in which women in the pastoral community have experienced marginalization and the resultant effects to women in particular and to the pastoral community as a whole. Maasai women in Longido and Monduli districts in Northern Tanzania will be used as case studies.

#### **SESSION 5: Advocacy and rights issues in the pastoralist context**

15.20 – 15.50: **Kotido District Local Government, Paul Collins Okello** *Ending pastoralist livelihood conflict and the dilemma of forceful disarmament in Karamoja, North East Uganda: time to adopt right-based approaches to peace-building process and development ([paulcollinso@yahoo.com](mailto:paulcollinso@yahoo.com))*

Karamoja region, a semi-arid area located in north-eastern Uganda, is a home to several pastoralist communities sub-divided along ethnic clans with a common heritage but wrecked traditionally by violent conflict, exacerbated by livestock-based raids. Drawing from the livelihood approach, institutional arrangements and conflict theories, this paper argues that: the Karamoja livestock mediated violence is directly linked to their continuous struggle for survival and means of livelihoods as a strategy to cope up with shocks and stresses that accrue from limited livelihood options and harsh environmental conditions; the availability of small arms in the hands of the Karimojong pastoralists is regarded as a community asset in the absence of state guaranteed security. Whereas it is central in facilitating the acquisition and replenishment of livestock and serves to guard against external threats and maintenance of community security, it's nonetheless destructive and does not guarantee sustainable livelihoods of the pastoralist. This calls for an urgent need to tackle the gun problem in the region. Extreme poverty and

underdevelopment of the region is due to historical institutionalised alienation and marginalisation of the pastoralist from the centrally allocated development initiatives by governments and other development agencies. As such, the current forceful military-led disarmament efforts by Government of Uganda, do not necessarily address the central problem in tackling the conflict in Karamoja.

15.20 – 15.50: **Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia, Wendessen Gulelat Wolde**  
*The Role of NGOs in pastoral Advocacy: Experiences of Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE).* ([wendessengulelat@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:wendessengulelat@yahoo.co.uk))

The pastoral areas of Ethiopia cover 61% of the landmass of the country. Ethiopian Pastoralists are accounting roughly for 12-15 per cent of the total population, which belong to 29 different ethnic groups and residing in seven regions of the country. Pastoral communities of Ethiopia like elsewhere in other sub-Saharan African countries have been subjected to untold political, economic and socio-cultural marginalization. These situations had been much worse particularly for the period of pre-1991 regimes. Macroeconomic policies and programs overlooked pastoralists' way of life and living conditions, without providing sound and fair pastoral development policy. However, for the past one decade, the overall socio economic and political situation of the Pastoral communities has undergone some marked shifts. Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE), a local umbrella NGO working with the pastoralists and partners to advance the right of Ethiopian pastoralists, has contributed a lot for this positive shift through policy advocacy action and empowering the pastoralists themselves so as to enable them to move from the margin to the centre of decision-making processes. The purpose of this paper was to promote the role of Civil Society Organization (NGOs) in raising the profile of marginalized groups such as pastoralists through peaceful and non-violent policy advocacy action and capacity building endeavour of the victims themselves. The experiences discussed in this presentation can benefit and contribute highly to advance the causes of neighbouring pastoral communities such as Karamoja pastoralist which are under serious pressure and crises in North eastern parts of Uganda.

#### **SESSION 6: Debate**

15.50 – 16.35 **Debate on 'What future for pastoralist societies in East Africa?'**  
*Facilitated by Sacha Kagan, from the Leuphana University* ([kagan@uni.leuphana.de](mailto:kagan@uni.leuphana.de)). *Panel participants: Florence Naduk, Luisa Natiwi, Kim de Vries, Moses Chuma and Paul Collins Okello*

The debate approached the possible futures for the Karamoja region. The facilitator presented the concept of resilience, which refers to a system's capacity to respond endogenously to exogenous shocks without collapsing. In other words, it corresponds to the capacity for a social group to adapt to an ever-changing context while sustaining its identity and autonomy. Resilience is essentially achieved through the maintenance of a wide scope of options which can be utilized or re-organized as changes occur. The participants exchanged their contradicting views about risks and opportunities resulting from different developmental ideologies, including the promotion of agriculture as an alternative livelihood for Karamoja and the tendency of governments to settle pastoral populations, through incentives or by force. Some participants stressed the need to break the cycle of marginalization and use vocational education as a tool for empowerment.

#### **SESSION 7: Closing**

16.35 – 16.45 **Closing speech by ACTED representative, David Knaute**

Different institutions were thanked for their participation and support to the conference. The regional dimension of the event – with speakers from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and several European countries – was stressed. The situation in Karamoja can be understood if and only the regional context is taken into consideration, with many regional challenges such as climate change, cross-border issues such as conflict, and shared visions such as the increase of women's participation in community life. The day of debates and presentation also highlighted.



**Pictures from the conference**  
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*Group picture of some of the conference participants*



*Debate on 'What future for pastoralist societies in East Africa?'*



# Karamoja



*ACTED is a French non-government organization created in 1993. ACTED's vocation is to support vulnerable populations worldwide and to accompany them in the construction of a better future.*

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