Communal conflicts in the Karamoja Cluster (Uganda)

- **Type of conflict**: Sub
- **Intensity**: 4
- **Conflict Locality**: Eastern Africa
- **Time**: 1944 – ongoing
- **Countries**: Uganda
- **Resources**: Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Conflict Summary

Livestock raiding and competition for water and pastures lead to cycles of reciprocal violence between pastoralist groups in Uganda’s north-eastern Karamoja region. More frequent and severe droughts as well as the proliferation of weapons from war-torn neighbour countries are further aggravating this situation.
Conceptual Model

Climate Change
- More Frequent / Intense Extreme Weather Events

Environmental Change
- Increased Water Scarcity
- Increased Land Scarcity

Intermediary Mechanisms
- Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources
- Grievances between Societal Groups

Fragility and Conflict Risks

Social and Economic Drivers
- Demographic Change
- Land Use Change
- Economic Development

Context Factors

- Insecure Land Tenure
- Water-stressed Area
- History of Conflict
- Lack of Alternative Livelihoods
- Low Level of Economic Development
- Weak Institutions

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Conflict History

Violent conflicts between pastoralist groups in Uganda’s north-eastern Karamoja region date back to pre-colonial times. As a way to cope with erratic rainfall and aridity, local communities such as the Dodoth, Jie, and different sections of the Karimojong have adopted a pastoralist or agro-pastoralist way of life, which entails competition for essential resources such as water, land and livestock. Since the 1980s pastoralist conflicts in north-eastern Uganda have been exacerbated by an increased availability of modern weapons and a series of particularly serious droughts. Between 1999 and 2009, alone, land disputes and livestock raids in Karamoja have caused more than 1200 fatalities, with a peak around 2000 (UCDP, 2014).

Climatic changes, population growth and pastoral conflicts
The Karamoja region in north-eastern Uganda is comprised of predominantly semiarid savannah. Rainfall is erratic and the region suffers frequent droughts. Over the last century the frequency of extreme weather events has increased, augmenting the risk of drought, famine, floods, landslides and epidemics. Pastoralists’ vulnerability to climatic changes is further exacerbated by high population growth, agricultural encroachment and unsustainable agricultural practices, land tenure insecurity and high levels of poverty in north eastern Uganda, all of which encourage livestock raiding and violent conflicts over grazing resources (Mubiru, 2010; Ejigu et al., 2006; Meier, Bond & Bond, 2007).

Insecurity, automatic weapons and weakened institutions
Violence between pastoralists in Karamoja is further encouraged by the lack of state sponsored security services. Financial and logistic constraints seriously undermine the effectiveness of law enforcing agencies. Meanwhile, the increased availability of automatic weapons from war-torn South Sudan, as well as the prevalence of commercialized livestock raiding across the Kenyan border has exacerbated insecurity and informed the need for local communities to arm themselves against bandits and raiders, thus informing the need for further weapons. These factors are also contributing to the weakening of customary authorities and conflict mitigation institutions (Stark et al., 2011; Powell, 2010).

Despite increasing disarmament and peacebuilding efforts, the continuation of violent livestock raiding, increasingly frequent droughts and the resulting disruption of social and economic life make efforts to reduce vulnerability and conflict in Karamoja extremely problematic.

Resolution Efforts

Different initiatives and programs have been put in place in order to contain communal violence in the Karamoja region. The Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) is the most comprehensive government development plan for the region. It harmonizes the various development interventions by the Government, its international partners and civil society actors. It stipulates the provision of basic social services, community participation and alternative means of livelihoods, as well as a comprehensive disarmament strategy and the reestablishment of law and order. In response to criticisms of earlier disarmament campaigns, the KIDDP aims at a better coordination of security and
development initiatives and a greater inclusion of local communities. Among other measures, the KIDDP plans for the recruitment of former raiders into a special police force, while involving community elders in the supervision process (see Powell, 2010).

Reducing poverty and vulnerability to climate change
In terms of poverty and vulnerability reduction, the Karamoja Action Plan for Food Security (KAPFS) for 2010-2015 and the Karamoja Productive Assets Programme, among other initiatives, promote agricultural/pastoral production and productivity, resource conservation, capacity building through work for food or cash work schemes, as well as the improvement of local markets, water and road infrastructures. These programmes have however been criticized for tilting too heavily in favour of sedentarization and agriculture at the expense of pastoralist livelihoods (Stark et al., 2011).

Strengthening pastoral livelihoods and inter-community dialogue
The World Food Programme (WFP) livelihood programme (2010-2013) has attempted to provide a productive safety net and strengthen livelihoods, while engaging in a number of public works, such as building roads and dams. Lack of coordination between projects, little analysis on potential impacts on the environment and poor community consultation by some of the implementing partners have however been impediments to the programme’s effectiveness. Oxfam has supported Karamoja’s pastoralists for many years. In addition, several NGOs, church-based and grassroots organisations are promoting inter-community dialogue and peacebuilding through joint livelihood and resource management programmes, as well as youth sports activities and women-led peace initiatives (Stark et al., 2011; Powell, 2010).

Challenges of joint development and security efforts
However, several gaps have been identified in the KIDDP. According to the Office of the Prime Minister (2011), further efforts need to be directed towards agricultural/pastoral productivity and livelihood diversification, efficient water management and protection, capacity building and soil conservation (see Mubiru, 2010). The same report also lists security, disarmament and the development of early warning mechanisms as priorities in Karamoja. Especially disarmament campaigns need to be adapted to local needs for security and mobility. In some cases disarmament without adequate government protection has made groups more vulnerable to attacks and livestock raids. In other instances, the confinement of pastoralist groups around protected villages, while intended to provide security to disarmed groups, effectively prevents them from effectively using surrounding grazing land, thus leading to problems of overgrazing, water pollution and epidemics (Eaton, 2008; Stark et al., 2011). According to Powell (2010), state-led efforts at restoring security, law and order in the region also need to further integrate customary and community-based approaches to conflict resolution, in order to rebuild trust in the government and foster cooperation between the local and regional level.
### Intensities & Influences

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**Violent Conflict**
Yes

**Salience with nation**
Regional

### Resolution Success

- **Reduction in Violence**
  There was no reduction in violence.

- **Reduction in geographical scope**
  There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

- **Increased capacity to address grievance in the future**
  The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.

- **Grievance Resolution**
  Grievances have been partially addressed.

- **Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity**
  There has been no reduction in intensity
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration
The Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) involves a comprehensive disarmament strategy and the reestablishment of law and order.

Dialogue
Several NGOs, church-based and grassroots organisations are promoting inter-community dialogue and peacebuilding efforts.

Promoting alternative livelihoods
Various initiatives promote agricultural/pastoral production and productivity. However, further efforts directed towards agricultural/pastoral productivity and livelihood diversification are needed.

Resources and Materials

References with URL
Meier, P., Bond, D. & Bond, J. (2007). Environmental influences on pastoral conflict in the Horn of Africa
Mubiru, D.N. (2010). Climate change and adaptation options in Karamoja
Powell, J. (2010). Karamoja: A literature review
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Further information