

Alcohol in Karamoja, Uganda: Observations and Remaining Questions

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF 

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This briefing paper presents findings from field work completed during early 2017 in the northern Karamoja districts of Abim, Kaabong, and Kotido. The field work was conducted by a team from the Feinstein International Center (FIC) at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, and was funded by Mercy Corps as part of the Growth, Health, and Governance (GHG) program supported by USAID's Food for Peace (FFP) program. In addition, this briefing paper relies on background material and observations from multiple previous rounds of research conducted in Karamoja by the same FIC team in the period from 2004 to 2016, funded by Mercy Corps, the World Bank, Save the Children in Uganda, UNICEF, and the International Development Research Center (IDRC).

The research team used qualitative methods (open-ended semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews) to collect data for this study. In early 2017, we interviewed approximately 150 people in 14 different villages (five in Kotido, five in Kaabong, and four in Abim). Questions to male and female respondents (in focus groups divided by age and gender) covered a number of topics relating to livelihoods, food security, access to markets, and health concerns. We did not focus exclusively on alcohol production, use or sale in any of the interviews; rather, questions on alcohol were embedded within broader discussions on these other topics. Key informants interviewed individually through open-ended semi-structured discussions included brewers, local councilors (LCI), and representatives of village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), mother care groups (MCGs), and water user committees (WUCs). We analyzed the qualitative data using the application Dedoose. Over the course of the analysis, it became apparent that we had a substantial amount of data on alcohol, and hence we have opted to discuss these findings in a stand-alone briefing paper. We examine these issues from both a health and an economic perspective.

Background

Research and observations in Karamoja over the past decade have made clear the prevalence of alcohol consumption by local residents. Traditional beverages brewed from maize (*ekwete*), sorghum (*ebutia*), or other grains have relatively low alcohol content and have long been a staple of social life at the village level. Once brewed for personal consumption or to share for festive occasions, brewing of these traditional beverages has evolved gradually into a commercial enterprise dominated

by women. *Ekwete* and *ebutia* are made in large batches and taken to trading centers or urban areas to sell for a small profit. In addition to the production, sale, and consumption of these traditional alcoholic beverages, the market for hard alcohol, also known as spirits or *waragi*, has boomed in recent years. Improvements in security in Karamoja since 2006 have opened trade between the region and other parts of Uganda and Kenya, and suppliers found a ready market for commercially brewed *waragi*.

Often sold in small, inexpensive plastic sachets, which can sell for as little as 500 UGX, suppliers market effectively to customers who may only have a small amount of money on hand at any given

time. Informal distilleries, many based in Teso and Lango, import locally-brewed and unregulated spirits into the region, responding to the demand for hard alcohol in Karamoja.

Alcohol: consumption and income opportunities

The prevalence of alcohol is readily apparent in Karamoja's towns. Informal bars abound, with large numbers of intoxicated patrons in their vicinity at times. Cases of extreme drunkenness are often caused by distilled alcohol (spirits or *waragi*), which is produced commercially (in Uganda or abroad) or in local stills, often in surrounding districts. The production and sale of homemade spirits and the sale of commercial *waragi* have been banned in some areas, such as Kaabong District, in an attempt to minimize alcohol abuse. However, these restrictions are extremely difficult to enforce, especially given that commercial *waragi* is often distributed in small 100 mL plastic sachets that can be easily transported by foot, by bicycle, or with other legal goods. Since 2017, the national government has been working on legislation to entirely prohibit the sale of the small sachets of commercial *waragi*, with the ban currently slated to go into effect in March 2019.¹

Traditional beverages brewed from grains (normally sorghum) is also prevalent, and is usually sold by women at markets, along the side of the road, or carried to prospective customers in jerricans. Traditional brew may be produced at homesteads in relatively small quantities to be consumed by family members or sold nearby. Additionally, commercial brewers also brew and sell these traditional beverages in larger quantities. These larger-scale brewers hire women to help with the brewing, and rely on a network of male and female traders to make the retail sales (also called "booking"). The preparation and alcohol content of these traditional

beverages differ by region and production location (i.e., homesteads versus commercial breweries). For instance, while *ekwete*, made from maize flour, is common throughout Kaabong and much of the Karamoja region, *ebutia*, made from sorghum, is the more common local brew in Kotido District. The brewing processes are differentiated by the number of times the grain is fermented, and *ebutia* reportedly has lower alcohol content than *ekwete*. Local brews made from grain (of any type) have significantly lower alcohol contents (estimated at approximately 2%) than commercial *waragi* or local spirits.²

Policy makers and public health advocates view alcohol consumption as a problem in Karamoja for a number of reasons. Drunkenness is frequently cited as contributing to domestic and interpersonal violence. In addition, traditional brew and its by-products (known as "residue" or *adakai*) are used as a food substitute and are consumed by all household members, including young children, infants, and pregnant and lactating women.³ Lastly, the production and purchase of alcohol may exhaust the limited food crops and/or cash that are available to a household, resources that might otherwise provide more nutritional value. While these public health concerns are valid and likely accurate, field data indicate that many respondents view alcohol and alcohol consumption very differently. In addition, more data from the field is needed to contextualize these concerns and to demonstrate the accuracy and/or extent of these issues.

¹ Kyeyune, M. (February 8, 2018). MPs angry at Govt extends Sachet Waragi ban. Daily Monitor.

² Interview with female brewer, Kanawat Market, Kotido, 18 January 2017. Local members of the Tufts team also said that *ebutia* had lower levels of alcohol than *ekwete*. In an on-line debate, medical anthropologist Sandra Gray says that "old data for sorghum beer" indicates alcohol rates between 2% and 4%, but that *waragi*'s alcohol content is in the double digits. "Some thoughts from Sandra Gray of KU", posted 7 May 2013. Available at <http://www.fsnnetwork.org/kids-drinking-uganda>.

³ Arlt, J. (2013). Determinants of Malnutrition in Karamojong Infants of Napak District, Eastern Uganda, Justus Liebig University Giessen. Masters Degree of Science in Food Economics.

Perceptions and experiences of alcohol consumption

Respondents distinguish between consumption of traditional brew made from sorghum (or other grains) and consumption of locally made spirits or commercial *waragi*. Most people felt there were few, if any, negative side effects of consuming *ekwete* or *ebutia*, even in large quantities. In fact, many respondents maintained that it was not possible to become drunk from consuming only traditional brew. For instance, a group of women in Nakapelimoru in Kotido explained that “The whole village takes [*ebutia*] every day because it is like food. We eat the residue as well. If we are lucky we will drink a full jug. This amount does not make us drunk!”⁴ Other respondents, however, made a distinction between those who “drink to get drunk” and those who “drink brew as food” without intending to become intoxicated. A young woman selling brew in

Kalapata Trading Center in Kaabong estimated that about one-third of her customers were drinking to get drunk, while the other two-thirds were drinking to fill their stomachs.⁵ This brewer and several other respondents reported that the people most likely to become problematic were those who were drinking a combination of traditional brew and *waragi*. Women in Kapedo, in Kaabong, also grouped drinkers by type. They explained that “the worst offenders” are male youth who drink to get drunk; these young men were said to often become violent when drunk. “One or two can destabilize the whole village,” the women explained. They also distinguished between drinkers who “drink so they can sleep, those that drink so they can laugh, and those who drink so they can feel full because they are hungry.”⁶ The women pointed out that people often drink for all of these reasons.



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⁴ Focus group discussion with women, Poet, Nakapelimoru Sub-County, Kotido, 18 January 2017.

⁵ Interview with female brewer, Kalapata Trading Center, Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong, 14 January 2017.

⁶ Focus group discussion with women, Kalimon-Sangar, Kapedo Sub-County, Kaabong District, 17 January 2017.

Consumption of hard alcohol continues despite efforts to limit its importation, production, and sale in the region. Men in a rural location in Kaabong District reported that more than one-third of people in their village consumed hard alcohol on a daily basis (they did not specify whether they meant commercially or locally produced spirits).⁷ Women in Nakapelimoru, in Kotido, reported that men drink more commercially produced hard alcohol and consume it more frequently than women, who are more likely to share one sachet of spirits among a group of friends.⁸ In various other areas, we were told that “only the young men drink it” or “only the old people drink it.”⁹ Certain personal characteristics were also linked to consumption of spirits. As a group of women in Kathile Sub-County in Kaabong explained, “For those who drink Kick, the mouth is strong but the body is weak.”¹⁰ Unlike responses around drinking traditional brew, participants clearly have negative associations with the consumption

of hard alcohol. This is likely due to observations of violent or hostile behavior as well as more overt negative health experiences. For instance, consumption of homemade spirits had reportedly decreased in some locations (such as Panyangara Sub-County in Kotido) as of late 2016 after a handful of people died after consuming this type of spirits earlier that year.¹¹

Sensitization activities or public health campaigns have clearly reached some areas. Women in Kapedo Sub-County in Kaabong reported avoiding both commercially-produced and homemade spirits. When asked the reason for the blanket avoidance, they said, “We were taught that it kills in the same way.”¹² They had learned this from a sensitization activity provided by World Vision and from people in the health centers. Similar campaigns have aimed to decrease alcohol consumption among children and infants, as discussed below.

Alcohol consumption among infants and children

Most respondents did not see a problem in feeding the local brew to children. Mothers often substitute *ebutia* or *ekwete* for breastmilk if they are away from their infants for a long period or if they “are low on milk.”¹³ In her research in three villages in Napak in 2012 and 2013, Jennifer Arlt examined causes of malnutrition in infants. She found that between 36% and 57% of mothers supplemented breastmilk with brew, in addition to other food and beverages, for infants under six months of age.¹⁴ For older infants (six to 24 months) and children, traditional brew is

often used in food preparation in place of milk. Arlt reported that 63% to 74% of mothers sampled fed brew to infants aged six to 24 months.¹⁵ The use of brew in place of milk was confirmed by the FIC data from 2017. Women in Kotido mixed brew with porridge for their children “because there is no more milk.”¹⁶ Women in Kaabong explained:

Drinking beer is increasing because there is no milk. We prefer beer to “kick” [*waragi*]—it is like milk. We feed children this; we make porridge

⁷ Focus group discussion with men, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

⁸ Focus group discussion with women, Poet, Nakapelimoru Sub-County, Kotido, 18 January 2017.

⁹ Focus group discussions with men and women, multiple locations.

¹⁰ Focus group discussion with women, Narube, Kathile Sub-County, Kaabong, 13 January 2017.

¹¹ Focus group discussion with women, Lomukura, Panyangara Sub-County, Kotido, 20 January 2017.

¹² Focus group discussion with women, Kalimon-Sangar, Kapedo Sub-County, Kaabong District, 17 January 2017.

¹³ Focus group discussion with women, Poet, Nakapelimoru Sub-County, Kotido, 18 January 2017.

¹⁴ Arlt, J. (2013). Determinants of Malnutrition in Karamojong Infants of Napak District, Eastern Uganda, Justus Liebig University Giessen. Masters Degree of Science in Food Economics. Range reflects variability of rates by village. The author points out that no data were collected regarding quantity or frequency of brew provided to infants.

¹⁵ Ibid. The same study found that the consumption of traditionally brewed beverages may be contributing to malnutrition among children through increased disease as a result of exposure to *e coli* bacteria.

¹⁶ Focus group discussion with women, Poet-Losilang, Kotido Sub-County, Kotido, 23 January 2017.

from the residue because it is nutritious. Every family does it. There are so few vegetables left; beer is a substitute for milk. We used to have wild fruits and vegetables but we cut it for charcoal.¹⁷

Public health outreach campaigns have expanded in the past few years, resulting in a shift in narrative in some locations around giving brew to babies. Mercy Corps and partners, for instance, conducted Mother Care Groups (MCGs) in villages to improve maternal and child health and nutrition. Many women in MCG sites emphasized the importance of breastfeeding without substitution, though they may have missed the broader message about children and alcohol. For example, women interviewed at an MCG site in Rengen in Kotido reported, “Babies are only supposed to drink milk.” *Ebutia*, they explained, was not given to babies, but to children aged “five or six years old as a source of nutrition.”¹⁸ At another MCG site in Kapedo, also in Kotido, mothers responded that that children who are “four to five years old drink brew regularly. Babies are given brew to help them sleep, but it is not used as a substitute for milk.”¹⁹

It is important to examine *why* mothers provide traditional brew and brew residue to their children in Karamoja. First, brew and brew residue are used as substitutes for food, primarily breastmilk and animal milk. Traditional brew is considered to be nutritious and provide energy, critical characteristics in a region of chronic food insecurity. At the same time, however, brew is recognized as a suboptimal substitute for milk. Furthermore, relying on brew for nutrition is a relatively recent practice. When asked whether children have always drunk *ekwete*, women in a focus group in Kaabong said:

No, this is only after disarmament when the animals were lost that children began eating residue with *ekwete*. Prior to this they drank milk—they maybe still had some residue but they

drank a lot of milk with it. There was no *ekwete*, just milk for the children.²⁰

Second, women throughout Karamoja are involved in time-intensive activities to generate income. With the decrease in animal husbandry, a traditionally male-dominated domain, women have increasingly engaged in income-generating activities. Mothers often carry their youngest infants on their backs while spending long hours away from home collecting natural resources, making charcoal, farming, or going to town to engage in petty trade or search for work as manual laborers. Older infants and children remain with relatives and caregivers, some of whom may themselves be very young children. (Arlt (2013) found that children as young as four years old cared for infants while their mothers were away.) The women in Arlt’s sample appreciated the portability of brew for the long periods they were away from home. They carried brew with them, consuming it “for energy” and feeding it to the infants they were carrying. Children who remained behind were fed whatever was available in the household, often including brew and residue.²¹

As discussed above, most women interviewed did not perceive there to be a problem in feeding children brew or brew residue. Importantly, however, mothers were clear that they did not give children spirits.

Yes, children drink *ekwete*. It is like a food. No, they don’t drink hard alcohol. Children also eat the residue and then they drink the *ekwete* like water to top-up until they are full. So they have residue and a cup of the *ekwete*.²²

Returning to the perception that the brew and the residue are sub-optimal as foods, women in Kapedo, in Kaabong, explained that during the time in which the women were receiving fortified corn soya blend (CSB) as part of Mercy Corps’ MCG program, “the

¹⁷ Focus group discussion with women, Narube, Kathile Sub-County, Kaabong, 13 January 2017.

¹⁸ Focus group discussion with women, Kanamwar, Rengen Sub-County, Kotido District, 19 January 2017.

¹⁹ Focus group discussion with women, Kalimon-Sangar, Kapedo Sub-County, Kaabong District, 17 January 2017.

²⁰ Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

²¹ Arlt, J. (2013). Determinants of Malnutrition in Karamojong Infants of Napak District, Eastern Uganda, Justus Liebig University Giessen. Masters Degree of Science in Food Economics.

²² Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

babies and children drank less brew.” With the end of the program and the loss of milk substitutes, however, women felt that their children’s health had declined and they were again feeding them brew.²³

Although such responses may be tailored to elicit sympathy (and support) from external interviewers, this feeding pattern does highlight that feeding children brew is viewed as an undesirable option.

The role of alcohol in income generation

Many women in Karamoja use the creation and/or sale of traditional brew as a livelihood strategy. Engagement ranges from occasional brewing to full-time. Some women make and sell brew in order to meet specific personal or household needs. For example, a woman in a focus group in Lolelia Sub-County in Kaabong explained: “We brew with a purpose. Like if my sheet [wrapped clothing] is ripped and I need a new one, I will get some sorghum and brew and sell it and get the money I need to buy some clothes.”²⁴ Another woman in the same group said that she would make and sell brew if someone needed to go to the hospital for medical treatment. The profits would be used to pay for the *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) ride.²⁵ The payment of school fees was another common reason for making and selling brew; this was done by mothers as well as by girls themselves during school break or prior to the start of a new semester. (Girls reportedly also make and sell brew to cover the school fees of their brothers.²⁶) Women in Lolelia reported that they had only used brewing in this way—making and selling a batch of brew for a specific purpose—in the years since the disarmament campaign.” Before that the way to get money when you needed something was just to sell an animal.”²⁷

Other women brew more regularly and as their main livelihood activity. This requires having access to a consistent market and steady demand, which can be difficult in the highly competitive brewing sector. A young unmarried woman in Kalapata, in Kaabong, explained that she sold brew in the trading center

approximately twice per week and had been doing so for three years. She spent the rest of the week preparing the brew to sell, making this her primary livelihood activity. She explained that there were up to ten other sellers per day selling brew in the trading center, and those that did not overly dilute their beer with water had the best business.²⁸ Her livelihood goal was to make sure that her parents and siblings had enough to eat, and she used the proceeds from her sales to buy goats. Another woman, in her early 30s, sold her brew at the weekly Kanawat livestock market outside Kotido town. She had been doing this as her main livelihood since 2011; prior to that she only sold brew occasionally when she needed school fees. She explained that although she had finished high school, she was unable to find a better job than making and selling brew.²⁹ Women of all ages brew, including some adolescents in youth groups or girls helping their mothers. In one focus group we learned that girls might start brewing at around age 12.³⁰ More research is needed to gather information on the range of ages involved in brewing and different responsibilities assumed by age.

The demand for brew varies, even in high-traffic areas such as trading centers and livestock markets. Most female sellers reported setting up for business at mid-day or earlier, including as early as 9 a.m. In Kathile, Kaabong, a cup of brew sold for 200 UGX (about 0.05 USD), a jar for 1000 UGX (approximately 0.50 USD), and a bucket for 12,000 UGX (about 3.40 USD).³¹ On some days, the supply would be consumed within a few hours, while on

²³ Focus group discussion with women, Kalimon-Sangar, Kapedo Sub-County, Kaabong District, 17 January 2017.

²⁴ Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

²⁵ Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017. IBID

²⁶ Interview with female agricultural dealer, Komuria West, Kaabong, 11 January 2017.

²⁷ Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

²⁸ Interview with female brewer, Kalapata Trading Center, Kaabong, 14 January 2017.

²⁹ Interview with female brewer, Kanawat Market, Kotido, 18 January 2017.

³⁰ Focus group interview with agricultural dealers, Kotido Town Council, Kotido, 23 January 2017.

³¹ Focus group discussion with women, Narube, Kathile Sub-County, Kaabong, 13 January 2017.



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other days there would be brew left over at the end of the day. (Leftover brew is normally brought home and given out at the homestead.) Clientele included both women and men. A brewer in Kapalata Trading Center described the different clients by age and gender:

Women are pickier about their purchase—they go to different vendors to taste—than men. Men are better [more regular/devoted] customers. The youth are the least reliable and the ones least likely to pay.³²

Reported profits varied greatly, from a few thousand shillings per day,³³ to about 15,000 UGX to up to 30-40,000 UGX per day.³⁴ The women in Lolelia, in Kaabong, who explained that they only brew for a clear and specific purpose (such as new clothes or school fees) did not think of their enterprise as

a profit-making one (stating “We can’t calculate like that!”) but rather simply an exchange of the proceeds for their desired purpose.³⁵

In addition to time and labor, inputs for making brew include the sorghum or maize grains. These may be saved from one’s own production or, more commonly, acquired from the market with capital from a loan from a local VSLA. Women explained that they do not use their own grains unless they have surplus, as the first priority is feeding their family.³⁶ Several of the brewers we spoke to were savvy in their purchasing strategy, seeking out the best values and taking transport into account. A woman in Kalapata explained that she purchased her sorghum in a variety of different places depending on price and availability. She was getting it from the Ik in Timu in January 2017, but prices had recently risen as their supply was running low.³⁷ In March 2016,

³² Interview with female brewer, Kalapata Trading Center, Kaabong, 14 January 2017.

³³ Focus group discussion with women, Lochedimeu, Kotido Town Council, 22 January 2017.

³⁴ Interview with female brewer, Kalapata Trading Center, Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong, 14 January 2017.

³⁵ Focus group discussion with women, Moruangita, Lolelia Sub-County, Kaabong, 12 January 2017

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview with female brewer, Kalapata Trading Center, Kalapata Sub-County, Kaabong, 14 January 2017.

a woman in Rengen, Kotido, explained that women from her village often went to the Acholi sub-region to buy sorghum for brewing, as it was cheaper and more plentiful.³⁸ Water can be another costly input for the brew. Women in Kotido paid 2000 UGX per day in town for the water to make their brew.³⁹ They resented not having enough water at home in their villages to brew, as this not only diminished their profits but also made it more difficult to share the *ebutia* or residue with their family members. Charges paid to set up the points of sale are another cost in the production and sale of brew. While we do not have data from all locations, these costs seem to be in the range of about 1000 UGX per day for each brewer. Additional research is needed on this fee system, who receives the point of sale charges, and how they are used.

Homemade spirits are also significant for earning livelihoods in Karamoja, contributing predominately to men's livelihoods, although the health report by the Moroto Diocese, 2017, reports that women are also involved in distributing spirits at the local level.⁴⁰ Many localities have prohibited the sale of homemade spirits, but they are nevertheless sold regularly through a variety of means. As representatives from a savings and credit cooperative society (SACCO) in Kotido explained, "Men often say they are investing in livestock trade businesses, but instead buy *waragi* and sell it illegally in Kotido town council." They went on to describe how lorries drop off jerricans in the villages late at night, thereby evading the police, who are based in town centers. Men later bring these jerricans into town on motorbikes.⁴¹ The research team also came across women selling spirits in Makatin Market in Abim. A respondent said she had purchased alcohol

in Lira and brought it into Abim to sell, though she reported that she had faced challenges with transportation. She had also received an order from the District Police Commissioner prohibiting her from selling liquor (as per the regulations in Abim), but she explained that this was her main source of livelihood.⁴² (It is not clear if the DPO allowed her to continue based on this response, or if she simply ignored the order.) Regarding why she sold spirits, she explained that one of the benefits of dealing in spirits as opposed to local brew was that the former does not spoil, hence she was able to return with her supply day after day.

The illicit trade in hard alcohol that brings spirits from Karamoja into Kenya's Turkana region is reportedly also booming. A Ugandan member of the research team who lives in Turkana reported that *boda bodas* carrying jerricans of spirits enter Turkana from Kaabong on a daily basis. The last time he travelled from Karamoja back to Kenya, he received a ride on a lorry loaded with *Kick* (a commercial brand of *waragi*) and other variants of distilled liquor. There are also reportedly numerous retailers selling Ugandan *waragi* in the border area. This trade flourishes because the Ugandan variety of hard alcohol is cheaper than the Kenyan variety, even with mark-ups that allow sellers to make a profit and kick-backs that must be paid to get the contraband goods across the border.⁴³

Many women use rotating loans from their participation in VSLAs to brew. Though in lesser numbers than female brewers, some men reportedly also use their VSLA loans to invest in the *waragi* trade.

³⁸ Interview with woman, Nangolmuria, Rengen Sub-County, Kotido, 1 March 2016.

³⁹ Focus group discussion with women, Lochedimeu, Kotido Town Council, 22 January 2017.

⁴⁰ Moroto Diocese Health Department, Increasing problem of alcoholism in Karamoja, unpublished, March 2017.

⁴¹ Interview with representatives from Kitogogong SACCO, Kotido, 22 January 2017.

⁴² Interview with brewers and sellers, Matakini Market, Abim, 28 January 2017.

⁴³ Notes from talking to Darlington Akabwai, Kaabong, 12 January 2017.

Concluding thoughts and recommendations

There is no doubt that excessive consumption of alcohol in Karamoja is a problem on a variety of levels. These include the mental and physical health impacts of alcohol abuse, the use of scarce funds to purchase alcohol, linkages between alcohol abuse and domestic violence, loss of human capital due to intoxication, and likely linkages between alcohol abuse and poor parenting. At the same time, the demand for alcohol also provides an important source of financial capital to those involved in its manufacturing and trade. This is perhaps most apparent in the narratives of the women who brew occasionally to meet specific needs, such as school fees, medical expenses, and clothes for their children. Others use profits from selling alcohol to invest in more substantial business activities, build herds, or otherwise diversify their livelihood activities. As such, it is important to thoroughly understand not only the largely negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption, but also the positive local economic impacts of the various forms of the alcohol industry.

Overall, while the problems of alcohol abuse in Karamoja are widely discussed, we find that there is a dearth of robust data on the topic. A 2017 report by the Catholic Diocese of Moroto partially fills this gap, but the report relies heavily on key informants and health officials as opposed to people actively involved in the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol.⁴⁴ Without such data, it is impossible to make recommendations as to how (and by whom, and to what end) the situation is best addressed, or even to have an accurate picture of the current situation. This briefing paper therefore concludes with potential topics and considerations for additional research.

Recommendations:

- Distinguish between spirits and traditional brew in investigating alcohol abuse and the role of their production and sale in the economy.
- Distinguish between commercially brewed spirits and the unregulated variety.
- Avoid imposing external moral views regarding alcohol use.
- Be clear and specific in terminology, including about types of alcohol consumed. Likewise, avoid the term “alcoholism,” as this is a specific, medical term not applicable without proper diagnosis.
- Seek to analyze whether alcohol consumption in Karamoja has increased, decreased or remained level over time. Clarify the time period considered, and seek to understand the drivers of changes. If (as is widely assumed) alcohol consumption has increased, parse out the role of factors such as hunger, livelihood loss, increased commodification in the region, and psycho-social motivations.
- Examine the positive and negative household-level economic effects of the alcohol industry.
- Seek to understand the nutritional impacts of the different forms of alcohol consumption, disaggregated by age and gender.
- Consider carrying out additional robust research on economic and social roles and their impacts on physical and mental health, interpersonal relations, household economies, the roles of

⁴⁴ Moroto Diocese Health Department, Increasing problem of alcoholism in Karamoja, , unpublished, March 2017

different actors, and the effectiveness of local initiatives to curb or decrease excessive alcohol consumption.

- From a public health perspective, consider both physical and mental health impacts of excessive alcohol consumption.

- Investigate the supposed link between excessive alcohol consumption and domestic violence.
- Include in the research sample men and women of different ages who produce, sell, transport, trade, and consume alcohol. Include both small scale and large-scale producers.

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