



**The Return of The Calves:
A Meeting Between the Turkana, Matheniko,
Politicians and Administrators
Lokiriama, 5 July 2002**

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THE RETURN OF THE CALVES: A MEETING BETWEEN THE TURKANA, MATHENIKO, POLITICIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS IN LOKIRIAMA – 5 JULY 2002

INTRODUCTION

In August/September 2000, Mr Draniga, the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) for Kotido, Uganda invited his Kenyan counterpart the District Commissioner (DC) for Turkana, Mr Peter Mooke, to visit his area to discuss matters of mutual concern to their domains. The security committees of the two regions visited a Turkana kraal that was grazing their animals at Kamion. To reciprocate the gesture and also follow up on the deliberations of the earlier visit, the two administrators agreed that the RDC for Kotido would visit Lodwar Town in Kenya. The visit was scheduled for 6 to 10 May 2002. The Ugandan delegation consisted of prominent personalities including RDCs and members of parliaments (MPs). The Kenyan delegation also included MPs, the in-coming DC for Turkana, Mr David Oyoo, and heads of parastatals working in the region.

Considering the constitution of participants, the meeting changed from an ordinary cross-border peace meeting between the two security committees to that of MPs from the region. The organisers of the meeting decided to include church leaders, elders from the Turkana and Karamajong communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). One hundred and fifty participants attended.

During the visit, the two parties resolved to organise follow-up grass roots meetings, urgently, especially along the borders, to facilitate discussions between pastoralists who share common *epiding*¹(pass/gate) and have common problems. One such meeting that was identified between the Matheniko and the *Ngikamatak*² took place from 20 to 23 May 2002 at Lokiriama. A pleasant surprise during this meeting was that the two communities decided to expose the thieves and demanded that they return stolen animals. Ekeno, the Turkana kraal leader was lucky to get back his two milking camels that Matheniko thieves had stolen. However, Tuturiaie Lokoroi, was not as lucky with his 50 calves that the Turkana had stolen. Because of political agitation, the handing over of the calves had to be postponed until a later date when the Moroto people brought back the 17 donkeys that the Karamajong youth had stolen.

Turkana elders were worried that the already feeble calves would die. They had already lost three out of the 50 calves. The elders approached the administrators and the staff of the Community-based Animal Participatory and Epidemiology (CAPE) Unit in Lodwar Town requesting for assistance in returning the animals home.

After consultations with the Moroto and Turkana districts security committees, the CAPE Unit settled on 5 July 2002 as the day to effect the plan. The committees from the two districts came as planned and the Lokiriama elders also brought the calves in good time but the unpleasantly conspicuous absence of the 17 donkeys caused restlessness among the Turkana group. However, the DC, Turkana, Mr David Oyoo; the MP of the area, Hon David Ekwe; and Immanuel Imana, the Managing Director of

¹ gates or mountain passes

² group from central Turkana

the Kerio Valley Development Authority (KVDA) explained the circumstances and the Turkana elders handed over the calves to the Matheniko owner peacefully. This report describes the events of 5 July 2002 during the return of the Moroto calves to the owners at Lokiriama.

Dr Darlington Akabwai, the Master of Ceremony, started the meeting by requesting the Guest of Honour, Mr David Oyoo, to invite the two elders from Turkana and Matheniko communities to offer traditional prayers. The Archdeacon of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Rev Josiah Muga then offered denominational prayers.

Mr David Oyoo officially thanked the delegation from Uganda for attending the function that is important to peace building in the region, welcoming them to enjoy their stay in Kenya. He emphasised that the current meeting was convened to fulfill resolutions that were made during the recent visit of the RDC Kotido, where representatives of the two governments vowed to weed out thieves who are the stumbling block to peaceful coexistence in the region. He then introduced the security team that he heads and gave his counterpart, the Acting RDC Moroto, Mr Dralaku Felix, the chance to introduce himself and his team.

Dralaku was brief. He introduced himself as the “mobiliser for peace and development in Moroto District, Uganda”. He reported that he came because his boss, the RDC Moroto, delegated to him the task of leading a team to receive the animals that the Turkana District administration had recovered. He apologised for the absence of senior officials in his team, explaining that they were on other assignments of national importance. However, he urged Kenyans not to underrate the ability of his team because they were efficient and able to handle the task at hand.

“*Maata ka ekisil, maata ka ngibaren*”³, saluted **Ekeno Lolupokong’u**, a kraal leader from Turkana. Ekeno was grateful that the two communities were finally meeting, as was promised in Lokiriama on 5 July 2002 during the returning of the donkeys. He related how he tracked his livestock and eventually recovered two camels on 21 May 2002. However, he suffered further misfortune while returning the 47 calves. His livestock, one camel and a cow were stolen and close relatives of Imana, the MD of KVDA: Lokochilmoe and Eyangana Nagira, were killed. Ekeno reported that the killer was traced to Matheniko and positively identified as Lokaalel Lokol. He called for punitive action against the murderer and demanded that he should pay for his *akibut*.⁴

He demanded compensation for the many activities he had to forego to track the calves and warned the culprits to come ready to pay up. He also cautioned the thieves to be careful because his next move after the recovery exercise was to turn them in to the authorities. Ekeno boasted that his strategic location between the two communities allows him to traverse the borders without much trouble and had enabled him to recover the calves assisted by the Kenyan administration.

He challenged the Matheniko group to emulate the good example of the Turkana saying that his noble deed “will be cherished as the fruits of the meetings we have

³ I greet you in peace, I greet you because of livestock.

⁴ evil action

fervently pursued." "What will the Matheniko be proud of at the end of the meeting?" he enquired.

Ekeno reminded the meeting that the undeniable cause of conflict was the activities of rowdy youth from either side. He warned that even as the peace meeting was taking place, they could be causing problems elsewhere. He called them "hyenas" and reported their recent mischief of stealing two camels and 17 donkeys from the Matheniko and 51 calves from Kamatak. "We actually got the 'hyenas' from both sides," he affirmed.

The elder raised the issue of two camel calves that died when their mothers were stolen. He requested that the matter is discussed and settled. He suggested that the Matheniko thieves should replace the calves and return them with the 17 donkeys.

Ekeno explained the traditional expression he used earlier as a greeting at the beginning of his speech. "I greeted you that way because I feel peaceful deep inside and also in reference to the calves under those trees that are to be handed peacefully back to the owners. These animals bear testimony that I have chosen peace because I am tired of the pouring of innocent blood of people whose creation we do not understand," he clarified. He challenged the Matheniko to demonstrate their commitment to peace to the public by returning the animals that they have stolen just like the Turkana have openly returned the calves before the gathering.

The elder further emphasised the need to support peace resolutions that were made during the Lodwar meeting and cautioned the speakers against using provocative language. He opposed the tendency among members of the Karamoja Cluster to revenge and reproached the owners of the 17 donkeys that were stolen by the Matheniko. Ekeno reported that the aggrieved party, following footprints, pursued their donkeys up to a certain homestead and drove away the calves that they found in the vicinity to avenge the loss of their animals. He also reminded the meeting that he has not only facilitated the return of the donkeys but he also apprehended Lopeimal during the Kapua incident and helped to return the stolen cows. To further convince the meeting of his commitment for peace, the elder narrated yet another incident involving Engolenyang, a Matheniko herdsman. The Matheniko man was trailing the footprints of his lost calves and the search took him to a Turkana kraal where he reported his loss. He was well-received. However, Ekeno doubted the Matheniko's capacity to show such kindness because of the harsh treatment that the Turkana boys who were tracking lost animals into Uganda received. "I received very bad news that one was shot and the others critically injured; what is this, is it a symbol of peace or war?" The kraal leader wondered. "Nevertheless, I decided to forgive and forget the barbarity," he said in a reconciliatory tone.

To his Matheniko friends, Lokwayara and Merimug, the elder was emphatic that when he speaks bitterly, he intends that they recognise the sacrifices that his community, the Turkana, have made for the sake of peace. "I am not trying to boast about the magnanimity of my country but I am speaking plain truth," he concluded.

When he took to the floor, **Lowakabong**, the Matheniko kraal leader, sustained the argument wondering about "this thing in our midst that keeps on provoking us to disgrace our peace." He marvelled aloud how they have sustained their friendship with Ekeno despite the numerous incidents that could cause rifts between them. He reported that the killings, as reported by Ekeno, are common in Matheniko and the killers' footprints are often traced to the Turkana side of the border. He claimed that

between the two of them, Ekeno and himself, have borne more burden than the administrators in Moroto and Lodwar. "We keep solving problems that occur along the borders and with the role we have assumed, we are apportioned a lot of blame and labeled different names by the thieves," he grieved. He wondered whether their quest for peace is cursed. He recognised Akabwai's efforts in returning the cows that were stolen at Kopua but also mentioned that the herd was less one cow that had been slaughtered and eaten.

He recounted some of the disturbing incidences, citing the stealing of his cows at Kitete, even after notifying Ekeno about his intention to migrate to Nakiloro. While he was away searching for his animals, he received reports that the stolen calves were sighted crossing his territory. He added that when he was returning from Nakiloro, he was informed of the killings at Ekeno's place. According to these reports, the Turkana and Matheniko youth traced the killers, suspected to be Turkanas to Nang'olol Apolon in Jie land.

Lowakabong reminded the group that the Lodwar RDC meeting resolved to clear misunderstandings that had grown between the two communities. He suggested that the priority was to move forward and achieve lasting peace by working out a pact and returning any stolen animals.

"What is eating us is in Elaar's home," revealed the elder alluding to the formers' two sons. He reported that he had brought the two young men to attend the meeting during the returning of the calves. Their role was to assist in clarifying matters of exchange and compensation of stolen animals. However, the administration intervened and made the return of the calves a priority so the subject was not discussed.

The elder also narrated the incidence of Logiron's camel. He reported that the animal was in labour when it was taken away across the border. Lowakabong was in Lotere and at the request of the owner, he traced the footprints to a homestead whose owners had just migrated to the area. He also spoke of the case of a second camel that he traced to some home and the culprits admitted that they had slaughtered and eaten the animal but were willing to compensate the loss.

There was yet another case of a cow that was allegedly given to an individual claiming to be a Turkana and he was seen herding the cow towards the Kenyan border. However, Lowakabong was surprised when the Turkana came the following day to look for the same cow and they realised that they had been tricked.

Lowakabong explained that his lengthy narratives were his understanding and opinion about the various incidences that has been brought to the fore by the Turkana community. He made it clear that he was not denying or confirming the allegations but his aim was to give the true picture on the ground and the problems that they encounter from day to day. He charged that the real culprits live amongst the two communities, causing enmity between them. "We have become enemies of the Matheniko just as Ekeno is becoming the enemy of the Turkana because we are pursuing peace from our respective sides by tracing stolen animals and returning them to the owners," he lamented.

The elder said that he agreed with the resolutions passed during the RDC meeting in Lodwar to punish thieves heavily and a death penalty or imprisonment of 78 years for anyone charged with murder. He, however, challenged the group to give him

names of people who have been put to death for committing murder. "I can give you three examples, Akwangoles' two killers and Lokwanreng'a" he volunteered.

Lowakabong pointed out that the Turkana are proud of their ability to compensate raid victims because of their wealth in terms of livestock and money. He assured the meeting that he is still tracking the lost donkeys through a lead that the thieves fled to Nakapiripirit. He promised to inform the authorities as soon as he identifies the right kraal. He explained that he had deferred the matter to allow the administrators from the two countries to oversee the returning of the calves. However, he warned the group not to use the incident of the donkeys as a cover for violating peace agreements. The elder also complained that the interference with the Turkana community's seasonal migration to Uganda has disrupted his investigations, requesting that the matter is discussed during the next meeting when investigations are complete. He also challenged them that if they insist on the same vein of argument then they should kill him and Ekeno then continue pursuing their evil deeds by asking for compensation over and over again on the same cow.

The kraal leader alleged that there were criminal elements who were planning to cause trouble between Ekeno and himself. He revealed that the culprits are believed to be coming through Lokwayara's home and Nangolol Apolon. To conclude, Lowakabong suggested that another meeting, similar to the present one, is organised in Uganda so that comparable messages are disseminated.

A **councilor from Kenya** was not too happy about the turn of events. He was concerned that during the Lodwar meeting, participants resolved that every stolen animal should be returned including the 17 donkeys that were stolen from Kenya and 51 calves from Uganda. He said that his perception of the meeting was to facilitate the exchange of animals by both parties but to his bewilderment, only one party was faithful to the bargain. "Then what has happened; why is it that only the calves can be seen while the donkeys remain invisible," he queried. He enlightened the meeting that his group brought hides of the missing calves to show that they died from natural causes and are not hidden somewhere in Turkana land. He accused the Matheniko of indifference to agreements if they could show such unbelievable boldness by coming to the meeting empty-handed and to add insult to injury, they feign ignorance on issues already discussed. He demanded an explanation for this dishonest behaviour from people who are stakeholders in the peace process and stand to gain from it. Turning to the DC, he warned, "I want to say this with all the seriousness it deserves, Mr DC, we will either retain the whole herd or the number of calves equivalent to the 17 donkeys that we are expecting."

The councilor argued that the calves were confiscated from a homestead where the donkeys are alleged to have entered. He further explained that the incident was not equivalent to an organised raid and no deaths or injury was reported. He clarified that the Turkana were just holding the calves in custody waiting for the return of their donkeys from the same homestead and denial by the Matheniko that they have no knowledge of the whereabouts of the 17 donkeys was rather surprising as well as annoying. The councilor also maintained that Tuturæ, the owner of the calves, knew the precise location of the donkeys because the footprints were traced to his homestead. "Why is it that we always return stolen animals yet the Ugandans never do the same, Mr DC; is our government betraying us?" he wondered. He confessed that his clansmen had thought of raiding the chief's camp when they got wind that the Matheniko were not bringing the donkeys along. The councilor advised that the way forward was for the calves to stay in Turkana land until the donkeys are brought

in exchange. He also appealed to the leaders to handle the matter judiciously to appease both sides.

In a rejoinder, a councilor from Uganda argued that loss of animals is equivalent to loss of human life and equal effort should be put in returning stolen animals. He was surprised that the Turkana were asking for 17 donkeys while he remembers that they put the number at 12 during a follow-up meeting. He cautioned the people against magnifying the issue of the donkeys at the expense of recent and more important matters. "Let's be committed to plain truth without incitement," he censured.

The councilor recounted how he invited his clansmen for a meeting to discuss the subject of the donkeys. He unearthed the information that during the time the donkeys were stolen from Turkana, there was a man from Upe in Pokot who was moving around the area selling the local brew, *ng'agwe*, and the foot prints belonged to his donkeys and not those of the animals stolen from the Turkana. He added that he wanted to advise Kenyans during the follow-up meeting to abandon the matter but he decided to investigate further and he has confirmed that his premise was true. He cautioned Kenyans to let bygones be bygones. "It is clear that we can't trace your donkeys and if you insist, then we are going to get you other donkeys," he offered.

Provoked by the speech, a Turkana youth became violent and had to be restrained by security officers but he broke off and tried to herd the calves away. Ekeno persuaded him to calm down and wait for the DC to handover the calves to the Ugandans.

The Kenya African National Union (KANU), Division Chairman, asked the people to stop personalising the issue of the lost animals and apportioning blame to friends who are eager to prove their commitment to peace by returning the calves. He advised the participants to suggest how best they could tackle the issue instead of condemning others. He also reminded the people that political diplomacy is important to peaceful existence and should not be ignored. The politician suggested that the two governments should urgently devise a method to supplement the efforts by churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and traditional ceremonies aimed at restoring peace along the borders. He also reminded the people that other ethnic groups were far ahead in development while members of the two communities would be lucky if their population reached 1 million.

Turning to the subject of the stolen donkeys, the politician reminded the Matheniko that the subject was discussed exhaustively during the last meeting and feigning ignorance was an insult to the owner of the animals. "You have seen the kind of reaction your careless statements provoke; let's not imagine what will happen if the donkeys are not returned on time as agreed," he warned. He informed the meeting that neighboring communities, the Merille and Dong'iro, who were notorious raiders have reformed after attending meetings organised by the CAPE Unit. He appealed to the people to value peace meetings so that they can also develop like other communities.

Alosius Alok, the representative of the Local Councilor V, opined that peace should never take second place to anything, emphasising that it should be achieved at all costs and not even the unfortunate incident should prevent its pursuit. Alok's

conviction was that everything was under control as confirmed by Ekeno and Lowakabong. He agreed that both the Matheniko and Turkana still harbour criminals and he challenged the two governments to ensure that the guilty are punished. He also upheld that if the peace initiative belongs to the stakeholders then, "let's assist them as the government and protector of the marginalised groups." He cautioned the people not to lose their tempers because it depicts weakness of character and raises queries in their ability to guide the peace pact.

Joseph Imana, the Managing Director of the Kerio Valley Development Authority, delved into history narrating how his father and Ang'ela signed a peace pact in 1973 that required both communities to meet and discuss all their differences for a whole month. He explained that he is a victim of conflict because he lost his three brothers to raids. He applauded Ekeno's peace efforts, informing the group that his (Ekeno's) father was a peace broker and it is encouraging that his son is still associated with what he started. He suggested that if possible, the two kraals should be brought together to hold discussions after grazing their animals for a whole month. "Let me assure you that they will resolve to bury their differences for the sake of lasting peace," he affirmed.

Addressing the issue of the donkeys that were to be brought by the Matheniko, he drew attention to the kind of reaction that breaks down or lack of adequate information evokes. Imana was convinced that everybody was informed accordingly because he spoke to three members of parliament who confirmed attendance of the meeting because of prior knowledge of the activity. He added that many NGOs are represented and failure to attend by some people was probably due to logistics problems.

Tuturiae, the owner of the 51 calves that had been stolen, refuted accusations that his in-laws were keeping the stolen donkeys. "These allegations are unfounded and I challenge anybody with further information on the precise location of the stolen donkeys to stand up and substantiate before the two communities," he demanded. He said that people had suspended their duties to attend the meeting and to witness the return of the calves that would be followed by the return of the camels and compensation of the deaths of three people. He wondered why people were deviating to other matters that did not belong in the current meeting.

Tuturiae reported that some participants failed to show up because reports confirmed that somebody was killed on Wednesday and the killers retreated towards Turkana land. He wondered whether this kind of meeting was suitable to the pastoralists' way of life because they need to return home every evening to ensure that their livestock was safe. He was wary of attending meetings for several days only to go back home to find that other animals had been stolen.

Lodwat, the owner of the 15 lost donkeys, reported that he has a big problem with travelling ever since his donkeys were stolen. He said that the people who were supposed to accompany him on foot feared for their safety and only a few of them came by road. However, he was quick to add that the absence should not be interpreted as fear to respond to the allegations leveled against them. He appealed to the administrators to help him solve the problem of his animals that are dying because he cannot access pasture and water.

Lodwat was perplexed by the turn of events and he wondered why they met under the same trees some weeks ago to suggest solutions that are not being

implemented. He accused the Matheniko of treachery, narrating how he assisted the administration to track down the calves and then offered to take care of the same animals. He was disappointed that after all these efforts, he was returning home empty handed. He suggested that if the donkeys are not available, then he should be given the equivalent number of calves and he will exchange them for donkeys.

Draleku, the Acting RDC Moroto, compared the confrontation between the Turkana youth to "a normal African traditional way of panel beating the peace process." He took the incident lightly and referred to it as a "symbol of better things to come" but on a serious note, he said that talking without commitment during past meetings provoked such aggression. Nevertheless, he said that the incident would not stop the progress of the peace mission. On behalf of the RDC and the government, Draleku thanked the DC, Turkana, for his efforts to recover the calves and handing them over to the Matheniko. He confessed that he was not briefed about the predicament of exchanging the calves with the donkeys and he apologised for the omission by his superior. He promised that the Ugandan administrators would pursue the matter and ensure that the donkeys are returned. He added that any development would be communicated to the Kenyan administration soon. He refuted reports by the Ugandan newspaper, the Monitor, that the Ugandan People's Defence (UPD) crossed the border to fight Kenyans.

Mr Oyoo answered that there was a solution to every problem especially when the involved parties are incorporated in problem solving. He added that peace could only be attained if the local communities took the initiative to guard and sustain peace on their own. He maintained that it is fruitless to force people to attend peace meetings if they are not interested. "Even if we take them to prison or use the power of the gun, peace can never be attained without personal initiative from stakeholders," explained Oyoo.

He wanted to know when the two communities would stop butchering each other. He also asked how much longer, ever since and before 1973, will they keep coming to Lokiriama to discuss peace. He warned that while the Karamajong region lagged behind in development, other regions are moving ahead. Oyoo informed the meeting that the practice of inter-tribal conflict and chasing after stolen animals is history in other communities, yet in the new millennium others are still obsessed with it. "Chasing cows and donkeys is an act that has been surpassed by time and it is obsolete in the current world," he taunted.

He advised the Turkana to join fellow Kenyans in raising their standards of living as a community. He warned them that when he returns to the area, he would wish to deal not only with the matter of returning stolen cows but also thieves that continue to disturb peace in the region. "Culprits must pay for their acts," he warned. He also admonished the people who trespass on other people's homesteads with the excuse of looking for stolen animals. "This symbolises that you have taken the law into your hands by assuming that the person you are harassing is guilty. We cannot encourage a state of lawlessness," the DC cautioned. He added that the two governments are working closely to ensure that theft of cattle along the borders is stamped out at all costs.

Oyoo also requested the Ugandan authorities that the Turkana are still expecting to have their donkeys back. He told the meeting that the Kenyan government entrusted him with the task of officiating over the return of the calves,

unconditionally and they trust that he performed the duty faithfully. He, therefore, appealed to his Ugandan counterpart to ensure that the donkeys are returned. Mr Kona requested the Acting RDC takes the DC's appeal seriously.

Hon David Ekwee Ethuro opined that the return of seven donkeys should not pose any difficulties to a government that has even ventured to disarm warriors. He asked the Ugandan administrators to give a time frame within which the 17 donkeys will be returned.

Draleku reiterated that his boss did not brief him concerning the arrangement of exchanging the calves with the donkeys when delegating the responsibility to attend the meeting. " I am hearing it for the first time so please accept my apologies for the oversight but I promise that we are going to pursue the matter and communicate with you," he assured Ethuro.

Conclusion

As promised, Ekeno the Turkana kraal leader went to the rebellious youth and recovered the calves and handed them to the DC, Turkana, who with the blessings of everybody including the MP Hon David Ekwee, handed over the 47 calves to the Ugandans. Pastor Muga prayed to conclude the whole occasion. The Ugandans had to spend the night in Lodwar since it was too late for them to ascend the escarpment to go back to Moroto.