



The Return of Cattle at Oropoi

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Foreword

The Community Based Animal Health and Participatory Epidemiology (CAPE) Unit of the African Union's Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU/IBAR) has been facilitating community dialogues in areas of conflict within the Karamojong Cluster since 1999. While CAPE and AU/IBAR's primary focus is animal health care, it was discovered that in order to appropriately improve livestock health through service delivery, the insecurity of the region must also be dealt with. Additionally, because the livelihoods of those in these conflict areas depend on livestock, and most of the conflict is over animals, there was significant rationale for CAPE to undertake these activities.

CAPE has worked throughout the Karamojong Cluster conducting conflict prevention, management, and resolution (CPMR) activities, mainly through peace workshops with elders and women's peace crusades focusing on women and youth. In recent times, however, CAPE has attempted to coordinate its activities with those of other organizations dealing with conflict. Certain organizations, including ITDG, have assumed responsibility for initiating and monitoring CPMR activities in specific areas, mainly the Kenya-Ethiopia border between the Turkana and Merille and the Kenya-Uganda border between the Turkana and Dodoth. While CAPE still works in these areas, its focus is on preventative measures, and not in responding to incidents of conflict. The burden of responding to activities of conflict has shifted to ITDG.

In August of 2001, the CAPE Unit carried out a Women's Peace Crusade along the Kenya-Uganda border to initiate a dialogue between the Turkana and the various ethnic groups of Karamoja with who they were in conflict.¹ This activity helped to cement the peace process that had already begun at certain *epidings*² along the border through community-led efforts and those of ITDG. Currently, the Turkana and Dodoth are at peace.

Introduction

On the 16th of November, a group of Turkana youths from Oropoi stole twelve Dodoth cattle from Kamion, in Kotido District, Uganda (see Map p 2). They then brought the animals back to the Kenyan side. Following the theft, they slaughtered and ate one of the cows, leaving eleven.

Upon hearing of the theft, the Turkana elders and chief of Oropoi insisted that the cattle be returned to the Dodoth, in line with the peace agreement the two communities have formed. These elders took the cattle to the police post for safe keeping and, along with the authorities, worked to find an intermediary to oversee the safe return of the animals.

As ITDG is the main organization facilitating CPMR activities in the area, they were expected to facilitate this return. However, because they had ceased activities for the financial year, CAPE was asked to act as facilitators.

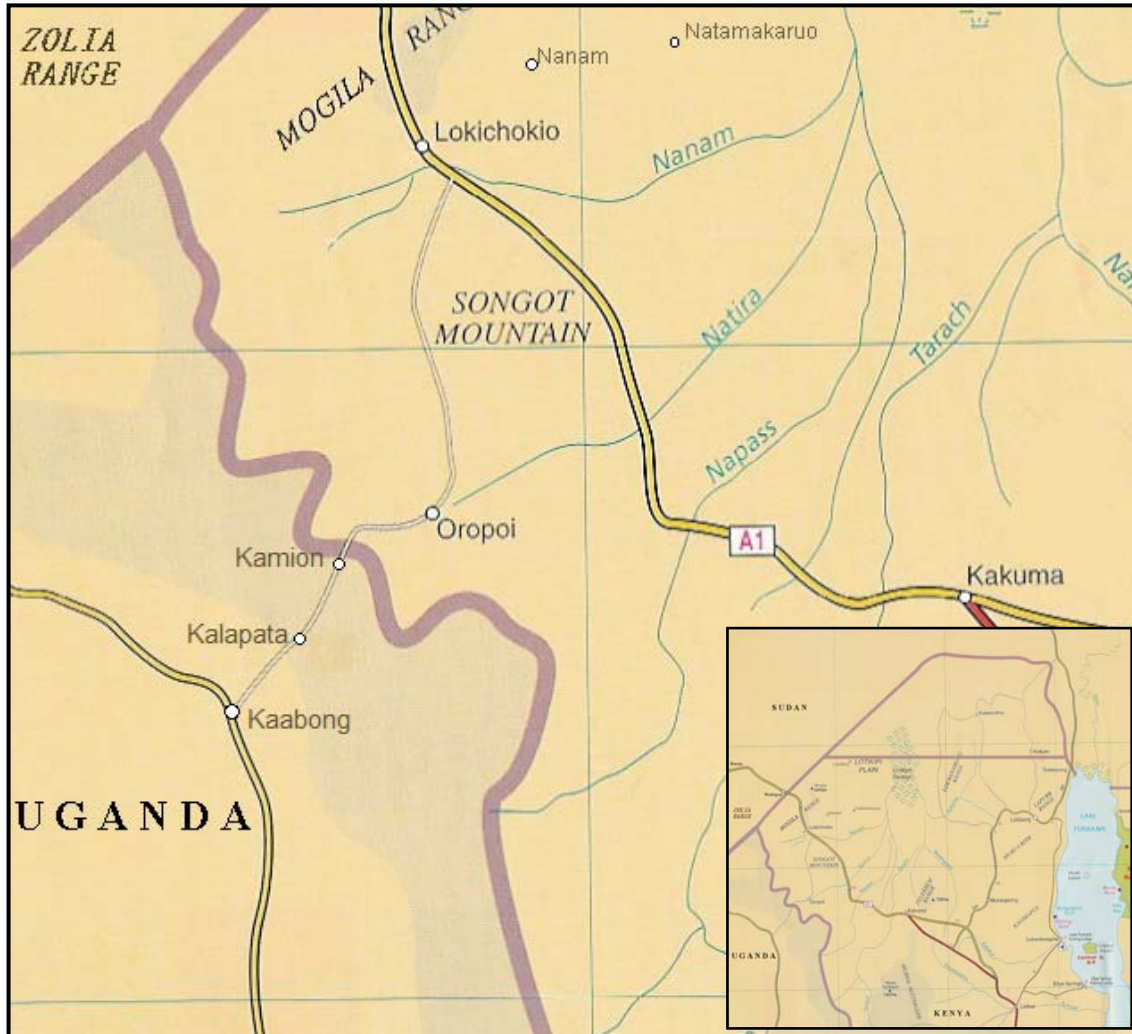
While there are some incidents of theft between the Turkana and Dodoth, the overall situation is still one of peace. These incidents are responded to by the communities, and the key elders involved ensure that any stolen animals are returned. This event was used both to return the stolen animals, and to continue the ongoing peace process by showing the youth in particular that theft would not be permitted.

¹ See Akabwai, Darlington "The Lukumong-Ngimonia-Woyakwara-Ng'ikamatak Women's Peace Crusade," August 2001.

² A border or pass between two communities of different ethnicities.

Objectives

1. To ensure the safe return of the stolen animals to their owners
2. To help the community members ensure that the peace process was followed as had been set out through earlier negotiations
3. To use the event as an occasion to discuss long-term peace between the Dodoth and Turkana
4. To involve the authorities in the return of animals to encourage their future accountability and involvement



Map of the Turkana-Dodoth Border Area

Proceedings

To open the meeting, the Turkana of Oropoi sang and danced, welcoming the authorities and other promoting their message of peace. The preparation that went into these songs revealed the importance that the Turkana placed on this event. The messages of some of the peace songs were as follows:

We are very happy sons and daughters living in Oropoi for the peace that has already prevailed between us and our neighbors Dodoth.

We are very happy that all our administrators and our Senior Govt. officials have come to witness our peaceful co-existence.

It is only peace that we want so that we may stay together with our neighbors and share together what we have and graze our animals peacefully.

Let's have peace, let's throw away the instruments of war, the spear, wrist knife, gun and razor blade so that sustainable and permanent peace is achieved.



Turkana women sing songs preceding the return of the animals

Following these songs, a Turkana elder was asked to deliver a traditional prayer.

May God Almighty bless the Turkana.

May he stop the raids.

May we stay at peace with Dodoth.

May God bless our Administrators.

May our animals graze in peace.

May God bless the Dodoth.

May God bless our peace initiative efforts.

May the Turkana and Dodoth stop raids in good hearts.

May we accept peace, sustain it, and make it permanent.

As the Turkana community had initiated the occasion, two individuals spoke on their behalf to the rest of the participants. Lotamakario, an elder, emphasized that any community members caught raiding or stealing would be denounced, by him and the rest of the community. He asked for the involvement of the Kenyan and Ugandan governments in supporting the communities to eliminate cattle rustling through providing security. Lotamakario also requested that NGOs continue to support their efforts by spreading knowledge and awareness which would help the communities. Additionally, he hoped that because of the efforts of the Turkana to return the stolen animals, any animals stolen by the Dodoth youth would also be returned. In the past, Turkana animals have been stolen and never returned. Lotamakario appealed that the Dodoth community and Ugandan authorities work to return them.

Margaret Eregae, a Turkana woman praised the efforts of the elders and Kenya Police Reservists (KPR) who had captured and ensured the safe return of the animals. Today

will be a memorable day for the positive relationship between the Turkana and Dodoth.” She also urged the Dodoth to follow their example by returning any animals they had stolen. She emphasized that their work towards peace was not yet finished, and they must continue to work to ensure the area’s security. “If we all continue in this way, soon we will see that the land is peaceful enough for the women to go out and harvest wild fruits and building materials without fear.”

Following the speeches by Turkana community members, many of the authorities visiting the area were invited to speak. It was rare for so many significant government representatives to visit Oropoi, and the community was eager to praise them for their involvement and encourage future involvement in ensuring security between the Turkana and Dodoth. By giving the authorities a key role in returning the animals, a sense of accountability was created, as both the elders and authorities are considered responsible for ensuring peace in the area.

The authorities themselves were impressed by the actions of the communities. As Simon Rotich, the District Commissioner of Turkana said, “this is one of the first times that I have seen a community willingly return stolen animals. I promise that I will spread the message of what is happening here so that other communities can learn from your work.” He called attention to the need to maintain peace so that the grazing areas along the border could be shared.

The DC drew attention to the need for all community members to be involved in peace meetings.

When we meet to discuss peace, we must include elders, women, and youth, because if all three are not involved, peace will not occur. Youth not attending the peace meeting will go and organize stage raids while elders and women are discussing peace. If women are not involved, they will sing songs of praise, encouragement, and heroism to the youth so that they will be driven to raid. Seeing all of these groups here today in Oropoi shows me that this will not be a problem.” Lastly, the DC asked the community members and authorities of the Dodoth to follow the example of Oropoi.



Turkana youth dance affirm their commitment to peace

The Local Council (LC) V Chairman, Mark Abuk suggested that this meeting be used to strengthen the peace between the Turkana and Dodoth. He even encouraged these two communities to work with their neighbors to create peace, particularly the Jie of Uganda.

He also suggested that if the governments of Kenya and Uganda worked to improve the road between Oropoi and Kalapata, this would improve the security through increased communication, interaction, and trade.

The Resident District Commissioner (RDC) of Kotido, Lawrence Okol, encouraged increased interaction between the Turkana and Dodoth to ensure peace.

To consolidate our peace efforts, we do not only need cattle returned but also we need each other. We need to encourage friendly visits between you the, Turkana and the Dodoth. Dodoth should be able to walk freely to Turkana and the Turkana should be able to do the same freely and at peace. We should be able to share pasture and water for our animals peacefully. We should also encourage intermarriage between Dodoth and the Turkana so as to curb cattle rustling between the conflicting communities.

The RDC agreed that building a road would not only help to increase friendly interactions between the two communities, but would also increase the security, and assured the participants that he was working towards this goal.

He concluded by challenging the Ugandan community members and authorities present follow the example of the Kenyans. He admitted that they had never expected that the Turkana would return the animals, and were extremely grateful that they had done so on their own initiative. The RDC asked the Ugandans to share this with their fellow community members as a sign of the level of commitment towards peace that the Turkana have.

The animals were then returned to their owners peacefully. The owners were assured that they would pass safely on their return, and the Turkana promised to do their best to ensure that it would not happen again.



The eleven animals are returned to their owners

Conclusion

While theft of animals is certainly not in line with the long-lasting peace that the Turkana and Dodoth proclaim they have, the fact that both communities are willing to return

animals that their young men have stolen is a positive sign that they are committed to peace. On this occasion, the Turkana seized and returned the animals without even being asked by the Dodoth. This shows the substantial commitment that they have made to maintaining peace. Occasions such as this one, in which authorities come together with the communities to help return the animals will only serve to cement the peace.

Because of the previous activities that have happened along this border, including the Women's Peace Crusade of August 2001 and other activities facilitated by CAPE, ITDG, and the communities themselves, the majority of the underlying issues that contributed to the conflict between the Dodoth and Turkana have been dealt with. These communities are able to share resources peacefully, even grazing their animals together. Despite lying on opposite sides of an international border, through their elders and with the support of organizations such as CAPE, they are able to maintain communication and deal peacefully with any incidents that occur.

Minor theft, such as the incident in which these animals were obtained, is still, however a common occurrence throughout the Karamojong Cluster, even in areas where there is no violent conflict. While this is not the same as the full-scale raiding that took place in the past, these minor incidents have the potential to lead to a significant escalation in conflict, and for this reason, should be taken seriously, as can be seen by the Turkana response. Ensuring that there is proper communication between the two communities, along with support from the government and outside organizations, will ensure that incidents such as this theft do not lead to an overall escalation in the conflict.