

Foraging and Fighting:

Community Perspectives on Natural Resources and Conflict in Southern Karamoja



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Acknowledgements

The authors greatly appreciate the support and collaboration of Save the Children in Uganda. In particular, we thank Thomas Cole of Save the Children for initiating this partnership. We also wish to thank Luc Vanhoorickx and Richard Odong in Kampala and Vincent Abura Omara in Karamoja. The rest of the Save the Children in Uganda team in Kampala, Moroto and Nakapiripirit provided extremely helpful logistical assistance. We also acknowledge our research assistants Michael Kapolon and Irene Emanikor as well as translators William Lochodo, Becky Nachuge and Betty Cheruto for their hard work. From the Feinstein International Center we thank Rosa Pendenza and Beth O'Leary for managing the finances and Anita Robbins for helping with logistics. All photos by Phil Bowen apart from photos on pages 5 and 11 by Lorin Fries.

About the Feinstein International Center



The Feinstein International Center at Tufts University develops and promotes operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives and livelihoods of people living in crisis-affected and marginalized communities. The Center works globally in partnership with national and international organizations to bring about institutional changes that enhance effective policy reform and promote best practice.

About Save the Children in Uganda



Save the Children in Uganda (SCiUG) envisions a country in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. SCiUG's strategic framework is designed to ensure that all children in Uganda realize their rights to be safe, educated and healthy in emergency, recovery and development settings.

This report is available online at fic.tufts.edu.

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of research examining the intersection between natural resources and conflict in southern Karamoja, Uganda, from the perspective of local communities. The study and report are based on a research partnership between Save the Children in Uganda (SCiUG) and the Feinstein International Center (FIC) at Tufts University. FIC researchers (hereafter called the Tufts team) are working with SCiUG in 2009-2011 on a series of discrete studies to investigate areas of mutual interest in Karamoja. The research findings from these studies are designed to inform programming, planning and advocacy in the area of livelihood interventions.

The topic for this report has been one of interest to the Tufts team for some time. In our research in Karamoja since 2005, respondents often discuss problems with natural resource access and availability, and with comparable frequency they describe conflict with neighboring or nearby groups who are also accessing natural resources. Political, academic and media perspectives on conflict in pastoral regions in East Africa and beyond cite competition over natural resources as a key factor driving violent conflict¹. In this field study, a combined Tufts and SCiUG team sought to better understand how local communities view the intersection of natural resource and violent conflict.

The terms of reference for this work emerged through a collaborative effort between the Tufts team and SCiUG staff in Kampala and Karamoja. Fieldwork was conducted in Moroto, Nakapiripirit and Amudat Districts over a two-week period in November 2009. A first draft of this report was shared with SCiUG staff members and other key stakeholders and experts for comments and feedback, which were incorporated into the final version.

METHODOLOGY

The research presented in this report is based primarily on fieldwork conducted by two of the authors and a research team, with field support provided by SCiUG. All sites were in southern Karamoja (Nakapiripirit, Moroto and Amudat Districts) with the Karimojong (Pian, Matheniko and Bokora) and Pokot. We collected qualitative data in 33 semi-structured focus group interviews,² specifically:

- 33% of focus group interviews with elders;
- 30% of focus group interviews with male youth;³
- 36% of focus group interviews with women;
- 27% of focus groups interviews with Bokora;
- 27% of focus groups interviews with Matheniko;
- 27% of focus groups interviews with Pian; and
- 18% of focus groups interviews with Pokot.

¹Authors relating the violence and intensity of civil wars in Africa to resource scarcity include M. Byers and N. Dragojlovic (2004). "Darfur: a climate change-induced humanitarian crisis? ." *Human Security Bulletin* October and P. Schwartz and D. Randall (2003). *An abrupt climate change scenario and its implications for United States National Security*. Washington, DC, Environmental Media Services. Authors looking more specifically at the role of climate change in increasing vulnerability and instability include G. Baechler (1999), *Violence through environmental destruction*. Dordrecht, Netherlands, Kluwer, T. Homer-Dixon (1994), "Environmental scarcities and violent conflict: Evidence from cases." *International Security* 19 (1): 5-40, and T. Homer-Dixon (1999), *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press. For a good discussion of the literature covering this topic, see C. Raleigh (2009), *New Directions in Climate Change-Conflict Literature*. *Environment and Conflict in Africa: Reflections on Darfur*. M. Leroy. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, University of Peace: 63-72.

²In addition to focus group interviews, which constituted the majority of the research, the researchers also conducted selected Key Informant Interviews of local government officials in their offices.

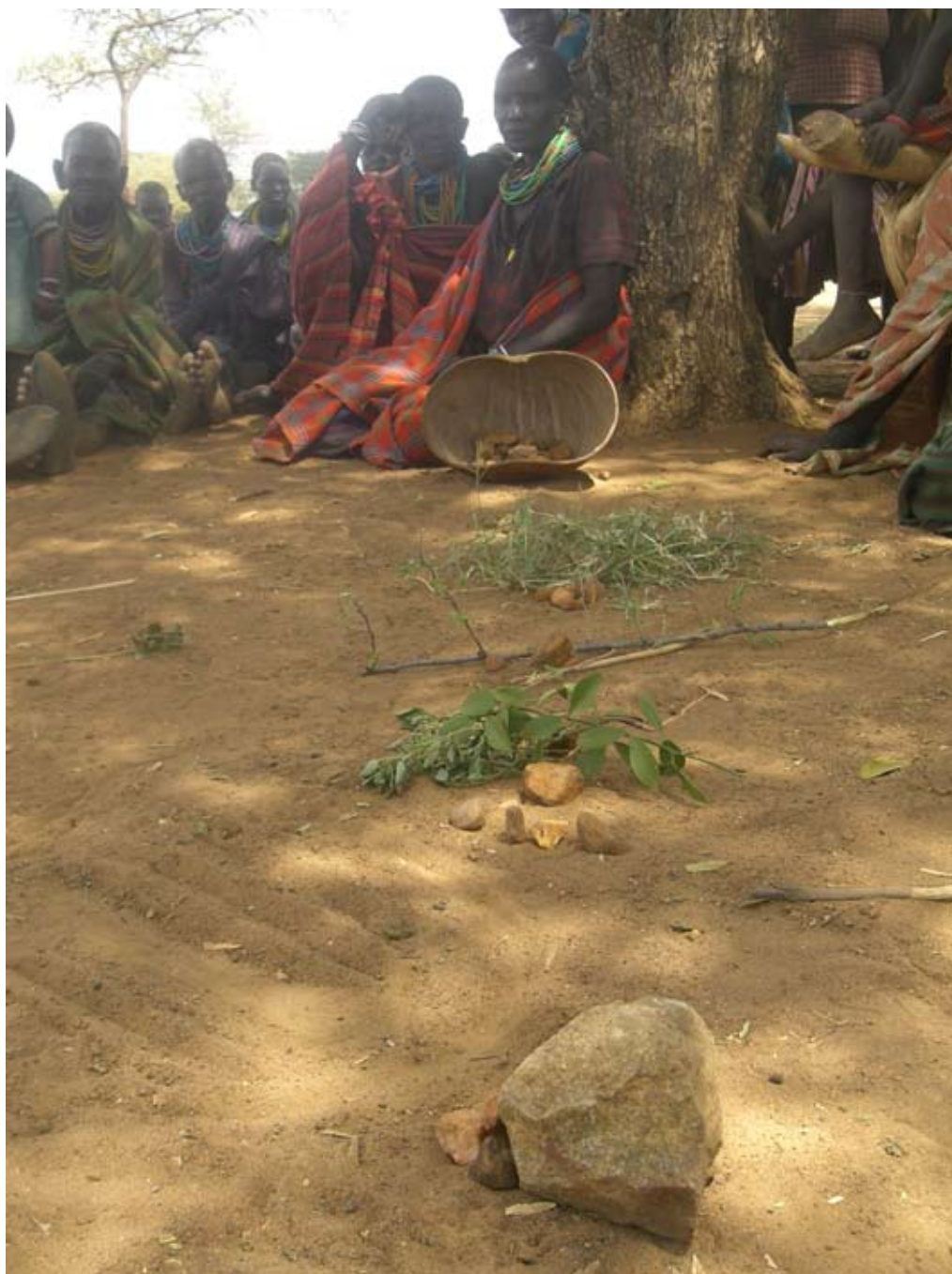
³This group is often called the *karaacuna*. This term is often used by English speakers to mean "warrior," although this is not implicit in the word's meaning. We have opted to refer to this group as young men or male. Exceptions exist in quotes where the word was translated or recorded as such.

We intentionally chose focus group discussions as a means to generate conversation and debate around questions of natural resources. Interviews began with two participatory exercises: a proportional piling activity to illustrate the relative importance of natural resources and a mapping exercise in which respondents drew and discussed a map of their community, important resources, and areas of insecurity or frequent conflict, where applicable. Of the three lead interviewers, two were fluent Ngakaramojong speakers and the third worked through translation while among Karimojong communities. In Pokot all researchers worked through translation.

Field sites were selectively sampled and intended to be typical of broader trends and patterns, with an eye to variation in natural resource access and exposure to conflict. For instance, we collected data in sites near to important grazing grounds and major rivers, sites with ready access to towns and trading centers, and a site at a stone quarry. We also sought a balance between remote sites and those near to more densely populated areas. Most of the communities whom we interviewed can be classified as agro-pastoralist, i.e. people engage in a combination of some degree of seasonal cultivation when conditions allow and extensive rearing of livestock between green and dry grazing zones.

Importantly, we designed this study to be a snapshot on a complex issue. Neither the data presented here nor the overall findings can be extrapolated beyond the locations we visited and the people with whom we spoke. Similarly, although we discussed how the situation has been changing, these data must be read as reflecting opinions and experiences in a particular moment in time. While these findings do not apply beyond this study population, we believe that they highlight important questions and issues for broader consideration and investigation.

In addition to the data collected in November 2009, the authors drew on data collected by the Tufts team in Kotido, Kaabong, Moroto and Nakapiripirit Districts between May 2005 and May 2009. This work did not focus specifically on natural resources and conflict but questions of insecurity, difficulties in accessing resources, and livelihood shifts were frequently raised by respondents. These data provide background information and have helped to frame our analysis and provide context for our findings.



Proportional Piling Exercise

In line with our previous reports, we identify the research locations by sub-county and interview date alone. No military or official personnel were present during any of our interviews. Whenever possible, local councilors were interviewed separately when present at interview sites and were asked to excuse themselves from group discussions. ⁴

The collaborative partnership between Tufts University and Save the Children in Uganda allows us to leverage field workers' knowledge to identify and pursue research themes of particular and timely relevance to local communities. This partnership also has its drawbacks, as respondents assume that the Tufts team is associated with an International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) when we arrive in white Toyotas with organization logos. We are highly cognizant of the biases this association creates, and seek to minimize these biases as much as possible in our introductions, discussion of the research and possible outcomes, and in how we conduct interviews and analyze the data.

This study seeks to understand local perceptions of the intersection between conflict and natural resources. In examining this issue, however, we intentionally did not ask directly if natural resource scarcity or competition caused conflict. Rather, we sought to gather data on access and availability of resources, the range of factors that might constrain access, processes for management and sharing of resources, and trends in the incidences of conflict. We also sought to understand how resource access and availability had changed over time, and what people perceived to be factors in this change. While this study does not purport to provide all the answers, we believe that the perspectives of the communities on these topics offer critical and often overlooked aspects for future programming.

⁴To note, we had a problem with this in the interviews in one parish in Nabilatuk Sub-County in Nakapiripirit, where a persistent local councilor insisted on sitting within earshot of as many interviews as possible.

NATURAL RESOURCES for LIVES and LIVELIHOODS

The environment of southern Karamoja offers a number of natural resources upon which communities depend for daily functional, economic and social purposes. In this region with high poverty rates,⁵ sparse social services and limited economic opportunities, such resources play a critical role in local lives and livelihoods. Dispersed geographically between Karamoja's three agro-ecological zones, regenerative resources such as pasture and water are temporal in their seasonal availability due to the region's cyclical droughts and extreme fluctuations in rainfall. In addition to variable resources, more static geological features like mineral deposits and water infrastructure offer important economic and domestic resources.

The people of Karamoja draw upon generations of knowledge and adaptive strategies to transform natural resources into food, items for trade, infrastructure and domestic and cultural items. We took care with the selection of our interview sites to represent a cross-section of livelihoods activities in an attempt to capture the role and importance of natural resources in cultivation, pastoral production, and economic enterprises.⁶

Natural Resource Priorities

To lay the foundation for this research, respondents identified and ranked the natural resources most important to their lives. The people of Karamoja use natural resources for myriad pragmatic and cultural purposes, as described by respondents:

- Water is important for human and animal consumption; crop and tree irrigation; hygiene and sanitation purposes such as bathing, washing clothes and utensils; cooking and making local brew; infrastructural uses such as building bricks and smearing huts; caring for the sick by cooling fevers and through hydration; and performing cultural cleaning during childbirth.
- Pasture is critical for consumption by livestock and wild game; thatching of manyattas⁷ and the protection of granaries against rats and insects; consumption of edible grasses by humans; burning charcoal; making bricks and medication.
- Forests or trees ranked highly for a number of uses including firewood, charcoal and poles⁸ for sale; providing shade, breaking wind and "attracting rain"; fences for kraals, manyattas and water troughs; edible leaves and fruits; browse for animals; and medicinal properties. Trees are also considered sacred when identified as akiriket, shaded sacred groves for elders' decision-making and community ceremonies. Dynamics around akiriket are discussed in Cutting Akiriket, below.
- Wild fruits are important resources for human consumption and nutrition – both from the fruits' flesh and from seed oils – and for their role in rituals. Other wild foods such as honey and ants are also highly valued.
- Soil is valued for crop cultivation, plastering walls, cultural ceremonies and burying the dead.
- Minerals, such as limestone and marble, are important to communities for income generation. Rocks are used for grinding food and for construction.

⁵United Nations Consolidated Appeal 2010. Accessed at [http://ochadms.unog.ch/quickplace/cap/main.nsf/h_Index/CAP_2010_Uganda/\\$FILE/CAP_2010_Uganda_SCREEN.pdf?OpenElement](http://ochadms.unog.ch/quickplace/cap/main.nsf/h_Index/CAP_2010_Uganda/$FILE/CAP_2010_Uganda_SCREEN.pdf?OpenElement)

⁶We did not collect data in any of the so-called resettlement sites, where agriculture might have been more intensively practiced.

⁷The terms 'manyatta' and 'kraal' are widely used in English to refer to the settlements of the Karamojong, but are not local words. 'Manyatta' is originally a Maasai word, while 'kraal' has its roots in Afrikaans but has become widely used to describe cattle pens as well as fortified cattle enclosures. The correct Ngakarimojong terms are ere for manyatta (plural: ngireria) and awi for kraal (plural: ngawiyoi). For the sake of consistency with other recent reports, we have opted to use manyatta and kraal in this publication.

⁸"Poles" are long, strong branches used for construction.

An important trend emerging from communities' responses on the use of natural resources is that extraction, gathering and foraging are often performed for commercial reasons. We spoke to workers at stone quarries who access basic necessities with profits they earn from selling extracted limestone and marble to cement companies. A Pokot woman explained:

Marble⁹ is important because we can sell it and get money for survival. We get this money for development but now we have too much drought and insecurity. Because of the drought we have lost all our animals and the only thing to do to survive is to break marble ... we old women can't even manage this hammer to break the marble but it is the only choice now.¹⁰

Many of the respondents overtly or implicitly indicated a shift from the usage of natural resources for domestic and livestock-related purposes towards the sale of these resources for income. Some community members see this as a positive trend, as a youth from Pokot described:

In the past marble was not important. Our fathers used to ask 'Do you eat soil?' We responded no. 'Do you eat stones?' We answered no. 'Do you eat livestock?' We said yes. Then they encouraged us to take care of livestock. These days we are depending on stones to earn a living more than depending on trees for wild fruits. In fact these stones are stopping us from relying on other natural resources around. Youth no longer go for raids; the stones have rescued us from encountering more deaths by engaging in raids. They have created employment for us.¹¹

As we explore below, the shift towards commercial uses for natural resources has broad implications for these resources' protection and management.

Demographic Differences in Natural Resource Prioritization

After discussing the multiple uses of natural resources in the local context, respondents ranked those most important to their lives and livelihoods. Groups in the study population overwhelmingly prioritized water, pasture and trees; this is consistent with local prominence of pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods, which depend on water and pasture, and the intensified use of firewood and charcoal for income generation. However, a closer look at each demographic group's responses reveals gender differences in the relative importance of these resources: notably, while all groups rated water as the most important resource, men and male youth identified pasture as the next most critical while women prioritized trees.

Furthermore, while elder men discussed water and pasture almost exclusively, young men expanded this focus slightly to resources such as trees, wild fruits and stones, while women discussed a broad range of foraged resources to be used as food, for domestic and social purposes, or sold/exchanged in the market. This reveals a related distinction between natural resources and their functionality for different groups: elders focus primarily upon resources that support livestock, women are primarily concerned with resources that provide human sustenance or generate income, and young men's focus encompasses resources with a range of purposes. Notably, the groups often prioritized the same natural resources but for distinct purposes. As an example, water and pasture for livestock were mentioned by all demographics but the elders focused upon the livestock itself while women emphasized milk for consumption, and young men discussed a wide range of animal products including skins and hides.

These differences in prioritization provide an important interpretive filter for data from the focus group discussions: men and women react most to dynamics surrounding the resources they prioritize, thus their discussions of protection, availability, access and conflict primarily concern those resources foremost in their minds. This is an important lens to understand the research data and also to navigate broader issues around natural resources and conflict in Karamoja.

⁹Communities use the term "marble" to reference both marble and limestone extracted and sold to Tororo Cement.

¹⁰ Interview with Pokot women, Katikekile Sub-County, Moroto District, 14 November 2009.

¹¹ Interview with Pokot male youth, Katikekile Sub-County, Moroto District, 14 November 2009.

AVAILABLE but INACCESSIBLE: BARRIERS to NATURAL RESOURCE UTILIZATION

As a starting point for investigating patterns of conflict and natural resources utilization, the research team collected community perceptions about the availability of and access to natural resources. Respondents' perspectives highlighted a critical distinction in this regard: while communities discussed concerns over declining natural resource availability, they uniformly emphasized problems with access—especially due to insecurity—as opposed to issues of availability. Barriers to access were the primary challenge to utilizing natural resources.

Availability of Resources

Asked to compare natural resource availability in current times against the experience of earlier generations, both young and old within the study population perceived that resources were more plentiful in previous decades. Many respondents attributed this to greater amounts of rain and stronger and more sustained periods of peace in times past. Respondents uniformly agreed that availability of natural resources has diminished significantly in the past several years. Drought over four consecutive seasons¹² prior to the research study undoubtedly resulted in lower amounts of seasonally regenerative resources such as water, pasture and wild fruit. When we asked communities why there are fewer natural resources today they spoke about both natural causes and increased destruction of resources in times of scarcity:

During past generations, natural resources and people were in abundance. There was peace and rain, so people could access what they needed. People used to cultivate so they didn't have to go out and destroy the natural resources like we do now. There is now famine, which is making people access and destroy these resources.¹³

Respondents feel that “normal” seasonal patterns of natural resource availability have been disrupted by prolonged drought. Asked about availability during the rainy season, respondents mapped proximal and plentiful sources for their most important natural resources; most often, however, these descriptions were accompanied by the statement that such rains have been absent for several years: “These days, the wet seasons are the same as the dry seasons. There is no wet season.”¹⁴

Accessibility of Resources

Respondents emphasized that barriers to access pose the greatest challenge to utilizing natural resources. The fundamental obstacle to access is insecurity: this perception was ubiquitous in responses from all demographics and territorial groups with whom we spoke. As a young Pian man explained, “Insecurity denies access to fruits, firewood and pasture as well as water. Fruits are now rotting in the bush because of insecurity ... only the jackals feed on them.”¹⁵ A Pokot elder echoed this sentiment, explaining “when the area is insecure, there is fear of grazing, so resources are left untouched while animals suffer.”¹⁶

Community members described insecurity as hindering access in three critical ways: by affecting community members when they encounter “enemies” while in search of resources, by reducing willingness to access distant natural resources because of perceived risk, and by altering human settlement patterns to the detriment of natural resource access.

¹² FEWSNet: Uganda Food Security Outlook July – December 2009:2; United Nations Consolidated Appeal 2010.

¹³ Interview with Matheniko women, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

¹⁴ Interview with Pokot male youth, Loroo Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

¹⁵ Interview with Pian male youth, Nabilatuk Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

¹⁶ Interview with Pokot male elders, Loroo Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

Firstly, respondents and previous research¹⁷ indicate that the practice of accessing natural resources can often result in violent encounters, especially when in the bush. As women in Nadunget sub-county described of their journeys to gather firewood:

When the enemies catch you sometimes they will remove your beads, remove your clothes, and rape you. If there are many men, they all will rape you. For women they usually leave you alive but will ask you many questions about how many cows you have and in which direction they are, the location of your guns, and other things. When they catch a man they will usually kill him.¹⁸

Accounts of women raped, and of men and boys killed, arose throughout the communities researched. This violence has complex roots and motivations: it can occur between groups that are supposedly at peace, for instance, and many community members feel they are more at risk since disarmament resulted in uneven ownership of guns and inadequate protection provided by the State.¹⁹

Secondly, perceived risk is paramount to actual risk as concerns resource access. The realities encountered by some as they venture in search of resources create a shared fear within the community, most acutely expressed by women. This fear impacts psychological health. As a Bokora woman described, “We don’t sleep well because we are psychologically tortured.”²⁰ Moreover, perceived risk prevents or inhibits community members’ pursuit of natural resources. Sometimes such fears are based on recognized danger signs:

When you go out looking for something maybe you will see the enemy’s footprints or you will hear the alarm call and you have to reverse your direction of search. Sometimes that means you don’t come back with as much, or anything at all.²¹

At other times, fear alone acts as a barrier to natural resource access, as a Pokot youth expressed:

These days we are not able to access these resources because of rampant insecurity. We cannot go out there to look for something to eat. The Jie are always there waiting for us. We are just waiting to starve to death.²²

Whether observable or anticipated, risk therefore plays a critical role in whether communities access the natural resources that are available to them.

Finally, natural resource access has undergone a shift as human settlements have become more densely grouped in response to insecurity. As a result, a greater number of people draw upon natural resources in the immediate vicinity of manyattas and kraals. As explored below, this trend toward settlement clustering has a reinforcing and deleterious effect upon communities’ ability to access and protect natural resources.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, “Changing Roles, Shifting Risks: Livelihood Impacts of Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda,” (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2009).

¹⁸ Interview with Matheniko women, Nadunget sub-county, Moroto District, 10 November 2009.

¹⁹ For more detail on these dynamics, refer to Stites and Akabwai, “Changing Roles.”

²⁰ Interview with Bokora women, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

²¹ Interview with Matheniko women, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

²² Interview with Pokot male youth, Loro Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009. The Jie are often mentioned as “the enemy” in this study, as this is the strongest and closest group to the populations of southern Karamoja interviewed for this report. We did not collect data with the Jie as part of this research, but it is important to stress that the frequent references to the Jie by respondents do not reflect a belief on the part of the authors or field team that the Jie are any more at fault than other groups for the insecurity in Karamoja.

Reinforcing Cycles of Insecurity, Resource Distance, and Clustered Settlements

We used participatory mapping to gather more in-depth information on key barriers to access. As discussed above, both actual and perceived insecurity limit access to resources. The mapping exercise showed that perceived risk intensifies with greater distance: people were more likely to experience attacks deeper in the bush, and they expect attacks to occur at a greater distance from home.²³ Male herders, who travel greater distances in search of adequate resources for animals, feel increased threat when moving to distant grazing lands or water sources:

Availability of natural resources has reduced because of drought. These resources are found far away from the village. As we try to go for them there, we are attacked.²⁴

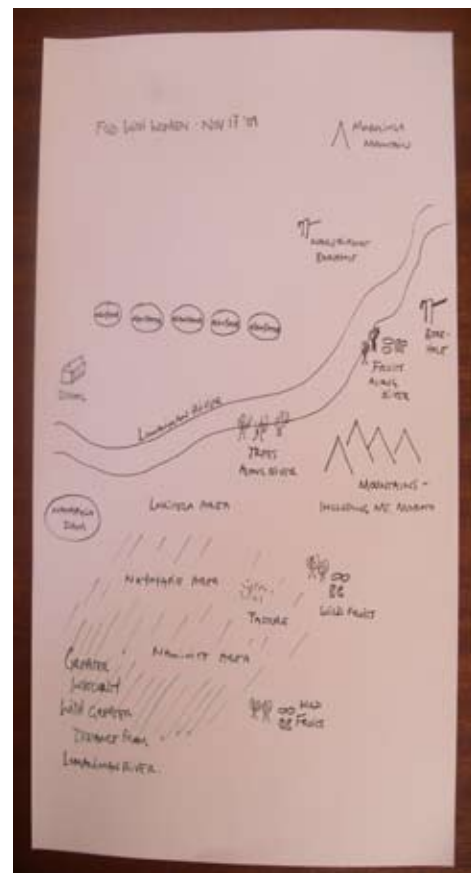
Women in the study population likewise reported a greater number of violent incidents the further they ventured into the bush. Pokot women spoke of this fear when describing their increased reliance on foraged natural resources for cash trade or human consumption:

When we go for firewood, we get attacked and our livestock is taken. The further we go the more insecure it is. When we go to these places we leave our good dresses and beads at home.²⁵

Some women were even more explicit when equating distance with risk: “If you go very deep into the wilderness, you are looking for death,” explained a focus group discussion participant in Lopei sub-county.²⁶ Many respondents choose to avoid these risks at the expense of the quality and quantity of resources they can collect, looking for scattered resources in lieu of those more plentiful in less secure sites. Due to the perception of attacks being more likely within the bush, resources are heavily depleted near to homesteads.

This interplay between distance from populated areas and commensurate increases in perceived insecurity has led to another important trend in southern Karamoja: the clustering of human settlements in the interest of greater security. This trend was observed by research team members who have long experience in the region and noted new residential clusters such as at Nangolekitela near the Teso border.²⁷ The dynamic was also highlighted by several respondents such as Matheniko elders who said, “The people are staying together. Because of insecurity they cannot dare have separate manyattas as they used to during those good days!”²⁸ Female Bokora youth explained the nuanced implications of this increased density for natural resource access:

People now concentrate in one place and this has affected natural resources. In the past, we were dispersed and were able to access such resources easily. But with increased insecurity, drought and diseases people are finding difficulty in accessing natural resources.²⁹



Participatory mapping output

²³ It is worth noting that these attacks in the bush are different from cattle raids. These attacks are better described as opportunistic theft and usually involve a small number of attackers.

²⁴ Interview with Bokora male youth, Lotome Sub-County, Moroto District, 17 November 2009.

²⁵ Interview with Pokot women, Loroo Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

²⁶ Interview with Bokora women, Lopei Sub-county, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

²⁷ Dr. Akabwai has worked regularly in Karamoja since 1972.

²⁸ Interview with Matheniko male elders, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

²⁹ Interview with Bokora female youth, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

These and similar statements illustrate a dichotomy of greater population density: the increase in human security is paramount to a decrease in natural resource security. A woman speaking in a focus group summarized this critical underlying and reinforcing aspect of vulnerability in the region, saying, “Conflict brings people together to crowd, whereas hunger disperses them for food.”³⁰ Put another way, people move together for greater protection, but, when coupled with food insecurity, their daily livelihood strategies force them to move farther afield to access adequate resources for human and animal needs.

In the data there is a clear correlation between drought, distance and insecurity. The conditions caused by drought mean that people have to travel greater distances in order to acquire the basic items for their survival, a role often played by women. As more people turn to livelihood strategies based on heavy resource exploitation, the distance that has to be travelled to reach adequate resources grows ever greater. Insecurity and risk of attack increase concurrently.

Natural Resource Governance

Understanding governance over natural resources is key to understanding shifts in resource use and the intersection between these resources and conflict. We examined issues of governance from multiple angles, but started with the question “Who controls natural resources?” Responses to this query varied markedly by age and gender. Elders reported that they were in control of resources. Women, in contrast, had one of three answers: no one controlled resources, God controlled resources, or women themselves controlled resources. Male youth most often reported that elders controlled resources, but were much more circumspect and conditional in these responses, and many pointed to potential shortcomings in the elders’ control.

The variations in these responses are closely linked to primary resource use by gender. This, in turn, links to the ways in which natural resource use—and hence governance thereof—is shifting over time and in response to current stresses. When asked who controls or manages natural resources, respondents answered with regard to the resources they prioritize.

Male elders were unanimous in identifying themselves as the authorities except in the case of water infrastructure requiring industrial materials, such as boreholes, which they perceived to be under local government authority. A group of Bokora elders stated bluntly, “Elders are the ones who control resources. We just give orders on what needs to be done.”³¹ This sentiment was common among male elders across all groups within the study population.

Not all elders within the study population were equivocal about the extent of their own control, however, and in several locations elders stressed the difficulty in extending their authority. This was sometimes blamed upon the presence of the army or the recalcitrance of the youth, particularly when youth had guns and thus were “difficult to control.”³² Respondents of various ages who linked the military presence to changes in resource management felt that the roles of the elders had been supplanted by the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) with negative repercussions for human and animal populations.³³ According to a group of Pian male youth:

The management by the UPDF differs sharply with that of elders. UPDF restrict cattle around villages and barracks- denying them access to good water and pasture at the grazing reserves.³⁴

³⁰ Interview with Pian women, Lolachat Sub-County Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

³¹ Interview with Bokora male elders, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

³² Interview, Bokora male elders, Lopei sub-county, Moroto, 16 November 2009.

³³ The effects of the military upon livelihoods are discussed in more detail in Stites and Akabwai, “Changing Roles.”

³⁴ Interview with Pian male youth, Nabilituk, Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

Male youth within the study population offered the greatest nuance in thinking about control of resources. They did talk about the proactive work by the elders in making peace to allow access to pasture, but often qualified these comments by pointing to the importance of their own role in daily arrangements needed to maintain access. There was also more disagreement within groups of youth as to the extent of the elders' influence, perhaps indicating the contested nature of this control. Within one group of Pian youth, for instance, we heard:

Elders have too many worries because of intensifying drought, diseases and conflicts. Decision-making and allocation of roles become difficult. Youth do their own things, sometimes not taking elders' advice. Everyone is on his own.

But we were told by another respondent in the same group:

Elders are decision makers. They have the power and authority to direct on how resources are to be used and managed.³⁵

The elders' influence over natural resource use involves the management of shifting alliances and relations with neighboring groups to secure ready access to water and pasture. This was traditionally done by building relations through social exchange, expected reciprocity, and accruing political capital over time.³⁶ External shocks such as droughts have the potential to disrupt the elders' authority and their ability to manage the relations both among different groups and with the younger generations within their own communities. A group of Pokot male youth explained:

During droughts co-ordinations between the elders and youth become poor. Youth go alone to distant places with livestock and make their own decisions.³⁷

The authority of the elders has been undermined both by the military and by the changing political and economic landscape. While an analysis of the potential factors affecting the authority of the elders and shifts in the social and economic order in Karamoja is beyond the scope of this study,³⁸ the patterns outlined in this report make clear that livelihood changes, power struggles, and environmental degradation are interrelated.

³⁵ Interview with Pian male youth, Nabilituk Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

³⁶ Jeremy Lind, "Manufacturing Peace in 'No Man's Land': Livestock and Access to Resources in the Karimojong Cluster of Kenya and Uganda," in *Livelihoods and Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, ed. Helen Young and Lisa Goldman, *Strengthening Post-Conflict Peacebuilding through Natural Resource Management* (New York: United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, forthcoming).

³⁷ Interview with Pokot male youth, Loroo Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

³⁸ The extensive debate over the role of weapons in Karamoja is one of the most often discussed aspects affecting the authority of elders; see Mustafa Mirzeler and Ben Knighton in the following sources: M. Mirzeler and C. Young (2000), "Pastoral Politics in the Northeast Periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as Change Agent." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38(3): 407-429; B. Knighton (2007), "Of war-leaders and fire-makers: a rejoinder." *History in Africa* 34: 411-420; M. Mirzeler (2007), "The Tricksters of Karamoja." *History in Africa* 34: 421-426; M. Mirzeler (2007), "The importance of being honest: verifying citations, rereading historical sources, and establishing authority in the Great Karamoja Debate." *History in Africa* 34: 383-409. See Another critical topic in understanding social and economic changes in Karamoja is the rise of commercial raiding. Much of this discussion regarding Uganda is anecdotal, but see M. L. Fleisher (2000), *Kuria Cattle Raiders: Violence and Vigilantism on the Tanzania/Kenya Frontier*. Ann Arbor, MI, The University of Michigan Press.

Gender, Natural Resources, and Survival Strategies

The different roles and responsibilities of Karimojong and Pokot households are determined by multiple factors, including wealth, status, location, and livelihood strategy. Within households, roles and responsibilities are segmented by age and gender. Anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson, who challenges the assumption that pastoral societies in Africa are strictly patriarchal, explains that gender-specific roles are dynamic based on context, but do follow established social expectations:

Pastoral production is almost always structured by gender and age, although there is of necessity flexibility in the assignment of duties to accommodate individual and household exigencies. Whatever the normative division of labor, each person generally understands the trajectory of obligations they will follow in their lifetime.³⁹

Drought, disarmament, and livelihood change in Karamoja in recent years have resulted in flexibility and adaptability at the household and individual level in gender roles and responsibilities. Men and boys, whose expected obligations would normally be highly livestock-focused, are faced with limited access to grazing lands, declines in animal health and herd size, and greater involvement of the military in decision-making on management of animal migration and sales. These broader gendered-shifts in livelihood roles are discussed elsewhere,⁴⁰ but specific aspects in relation to natural resource exploitation and management bear closer examination.

As detailed above, the relative importance ascribed to natural resources varies by demographic group. Men have greater influence over the livestock sector, especially large animals, and thus emphasize the importance of pasture and water. Women, in contrast, have greater authority over plant-based resources, but the importance of these resources is often overlooked in a production system that tends to focus on livestock.⁴¹ Findings from our study population point to two linked developments in regard to accessing plant-based materials: first, more people are accessing these resources in the absence of other means to acquire cash or food, and, secondly and specifically, men are engaging more heavily in non-livestock, plant-based foraging than previously. The following explanation by a group of elders in Rupa picks up on both of these trends:

Many people are cutting trees for firewood and for burning charcoal to be sold in towns. Men, women and youth carry all these commodities to town. This is a problem because it was meant for the poor only but today they have lost cattle thus making them vulnerable to hunger.⁴²

We could hypothesize that these shifts within livelihood strategies are gradually transforming traditional gender roles and responsibilities. However, in line with Hodgson's argument, we might see this trend rather as evidence of the flexibility and adaptability of gender roles at the household level in response to change. Either way, it is worth noting that respondents within the study population do not currently consider male engagement in traditional women's roles as shameful. As a group of Bokora elders explained:

All people access these resources: women, youth and elders burn charcoal and carry firewood to market. This used to be shameful but it is normal today due to hunger.⁴³

Other elements of increased natural resource exploitation are associated with sentiments of shame and guilt, as discussed in more detail in the section on protection of resources.

³⁹ Dorothy Hodgson, "Introduction: Gender, Culture & the Myth of the Patriarchal Pastoralist," in *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa*, ed. Dorothy Hodgson (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), p. 10.

⁴⁰ Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles."

⁴¹ Sian Sullivan, "Gender, Ethnographic Myths & Community-Based Conservation in a Former Namibian 'Homeland,'" in *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa*, ed. Dorothy Hodgson (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

⁴² Interview with Matheniko elders, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁴³ Interview with Bokora elders, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009. This general acceptance of the male engagement in female roles was also picked up in data collection for other Tufts studies in 2008-2009.

It is important to point out that not all natural resource utilization is done out of desperation. Sian Sullivan describes ‘absentee’ Damara herders in Namibia returning to rural areas to collect foods and plants on weekends much the way a middle-class Briton picks blackberries in autumn. Her point is that this strategy is not always strictly about ‘subsistence,’ but is also about culture.⁴⁴ This important observation is likely to hold true in Karamoja in normal times as well, but two important differences illustrate the ‘survival’ nature of the current levels of resource exploitation. First, a greater number of people are currently gathering plant-based material and are using these materials either as food or to convert to food through cash sale or barter. This indicates a shift away from own-consumption of resources (as firewood or food, for instance) and the increased importance of these materials in trade or sale to meet subsistence needs.

Second, adherence to some of the informal codes and regulations of natural resource exploitation appears to be eroding. This was evident in the responses of multiple female and some male respondents who spoke of breaking the taboo on cutting akiriket trees. We hypothesize that this collapse in adherence to taboos is contributing to a growing governance gap. This is discussed in more detail below.

Shifts toward Foraged Resources and Resulting Governance Gaps

The shift in roles for women in natural resource management in Karamoja illustrates the ways in which governance structures are evolving and emerging, and why these changes are occurring. Women in pastoral areas in East Africa have long played important livelihood roles in caring for animals, particularly ruminants, young offspring, and the milking herd left near the home.⁴⁵ As pastoral livelihoods have gradually transformed in Karamoja, however, women have decreased their involvement in animal husbandry. Milking animals are farther from homesteads, women are discouraged or prevented from spending time in the protected kraals where they would be responsible for tasks such as watering the animals, and the traditional kraals have not fully returned to southern Karamoja since the partial disbanding of the protected kraals.⁴⁶ All of these factors mean that women are spending much less time engaged in animal husbandry. At the same time, women have taken on more responsibility for household food security to counter the decreases in animal proteins and income. This responsibility involves greater exploitation of foraged resources in an effort to provide for household needs. These plant-based materials do not fall within the realm of customary systems of governance based on ties of social capital and exchange. Women point to the lack of active management of these resources by male elders and stress that women’s own decisions – what to cut or not to cut, when to leave fruit producing branches—form the basis of governance. A group of women in Lotome expressed this succinctly:

The elders used to perform good work when the cows were around but now that most of the live-stock has been taken, it’s like they have no other duty. That is our challenge when it comes to managing resources – they only pay attention to the things that have to do with the animals.⁴⁷

When women do discuss the involvement of elders in resource management it is usually in reference to punishments or fines for cutting wood in the wrong place, as opposed to proactive systems to manage resource use or access. Often women emphasize the role of God in creating—or denying—availability of resources as an underlying facet of access. “God keeps these natural resources. When he brings rain, everything is nice.”⁴⁸ Women increasingly attribute natural resource availability to God rather than to management decisions within direct human control.

⁴⁴ Sullivan, p. 150-51.

⁴⁵ Hodgson, “Introduction.”

⁴⁶ Email exchange with Kasper Engborg, 10 March 2010.

⁴⁷ Interview with Bokora women, Lotome Sub-County, Moroto District, 17 November 2009.

⁴⁸ Interview with Bokora women, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

We hypothesize that a governance gap is emerging in regard to natural resource management. This gap is due to the growing importance of foraged natural resources in the livelihood strategies of the people in Karamoja, and the accompanying move away from livestock-related resources. Male elders—agreed by all demographic groups in the study population to have been the traditional custodians over the critical resources of pasture and water for livestock – do not have systems in place to manage foraged resources. Their authority over these resources and areas where they are collected is limited to prohibitions on cutting wood in sacred sites such as akiriket, with management techniques apparently based on punishments and fines. These reactive measures are in marked contrast to the proactive system of negotiation and creation of social ties traditionally used to ensure regular access to pasture and water.

This governance gap has been exacerbated by gendered shifts in livelihood roles, whereby women are taking on increased responsibility for household survival as traditional pastoral livelihoods erode. Household subsistence was previously based on livestock products (milk and blood), but has moved towards resources collected by women and exchanged for cash, bartered for food or local brew residue in urban markets, or consumed (in the case of wild fruits and vegetables). These resources were always part of household livelihood strategies to a degree—firewood was always needed, wild greens were collected seasonally, thatch was essential for regular roof repairs—but commoditization of these resources was not widespread and only the very poor would have needed to convert these materials into cash or food. Therefore, these foraged resources did not need to be governed in the same way as water and pasture, as they were primarily collected in small quantities and for individual household needs. The management systems that were in place relied on restrictions to collecting in certain areas. These restrictions were understood and adhered to and, as such, were effective based on the local context and need. A group of Matheniko male youth in Nadunget appeared to be referencing the shift towards a different prioritization of resources and the associated decline in the authority of the elders:

In the past, dependence on natural resources was minimal since people had enough milk and food to depend on. Because of more reliance on natural resources, elders are finding it difficult to manage them. Their role in the management of natural resources is declining.⁴⁹

The gendered shift towards greater emphasis on foraged resources has not been matched by an evolution of governance systems able to respond in a way that adequately manages or protects these resources.⁵⁰ This explains the perception of women that “no one manages these resources.” Interestingly, although male elders in the study population largely interpret questions of natural resource management to refer to water and pasture, there is evidence that some are cognizant of this growing governance gap and the gendered dimensions inherent therein. Elders in one Matheniko community complained:

It is our duty to protect these resources but we have been defeated by the hungry women who say they cannot afford to watch their children to starve to death while trees are there to cut for firewood and charcoal.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 15 November 2009.

⁵⁰ The governance gap may also be exacerbated by the power struggle between generations of men due in part to the lack of succession from one generation set to the next. This aspect was not raised by respondents so is not discussed here, but this power dynamic is important to keep in mind. Email correspondence with Vincent Aburu, SCIUG, 18 June 2010.

⁵¹ Interview with Matheniko male elders, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

Role of the Official System

The above discussion has focused on customary systems of authority and governance, and is meant to illustrate the increased challenges facing these systems in light of the livelihood, economic and gender adaptations occurring as survival strategies shift and the economy of Karamoja becomes increasingly cash-based. The official governance system in Karamoja, as elsewhere in Uganda, consists of a series of local councils (LCs), ranging from the LCI at the village level up to the LCV at the district level. Appointed technical officers at the district level are meant to include a District Forestry Officer (DFO), District Agricultural Officer (DAO), and District Environmental Officer (DEO), among others. District Environment Committees exist at the sub-county (LCIII) level, and are in charge of planning and managing natural resources within the sub-county. According to the DEO in Moroto, the committees are meant to meet quarterly, but service on the committees is voluntary and facilitation funds are often unavailable. When the committees do meet, the topics of drought and United Nations World Food Programme rations often supersede discussion of environmental management.⁵² Furthermore, due to lack of funds, poor facilitation, and difficulties filling vacancies in Karamoja, many of the district level posts remain unfilled for substantial periods of time – a trend likely to be exacerbated by the increasing number of districts. As of early 2010, for instance, the DEO in Moroto was covering his position as well as the DFO and head of natural resources.⁵³

We collected data from respondents in the rural areas regarding the role of local officials in regard to natural resources. Impressions were mixed. Many respondents reported that local officials did visit their communities with messages regarding environmental protection. These officials were said to sometimes bring tree seedlings to plant. Groups of women and elders, however, pointed out that keeping the seedlings alive was extremely difficult without regular access to water. One group of elders believed that the messages fell on deaf ears, saying “Who will listen to them with empty stomachs?”⁵⁴ The DEO recognized this gap and how it affected the nature of information shared by elected officials: “Politicians are worried about votes – they can’t tell hungry people not to cut trees.”⁵⁵

The impression from both the local officials and the communities they are meant to serve indicates that the governance gap discussed in regard to customary authority is mirrored by one at the official level. Local officials do not have the means to effectively reach the rural populations who are utilizing natural resources. At the same time, survival strategies among these populations mean resource management is a low priority, if not altogether impossible. A political imperative coupled with an awareness of the dire situation of the population makes messages about resources protection unpalatable.

⁵² Interview with John Lotyang, District Environmental Officer, Moroto District, 12 November 2009.

⁵³ Email exchange with Vincent Abura, Save the Children in Uganda, Moroto Office, 5 March 2010.

⁵⁴ Interview with Matheniko male elders, Rupa sub-county, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁵⁵ Interview with John Lotyang, District Environmental Officer, Moroto District, 12 November 2009.

⁵⁶ Stites and Akabwai, “Changing Roles.”

⁵⁷ In an email exchange in March 2010, Kasper Engborg of UN OCHA in Moroto provided an overview of the status of protected kraals in the region. In sum, the UPDF was still operating in or near many kraals across Karamoja region. In Moroto, for instance, out of seven kraals, two had UPDF detachments within them, three had detachments 200-600 meters distance, one had a detachment two kilometers away but not providing protection, and one had no UPDF in the vicinity. In some instances in Kotido, communities that did go back to traditional grazing patterns were assumed to have guns and were the targets of UPDF aerial and infantry operations in January 2010. Email exchange with Kasper Engborg, 9-10 March 2010.

We cannot ignore the UPDF as a major power broker—perhaps the major power broker—in Karamoja at the time this research was conducted. As discussed in an earlier paper,⁵⁶ both the removal of guns and the emergence of the (now defunct or partially disbanded in many but not all areas⁵⁷) protected kraal model have radically shifted the livelihoods of many men, women, and children across Karamoja. Military policies, whether formal or de facto, influence access both to resources and to markets.⁵⁸ A group of Matheniko youth in Rupa explained:

The coming of UPDF has interfered with the management of natural resources.... The real problem here is that UPDF has restricted us from moving our livestock to access good pasture and water resources. This has been made even more difficult by the presence of UPDF, which has scared and restricted us from accessing these resources. In the past we could organize ourselves to reach all areas with pasture and water for the cattle.⁵⁹

Women also discussed problems of access to natural resources attributed to the UPDF, usually due to the lack of security in the forested areas:

When the government sends UPDF they are supposed to protect us but they just stay in the centers, come and use our natural resources, and go back – they don't really protect us.⁶⁰

The military clearly has an impact on who is able to access resources and when and where this access can occur. The UPDF does not (and should not) purport to have an interest or desire to engage in natural resource management. However, the disarmament policies of the UPDF are driving those who still have arms into remote and forested areas—a move that likely correlates to the higher rate of attacks in these areas;⁶¹ thus we are left not only with a governance gap in relation to the heavy use of forest-based resources, but also a human protection gap. This has profound effects on the livelihood strategies and overall levels of human security of the local populations.

⁵⁸ While men in many areas engaged in increased collection of natural resources, in some places these strategies are limited by UPDF restrictions. In interviews in 2009, for example, men in Kotido explained that they were not going to the bush to gather resources for sale (such as building poles or charcoal) or to provide protection for female relatives collecting wood or wild foods. They were also reluctant to access towns or trading centers for fear of being targeted for potential detention or harassment. Men in Bokora in 2007 explained that they were frequently detained if found on the road to town. While these examples are snapshots and influenced by particular events at a given time, they illustrate the on-going effects of the UPDF in basic livelihood decision-making at the household and individual level in the region.

⁵⁹ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009. It is important to note that there are many factors other than the UPDF affecting access to dry season pasture and water, including prohibitions on cross district and national boundaries, recurrent drought, and conflict among groups.

⁶⁰ Interview with Matheniko women, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 15 November 2010.

⁶¹ Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles."

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

We have discussed a number of the barriers the Karimojong and Pokot face in accessing natural resources. This section explores perceptions about protecting these assets. Recognizing the fundamental role these resources play in local livelihoods – indeed, in daily survival - we sought to determine how communities view resource exploitation; what, if any, protection or conservation measures are in place; and perceptions of authority and agency vis-à-vis safeguarding natural resources.

Natural Resource Exploitation

Views on the positive and negative aspects of resources exploitation split clearly along demographic lines within the study population. The vast majority of male elders and male youth expressed concern about the ramifications of certain actions, particularly the cutting of trees, citing a number of short- and long-term deleterious effects. This is captured in the concerns of a Matheniko youth:

The negative effects of cutting trees and destroying the natural resources are many. The open spaces resulting from destruction of forests opens up the land, increasing wind erosion. The disappearance of trees means reduced rainfall. There will be no shade to protect people from direct sunrays. In times of insecurity and tension there is no thicket where we can hide.⁶²

These and similarly voiced concerns focused almost exclusively on the practice of cutting trees and the wide-ranging impact of this activity on attracting rain, creating wind barriers, providing shade, and preventing soil erosion. These concerns are raised almost entirely by men, although the collection of firewood and (usually) the burning of charcoal are duties performed by women. In contrast to the perceptions of males, women indicated minimal concern about natural resource exploitation. “We don’t see any negative aspects of the way we use natural resources,” explained a group of Pian women.⁶³ Their Bokora neighbors felt that “When we destroy them, the natural resources will reappear.”⁶⁴

Natural Resource Protection Strategies

We asked several questions to gather data on possible means of protecting natural resources. Systems of water management were the most commonly mentioned protection strategies; this makes sense given that water was consistently listed as the most important natural resource. These mechanisms included controlling water point access, caring for boreholes and hand pumps, and de-silting dams. It is notable that several of these mechanisms depend on government services and costly industrial materials; thus, communities do not have direct control over some of the most critical protection measures for water. As a Matheniko youth said simply, “In the dry season water is scarce. People rely most on the only hand pump at Nakal. When it breaks down, people suffer.”⁶⁵

Men and male youth mentioned traditional mechanisms for managing rangeland. This was primarily done through careful selection of grazing areas, and most groups named the specific elders who have traditionally held authority regarding such issues. Elders stressed, however, that their authority had diminished due to insecurity and disarmament.⁶⁶

⁶² Interview with Matheniko male youth, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁶³ Interview with Pian women, Lorengedwat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 15 November 2009.

⁶⁴ Interview with Bokora women, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

⁶⁵ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁶⁶ Stites and Akabwai, “Changing Roles.”

Much of the perceived need for improved strategies for resource protection relates to trees and forests. Within these responses, perceptions regarding the protection of forests illustrate variations in beliefs and practices by group and gender. Firstly, the Pokot and the Karimojong cited contrasting motivations around tree cutting for the goal of security: the Pokot respondents in the study population felt it was safer to be surrounded by trees, while Karimojong respondents explained that clearing trees allows for a line of sight of approaching enemies. Pokot reflected proudly on their landscape when asked about the protection of wooded areas: “As you can see, there are trees all over,” pointed out a Pokot youth.⁶⁷ Another explained:

We are not allowing our trees to be destroyed. Trees attract rain and are relied upon by people and livestock. If trees are destroyed, the land becomes open and wind increases, eroding the soil. It is from these trees that we get wild fruits to eat.⁶⁸

The second notable trend in responses about protecting trees was the level of specificity by gender among Karimojong respondents. We mentioned above that women did not perceive a problem with the manner in which they were using the forests. Over the course of data collection, it became apparent that this perception was more nuanced. Men usually spoke in general terms about the negative aspects of cutting trees, while women offered rich detail on how trees can be protected and sustained. These less absolute forms of protection included techniques such as trimming branches while leaving the tree intact, selecting dead or dying trees, and protecting medicinal and fruit trees. It is important to mention that respondents’ citation of such practices does not mean that they are always able to employ them, as we will explore below.

Responsibility for Resource Protection

Management of natural resources refers to issues of overall governance, whereas protection of resources refers more specifically to efforts to conserve or mitigate damage to these resources. As with the question of management of resources, perceptions regarding responsibility for protection differed significantly according to gender. Male elders generally reported that they had exclusive control, whereas women did not reach consensus on the question of who has authority for protection of natural resources. “It is our role to protect natural resources,” say Matheniko elders, “we have rules which are known to all people.”⁶⁹ Yet Matheniko women explain, “None of the leaders restricts access to anything – it’s just the enemies.”⁷⁰ A large sub-set of women respondents felt that no one played a role in resource protection, while others felt that elders worked with government officials on water usage, but not other resources.

These disparate responses by demographic group reflect an overall lack of clarity about what rules, arrangements and systems may be in place to protect natural resources. Particularly in regard to tree cutting, women are the principle agents of action; if the systems that manage the protection of this natural resource are unclear – or unviable, as we shall explore in a moment – there is a disconnect between those who ostensibly oversee natural resource protection and those who carry out actions that may be unsustainable.

We also examined whether communities perceive the protection of natural resources to be a communal or individual obligation. Notably, the majority of women and some male youth within the study population put agency solely with individual actors. “Everyone now looks for a chance and makes his own decision to access resources,” a Pian youth noted.⁷¹ Coupled with the rhetoric of survival that pervaded explanations about natural resources, we see an emerging individualistic and more short-term dynamic that is in contrast to more communal and longer-term systems of pasture management. These individualistic conditions create an environment conducive to the exploitation of natural resources.

⁶⁷ Interview with Pokot male youth, Katikekile Sub-County, Moroto District, 14 November 2009.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Interview with Matheniko male elders, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁷⁰ Interview with Matheniko women, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 10 November 2009.

⁷¹ Interview with Pian male youth, Lolachat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

Cutting Akiriket

The final dynamic arising from discussions about the protection of resources concerns akiriket, a selected grove of trees in each community that is considered sacred. It is in this site that important ceremonies are conducted, decisions made, and prominent male elders gather. Notably, prohibitions on cutting trees in akiriket are one of the few management rules made by male elders (or God) that apply to the resources generally used by women. As Bokora women described:

Akiriket is where elders sit under a tree, with the women and karacuna a bit far away. Bulls are killed and roasted, then the blessing begins and issues are raised in this order: peace, animals, grains and other food, and finally rain. We are not allowed to cut those trees – we would get cursed and killed by God.⁷²

Matheniko elders further describe, “Akiriket are feared places. It is a taboo to cut any tree from these holy sites. They are like church places to the Karimojong.” The fine for violating these protection measures is steep: most communities mentioned such an action could only be appeased by offering a bull to slaughter, while others insisted that a death curse would be put on a woman’s husband by the community elders. Such expectations are well communicated and carry significant weight in communities’ notions of acceptable natural resource use. Despite the consequences of cutting trees in akiriket, however, such protection measures for natural resources are increasingly at odds with the strategies needed and employed for survival in southern Karamoja.

The Karimojong and Pokot respondents in the study population expressed unequivocal reverence for the sacred trees of akiriket and stressed the importance of protecting these areas. Yet some communities also point to an emerging trend driven by survival needs. A Pian woman explained the torment that can occur when faced with the decision to cut *akiriket*:

Sometimes you can be psychologically tortured and you can end up cutting a tree from akiriket. We are in this situation because of hunger. You know the akiriket and yet you cut it – you ask for Akuju’s forgiveness as you do because Akuju knows why you are doing it. When the elders return to their trees and find the tree missing either they will have that heart of the Karimojong and understand that it was because of the difficult times, or he won’t.⁷³

To note, many respondents, including other respondents in the same locations cited above, maintained that trees in an akiriket are never cut. We do not imply that the breaking of the taboo on cutting in akiriket is necessarily widespread, but believe that the repeated mention of this practice points to the urgency of this as a survival strategy. The example of shifts in use and protection of akiriket reflect a larger pattern whereby immediate needs increasingly outweigh the existing management mechanisms that have traditionally governed access to resources in southern Karamoja.

⁷² Interview with Bokora women, Lokopo Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

⁷³ Interview with Pian women, Lorengedwat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 15 November 2009.

NATURAL RESOURCES: Drivers of Conflict?

We designed this research in an effort to shed light on the linkages between natural resources and conflict in Karamoja. A logical assumption—often backed up by literature and political discourse—is that resource scarcity and competition drives violent conflict in pastoral areas. Jeremy Lind explains one of the critical underlying arguments of this perspective:

According to the resources conflict perspective, worsening scarcities of important resources for supporting livestock are causing pastoralists to move over longer distances, whereby they come into conflict over increasingly scarce water, pasture and browse.⁷⁴

In regions such as Karamoja where movement is already constrained, pastoralists are likely to experience conflict close to home, as multiple groups vie for access to an increasingly limited and often drought-affected supply of natural resources.⁷⁵ Karamoja has suffered repeated and prolonged droughts over the past decade; mobility is severely curtailed due to poor relations with neighboring groups, insecurity, restrictions on crossing national and regional borders, and the presence of the military. Violent conflict continues to occur between and occasionally among (e.g., within the Pian) groups. As these factors and the scholarship seemed to support resource scarcity as an exacerbating factor, we sought to understand how the populations directly affected by and engaged in these conflicts viewed this.

We came at this question from multiple angles and never directly asked if resource scarcity caused conflict.⁷⁶ The compiled responses that emerged from the participatory exercises and interview questions illustrate a nuanced relationship between conflict and natural resources: respondents within the study population did not state that conflict or insecurity was caused by tension over resources, competition in accessing resources, or resource scarcity. They did make clear, however, that conflict is most likely to occur in areas where natural resources are being accessed and utilized. The rest of this section explores this issue in more detail.

⁷⁴ Lind, “Manufacturing peace.”

⁷⁵ Conflict occurring “close to home” is in comparison to periods when pastoralists were able to travel more easily across district and international boundaries in order to access dry season grazing and water. Due to increasing restrictions on mobility, conflict is now more likely to occur within Karamoja and often relatively close to settlements. This does not contradict the earlier discussion whereby people said they were more likely to be attacked when collecting “distant” natural resources.

⁷⁶ Our first questions on this topic were in the form of participatory exercises: focus groups (disaggregated by gender) used proportional piling to show the relative importance of different resources to demographic groups (discussed in *Natural Resources for Lives and Livelihoods*). The groups then drew maps of their communities and indicated where each of the resources listed in the first exercise could be accessed. Using this same map, we then discussed areas where conflict was likely to occur. We then moved on to semi-structured interviews with the groups, and asked a series of questions on access to resources—who was able to access these resources, how had this changed over time, what were the factors in this change, and how were shared resources (such as watering points) managed, restricted or controlled. These questions were designed to capture basic information on access but also to highlight areas of potential conflict not captured in the initial mapping exercise. Third, we asked direct questions about competition and conflict in regard to the resources cited as important. We asked (again) if any of these resources were shared or had been shared in the past, and if there had ever been a conflict with other groups in regard to these resources. If so, we asked how the conflict was managed at that time. Fourth, we discussed various external factors and the effects of these on resources, including drought, insecurity, and animal disease.

Site-specific Conflict versus Conflict over Sites

Insecurity experienced by respondents in the study population fell into two categories: attacks by intruders coming into their homes at night, or attacks when they were seeking to access natural resources. The first category has been examined in earlier work by the Tufts team.⁷⁷ In the second category, we posit that most of the violence is better characterized as site-specific conflict rather than conflict over natural resource sites. In other words, the majority of respondents in the study population did not convey access to or competition over resources as being underlying causes or motivating factors behind the conflict. Most of the violent conflict is, however, occurring at the site of these resources, whether these resources are the pasture and water areas prioritized by men or the forested areas prioritized by women for resources access. As explained by a group of young Matheniko men:

[Pasture] is scarce these days. It is fed [on] by livestock both in the dry seasons and wet seasons. Insecurity has really hindered access to pastures especially in the dry season grazing areas of Lokorikwei. Insecurity denies access to natural resources particularly during dry season. In the dry season, resources are scarce and only available in marginal areas bordering communities we conflict with. It is not secure for women to fetch firewood when insecurity tension is there. Access to pasture also becomes difficult as attacks by raiders are always expected. Areas with wild edible fruits are also avoided due to insecurity.⁷⁸

The trouble, as explained by these young men, arises when herders seek to access resources such as pasture and water in areas adjacent to groups they “conflict with.” These are the areas in which hostile groups—seeking to access such resources simultaneously—clash with each other. The data do not indicate that these clashes are born out of competition over resources or efforts to protect territory rich in resources, but rather that these are the locations where interaction occurs as groups seek access. Respondents repeatedly discussed violent conflict erupting at sites where interaction occurs, but rarely characterized conflict over the resources as the source of the problem. The conflict-at-sites logic is apparent in the comment by a group of Pian elders discussing access to dams:

Nawoyarit dam has a lot of water and fish, Nachagar dam also has water and grass but enemies like Bokora, Jie, and Matheniko come there too, thus scaring us [away].⁷⁹

Women are the most common victims of the insecurity occurring at sites of natural resource collection.⁸⁰ This is due, in part, to the increase in women’s responsibility to sell resources for household survival and the parallel decrease of men’s engagement in animal husbandry. The prevalence of attacks on women collecting resources lends further credence to the argument that violence is occurring at resource sites, not due to resources themselves, particularly in reference to foraged resources. The women are attacked not by others seeking to access the same resources—which would be other women—but by men. These men do not purport to be staking claim, preventing competing access, or guarding territory that is seen as ‘belonging’ to their group. Rather, the attackers appear to be hiding in the bush to stage attacks on manyattas, avoid disarmament or harassment by the UPDF, or to steal items of value that the women might be carrying (such as clothes, beads, water cans, or the natural resources themselves). Women in the study population also report that the attackers are seeking information about the location of livestock or guns. These constraints affect the way that women are able to gather resources—they often avoid areas where resources are likely to be more plentiful due to perceived danger:

The worst thing about the gun and natural resources is that people are in the wilderness looking for guns. Because of insecurity we always look for the scattered natural resources, not the good ones.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Stites & Akabwai, 2009, discuss the rise in attacks within manyattas and how this links to shifting security conditions brought by the disarmament operations.

⁷⁸ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 10 November 2009.

⁷⁹ Interview with Pian male elders, Lolachat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

⁸⁰ Every female focus group (twelve out of twelve) and many of the male focus groups raised the issue of the high

⁸¹ Interview with Pian women, Lorengedwat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 15 November 2009.

In eight out of twelve focus groups with women, respondents said they also faced insecurity when seeking to access water for their families or livelihoods needs. (Of the four groups that did not list this problem, each manyatta was situated close to a riverbed.⁸²) Insecurity in accessing water was reported in reference dams, boreholes, and riverbeds. The comment by a group of Bokora women highlights a number of threats:

Insecurity makes us fail to access natural resources. This is important! If you get to the river, the enemy will take your axe and then undress you. He takes you to the wilderness, rapes you, and sometimes infects you with HIV... Then they leave you—if they are not friendly they will kill you with their guns or by strangling you. Sometimes these same enemies will release you, but conditionally because they ask about the location of relief food and cows, sometimes poultry. Then you need to accompany them to go and raid those things.⁸³

Once again, this response does not imply that the dispute is arising over the resources to be found at and near the river—namely water and wood—but rather that it is location-specific threat. Other respondents explained that enemies often hide in or near the riverbeds due to the protection provided by the banks and the lush vegetation.⁸⁴ Within the eight focus groups with women in which they stressed the threat of attack at water points, no group said that the attackers were seeking to protect a water supply.

Jeremy Lind's forthcoming chapter on conflict and natural resource management in the Karamoja Cluster backs up our finding that while conflict often occurs at areas of resource use, there is no clear causal link between the scarcity of these resources and the conflict itself. He writes:

Importantly, there is no simple, direct causation between scarce resources and conflict in the region or one singular cause of chronic armed violence. Uncertainty and variability of rainfall and physical resource scarcities are altogether normal ecological features in the Karimojong Cluster and... have largely defined both customary and contemporary pastoral social relations. Yet, it is not uncommon for social relations to alternate between open hostility and cooperation in variable, highly fluctuating non-equilibrium environments like the Karimojong Cluster.⁸⁵

In the same chapter, Lind explains that the fact that “most raiding occurs in prime grazing environments... is incidental to the acquisition of livestock as the prime motive for armed violence.” In other words, violence occurs where livestock are present and accessible by hostile groups, which is most often the case in locations where herds and herders are also accessing natural resources. While we have argued that the prime resources for livestock—water and pasture—have decreased in relative importance to the foraged resources collected primarily by women, this does not mean that pasture and water are irrelevant for local livelihoods. Indeed, these resources remain critical to rebuilding the health of herds that have suffered due to multiple years of drought and limited mobility within the protected kraal system. Following Lind's logic, violence linked to raiding will continue to occur in grazing areas as groups struggle to restock depleted asset bases.

⁸² This proximity is interpreted from communities' maps generated during the participatory mapping process.

⁸³ Interview with Bokora women, Lopei Sub-County, Moroto District, 16 November 2009.

⁸⁴ The mapping exercises with focus groups often located “conflict” on the far side of rivers, illustrating the role of rivers as natural territorial divides between groups.

⁸⁵ Lind, “Manufacturing Peace”, original emphasis.

The above discussion is not to imply that we did not gather any information on causal links between resource scarcity and conflict. These responses, however, were few and far between, and, when taken in context, were often inconclusive. A district official in Moroto was convinced that resource scarcity is an important driver in conflict—a logical and understandable view given the frequent mention of this point by outsiders and by the regular occurrence of violence in resource-rich areas. Even his comments, however, were specifically about a) clashes between cultivators and pastoralists (such as in areas of Teso, Lango and Acholi where herders traditionally sought dry season grazing), b) concerns over access to potentially lucrative stone quarries without licenses, and c) fears of the impact of selling large swathes of good grazing land to private investors and the impact on access to pasture.⁸⁶ Similarly, when respondents in the study population mentioned resources as a causal factor, this usually referred to conflict between herders and farmers, even within Karamoja, as explained by Pian youth:

Livestock keepers and farmers conflict over pasture for livestock and land for crops respectively. Bokora and Pian were sharing resources at Napak peacefully. Then small thefts of crops started. This ignited conflict, which has continued since 2006.⁸⁷

The only group that raised conflict as directly related to natural resources was the Matheniko group in Nadunget, who felt that the Pokot were controlling access to dry season grazing and preventing access to some water points. They emphasized that this was not the case when they were in peace with the Pokot, but that at present they were engaged in hostile relations and thus had trouble accessing these areas.⁸⁸ This is discussed in more detail below in the section on peace and access.

We stress that these views represent the views of local communities who most often experience conflict in a relatively limited geographic area. These perceptions potentially could be challenged by region-wide data comparing incidents of violent conflict with drought, erosion patterns, and deforestation. However, even if reliable data of this nature existed, we would question which view—that of the external scientific experts or that of the local communities—should receive more weight.

Peace and Natural Resource Access

As discussed in the section on governance, male elders traditionally managed natural resources in part through maintenance of relations with other groups. This ‘social connectivity’ was managed through inter-marriage, trade and exchange, stock associates, reciprocity in stock transfers, and negotiation over use of resources.⁸⁹ These relations occurred both within groups and across national and international borders, and were key to enabling pastoralists to access dry-season grazing and trade and exchange, particularly in times of hardship in a particular area.

In the interviews conducted for study, male elders, male youth, and female respondents repeatedly talked about the essential role of peace in allowing access to resources. A group of Pokot male youth explained:

We do not conflict over the resources when we are together and at peace with others. We organize meetings to share these resources.⁹⁰

A group of Bokora youth said:

In the past, we used to share grazing and water resources with the [Teso], Matheniko, Lorengedwat [Pian] and Bokora. But this was only possible during peacetime.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Interview with John Lotyang, District Environmental Officer, Moroto, 12 November 2009.

⁸⁷ Interview with Pian male youth, Lolachat Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, 13 November 2009.

⁸⁸ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 15 November 2009.

⁸⁹ Lind, “Manufacturing Peace.”

⁹⁰ Interview with Pokot male youth, Loro Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

⁹¹ Interview with Bokora male youth, Lotome Sub-County, Moroto District, 17 November 2009.

In contrast, when peace is not present, access is either impossible or can only occur with great security risks. Matheniko women explained the repercussions of the lack of peace on both their access to water and their overall security:

The dam beyond the Porro River is shared with the Jie when there is peace. Now it is a challenge. This year there was an incident where the Jie killed most of the shepherds and took the animals. This hasn't been reconciled even though our elders and the government have tried to reach out to the Jie for peace. The Jie are still raiding our animals.⁹²

Peace is seen as both a desirable goal and a critical means of improving livelihoods and access to important resources. While male youth often chaff against the power of the older generation,⁹³ youth in the study population were clear in the importance of elders in attempting to build and maintain relations to allow access to key resources. Male youth in Rupa explained:

Efforts are in place to protect and improve access to natural resources in our area. In particular, we are encouraging peace among all the Karamoja groups. With peace we will be able to access these resources in a much more relaxed and sustained manner. Elders and leaders take initiative to make us make peace.⁹⁴

Other respondents felt that the government should take a more proactive role in promoting peace:

Insecurity denies access to these resources. We are looking for peace in order to access the resources. If not we find ourselves restricted within here and our animals will continue to die. The government should coordinate communities to co-exist peacefully so as to share resources without conflicts.⁹⁵

Without peace, communities are not able to access natural resource in safety. Conflict arising in the absence of peace hinders access, but this conflict is not necessarily directly linked to competition for resources.

Respondents believe it is the job of the elders to manage peace—with possible assistance from the government in the eyes of some respondents—but Vincent Abura, SCiUG's Team Leader for the East and himself from Karamoja, explains that maintaining peace is not simple. Power dynamics between groups shaped by access to key assets such as weapons can influence the balance of peace and thereby upset the system of shared access:

[D]uring periods of intensive drought, the Bokora would access natural resources from the swamps in Teso. The Jie would access water and pasture in Acholiland; the Matheniko would access natural resources in Pian and on the slope of Mt Moroto. During heavy rainy periods when the green grass becomes poisonous to the livestock elsewhere, the Bokora, the Tepeth and the Pian jointly would access water and pasture (salty grass called eleet) in Nakadanya in Matheniko. This [they are] no longer obtaining because of the presence of the guns that have made some of these ethnic groups more powerful than others, thus restricting access over the natural resources.⁹⁶

Abura went on to say that disarmament should help to balance this inequity and to bring greater access to natural resources. Some respondents within the study population, however, held a very different view and felt that military operations in the region were working at cross-purposes to the efforts at establishing peace:

But the government soldiers continue to scatter us. For example, every time we mix with the Turkana, UPDF soldiers scatter us. This is not good.⁹⁷

⁹² Interview with Matheniko women, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 10 November 2009.

⁹³ The main complaint about the elders by young men is the delay in handover of power from the senior to the junior generation set. B. Knighton, *The Vitality of the Karamojong Religion: Dying Tradition or Living Faith?* Hants, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2005. E. Stites, *A Struggle for Rites: Masculinity, Power and Livelihoods in Karamoja, Uganda*, unpublished manuscript.

⁹⁴ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009.

⁹⁵ Interview with Pokot male youth, Loroo Sub-County, Amudat District, 14 November 2009.

⁹⁶ Email correspondence with Vincent Abura, Team Leader East, SCiUG, 25 November 2009.

⁹⁷ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Rupa Sub-County, Moroto District, 11 November 2009. Additional information regarding the perception of respondents that the UPDF often hinders local peace initiatives can be found in Stites & Akabwai, 2009.

As discussed earlier, a governance gap has emerged in parallel with a shift away from the relative importance of typically male-controlled resources of pasture and water and towards the female domain of foraged forest resources. The governance gap is exacerbated by the absence of peace between groups, which contributes to a collapse of social capital. This positive social capital is akin to the grease that allowed the traditional cycle based on a governance system of natural resources to operate smoothly. As social relations began to collapse, peace became more difficult to achieve and maintain. In the absence of peace, natural resources cannot be managed effectively. When resources are not managed effectively, communities are more likely to experience violent clashes as they access resources adjacent to hostile groups.

This cyclical relationship is illustrated with some variations by Helen Young in her work on conflict and livelihoods in Darfur. The livelihoods-conflict cycle described below highlights the ways in which drought leads to livelihood adaptations (such as an increased reliance on foraged resources and cash trades) and the ways in which this can exacerbate traditional systems of governance. These factors all contribute to more pressure on livelihoods, which in turn leads to more conflict and polarization, poor management over resources, and ensuing environmental degradation. The erosion of social capital and peaceful relations continues throughout this cycle, making conflict resolution, sustainable livelihood adaptations, or shared access to increasingly scarce natural resources all the more difficult. As governance systems erode and customary and official systems are unable to meet the challenges faced in a changing political, environmental and social landscape, peace becomes increasingly difficult to attain, and can lead to gradual worsening of the situation.

Box 1: Conflict-Livelihoods Cycle⁹⁸

1. Drought puts pressure on livelihood systems.
2. As a result of this pressure, groups resort to livelihood adaptations, which include competing claims over natural resources (land, pasture and water).
3. These pressures are not alleviated nor managed well by local systems of natural resource management and conflict resolution – which further pressurizes livelihoods and contributes to local conflict.
4. The result is conflict between competing livelihood groups, which further pressurizes livelihoods and polarizes livelihood groups.
5. Conflict also weakens and undermines effective local governance.
6. A further complication is environmental degradation that puts further pressures on livelihoods and in turn as a result of pressure on livelihoods there is increased environmental degradation, competition and conflict between groups.

We end this section with a quotation from a group of Matheniko young men who highlight the role of peace not only in allowing governance to function, but also in the sustainable management of natural resources:

Only peace is important. When people are at peace with one another, access and use of available natural resources will be easy. People will also allow natural resources to recover in one place as they move to another place.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Helen Young, “The Conflict-Livelihoods Cycle: Reducing Vulnerability through Understanding Maladaptive Livelihoods,” in *Environment and Conflict in Africa: Reflections on Darfur*, ed. Marcel Leroy (University for Peace, 2009).

⁹⁹ Interview with Matheniko male youth, Nadunget Sub-County, Moroto District, 15 November 2009.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In this study we set out to understand local perceptions on the linkages between natural resources and conflict: namely, does competition over resources drive conflict? The answer to this question turned out to be more complex than we had anticipated, and also more important to how we think about resource use and management in the region. The complexity arises because, in short, while respondents do not perceive competition over natural resource to be a driver of conflict, the conflict they describe most often occurs at sites where natural resources are available, and where groups often interact in the course of collecting or utilizing these resources. This distinction between conflict over resources and location-specific conflict is subtle but important, with implications for interventions aimed at livelihoods, resource management and peace building. This finding points to the importance of peace in allowing resource access, but also stresses the need for customary and official systems of governance to manage resource access in ways that take these potential flash points into account. Importantly, we stress that while sites at which natural resources are collected can be sites of conflict, they are also very important sites in allowing for regular and symbiotic interactions between groups. These interactions build trust, allow for dialogue, and ultimately help to promote peace.

The extent of environmental degradation in Karamoja is visibly apparent in many locations, and members of our team with long experience in the region frequently point out areas that have been deforested or eroded in the last one to three decades. The increased concentration of human settlements in response to insecurity is one of the factors contributing to this process. At the same time, repeated droughts have increased reliance on natural resources as a source of food or for cash sale/exchange. The depletion of resources around these larger and denser settlements means that household members, usually women, have to travel ever-greater distances to access resources critical to their survival. Women and men alike believe that moving these greater distances greatly increases exposure to physical attack. The increased risk for women while collecting foraged resources means that vulnerability is taking on new gender dimensions: in the past, male herders were more likely to be attacked while grazing or watering animals, in part because livestock were the main assets targeting for attacks. Today, women face a higher risk of attack as they venture further into bush areas.

Most community members recognize the importance of natural resource protection and are aware of the environmental consequences of over-exploitation. In most cases, however, the reliance on natural resources for survival outweighs customary protection regulations. In making this trade-off, people are exchanging a long-term gain for a short-term benefit but, in the absence of economic development and viable alternative livelihoods, they feel they have little choice.

The lack of effective environmental protection mechanisms is compounded by a gap between authority (those who make and enforce rules) and agency (those who are responsible for daily actions that utilize natural resources). Women feel that the male elders who attempt to enforce the existing restrictions do not adequately comprehend the lack of alternatives in attempting to provide for households. The male elders, on the other hand, feel at a loss to develop effective protection mechanisms and instead resort to fines and punishments. Thus, a governance gap has emerged at the customary level as the relative importance of resources within livelihood strategies has shifted from those traditionally managed and controlled by the elders (pasture and water) to those accessed by women. Elders lack mechanisms and authority over these foraged resources, meaning that there are few systems for either management or protection in place. Attempts at regulation are largely through prohibitions and punishments on women's use of these resources; this does not encourage sustainable resource use or establish effective regulations for resource management.

The governance gap at the customary level is mirrored by one at the official level, due largely to limited funds and inadequate capacity and facilitation of district technical officers. This is compounded by lack of regular interaction with rural communities and the absence of a positive citizen-state relationship. As a result, many respondents do not respect the authority of the local government officials, and do not believe that these of-

ficials understand the challenges they are facing in their daily lives. In the broader policy context, the Government of Uganda de-emphasizes natural resource conservation and protection in Karamoja in favor of food security strategies dependent on opening land for crop cultivation. This approach and concurrent funding allocations further inhibit effective natural resource management and governance driven by the local government.

An overarching theme that emerges from this study is the extent of change experienced in recent years for many communities in Karamoja. This change affects all aspects of lives and livelihoods, including interactions with markets, gender dynamics, food acquisition, diet, and resource management. In response to these changes, populations engage in coping strategies meant to alleviate hardship or smooth consumption. Many of these strategies are similar to those used time and again across multiple generations, such as shifting to foraging during a poor harvest or extended dry season. Ideally, populations would move away from such strategies when the stress or shock abated. After years of repeat and extended droughts coupled with insecurity and erosion of traditional pastoral livelihood strategies, many of these short-term coping strategies are giving way to longer term adaptations. Communities are shifting to new methods of survival, many of which are neither sustainable (such as those based on heavy resource exploitation) or appropriate for the fragile and variable ecology of the region (such as the shift to sedentarized agrarian communities).

Some changes, such as the decreased effectiveness of traditional governance systems for certain natural resources, are likely to persist over an extended period. Livelihood shifts create stresses on traditional systems of governance that are unable to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. This creates a cyclical pattern, resulting in poor management of resources and, in turn, additional pressure on livelihoods. The fraying of coping systems contributes to local conflict. These conflicts break down relations between groups, rendering vulnerable the careful system of social exchange and reciprocity that underpin peaceful relations. Access to shared natural resources becomes more dangerous in the absence of peace agreements, and clashes erupting at sites of natural resource exploitation fuel stress on livelihoods and problems in effective governance.

There is no doubt that lives and livelihoods in Karamoja are undergoing change at multiple levels. Populations will continue to adapt to these changes through a variety of means, including migration and diversification. Migration is a normal and appropriate response to stress, and migrants—whether moving for economic or security reasons—should be supported and assisted, not criminalized or forcibly returned to their places of origin. Livelihood diversification has been occurring within pastoral production systems in East Africa and elsewhere for generations, and is evident in the agro-pastoral model practiced by many in Karamoja. There is a key difference between diversification of livelihoods and the replacement of pastoral livelihoods with alternative systems. While “alternative livelihoods” may be appropriate for a small portion of the population (particularly those with skills, education and capital), a diversified system that continues to revolve around livestock-based production systems will be the most effective, appropriate and resilient for the region over the long term. The sustainability of efforts at diversification and positive adaptation will depend, in part, on the willingness of the Government of Uganda to adopt pro-pastoral policies that enable communities to retain control over their assets and that support mobility for livestock and humans and appropriate seasonal access to water and pasture.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ ECAPAPA (2005). *Managing Conflicts over Pasture and Water Resources in Semi-Arid Areas: Beyond Misleading Myths and Ethnic Stereotypes*. P. B. n. Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA).

Recommendations

Development Actors

- Development actors promoting conflict mitigation and peace building should consider locations of interaction over resources as strategic entry points for programming. Clashes often occur where people collect resources, but this does not mean that groups should be prevented from interacting in order to prevent this conflict. In contrast, locations where groups seek to jointly access critical resources serve as important venues for regular interactions and potential peace building. Peace agreements are often reached because of the importance of these shared resources, and these agreements then allow for trade, marriage, shared grazing, and greater mobility.
- Development actors should consider women as a key target group for income generating activities (IGAs) that provide immediate and productive alternatives to the sale of natural resources such as firewood and charcoal. These interventions, however, should not be at the expense of men, many of whom have lost livestock and are eager for new livelihood opportunities. Any income generating training exercises should only be undertaken after a thorough market analysis of supply and demand. Training programs need to be tailored to these demands (without crowding out existing entrepreneurs), extensive enough to impart real skills, and include start-up capital and on-going technical support. Development actors must recognize, however, that IGAs will likely affect a very small proportion of the overall population and will have minimal larger impact until economic development and infrastructure allow for true livelihood diversification in Karamoja and the surrounding districts. To this end, international actors should continue to advocate for economic investment and sound financial management and development throughout the Karamoja region.
- Development actors should advocate among politicians to prioritize natural resource protection / management in upcoming election campaigns, and should then push for follow-through on these campaign promises in budgets and programs. This can be a politically risky choice when the electorate is focused on short-term needs, but longer-term perspectives are crucial for the survival and well being of people in Karamoja. Political will is critical to break the cycle of increased vulnerability, increased dependency on natural resources for survival, and breakdowns in peaceful sharing of common resources.
- Development actors should consider conditional transfers of food security and livelihoods inputs in exchange for natural resource protection and management initiatives developed by communities. This is a modality of providing assets and inputs where critically needed in exchange for actions and behaviors that support environmental management and the protection of natural resources. With proper caution, this approach could enable a collaborative process between communities and development stakeholders to combine programming for material needs with desired behavior change.

Customary Institutions in Karamoja

- Customary institutions (councils of elders) should consider what protection and management strategies might be available for plant-based natural resources. They should reach these decisions through fora that include women and youth. These protection mechanisms should incorporate existing protection and management strategies, and should seek to balance short-term needs with longer sustainability to the greatest extent possible. Women will likely have ideas on how best to do this, and women should be involved in ensuring that these regulations are upheld.
- Customary institutions should hold local government civil servants and politicians accountable for policies and practices that enable natural resource management. In the context of low funding and weak political will on these issues, communities should demonstrate demand for medium- and long-term perspectives to protect the resources vital to their lives. This will require increased dialogue between communities and local politicians, which could be promoted by development or national actors. This process may also help to build trust and rapport among these parties.

The Government of Uganda

- The Government of Uganda should move quickly to draft and adopt a Pastoralist Strategy that supports mobile animal-based livelihoods. Such a strategy should recognize the adaptive capacity of pastoral lifestyles and the appropriateness of pastoral and agropastoral production systems to Karamoja's ecological and climatic conditions. The strategy should seek to support and empower pastoral and agropastoral communi-

ties and their way of life, without pushing for relocation, sedentarization, or coerced transition into livelihoods that are significantly less appropriate for the region and likely to increase vulnerability (such as settled agriculture). At the same time that the primacy and on-going importance of livestock-based livelihoods should be protected and supported, increased economic and livelihood diversity within Karamoja is needed in order to absorb a growing population in changing economic and ecological environment. The Government of Uganda should commit to economic development, sustained investments in primary, secondary and technical education, the extension of state services such as courts, police, and health services, and infrastructure such as all-weather roads and bridges. In working to support a diversified livelihood base, however, the government and development actors need to remember that most people will continue to engage in livestock-related activities, and that the role of animals will and should remain central to the regional economy and household level production systems.

- The Government of Uganda should recognize the increasingly critical role that natural resources are playing in daily survival and should prioritize and fund natural resource management staff and programs at the district level. These staff should be facilitated to travel to and engage with local communities in order to better understand their priorities and the challenges they face in meeting basic needs, and should work with customary leaders and community members to develop more effective systems of management for those resources that are most heavily utilized. This will mean listening to the experiences and concerns of women regarding access to foraged resources, and working with women and community leaders on governance mechanisms. It is hoped that the forthcoming Pastoralist Strategy will include recognition of the importance of natural resources to pastoral and agropastoral livelihoods, and will provide for adequate funding and capacity building to initiate these positive advances at the district and sub-county levels.
- The Government of Uganda should recognize the vulnerability of those who continue to access natural resources in highly insecure areas. The gendered dimensions of this vulnerability need to be taken into account in an expansion of means for civilian protection in and around settlements.
- The UPDF should be aware of the impact its mandate and actions have for natural resource availability and access, particularly in areas where this is increasing vulnerability. The UPDF is currently engaged in activities normally done by civilian police forces. While we encourage a shift to police responsibility for these activities as soon as possible, for the duration of the military's involvement in the region the soldiers should ensure civilian protection, and, as such, should focus on areas where civilians are most at risk. Understanding these risks and the related protection needs will require more extensive community dialogue and on-going sensitivity and human rights training for military personnel.
- Government of Uganda policies should support intra- and inter-group dialogues for peace building to develop and sustain agreements for sharing natural resources. These could take place at or near the sites of important resources, and should involve all demographic groups who utilize these resources, including women and youth.

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