



Conflict Factsheet

Communal conflicts in the Karamoja region

Type of conflict
Main

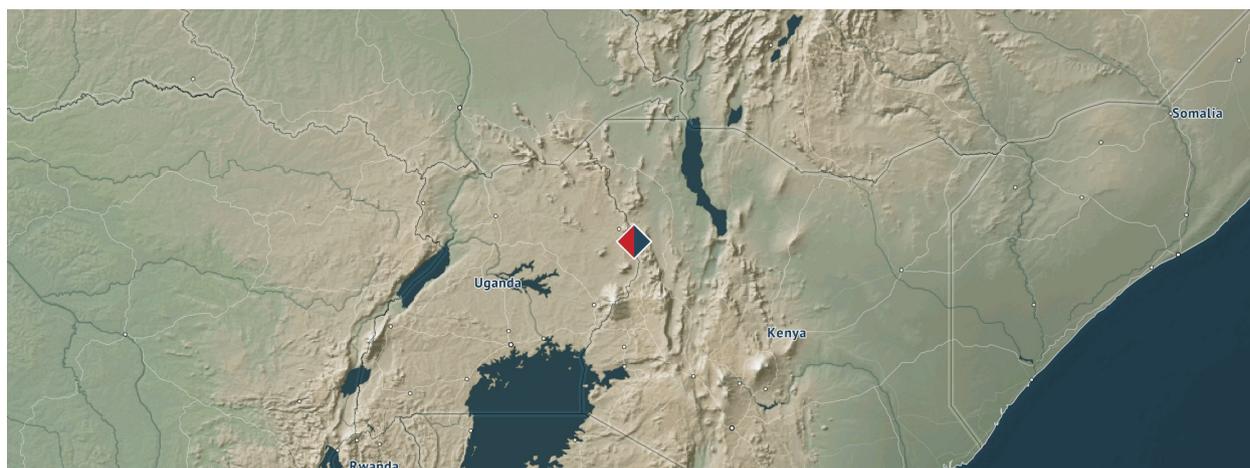
Intensity
4

Conflict Locality
Eastern Africa

Time
1944 –ongoing

Countries
S. Sudan, Kenya, Uganda

Resources
Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



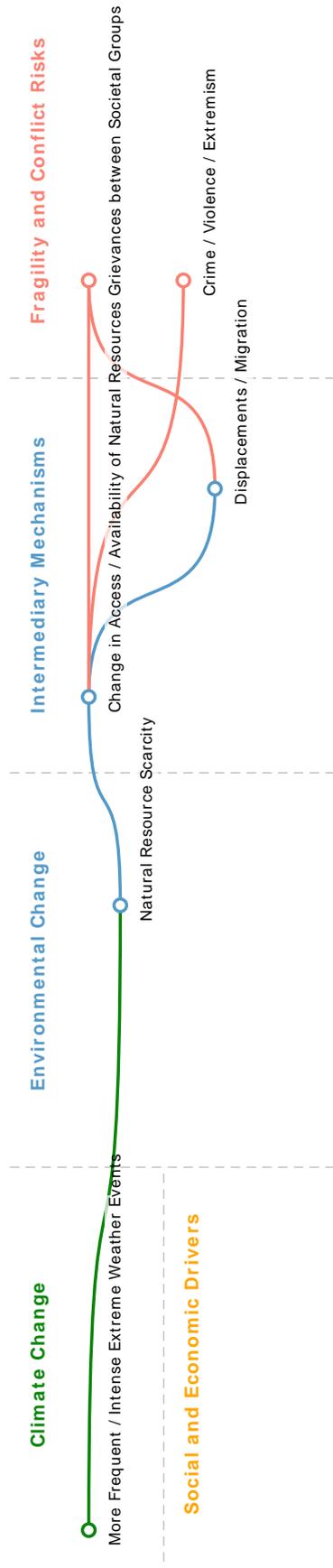
Local resource
competition

Conflict Summary

Pastoralist groups in the Karamoja region have been engaged for centuries in cycles of reciprocal livestock raiding, involving inter-communal armed violence. With the increasing availability of automatic weapons and commercialization of livestock raiding, but also with the erosion of traditional conflict mitigation institutions, violence in the region has intensified. This tendency has been further aggravated by frequent droughts and floods, which fuel competition for livestock, pastures and access to water.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

Water-stressed Area

Eroded Social Contract
History of Conflict
Lack of Alternative Livelihoods
Low Level of Economic Development
Weak Institutions



Conflict History

The Karamoja Region, or 'Karamoja cluster', extending over the Kenyan-Ugandan border is frequently described as one of the most inhospitable zones of Africa. Dry conditions and erratic rainfall largely impede agriculture and have favoured the development of a livestock-rearing-economy. The region, ranking among the poorest in Uganda and Kenya, is also lacking in critical infrastructures and services, as well as in the provision of state security. The various groups in the region, such as the Jie, Pokot and different Karimojong groups, have mostly adapted to these harsh conditions by pursuing a semi-nomadic agro-pastoralist lifestyle, moving their herds according to spatio-temporal weather fluctuations.

Weapons, traditions and cattle rustling

Reciprocal livestock raids between communities are an integral part of this culture. They allow for the compensation of animal lost to drought, theft, and disease and are traditionally regulated by a set of rules and customs. With the increasing availability of modern weapons and the implication of economic and political actors from outside the pastoral sector, but also with the erosion of customary systems of conflict mitigation, this livelihood sustaining practice is progressively giving way to more violent and detrimental conflicts (Meier, Bond & Bond, 2007; UCDP, 2014). According to a report by Saferworld, 'Karamoja is one of the most violent regions in the world, with a small arms death rate of nearly 60 per 100,000 of the population', whereas violence is characterized by 'peaks and valleys'. Between July 2003 and August 2008 it contributed to more than 1600 violent incidents and 2800 human deaths (Powell, 2010).

Frequent droughts and floods play an aggravating role

Climate change is playing an aggravating role in this situation. Increased drought frequency motivates further raids in order to replenish decimated herds and can lead to displacements and conflicts over water and grazing resources between migrants and residents. Moreover frequent floods degrade soils, damage key infrastructures, and facilitate the propagation of vector-borne livestock diseases. Hence the cycle of livestock loss and raiding is accelerated (Stark, 2011; Powell, 2010).

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

Resolution Efforts

Different initiatives and programs have been put in place in order to contain communal violence in the Karamoja region: On the Ugandan side, the [Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Program \(KIDDP\)](#) is the most comprehensive government plan for development in the region. It stipulates the provision of basic social services, community participation and alternative means of livelihoods, as well as a comprehensive disarmament strategy and the reestablishment of law and order. [The Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda \(PRDP\)](#) aims at consolidating state authority and revitalize



the economy. [World Vision Kenya \(WVK\)](#) is promoting peace through the provision of formal education and drought resistant cattle breeds, as well as through the drilling of boreholes. And the Kenyan Red Cross Society (KRCS) has distributed food and non-food items to affected communities, to name just a few initiatives ([Powell, 2010](#)).

Disarmament programmes have had little success

The governments of Uganda and Kenya have conducted various disarmament efforts in the region. Lack of coordination has however frequently created situations, in which certain groups were disarmed but others not, encouraging the latter to attack the former. In other cases, pastoralists were able to avoid disarmament just by crossing the Kenyan-Ugandan border. Both, the governments in Kampala and Nairobi have also facilitated the creation of local defence and community police forces, but it remains unclear whether this really helps improving the security situation or rather fuels further violence as additional weapons are provided to local communities ([UCDP, 2015](#); [Leff, 2009](#); [Stark, 2011](#)).

Cross border conflicts require transnational cooperation

Due to the cross-border challenges presented by pastoralist conflict and arms trafficking, transnational initiatives such as the Regional Center on Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA) or the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO) have emerged, which act as forum for cooperation between different countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. In addition, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) created the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) in 2002. With field monitors reporting from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, CEWARN is able to report on violent incidents, trends and factors behind pastoral conflicts ([Leff, 2009](#)).

Remaining challenges and open questions

Nevertheless, despite these encouraging developments, there are still major impediments to the peace and development process in the Karamoja cluster. Access to basic services and infrastructures, as well as drought preparedness in the region remains insufficient. Insecurity leads to the clustering of people and animals around villages with detrimental impacts on the local environment and many high potential grazing areas remain unused. Rivalries between customary authorities and local government, as well as lacking community involvement complicate the implementation of development policies as well as the mitigation of land use conflicts. Distrust in police and military forces is strong among local communities and government forces are blamed for targeting and abusing specific groups and failing to recover stolen livestock ([Powell, 2010](#)).



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

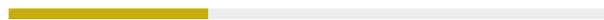


Human Suffering



INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Regional



Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

There was no reduction in violence.

-

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Disarmament, demobilisation & reintegration	1
Both the Ugandan and Kenyan governments have conducted various disarmament efforts in the region.	
Strengthening the security sector	1
Both the Ugandan and Kenyan governments have facilitated the creation of local defence and community police forces.	
Cooperation	2
Several countries in the Horn of Africa are cooperating in different ways to address the cross-border arms trafficking.	
Humanitarian & Development aid	2
The Kenyan Red Cross Society (KRCS) has distributed food and non-food items to affected communities.	
Promoting alternative livelihoods	2
The Ugandan Government has implemented two peace and development plans for the region.	
Promoting social change	2
World Visions Kenya (WVK) is promoting peace through the provision of formal education and drought resistant cattle breeds, as well as through the drilling of boreholes.	

Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme \[accessed 2014-12-12\]](#)
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[Meier, P., Bond, D. & Bond, J. \(2007\). Environmental influences on pastoral conflict in the Horn of Africa](#)
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[Powell, J. \(2010\). Karamoja: A literature review](#)
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[Stark, J. \(2011\). Climate change and conflict in Uganda: The cattle corridor and Karamoja](#)
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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/karamoja-pastoralists>