



## REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: ISSUES OF PASTORALISM – ZUR SITUATION DER HIRTENVÖLKER



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Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, Campus Rotes Feld  
(Wilschenbrucher Weg, Lüneburg, Germany)

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### ***About the Karamoja awareness raising campaign across Europe***

The conference took part in the Europe-wide Karamoja campaign that approaches, in an interdisciplinary way, issues of development and sustainability as well as questions of past, current and future relationships and cultural understandings between European and East African societies in the context of globalisation. The conference combined international perspectives on pastoralism with the closer focus on east Africa and especially Karamoja.

Karamoja, the specific case we are focusing on, is a crisis region in North-Eastern Uganda, bordering Kenya and Sudan with Ethiopia nearby.

The Karamoja campaign is supported by the European Commission, coordinated by the French NGO ACTED together with the Institute for Theory and Research on Cultures and the Arts (IKKK) at Leuphana University Lüneburg and the Czech NGO PIN and includes seminars and events at universities and schools in 5 European cities (Bordeaux, Geneva, Groningen, Lüneburg, Prague). Awareness raising events and meetings at the EU Commission and Parliament will take place in January 2009 in Brussels.

### ***About the Lüneburg Conference***

The conference offered an unprecedented occasion to bring together an interdisciplinary group of experts of the Karamoja region and of pastoralism worldwide.

As such, it was a unique opportunity to weave together the threads of a possible sustainable future for Karamoja, and other pastoralist societies, with contributions from representatives of international organisations, NGOs, and local authorities engaged in Karamoja and in neighbouring Teso region; and with insights from researchers, practitioners and other observers from a wide diversity of backgrounds: e.g. political scientists, ethno-botanists, anthropologists, medical doctors, missionaries, meteorologists, etc.

We invite you to consult the full presentations and the videos of the conference on our website: [www.karamoja.eu](http://www.karamoja.eu)

## ***Acknowledgements***

We would like to express our gratitude to all participants, supporters and helpers, without whom this conference would not have been possible.

These are, first of all, the institutional supporters: The European Commission, which supports the Karamoja European Awareness Raising Campaign, but also all the other organizers that financially supported the costs of conference participants (among which DED, Save the Children, CUAMM, UNOCHA as well as several German universities and research institutions).

Furthermore, we thank the Leuphana University Lüneburg for the generous availability of its precincts, technical material and financial support.

Last but not least we would like to mention the volunteering students from the Universities of Lüneburg, Bordeaux, Groningen and Prague who worked on the conference site. Our special thanks to the students in the Karamoja conference team and in the media team at the University of Lüneburg.

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Yours faithfully,

Sacha Kagan, IKKK  
David Knaute, ACTED

NB: Of course, the responsibility for any shortcomings in this conference report lies with the writers of the report. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the positions of the different organizations whose members participated at the conference.

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## **A. THE CONFERENCE IN 30 PRESENTATIONS**

### ***Sustainable ecology: comparative and international perspectives***

#### *- Global*

1. Hubert Beckmann, from HBB-Consult, advocated that globally, transhumance has the capacity to enhance and preserve biodiversity, as an agent of 'zoochory' (allowing vegetal species to migrate). European environmental policies will have, now and in the future, to promote transhumance, especially as a response to global warming that will threaten many vegetal species.

2. Jorge Guerra Gonzalez, from the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, argued that the concept of sustainable development may not be appropriate, as long as it is centred on economic priorities. While this focus responds to one basic need of humanity, i.e. security, it ignores and often contradicts another one, which is liberty. Ultimately, economic security falls short of enhancing happiness, Gonzalez argued.

#### *- Finland*

3. Steffen Keulig, from Freunde der Naturvölker, illustrated, using the Finnish example of the Saami, the negative impact that external actors, e.g. timber industries, often have on natural resources and pastoralist livelihoods. It is important for pastoralists to lobby at a political level, both nationally and internationally, to safeguard their environment, their cultures and their livelihoods.

#### *- Germany*

4. Günther Czerkus, from Bundesausschus Berufsschäfer, explained that in Germany pastoralism represents an essential mode of environmental conservation, and consequently plays the role of a public service. It would cost much more if local communities were to maintain landscapes and natural resources by themselves. It is necessary to recognize and support the status of pastoralists as 'stewards of the commons'.

#### *- Kirghizstan*

5. The artist Insa Winkler, from Cultura21, presented the way of life of Kyrgyz pastoralists and the contemporary challenges they face, particularly regarding water management. She also highlighted several opportunities for sustainable development she discovered during a cultural exchange, e.g. wool production, eco-tourism, etc.

#### *- Morocco*

6. Korbinian Freier, from the International Max Planck Research School on Earth System Modeling in Hamburg, demonstrated the economic and ecological importance of extensive grazing for people in the Atlas Mountains. Meanwhile, the increase of population, structural socioeconomic changes and changes in property rights are key drivers in shifting the grazing-strategy towards non-sustainable intensities.

- *Siberia*

7. Kirill Istomin, from the Max Planck Institut für ethnologische Forschung in Halle/Saale, presented the case of Nenets and Komi pastoralists. His argument was that one has to consider with subtlety the notion of carrying capacity. Herd management is largely influenced by factors such as technology, e.g. the introduction of snowmobiles, and the specificities of semi-domesticated reindeers, which result in grazing and migrations much different from the case of cattle herds.

- *Spain*

8. Hubert Beckman, from HBB-Consult, explained that Spain is characterized by a unique biodiversity, largely due to a long history of transhumance. Today, it is necessary to promote transhumance in order to maintain biodiversity, for example by recognizing the *Cañadas Reales*, i.e. transhumance highways.

- *Tanzania*

9. Marion Rolle, from Verband Entwicklungspolitik Niedersachsen, argued that women are the first victims of climate change. For example, access to hospitals and other basic facilities is hampered following natural disasters such as floods and extreme droughts. Women are the ones to take care of subsistence agriculture and moreover have little control over land management rights.

### ***The ecology of Karamoja***

- *The ecological circle of Karamoja*

10. Mario Cisternino, from the Comboni missionaries, detailed the social structure of the Karamojong, to demonstrate the origins of the tensions that characterize their relation to other societies. His idea is the necessity to open 'valves' allowing the Karamojong culture to sustain itself, through freedom of movement, especially outside their own territory. To enhance this freedom could counter demographic pressure, or create opportunities for more positive interrelations with other societies.

- *The commons*

11. Ben Knighton, from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, demystified the 'tragedy of the commons', by using two main arguments. On the one hand, it is economically and ecologically more sustainable, in Karamoja, to promote freedom of movement for cattle, than to promote intensive production, which has been the case from colonial times until today. Secondly, the Malthusianist approach on demography, which is applied to Karamoja, neglects the realities of the vitality of pastoralism in East Africa, and creates exaggerated fears confirmed by the overestimation of the population of Karamoja in national censuses.

- *Karimojong cattle breeds*

12. Evelyn Matthias, from the League for Pastoral Peoples, demonstrated the necessity to support pastoralists from Karamoja to keep up their knowledge on local breeds, on how to conserve them, and to pressurize for pro-pastoralists policies. Without precious documentation on existing breeds, the extinction of breeds will continue, with serious consequences on productivity, sustainable use and conservation of livestock and rangelands.

*- Traditional medical knowledge*

13. Jeanne Gradé, from the Laboratory of tropical and subtropical agronomy and ethnobotany at the University of Ghent, explained how the Karamojong rely chiefly on traditional knowledge both for their health and their livestock. Knowledge will not disappear if it is used and communicated through both traditional and orthodox networks. This may help spare the Karamojong pastoralists from a future 'cultural limbo' stage, that many cultures have experienced as modernity floods over the people and land, thus enabling a better resilience in the face of changing ecological and social contexts.

***Cattle-raiding, war and peace***

*- The State as an invader*

14. Ben Knighton, from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, argued that the sedentary state, i.e. Uganda, supported by the strategies of 'strong states' in the West, has been trying to implement its territorial sovereignty in a pastoralist area, where land is used communally for various purposes. The actual effect of disarmament programmes reinforces the desire for autonomy, since where they do succeed, they allow security forces to abuse their power. Operating in mists of misunderstanding that allow declarations of war to be mistaken for the maintenance of law and order, the UPDF puts itself in the role of invading a space to which, in the view of the Karamojong, it is not entitled.

*- Subversive sociability*

15. Sylvain Froidevaux, from the Haute Ecole d'Art et de Design de Genève, argued that European colonization, then postcolonial states, have not only imposed new political and economic rules to African societies, determined State borders without taking into account the ethnic ones, introduced a free market economy, prompted people to move from their land etc., but it also contributed to transform clan network and family structures, elders' power, ancestral beliefs and therefore involved fundamental changes. Marginalization of pastoral populations drive them to go beyond the rules and to adopt a kind of subversive sociability, using all the opportunities they have, e.g. not recognizing official justice or State boundaries. However, Sylvain Froidevaux warned, it would be inappropriate to qualify this sociability as "illegal business", "guerrilla" or "criminality" following categories of thought inherited from the European political tradition.

*- Cattle-raiding and human rights*

16. Peter Ken Lochap, District Chief of Moroto, explained that in the seventies cattle rustling became so unbearable that the legislators from the neighbouring districts to Karamoja moved a motion in parliament demanding that the Karimojong be disarmed. This process did not take into account the consent and legacy of the local community and traditional systems in place. It has accelerated the impoverishment of Karimojong pastoralists now vulnerable to recurrent cattle thefts and raids. Aggravating factors included the high prevalence of complicated livestock diseases, which increased by 20% and claimed a lot of livestock. Looming poverty has forced more than 30% of the Karimojong children and women especially of Bokora County in Moroto District to resort to a life of begging in the streets of Kampala, Jinja, Mbale and Busia.

*- Teso-Karimojong peace-efforts*

17. Julius Ochen, Lokut Timothy Sagal and Stephen Makumbi, respectively LCV of Amuria and from OCODI and TIP, argued that the Iteso and Karimojong belong to the same ethnic cluster of “Itunga”, a people who were originally pastoralists. While the Iteso gradually adopted sedentary subsistence agriculture, the Karimojong depend on livestock rearing for their livelihoods. Today, there is need for confidence building and for common political lobbying towards the central state, illustrated by how cross-border communities afflicted by rustling, in consultation with the respective local governments, are seeking peaceful means of solving the ongoing conflict. Activities to spearhead the above include community meetings, dialogues, exchange visits and other confidence building measures aimed at bringing peace between the two conflicting communities.

18. The Apeitolim experience serves as a model for peaceful conflict resolution among pastoralist communities and their neighbours in North-Eastern Uganda and East Africa at large. The collaboration with the German development service (as described by Klaus-Dieter Seidel, Head of Regional Department at DED, in his keynote speech) worked effectively.

*- Regional comprehensive security*

19. Roselyne A. Omondi-Ogao, an independent researcher, presented the concept of comprehensive security applied to the case of the Turkana in Kenya. She highlighted the importance of understanding geopolitical factors and other types of security issues affecting the security of pastoralists. States tend to concentrate their efforts on crises threatening their sovereignty, and neglect the situation in most marginalized regions.

*- The Arbore case of peace-making*

20. Echi Christina Gabbert, from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale and the South Omo Museum and Research Centre in Ethiopia, presented from an anthropological perspective the transformation of the Arbore society, around 1998, from a war-based to a peaceful culture. All social codes and cultural symbols had to be adapted; however, this has been challenging for youth groups. Musical creation, essential to the Arbore culture, is still based on war and the whole group is trying to redefine its relationship to other societies.



## ***Cooperation and development: the role of international organizations***

### *- United Nations*

21. UN OCHA: Andrew Timpson, from OCHA Moroto, made a review of humanitarian and development challenges in Karamoja, stressing each time the particular position of the UN coordination agency. He mentioned coordination, underdevelopment in Karamoja, health problems, livestock epidemics, cattle raiding, protected kraals, the KIDDP, etc.

### *- NGOs*

22. ACTED: André Krummacher explained how recent years have shown more frequent and more severe shocks to the Karimojongs' livelihood system. As a result, livelihoods of pastoralists have been eroded. Protecting and improving core livelihood assets is therefore essential in the event of a crisis. New approaches are currently implemented where humanitarian agencies work with the community to find out existing ways of preparing for and managing drought situations. This means using local knowledge and practices. One of these approaches currently being piloted is the Pastoralist Field School (PFS). The PFS developed out of the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach.

23. Comboni missionaries: Günther Nährich described the ecological project initiated in 1997-1999 by DKA (Dreikönigsaktion) Österreich, with e.g. a reforestation programme and the introduction of renewable energy installations for the hospital of Matany. The project's results so far were discussed.

24. Save the Children: Geoffrey Mugisha argued that while Uganda is committed to achieving the 2015 Education for All (EFA) goals and targets for every child, these will not be achieved unless policies and resources are directed to provide children with access to relevant, quality education in such hard to reach, harsh environments as Karamoja, with strong cultural specificities. ABEK is a non-formal education model that was designed to provide basic education to the children whose pastoralist way of life could not enable them to enrol and stay in formal schools (i.e. boarding schools).

25. Saint Kizito Hospital of Matany: James Lemukol explained that significant health indicators for Karamoja are alarming, compared to the national ones. For the delivery of health services in the area, the main challenges are connected to the environment and to the semi-nomadic culture. The people who move with the cows and live in cattle camps are exposed to many threats, including cattle raids. At present the training of "Community Health Workers" chosen among the nomadic community of the Karimojong Pastoralist, seems to be the most promising solution.

26. The Kids League: Trevor Dudley explained how sports and games are being utilised by the Kids League Uganda to improve the lives of boys and girls in Karamoja, through peace-building, encouraging school attendance and developing health awareness. Examples were shown to demonstrate how cost effective such sports programmes can be in helping develop lasting social change. It is also hoped that the presentation will encourage international academics and researchers to link with the

Kids League Uganda to provide opportunities for collaboration as it strives to advocate the use of sports as a vehicle for social change.

27. Toyai: Andrea Rovati and his colleagues explained how 'Toyai' began to support the Matany hospital through fundraising in Italy and spreading information about Karamoja in Italy. 'Toyai' was the logical name of the group whose motto is: "let the Karimojong and their friends... be". It is an example of a cooperation challenge pursued by a group of European people and their Karimojong friends.

*- Research institutions*

28. University of Victoria: Jennifer Tang explained the importance of focusing on child rights in Karamoja, where more than 50% of the population is under 18. Programs should be designed to highlight and build on the Karimojong values of responsibility, work ethic, respect for elders, cordial inter-personal relationships, helpfulness, egalitarianism, and pride in tradition.

29. Leuphana University Lüneburg: Lena Wäbs told the story, through posters and videos, of her two-weeks visit to Karamoja in June 2008 as part of the Karamoja European awareness-raising campaign. Through a cultural exchange, schools in Europe and in Karamoja are learning from each other, telling each other about their environment and their culture and building friendships as well as intercultural competence.

*- The media*

30. Missio Magazine: Christian Selbherr explored the characteristics and the limitations of journalistic coverage of regions like Karamoja. Expectations, editorial demands and time-pressure all constrain and pre-structure the outcomes of reporting on Karamoja. Too little room is left for the 'unexpected' when "journalists wish to raise awareness of the evil in the world", when "NGOs and churches promote their cause by using the media" and when "readers, viewers and listeners love to think that there are "good" people who try to change the world for the better". Only with a longing for the unexpected can the complexity of Karamoja be revealed.

## **B. THE CONFERENCE IN 10 KEY CONCEPTS**

### **1. Resilience, diversity and transhumance**

Resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt to change through the preservation of diversity. In the case of Karamoja, pastoralism or agropastoralism can be a sustainable way of life and livelihood if and only if diversity is preserved: not only biodiversity, but also traditional knowledge and cultural diversity. New technologies and new habits can be introduced as long as they create more opportunities for diversity and strengthen coping mechanisms already available. Internationally, pastoralist groups face similar challenges as illustrated by the importance of transhumance in the preservation of many ecological systems.

### **2. Mobility and opportunism**

Mobility is a prerequisite that allows pastoralists to manage their territory effectively. Pastoralists are always in movement in search for good grazing areas for their animals, where they will find optimum rainfall, nutrients and minerals at any particular time. In Karamoja, the same applies to agricultural activities, which are opportunistically developed as complement to cattle-herding. Flexibility in land uses goes hand-in-hand with resilience and sustainability in Karamoja.

### **3. Regional cooperation**

The high level of conflict between Karamojong and neighbouring tribes in Teso and abroad has damaged the interdependence that used to characterize their mutual relations. One should not forget that all these tribes have the same origins and, to some extent, share similar or complementary types of livelihoods. Efforts to rebuild cross-border confidence are critically important, and factors of comprehensive security, such as the fight against arms trafficking, must be tackled to make these efforts possible.

### **4. Freedom of movement**

Freedom of movement has been much eroded in Karamoja. A first controversy relates to the so-called 'tragedy of the commons' which implied that the free use of their territory by Karimojong had disastrous consequences, both ecologically and economically while, in reality, communal grazing rights are actually very much perpetuated by traditional politics and religion in Karamojong culture. Another controversy concerns the current demographic boom and the resulting out-migration of Karamojong to other regions of Uganda. This should be considered as a positive opportunity for the region and its development, and not as a threat calling for the transformation of Karamoja into a 'human zoo'.

### **5. Social structures**

The Karimojong way of life is based on a complex set of social institutions which have been constituted over a long period of time to respond to the specific challenges of their environment. The central role played by elders, who are also often major cattle owners, illustrates this fact. Contemporary socioeconomic changes, and the new political order, affect the context for an evolution of these structures. One of the main

challenges will be for youth groups to learn their traditions while in the same time acquiring skills necessary to survive in the modern world. Education, both formal and informal, will certainly be one of the key drivers in this process.

## 6. Political representation

National policies relating to Karamoja have always been designed without the involvement of the Karimojong themselves. As a result, there has always been a sense of discrimination and marginalisation from the rest of Uganda. Today, political representation and political pressure therefore represents major priorities if the Karimojong wish a better consideration of their interests in national policies.

## 7. 'Disarming the minds'

The issue of disarming the Karimojong has two faces. First, it requires a transformation of the mindset of the Karimojong who have been used to raiding for a long time. This would be possible if and only if the political environment of the Karimojong is also transformed – that is if the government and neighbouring countries stop adopting a military approach to politics, and if Western countries stop supporting foreign armies, e.g. by producing arms or upholding military regimes.

## 8. Exploitation of natural resources

As in many other pastoralist areas in the world, Karamoja is subject to overexploitation of natural resources. Most of the time, external actors are taking advantage of existing gaps in law for their own profit. This can result in land encroachment, or non-sustainable exploitation of underground resources by national or international companies. In return, this further limits the mobility of pastoralists who have no other alternatives than themselves overexploiting their resources, for instance by overgrazing when a part of the grazing land is not available anymore.

## 9. The role of international organizations

International organizations which provide humanitarian and development assistance to the Karimojong, have a major impact on the local population. However this impact can be extremely disruptive when not properly managed. Coordination therefore represents a key factor for an efficient distribution of aid and to facilitate intelligent and long-term planning. In addition, international organizations, especially the United Nations, have a central role to play in terms of advocacy.

## 10. Climate change

Climate change is affecting first and foremost the most vulnerable groups around the world. In a pastoralist region such as Karamoja, the effects of climate change are already a reality, and hamper many efforts towards sustainable development in the region. Countries from the Northern hemisphere are clearly responsible for global warming and it is their responsibility to take action in order to help poorer countries cope with its present and future consequences (as pointed out by Rebecca Harms, Vice-President of the Green parliamentary group and Deputy Chair of the climate change committee at the European Parliament, in her opening speech).

## **C. THE CONFERENCE IN 5 DEBATES**

### **1. Women**

Gender issues and the situation of women in Karamoja appeared as one of the main preoccupations of the conference's participants, which was visible during discussions and side events. During presentations, it was mentioned at several occasions that women represent one of the most vulnerable groups in Karamoja but at the same time, few presentations had a focus on them. It seems critical, however, to discuss more about the role of women in the social system of Karamoja, and to what extent they can participate in peace-building efforts, or in the promotion of alternative livelihoods to cattle-herding.

### **2. HIV/AIDS**

Several presentations and discussions raised HIV/AIDS as an upcoming threat in Karamoja. Nobody doubts that the epidemics will keep increasing and will have dramatic consequences in the region if not tackled in an appropriate manner. Meanwhile, the participants had divergent opinions on issues of sexual education and family planning. It is important to elaborate possible solutions, especially given that the cultural context of Karamoja is so different from the rest of Uganda. The possible role of the Churches' influence in Karamoja as an eventual hindrance to sexual education was insufficiently addressed at the conference.

### **3. Tradition versus modernity**

The conference highlighted the old opposition between the 'defenders of tradition', and the 'modernists', who argue that a region like Karamoja needs to adopt radically new ways of life to survive in today's world. In the end, both sides agreed on the necessity for change and constant adaptation (cf. resilience), but the definition of what change is, remained divergent. It is necessary to bring together the parties to define the frontiers of their respective perspectives, and find a balance appropriate for the sustainable evolution of original societies such as the Karimojong.

### **4. State-building**

Karamoja is part and parcel of the Ugandan State, however it has always been marginalized and 'underdeveloped'. Meanwhile, the Karimojong society, characterized by semi-nomadism, is clearly different from other regions of Uganda, and the concept of borders, fundamental to State-building, makes sense socially rather than physically for the Karimojong. The participants had divergent opinions on issues of positive discrimination for Karamoja, and also regarding the role played by the army and other State institutions to maintain law and order in Karamoja. Some participants would advocate for some form of political autonomy for the whole "Karamoja cluster", following the example of indigenous institutions in North-America.

### **5. Pastoralist education**

Formal education has been recently introduced in Karamoja. Some participants were critical against several aspects of schooling, e.g. the system of boarding schools that separates pastoralist children from their communities. Many organisations therefore

praise the existence of an alternative education system called ABEK that adapts the curriculum to the specific needs of Karimojong. However, ABEK is only utilized as a temporary learning environment enabling drop-outs to catch up with the formal education system. One open debate is whether ABEK should be promoted further to include secondary education rather than be restricted to primary education.



# Karamoja



*ACTED is a French non-government organization created in 1993. ACTED's vocation is to support vulnerable populations worldwide and to accompany them in the construction of a better future.*

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