



# **Greater Horn of Africa Peace Building Project**

## **Assessment and Programmatic Recommendations: Addressing Pastoralist Conflict in the Karamoja Cluster of Kenya, Uganda And Sudan**

*“Erae ekisil: akinapakina, apturi, alaru ka akiyar”*

*“Peace is a good place to stay, multiplying riches and life”*

**Karamajong signboard for  
Karamoja Initiative for Sustainable Peace  
Moroto, Uganda**

**Written for the S.O. 6 Conflict Strategy Team  
USAID/REDSO**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. Background

The term “Karamoja Cluster” is in common use and has been employed for many years to describe the pastoral and agro-pastoral ethnic groups, most of whom share a common language, culture, and land area encompassing northeastern Uganda, northwestern Kenya, southeastern Sudan and southwestern Ethiopia. Many of these ethnic groups live in what was the old Karamoja District in northeastern Uganda, and the people of the area are thus popularly referred to as “Karamojong”, in both Kenya and Uganda.

The drylands of the Karamoja Cluster, like many arid to semi-arid lands of Africa, have a diversity of ecosystems tuned to a seasonal but highly variable pattern of rainfall. Access to resources, primarily pasture for livestock and water human and animal consumption, is closely linked to the annual dry and rainy seasons. The predominant mode of food production of KC groups is an occupational continuum with those groups inhabiting drier climates relying primarily on livestock, to those in wetter climates relying primarily on cultivation, although all groups keep some livestock and all groups at various times plant crops. Over the centuries, pastoral, agropastoral, and agricultural societies in the cluster acquired and defended territory, in which they lived, farmed, and raised livestock. Systems of natural resource management (NRM) evolved generally based on common tenancy of land organized for the efficient utilization of available resources, primarily for livestock herding.

Boundaries between different ethnic communities have never been static and rigid but are fluid, given the variable pattern of rainfall distribution. As a result, negotiation of livestock movement is a constant. Survival is dependent on a web of good relationships that provide for sharing and collaboration. Finely honed strategies of herd splitting, opportunism, defensive capability and raiding to enlarge one’s herd all have relevance as adaptive strategies for survival. Critical to the success of these strategies are the two major concerns of having an adequate dry season pasture paired with nearby sources of sufficient water, and mobility. Movement is always negotiated between groups. Reciprocal relations were established with other pastoral and agro-pastoral groups, and when possible with agricultural groups, allowing access to pasture and water in dry seasons, particularly in times of drought. In periods of stress, elders would negotiate access to grazing rights. When negotiation failed to secure agreement, action by force was not ruled out.

Present day conflict in the KC revolves around many issues. Traditional pastoralism over the last century and a half has received a series of blows from which it is still attempting to adjust. Violent cattle raids, perhaps the most well known and obvious form of conflict, are one symptom of much deeper conflicts and fractures. Colonialism; disease and famine; the emerging post-independence state; the introduction of new systems of religion, business and private property; the struggle for political control in the face of changing regimes and distant powers not inclined to invest in marginally productive land, all stand behind cattle rustling, restricted pastoralist mobility and declining cattle per capita.

For centuries, raiding other groups for livestock has been a traditional method of replenishing herds in the wake of drought and disease. In some respects, this raiding can be seen as a quasi-legitimate sharing of resources, permitting groups on the verge of economic ruin and even starvation to reestablish their systems of food production and natural resources management. The proliferation of automatic weapons has, however, greatly exacerbated the consequences of the cattle rustling. Thus members of the Cluster now distinguish between stealing livestock from raiding for livestock. The individuals involved in stealing may be acting on their own, without permission from group elders. Raiding is considered a very different and far more legitimate activity. It is not considered theft but is described as a taking by force.

One newer phenomenon in the KC is roadside banditry, which is often blamed on young men living in the towns and centers. They are part of a growing reservoir of impoverished and uneducated young men, many of whose families have been forced out of pastoralism by circumstances beyond their control or who have dropped out of the pastoralist way of life while their families struggle on. All these young men have limited opportunities to earn income so they end up preying on their fellow citizens.

One important team finding is that while conflict in the KC is frequent, it is also unpredictable and intermittent. It is not steady and unrelenting. Instead, peaks and valleys characterize it, by periods of relative calm and then sudden outbreaks of violence. The periods of peaceful relations may be punctuated by small episodes of cattle raiding, and after a series of such raids, one group may mount a major response and violence will escalate. In some cases, there is no escalation. For these reasons, conflict between groups, can be described as recurrent rather than continuous. Intergroup relationships are characterized by ever-shifting alliances. For all of these reasons, conflict in the Cluster is very difficult to pin down and even more difficult to predict. The “hot spots” of today may be peaceful tomorrow. Monitoring is needed to determine whether small tensions are emerging and could under certain conditions add rise violence.

Groups in the KC Cluster, also have conflicts with groups outside the Cluster. There is a perception that the three national governments and the majority of the populations of the three countries are much more concerned about the impact of conflict on groups outside the Cluster than the effects on groups within the KC.

Conflict inside the Cluster and with neighboring groups has had many negative consequences. It has worsened the condition of an already impoverished people. Many informants reported to the decline in cattle per capita, one clear sign of poverty. Many people have been killed or maimed in conflicts, and even more have been rendered destitute. The number of people impoverished by conflict is large; evidence of this can be readily seen in settlements near towns, trading centers and mission posts. Many have lost their ability to be self-provisioning. They desperately need assistance to survive and become economically active again. In many cases, they have very little or no access to social services.

The existence of widespread conflict is a major hindrance to effective development. It interferes with normal trade and local development efforts, and greatly reduces the willingness of Government officials and NGO staff to work in the areas. The climate of insecurity is a serious impediment to improving economic and social conditions, which are essential to effective, long-

term reduction of poverty. Large areas of the Cluster have become abandoned because of conflict.

Not only has there been a significant increase in violent conflict in the Karamoja Cluster and adjoining areas over the past 20 years, the nature of the violence has also changed during that time. The traditional rules that governed raiding and warfare in the Cluster and surrounding areas have loosened and have been at least partially replaced by more random violence. The increase in violence has also led to increased animosity and hatred, and a strong desire for revenge. These factors further inflame the situation, leading to further violence. Many believe that the enormous increase in modern weapons has played a key role in both the increased levels and the changed nature of violence.

These changes in the scale and nature of conflict in the region have led some to conclude that traditional methods of conflict resolution alone cannot effectively deal with current conditions. While there is debate on this point, it is important to recognize that what is needed is an appropriate combination of “traditional” and “modern” methods of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

## **B. The Conflict Assessment**

The conflict assessment was carried out in November and December 2001. The team was comprised of six individuals. The basic goals of the conflict assessment were to produce: 1) highly contextualized but systematic and ordered accounts of Causes of Conflict as well as Causes of Peace in the areas in which they conduct field work; 2) a summary characterization of the kinds of existing USAID and other donor activities that are already going on in the area of the conflict, with some assessment of whether, to what extent, and how effectively, they address the cause of conflict or capacities of peace; 3) a set of recommendations that suggest programming options that USAID can pursue to reduce the likelihood of violent conflict; and 4) baseline data for key S.O. performance indicators for REDSO and USAID/Uganda.

## **C. Analytical Framework and Methodology**

Because conflicts are numerous and various in the KC, the assessment team noted in its initial meetings that there was a need to more clearly define and identify exactly what types of conflicts were of interest. The USAID/REDSO scope of work identified the conflicts of interest as being typified by significant persistent violence. The assessment team as a whole agreed that the term persistent was not entirely accurate in so far as it implies that the same groups are fighting throughout time. In the pastoral environments of the KC, violence seems to be recurrent but sometimes intermittent and it follows broad patterns.

In order to identify significant recurrent violence, the team applied a set of rough conflict magnitude/intensity criteria that looks at the intensity of conflict in a number of different dimensions. In order for a conflict to be considered “significant and persistent” for the purposes of this study, it would have to cross the threshold on most of the dimensions we identified. In point of fact, all of the conflicts that the team identified for inclusion and deeper analysis in this report crossed the basic threshold on all or almost all of the dimensions of interest. These were:

deaths, displaced people, destruction of property, theft of property, interruption of economic activity, and interruption of administrative activity.

The framework of conflict causes and peace capacities that served as a generic starting point for the team is summarized in the Conflict Assessment protocol that follows. The theory of conflict that this protocol assumes is that conflicts involve a perceived clash of interests, which can be pursued either violently and destructively or constructively. Violent international and intra-national conflicts (dependent variable) in the GHA can be thought of as emerging from various combinations of three types of interacting sources (independent variables) or Causes of Conflict. In the case of the KC, the clashes of interest are those relating to access to resources.

Because the eruption and continuance of violent conflicts usually depends on the accumulation of several factors, it is important to look at all these possible levels in the chain of causation. It should be noted that the conflict sources at each level above may originate both from within the arena of the conflict studied and from outside that arena (such as, for example, the support of insurgencies by neighboring states or structural adjustment policies by the IMF). Thus, they may be local, regional-sub-national, national, or regional-supra-national.

In addition, there usually will be some peace capacities or “causes of peace” present that are functioning to some degree to offset the pressures that are driving violent conflict, by preventing, mitigating or peacefully channeling them into constructive forms of (non-violent) conflict. The value of deliberately looking for and describing these ameliorative factors as an integral part of the diagnosis of the conflict situation is that such trends and capacities within the arena of the conflict might suggest amenable entry points for external actors to reinforce. These Causes of Peace mirror the Causes of Conflict in that they can be organized around the same three overall categories. These capacities may exist traditionally in a given community. They may also be developed, with assistance from outside the community, through development efforts and activities.

The methodology of this Conflict Assessment was guided primarily by the document “USAID REDSO/GHA Conflict Assessment Protocol: Pastoralist Conflicts”. The Protocol outlines a theory of conflict causes and peace capacities that are thought to be operative in most conflicts considered in the assessment, and helpful in constructing successful conflict responses. This protocol served to guide the team in designing the field-work, choosing methods of information gathering, insuring comparability between the two branches of the team, and largely serves as the analytical framework of this report. That said, as with any good research protocol, it proved to be flexible enough to allow modification in the field as the evolving circumstances on the ground and findings of the team informed the ongoing research. This framework suggested a methodology that guided the team in identifying structural, proximate and immediate conflict causes and linking these conflict causes to a set of peace capacities.

Data collection techniques included reading extensive reports as well as current academic writing on pastoral development and conflict in the areas of study. In addition to this documentary research, the team employed a combination of field research methods to gather data. The primary data source was key informant interviews with USAID partners, international, national and local NGOs, government representatives, political figures, church leaders, CSOs, donors, and local people in the KC. When in villages and towns outside the major cities, many team members utilized group interview techniques

as well. Participant observation of conflict conferences and workshops was also employed. Finally, the team commissioned two activities, a workshop and a meeting, organized by OAU/IBAR, which for the past three years has carried out a Pastoral Communities Harmonization Initiative in the Karamoja Cluster.

## **D. Conflict Causes**

Section IV. of the report provides a more detailed discussion of the causes of conflict in the Karamoja Cluster and neighboring areas divided according to the research protocol's categories of structural or root causes, proximate causes and "triggers." The section closes with a brief discussion regarding the possibilities of predicting and locating future conflict. Structural causes of conflict in the Cluster include competition for scarce resources, traditional pastoral cultural values, increasing frequency of drought since about 1980, and the general poverty of the cluster.

Proximate causes of conflict in the KC include systematic neglect by governments of pastoral areas, politicization of conflict, the enormous increase in modern weapons, inappropriate government responses to conflict, provision of food aid without developing suitable livelihood opportunities for the recipients, interference by political leaders, weakened traditional authority systems, increased levels and non-traditional nature of violence, inflammatory media, and the introduction of commercial raiding. Most of the causes are external to the Cluster, or are the result of external influences. In several cases, the proximate causes listed above are also effects of violence, creating a vicious circle of influence.

Several factors can trigger immediate violent conflict between groups in the Cluster and surrounding areas, including a specific violent incident, a series of livestock thefts, a raid, a government operation, traditional taunting by girls and women, a seer's prophecy, an inflammatory media article or a politician's speech.

In the Karamoja Cluster, it is very difficult for those involved in conflict reduction activities to predict, locate, and identify and quickly respond to triggers of conflict. It is even more difficult to accurately predict the location and timing of future outbreaks of conflict even though one might be able to forecast that retaliation will occur. Communities residing nearest to opposing groups are often targeted for retaliatory raids. Pastoralists may wait long periods of time before responding to specific triggers with a large-scale raid or attack. They usually plan their raids and attacks carefully in an effort to achieve surprise, and they use traditional methods of surveillance of the other group's territory to identify their targets. The specific sites of conflict can vary, which makes the identification of "hot spots" particularly difficult. The possibility that new, temporary alliances can be established between groups, even between traditional enemies, further complicates an already complex situation.

## **E. Peace Capacities**

Section V. of the report provides a more detailed discussion of the causes of peace in the Karamoja Cluster and neighboring areas, where there are a host of existing and potential peace capacities that can be leveraged in the broad category of activities that fall under the umbrella of CPMR. By strategically matching conflict sources/causes with peace capacities, the conflict

sources may prove more amenable to solutions. The nature of conflict response, however, will not always entail activities that fall clearly under a CMPR rubric. Because structural and proximate conditions shape the conflict environment in fundamental ways, CMPR activities must engage with and be integrated carefully into broad development strategies for conflict response to be more than palliative. Without attention to this point, CMPR could serve to promote or perpetuate unjust or inequalitarian outcomes and circumstances which may result in greater levels of conflict in the long-run, even if successful in stemming particular conflicts in the short-run. Thus CMPR activities should not only aim at the reduction, solution, mediation or prevention of conflict, but more importantly to the improvement of structural factors that give rise to conflict situations.

This section examines CMPR activities in the Cluster (both extant and potential) using the framework introduced in Section I above and followed in Section IV of Conflict Causes. For each of the three levels of analysis, the report draws distinctions between and explores the utility of the dualities of traditional and modern CMPR. The report also considers the role of women, faith-based leadership, and the media in CMPR activities as well as the use of problem solving dialogues. The report notes the important role of regional organizations and the promotion of inter-state activities, and includes a summary of the team's impressions of particular CMPR activities as a result of our observations.

The team was not engaged in formal evaluation and thus it is vital for the reader to view the judgments made in this regard as tentative and impressionistic. To provide a more systematic means of making judgments, the team adopted the following broad criteria in regards to CMPR activities. The team noted the degree to which activities: 1) are consistent with stated objectives, 2) produced tangible results that can be cited, and or explained convincingly, and 3) made contributions or were successful.

The nature of structural capacities is such that the capacities change slowly over time. Patterns of behavior, cultural practice, levels of economic development, and environmental factors are difficult to influence except when one takes a long-term view. Thus structural peace capacity development will require long-term commitment. Quick fixes are not likely to result in lasting change, and could even prove to have a negative impact on conflict if not well grounded in solid strategy. Structural peace capacities are those which address competition for scarce resources and patterns of resource sharing, traditional pastoral cultural values (including changing structures, the roles of women, the role of elders, and the roles, of warriors), and poverty.

Proximate/channeling peace capacities are those which address the role of government and civil society (including the roles of national government, local government, donors and civil society, and the media), the relationship between development and conflict, indigenous responses to violence, and changed incentives for peace.

While it is not possible to predict exactly when and where the next cattle raid will occur or when one will spiral out of control, there are a number of conflict response techniques that could serve to suppress triggers and reduce the probability, frequency, and severity of such events, including immediate responses to raids, the rule of law and public security, and the media as a tool for "cooling the earth".

The report recognizes that any effective strategy on the part of USAID will entail partnering with a host of organizations, careful coordination, and mutually complimentary strategies.

## **F. Recommendations for Programmatic Approaches**

The issues related to conflict within and adjacent to the Karamoja Cluster are very complex, emotionally charged and politically sensitive. Designing and implementing an effective conflict reduction strategy requires considerable knowledge and constant monitoring of pastoral cultures and systems of natural resource management, the ethnic groups involved, the sometimes shifting relationships of the groups to one another, the political and administrative contexts, the external factors that have changed the nature of conflict, and the capacity of the peacebuilding and development organizations concerned. It is critical to note the dynamic nature of the situation on the ground, and to keep in mind accurately predicting incidents of violent conflict in this area is particularly difficult. The report recommends that REDSO commit itself to working directly with and supporting the activities of organizations already on the ground that have a firm understanding of local conditions, pastoral culture, and are engaged in innovative and promising CMPR activities.

The reports consider the set of constraints that necessitate a thorough rethinking of the recommended strategy and that guide the current approach. Section VI. aims to provide three strategy options which emerge from the substantive findings of the report and which the REDSO Mission can use to guide programming decisions in the near and medium term. The section ends with a set of broader recommendations that could serve long-term assistance strategy development and may be able to guide not only REDSO, but other stakeholders as well.

The first strategy option would focus on a regional issue or set of related issues that would not be conflict specific but rather issue driven. The logic here is that because there are multiplicities of conflicts and given the adaptive and unpredictable nature of pastoral conflicts in this area, working at a level slightly higher than particular conflicts is a useful and needed contribution. Further, the report suggests that a focus on linking development and conflict response is vital. Thus, possible issues that REDSO could use as foci for grant making decisions that are highly relevant to conflict drivers explored by the assessment team include: cattle health, cattle rustling prevention strategies, negotiated inter-group bride price controls, peace radio infrastructure and content, disarmament efforts, advocacy on behalf of pastoralist issues and concerns, and cross-border resource access.

The second strategy option would involve the dissemination of successful models. The report cites the one highly successful cluster of CMPR activities that have been employed in an area similar in many regards to the KC. The Wajir model (and other successful measures) could become a strategic focus for REDSO. USAID resources could focus on trying to transplant key aspects of the Wajir model to the KC. In addition to Wajir, there are a number of other successful models and approaches that recommend themselves and that have been developed in the KC itself.

The third (and least preferred) strategy recommendation would be a focus on one or at the most two specific conflict relationships. This would allow REDSO to concentrate resources on a narrower geographic focus (still bearing in mind REDSO's regional mandate) and try to "bulk"

activities in that area. This strategy might be successfully pursued by focusing on a small number of pilot activities and then expand out from that geographic base as methods are tested and found to work. One approach to a narrower geographic focus would be to choose a set of conflict relationships. REDSO could then sponsor work on improving those relationships, trying again to establish models that can be replicated throughout the cluster over time.

Finally, the report summarizes a number of recommendations that should be taken account of as REDSO or other donors embark on long range strategy formation and in planning with other donors and stakeholders in the KC. These points have informed our three strategy options presented above and should be further integrated into future planning. They include the following: 1) the need to integrate conflict resolution with socioeconomic development; 2) address the question of whether or not pastoralism should be abandoned by the peoples of the Karamoja Cluster; 3) the need for effective inter-state and regional conflict reduction mechanisms; 4) the need for adequate coordination; 5) the need to promote exchanges of experiences; 6) the need to integrate customary peacebuilding approaches into formal conflict reduction mechanisms and approaches; and 7) the need to promote the involvement of women in CPMR activities.