

EKOI!

Issue 1: March 2013

Land & the ironies of peace

We are a team of 24 young men and women aged between 20 and 29 from Moroto, Napak, Kotido and Nakapiripirit Districts. We conduct action research in Napak, Moroto and Kotido districts. Some of us have been to school and others have not, and we consider this combination to be our great strength as a research team.



We aim to see Ngikarimojong working together for the development of Karamoja. We hope our research will help us and other Ngikarimojong to do this.

We intend to share the findings of our research with people living across Karamoja, civil society and government; decision makers at all levels to inform design and programming of policy development interventions in Karamoja

In our EKOI Bulletin, we share key research findings and stories.

What we research

Since December 2012, we have visited several different communities across Napak and Moroto districts to understand what issues different people consider important. We started off by asking people about land, peace and customary law and people told us their stories and told us what they thought. We used what we learnt from them to focus our research and reached a hypothesis; **With relative peace, changes in land use are eroding customary land use and management systems.** We will find out evidence for and against this in the next phase of our research, starting in March 2013.

Why research these issues?

We have learnt that Karamoja's land tenure system is fast changing as a result of the relative peace and with it the fate of the pastoralists, whose major occupation – also the backbone of the Karamoja economy – depends. Pastoral economies are not revived by any means that excludes revival of pastoral factors of production, one of which is mobility. Our two months' research has indicated that mobility is affected if communal land, water points and grassland is up for grabs and that these are important issues to Karamoja.

How do we do our research?

We go to villages, kraals, towns, stay with people, make friends and share stories. We choose what to study, where to go, who to speak to, taking advice from the people we meet. We choose what to do with the information we get, sharing information with all sorts of different people across the districts we work in. We go to places we have networks, as well as places we are not known and we make sure we meet a broad range of people – people of different ages, with different livelihoods, living in different places.

The Research in March 2013

We have recently recruited another twelve team members (to make the magic number 24) in Kotido. In March and April, we are visiting communities in Kotido for the first time and following up with some of the people we've been talking to in Moroto and Napak Districts to explore their stories further. This includes elders and government departments. We intend to use this knowledge to input into community debates and other forums.

We have chosen four stories from the many that people have told us to share in this bulletin. The ones we have chosen show what is happening with land in different parts of Napak and Moroto districts. We are going to follow up all of these stories to understand them better during March and April.

This land has become ours

Apeitolim settlement is a product of the relative peace existent in wider Karamoja today. Many people we spoke to said they stay and go about their duties without interference, or having to worry about insecurity, even at night. They said local leaders including LCIs and the general community are vigilant about the peace.

Located on flat plains, Apeitolim is a rich agricultural land, formerly used for crop growing and as grassland; residents we spoke to said it had been abandoned as a result of decades of conflict and cattle rustling.

When the peace set in, Apeitolim became a prize for crop farmers and settlers from four districts, as people struggled to have a piece of the land. When we visited Apeitolim, we spoke to people from the districts of Napak, Abim, Amuria and Katakwi.

Some people said this has led to land conflicts, and the fact that the current occupants and users of Apeitolim land are from four districts has made the aspect of land conflict resolution an even more intricate affair. The youth, rather than the elders, are more involved in land; both as perpetrators (struggling for land themselves) and decision makers (involved in land decision making), replacing cultural and traditional systems of land management and land conflict resolution.

"In this land of Apeitolim, we started staying here thinking that this land was not ours but now it has become ours and we now keep telling each other to take good care of the land. You know that before, the government was tough and we feared we would be chased out but now it has become a true Karamoja due to the removal of guns and the government's initiative to stop raiding and bloodshed. People have settled with peace even if you leave your chicken, goats, clothes etc outside at night no-one will take it away. We have mixed here, others becoming in-laws from various places; Nyakwai, Teso and others as a result of peace" Middle-aged man, Apeitolim

This is a photo of an elder in Kokorio. Elders are traditionally powerful on land matters.

"When someone comes and puts a building on your garden, he angers you, so you remove poles from your garden, that person goes to the police, who handle the case without even investigating and you are taken to Katakwi police station. We have tried calling the government leaders of Napak district but nobody is willing to come and help us solve these problems. But when we also try to hold meetings with them, they cool down a bit for some short time and later start again and you find that even the land they are claiming for does not belong to them." Elder, Apeitolim



“We want the wildlife to go somewhere but not to occupy our farmland. Land has helped us alongside our animals as a source of livelihoods. It has helped our cattle to multiply. We are working hard in ensuring peace so that we can live peacefully. We do not have land wrangles except that of farmland boundaries where some people come claiming that that land belongs to them. When this issue of struggle for land came up, we solved it through negotiating with each other. When negotiations fail, we invite the rest of the community members to solve the problem. And if these negotiations fail completely, one party has to surrender that piece of land and go somewhere. For the case of Wildlife, they should know that Kidepo is the right place to be. Our cattle are alright, nothing is disturbing our peace. In the past, no body used to stay here because of serious raids. This peace is now prevailing everywhere in the neighborhood.” Kraal Head, Kobebe



Which herd: Wildlife or cattle?

The story of Kobebe, a vast pastureland in the heat of Karamoja's cattle wars and fought over by the locals and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) exemplifies institutional versus local communities' struggle for pastureland. People are not clear who has authority over the land. They told us two possible reasons for the renewed struggle for this rich pastureland - the envy of the Jie, Turkana, and the Matheniko: firstly, that in the days of cattle rustling the UWA found it hard to control the territory and has only enforced its presence since peace came; or secondly that either UWA or the local communities are attempting to expand their boundaries.

Like in the rest of Karamoja, UWA and the local communities remain locked up in a battle for territory, much of which Ngikarimojong have traditionally used for cattle grazing. After hearing what people in Kobebe and other areas were saying, we are going to follow this story and hope to meet the UWA to understand things better.

A return to land wrangles

Known most for the status of its occupants as 'returnees' from Kampala and other towns, and for its agricultural productivity, Kobulin, located at the centre of Napak district is one of the settlements whose expansion has been credited for the prevailing peace. Most of its residents have told us they originate from the rest of Napak district, acquiring land in these northerly plains of the Napak Mountains.

It is this quest for land that has made Kobulin, a vast stretch of productive land laden according to some residents with rampant land wrangles, forged land agreements and land grabbing. Yet the management of these affairs is no longer in the hands of the elders, according to some community members, an institution considered a custodian of land in Karamoja especially given the fact that the police and the Local Council system has become a central player in resolution of these conflicts. Previously accessed and used by herders, Kobulin is fast becoming fragmented and under individual tenure system, leaving the herders with less choice of grassland. Some herders from other parts of Napak who have been grazing in Kobulin say there is increasing difficulty in accessing pastureland.

Panning for livestock

We have learned that mineral resources exploitation in Karamoja was never really popular or even possible until the relative peace came. Peace brought the ability to carry out small scale mining in previously insecure locations and the need to find new means of livelihood after many people lost cattle stocks. New frontiers have been opened up in this interest, including Nakabaat, a large swathe of mineral rich escarpments of Mount Moroto.

Elders we spoke to said mining was practiced here in the early 1980s, but as cattle wars escalated, the site was deserted because of insecurity. It is currently a nucleus of gold mining attention in which we have seen the resource interests of the local people and the investors are in a virtual log jam. That the elders are no longer in charge of decisions about these resources is a concern in many mining sites like Nakabaat; with people decrying the desecration with heavy duty equipment of traditional shrines, ancestral burial places and water points among other resource exploitation ills. In Nakabaat, some miners told us that they hope to earn enough from their activities to restock.

“We have come here to the mines because we have lost our cows, trying to derive livelihood from the basin of this river. When Government asked for the guns, we gave them, and now we have come here, to carry out mining... We do not know who has given these investors this land to exploit from, but we as a community are going to limit their stay here. Why were our elders not approached when this and other mineral land was given away? The Matheniko have given up raiding cattle, the mines our only source of getting these animals back.” Young man, Nakabaat

Quick Summary

We found in Apeitolim that different people are living together and that's making new land conflicts, but there is no clear mechanism for resolving them.

In Kobebe, we found herders uncertain of their continued stay & which land is gazetted for wildlife.

In Nakabaat, communities are trying to earn a living from gold mining, while investors' access land without consulting them.

In Kobulin, we found that traditional systems of land management are being replaced by the police and a rising increase in private ownership of communal land is leading to diminishing pastures for animals.

The team will now investigate these issues further.

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