



EKOL!

Issue 2: April 2013
Building a spider's web

Our understanding of issues continues to deepen and from May 2013, we will dedicate more effort to connecting people and communities.

As we promised in **Issue 1**, we met with the Uganda Wildlife Authority to better understand their perspective on community relations. See below for a briefing of our discussion with them.

From May to September, we are going to bring elders and women into our research process to help build our networks, generate balance and depth of understanding, build confidence amongst communities, understand different perspectives and to help us in our analysis. We are also going to share our findings in the traditional Karimojong parliament, or *akiriket*.

We have been deepening our understanding of the relationship between elders and youth and between cultivators and pastoralists in relation to their use and management of land. In the following weeks and months, we intend to connect people and use the knowledge we have acquired and our connections to have people share their experiences and solutions.

"We are shepherds of the wild"

In our last issue we said we would go and meet the Uganda Wildlife Authority to understand community relations and the use of land in the wildlife reserves. The

UWA says its relationship with local communities is good, and the reserves are open to pastoralists; while local communities say they are denied access to resources in the reserves. We need to find out facts and understand more about this relationship. When this understanding is complete, we are going to look for opportunities to facilitate dialogue between the local communities and the UWA from now to September 2013.

"Our relationship with communities is good. It is not true that we are chasing cattle keepers from the reserves. Even currently, the reserves are grassland. Cattle have been coexisting with wildlife for so long. The game reserves were gazetted in the 1960s and in the case of Kobebe, it was just de-silted recently. The dam was for example constructed purposely for wildlife and livestock. It is only settling in the reserves and cultivating there that is a point of contention. But we are managing this peacefully. UWA is not grabbing land, our interest is wildlife conservation and the reserves have been here for long. Our mandate is to manage the protected areas on behalf of the people of Uganda. These are national resources which need national attention. If the reserves are degazetted, individuals like us will own chunks of it and the local people will suffer... in the future, the reserves may become the only places in which we'll find kraals" – Okware James Ilukol, UWA

About us

We are a team of 24 young men and women from Moroto, Napak, Kotido and Nakapiripirit Districts doing action research in Moroto, Napak and Kotido Districts. Some of us have gone to school and others have not. We are working on this research to see Ngikarimojong working together for the development of Karamoja. We believe the voices of Ngikarimojong should be heard in development processes, and that land is one of the key resources in which our views have to be heard. We say this in respect of the relative peace currently prevailing and how it impacts on traditional livelihoods and land management mechanisms. We go to villages, kraals, towns, stay with people, make friends and share stories. We choose what to study, where to go to, whom to speak to, taking advice from the people we meet. We have done this research since 2011. We have published "*Strength, Livelihoods and Creativity of Karimojong Youth*" among other work.



The shift of power that never is

In areas like Kalorwakomol, Lobanya, and Kopusang all in Kotido district, the youth are the decision makers over land. For example, if a new person comes to the settlement, he or she goes to the youth who are holders of most of that land, to request for a portion to settle on and cultivate.

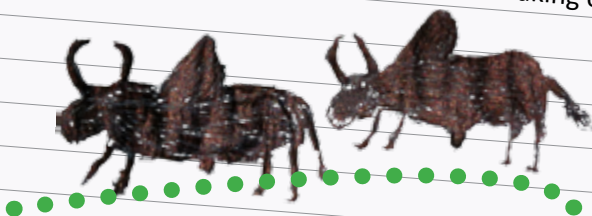
These are new settlements, most of which were first settled in by the youth. Those youth we talked to told us they continue to make decisions over land because they were the ones to come there first, and they allocate land for other people who came to the camps last, even the elders.

Even as there is a struggle for decision making power for land between elders and youth, many elders say they are still in control and there has been no shift of authority. In Lodera, one elder told us that they are still in control of land, arbitrating land wrangles especially land in the villages. Youth said they are seeking control over land because of lack of employment as a result of loss of animals due to cattle rustling and the disarmament exercise.

Some people we interviewed said this pressure on land resources includes exploitation of resources like trees at traditionally sacred sites that elders are custodians of. They added that it includes clearing and cultivation of grassland for cattle or land that is communally owned.

In Moroto, Kotido and Napak, land conflicts driven partly by the youth have been resolved through traditional mechanisms like *ameto*, a traditional public flogging rite in which elders command the youth and middle-aged men to punish offenders. In Kotido district, *Etem*, also called *Ekokwa* in Napak/Moroto is also used to resolve these land related conflicts.

We see a quest for power by the youth to make decisions on land, but power hasn't shifted to the youth. Elders remain in charge, except in new settlements and settlements that have been re-populated since the peace, where the youth are in control of decision making on land.



"The youth have eroded our customary ways on land use. They are disobeying the customary laws by deforesting the revered shrines, destroying trees at the shrines for making charcoal. The youth are also struggling over land and have taken part in managing and making decisions. Formerly, we used to perform these duties but because the youth feel they are mature enough are claiming responsibility. We have decided to punish the youth by publicly beating them so that they obey elders." – An elder in Moruanadou, Kotido

"I was flogged publicly because of irresponsible clearing and tilling of communal land. I and others are now desisting from this and other irresponsible acts." a youth



"Youth respect elders and fear the police"

"In Kacheri an elder and a group of youth were struggling for land in an etem meeting. The two parties had land documents but the elders and other members in the etem dismissed the use of these documents insisting on the use of traditional knowledge and mechanisms to make a decision. Police had been involved but still failed to come to a solution. The conflicting parties had considered court action but said

that a court decision may take long to come. That etem decided in favor of the elder, and ordered the youth to remove construction materials on the land contested for. When we went to Kacheri after sometime, the construction material had been removed from that land. "Why do you youth grab land? Why don't you borrow land or buy with money?" – An elder in the etem in Kacheri.

'Of a Cow and Sorghum'

When the Moroto/Napak team met elders at Nakichumet, the elders called an *etem/ekokwa* (a small sitting of the kraal members) to tell people not to cultivate where the cows should be grazing. We learned that in some cases animal track-ways have been cleared for cultivation and water points have been surrounded or closed to herders by cultivation. Much of the land around Arechek dam that was once designated by the community for grazing has been claimed for individual plots.

This problem at Arechek is not the only one. According to householders in Potongor, Kotido, the growing number of cultivated plots around settlements means that animals have to graze far away. People complain they cannot get milk for their households.

Many who we interviewed explained that cultivation has increased because people lost cows and cultivation is a means of getting the cows back. Now that the peace has come, cultivation is expanding. Elders are worried that cultivation of prime grazing land is upsetting the balance of Karimojong pastoralism. They say that many non-governmental organizations are supporting cultivation at the expense of herding. This is contributing to a worrying pressure on grassland and undermining the pastoralist way of life.

At the Nakichumet *etem* the elders reminded the people that they have the authority to stop excessive use of the land for cultivation. Cattle are important in Karamoja, as it is the cow that feeds people in the dry season, they said. Sorghum is also important; the two forms of production have to move together. That is why the elders are now using their authority to stop over-cultivation. People can cultivate small portions of land, but if elders find trackways covered, or grazing land ploughed, they will allow the animals onto that land.

In interviews with elders across Moroto, Napak and Kotido we find repeatedly that they are taking action on what they see as over-cultivation by calling *ekokwa/etem*.



'A cow is good for many people; a crop is only good for the family; if someone gave me five cows, I'd throw down my hoe'





“We in Lobeel are mostly pastoralists who have stayed here for one year. Five years back, people came to join us from nearby communities. They settled and practiced cultivation around the water points. Within a very short time, we had lost animal access routes to the watering points. When we quarreled and broke a way through for the animals to get to the water, the cultivators informed the sub county. The sub county trusted elders since they were well versed with issues around the land. During the dry season, the animals should pass via the garden to access water. During the wet season, animals should not pass through the gardens because they can access water in large quantities elsewhere.” – kraal head Lobeel, Kotido

“Why should someone buy a large chunk of land? Where will our animals pass because our grazing land is now narrowing? We recently organized a meeting with cultivators and we also warned those coming from elsewhere to sell land here. Cultivation and cattle grazing have been in existence for a long time. We don't discourage cultivation, but you must make sure to leave pasture for cows. We want to discourage people from selling land. There are some people who want to sell this land to buy a motorbike, we the elders have refused. Go and look for something elsewhere to buy your motorbike” – Elder, Nakichumet, Napak district

“In the past, our forefathers cultivated next to the villages and the vast land was left for animal grazing. Due to the former raids, herdsmen own few animals and they are growing crops with an aim to sell their produce and buy more animals. Farmers have occupied fertile grazing grounds for cultivation leaving little or no land for grazing. The herdsmen have solved this issue through etem.”

“Animals will multiply in time to come but where will they graze since much land has been turned in to cultivation?”

••••• We are supported by Restless Development, the Institute of Development Studies, PCI and Irish Aid. ••••• If you'd like to know more about our work, please contact us on youthresearchteam@gmail.com or +256 (0)776 775775. •••••

