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Author(s): Kennedy Agade Mkutu
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Uganda: Pastoral Conflict & Gender Relations

Kennedy Agade Mkutu

This article uses testimonials from women and men to ask how pastoral gender relations are configured, how they are being altered in the context of armed conflict, including violent cattle raiding, in the last four decades and how they are coping with their resulting pastoral livelihoods becoming increasingly unsustainable. In addition, the status of both men and women as defined by marriage is declining as marriage is dependent upon a diminishing cattle economy. It is here that women are being required to take on new roles for their survival and the survival of the family, including making decisions about acquiring guns and ammunition, and branching out into alternative livelihoods. Men are gaining power over women in some respects because they remain the owners of weapons, but conflict has also created space for women to gain independence and status. The article considers the benefits of this situation for women, but also notes the new risks to their physical and mental health. It then argues that in turn there are both positive and negative aspects for the whole family and the stability and sustainability of the Karimojong society as a whole.

Introduction

There are nearly 20 million nomadic people in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti) and Great Lakes (Burundi, CAR, Congo, DRC and Rwanda). For centuries, this arid/semi-arid climate has seen pastoralism and land management as the main form of livelihood. However this way of life is now under threat by the increasing resource-based armed conflicts which have affected the entire ordering of pastoral societies, not least their gender relations. A pastoralist woman from Karamoja offers an illustration:

Last year... my husband had gone for a raid in Acholi and he was killed there. The brother then inherited me. On 25 August 2004, the jie went to raid the Turkana from Morulem grazing areas within jie. There were two casualties in the raid, my husband being one of them. His gun was not recovered. They were only two brothers in the family and only my mother in law is left. I am not ready to be inherited by another man again. I might get someone who will take me for granted.

Although unequal gender power relations have been noted in situations of conflict (Byrne, 1966:32), only rudimentary data exist on pastoral areas, partly due to the inherent insecurity. The Nairobi Declaration on Small Arms (2000) recognises that conflict has a devastating impact on women, but neglects to quantify this in any way. Adelman (2005) notes that 'One cross-cutting issue still inadequately dealt
with by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development’s (IGAD) conflict early warning (CEWARN) is that of gender’. He argues that:

CEWARN should ensure their information data system includes data on female assaults and rapes … illuminating the costs of conflict that might otherwise be overlooked.

Since 2000 when the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the United Nations and its related agencies involved in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) moved to include gender analysis in their policies and programmes (UNIFEM, 2003). Cockburn (2001), El-Bushra (2003), and Jacobson (1999) argue that focusing on the ‘impact of conflict on women’ is not enough; the use of gender analysis is vital to investigate gendered identities and their dynamics. Baden (1997) and Byrne (1996) believe that conflicts change gender relations and might transform social patterns and promote gender equality.

Women are often identified for their capability to make peace as an organic by-product of their ability to mother and nurture.\(^3\) At an extreme, some lines of discourse have tended to promote the simplistic ‘women equals peace, men equals war’ dichotomy (Kelly, 2000). However, several writers have noted the need to see women as participants in, and contributors to, armed conflict (Jacobs et al. 2000; Moser and Clark, 2001, Enloe, 1993) and may be part of the war machine in vital but hidden ways (De Pauw, 1998; Enloe, 1998). Women may also be guerilla fighters; in Sri Lanka, women are said to form 40 per cent of the Tamil Tigers.\(^4\) Kelly (2000) notes that women, in a variety of contexts, ‘take up arms’ and collude with, or acquiesce in, the use of violence in civil unrest and international conflicts. Human Rights Watch Africa details the involvement of women in the violence of the Rwanda genocide of 1994 and their active involvement in conflicts as combatants or service providers in Angola, Eritrea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda (Bennett, et al. 1995).

Given this close interplay between women, conflict and peace, women’s involvement in peace building exercises is essential; however, as De Pauw notes, once the conflict is over, the women’s voices are gone, and their part in it all is forgotten (De Pauw, 1998:XIII). Women may continue to have no representation in economic and political life and tend to be excluded from formalised peace negotiations (Jacobs et al. 2000; Moser and Clark, 2001). From another angle, the programme officer of the Social Services Development in Moroto, Uganda, noted that the ‘Women in Development’ approach in Karamoja was felt to be culturally insensitive, and inflamed conflicts between men and their wives as it only focused on women,\(^5\) such that men refused for their women to be involved in any programmes run under the guise of gender. Patriarchal power is still potent and should be noted in any discussions.

This article uses testimonials from women and men to ask how pastoral gender relations are configured, how they are being altered in the context of armed conflict in the last four decades and how they are coping with their resulting pastoral livelihoods becoming increasingly unsustainable. In addition, the status of both men and women as defined by marriage is declining as marriage is dependent upon a diminishing cattle economy. It is here that women are being required to take on new roles for their survival and the survival of the family, including making decisions about acquiring guns and ammunition, and branching out into alternative livelihoods. Men are gaining power over women in some respects because they remain the owners of weapons, but conflict has also created space for women to gain
independence and status. The article considers the benefits of this situation for women, but also notes the new risks to their physical and mental health. It then argues that in turn there are both positive and negative aspects for the whole family and the stability and sustainability of the Karimojong society as a whole.

This work stems from the author’s involvement in peace building in Karamoja, observing that women were active players in pastoral resource-based conflict, and that they and their families were undergoing great upheaval. Understanding these changes within the context of armed conflict is vital if any creative suggestions to conflict transformation are to be made. However, if members of this society are gaining from the conflict situation, then change will be difficult.

Introducing Karamoja

Karamoja is a geographical area of Northeast Uganda. Internationally, it borders Sudan in the North and Kenya in the East. The region consists of a plateau 1,000 metres high and 27,200 square kilometres, approximately equal to the size of Belgium which administratively is divided into four districts: Moroto, Kotido, Nakapiripirit and Kaabong. In addition to Karimojong pastoralists, Jie, Dodos, Labwor and Pokot also live in the area. The total population of Karamoja is approximately 954,000 (UBOS, 2003). Livestock are the only major form of production possible to sustain daily life in this harsh environment and are prized not only as an economic asset securing survival, but also have intrinsic value as the means on which the entire fabric of Karimojong society depends:

When born, a child’s most distinctive name is drawn from cattle, he founds and feeds a family of his own with cattle. His adult life centres on defending the cattle he has, and fighting to acquire more. When he dies he is wrapped in cattle hide and laid in a grave beneath his cattle corral (Dyson-Hudson, 1966:101-102).

The Karimojong are interesting among pastoral groups for three main reasons. First is the chronic problem of marginalisation and underdevelopment. The area has few police posts, hospitals, no courts and poor telephone communication. Karamoja region has the lowest rates of literacy in Uganda (only 12 per cent as compared to over 60 per cent national average) and their contact with other Ugandans has become more regular mainly through visits by villagers to trading centres or towns, demonstrating a gradual turn from pastoral values.

Second, there is a problem of weak governance and inadequate security. There are no effective policies to address pastoral insecurity. Governments have often been slow, ineffective or overly forceful, with the police sometimes complicit in violence. The state formation of paramilitary forces to keep law and order, have often been counterproductive. Parallel governance systems exist, with elders wielding significant power over warriors. The Karimojong traditionally have resisted external government though under Museveni’s government there has been an attempt to incorporate them into local administration, police, the army, and the teaching profession.

Third, there is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region, exacerbating existing inter-communal resource-based conflict and creating a highly insecure environment.
The Proliferation of Small Arms & Light Weapons (SALW)

Since the 1960s weapons have proliferated in the Greater Horn, being used in struggles for independence, rebellions in Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia and later, the cold war, in which the Horn of Africa was the battleground for the superpowers. These include the Ethiopia-Somalia Ogaden conflict, the collapse of Mengistu’s regime in the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1991, the collapse of the Said Barre regime in Somalia in 1991 and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) rebellion from 1983 to 2004 and the ensuing destabilisation of the region which continues today. Therefore it is no surprise that illegal arms and ammunition trafficking into Karamoja originates largely from Sudan, Ethiopia and the Somalia frontier today.

Following the defeat of Idi Amin in 1979 the Karimojong broke into barracks and obtained over 60,000 small arms abandoned by fleeing soldiers. Using these arms they carried out many cattle raids between 1986 and 1989. The emergence of various rebel groups such as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and other militia groups in the region have assisted in sustaining the supply of arms to various pastoralist groups. Other sources have included buying from arms traffickers by bartering for animals, stealing of guns after killing enemies, and more recently attacking the United Peoples Defence Force (UPDF). Arms are also sold by undisciplined soldiers and armed paramilitary forces. A major problem with these state-sanctioned paramilitary groups is that they are poorly paid and poorly controlled, leading some to desert with their guns and others to misuse their authority. Their arms are frequently found to have been used in raids or traded as above.

Armed Cattle Rustling

Pressure on pastoralists is further increased by marginalisation, land alienation and lack of policy by states to mitigate conflict or promote development. Since the 1980s, with the proliferation of SALW, cattle raids, insecurity and clashes with the state have escalated within Karamoja and across the international borders.

The presence of arms has amplified the existing raiding tradition and exposed underlying lawlessness and weak governance. It has made traditional inter-ethnic conflicts (which were small scale, traditionally fought with spears, bows and arrows and managed by local elders) more lethal. Raids take various forms: redistributive raiding, or areom (large scale collective raids) serve to rebuild herds of cattle depleted by drought, diseases, raids or serve the needs of marriage and rituals. However, nowadays, cattle raids do not simply wait for disaster to deplete stocks. Rapacious/predatory raiding occurs, driven chiefly by the desire to increase one’s herd at the expense of neighbouring peoples, by cultural instinct for power, and more recently for commercial reasons. There are also small individual cattle thefts (akoko) committed by youth, which may escalate into collective revenge raids (ajore). An elder interviewed in Jie noted:

Today there are many types of raids, where groups of five, ten and thirty go but also the ajore community sanctioned raid where you have 100 people going. These days it’s self-raids and they are commercialised. This is where the two or three or thirty can discuss and go raid without consulting the emuron (diviners).

In the past, the three Karimojong clans, the Matheniko, Bokora and the Pian were united against a common raiding enemy, namely, the Kenya Pokot. Now, intra- and
inter-ethnic alliances may be created for individual economic gain, which can later be completely reversed. An elder noted, ‘Once upon time ngikaitotoi, (brothers), but now they are ngimoe (enemies).’

The market economy is penetrating into pastoral areas, and cattle are raided to obtain cash for food, medical treatment, school fees and modern goods, where for years the mode of trade has mainly been barter. In Namalu, it was observed that raided cattle are sold at parallel and hidden markets at a lower price and transported to Mbale. In Rupa, the Matheniko karachunas (young warriors) admitted that they were stealing animals from the Bokora because of hunger: ‘If you have nothing to eat, you steal and then you sell on the market.’ A cattle trader in Nabilatuku commented:

> Because you have people watching you, you buy cattle from them and they wait [for] you on the road and ambush you and take the cattle you bought from them again. The cattle stolen are reported to the Local Councils, but they can do nothing. In fact some of thieves are now kraal leaders and who knows, if they are connected with the warriors selling the stolen cattle.

SALW have allowed certain individuals to gain control of cattle wealth through building up networks of violence. Through links with influential businessmen, cattle are then sold out of the region, depleting already scarce wealth and further fuelling raids.

Arms are so common in Karamoja that they are being used also in brawls and banditry, impacting on the entire society and hampering attempts at development. They have also led to a new type of conflict, that between the community and state security. Disarmament by government has been attempted several times since the 1960s, with the most recent attempt from 2001 failing with many losses of lives of both state forces and Karimojong. Causes of failure include lack of understanding of local dynamics in raiding, lack of consideration of livelihood issues and inadequate provision of public security.

Currently there is a major toll on men with over 80 warriors killed in raiding and disarmament violence, in a clash between Karimojong and the UPDF in February 2007. However, according to a report in January 2007, the Bokora and the Pian of Lorengedwat went to Nabilatuk for a raid as usual and when the raid failed they killed nine women, of whom three were in advanced pregnancy, and seriously injured another four women. Six UPDF soldiers were then killed by the warriors as they attempted to pursue them.

Gender Relations & Pastoral Conflict

The Karimojong society is a patriarchal and polygamous society. Generally accepted customary roles are gender specific; women are occupied throughout the day with the household, care of the fields and management of daily life. Men handle security issues, herding and raiding and decision-making. Every newly married woman is allocated land and a cow to enable her to feed herself and her children. New-born animals are the charge of women, and additional animals may be given as more children are born or more cattle are received in the homestead. Commonly, wives have rights of usufruct; technically however they still belong to the husbands. A Pian elder noted: ‘Father owns the cattle. However, the father gives each wife cows for milking. The cows are hers, though she cannot sell them without the permission of the husband.’ A widow in Loputuk revealed ‘women have no say over the cow,
even when hunger is biting'. Worse still, women told me: ‘If your husband wants to marry [again], he can take the cow and pay bridewealth with it!’ In contrast to animals, a woman can cultivate as much land as she wants, and it is up to her how much she wants to cultivate in any year. The produce of the garden is hers to use as she wishes.

The formal decision-making process is mainly carried out by men in a forum known as the akiriket or meeting place often under a fig or tamarind tree. Meetings are called together in times of crisis and may be requested but not attended by senior women. Women have informal influences on decision-making through husbands, sons, prospective spouses (SNV, 2005:20; Mkutu, 2005a, 2007a; Novelli, 2001), and also through the akiwor. Akiwor refers in a general sense to the initiation of individuals in Karimoja society into an age-set group. However, the term has been used to describe initiation of women in particular into increasing levels of seniority. The akiwor gives women status, solidarity, defence of rights, and also the right to perform certain traditional ceremonies. Thus women are not given the same power in decision making as men, but are not without power.

Raids and counter raids are part of Karimojong tradition. Women benefit greatly from raided cattle for feeding and clothing the family, using the milk, meat, skins and blood. They also receive money from the sale of raided cattle depending on their seniority and position within the family; they may also benefit from bridewealth, thus women are involved in encouraging men to raid. An elder noted, ‘In Jie custom women encourage the men to raid, but what shall I do? I found it like that for generations and generations.’ Warriors in Panyangara said:

The moment the women see cows, they ululate and the man shoots in the air ... The women become very excited and prepare everything; bathing water, drinks, good food. They view you as very special.

Mzee Lokiru noted that

If a husband does not go for raids while his age-mates go for raids and bring raided animals frequently, the woman nags the man continuously to provoke him to go for a raid. The woman may sing songs, indirectly telling the man he was a coward like a woman.

This was concurred several times. Senior women in Rupa noted that ‘Women would tell the men who did not go raiding: you are not a man. Women encourage raids because all her peers are fully married, and they would tell the man why are you still sitting here? go for raids and marry me.’ Mudong noted that ‘The other women will start abusing their sons, [saying] ‘so and so has gone raiding and they now have cows and you do not want to go.’ A woman in Namalu noted:

she takes soil from the footprints of her son, and puts it in a leather bag and sleeps on it all day. She believes no one will see her son, he will walk among the enemies, he will pass security [police] and he will be invisible.

Women are rewarded for their support in raiding in the form of cows or cash. ‘It is often thought that if you return with cows it’s because of the blessings from women, hence she is given a cow’ said a woman from Kachire.
Bridewealth & Half Marriage (*Ekicul*)

Bridewealth is an important currency, for survival and the cost of marriage in Karamoja is high. The family giving away their daughter are able to create alliances by distributing cattle and are compensated for the loss of a hard worker. Ellen Longolok a Karamoja woman was married to a pastor who paid 70 cows and 20 goats. In the 1980s, Joyce Awasi was married to a teacher who paid 60 cows and 15 goats. Cheere, the parish chief of Rupa has five wives. For the youngest he paid 30 goats and 30 cows for ‘half marriage’ (see below). The price differs between communities and between clans and for other reasons, such as beauty, desirability, age, virginity and the size of the girl’s family; 160 cows were given to one large family in Kanawat. Women are proud of their bridewealth. One woman in Namalu related, ‘I was fully married and my husband paid 150 cows. I was very stubborn, so the people had to pay more cattle.’ It is a matter of pride to be married. Even children will abuse unmarried women and call them names.

Customarily in Karamojong society, parents meet all the marriage obligations for their sons beginning from engagement to marriage. Nowadays, young men from poor families have to raise bridewealth by themselves, sometimes through armed cattle raids, sometimes hiring guns from friends, relatives and rich gun owners (the latter who insist on payment in cattle after a successful raid). Poor warriors may look after the cattle of the rich and are given animals either annually or after a set term, or they may be employed by rich men to raid on their behalf with promises to pay their marriage obligations (ADOL, 2002).

The pressure on young men is also related to a structural opposition between fathers and sons. The priority of the fathers has always been to get additional wives before he agrees to provide bridewealth for the first son of his first wife. His career is at its height when his young daughters are married away creating bridewealth that allows him to marry more wives. He tries to delay his son’s marriages as long as possible because this will signal the beginning of the end (Bruch-Due, 1999:23). Senior men have an interest in high bridewealth from the marriages of their daughters.

One would have expected that with diminishing cattle and livestock rearing as a livelihood, the bride price would be going down. However this is not the case in Karamoja, where it remains as high as it has been in previous decades. In Pokot and Samburu in Kenya however, bride price has reduced with diminishing cattle due to drought and raiding. The maintenance of the high price in Karamoja may be because of the continual dependence upon cattle for survival and alliances in a harsh climate, and the lack of viable economic alternatives at present. Also, as noted previously, with the increasing movement of the free market economy into Karamoja, cattle, cash and guns are becoming interchangeable. Lastly, there is the existence of an alternative ‘half marriage’ contract, which gives the bride’s family a means of acquiring the large cattle wealth but more slowly over time. When a man has inadequate resources he may resort to ‘half marriage’, whereby some cows are given, and the rest are pending. It may be years before the full transaction is complete and the poor groom may pay the full bride price of his wife with the bridewealth of one of his daughters. As noted by an elder, this leaves many rights with the bride’s family.

_You can stay with my daughter, if you get the first child, you pay! You come and say ‘I have sinned!’ You compensate the blood of my daughter. You also say ‘thanks’! You pay 30 goats or 3 oxen ... When you die the children come back to us. When it’s time for initiation, the clan of the mother initiates the children._
Senior women interviewed noted: ‘The problems of half-marriage include not being respected that you are someone’s wife, not recognised especially during ceremonies and even the man you live with does not respect you.’ These women also reported that half married women are the servants when the initiated women meet and may not even eat at the meetings; it is a less secure marriage contract. Lochero, a man of 69, noted, ‘Another man can take your wife and children if you do not marry in full.’ Two raiders concurred, ‘If you are not even able to provide the three animals, the father of the girl will give your wife to another man. But they will still follow you to pay the cows!’ Father O’Halloran of Panyangara noted, ‘The loss of wives to other men happens quite often.’ Thus the depletion in cattle wealth due to armed raiding has undermined the customary provision for marriage. This is having a negative impact on marital stability, male and female identities, and self-esteem.

Custodians of Small Arms

The woman has customarily been the keeper of the man’s weapon. As well as taking off the man’s shoes she must take the gun and put it in a place of safety. ‘If she leaves the gun she gets a whipping’ said senior women in Rupa. A women’s group in Nadiket had another interesting story:

> It is respect for a husband to carry his gun or spear and shoes and take them to the house. For some the man comes, leaves shoes, chair and gun in different places, then he calls you and goes inside. The woman would ask, ‘Where are your things?’ the man will say ‘go and get them from outside.’ This is at night. The woman has to search until she finds them. After searching and bringing these things, you feed him with a wooden spoon. All these things are done because he has given you cows and he is just testing you to see if you can abide by the rules.

Women insisted that they do not support such behaviour but these are customs inherited from long ago. Traditions are changing however. In Lokitelaebu, women said: ‘The young generations refuse to remove the shoes or accept to take the spear and the shield to storage.’ It was noted that such defiance may lead to violence in which parents and brothers might join in the beating of a woman. A former Moroto MP made the relationship between the gun, the woman and the cow clear saying:

> The first time you’re buying the gun, you have to take the cows to pay for it from the mother. The gun is sought particularly for protection and livelihood ... At first it used to cost 20 cows. It came down to 15 then to 10 and it now costs about 1-3 cows depending on either it’s the border area or the interior. The father owns the cattle but the woman has a say. Usually the father is more rigid than the mother and when a son comes to the mother she will respond quickly.

The woman in the introduction who had lost two husbands to raiding, refers to her request to know the whereabouts of the gun. She and others are now looking at their future. Many women are now securing weapons for their sons, which are essential for security, herding and economic survival. Thus, women have always handled weapons, but now they are more involved in acquiring them, giving them more power to determine their own welfare against aggressors. No examples were found of Karimojong women actually using weapons, but this is a possible future development if conflict and modernisation continue to change the way women see their role within families.
Women as Breadwinners

In focus group discussions, participants were asked, ‘What are both women and men doing in light of diminishing cattle?’ Many women revealed that they were moving into businesses of which the most common were cereal banking, brewing, and marble harvesting. With financial assistance from the NGO, the Karamoja Agro-pastoral Development Programme (KADEP), women have been encouraged to buy cereals, which are stored until times of drought and then sold on. However, women have been unable to access markets due to long distances and insecurity on roads. The exploitation of minerals is currently a growing commercial interest, especially in Moroto District, and this is a potential source of livelihood. Many of the people quarrying marble and breaking aggregates are women and karachunas. Interviews revealed that a 7-ton truck of marble gathered in five days went for 30,000 Uganda shillings (US$16, that is only $4 per ton). This is exploitative, given that women would carry marble on their heads around half a mile to the lorries for collection.

Brewing has been described as a relatively lucrative trade and has become commonplace in Karamoja in the past one to two decades. Two types of alcohol are brewed in Karamoja: waragi which is a spirit (very strong and expensive), and ekwete, local sorghum brew (mildly intoxicating). Interviews across Karamoja found that the people who brew were mainly women. This also links them into the trade in ammunition as interviews with warriors in Musasi reveal:

> When I do not have money and I am hungry I use bullets to purchase alcohol and the system of using bullets to buy alcohol is common in all rural areas except in Kotido Township where we have soldiers.

A bullet is now worth 300-1,200 Ugandan shillings depending on the area, which is equivalent to approximately three litres of ekwete.17 The customers for the local brew are mostly warriors and sometimes security officers. Warriors from Nakapilimoru concurred: ‘We each contribute a bullet and pay in exchange for the brew … In the villages, you can find women with as many as 20-30 bullets.’ Lotirir Mothers’ Group added ‘The women then resell the bullets to other warriors, or they give their sons or husbands to use during raiding.’ Sometimes, as noted by a Pian elder, women accumulate as many bullets as they can and barter the bullets for a goat or cow. A young brewer gave her experience:

> Sometimes people need bullets and they tell me, if some one offers you bullets, take them and keep for me. Interested warriors contact me in advance. If I get 10 or 20 I sell to the customer who has booked. If it’s 10 I get 5,000 Uganda shillings.

Lochoro, a former Ekwete brewer stated her reservations: ‘Several times when I made brew, people came with bullets but as a Catholic, I refused to take them.’ This demonstrates women as active participants and beneficiaries from the trade of ammunition. One can understand why they choose this relatively lucrative business, particularly when they need to care for children, including orphans of the conflict and the elderly. Some women commented: ‘It’s the only income for women but also when they sell the beer the children can eat the residue.’ A Catholic father noted that the eating of residue was common and is a sign of absolute poverty in pastoral areas.18

The advantage of these alternative livelihoods is that women are now able to secure money to feed their children and possibly attend school, without relying on a husband who may be absent for long periods of time, dead, or reluctant to sell his
livelihood. ‘With the little profits you can buy food, books, pens and even beddings’, revealed some women. Thus the power balance has been altered as they have gained status and independence, although some women commented that the man still makes the decision on how the money is to be used. Women’s entrepreneurship, which results in part from opportunities provided by development agencies and external investors into Karamoja, is also reducing the dependence of Karimojong society on cattle. However the risks to women’s health and their increasing involvement in the ammunition trade are negative aspects of these alternative livelihoods.

**Domestic Violence, Weapons & Alcohol**

Domestic violence may be increasing due to small arms and alcohol. A Catholic father stated:

>We have not begun to record issues in domestic violence as such because we are becoming aware of it now. Very often domestic violence is related to drinking and money and the hiding of money that has not been utilized.

One woman said: ‘In the case of singing you get tired, but the man wants you to continue and if you refuse he beats you.’ Added to this scenario is the presence of small arms in the home, and there is evidence of their use in domestic incidents and accidents. Tiako, a widow in Loputuk, noted ‘When intoxicated with alcohol, the warriors just shoot. They can shoot mothers or even their sisters. A warrior shot his mother and sister and then took his own life.’ Staff from different health facilities concurred, one doctor noting, ‘Once they become drunk, it’s when they plan for raids but also sometimes they beat their wives and accidentally use their guns.’ Another interviewee noted, ‘Sometimes the gunshots were mainly caused by a small quarrel, which resulted in the warriors using their guns, especially when under the influence of alcohol.’

Very little research has been done on this subject, as noted in an interview with a former Moroto MP. ‘Domestic violence with the use of guns is never reported. You kill. If you are rich you pay 60 cows. Even the government is not reporting the death rates due to domestic violence.’ There are other factors in domestic violence such as half marriage – which has been previously discussed – and scarcity of food. Most domestic violence that has been described is male against male or male against female, thus in this context small arms have increased women’s vulnerability, but occasionally women have been the perpetrators of violence.

**Gendered Impact of SALW Violence**

Hundreds of people are killed each year by small arms, while millions more survive their injuries but are left with permanent physical and mental trauma. Public health data extracted from St. Kizito Hospital in Matany from 2002-2004 is shown opposite. The hospital is a referral centre for approximately 60 per cent of the Karamoja district, however the figures underestimate the problem, as the perils and cost of travel are too much for most. Interviews and work done on reports of injuries at local dispensaries in Karamoja show figures over this period are much higher. The figure shows that the ratio of men to women injured is 15 per cent; the ratio of men to women injured is 15-1. One trend is the shooting of young boys who are viewed as future raiders, and closer analysis of the data conforms this. The high death rate of
warriors will also affect women indirectly leaving many as widows. One woman noted that sometimes when a son or husband is killed a woman might commit suicide.

**Increasing Vulnerability of Women**

Although women are not involved in raiding, rapes or even shootings occur during raids when women leave the home to collect water or firewood. As reported by some Rupa women:

> Sometimes you just hear bullets, so women are learning how to dodge from bullets ... Sometimes, if they do not want to kill you, they rape you ... More and more women have to avoid sending their daughters or going to collect water in the evening, which traditionally is one of the best times as it is cool.

A young newly married woman from Kachire said:

> You cannot go in the evening anymore to fetch water. You face the risk of being killed by the enemies ... In Kachire water is scarce, you have to go to another village with a borehole 15 km away. Sometimes we stay the whole day, as the locals must get water first. We have to travel at night hence the risk of being attacked by the Dodoth, our enemies.

A woman from Lotirir Mothers’ group said, ‘My sister was collecting sorghum in the garden. The raiders attacked her and undressed her, took all her beads and left her naked.’ Another recalled, 

> My neighbour went to collect firewood. The raiders found her. She was found undressed, raped several times. They went with her for a long distance and she was abandoned in a strange village she did not know.

A women’s group from St. Mary’s Nadiket told of a woman who had gone charcoal burning in the Tepes Mountain, who was shot in the thigh by warriors and raped. Everything was taken from her including her machete. Interviews revealed that
when they see danger, women ululate to ‘raise the alarm’ for the other villagers, therefore the attackers may try to silence them. Another insecurity women have to live with concerns the care of cattle. If women have a raided man’s livestock, the law of revenge among the pastoralists means that the ‘enemy’ may retaliate at any time. The result of this insecurity is that women are being forced to get the warriors to escort them. Relating to insecurity outside of the village, the following story is undoubtedly one of the worst examples of how small arms violence is affecting non-combatants, and was told in Natarumurum, Rupa by Edison Achia.

Three young boys aged 14-16 were drinking with others and singing their songs of bulls (songs of giant warriors who have killed). However the young boys did not know how to kill and decided to go and try. They travelled to Nakajat and hid and waited. The first people that appeared were three girls from Leyia primary school. As they were going they asked them whose children they were. The three girls aged eight to twelve responded and the boys opened fire. Two of the girls died instantly and the other died later. The Tepeth community, from where the girls came, followed the footmarks of the killers. The army and the Rupa community from where the boys came also hunted for them. They caught the boys still drinking, smeared with red clay [a sign of cleansing]. The next day the community of Rupa handed them to the Tepeth. The army had intervened and wanted the boys to be prosecuted by the police. But the people grabbed the three boys and threatened to shoot the soldiers. Then the local people shot the boys, even the third boy who was innocent.

The tragedy of this story is that the society has become so brutalised that even children can get their hands on a gun and take life before they understand what life is. One may also ask whether the boys targeted girls specifically, seeing them as weaker. It was previously considered unacceptable to kill women and children. In the context of rapes and shootings, small arms violence has increased the gender power imbalance in Karimojong society, though this is mainly between and not within ethnic groups.

Widow Inheritance

Part of the cultural provision for widows in many societies in Africa is wife inheritance: the transfer of women and their children to the husband’s brother or lineage. Marriage is seen in terms of clans rather than individuals, so children and wife belong to the clan. As noted earlier, often ‘If your brother dies, your relatives will force you even against your will to marry a relative’. It was noted by Nakiru a widow in Rupa, however, that sometimes one can refuse to be inherited ‘if you are very old’. Another widow said, ‘The person who inherits takes away all your husband’s property. If you cry they beat you, torture you, you have to surrender everything or die, there is no negotiation.’ Others mentioned that sometimes they are not provided for and co-wives would insult them telling them, ‘You have killed your husband, now you have come to kill my husband.’ Maria, a widow, noted, ‘I have been inherited three times.’ A former MP gave his opinion on the problems with inheritance in the current climate of conflict.

The one you are inheriting, you do not know if she is safe given the current risk of HIV. Some women have been inherited 5 to 10 times because of the gun and raiding. In addition, poverty is pushing the Karamoja girl to come to Moroto for prostitution. They come to Moroto, have sex and then return to the village to marry the warriors.

Thus the culture of widow inheritance and polygamy in the context of armed conflict increases the susceptibility of women to abuse within marriage.
Women & Peace Building

This article has shown how women are actors in the dynamics of conflict. Other findings demonstrate their assets in peace building. In 2002, during disarmament, a misunderstanding arose between the army and the warriors over animals allegedly raided by Jie from Bokora. This led to a shootout in Panyangara lasting three days, which left several villages, shelters, and granaries burned, household items looted and widespread displacements of people and animals. Women reported, ‘We lost everything … Enemies raped some of the women.’ On the third day there was a peace meeting at Kongencha, between the Bokora and Jie. The women played a major part in the initiation of, and participation at, the meeting telling the warriors:

> With you, you are fighting the government because you are strong; you can run and go to any other place to settle. What about us women and children, old men and women, where shall we go? … The only cow you have will multiply in peace and also we shall enjoy it, do not go for more.

At the request of women, the warriors unilaterally declared a ceasefire and vanished from the battlefields. When Civil Military Operation Centres (CMOCs) were established by civil society groups, donor organisations and the government to assist in disarmament in Karamoja in July 2001, they ignored women’s potential by excluding them. CMOCs were physical points of access to the community for arms collection, information, promotion of confidence and reporting of human rights abuses. However, they didn’t cater for women, in that men ran them and they were not local enough for women to be able to access them. The entire disarmament programme did not recognise the role of women. Women interviewed noted: ‘This was unfortunate as women were effective in convincing their men to deposit guns at collection points.’ Incentives were only directed to men, hence women did not feel that they were part of the ‘peace building’. The potential of women in peace building cannot be ignored; they can mobilise society to come together to discuss peace.

Conclusion

Karimojong society is a patriarchal polygamous society, which until recent decades has been closed to outside influences and remains underdeveloped. Defined roles for women mainly focus around the home, in reproduction and production, whilst men are the main breadwinners through livestock production, as well as being security providers and formal decision makers. Women have lesser though considerable influence however, through their own hierarchy of seniority, and informal influence within families. This may be seen particularly in the way in which women encourage men to raid and in their role as custodians of weapons necessary in herding and raiding.

Much of this remains distinct, due to several factors including remoteness of the area, dependence upon cattle as the main viable form of livelihood in environmental variability, marginalisation by the colonial and post-colonial state, and strong resistance amongst the Karimojong to external control. However, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region has exacerbated traditional cattle raiding to produce armed and criminal activity. This has depleted cattle resources, rendering the traditional economy unviable and therefore changing pastoral society’s gender relations.
The institution of marriage has also been shown to be changing. Bridewealth is much harder to acquire through family or through raiding. Male and female status, which are both established through marriage are now less valued within the more shaky ‘half marriage’ institution and women feel undervalued if they have not been properly paid for. Women and children may be taken away from husbands and a secure marriage becomes a privilege for elite or older men. Men feel very insecure and constantly under pressure to raid, which puts them at great risk. Another change to family life is the increase in the number of widows who are still being inherited, according to the Karimojong tradition. This may not be the desire of either man or woman, and often leads to derision from husbands or fellow wives.

The gendered impact of small arms violence has been examined with men most directly affected. Women have also experienced enemy shootings and rapes. The gendered impact of HIV within this context and within the context of widow inheritance also deserves further work. With reference to the family unit, there are suggestions that domestic violence is becoming more deadly, which is related directly to small arms, and also to alcohol brewing, which is an alternative livelihood increasingly carried out by women. In this context, the gender power imbalance has been increased as women currently do not take up arms.

In many ways the presence of small arms has made women weaker. However there is much evidence that the conflict situation has created space for women to grow in independence and gain new identities, whilst men are losing their livelihoods, and identities in being able to provide food and security for the family. As Byrne 1996 and Baden 1997 point out, conflict situations may in some ways promote women’s independence and empower them, but this article suggests it has also left them vulnerable to exploitation, for example, as prostitutes in urban centres or in other occupations detrimental to their health.

The question that must be asked is, what will be the overall effect of these changes in gender relations on pastoral society? If women and young girls are being removed from the home or facing insecurity as they find alternative livelihoods, what is the impact on the children? Some reports have noted that 80 per cent of the beggars in Kampala streets are Karimojong women and children. Can pastoral families adjust to these changes? Also, the impact that pastoral conflict is having on men’s health and identity is particularly negative and must have repercussions on the family and the education of future generations.

The structures of patriarchal society have to some extent been affected by the conflict, as there is tension between fathers and sons over the issues of bridewealth. Additionally, other research shows that the actual power of the elders has decreased with the elders having legitimate authority, but the muscle in the form of the guns belonging to the warriors. Practically speaking this largely translates into unsanctioned uncontrolled raiding. A new generation of elders is soon to emerge, many of whom are elite and well educated. They are suggesting, along with others that patriarchal power could be strengthened, as a possible in-road for peace building. It would be interesting to see how this would interact with the women’s increasing independence. Would this limit the space that has been created for them? Should peace building also take account of women’s new responsibilities and use them as opportunities for transformation? Both could be strengthened in tandem and akivouri could be examined as mechanism for this.
Anderlini and Machanda (1999) noted how women’s environment, individual situations and family loyalties may determine their response in conflict situations. They may desire peace until someone close to them is affected by conflict, or family and cultural ties may lead them to be loyal to one side of the conflict. Sometimes, when gun culture takes over and chaos prevails they may abandon the struggle and desire a way of peace. Thus their role in conflict may be variable, or may fluctuate. Widows in particular, may see cattle raiding conflict as having little benefit for them, and often have their own survival strategies, excluding men and cattle. Further work on these changes in gender relations, in the context of armed conflict, could reveal opportunities for mitigation. These may include promotion of viable alternative livelihoods, education of the community, particularly the youth in a manner appropriate to pastoralism.

Kennedy Agade Mkutu, Mzumbe University, Dar es Salaam Campus, Tanzania; e-mail: Kmkutu@yahoo.com. I am extremely indebted to the many people in Karamoja, NGOs, faith based organisations and administrators of Moroto, Kotido and Nakapiripit who agreed to be interviewed in the course of the research fieldwork. Thanks to Dr Janet Bujra for her generosity in enriching the draft and two other anonymous reviewers. Finally, thank you to Dr Tessa Mkutu for editing the work for me.

Endnotes

2. Interview Maria, Longolei, Lockochil, 6 October 2004.
3. CMOCs in Karamoja, Moroto/Nakapirit NGO Forum, 2001; See Anderlini and Machanda, 1999-9
4. Interview Rita Machanda and Sri Lanka senior government officials, Nepal 2005. This was also confirmed in an interview with several people from Sri Lanka at the International Conference on Sustainable Development in Conflict Environments: Challenges and Opportunities held from 16-18 January 2007.
5. At least the Gender and Development (GAD) approach integrates men’s as well as women’s viewpoint see Byrne and Baden et al. 1995.
6. The data comes from Ph.D research from 2001 to 2005 and research funded by the Netherlands Development Agency (SNV) Uganda in 2005. Interviewees included senior elders, senior women (who are important in decision making), NGOs in the region, religious leaders, Local councils, opinion leaders, Members of Parliament and senior civil servants. Participant observation provided opportunities for informal conversations. Some areas could not be accessed due to high insecurity, and data collection was also limited by pastoral mobility. Also the government disarmament programme 2001-2004 caused people to fear speaking about their role in the handling of arms. However despite these limitations the researcher’s long experience and good relationships with the communities ensured good representation.
7. However, the enormous growth from 1991 figures of 350,000 (UBOS, 1991) is questionable, because pastoral mobility across local and international borders is common. Secondly, disarmament threats from 2000-2003 would likely have led to emigration to Kenya, or other Ugandan districts.
9. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) is often used to mean all type of firearms, including revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine-guns. However, the term refers to “any weapons that can be carried or transported and
managed by a single person” which includes hand grenades, land mines and small surface to air missile launchers. United Nations 1997:24.

10. For details on routes of arms into the North Rift see Mkutu 2008a.


15. See Gulliver 1955 who studied the neighbouring Jie women who also had no rights over livestock.


17. Email communication with a Kotido elder, February 2007; see also Mkutu 2008b.


23. The CMOCs were composed of UPDF, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), NGOs, CSOs, Resident District Commissioners, local councils system, kraal leaders, local leaders and faith-based organisations. For details see the Uganda Human Rights Commission, CMOCs Joint Lessons Learnt Draft report, November 2002 and Mkutu 2003.


25. Focus group discussion with Panyangara women, 8 November 2004.


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