



# Peace, Security and Justice in Karamoja: Amplifying Women's Voices

## Introduction

The Ugandan government, national and international organisations have endeavoured to improve the status of women and promote gender equality in the country. However, most women in Uganda still face a wide range of challenges because of their gender. These challenges are particularly acute in the north-eastern region of Karamoja, where patriarchal values continue to undermine the potential for women and girls to live in peace and safety and to access justice.

Further, following the disarmament program by the government, the region has experienced a dramatic reduction in inter-communal conflict and an end to violent conflicts between Karimojong ethnic groups, their neighbouring pastoral communities though mild inter-communal clashes and violence within families, particularly against women and girls, continue in a context of socio-economic change – as families move from a pastoralist economy and way of life and trying to adapt an agro-pastoralist and more money-based economy. These dynamics continue to have specific gendered impacts and drivers.

In July 2018, Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) and Saferworld carried out a gender analysis of conflict in the Karamoja districts of Moroto, Amudat and Kaabong. The study identified gender-based constraints faced by women, girls and boys in these districts in terms of their ability to influence peace and security processes, and to access justice for violence and human rights abuses perpetrated against them.

This briefing outlines the key findings from the analysis. It aims to share a detailed understanding of the gendered issues related to peace, security and justice in Karamoja, as well as to promote gender-sensitive responses to these issues by government, aid actors, religious and cultural institutions and communities in the region.

The analysis was carried out within the framework of a joint Saferworld/CECORE project “Amplifying Women’s Voices on Peace, Security and Justice in Karamoja” with financial support from the European Union. The project seeks to promote the rights of marginalised women and children in Karamoja, to achieve inclusive peace, security and justice in communities affected by conflict.

## Unfulfilled policies: gender equality, peace and violence

Uganda has a relatively strong international and domestic policy framework for protecting women’s rights and promoting gender equality. The Constitution of The Republic of Uganda, 1995 (1995 Constitution) affirms gender equality and women’s dignity and prohibits marriage of girls under the age of 18. This was the foundation for the 1997 National Gender Policy and its revision in 2007, and the ensuing legal reforms that included the Domestic Violence Act and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (both 2010). Other important pieces of legislation have not yet been passed, such as the draft Sexual Offences Bill and Marriage and Divorce Bills. On paper, this policy framework creates an enabling environment for women’s empowerment and gender equality.

## Women's rights in Ugandan law and policy

However, these legal reforms have not yet fully translated into gender-positive practices and access to justice for women and girls, and there is broad recognition that the situation is worse for women and girls in rural areas. The 2017/18 Women, Peace, and Security Index rated Uganda at 100 out of 152 countries for well-being of women – in terms of inclusion, justice and security – and highlighted a particularly poor performance on intimate partner violence (IPV), discriminatory norms, education and financial inclusion. It also raises concerns about legal discrimination against women and community safety for women. A 2015 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Gender Assessment stated that 'unbalanced power relations between men and women continue to have a negative impact on women's agency [and] their human capital development' in Uganda. The report concludes that 'women's legal status is precarious, their capacity as economic agents is limited, and their rights are not effectively guaranteed'.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains high: according to the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, 56 per cent of women older than 15 had experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner in the preceding 12 months. And the 2015 UNDP Country Gender Assessment cited the conviction rate for rape and defilement (sexual intercourse – whether consensual or not – with somebody under 18) at 0.8 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively.

In the Karamoja region, these challenges are exacerbated by the region's history of conflict and violence and by deeply entrenched

Uganda is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Platform of Action, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), among others.

The 1995 Ugandan Constitution provides for affirmative action and empowerment of women under Articles 32 (1), 33 (5), 78 (b) and 180 (b). The National Equal Opportunities Commission Act (2007) and the accompanying policy provide guidelines on operationalising the state's constitutional mandate to eliminate discrimination and inequalities against any individual or group of persons.

Uganda's National Gender Policy (2007) aims to reduce gender inequality in order to achieve poverty reduction; increase knowledge and understanding of human rights among all; strengthen women's meaningful participation in administrative and political processes; and ensure inclusion of gender analysis and equality in macro-economic policy formulation and implementation.

Uganda's second National Development Plan (2015/16–2019/20) calls for observance of equal opportunities for all in the development of laws, practices and traditions as a universal and fundamental human right.

Uganda also has a National Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence (2016) and a National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2014/2015–2019/2020).

socio-cultural patriarchal norms, attitudes and practices that exclude and discriminate against women and girls. The conflict in Karamoja dates back to the colonial days through until recently. This was caused by tensions between and within the various Karimojong pastoral groups over pastures and water and differential developments compared to other regions of the country. Women in Karamoja continue to face overwhelming barriers that deprive them of the opportunity to live with dignity, access basic social services, or participate in social, cultural and political life in the same way men do. The 2016 Demographic and Health Survey indicated that Karamoja remains the most neglected and least-developed region in the country, with the lowest literacy rates – 6 per cent for women and 12 per cent for men, compared to the national averages of 68 per cent for women and 79 per cent for men.

After years of armed conflict, the onset of the Karamoja disarmament programme in 2007

created an opportunity for communities in Karamoja to build peace and participate in development and democratic efforts. However, post-conflict recovery processes have presented new challenges for gender equality and the fulfilment of human rights. State-led recovery under initiatives like the successive Karamoja Integrated Development Plans (2015-2020) has focused on settling people and promoting agriculture and other livelihood options, alongside the cattle economy.

Women and girls' participation in the cattle economy especially working on animal products like milk and gee in Karamoja – but the rest are traditionally a male domain – which keeps women's participation very limited.

They have, however, taken on the bulk of the work in agricultural production and are active in other livelihood areas, like rearing small domestic animals and artisanal mining. Despite their increased economic activities, women and girls remain responsible for the majority of household work, including collecting fencing and building materials, building huts, fetching water and firewood for cooking – in a region affected by drought and deforestation. It is however imperative to note that these differ from ethnic group to another. At the same time, social norms around masculinity make men unwilling to engage in crop production, even when the family has lost all or most of its cattle. This results in what one study has called 'male idleness'; women in Karamoja work on average 18 hours per day, while men work five to ten hours less. Despite their labour and their legal right to access and use land, women have no decision-making powers regarding land sales and do not control income from the produce obtained from the land. Many women are therefore left highly vulnerable to economic shocks.

One of the coping strategies available to people in Karamoja, including women, is to migrate to the growing towns where the government has invested in increased infrastructure and basic services like health and education. This and other factors expose people to new types of crime and violence, such as theft and robbery,

and specifically exposes women and girls to sexual harassment, rape and trafficking.

At the same time, the government has encouraged investment in tourism and the extractive industries in Karamoja. With regards to extractives, the result has been an influx of investors that has further fuelled competition for land in a way that further strengthens gender inequality and conflict. Previous Saferworld research points to the risk of some men being willing to take up arms to protect or reclaim community land – particularly as government soldiers protect investors and there is a sense that resource access is prioritised over community rights. The research also highlighted conflict between mostly male elders and young men about how or whether to engage with investors (for example, accepting jobs or allowing them to mine – but only if community land access is protected); between men and women when men decide to sell land without consulting their wives who farm it; and between women – particularly when a man marries another wife and redistributes the land between his wives. The impacts of the mining activities on other natural resources like water are also highly gendered. For instance, when water sources are polluted by mining companies, women have to walk longer distances for clean water and have to care for family members who get sick from using the polluted water.

Artisanal mining – traditionally practised on a small scale – has also greatly expanded. Men and women, boys and girls all participate in this activity and are both exposed to dangerous working conditions, albeit in different ways. Men report developing respiratory problems from the dust created by working in the quarries, while women sometimes grind stones to extract gold at home, so that they can do their domestic work at the same time, exposing themselves and their children to dangerous levels of dust inhalation. Men and women both face exploitative pricing and payment practices, but women are paid even less than men because of gendered perceptions that work requiring physical strength (such as breaking stones) is worth

more than work requiring skill (grinding or sorting the stones to find marble).

## Conflict and abuse response

In seeking redress for conflicts and abuse, people in Karamoja generally prefer traditional and informal institutions over formal structures. Reasons for this include the police and courts having inadequate resources to effectively respond to conflict and insecurity in the region; corruption and perceptions of corruption; and limited coordination between these institutions (for example, between police, courts and health centres) to objectively deal with cases. In addition, trust in government institutions remains low, meaning that issues that go beyond the powers of the traditional structures – such as conflict with mining companies – often go unaddressed. District Peace Committees have existed for many years with the purpose of connecting communities and district authorities in their efforts to resolve inter-community cattle raiding. But since the raiding has decreased, these Committees have also been less active. In addition, they are mostly made up of men, and issues affecting women are seldom prioritised.

For women, this means that even the most sensitive crimes affecting them like rape, defilement, forced marriage and IPV are often handled by community leaders and mostly male elders, instead of formal justice institutions such as local council and district courts and the police. Women's reluctance to report these crimes to formal institutions appears to be partly because referral pathways are not clearly understood and partly because there is a high level of community pressure to resolve these cases within the community. It is worth noting that sexual violence, including rape and defilement, falls within the jurisdiction of the formal legal system. Nevertheless, given the inability of the police and the courts system in Karamoja to effectively serve the region, there is widespread acceptance that the traditional mechanisms provide more accessible justice, even if this may be biased against women's individual interests and rights.

## Key findings of the gender analysis of conflict in Karamoja

### Gender roles, conflict and peace in a changing society

In traditional pastoralist societies in Karamoja, men and boys were responsible for protecting the community and the cattle, grazing cattle away from home, and raiding cattle from other

### Gender-sensitive conflict analysis: methodology

The research followed a participatory approach. The team was composed of project staff, interns and volunteers from CECORE and Saferworld. There were 245 participants in total: 75 children (girls and boys), 68 men and 102 women. Most of the respondents participated in focus groups, as follows: five groups for children (some mixed and some single gender); three for men; six for women; and one mixed adult group. FGDs were held in the selected study areas in Moroto, Amudat and Kaabong. In addition, 20 key informant interviews were held at the district and sub-county levels in the study areas. These included police officers, women representatives, community elders, civil society focal points and religious leaders.

A literature review and previous Saferworld and CECORE research informed the analysis and background information contained in this briefing.

groups to increase stock and enable bride price payments to the girl or woman's family. This meant men and boys were engaged in inter-group conflicts and fought against the Ugandan armed forces during the disarmament process – particularly in the early phases when human rights abuses against civilians were predominant. Because of gender norms, women supported and encouraged the men, but did not participate directly in the fighting. As a result, the armed violence not only impacted on men and boys, women and girls during the fighting but has had a lasting impact on gender norms.

The disarmament process – described by some men as a process of turning them into women – affected masculine identity in the region, by taking away men’s weapons and forcing them to take on other livelihoods. At the same time, it made the region safer in terms of men and women’s ability to move around and undertake different economic activities. The types of conflict and violence experienced by people in Karamoja have shifted to matters like small-scale theft of cattle and other items by lonetia (young criminal men), and disputes over land between communities and families and with outside investors. These disputes generally do not cause large-scale violence but still generate a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future for men, women, boys and girls.

In addition, intra-communal and intra-family violence appears to be commonplace. Sexual violence and IPV against women and girls was referenced throughout the research, as were issues of forced and under-age marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). While these are not new phenomena in Karamoja, there is a sense that violence that was previously considered ‘acceptable’ has changed into violence that has always been considered ‘unacceptable’ violence – often fuelled by alcohol which has turned out to be a coping mechanism towards the context changes. For instance, respondents referred to the traditional practice – often agreed to by the prospective bride’s parents and reportedly the girl herself – of overpowering and forcibly having sex with a girl or woman as part of claiming her as a wife. However, respondents also mentioned a newer phenomenon of gang rape associated with this practice and that this has become more prevalent, which was not seen as acceptable.

The research confirmed that the role of men and boys remains centred on rearing cattle, opening up new land for cultivation and providing security for their families. Changes in living conditions mean that men now also work in mining or other businesses to generate sufficient income – particularly to pay bride price for their sons’ brides – while boys and young men (12-30 years) take on activities like providing bodaboda (motorbike taxi) services.

Boys are also responsible for enforcing marriage decisions in their families like taking their sisters to their respective husbands and taking on their fathers’ responsibilities when their fathers are absent; even if the boys are still very young, they have more authority than their mothers. Older men are responsible for making community decisions, guarding traditions and performing cultural rituals (in addition to also helping with cattle and children).

Women and girls are responsible for childcare and all household work like cooking, cleaning and collecting firewood and water. Respondents also referred to women’s roles in building fences and houses or other parts of their home, taking care of smaller livestock (like goats), cultivating and harvesting crops, burning and selling charcoal, taking care of visitors, milking cows and carrying out artisanal mining (in Rupa sub-county – Moroto district - especially, where this is an option). Young girls were described as being responsible for bringing wealth into the family by attracting a good bride price (although respondents did not explain how girls do this). Older women are responsible for cultural practices such as marriage rituals, naming ceremonies and attire, the initiation of young girls or women into motherhood and performing FGM.

Overall, expectations of women, girls, men and boys have changed in terms of their economic roles, but the same patterns appear to remain in place in terms of their social standing and responsibilities. According to respondents’ analysis of gender roles in their communities, the change in context in Karamoja has meant more economic activities for both women and men, with women also retaining responsibility for all household work and family care responsibilities – while men from families that have lost their cattle try to find other income-generating opportunities. In the Rupa and Kalapata sub-counties, the new economic roles appear to give women more opportunity to work outside their homes as they are selling charcoal and firewood and engaging in artisanal mining. However, this does not seem to be accompanied by a greater say in family or community affairs.

When research respondents talked about conflict, they were referring to criminal violence and disputes, small-scale raiding, and intra-communal and intra-family violence and disputes. As such, the situation in Karamoja can at best be described as 'negative peace', since large-scale armed conflict has ended. It does not amount to 'positive peace' however, as this is when the rights of all community members are respected, and women, girls, men and boys are safe and have access to justice and equal opportunities.

## **Gender based violence and human rights abuse – fuelling insecurity for all**

“Women are a “beast of burden” among the Pokot. In the Pokot community every woman is a child (wife, children), therefore boys are more prominent than their mothers in decision-making, for example over the sale of cows. This is a precursor for increased abuse of women and girl children that denies them a sense of security.” Male respondent in Amudat district.

Our analysis found that deeply patriarchal norms persist in the targeted communities in Moroto, Amudat and Kaabong and combine with a history of violence to keep women and girls at a disadvantage and normalise violence against them. This violence is physical and psychological.

The types of physical and psychological violence described by research respondents in all locations include high levels of rape and defilement, forced marriage (including of girls) and IPV. The analysis illustrates that men's perceived entitlement to women's bodies – or the perceived 'sexual rights' of men – is an ardent driver of VAWG. This follows patriarchal gender norms identified by participants, that characterise men as violent and lustful and women as weak, who must be obedient and satisfy their husbands and men more generally. Within a relationship, if a woman denies a man his perceived 'sexual right', he feels entitled to beat her. Participants described many incidents of wife-beating and how this sometimes resulted in suicide by the women and in family

conflicts – in some cases the couple's children became homeless and some end up on streets in urban centers. These norms are enforced and practices enabled by male-dominated structures and systems, including the dowry and marriage systems, in which women become men's property when they marry.

Respondents also described practices relating to forced marriage, including the duty of boys (usually brothers of the girl) to physically take the prospective bride (their sister) to her future husband's house. These girls are often very young: for example, male respondents in Karita sub-county in Amudat said they preferred marrying girls in primary five to seven (roughly ages nine to fourteen). Forced sexual intercourse with prospective brides – which respondents acknowledged can be classed as rape or defilement depending on the age of the survivor – was reported to still be widely practiced, although it is becoming less acceptable. Forced marriage can have serious consequences, including pregnancy before the age of 18– and the complications this creates for girls' sexual and reproductive health – and even suicide, as mentioned by respondents in one case in Kaabong. Yet women in the focus group discussions (FGDs) in Amudat and Moroto said they would not report being forced to marry as they would be shamed by their communities for reporting their fathers and brothers. This is a complex area – respondents named examples of young girls who argued that they were not defiled, because they consented as they were ready to get married much as the law defines it as defilement even when consent is given, implying that respondents have their own understanding of the definition. But respondents also spoke of young girls who were traumatised and humiliated by incidents of sexual violence and who did not want to tell anybody about it, even when they had supportive parents.

The analysis also revealed that both men and women blame women for catalysing certain types of violence and abuse, notably FGM. In the Pokot community in Amudat, high levels of FGM persist, especially in the areas bordering Kenya. FGM has been outlawed in Uganda since 2010, yet the practice is still ongoing. Like often seen in other communities where FGM is

outlawed, respondents here, reported that elderly women are the key practitioners of FGM, and that this practice has now become more secretive with girls undergoing FGM at night, in the bushes, or are even taken across the border to Kenya. FGM has traditionally been considered to be part of the initiation rituals for marriage, but views are slowly changing among girls; this was evidenced by a focus group with secondary school girls in Amudat who explicitly mentioned “freedom from FGM” as one of their goals for a more peaceful community. Other male and female respondents described FGM as a cause of conflict within families and communities, although it is not clear whether they regard the solution as stopping FGM – or whether they see the real issue as the conflict between FGM as a cultural practice and the law that forbids it.

Patriarchal norms and gender inequality not only affect women’s safety and security in the region, but also fuel insecurity and violence generally as the violence women suffer has serious consequences for family and community well-being and cohesion. More awareness that VAWG is illegal or unacceptable is creeping in, amidst resistance from community members who regard this change as a threat.

## **Structural discrimination – silencing the voices of women and girls**

Women are seen as subordinate to men and are viewed as property, which is partly informed by and reinforced through the bride price system. In response to this, men’s value and reputation are linked to how many resources they possess (mainly land and cattle). In particular, the value of young men is based on their ability to pay a good dowry, which in Karamoja is directly linked to cattle ownership.

Although some efforts have been made to increase women’s empowerment – for example, by increasing girls’ access to education – gender norms are hindering attempts to transform women’s situations. Educated women are deemed to be a threat to men, because they are perceived to be resisting the traditional norms of male dominance. As such, women with no or little education are more ‘highly valued’ than educated women:

“The uneducated ladies are more peaceful compared to those that are educated because they consent to any type of treatment and lack exposure. The reason being that highly educated ladies cannot easily get married in the village. The educated ladies are expired [their dowry worth is reduced by the number of years spent in school].” Male respondent in Amudat.

Girls who go to school are sometimes shunned and excluded from their communities, according to respondents in Kaabong and Amudat districts. As education is a necessary requirement for formal political participation – such as contesting for elected positions – the perception of an educated woman as a threat, or as being less valuable, is therefore a significant obstacle to women’s participation in formal governance structures in the region. The government’s policy of universal primary and secondary education has contributed to higher enrolment rates for girls and boys in primary school in Karamoja, but this still stands at a mere 20 per cent – of which 43.6 per cent are girls. However, as mentioned above, when girls reach puberty, they are often withdrawn from school and married off.

## **Resolving disputes – a male domain**

Our research found that in the Karamoja districts of Moroto, Kaabong and Amudat, traditional norms around masculinity and femininity undermine efforts towards inclusive peace and the fulfilment of rights, by excluding the experiences and contributions of women. Gender norms in Karamoja define communal and political decision-making spaces as predominantly or exclusively male role.

The girls and boys interviewed for the research mentioned a long list of human rights that they had learnt about in school. But the adult men and women interviewed seemed to confuse rights with duties or roles; for example, they mentioned “looking after livestock” (men) and “handling home affairs” (women) when asked about their rights. However, across the groups (12-18 years of age), there was awareness that the police had a role to play in protecting and ensuring respect for rights,

while some of the adult respondents placed a stronger emphasis on community leaders enforcing rights for the whole community (rather than focusing on individual rights).

Human rights awareness is improving among younger people attending school, but there is a clear tension between what rights mean in the communal sense – and presumably within a customary justice system – and what rights mean in the more individually focused state justice system. As a result, women and girls are still not in a position to argue for their rights to security and bodily integrity, equal opportunities, or access to justice for the violence and abuse they suffer.

The research showed that, despite interventions, women's participation in structures linked to peace processes remains very limited and, where it exists, is not very prominent or meaningful. For example, in Karamoja, clans meet to discuss domestic disputes and intra- and inter-communal violence. However, women can rarely attend or speak at these meetings and when they are allowed into such spaces, it is still the men who make the decisions. Women are also often excluded from resolving family conflicts, which are handled by male community members through mediation, either by involving neighbours or – in the case of the Pokot communities in Amudat District – by an oath-taking ceremony in which the conflicting parties are called and a ritual is performed, with the intent of punishing the responsible party.

Women who report their husbands for domestic related offences or call for a meeting to solve a family conflict face being beaten by male relatives and community members, and also face a higher risk of divorce. Women who get involved in conflict resolution activities are viewed as running away from their family responsibilities and can be called names or even beaten by other community members. Despite women being excluded from conflict resolution and despite them having no direct role in informal peace processes, the analysis showed that women still engage in peacebuilding at an inter-communal level, because they are seen as less threatening than

the men. For example, women are sometimes asked to visit the other community involved in a conflict, to convey the remorse of their husbands as a step in the resolution process. They can also advise their children to inter-marry with the other community in order to help cement a peace agreement.

## Gender and (in)justice

Formal and informal systems of justice and accountability exist, but work in parallel to each other – and in most cases, this has adverse effects for women. Confidence in – and access to – formal legal institutions is very low in the region, with most people preferring to turn to informal justice systems. This is aggravated by people's experiences (or perceptions) of police corruption. A respondent mentioned an example where a teacher impregnated a school girl, but bribed the police in Kaabong to release him.

The informal institutions active in Karimojong communities include the council of elders, the sacred assembly of initiated men (Akiriket) and men's local gatherings (Ekokwa). These mechanisms, and the processes they execute, are completely dominated by men: in all of the areas studied, there were only a few elder women who were involved in decisions. Despite issues such as early marriage being regulated by national and international law, the informal mechanisms tend to base their decisions on traditional measures, with a stronger focus on what they consider good for the community, rather than for the individual victims. While justice and conflict resolution mechanisms vary between the interviewed communities, some common mechanisms include mediation, dialogue, community meetings, punishment, payment of fines and reconciliation meetings. Informal institutions are used to resolve many types of cases, especially gender-related disputes such as marriage of under-age girls, domestic violence cases and sharing of property. Male respondents in Rupa sub-county noted that perpetrators of serious crimes like gang rape would normally be given corporal punishment and fines by the community, but that issue of human rights and the need to involve the police "complicated the situation".

Women almost never report issues to formal legal authorities, while men do not report issues they perceive will make them appear weak at all – as they fear that they may appear weak to other men and women and that this would undermine their masculinity. The few women and girls who do attempt to report cases, such as rape or defilement, find themselves at risk of seclusion and violence from their families and social networks. Women and girls have to weigh up the risk of reporting against the potential punishment and or exclusion they will receive, in terms of social stigma and potential physical abuse by their families and communities. As a result, women report cases at a late stage or, in extreme cases when the harm and impact of the existing abuse outweigh the risk of exclusion and punishment.

For women and girls, their fear of reporting abuse stems from the gendered consequences that accessing justice can lead to – consequences that will be enforced by men at home, in the community and institutions of justice. They fear accessing justice through reporting because if their case is made public, they risk losing their marriage – and with it, their home or they also risk being hated and physically and verbally castigated by community members or by their fathers and brothers. Girls are afraid to report cases of defilement and forced marriage because if they do, it is seen as bringing shame to their fathers and husbands. They also feel humiliated by the need to have medical examinations if they report a case of rape or defilement to the police – allowing anyone other than their husbands and traditional birth attendants to see their private parts is unacceptable in Karimojong culture. Nevertheless, the girl respondents in Amudat referred to the Sauti 116 toll-free line – a child helpline that connects directly to the Family and Child Protection Unit of the Uganda Police Force – as a possible action in case of violence and conflict. This may be a sign of more awareness, at least among the school girls, of the options that are becoming available under the formal justice system.

The research also revealed that cases reported to the formal structures stagnate at various levels – for example, they are lost or no

evidence is filed. As one key informant remarked: “The public is a stronger court system than the actual court system when it comes to cases in our Karamoja community.” Notions of masculinity also prevent boys and men from reporting any violence committed against them to formal and informal authorities, because they believe that it makes them look weak. One young male respondent mentioned that if a boy is beaten or attacked by a girl, it is regarded as shameful and the boy will not report it. Boys also feel that the police do not believe them when they report abuse against them and instead usually throw out the cases.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The report found that despite the existence of national laws and international instruments for preventing VAWG and pursuing justice, peace and security, serious challenges remain for women and girls in Karamoja. The prevailing social norms remain deeply patriarchal, with men’s dominance in social, economic and political affairs accepted as the norm. Women are seen not only as subservient to men, but as possessions and as “beasts of burden”. The changes in livelihood options in the post-disarmament context have created new economic opportunities for men and women, but have not changed the pre-existing discriminatory attitudes that expect women and girls to continue shouldering the burden of all household and care work alongside these new activities. In addition, the overall context in Karamoja remains one of poverty and food insecurity, and the stresses stemming from these conditions – alongside many men losing their traditional cattle-based livelihoods – have led to increased alcoholism among men, which further fuels violence against women and girls. This translates into high workloads that deprive women of the time to engage in anything other than their daily responsibilities, even if they were able to engage in other activities. Coupled with continued negative attitudes towards educated women and girls, women experience significant structural barriers to participating meaningfully in governance structures, like standing for election to the local council or the

women's seats in parliament. The dominance of men in community decision-making, including in the informal conflict resolution and justice structures, further excludes women from raising issues that affect them, or having a say in their solutions.

Discriminatory attitudes and women's continuous exclusion from decision-making structures further fuel a high level of acceptance and normalisation of VAWG – which is actively reinforced by family and community members, such as brothers forcibly taking their sister to get married if she resists, and community members beating women who try to report abuses. This is reinforced by the male-dominated and discriminatory informal justice mechanisms and the serious challenges of seeking justice through formal mechanisms. Yet respondents seemed to recognise the broader damage of VAWG, as they cited examples of women committing suicide and children being abandoned, and all respondents (male, female, children and adults) cited specific types of VAWG as causes of conflict and disputes.

In this sense, there is a need to understand the narrative that Karamoja is at peace. Large-scale inter-communal violence and raiding has all been stopped, but violence is still prevalent – both criminal violence that can affect everybody and violence against women and girls specifically. It is now well-established that VAWG seriously undermines development prospects and social well-being wherever it occurs. Despite the absence of large-scale inter-communal violence and cattle raiding, Karamoja continues to lag behind the national averages on almost every indicator and can ill afford this additional strain on its human capacity and potential to emerge out of poverty and food insecurity. The situation can therefore at best be described as 'negative peace'.

The research shows that there is some increase in awareness of human rights. This was most prominent among the interviewed girls and boys who attend school, who were able to name a long list of rights and expressed hope for a future without FGM and forced and early marriage. Adults seemed to confuse human rights with duties they have in their

communities, though human rights were mentioned in relation to the most serious crimes, like gang rape. There is a potential to continue building on human rights awareness and contribute to attitude change about VAWG and women's rights in the medium to longer term and moving this awareness forward towards behaviour change.

Following the gender analysis of conflict in Karamoja, the recommendations below were developed by and Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) Saferworld to improve peace, security and justice for women and girls. They are aimed at international and national non-governmental organisations, the Ugandan government and communities in Karamoja.

## **Government of Uganda and its agencies**

1. Continue to strengthen the access and efficiency of the court system and the police service in Karamoja, paying particular attention to making it easier for women and girls to report sexual and other forms of VAWG – and at the very least access referral services.
2. Continue to combat corruption and discriminatory attitudes within the police and formal judicial services about sexual violence, and change any procedures that hinder women and girls from seeking help.
3. Continue to raise public awareness of and actively enforce laws that protect women and girls against harmful practices like FGM, defilement and forced marriage. Support and design initiatives that engage communities to change their attitudes towards such practices, and increase people's understanding of these practices as human rights abuses and as harmful to both the health of women and girls and the well-being of entire communities.
4. Continue to raise awareness among the population in Karamoja, through all levels of government and through all ministries and agencies, about human rights and the existing policies and laws that are in place to protect them. Pay particular attention to the rights of women and take care to actively counter

potential backlash from men in these initiatives by involving them in consultations (alongside women), and demonstrating the benefits to them and the entire community of women being able to fulfil their potential.

5. Rigorously review the impact of the special development efforts for Karamoja on women and girls – as a particularly vulnerable constituency within an already vulnerable population. This should include supporting women in accessing livelihood opportunities in towns and the mining sector, while helping them mitigate the costs they may bear for doing so in terms of resistance from their communities or unmanageable workloads between ‘public’ and ‘domestic’ work. It should also include special initiatives aimed at protecting women and girls from the specific risks they face, particularly related to VAWG as well as social support structures for those no longer able to rely on family networks.

6. At the local council level in particular and in parliamentary elections, send a clear message that women candidates from Karamoja have the right to stand, and actively support those who would like to do so.

7. Continue to support the roll-out of girls’ education and human rights education in schools. Combine this with broader awareness raising within communities on the benefits of education for women and girls.

## **Communities in Karamoja**

### **1. To elders/community leadership:**

- o Reflect on the links between disputes in the community and harmful practices against women, and discuss with women from the community how these issues affect their ability to actively support family and community prosperity and well-being.

- o Continue to make sure that any informal justice and conflict resolution processes respect the rights of women and children and are in compliance with Ugandan laws and the Constitution.

- o Increase their understanding of human rights to enable them to provide better leadership in traditional dispute resolution and justice processes.

- o Engage with the police and court systems in constructive ways, with a particular focus on addressing violations against women and girls in a manner that respects human rights as well as the interests of the broader community.

- o Involve more women in meetings about community affairs and in conflict resolution processes.

### **2. To active community groups:**

- o Continue to raise awareness of human rights among adults and children and of how they are enshrined in the Uganda constitution and laws. This can be done in school curriculums, through youth activity initiatives, on the radio and in other outreach materials and events. In particular, make information available about the illegality of VAWG, including FGM, early and forced marriage, rape, defilement among others, and about the available referral pathways.

- o Support those who want to claim their rights and mitigate any risks they may face when doing so – for instance, by acting in social groups rather than individual efforts and by building alliances with influential community or local government stakeholders like the sub-county, community development officers, probation officers, councillors and technical staff.

- o Identify potential women and girls role models who can encourage attitude change and support them – in a way that protects them from any backlash – to reach out to their communities, so that more people are aware of how these role models are challenging existing practices. Role models could include women who are already accepted into traditional mechanisms as elders, women parliamentarians or local government officials, and women and men who campaign against harmful practices against women and girls.

- o Provide referral and support services to women and girls as much as possible, coordinating between formal services (for example, those provided by the government or non-governmental organisations and informal support (for example, from supportive community members).

## **International and national non-governmental organisations**

1. Continue supporting dialogue and awareness-raising programs and events with elders, which aim to reflect on how harmful practices against women and girls affect the broader community and increase disputes and violence. This should engage all community members – including women and children – in these conversations.

2. Continue working with respected women, men and community leaders and elders on ideas for how women could directly and meaningfully participate in informal justice mechanisms and how to make these processes more in line with human rights standards. Help them increase their knowledge on human rights and how these are enshrined in the Constitution and laws, as well as how they can engage with the police and courts system – recognising the significant challenges involved in doing so.

3. Provide more training to women and men who are active in different communities, to create a pool of community-based human rights promoters who can:

- o support awareness raising in their communities;

- o advocate against VAWG and for women's involvement in traditional justice, conflict resolution and governance processes; and

- o provide support and referral services to women and girls.

4. In the training strategies, include ideas on how they can promote changes in attitudes and norms in their communities, drawing on their experience of norms change in combating GBV.

5. Directly support and help strengthen the capacities of women's associations to promote human rights, facilitate attitudinal change on gender norms, and advocate for women's involvement in peace processes and informal and formal decision-making structures. Provide them with core organisational support to continue their social change work alongside dedicated project funding for specific initiatives.

6. Support girls in and out of school, to advocate for their rights, particularly around access to justice, education and protection from FGM, defilement, early and forced marriage and trafficking. This has to be done very carefully to not put them at risk, but could include girls spreading messages through music, dance and drama groups (as mentioned by child respondents), as well as meeting with school authorities, community leaders and parents to share their concerns. Boys should also be encouraged and engaged with to improve respect of and advocate for the rights of girls and women.

7. Identify and support women leaders who are potential role models for more equal gender norms. This could be women running their own businesses, running for election to local government or parliament, participating as elders in traditional mechanisms or with professional careers, pursuing higher education. Taking care not to expose them to additional risk, work with them in reaching out to others within their communities, including girls and boys. Continue supporting the implementation of the nationwide campaigns, the child helpline services and action plans on the elimination of early and forced marriage and FGM. Make sure these campaigns reach all members of the community, not only those living close to towns or already in leadership positions

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- <sup>i</sup> Rupa Sub County.
- <sup>ii</sup> Karita Sub County.
- <sup>iii</sup> Kalapata Sub County and Kaabong Town Council
- <sup>iv</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2010), 'Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention. Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Uganda', November, p 11.
- <sup>v</sup> Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo (2017), 'Women, Peace, and Security Index 2017/18: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women'.
- <sup>vi</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2015), 'Uganda: Country Gender Assessment', October.
- <sup>vii</sup> Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2017), 'Uganda: Demographic and Health Survey 2016', March.
- <sup>viii</sup> Saferworld (2010), 'Karamoja conflict and security assessment', September.
- <sup>ix</sup> Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry for Karamoja Affairs, 'Karamoja Integrated Development Plan 2 (KIDP 2) 2015–2020', Government of Uganda, p 9–10.
- <sup>x</sup> Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance (2016), 'Gender, land and conflict in Moroto', July, p 3.
- <sup>xi</sup> Mercy Corps (2016), 'Karamoja Strategic Resilience Assessment: Final report', August, p 30.
- <sup>xii</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2018), 'Resilience Analysis in Karamoja', p 1.
- <sup>xiii</sup> USAID/East Africa Resilience Learning Project (2016), 'Resilience and risk in pastoralist areas: Recent trends in diversified and alternative livelihoods', p 11–31.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> Saferworld (2017), 'Mining in Uganda: A conflict-sensitive analysis', August, p 7; Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., p 6–7.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Saferworld (2017), op. cit.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., p 6.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xix</sup> Eftimie A, Heller K, Strongman J, Hinton J, Lahiri-Dutt K, Mutemeri N (2012), 'Gender dimensions of artisanal and small-scale mining: A rapid assessment toolkit', World Bank, p 12.
- <sup>xx</sup> Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., p 6.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Mercy Corps (2016), 'Karamoja Strategic Resilience Assessment: Final report', August, p 23.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Carlson K, Proctor K, Stites E, Akabwai D (2012), 'Tradition in Transition: Customary Authority in Karamoja, Uganda', Feinstein International Center, October.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Stites E, Akabwai D (2010), "'We are now reduced to women": Impacts of forced disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda', *Nomadic Peoples* 14 (2), pp 24–43.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> USAID/East Africa Resilience Learning Project, op. cit, pp 11–31.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Drawing on the concept promoted by Johan Galtung.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Wetaya R (2018), 'Karamoja leaders map out ways of tackling low girl child education', *New Vision*, 19 October ([https://www.newvision.co.ug/new\\_vision/news/1488018/karamoja-leaders-map-tackling-low-girl-child-education](https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1488018/karamoja-leaders-map-tackling-low-girl-child-education))



FGD of Adults in Kalapata Sub County During the discussion session



A member of the Research Team (Tom) interacts with LCIII Kalapata Sub County



FDG of youth in Kalapata Sub County



Group of Women pose for a group photo after FGD in Rupa Sub County



Lotynag LC1 Rupa Sub County Testifies during FGD



Project team Interacting with FGD for youth in Rupa Sub County



Pokot women provide information during a FGD Session



Group of Girls interacting during a FGD in Rupa Sub County



FGDs in Kalapata Sub County



Youth in Rupa pose for group photo after session



Group of Women in Karita During FGD



The women group in Rupa pose for photo after session



Group of Women in Rupa during FGD session

## About the project:

With funding from the European Union, Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) and Saferworld are implementing a two year project, 'Amplifying Women's Voices on Peace, Security and Justice in Karamoja' in the period May 2018 to April 2020. The proposed action is being implemented in the sub-counties of Rupa in Moroto District, Karita in Amudat District, and Kalapata and Kaabong Town Council in Kaabong District. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the promotion of the rights of marginalised women and children for the realisation of inclusive peace, security and justice in conflict-affected communities in the Karamoja region.

## About CECORE

Founded in 1995, Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) is a non-profit-making organization based in Kampala - Uganda, with a field Office in Kaabong district, Karamoja - north eastern Uganda but operates in all regions of the country. Its purpose is to empower communities, institutions and individuals to transform conflicts effectively by applying alternative and creative means in order to promote a culture of peace. CECORE envisions A Society where Peace, Tolerance, and Human Dignity prevail. Its mission is to promote a Culture of Peace. "Building Bridges": Creating links between parties in conflict for dialogue and reconciliation in one of our programs; Our main target groups are communities affected or threatened by conflict. The specific targets include women, youth, and ethnic minorities. Under the capacity building programme, the specific groups include Government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and private sector

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## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people - we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation operational in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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