

Region was trying to come to terms with closure of cattle markets

KARAMOJA

By Hope Mafaranga

Meaning the year 2019 and 2020 evokes a bitter taste for Maria Nakido, a resident of Kalokarokot village in Kapeta sub-county, Korkko district.

"The trying moments she and her colleagues in Karamoja have endured since July 2019.

She explained that the region depends on livestock as source of food and income. However, in July 2019, the region was hit by foot and mouth disease (FMD), which prompted the Government to close all the livestock markets.

"We depend on livestock but foot and mouth disease led to the closure of our markets. This affected our income and threatened our food security," she said.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As the region was trying to come to terms with the closure of markets, the country was hit by the coronavirus in March.

Anna Cilla, the chairperson of Korkota Women's Group, said the closure of markets and the COVID-19 lockdown affected members' savings as they had nowhere to get money as well as access to members.

Cilla said the group has 30 members and used to save sh850,000 per week, but following the handshakes, they only save sh20,000.

"The group is unable to lend money to its members because we depend on weekly savings to disburse loans," she said.

Cilla said COVID-19 has also affected the group's social lives since it can no longer freely meet to discuss matters related to development.

"We cannot even visit our friends when they are unwell because of the COVID-19 restrictions," she said.

Cilla said they also need to sensitize people on the education of girls but they can no longer do so.

"In our sub-county alone about 100 girls have been impregnated during the lockdown and cases of gender-based violence have increased," she said.

"In our culture, it is women who take care of the families, so they are struggling to do so as men blame them for not doing enough to feed the families," Cilla said.

She said maternal health has been affected as many mothers cannot go for antenatal visits because they cannot walk long distances to hospitals.

REVENUE AFFECTED

At Lokot, the Kaabong Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), said COVID-19 did not spare the local governments as their



Women have received handwashing facilities and other items to help them deal with the challenges of COVID-19

CORONAVIRUS WORSENS KARAMOJA'S SITUATION

local revenue sources have been greatly affected.

"We used to get 35% from the gold miners in the district, which was contributing to our budget. Following the pandemic, mining was suspended and this will affect the implementation of the district's activities," he said.

Lokot also said the district halted council meetings and that there are no economic activities being implemented.

Rex Achalla, the Kaabong Resident District Commissioner (RDC), said Karamoja gets food from Mbale and Kijungu, but the region is struggling to survive due to COVID-19.

"We were affected by the pandemic because most of the development partners suspended their operations," he said.

CRIME INCREASES

Achalla said crime has gone up and cattle rustling has resumed in the region.

He said most people are locked in a struggle for

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

Charles Edil Apular, the ADRA-Uganda country director (pictured), said in partnership with ADRA Denmark, they are working with the COVID-19 task forces to reach the communities of Abim, Kotido and Kaabong districts to contain the spread of COVID-19 with sh815m.

"We have given 1,089 households and community-based organisations fast-growing seeds, hoes, handwashing facilities soap, jerrycans, capillary seeds and animal vaccines to help the region recover from the shocks of COVID-19 lockdown," Apular said.

resources, so some of them cross to Kenya and South Sudan to steal cows using guns.

"Do not be deceived that there are no killer any guns in Karamoja. During the disarmament, some warriors

buried their guns and now that they have retrieved them so as to resume the region," he said.

Maj. Peter Mugisa, the 3rd Division public relations officer, confirmed that illegal guns still exist in the region.

adding that since July 2019, 100 warriors have been killed, while more than 100 have been arrested.

"We have deployed along the Uganda-Kenya border and other routes that the warriors use. The Tibeth of Turkana in South Sudan and the Dodeho and Jie in Karamoja are the biggest culprits," he said.

Maj. Mugisa said the arrested were managed in the division court martial over charges of possession of illegal guns.

He said some of the local defence security personnel have also been arrested for participating in illegal activities, including the sale of guns.

"Imagine a gun is being sold at sh800,000 and some of the LDCs are taking part in this crime," he said.

LOCKDOWN SINCE JULY 2019

George William Kiburu, the Action for Social Change programme manager at the Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA), said the region has been facing a difficult period since July 2019, when the Government

NO MATERNAL DEATHS

The Kaabong district health officer, Dr Shirif Nabire, was happy to note that despite the challenges, the district has not registered any maternal death.

"Being at the border with Kenya, we prepared ourselves as soon as COVID-19 was announced. We ensured that we have ambulances on standby and blood from Gulu Regional Referral Hospital to ensure that we do not lose mothers," he said.

livestock markets following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

"The region has been under quarantine since July 2019 and the COVID-19 lockdown just added salt to an already injured community, worsening their livelihood situation," he said.

Cilla said when the markets were closed and the communities hit by COVID-19, God was gracious enough to bless the region with rain. The women took advantage of the rains to plant vegetables and other fast-growing foods to ensure that their children survive.

"We are surviving by God's grace, who gave us the rain. Otherwise, we would have seen mass graves in Karamoja due to hunger. We are also grateful to ADRA, which has supplied us with seeds that we have been able to use. This has helped us to cope with the situation," she said.

COVID-19 MONEY MISUSED

Mpimbura Hashaka, the Abim RDC, said if it was not for partners like ADRA, COVID-19 would have wiped out Karamoja.

Hashaka said the money the ministry gave Abim district to fight COVID-19 was misused by the district leadership and they have not been accounted for it.

"The sh165m COVID-19 money was eaten by people who are not even on the task force and are not attending meetings related to the fight. One day, I was called to sign for sh160,000 released because I walked in first see the accountability as the chairperson of the task force," he said, adding that it is partners who are supporting the COVID-19 activities.

Hashaka said he has alerted Lt. Col. Edith Nakalemwa, the head of the State House Anti-Corruption Unit and the office of the Inspectorate of Government (IGG) to carry out a forensic audit of Abim.



Karimojong children drinking porridge out of calabashes for lunch. Many families are living off porridge once a day. Kaabong Chief Administrative Officer Jim Lokot