

Scramble for Karamoja

By Godfrey Ojore

Karamoja was once a haven of endless inter-ethnic conflicts. For a long time, the rest of the country watched helplessly as the region degenerated further into chaos. Then the government came up with a plan. It set out to implement the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP) that certainly was a game changer.

Popular districts

Today, there is a scramble for Karamoja. Everyone wants a piece of the region.

The region, which was once avoided like a plague, is now teeming with Indians, Chinese, Americans, Ghanaians, Kenyans and a host of Ugandans hailing from other parts of the country.

The road network in Karamoja is superb. For instance, the road from Kampala to Moroto is tarmacked, which was not the case several years ago. The standards of living of the Karimojong have improved, so much that people now watch CNN, BBC and Aljazeera on giant screens in their homes and hotels.

Nakapiripirit, Nabilatuk, Napak, Amudat and Moroto, are all connected to electricity.

The remaining districts are yet to be switched on as connection is being completed.

By next year, Karamoja will have transformed into a modern region, experts say.

Business is thriving and the construction of modern buildings is taking centre stage.

Business club

Karamoja is no longer a home for cattle raiders, but a business hub with people who think about developing their area.

"We were being blind-folded to think that cattle raiding was the only way to earn a living, but we have woken up now and we shall not go back to that life again.

"We will not even allow our children to do so," Simon Adoo, a former warrior-cum businessman, says.

Before the disarmament took place, there were over 40,000 guns in the possession of the people in Karamoja.

The region was a no-go-zone. It scared potential investors and tourists.

"The number of the guns in Karamoja that time, was twice the number of those in Obote's government," President Yoweri



The tarmacked road in Moroto is notable for road network development. The scramble for the region has attracted investors and thus, development of infrastructure in the area. Because of this, experts say by next year, the region will have transformed into a modern one

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Museveni said, recently.

The region has embraced the existing peace and used it to develop themselves.

Towns, such as Kaabong, Kotido, Abim and Napak that were previously more or less like trading centres, are rapidly growing.

Development partners like Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) have offered trainings to locals in business and other income-generating ventures, which is improving livelihoods in the area.

With these developments, some locals are now able to send their children to school and live a better life.

"Through my business of selling vegetables, tomatoes and cooking oil, I have been able to educate my children. One is sitting her Senior Six while one is in Senior Five," Anna Naron says.

Naron, herself, was trained in financial management under a programme sponsored by ADRA.

In 2015, Museveni awarded Rosalba a medal for being Karamoja's first female medical doctor.

Rosalba was orphaned at a tender age — when her father abandoned the family, and her mother tragically died

from complications during childbirth.

Since then, the quest for education in the region is becoming more competitive.

"I am happy to note that the number of girls enrolling in school is increasing year after year, which was not the case in the past, when girls were asked to marry while boys looked after cattle," Moses Ghinno, the headmaster of Lokitaleebu Primary School in Kotido, says.

With the current peace in the region, coupled with infrastructure development currently being undertaken by the Government, Karamoja's future is bright.

"Since the guns went silent over a decade ago, Karamoja has been open to the world.

"We host anyone and many have found this place attractive, both in business and settlement," Joseph Orisa, an information officer in Kotido, says.

Dodoth East Member of Parliament Samson Lokeris, says: "By next year, all the districts in the region will have electricity.

"Plans to tarmac the Moroto-Kaabong road are underway, while the contract to work on the Muyembe-Nakapiripirit road has been signed," Lokeris

says.

He noted that the Government had embarked on constructing big dams so

as to support the region with water for production.

"Already, people are engaged in serious agricultural

production, where farmers in Namalu are harvesting rice in big quantities," Lokeris says.



OUR EXPERIENCE IN KARAMOJA REGION OVER THE YEARS

The work of Doctors with Africa CUAMM in Karamoja started in the late 1960s with doctors from Italy Gianluigi Rho and Mirella Capra, who were initially sent to Gulu Lacor Hospital and but later started to oversee Matany dispensary in the Diocese of Moroto (Karamoja), which also had a maternity ward.

In 1971, after major expansion work supported by MISEREOR, the dispensary officially became the present day St. Kizito Hospital of Matany, and CUAMM doctors Rho and Capra started to work there permanently and expanded preventive activities to the hospital's catchment area.

For 50+ years, CUAMM has stood with Karamoja striving to improve access, utilization and quality of services through Health System Strengthening efforts especially geared to Maternal and Child Health services, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Nutrition, refurbishment of health facilities and improving human resource capacity.

Karamoja, as a region has 1.1 million inhabitants in 9 districts continues to pose major development challenges; 75.8% of the people still live below the poverty line, 26% of children are stunted, 72/1,000 birth die before 1 year, 102/1,000 births don't live up to 5 years. Life expectancy is 47.7 years. While progress has been recognized these indicators illustrate persisting needs in development for the region.

Despite the different interventions in the region, access to and utilization of maternal, neonatal and child services remains a challenge due to health system, geographical and development challenges. The HIV prevalence in the region although still relatively low, has risen in the last many years, now estimated at 3.7%. Global Acute malnutrition at 10.4% remains serious across Karamoja, household food security, feeding practices and concomitant illness especially from WASH related diseases are major factors behind malnutrition.

CUAMM with support from UNICEF and the Karamoja districts and other partners have been trying to address system constraints to improve services for mothers and children in Maternal-neonatal, and Nutrition project since 2013.

Karamoja still remains central to CUAMM, the current interventions are guided by the strategic plan 2016-2030 "Strengthening health systems to build resilient communities in Africa." Current effort in Karamoja is through the following projects:

1. Nourishing with food and knowledge the communities of Moroto and Napak, Karamoja, Uganda;
2. Support for Multi Drug Resistant Tuberculosis in Karamoja region and Cancer of Cervix in Napak;
3. Mothers and Children First, 1st 1000 days, Napak District;
4. Improving the capacity of the health workforce for Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health in Karamoja.
5. It's Good TB Free! Project to contribute to a TB Free Uganda by 2020 in Moroto, Napak, Amudat, Nakapiripirit and Nabilatuk.

CUAMM will continue to prioritize Karamoja in its health development for Uganda.



A mother (on the left) and the VHT on the right after a home visit by a health worker and a CUAMM nutritionist, Jalia in Nadugut Moroto District