

Community perspectives on multi-dimensional social conflicts in the Karamoja sub-region

This study demonstrates that community perspectives offer a deeper understanding of different social conflict types in the Karamoja sub-region. It also reveals how certain key societal challenges, like inherent resource scarcity, perceived inequity in resource distribution and gender roles, power struggles, traditional norms and practices, form different types of social conflicts. Policy makers are encouraged to consider all forms of social conflicts, beyond the common resource-based and livestock raids, and put local communities at the center of designing appropriate and integrated interventions.

KEY MESSAGES

- Community perspectives highlight a diverse nature of social conflicts, some of which have in the past received limited emphasis by scholars and policy makers in the Karamoja sub-region.
- There is a need to pay attention to all forms of social conflicts and develop holistic and fully integrated decision-making and policy development processes.
- This can foster national and regional aspirations for realizing peaceful community coexistence and harmony at all levels, including the grassroots level.



Background

The Karamoja sub-region has been embroiled in different forms of social conflicts for over four decades. Particular forms of social conflicts, including cross-border livestock raids and natural resources-based conflicts, have received attention [1], [2]. The region still suffers from recurrent social conflicts, despite efforts by national governments and regional development partners, such as the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), to mitigate them [3], [4].

These conflicts can be attributed to different factors, including socio-economic and political marginalization, climate variability, and environmental change [1], [5].

Affected communities possess unique insights into social conflicts; however, their perspectives are lacking in research.

Methods

This policy brief is based on a qualitative research study conducted in the pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of Napak and Moroto districts in the Karamoja sub-region of northeastern Uganda. It involved gender-separated focus group discussions (FGDs) selected from youthful and older age groups.

Findings

Five types of social conflicts were identified.

A. Social conflicts on responsibility and responsiveness

Arise among individuals of a nuclear or extended family due to failure to fulfil certain obligations. This includes failure to contribute to family labour, basic needs, and proper management of household income. They also arise from contested gender roles between female and male household members, such as livestock grazing and fetching water.

B. Social conflicts around natural resources management

Arise from complexities in the ownership, access, control and equitable use of resources, such as grazing and farming land, mineral mining and water sources, including raising fees for communally managed waters like boreholes.

C. Social conflicts on power asymmetries and equity in decision-making

Arise among household or community members and institutions due to disputed power struggles and non-inclusive decision-making setups. This is common in contentious issues, such as inequity in the distribution of common pool resources, the distribution of relief materials, and mining rights. Some instances where security bodies either fail to engage community members or reach consensus with elders on identifying actual perpetrators legitimately during the recovery of raided livestock lead to retaliatory raids by aggrieved persons.



FGD with female respondents in Longoricho Village, Napak district.

D. Social conflicts on cultural values, ethnicity and traditional identity

Cultural values, norms and unpopular traditional practices like forced marriages, failed display of reciprocity or social support between two individuals, and livestock raiding, but also changing gender roles, lead to these conflicts.

E. Social conflicts on community disorder and lawlessness

Occur due to lack of trust and lawless acts at family and community levels, and can include petty thefts of household items, alcoholism, unscrupulous land transactions and commercialized livestock raids. These are attributed to the high rate of joblessness and lack of alternative livelihood activities among the youthful and older people in the community.

Conclusion

Community perspectives have contributed to a better understanding of different types of social conflict. Social conflicts in the study area stretch beyond common narratives of resource scarcity and livestock raiding. Some key societal issues, often overlooked by stakeholders, like gender inequity and unfair distribution of scarce resources, power struggles and traditional norms and practices, form the different social conflict types.

ACTION POINTS

- Elders, local government officials and development partners are encouraged to pay close attention to the effect of livelihood diversifications and related changes in gender roles on household-level social conflicts. This is because changes in livelihood options create new domestic obligations for both men, women, boys and girls whose social cohesion is jeopardized due to disagreements over the distribution of responsibilities for household work and income-generating activities.
- Stakeholders from formal and informal institutions are encouraged to ensure secure property rights that promote equitable distribution, access and use rights for natural resources to address resource-based social conflicts among affected parties.
- Local governments and development partners should collaborate with local communities in the design, implementation and monitoring interventions aimed at eliminating institutional design failures to address the perceived exclusion of communities from meaningful participation in development interventions. This will increase social cohesion and ownership of development actions.



FGD with Female respondents in Napak village, Napak district

ACTION POINTS

- Community leaders and development partners need to develop community-based mindset change programmes aimed at creating intergenerational shifts in norms, values, behaviour and practices that propagate social cohesion, unlike those that increase the vulnerability and inequalities of young girls and women, like forced marriages.
- Local leaders and development partners in the region are encouraged to develop integrated approaches aimed at addressing institutional, ecological and socio-cultural dimensions of social conflicts at all levels.



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FGD with male respondents in Lokipetot village, Moroto district.

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FGD with Female respondents in Komuturonyo village, Napak district

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