

Executive Summary

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Crisis in Karamoja: Armed Violence and the Failure of Disarmament in Uganda's Most Deprived Region

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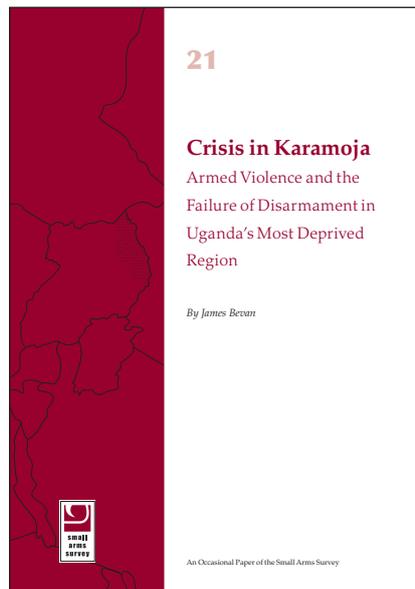
Violence in Uganda's Karamoja region is, for many people, the exemplar of Africa's pastoral wars. The area hosts a number of sub-clans that, together, comprise the Karimojong—a population fractured by protracted inter-clan conflicts over cattle, pasture, and access to resources.

Karamoja suffers significantly higher levels of small arms violence (death and injury by firearm) than any other region of Uganda, including the highly publicized northern region, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operates. With a small arms death rate approaching 60 per 100,000 of the population, Karamoja is one of the world's most armed violence-afflicted regions.

Since the 1970s, with the proliferation of modern assault rifles, cattle raids have escalated in lethality. A commensurate rise in armed criminality, in which acts of violence are increasingly orchestrated irrespective of community norms on the use of force, has severely impaired the region's socio-economic development.

This paper explores the dynamics behind armed violence in Karamoja and the scale and distribution of its impacts. It is the product of two

years of research focused on the Karimojong and neighbouring clans, and presents findings from an extensive range of research methods, includ-



ing household surveys, interviews, and focus group studies throughout the region.

While Karamoja features prominently in many studies of pastoral armed violence, this study differs from those of the past. Not only does it contextualize armed violence and its results within re-emerging (and escalating) hostilities between the Government of Uganda and the Karimojong, but it also critiques the related failure of state- and internationally formulated conflict-reduction and development interventions. The report finds that:

- Small arms are often the only source of security for warring communities in Karamoja. Without the provision of adequate security by the Ugandan state,

small arms will continue to play a central role in providing community protection; conversely, their offensive use is likely to continue.

- Small arms play an equally offensive role as they do a defensive one. They are used in the vast majority of violent incidents, comprise the greatest source of violence-induced mortality and morbidity, and rank highest among people's security concerns.
- The Karimojong acquire weapons from southern Sudan; on the domestic illicit market in Uganda; and, notably, from members of Uganda's security forces.
- Military-enforced disarmament initiatives have destabilized an already volatile security situation and involved extra-judicial killing and torture directed at the Karimojong. These initiatives have resulted in civilian displacement and engendered widespread fear of the Ugandan military.
- Ugandan military operations to forcibly disarm the Karimojong have been launched irrespective of an emerging—and more integrated—set of policies premised on increasing community security and development in order to promote voluntary weapons collection.
- Nascent initiatives, such as the Karamoja Disarmament and Development Programme/Plan (KIDDP), which are based on integrated security- and development-





of force, spilling over into more general types of armed crime.

First among these factors is the urgent requirement for state security forces that are able to regulate community relations and police disputes before they escalate into outright war. It is this uncontrolled, escalatory phenomenon that lies behind much of Karamoja's insecurity. Although they are the primary tools of violence, small arms are best understood as a symptom, rather than a cause, of this deeper malaise.

That said, there is a legitimate common understanding—among governments, civil society, the international community, and the Karimojong themselves—that small arms need to be removed from the equation in order to sustain peace and promote development. While these weapons are not at the root of the violence, they have an intensifying effect on raids; retaliatory actions; and, ultimately, life and development.

Recent violence-reduction initiatives, however, suggest that a pure focus on disarmament may be a misplaced policy priority and potentially damaging in both the long and the short term. Without adequate provision of state security to communities in Karamoja, demand for weapons is likely to remain high.

Disarmament is therefore not the first step required to solve Karamoja's armed violence, but a secondary consideration that can only be addressed once communities are protected and feel safe enough to disarm.

Above all, it is Karamoja's peripheral status that is the primary factor in its continued insecurity. Investment in adequate police and legal systems, roads, and infrastructure, and the positive benefits these measures could bring to encouraging investment, are long-term development imperatives that are a necessary complement to future armed violence-reduction initiatives. ■

enhancing strategies, have been impeded as a result of forcible disarmament measures that have made disarmament a more contentious issue.

- The Karimojong stress the need for their greater involvement in community policing, decisions concerning the defence of communities against hostile parties, and the future shape of disarmament initiatives.

The report concludes that past violence-reduction, development, and disarmament interventions have all

failed to bring sustainable peace to Karamoja. As a result of widespread insecurity, a reduction in hostilities is unlikely unless there is a radical shift in the way governments and international development agencies view pastoral regions and the conflict-reduction strategies applied to them.

In the particular case of Karamoja, measures need to address a number of factors that have pushed the pastoral system out of equilibrium and resulted in armed violence, which was traditionally conditioned by community norms regarding the use