SAFERWORLD
PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Peace, security and justice in Karamoja
Amplifying the voices of women and girls

Despite the efforts of the Ugandan government and of national and international organisations to improve the status of women and promote gender equality in the country, most women in Uganda face a wide range of challenges because of their gender. Girls are often married at an early age, with approximately 46 per cent married before they turn 18, polygamy is largely accepted, and the practice of 'bride price' is also prevalent.[1]

While women officially have a say in any significant decisions related to land allocation and sale under the 1988 Land Act, in reality custom dictates that men maintain control of resources and household decisions.[2] Cases of domestic and intimate partner violence are often not reported and when they are, a largely patriarchal system of local leaders and the police means they are not necessarily taken seriously or adequately addressed. The challenges women and girls face are particularly stark in the north-eastern region of Karamoja, exacerbated by the traditional pastoralist way of life where patriarchal values and associated norms continue to undermine the potential for women and girls to live in peace and safety and to access justice.
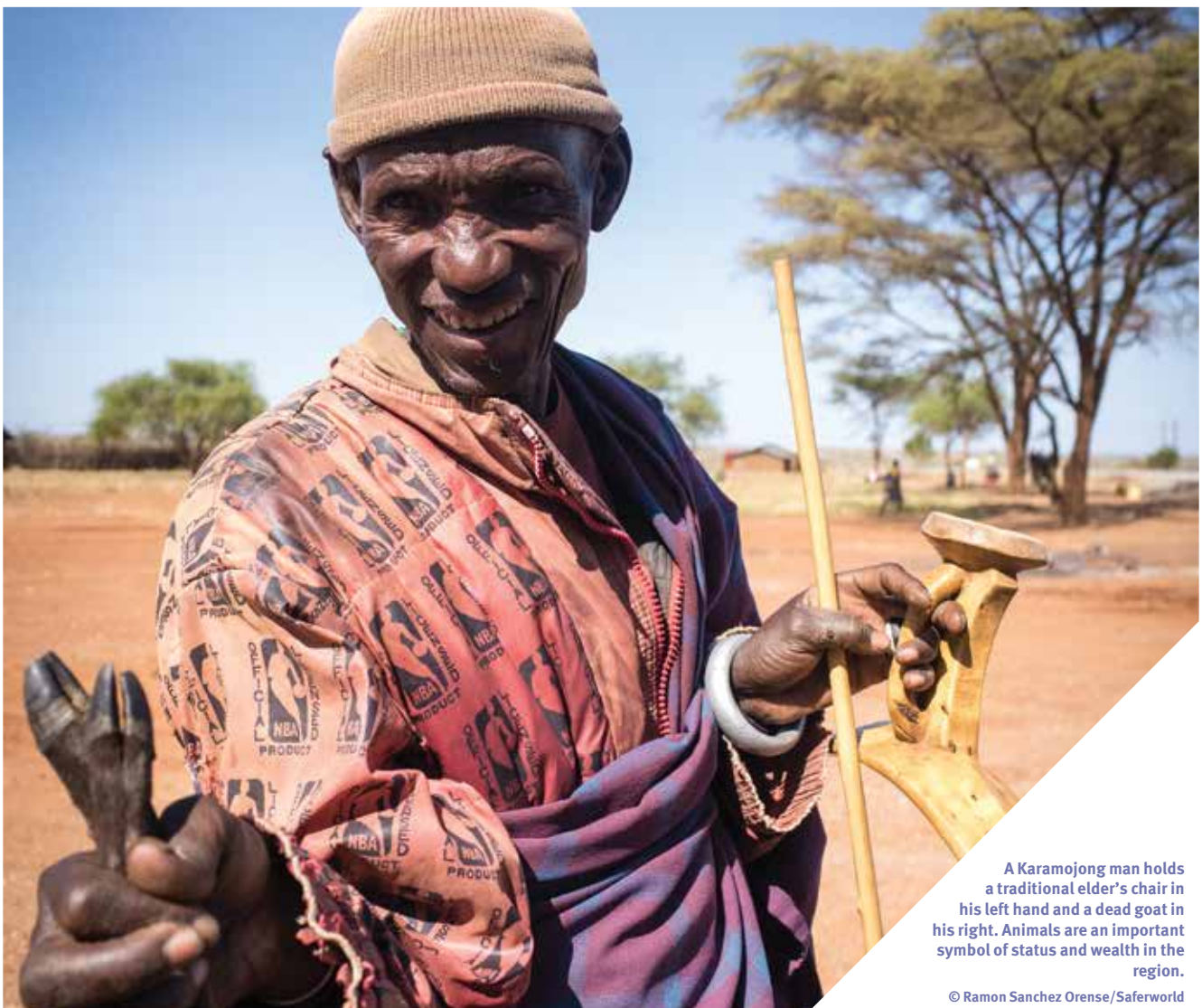
INSIDE

Despite military interventions and the signing of a cross-border sustainable peace and development agreement among Turkana and Pokot communities in Kenya and Karamoja – which include the Pian, Matheniko, Tepeth, Jie, Dodoth, and Pokot communities in Uganda – armed conflicts continue in the region. Insecurity has increased due to the rearmament of some members of these communities for protection from external attacks, cattle theft, and the infiltration of illegal arms from South Sudan and Kenya. The re-emergence of inter-ethnic cattle thefts, a lethargic response by security agencies to cattle theft, and COVID-19 restrictions have had a negative economic effect on communities. During the COVID-19 lockdown (between March–August 2020), markets were closed, public transport was suspended and *boda bodas*[3] were banned, because of a high risk of transmission. *Boda bodas* are the main means of economic sustenance for most rural households. Local shops that used to give families credit were unable to do so and families without gardens and granaries struggled with food shortages. High levels of delinquency among young people escalated with drug abuse and violent behaviour. Climate change-induced uncertainty has made it harder for people to make a living from agriculture, as rains have failed or been increasingly unpredictable and this – combined with the large-scale acquisition of land by investors – has led to many people having to seek alternative ways of making a living. This shift in socioeconomic circumstances, as families and communities move from a pastoralist economy and way of life to an agro-pastoralist and more market-based society, has led to intercommunal clashes and violence within families. The shifting dynamics have specific gendered impacts as social norms and gender norms are challenged. Men often find they are unable to fulfil their role as income providers for their family and community, and these frustrations result in an increase in gender-based violence (GBV) as they seek to exert control in the private sphere.

In July 2018, Saferworld and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) began a gender analysis of conflict in the Karamojan districts of Moroto,[4] Amudat[5] and Kaabong.[6] This analysis was updated in 2020. 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 nuanced understanding of the gendered issues related to peace, security and justice in Karamoja, as well as to promote gender and conflict-sensitive interventions to these issues by government, aid organisations and communities in the region.

The analysis was carried out within the framework of a joint Saferworld/CECORE project funded by the European Union. The project sought to promote the rights of marginalised women and children in Karamoja, to achieve inclusive peace, security and justice in communities affected by conflict.

A Karamojong man holds a traditional elder's chair in his left hand and a dead goat in his right. Animals are an important symbol of status and wealth in the region.
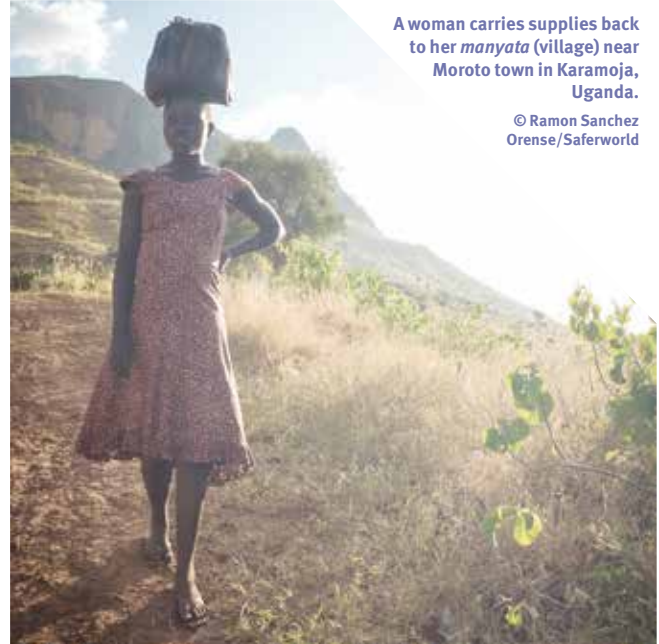© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

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 1995 constitution laid 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 yet to be passed, including the draft Sexual Offences Bill and Marriage and Divorce Bills which women's rights activists are lobbying to be passed before the 2021 election. On paper, this policy framework creates an enabling environment for women's empowerment and gender equality.

However, these legal reforms have not yet been fully translated into gender-responsive 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.[7] It is imperative that the needs of vulnerable groups in the region and the neighbouring districts are addressed to achieve equity, peace and justice. Uganda was ranked 109 out of 167 countries for the well-being of women in the 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security Index, with particularly poor performance in relation to discriminatory norms, intimate partner violence, community safety and education.[8] A 2015 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Gender Assessment[9] 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 remains high: according to the 2018 Global Database on Violence against Women,[10] 30 per cent of women experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) – which includes physical, psychological or sexual violence – and 40 per cent experienced child marriage in the preceding 12 months. A cross-sectional study done in 2019[11] showed that this had increased, with 78.50 per cent of women experiencing high levels of IPV at any point in their life and more than half had been exposed to IPV in the previous 12 months (55.7 per cent). Yet the 2015 UNDP Country Gender Assessment cited the conviction rate for rape and defilement (sexual intercourse – whether consensual or not – with somebody under 18)[12] 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, violence related to cattle rustling practices (the act of stealing cattle), and other violence that is deeply entrenched in socio-cultural patriarchal norms – such as the rape of girls as part of courtship, and attitudes and practices such as *sapana* (an initiation ceremony and rites for men) that exclude and discriminate against women and girls.[13] The conflict in Karamoja dates back to colonial days. Recent and ongoing conflicts have been caused by tensions between and within the various Karamojong pastoral groups over scarce pasture and water for people and animals, small arms proliferation, historical underdevelopment, marginalisation, and slower development than in other regions of the country.

Women in Karamoja continue to face overwhelming barriers that deprive them of the opportunity to live in dignity, access basic social services, or participate in social, cultural and political life in the same way men do.

A woman carries supplies back to her *manyata* (village) near Moroto town in Karamoja, Uganda.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

Women's rights in Ugandan law and policy

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 (the 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 people.

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).

A miner works under the midday Karamoja sun at a marble mine in Rupa sub-county, Moroto District, Uganda.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/ Saferworld

The 2016 Demographic and Health Survey indicated that Karamoja remains the most neglected and least-developed region in Uganda, and has the country's 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. Women and girls' participation in the cattle trade in Karamoja – traditionally a men's domain – remains very limited. Women 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. Yet despite their increased economic activities, women and girls remain responsible for the majority of household work, including fetching water and fuel for cooking, in a region affected by drought and deforestation – challenges that are also increasing with climate change. At the same time, social norms around masculinity make men unwilling to engage in crop production or home and child care,[14] even when the family has lost all or most of its cattle – a major livelihood domain. This results in what one study has called 'male exploitation' – with women in Karamoja working on average 18 hours per day, while men work only five to ten hours. This situation has been perceived by many as burdensome and exploitative.[15] Despite their work 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, which impacts their ability to make a living and feed their families.[16]

One of the coping strategies available to people in Karamoja, including women, is to migrate to growing towns where the government has invested in increased infrastructure and basic services like health and education. This exposes 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.[17]

In the Karamoja region, investment in the extractive industries has resulted in an influx of investors that has further fuelled competition for land, worsening gender inequality and conflict. Saferworld research has shown that some men are now willing to take up arms to protect or reclaim community land – particularly as government soldiers are perceived to protect investors and there is a sense that resource access is prioritised by the national government for individuals and private firms over community rights.[18] The research also highlighted conflict between (mostly) men elders and young men about how or whether to engage with investors (for example, whether to accept jobs or allow men to mine if community land access is protected); between men and women when men decide to sell land without consulting their wives or children, especially girls who are not considered in these discussions, despite both boys and girls working on the land (for example, farming); and between women – particularly when a man marries another wife and redistributes the land between his wives.[19]

The impacts of mining activities on other natural resources like water are also highly gendered. For instance, when water sources are polluted by mining companies, girls have to travel longer distances to get clean water – exposing them to sexual violence on the way – and have to care for family members who get sick from using polluted water.[20]

Artisanal mining – traditionally practised on a small scale – has also greatly expanded. Both men and women 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,[21] while women grind stones to extract gold, which they sometimes do at home – as they have to carry out their domestic work at the same time – exposing themselves and their children to dangerous levels of dust inhalation.[22] 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).[23]

When 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 the police, courts and health centres) to objectively deal with cases. Trust in government institutions also remains low, meaning that issues that go beyond the powers of the traditional structures – such as conflict with mining companies – often go unaddressed.

Because of the cultural attachment to traditional and informal institutions in Karamoja, even the most sensitive crimes affecting women and girls such as defilement, rape, forced marriage and IPV are often handled by community leaders and mostly men 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 as a result of referral pathways not being 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 defilement, falls within the jurisdiction of the formal legal system. Nevertheless, given the inability of the police and the court system in Karamoja to effectively serve the region, there is widespread acceptance that traditional mechanisms provide more accessible justice, even if this may be biased against women's individual interests and rights.[24]

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 cattle, grazing cattle away from home, and raiding cattle from other groups to increase stock and enable the payment of bride price – a payment, usually in the form of cattle, that men are required to pay to the girl's or woman's family in order to get married. This meant men and boys were engaged in inter-group conflicts and fought against the Ugandan armed forces during the disarmament process,[25] because they needed arms to protect their communities and cattle – particularly in the early phases of the process when human rights abuses by the Ugandan armed forces against civilians were rife. Accepted gender norms meant that women did not participate directly in the fighting but supported and encouraged it. Older women were involved in 'blessing' raiders, and unmarried girls sought out the most successful raiders who had both proved their strength and 'manliness' and who were also able to pay the best bride price.

The disarmament process – described by some men as a process of 'turning them into women'[26] – 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 for men and women to move around and undertake different economic activities. The types of conflict and violence experienced by people in Karamoja have shifted to issues like small-scale theft of cattle and household items by *lonetia*[27] (young men involved in criminal activity),[28] as well as 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.

Intra-communal and intra-family violence is also commonplace. While these are not new phenomena in Karamoja, there is a sense that the kind of violence that is occurring has morphed from 'acceptable' to 'unacceptable' – often fuelled by alcohol which is used by men as a way of coping with the changes in society that have taken place and their sense that they are no longer 'proper' men. For instance, respondents referred to the traditional practice of 'overpowering' and 'forcibly having sex' with a girl or woman as part of claiming her as a wife – which is often agreed to by the prospective bride's parents even when the girl is not okay with it and does not have affection for the boy. 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 are now also working in mining or other businesses to generate sufficient income – particularly to pay the bride price for their sons' brides – while boys and young men (12–30 years old) take on activities like providing *boda boda* (motorbike taxi) services.

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. Focus group discussions were held in selected study areas in Moroto, Amudat and Kaabong. Twenty key informant interviews were also 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.

Boys are also responsible for enforcing marriage decisions in their families 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.

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 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 especially, where this is an option). Young girls were said to be 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 female genital mutilation (FGM).

Overall, roles of women, girls, men and boys have changed in relation to their economic activities 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 cattle try to find other income-generating opportunities. In Rupa and Kalapata sub-counties, the new economic roles appear to give women more opportunities to work outside their homes as they sell charcoal and firewood and engage in artisanal mining. However, this does not seem to be accompanied by a greater say in family or community affairs.

Men discuss masculinity and conflict during a focus group discussion in Nadunget sub-county, Moroto District. The issues of land conflict and the importance of cattle came up repeatedly.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

When research respondents talked about conflict, they referred 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',[29] 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: consequences, and a driver of conflict

Our analysis found that deeply patriarchal norms persist in 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 both physical and psychological.

❝

Women are a 'beast of burden' among the Pokot.[30] 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."

A man research respondent in Amudat.

❞

The types of physical and psychological violence described by research respondents in all locations include high levels of rape and defilement, early and forced marriage, 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 GBV. This combines patriarchal gender norms – identified by participants – that characterise men as violent and lustful and women as weak, obedient and having to 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 describe how many IPV incidents become unbearable and in some cases have resulted in the woman committing suicide.

Respondents also described practices relating to early and forced marriage, including the duty of boys (usually brothers of a girl) to physically take a prospective bride (their sister) to her future husband's house. These girls are often very young: men respondents in Karita sub-county said they preferred marrying girls in primary school grades five to seven (roughly ages nine to 14). Rape or defilement of prospective brides was reported to still be widely practiced, although it is becoming less acceptable. Early and forced marriage can have serious consequences, including IPV, early/teenage pregnancy – and the associated serious complications this creates for girls' sexual and reproductive health – and even suicide.

While the law defines defilement as taking place even if 'consent' is given, social norms around this do not always reflect this (respondents named examples of young girls who argued that they were not defiled because they consented as they were ready to get married), and girls face multiple risks and consequences if they decide to report it as a crime. Respondents 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. This may be an area that is being challenged by young people; for example, one of the mixed gender children's groups mentioned that 'elimination of forced marriages' is part of their vision for a peaceful future.

The analysis also revealed that both men and women consider women predominantly responsible for fuelling 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. As often seen in other communities where FGM is outlawed, respondents 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 or in the bushes, or even being taken across the border to Kenya. FGM has traditionally been considered an initiation ritual 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 men and women respondents described FGM as a cause of conflict within families and communities, although it is not clear whether they regard stopping FGM as the solution – 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 are among the root causes of GBV and related practices, as well as why they are enforced, legitimised and enabled by formal and informal legal, governance, and security and justice structures and systems dominated by men. GBV and related practices do not only affect women's safety and security in the region, but also fuel general insecurity and violence, as the violence women suffer has serious consequences for family and community well-being and social cohesion. While awareness that GBV is illegal or unacceptable is increasing, there is also resistance from community members who regard this change as a threat to their traditions, culture and norms.

Structural discrimination: women and girls as resources

Women are seen as subordinate to men and are viewed as men's 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 the government and civil society organisations have made some efforts 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 as resisting the traditional norms of men's power and 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). "
>
> **A man research participant 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 standing 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.[31] When girls reach puberty however, they are often withdrawn from school and married off.

Decision-making dominated by men and women's exclusion

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, as these exclude the experiences of and prevent the participation of women. Gender norms in Karamoja define communal and political decision-making spaces as being predominantly or exclusively for men.

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 men 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 to punish the responsible party. 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 formal peace processes, the analysis showed that women still engage in peacebuilding at an inter-communal level, because they are seen as less threatening than men. For example, during a community gathering, women are sometimes asked by men to visit another community involved in a conflict, and convey the remorse of their husbands as a step in the resolution process. In most cases, even if there is a life-threatening risk, they have no option but to accept this request, as it is made by elders. Women can also advise their young sons

Maria Awas, a community member from Nadunget sub-county, makes a point during a focus group discussion on the roles of men and women in Karamoja.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

to inter-marry with another community in order to help cement a peace agreement. Important to note is that girls have no say in the whole set up; they are identified by the boys, raped, and accepted for marriage. Communities that offer girls are mainly interested in wealth in the form of cattle.

Gender and access to justice

The girls and boys interviewed mentioned a long list of human rights that they had learnt about in school. Different age groups (12–18 years old) were aware that the police have a role to play in protecting and ensuring respect for rights. However, the adult men and women interviewed confused rights with duties or roles.

For example, they mentioned 'looking after livestock' (men) and 'handling home affairs' (women) when asked about their rights, and some of the adult respondents placed a stronger emphasis on community leaders enforcing rights for the whole community (rather than focusing on individual rights).

The tension between an increased awareness among younger people of individual human rights and strongly held beliefs in more traditional group-based notions of community rights – and presumably in customary justice systems – leaves women and girls still unable to argue for their rights to security and bodily integrity, equal opportunities, or access to justice for the violence and abuse they suffer. Women who report their husbands for domestic-related offences or call for a meeting to resolve a family conflict face being beaten by relatives and men community members, and also face a higher risk of divorce.

Both formal and informal systems of justice and accountability exist in Karamoja, 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 abused a school girl and as a result she got pregnant, but he bribed the police in Kaabong to release him.

The informal institutions active in Karamojong communities include the council of elders, the sacred assembly of initiated men (*Akiriket*) and men's local gatherings (*Ekokwa*). These mechanisms and associated processes 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 GBV – including early and forced marriage – being regulated by national and international law, informal mechanisms tend to base their decisions on traditional measures, with a stronger focus on what they consider best for the community, rather than for the individual survivors. 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. People use informal actors and institutions to resolve many types of cases, especially gender-related disputes such as early and forced marriage, domestic violence cases and gender-related property cases. Men 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 "issues of human rights" and the need to involve the police "complicates the situation".

Women almost never report issues to formal legal authorities, while men do not report issues that they perceive will make them appear weak to other men and women, as they fear this would undermine their masculinity.

The few women and girls who do attempt to report cases, such as IPV, 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, fear of reporting abuse also speaks to the gendered consequences of reporting – consequences that will be enforced by men at home, in the community and in justice institutions. Women fear that 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 punished by community members or by their fathers and brothers. Girls are afraid to report cases of defilement and early and forced marriage because if they do, it is seen as bringing shame to their fathers and husbands. For instance, women in the focus group discussions 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.

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 course of action in case of violence and conflict. This indicates more awareness, at least among school girls, of the options that are becoming available under the formal justice system. However, respondents also said structural barriers to reporting include feeling 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 genitals is unacceptable in Karamojong cultures) and that cases reported to 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 boy 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 feel that the police do not believe them when they report abuse against them and instead throw out the cases.

A miner from Rupa sub-county in Moroto District, Karamoja.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

Men in Nadunget sub-county take part in a focus group discussion on the roles they are expected to play to be considered 'real Karamojong men'.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

Conclusions and recommendations

Our analysis found that despite the existence of national and international instruments for preventing GBV and pursuing justice, peace and security, serious challenges remain for women and girls in Karamoja. Prevailing social norms are still deeply patriarchal, and men's dominance in social, economic and political affairs is an accepted part of life. Women are seen not only as subservient to men, but as resources or possessions, and as 'beasts of burden'. Livelihood changes and challenges linked to COVID-19 and post-disarmament have shifted economic livelihood strategies for men and women, but pre-existing discriminatory attitudes and gender norms expecting women and girls to shoulder the burden of all household and care work remain, now alongside new economic activities. The overall context in Karamoja also remains one of poverty and both human and food insecurity, and the stresses stemming from these conditions – alongside many men losing their traditional cattle-based livelihoods and the effect of COVID-19 – have led to thwarted masculinities and increased alcoholism among men, fuelling GBV.

The stagnation of patriarchal gender norms also translates into heavy workloads that leave women in exploitative conditions. This deprives women of time to engage in anything other than their daily responsibilities, and it fuels negative attitudes towards educated women and girls.

Consequently, women experience significant structural barriers to participating meaningfully in governance structures, like standing for election in the local council or to women's seats in parliament.[32] The dominance of men in community decision-making, including in informal conflict resolution and justice structures, further excludes women from raising issues that affect them, or having a say in their solutions. Women who do try to move into these spaces reserved for men face violence and discrimination.

Discriminatory attitudes and women's continuous exclusion from decision-making structures also fuel a high level of acceptance and normalisation of GBV – which is actively reinforced by family and community members, such as brothers forcibly taking their sisters to get married if they resist, and community members beating women who try to report abuses. This is because IPV or 'wife-beating' is still regarded as a private family matter. This is reinforced by informal justice mechanisms that are discriminatory and dominated by men, and the serious challenges of seeking justice through formal mechanisms. Yet respondents who took part in the analysis recognised the negative impact of GBV, as they cited examples of women committing suicide and children being abandoned because of it. Furthermore, the research showed strong and direct links between GBV and conflict and violence more broadly, as all respondents (men, women, boys and girls) cited specific types of GBV as causes of conflict and disputes in their families, communities and between communities.

Following the analysis, Saferworld and CECORE developed recommendations based on this research. These recommendations aim to strengthen gender responsiveness within peace, security and justice practices, especially for women and girls. They are aimed at international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Ugandan government and communities in Karamoja.

The Government of Uganda and ministries

These include the Ministry for Karamoja Affairs, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, as well as relevant agencies.

1. Continue to strengthen the gender responsiveness, reach and efficiency of the court system and the police service in Karamoja, paying particular attention to addressing women's and girls' needs, experiences and the barriers they face to access justice. Make it easier for women and girls to report sexual and other forms of GBV, by training and sensitising officers who receive GBV reports to better investigate and prosecute these. Aim to increase women police officers within these functions and create GBV desks or units to respond to these specific crimes. Intensify sensitisation on violence against women and girls to raise public awareness of and actively enforce laws that protect women and girls against GBV and harmful practices like FGM, defilement and forced marriage.

2. Increase financial support to courts in order to reduce the costs of litigation for people without financial means. Many GBV survivors cannot afford the costs of state litigation. Even with cases that require being resolved through traditional justice, survivors are expected to facilitate the process of bringing witnesses and mobilising traditional leaders. This is sometimes too expensive for widows, orphans, disabled and elderly people to achieve.

3. Increase financial support to women's organisations and GBV service providers in Karamoja. Uganda has a vibrant women's rights sector and expert organisations with evidence-based models for GBV prevention and response, whose expertise and models – such as SASA![33] from Raising Voices – could be adapted to be used in Karamoja. Provide funding for GBV services including case management, legal aid, medical and psycho-social support, and development of GBV referral services and mechanisms in Karamoja.

4. 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. Raise awareness of and challenge harmful patriarchal norms and practices among people in Karamoja, through all levels of government and through all ministries and agencies. Raise awareness about human rights education and the existing policies and laws that are in place to protect people. Pay particular attention to the rights of women and girls and address the potential backlash from men in these initiatives by involving them in gender transformation (alongside women), demonstrating the benefits to families and communities of women being able to fulfil their potential.

5. At the local council level in particular and also 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.

6. The government – through its local authorities/government – should engage community leaders and elders to create and increase awareness and understanding of human rights, to enable them to appreciate the rights of women and children and provide better leadership in traditional dispute resolution and justice processes.

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

Elders take part in a focus group discussion in Nadunget sub-county, Moroto District, Karamoja.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

Communities in Karamoja

To elders/community leadership

Reflect on the links between disputes in the community and harmful practices against women. Discuss with women from the community how these issues affect their ability to actively support family and community prosperity and well-being. Make deliberate attempts to ensure all forms of discrimination against women, girls and boys are strongly discouraged and condemn such acts of discrimination in the community and among its leadership.

1. Strengthen informal justice and conflict resolution processes to complement and respect the rights of women and children, in compliance with Ugandan laws and the constitution.

2. Engage with the police and court systems, 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.

3. Involve more women in community meetings and dialogues about community affairs and in conflict resolution processes.

To active community groups

1. Continue to raise awareness of human rights among adults and children and of how they are enshrined in the Ugandan constitution and laws. This can be done in school curriculums, through youth activity initiatives, music, dance and drama, on the radio, and in other outreach materials. In particular, make information available about the illegality of GBV, including FGM, early and forced marriage, rape, defilement and IPV.

2. Support those who want to claim their rights and mitigate any risks they may face when doing so – for instance, through group action rather than implementing individual efforts and by building alliances with influential community or local government, such as sub-county councillors and technical staff.

3. Identify potential role models who can encourage attitude changes 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.

4. Support and coordinate with women's groups and organisations in communities and at the national level. Make GBV services and referral pathways public, clear and understood to make it easier for women who are reluctant to report these crimes to formal institutions to do so, and provide support services to women and girls as much as possible, coordinating between formal services (for example, those provided by the government or NGOs) and informal support (for example, from supportive community members).

5. Use and adapt GBV prevention models and tools to work with community leaders and community groups. Ugandan women's organisations have developed and tested successful models to challenge and transform gender norms fuelling GBV, which can be adapted to the Karamoja context – such as SASA! from Raising Voices in Kampala.
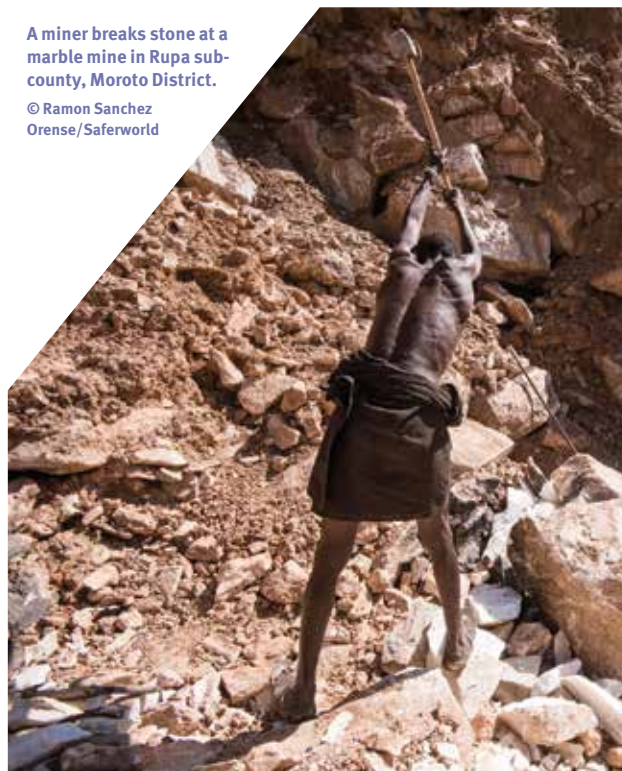
Donors, international and national NGOs

1. Increase support to gender-responsive and gender-transformative peacebuilding and community work, which aims to address conflict drivers and grievances as well as gender norms and GBV, given the proven links between these. This should include supporting and enacting dialogue and awareness-raising processes with community leaders and elders, to promote women's rights and reflect on how harmful practices against women and girls fuel conflict and violence and affect the broader community. All community members – including women and children – should be engaged in these conversations.

2. Include participatory reflection on how to transform or challenge harmful gender attitudes and norms in their communities when working with government, communities, and local, national and international organisations doing development and peacebuilding programming in Karamoja. Draw on their experiences of norm change in combating GBV or other forms of violence, and on using proven tools for social norm change, such as SASA! from Raising Voices in Kampala. These can be successfully carried out targeting middle-level managers and even senior civil servants.

3. Support women's groups, associations and organisations, and continue working with respected women and men community leaders to increase gender responsiveness of – and women's meaningful participation in – informal justice mechanisms, including how to make these processes more in line with human rights standards. Directly support and help strengthen women's groups and associations in methods of non-violent conflict transformation to promote and uphold human rights, facilitate attitude changes 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.

4. Help community leaders 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.

5. Increase women and youth empowerment programmes at all levels to empower women and youth on different thematic areas such as human rights, justice, gender and peacebuilding, gender analysis of conflict and violence, skills for women in peacebuilding and addressing challenges for women in peacebuilding.

6. 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:
   - support awareness raising in their communities
   - advocate against GBV and for women's involvement in traditional justice, conflict resolution and governance processes
   - provide support and referral services to women and girls

7. Increase support for girls to become advocates and champions for their rights, particularly around access to education and protection from FGM, defilement, early and forced marriage, and human trafficking. Pilot integrated or holistic approaches between GBV experts, child protection experts and peacebuilders to ensure girls are not being put at risk, which could include a combination of tested girl protection and empowerment models with community peacebuilding activities such as 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 concerns. Encourage and engage with boys to improve respect of and advocate for the rights of girls and women.

8. 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 in local government or parliament, participating as elders in traditional mechanisms or 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 nationwide campaigns, child helpline services and action plans on the elimination of early and forced marriage and FGM. Ensure these campaigns reach all members of communities, not only those living close to towns or already in leadership positions.

A miner breaks stone at a marble mine in Rupa sub-county, Moroto District.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

Notes

1 Ninsiima A B, Leye E, Michielsen K, Kemigisha E, Nyakato V N, Coene G (2018), '"Girls Have More Challenges; They Need to Be Locked Up": A Qualitative Study of Gender Norms and the Sexuality of Young Adolescents in Uganda', *Environmental Research and Public Health* **15** (2), p 3.

2 Focus on Land in Africa (2011), 'Women and Customary Land Rights in Uganda', April (http://www.focusonland.com/countries/womens-customary-rights-in-uganda/)

3 Motorcycle taxis.

4 Rupa sub-county.

5 Karita sub-county.

6 Kalapata sub-county and Kaabong town council.

7 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.

8 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (2019), 'Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20' (https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf)

9 United Nations Development Programme (2015), 'Uganda: Country Gender Assessment', October.

10 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2017), 'Uganda: Demographic and Health Survey 2016', March.

11 Black E, Worth H, Clarke S (2019), 'Prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence against women in conflict affected northern Uganda: a cross-sectional study', *Conflict Health* **13** (35).

12 Defilement is both the legal term used in Uganda and is used in general speech when discussing 'consensual' and non-consensual sex with a minor.

13 *Sapana* is a Pokot word for men's initiation ceremony and rites. The Pokot are one of the main tribes in Karamoja who also live across the border in Kenya.

14 Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance (2016), 'Gender, land and conflict in Moroto', July, p 3 (https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1077-gender-land-and-conflict-in-moroto)

15 Mercy Corps (2016), 'Karamoja Strategic Resilience Assessment: Final report', August, p 30.

16 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2018),'Resilience Analysis in Karamoja', p 1 (http://www.fao.org/3/I8365EN/i8365en.pdf)

17 USAID East Africa Resilience Learning Project (2016), 'Resilience and risk in pastoralist areas: Recent trends in diversified and alternative livelihoods', February, pp 11–31 (https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00m1pz.pdf)

18 Saferworld (2017), 'Mining in Uganda: A conflict-sensitive analysis', August, p 7 (https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1135-mining-in-uganda-a-conflict-sensitive-analysis); Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., pp 6–7.

19 Saferworld (2017), op. cit.

20 Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., p 6.

21 Ibid.

22 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.

23 Saferworld and Uganda Land Alliance, op. cit., p 6.

24 Carlson K, Proctor K, Stites E, Akabwai D (2012), 'Tradition in Transition: Customary Authority in Karamoja, Uganda', Feinstein International Center, October.

25 The Government of Uganda undertook a disarmament exercise during 2001–2002. Over 10,000 firearms were collected out of an estimated 40,000, which was not a resounding success. Armed conflicts in Karamoja, including road ambushes and internal raiding, did not decrease. Therefore, in 2006, the government sought to rid Karamoja of all illegal arms and ammunition by military intervention using the Uganda People's Defence Forces to continue disarmament.

26 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.

27 *Ionetia* is the Karamojong phrase used to describe groups and individuals associated with stealing household items like nets.

28 USAID East Africa Resilience Learning Project, op. cit, pp 11–31.

29 Drawing on the concept promoted by Johan Galtung.

30 The Pokot community are part of tribes in Karamoja that live in Amudat District. They also live in Kenya in West Pokot County. In this reference we refer to the Pokot community in Amudat District.

31 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)

32 There are specific seats that can only be filled by women and these include women members of parliament, secretary for women on local councils, women councillors and area land committees.

33 https://raisingvoices.org/sasa/

About the project

With funding from the European Commission, Saferworld and the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) implemented a project, 'Amplifying women's voices on peace, security and justice in Karamoja'. Saferworld and CECORE implemented activities in the sub-counties of Rupa in Moroto District, Karita in Amudat District, and Kalapata and Kaabong in Kaabong District. The overall objective of the project was 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 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 working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Cover photo – Women take part in a focus group discussion in Nadunget sub-county, Moroto District.
© Ramon Sanchez Orense/Saferworld

About CECORE

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) is an initiative of Ugandan people working to find alternative and creative means of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. Members come from a rich background of peace and human rights work, research and training. CECORE is a non-profit NGO registered with the NGO Registration Board in Uganda, with programmes in the Great Lakes region and the greater Horn of Africa. Current programmes include training in research, mediation, trauma healing and peace programme development consultancy.

SAFERWORLD