

## **Images of Ugandan Pastoralists**








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## Photograph Collection

This photograph collection supplements an excellent collection by AU-IBAR which focused on the Karamoja Cluster (Karamojong, Maasai, Samburu, Turkana etc). This collection seeks to portray the pastoralist diversity by capturing images from Central and Southern Uganda. This collection is however, by no means representative of all the pastoralists in Uganda. But rather gives a glimpse into the richness of pastoralist's lives, as well as the commonalities among pastoralists.

## Foreword



This exhibition attempts to present livelihood images of pastoralists. Pastoralists are people living their lives within relational/social boundaries, relating to their environment, and closely bonded to their livestock that form the basis of their production.

It is our hope that these pastoralist images help us to see

beyond the mythological popular perspectives. To see people who have lived with courage and determination in harsh and unforgiving environments. To see the challenges of daily life beyond the one-off incidences often reported in the media. To see the productive outcomes of pastoralist lives that we all enjoy. To see the injustices, the lack of support and the challenges that remain in helping pastoralists break cycles of poverty and hopelessness.

Pastoralism is a viable livelihood. Pastoralism like any other livelihood option requires supportive policies and appropriate interventions to make it productive and sustainable.

Pastoralism is people centric, natural resource based livestock production. We invite you to enjoy the people, the rich culture, to appreciate the challenges of their environment and daily lives, and understand their deep attachment to livestock.

We are all connected to pastoralists ... 90% of the meat we eat (tasty Nyama Choma) and the milk, yogurt, butter and ghee we enjoy comes from pastoralists. And perhaps you are wearing nice comfortable leather shoes ... and are planning a trip to a game park located in a pastoralist area!

We hope these images help us connect with pastoralists and begin to see that pastoralism is viable and needs to be supported.

## **The Civil Society Organizations Pastoral Task Force**

Members: Associates for Development, Bio-diversity Initiative, Center for Basic Research, Joint Energy and Environment Projects, Karamoja Development Program, Kulika Charitable Trust, Minority Rights Group International, New Horizons, Nyabushozi Development Association, Oxfam (GB) Uganda, Panos Eastern Africa, SNV Uganda, Uganda Environmental Education Foundation, Uganda Land Alliance and Uganda National NGO Forum.

### **Introduction: Who are Uganda's Pastoralists?**



When you mention 'pastoralist' most Ugandan's will think of the Karamojong or the Bahima. They are not far off the mark, except that infact pastoralist communities are found in as many as 29 out of Ugandan's 56 districts. Ugandan Pastoralists are from many different ethnic groups. Pastoralists are as diverse as the districts they hail from, yet they share many commonalities: they live in harsh and exacting environments which dictate their livelihood; livestock is central to their production systems, and their lives are often based on strong social ties and patterns.

Different types of pastoralists exist in Uganda. The transhumant pastoralists maintain a home base, but move satellite herds in

search of pasture and water during dry seasons. Other pastoralists are agro-pastoralists and combine a level of crop production with livestock keeping.

Images of pastoralists are laden with cultural pictures ... indeed, traditional institutions continue to govern the lives of many pastoralists. However, these are not simply sentimental practices that should simply be done away with. Harsh environmental conditions, which sometimes lead to loss of livestock and even human lives, have taught pastoralists that working together as communities is the only way to ensure survival. Many traditional practices are therefore structure and instituted to help maintain a strong community social fabric.

For others, stories of conflicts and insecurity are most vivid. Cattle raids sound familiar. But perhaps far less familiar are the realities of pastoralist lives. The challenges of erking a life out of an exacting and unforgiving environment. The alienation of land and therefore loss of grazing land and water rights. The lack of access to basic rights like water, primary health, primary education that have narrowed the life base of many pastoralist people. Indeed the poorest districts in Uganda are pastoralist districts. The three poorest districts in each of Uganda's regions have significant pastoralist populations.

Pastoralists in Uganda have been marginalized since colonial times. Appropriate supportive policies and development

initiatives that capture their aspirations are needed. Many times pastoralists have been relegated to continue a life of vicious cycles of poverty on the premise that they are not ready to change, indeed refuse to change. However these assertions have not taken into consideration the challenges pastoralists face. Pastoralists weigh risks, and therefore often respond cautiously to innovations and introduced knowledge. Having studied pastoralist communities, Niamir Fuller (1998) cautioned

*"... although knowledge is extremely important by itself, it cannot simply be 'plugged' into development. Focus has to be on the process by which the knowledge is translated into actions, rules and changes to the system,"* As Kottak (1991) succinctly states

*"... the goal is that of changing so as to maintain: i.e., (manageable, acceptable and specific) changes (are introduced) so as to preserve a system while making it function more effectively."*

The over-arching goal should be to integrate policy and development interventions into the pastoral strategy. This requires a healthy appreciation of the status quo, while enabling pastoralist populations to transform.

## **Symbolism**

### **a. The long horned Ankole cow**

**The long horned Ankole cow is the main breed for the many of the south/western pastoralists the cow/breed believed to have been introduced by the Bachwezi dynasty is symbol of pride. The horns are predominantly white and have different names depending on their shapes. Closely related to the horn's shape and size is the colour of the skin of each cow. Every individual keeps a specific and distinct colour. These are useful for identification and beauty. Each cow has a name based on the skin colour, shape of**



**horns. Some cattle are named in reflection of life circumstances.**

**b. The bell.**

A bell is a very important symbol for the pastoralists. In South-Western Uganda there are two main types of bells. The first is the closed bells (Amajugo) and the second one is the open bell (omurebe). The closed bells (amajugo) are always identified with a herd that is less than a hundred. Once the numbers reach 100 (Igana ryente) one then puts in an open bell. The bells are always dressed on the best fed cow or heifer. The one that will make it sound well. Traditionally once a herd reaches one hundred cows,





the kraals are always separated. Individuals that have attained a level of having two- three open bells (amagana abiri nari ashatu) were regarded and upheld as opinion leaders in society and hence could work as arbitrators.



### **c. Informal education:**

In the pastoral communities, like in any traditional society, boys learnt from their fathers and girls from their mothers. The young boys normally start by looking after the calves and then the whole herd. Boys as young as 10 years old are able to trace the origin of every cow in the kraal, know the names of each

cow, and have some basic knowledge of animal diseases and treatment.

A stick is also an important symbol. In the pastoral community, every male from the age of five carries a stick. The boy in the picture looks into the future with determined eyes ready to defend his herd. The adults add a spear to the stick. This is not to say that the pastoralists are outlaws but keeping cows is a risky job especially where one could meet wild animals. The stick and spear are defense tools.



#### **d. Leadership**

The pastoral community especially from the South Western Uganda were the first to embrace the Christian revival that went

to Ankole and parts of Buganda in the 1930's through 40's. Many of the pastoral communities accepted religion and many were baptized. They later learnt how to read the Bible and write their names. This revival helped them to adopt some of the western cultures like dressing in western cut suits. The families that converted to Christianity were able to send their children to school. Today you will find pastoralists who never went to school well dressed, with clean traditional homesteads and embracing modern technologies like radios and telephones. Many elders have substituted the traditional stick with the western fashioned walking stick. The walking stick has been integrated into local culture and are now carved in the communities.

### **e. The Milk Gourd/Pot (Ekirere, Ekishaabo, Ekyanzi)**

The milk gourd is a long time honored household container in many pastoralist communities and homes. There are different gourds, each selected and prepared for a different purpose. Families keep gourds and pots for years.



A big gourd is set aside for churning butter or ghee. Each day a specific amount of milk is added to the gourd contents so as not to destroy the butter/yogurt culture that is in the gourd.



The women in the family then spend sometime shaking the gourd. Milk pots are carved from oak trees, and have patterns on them. Early each morning women rise to smoke the gourds and pots over an incense burner to prepare them for fresh milk. Milk remains a staple food for pastoralist people. In many areas, one really drinks water. It is considered a disgrace to serve a guest water, or even milk with water in it. Guests are served milk. Gourds have remained within pastoralist communities, even with the integration of plastic and other

man made containers. These containers don't serve the same purpose, they don't keep milk as cool, nor do they add that special secret flavor that only gourds hold! Can you imagine 'smoking' a plastic water jug? The gourds that are deemed of less quality are often relegated to other duties such as holding water, grain and flour and other household duties. Often these gourds are cut into calabashes or half gourds.

## Natural Resources



### a. Rangeland/ Grazing Land/ Pasture

Pastoralism is a natural resource based livelihood. Pastoralists rely upon the precarious and harsh environment of the areas in which they live. Some of the areas are classified as arid, many as semi-arid, but most are characterized by a pronounced and often prolonged dry season, and low and unreliable rainfall. Drought is a common phenomenon in pastoralist areas.

The exacting climate produces poor vegetation, and combined with poor soils, and rough and difficult terrain makes it very harsh and yet fragile environment. Precious little of man's

domesticated crops can grow on a sustained basis in these environments without significant external inputs. The opportunistic pastoral lifestyle that provides flexibility to utilize resources across the landscape is best adapted to the environment.

Land degradation is evident in many pastoralist areas. A blanket blame is accorded to pastoralists. However many underlying causes are evident including the backlash from land alienation due to fencing of some areas (making it inaccessible to other pastoralists), abandoned cropping, insecurity that restricts movement across landscapes, poor siting of water that encourages concentration of animals around water points among others. The issues of land degradation cannot be curbed nor reversed until root causes are addressed.

Another form of degradation i.e., invasion of weedy species is spreading in pastoralist areas, rendering once valuable land almost useless. Common invaders include thorny *Acacias* and '*Omutete*' or *Cymbopogon afronardus*. The latter has decimated large areas of Southern-Western Uganda and is rapidly spreading into Eastern Uganda. This weed is comparable in its vengeance and impact to the Water Hyacinth that threatened the fishing industry and water body ecologies. Warnings of the potential negative impact of *Omutete* were issued as early as the late 1960's! Pastoralists in South western Uganda need to sell as many as one to two cattle to provide enough money to

clear one hectare of *Omutete*! Only the rich ones can afford this. Many pastoralists move to other areas. Unfortunately, the *Omutete* seed is effectively spread via the dung of cattle. So pastoralists unknowingly carry their problem with them.

## **b. Water**

Water is life, and more so for pastoralists who live in areas where water is scarce, and opportunities for recharge of water sources through rains that are erratic. Water is often a source of conflict and yet traditionally water points also provided an important meeting point for pastoralist people on a daily basis.

In South-Western Uganda, many cattle keepers dig shallow wells as result these wells dry during the dry season. The art of watering cows is sophisticated, once one has located a water catchment, a well of about 10mx5m is dug. A watering trough is molded next to the well. The trough is prepared (smeared) with brown soil to turn the water brown.

It is a common belief to the pastoral community that cows like the brown soil. In some situations more than one person is required to fill the trough especially when water is so low (okweshera Omunago). The watering exercise is done by both men and women. Communal watering is common and is always a fun making time. After watering the cows, herdsman bathe, wrestle and compare and challenge each other by demonstrating the strength and ability of their bulls to chase one another.





**Water dams are some of the main water sources in pastoralist areas. Some dams provide clean water to large pastoralist communities.**



**Other dams however, have silted and present a challenge for pastoralists. Some pastoralists have settled around dams resulting in degradation of the areas around the dams. Means to diffuse this phenomenon are needed.**



### **c. Mobility/ Migration in Search of Water and Pasture**

Migration or mobility is probably the underlying cause for the controversies around water provisioning. Pastoralists view their resources from a landscape view. That is pastoralists assess their landscape not on the basis of boundaries such as fences, district boundaries or national/international boundaries, but rather as where they can access wet season and dry season resources. Pastoralists will therefore make decisions on where and when to move based on assessment of the situation.

The most well-known migrations are those of the Karamojong into neighboring districts. However migrations in Central and Southern Uganda e.g., into the Kagera basin or towards Lake Kyoga are almost annual events.

Migrations impact upon all aspects of pastoralist life and affect all family and community members. In Nakasongola districts, communities meet to decide where next to locate their complementary basic school classes (CHANCE classes) once the prolonged dry season sets in.

In most cases, families have to make serious decisions on how to manage the migration. Herds are often divided into core herds (young animals, small stock, old and sick animals, pregnant animals) and satellite herds that have the more hardy animals. The latter are then moved in search of water and pasture.

Decisions on when and where to migrate are often discussed as a community, led by elders, but families take final decisions. Men do most of the scouting for pasture and water led by kraal leaders.

The role of women and girls in migration is perhaps less documented, but nonetheless significant. Young women are often charged with moving household property and will go with the migrating group to put up and care take the house. Young women also often travel long distances back to the home base taking grain exchanged for livestock to the family left behind. The women who stay back at the home base are expected to take care of the home, and the livestock especially the calves. This is an enormous responsibility considering that the calves

are the core of the future herds.

Migration routes are not danger free, and migrants often expect and do incur hostility from host communities. However, pastoralist communities have and employ negotiation skills that often allow them to temporarily settle and live harmoniously within their host communities, often sharing homesteads. Cases of violence and conflict during and at the end of their tenure unfortunately occur.





## Livestock

Pastoralists keep many different livestock: cattle, goats, sheep, camels and chicken. Pig rearing however, is rare and often frowned upon.

### a. Cattle

Cattle are the central love of pastoralists. They are symbols of prestige, a source of pride and satisfaction, a bank of wealth. Cattle are often given as a sign of friendship. Pastoralists consider cattle as companions, and develop intimate relationships with them from very early in childhood. Often cattle are given individual names.

A well bred herd is a source of pride and prestige for the owner. An individual with such herd is always admired by many. In many cases he becomes an opinion leader in his locality. Many people will want to exchange cows with him (Okuhaana).





## **b. Goats and Sheep:**

Along side the herds of cattle, pastoralists keep goats and sheep. The sheep normally graze with cows. Pastoralists do not eat mutton. These are normally sold or exchanged for food or other commodities. The goats are kept for both consumption and sale. Once a visitor comes into a home, a goat is slaughtered for him.

If it's a highly honored visitor then a young bull is slaughtered. The goats and sheep are one biggest source of income to pastoral women because these are stock that women can own. This situation is however changing in some areas where men are beginning to take over goat keeping due to the income that they can get from it.



### c. Camels

**Camels are perhaps lesser known livestock of pastoralists being found mostly in North-Eastern Uganda. Camels are**



**highly valued and are used to transport household equipment and other goods. Camels also provide milk and are sometimes slaughtered for important celebrations.**



## Contribution to the Economy



### a. Milk

The Banyakole have a saying that "Obuzaare bw'ente namabeere" the love for the cow is because of its milk. The milk is taken raw (un boiled) boiled or cultured. The milk taken directly from a cow is warm and frothy, and the tiny air bubbles make it a smooth drink! Both the young and the old depend



In addition to home consumption, excess milk is sold out. The milk is collected into the cooling plants



on milk. In pure pastoral communities a family depends almost exclusively on milk.



located in the community and transported to the urban centers. However, there are few collecting centers and some places are not accessible. During the time, when there is a lot of milk, the communities are paid very little money and sometimes their milk rejected.

**In most parts of western Uganda-cattle corridor, milk costs less than 200 Uganda shs per litre compared to an average 800 Uganda shs it costs**

**in the city center.**

**With the provision of more cooling plants in pastoralist's communities, more families have tried to improve their herds. Some have started cross breeding and settling on a permanent basis. Such families have managed to provide quality education to their children, access proper medication and build decent homes. The provision of cooling plants have provided an alternative source of income as many youth now operate and manage the collection of milk, and man the collecting plants and centers.**



**The challenge still remains for**

**many pastoralist areas that are remote with difficult terrain and very poor infrastructure. Development of cheese and ghee enterprises may better serve those locations where milk cannot reach collection points without spoiling. Proper infrastructural and marketing support are prerequisite for livestock products that are largely perishable.**



## **b. Meat**

**A "*Kafunda*" or drinking joint/social meeting place is surely incomplete without "*Nyama Choma*" or the popular roast meat. In Kampala, pork may be a serious contender, but for the rest of Uganda, goat meat and beef are the choice meats. 90% of Uganda's meat originates from pastoralists and small holders who hold 90% of Uganda 's stock.**

**Each day hundreds of cattle are slaughtered around the country. In many pastoralist areas in Southern Uganda, meat**



**markets are found along side the road or at small trading center established by the communities. Both raw meat and roasted meat are offered for sale. It is however rare for pastoralists to slaughter their cattle for home consumption. Families only eat beef during a function or when an animal dies ..., or fails to respond to treatment.**

**At the meat markets, ghee will also be found on sell by women who utilize the income for household and personal needs. In some communities women groups have been established and these are in-charge of buying and selling ghee.**

**Uganda has a great potential for production of meat and hides**





**and skins. This potential is however not realized due poor disease control and poor infrastructure. Pastoralist communities have poor access to veterinary services, and the services, including drugs are too costly. Most countries that would be willing to import Ugandan meat have stringent disease free meat requirements. Ticks destroy the skins and hides of Ugandan livestock reducing the quality and therefore the potential income.**

### **c. Horns**

Horns remain a largely untapped 'side' product of livestock production. Horns can be used to make buttons, jewelry and other products. This remains an area of limited knowledge resulting in waste of an

otherwise available and valuable source of income. Jewelry making would provide an opportunity for cottage industries that offer space for low start-up costs and latitude for innovation. While pastoralist communities use horns for making wind instruments, most horns are dumped, presenting a waste hazard.



## Governance and Traditional Institutions



**Pastoralists live a very social life, where many decisions are made communally. Elders are accorded high honor and respect and their views are given much weight in the discussions. Among the Karamojong, when there is need to discuss any matter, members of**

**the community  
congregate. Each takes  
their place, sitting in a  
semi-circle facing the  
direction of their  
ancestry.**

**During a discussion,  
order is maintained, with  
time and respect given  
to each speaker to  
articulate their thoughts.  
First the elders speak,  
then youth leaders are  
given an opportunity to  
speak.**



Women, and children often do not get an opportunity to speak at such functions, although in many places this is changing. However, research has shown that women, especially mothers and wives have strong influence on the men folk. Often they garner this influence within their homesteads. Mothers are known to incite or prevent their sons from participating in raiding and other activities. The place of women in traditional institutions however needs to be strengthened through dialogue and sensitization. Women hold the responsibility of ensuring the health and food security of homes, and they need to be able to



engage in decision-making.

## **Conflict and Insecurity**



Conflict and insecurity occur in pastoralist areas. While some of this is perpetuated by criminals, conflict also occurs because of the need to share resources. Conflicts can occur between households, communities, ethnic groups and across borders.

Inappropriate policies have not supported production of shared natural resources resulting in escalation of conflict and insecurity in pastoralist areas. The conflict has intensified due to shrinking resources as traditional dry season/drought resources are alienated. The conversion of wetlands into rice paddies, the encroachment of cropping into pastoralist land, the growth of mining enterprises, the gazettement of pastoralists land as wildlife reserves has increased resource pressures for pastoralists.

The security problem has been exacerbated by proliferation of small arms and weapons, as many pastoralist areas are border frontiers that join up to arms trade corridors. Rigorous initiatives are needed to address the cross border issues. Women and children often present a face that is not seen and a voice that is unheard in public fora on the issue of conflict. But women's lives are radically affected by conflict. While men

participate in the frontline conflicts and make decisions there, women have to ensure food security, the security of children and household goods. Women often carry large amounts of food stores, and at times the granaries themselves to safe locations which may be tens of kilometers away. Women know that even in times of conflict and insecurity, they have to provide food for their families.

## Health



Pastoralists observe basic hygiene practices although this is often difficult when water is scarce. Sometimes, in dire circumstances, pastoralists utilize livestock urine for basic cleaning purposes; the livestock drink the water, the pastoralists gather the urine. The vegetation in the areas in which pastoralist live harbors mosquito's that make life very uncomfortable. Pastoralists aspire to have mosquito nets to protect themselves, but this remains a luxury for most.

Many are still unaware of the opportunity that mosquito nets offer since communication is very limited and many pastoralists do not have access to radios. Pastoralists utilize indigenous knowledge to control pests and to treat diseases. Many health practices are accompanied by ceremonial rituals.

In Southern Uganda, pastoralist men use gum boots to protect

themselves against thorns and other biting insects while looking after cattle. These boots are always washed and sun dried to make sure they do not smell.

There is still little knowledge on sexual health especially concerning HIV/AIDS. Many pastoralist communities have practices that make them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Remote locations mean poor access to health facilities and health information. Often health messages are not appropriately packaged to reach pastoralist populations.

## Education



**Education is an important element in society . The pastoral communities have informal education as any other African society. It is during this informal education that the young acquire skills from the old. Formal education has proved a challenge for pastoralist**

**communities. While some families embraced the formal education system, it is still common to find that only one child per family attends school while the rest are integrated into the livelihood duties.**



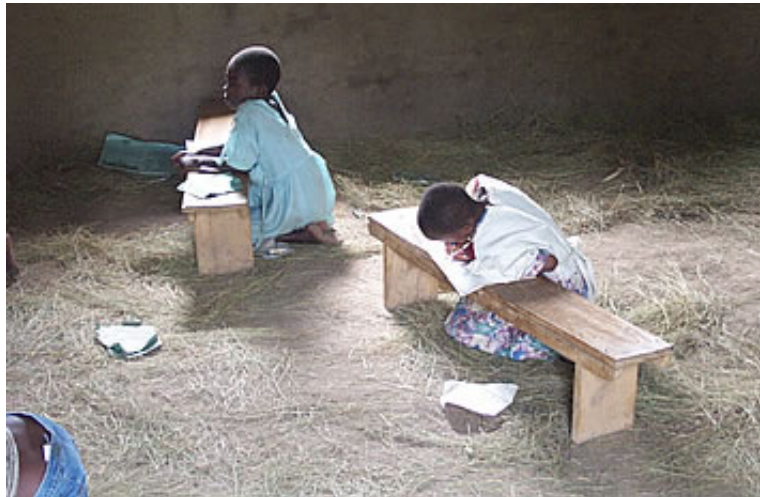
**The biggest problem however, is the high rate of drop outs. Even with the entry of Universal primary education, school drop out is very high. Recent reports (New Vision, March 2004) showed that upto 70% of children in Mbarara district who joined UPE in 1997, dropped out by end of 2003.**



**During the dry season children drop out of school to help their parents with cows. Although class rooms are temporary and poorly constructed, there is evidence that the communities**

**are willing to send their children to school.**

**The Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) has made significant gains in increasing school enrollment and community empowerment, but still has flaws. The mainstream school curriculum does not cover pastoralism topics - it in a sense Educates pastoralists out of pastoralism! That only does not help pastoralists live better in their community. Most Ugandans are born and will live and die within 10 - 100 km of their birth place. It is important therefore, for government to design**





**user friendly strategies that will allow communities to educate their children without abandoning their way of life.**

## **Alternative livelihoods**



**The pastoral communities need alternative ways to supplement their way of living. Pressures on natural resources, growing populations, lack of supportive policies and infrastructure for the pastoralist livelihood means more and more pastoralists have to seek alternative livelihoods. Indeed pastoralists are enterprising and do interact with the market within their communities**



**and with other communities.**



**Pastoralist women now engage in income generating activities like making of crafts, spinning with hand looms, ghee selling and other forms of trade. Men too engage in selling other commodities in their small trading centers.**

**Rearing of chicken, goats and sheep are aimed at providing alternative livelihood. Pastoral communities also live harmoniously with the wild. The communities graze their herds without tempering with the wild.**





