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From Warriors to Mere Chicken Men, and Other Troubles: An Ordinary Language Survey of Notions of Resilience in Ngakarimojong

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ABSTRACT

We examine some vernacular concepts that reflect Karamojong understanding and everyday experience of resilience following a devastating disarmament process, and what this means for resilience-driven humanitarian-development processes. We found that whereas humanitarian-development actors view market development, improved security, and accessibility as indicators of increased resilience capacity, local people paint a contrasting picture of a region with mounting inequality. We argue that Ngakaramojong concepts of resilience are, for the most part, unseen or ignored by humanitarian-development programming. In their current form, resilience-based intervention appears to neutralise and dismantle those aspects of communities that make them resilient in the first place.

Introduction

This paper examines whether resilience is what humanitarian-development processes in post-conflict settings in practice work with and to advance, or what they work against. Using the Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda as our case study, the paper examines some key vernacular concepts that reflect Karamojong understanding and everyday experience of resilience in the aftermath of an extended and devastating disarmament process, and what this means for resilience-driven humanitarian-development processes.

Karamoja, a region of north-eastern Uganda occupied by the predominantly pastoralist Karamojong, has experienced communal violence and multiple government disarmament campaigns since the colonial period. The most recent and excessively brutal disarmament was conducted by the Uganda Government between 2001 and 2011 with backing from development partners including the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA), European Union (EU) and United

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Nations Development Program (UNDP). This wave of disarmament has left communities in Karamoja without most of their highly adaptive pastoral livelihoods.

The concept of resilience has become a driving paradigm of both humanitarian-development interventions and the academic conceptualisations underpinning them. So much so that most humanitarian-development interventions in the region seem to incorporate ideas of resilience. Examples of interventions include the Pro-Resilience Action Project (Pro-ACT) by the EU, World Food Program (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU) by United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Uganda Karamoja Resilience Support Unit II by ACDI/VOCA; and Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Karamoja Sub Region (SURE-FS) by the African Innovation institute supported by Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Following the conclusion of the Government's disarmament campaign in 2011, post-conflict humanitarian–development interventions in the region have often pointed to improved security, market development, accessibility and mobility as indicators of a region with increasing resilience (Mercy Corps 2016, p. 12). This paper will argue that whilst the government and its development partners and NGOs in the region reference these indicators, distributive, and justice issues such as increased poverty, inequitable income and resource distribution and access, and exploitative relationships may have been equally exacerbated.

Resilience as a concept has been attributed a variety of meanings, but is often presented as the ability of communities or socioecological systems or individuals to absorb shocks and to retain their function and form through reorganisation, presenting a solution to the complexity and uncertainty presented by change (Cooper and Wheeler 2015, p. 96). It has also been presented as 'the capacity of communities in complex socio-ecological systems to learn, cope, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks and stresses' (Mercy Corps 2016, p. 7).

Resilience as used in development theory and practice, however, has proved to be a deeply problematic term that can function to distort developmental problems, ignoring and marginalising local politics, and shifting responsibility away from global or national structures of inequality and onto local victims of crises (Cooper and Wheeler 2015). The anti-political nature of resilience theorising has been a recurring theme in the literature, in which the concept and its shaping of programming are seen to disguise the reiteration of previously ineffective interventions and to reproduce and reinforce existing inequalities, or become co-opted by other problematic or normative agendas (Cavanagh, 2017, Dobson *et al*. 2015, Vindevogel *et al*. 2015, Liao and Fei 2016, Ziervogel *et al*. 2017).

This paper argues that those who survive conflicts such as in Karamoja may do so because they appreciated individual or group characteristics or behaviours or understood and dealt with external or environmental factors crucial for survival. These behaviours and environmental/external factors have names in their local languages or figure in their sociocultural customs communicated through stories or sayings. For instance, in Karamoja, research participants highlighted concepts such as *warriorhood, 'kiwa ekile'* (hide the man), '*apalago'* (vulnerability), *'Ngimaaniko lu apolok'* (to be identified with fat and healthy-looking cattle), *or 'echuet'* (the art of brewing) as some of the ideas that underpinned local concepts of resilience.

In addition, we found that new words and concepts around resilience may have emerged as a result of surviving conflicts and evolving threats. Our case of Karamoja revealed such words and concepts, including *'ata lookoroi'* (mere chicken men), '*ngulu eya ngikial'* (those with teeth), *'ata lonetia'* (petty theft), *'ngiwonyoi'* (hooligans), '*ebooking*[1]*'*, and *'buze-out'* – both words are derived from the English words 'booking booze' and 'taking booze out of town' respectively.

Together, these concepts and words deployed by communities during and after crisis such as conflict, are significant for their survival and recovery, but also differentiated those who coped and those who did not. We posit that these local concepts are fundamental for interventions that seek to genuinely bolster communities' capacity. This is because these concepts present the best window through which to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the population negotiates fundamental changes to their sociocultural, economic and livelihood choices.

The paper demonstrates that the above Ngakaramojong concepts of resilience are for the most part unseen, ignored or misinterpreted by development interventions in their approaches to resilience in the region. Even in circumstances where interventions appear to engage with local concepts such as warriorhood, they have only done so from a narrow perspective. For instance, warriorhood is viewed only from the perspective of the exercise of violence and looting; hooligans disturbing peace and stability, who could be reformed and turned into promoters of peace, rather than in relations to other concepts. This is seen in the reference to former warriors as 'reformed-warriors' in several post-disarmament development interventions (Mercy Corps 2018, SOMIRENEC 2021).

But by adopting a position that views warriors only in terms of violence, interventions failed to make the fundamental link between warriorhood and other concepts such as 'kiwa ekile' further discussed in this paper. Consequently, government and humanitarian-development actors in the region found an easy way of avoiding the cost and responsibility for a proper resilience programme that considers local context; instead the cost has been borne by local communities.

Resilience driven interventions in the region in their current form, despite their good intentions, do not seem to advance the resilience of the communities they target. Rather, as this paper demonstrates, on the contrary, interventions appear to neutralise and dismantle those aspects of communities that make them resilient to fundamental changes to their sociocultural, economic and livelihood strategies in the first place. Mercy Corps notes that: 'resilience is not the outcome of good development, but rather an ability that allows development to continue on positive trajectory in spite of disruption' (Mercy Corps 2016, p. 7). Whether this is what their interventions promote is a different matter, which we examine below.

This paper is a contribution to what, at present, is a limited representation of the perspective of conflict-affected communities in what is a huge academic literature about resilience in disciplines connected to post-conflict contexts, especially psychology, cultural and critical geography, and international development. The paper is not however, a deviation from existing scholarship of resilience, rather its primary aim is to bring into significance the perspective of how conflict-affected populations understand and communicate their own survival; and their identification of the factors enabling their potential recovery.

In contrast to the definitions and understandings of resilience most common in academic and international-development literature as earlier presented, this paper prefers an alternative perspective initially presented by Vindevogel *et al*. (2015), Dobson *et al*. (2015) and Liao and Fei (2016). This group of scholars suggest deriving locally significant or meaningful definitions of the concept, linking practices and understanding of coping with shocks and stresses to pre-existing local concepts and their uses instead of beginning with an externally imposed definition of resilience. Vindevogel *et al*. (2015) for instance argue that using concepts and methods derived as much as possible from within or through dialogue with intended recipients may better mobilise and empower communities to foster resilience through collective thought, planning, and action.

In subsequent sections, the paper offers a contextualised background to Karamoja in relation to the research interest and the research methodology, followed by a discussion of the findings. The paper draws out key experiences, understandings of resilience in the community's culture and everyday usage in their Ngakaramojong language; and their relationships with various humanitarian–development definitions and understanding of resilience.

Background

Up until the government's disarmament of the region began in 2001, Karamoja's economic, ecological and social system was best described in the context of their livelihood options (Nakalembe *et al*. 2017). With an

estimated population of 1.2 million, the region traditionally survived largely through a combination of pastoralism, and opportunistic agriculture to maximise their survival chances in characteristically harsh environmental conditions (UBOS 2016). Failed or poor crop yields driven by periods of prolonged drought and erratic rainfall patterns are a rampant occurrence in the region (UBOS 2016). As such, livestock-based products in the form of meat, milk, and blood[2] have been fundamental and the most suitable source of sustenance and identity for the region's population (Nakalembe *et al*. 2017).

As a way of coping in a region with recurrent environmental extremes, migration has been a key element of pastoralist adaptive and coping strategies. For the pastoralist communities in East Africa more broadly, the movement of herds and people between pasture areas has historically been based on weather conditions as well as disease outbreaks (Gray *et al*. 2002).

Socio-cultural systems and governance structures likewise revolved around livestock management, with a complex system of councils of elders in *manyatta* overseeing seasonal movements of herds, water and rangeland use in the region. *A manyatta* is a small static, semi-permanent pastoral settlement, surrounded by a woodpile fence comprising around 50 households. In the past they were predominantly occupied by women, children and elderly people all year round (Quam 1997, p. 34); the men's presence was based on the seasonal availability of pasture and fresh water.

Men spent most of the dry months seeking fresh pastures for their herds in mobile kraals[3] which in most cases took them to neighbouring communities along the region's western borders – Acholi, Lango and Teso lands (Quam 1997). While livelihood strategies vary across Karamoja to differing degrees, often reflecting underlying ecological and historical differences, and despite recent government attempts to suppress pastoralism in favour of agriculture, participants in our research still considered themselves as cattle keepers. Livestock herding was essential to both sociocultural identity and livelihood options.

Interethnic cattle raiding has long been a critical occupation of the pastoralist population of the semi and arid north of eastern Africa (Fukui and Turton 1979, Kurimoto and Simonse 1998). In addition to social and animal mobility as a fundamental coping mechanism in a region with profoundly uncertain and highly erratic rainfall patterns, periods of environmental extremes, and disease outbreaks, raiding provided an alternative coping mechanism for successful nomadic pastoralism (Kurimoto and Simonse 1998). Raiding provided a means to recoup livestock losses from drought and disease outbreaks; essentially a way to redistribute herds quickly among people (Gray 2000).

Rather than pastoralism and the mobility of pastoralists being viewed as survival mechanisms specially adapted to and crucial for the survival of pastoralist communities in a harsh and highly unpredictable environment, successive governments have perceived it as a threat since the early colonial

era (Gray *et al*. 2002, 2003). The Ugandan government has persistently pursued policies aimed at restricting pastoralists' mobility. These have included demarcation of national boundaries; protection of areas for wildlife (Gray *et al*. 2002); a mandatory farming policy to counter persistent food insecurity; and a move to abolish pastoralism entirely (Wambede and Woniala 2019).

The post-independence civil wars in the country, particularly in northern Uganda, restricted access to pastures and water during dry periods. Consequently, the limitation in seasonal migration due to civil war amplified pressure on Karamoja's environmental resources, intensifying already volatile inter-group competition. The situation worsened due to the sudden availability of semi-automatic rifles in the late 1970s as Idi Amin's government collapsed. Consequently, a new frontline emerged within and between the Karamojong and their neighbours significantly complicating seasonal migratory grazing. Between the 1980s and early 2000s, guns ensured that violence intensified during raids and in accessing grazing.

In 2001, the Ugandan government initiated a series of disarmament campaigns, culminating in the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Plan (KIDDP) in 2006 (OPM 2007). The disarmament exercise was accompanied by an anti-pastoralist policy primarily driven towards settled sedentary farming as a sustainable source of livelihood – a means to restrict pastoralists' mobility (Wambede and Woniala 2019). Because of these actions, an estimated 70 per cent of livestock were lost reportedly to livestock epidemics spread through government sponsored protected kraals; reduced livestock reproductive rates due to poor nutrition; distress sales; cross-border raids from northern Kenya and south-eastern Sudan; and the loss of mobility for grazing (Mercy Corps 2016, p. 14). Simply put, the Karamojong lost their guns to the government – who now had a monopoly over the ownership and use of firearms. With this, went their ability to protect their cattle and access restricted resources in the neighbouring communities.

In addition to these actions, the region witnessed a surge in the number of humanitarian–development agencies who described their activities specifically in terms of improving the populations' resilience capacity. For instance, a market system development approach to resilience building project implemented by Mercy Corps between 2012 and 2017 called 'Growth, Health and Governance (GHG)' focused on expanding economic opportunities through market development; promoting maternal and child health; and boosting nutrition and improving governance (Mercy Corps 2015, 2016).

Another example is that of the WFP's Enhanced Resilience for Karamoja Programme (ERKP) initiated in 2013 with the financial backing of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID) (Kaari *et al*. 2016). In a major strategic shift, WFP, which had been present in Karamoja for over

50 years providing lifesaving food relief to the most vulnerable, changed its strategy in 2008 from food aid to food assistance, integrating its work into government policy (Gayfer *et al*. 2012, Kaari *et al*. 2016).

Like the government, ERKP aimed to deliver food in emergencies and concurrently sought to empower the hungry to overcome food insecurity through agriculture and market support as a more sustainable alternative measure to pastoralism. However, issues such as limited participation of community members in the planning, selection and implementation of projects have been highlighted as contributing to the project's poor outcome (Kaari *et al*. 2016).

Through market system development, a new social order has emerged, boosted by improved security and accessibility, threatening to replace pre-existing sociocultural practices. In the course of our research, participants described social relationships and exchanges as previously having been based on trust, love and the anticipation of blessings of good fortune and luck but money had now become the dominant measure of value. With current anti-pastoralism interventions undermining the economic viability of pastoralism – the essence of the Karamojong's resilience capacity – the majority of the population found themselves having to break stones, cut trees for firewood and building materials to sell, or sell their labour in order to buy food from the market as our findings highlight. These include environmentally unsustainable natural resource extraction.

Recent interventions intended to address the region's perceived poverty and food insecurity (Czuba 2017, Wambede and Woniala 2019) seem to have increased peoples' vulnerabilities and weakened existing coping mechanisms. There is little evidence of new, viable livelihood options generated since disarmament except for those which participants describe in their daily vocabulary as merely 'survival measures', which expose participants to exploitation, gender-related violence and unhealthy power relationships as well as new sets of vulnerabilities.

Methodology

This paper is based on two rounds of focus group discussions (FGD) conducted over the periods July and August 2018 and August and September 2019. Thirty FGDs were conducted with nine of those in the first round acting as a pilot study whose preliminary analysis and findings then formed the basis for the second round. The second round provided a more grounded study due to the insights afforded by the preliminary findings.

A team of seven researchers, mother-tongue Ngakaramojong-speakers based and operating in the region, conducted the FGDs across five of Karamoja's seven districts: Napak, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, Kotido and

Kaabong. Of these, four are authors of this paper. FGDs targeted male and female participants aged 18 and over, with group sizes ranging from five to eight participants, and took place in both rural and urban settings. Populations from areas with particular geographical characteristics, dry and green belts, were also targeted. Socio-economic and demographically defined groups of former warriors; women retuned from migration to other parts of Uganda; elderly men and women; and youths were used to disaggregate groups and related data during the second period of field research to determine whether these characteristics had any influence on how people experience, navigate and talk about crisis, vulnerability and resilience.

We opted for FGDs as our data-gathering vehicle as the Karamojong rely on oral history and literature, with elders viewed as the main source of knowledge and authority. Elders are typically older people who are seen as figures of authority based on their lifelong experience, deep community knowledge and leadership. Due to the nature of individuals and groups targeted by our research, we found FGDs the most suitable method of information gathering because group discussions helped in triggering memories of historical events.

Research Findings

'Apalago' (Vulnerability): The Changing Landscape, Meanings and Experiences

For a region that has the lowest rainfall in Uganda (Mugerwa *et al*. 2014, Nakalembe *et al*. 2017), it is difficult to imagine flooding as a major problem. However, participants pointed to flash flooding and prolonged drought as among the main problems facing the region at the time of this research. The problem was exacerbated by environmental degradation attributed to increasing reliance on environmental resource exploitation as an important coping strategy.

With the return to relative peace in the region, previously inaccessible geographical areas often referred to as 'green belt' have been transformed and become accessible to the population (Nakalembe *et al*. 2017). Recent literature talks of new agricultural settlements mostly along the green belt zones emerging, as households and individuals, who have lost their animals to disarmament and raiding, migrate to previously unsettled areas to take on farming (Mercy Corps 2016). Examples of such settlements include Lobanyia in Kotido and Lokolia in Kaabong districts.

Because decades of violence and armed raids prevented people from accessing and understanding the ecology of these places, the population has moved into unchartered zones without vital knowledge of their new environment. A middle-aged former warrior from a community which had relocated to the newly opened land in Kaabong District, said:

> Here in this community of Lokolia, I think we settled in a bad location of insecurity; poor soils because they cannot even support the crop growth. We lack crops that ripen very fast to catch up with the little delayed rains during drought. Take this year for example; there was very poor harvest due to too much water that affected the crops.[4]

A young woman in her mid-twenties, from another of the newly opened areas in Nakapelemoru in Kotido said:

> If you plant something, you will find that there are diseases that affect the sorghum. Sorghum is not healthy, you will find some sorghum with funny infection, even g-nuts, but I do not know whether it is water that is bad or disease. We do not know and have no solution.[5]

Upon losing most of their animals following disarmament, communities told us that information previously relevant for survival during armed raids was no longer relevant for their present situation. New information was therefore required to match the shifting survival landscape. Of much bigger concern for those migrating was the appropriateness and suitability of farming to the erratic climatic conditions of Karamoja, one reiterated by Nakalembe *et al*. (2017).

FGDs highlighted conflicting understanding and views of circumstances in the region between the locals and external actors, including government. For example, erratic weather patterns, including droughts and floods, created a common concern among participants that dry spells had become longer and rainfall patterns difficult to predict. In other words, participants see unpredictability of weather as posing a major challenge to their day-to-day survival.

However, some external academics and humanitarian–development actors in the region seem to disagree with these perceptions held by the local population and their accounts and definitions of threat and vulnerability. They argue that precipitation and annual rainfall data does not support the concerns expressed by FGDs (Jordaan 2015, Levine 2010; Mercy Corps 2016). This paper notes that such a gap in understanding between the local population and external actors is one reason for poor resilience outcomes in the region.

In their resilience assessment report for the region, Mercy Corps (2016) noted that the concept of drought is relative and linked to the dominant type of livelihood practiced in a specific region. Nakalembe *et al*. (2017) highlight how government driven programmes instituting sedentary agriculture were the main drivers of cropland expansion in Karamoja, and the lack of evidence that these policies were translating into an increase in overall crop yields. Rather evidence pointed to the increasing importance and reliance on food aid due to recurring crop failures (Nakalembe *et al*. 2017).

This seems to support the assertion by Levine (2010, p. 2) that 'for as long as livelihoods are livestock dependent, then, we can say that there have been no recent droughts in Karamoja. There have only been "droughts" for people who are settled and who rely on farming'. Yet participants in the FGDs explained that pastoralist too, are being impacted by these weather extremes. The reason they offer is that pastoralists are struggling with flooding and droughts because of government policies restricting pastoralists' mobility, a traditional coping mechanism.

FGD findings demonstrate that it is not merely changes in the dominant type of livelihood practiced by communities which determines whether or not they suffer drought. Rather, vulnerabilities arise from changes to (or in this case government's restriction on) populations' existing coping strategies previously deployed by communities in response to extreme weather.

'Kiwa Ekile' (Hide the Man): Warriors, Thieves or Thugs?

Another concept that featured very prominently in FGD discussions of crisis, vulnerability, resilience and coping strategies was *'kiwa ekile'* (literally translated as 'hide the man'), a concept that was vital for coping during the periods preceding disarmament. Before disarmament, as Gray *et al*. (2003) point out, raiding, predominantly conducted by a group of warriors, presented one of the innovative ways through which the Karamojong tried to ensure group survival. Participants point out that cattle raiding was prohibited among members of the same ethnic sub-groups, for instance, Jie raiding fellow Jie.

Information regarding seasonal movement of animals, water sources and rangeland, and raid-related intelligence was vital for guaranteeing pastoralists' survival. Lienard (2016) documents how male youth are initiated: Turkana boys would risk their lives surveying and spying on their rival groups to gather intelligence for raids. The Karamojong, Turkana and Pokot ethnic groups have had shared history of organised cattle raids within and between each other. As each group sought to gain advantage over the other, the information economy played a vital role.

There was therefore an aspect of Karamojong culture and Ngakaramojong language for ensuring that such intelligence was kept secret from outsiders at all costs. Participants referred to this cultural norm in Ngakaramojong as '*kiwa ekile*' which means, 'hide the man' – protecting the truth at all costs. The concept implies a sociocultural practice with a fundamental preference for the survival of communal life and lives over individual ideas of right, wrong, ownership and responsibilities (Correll and Park 2005, Lienard 2016).

Our research found that young men, some of whom were warriors who had previously engaged in raiding, took to stealing from their own families and members of the same ethnic groups, something that was uncommon before disarmament. Having lost their animals to disarmament-related

circumstances, these young men engaged in opportunistic petty theft of household items such as mosquito nets and chickens and occasionally larger animals (Stites and Akabwai 2010, Stites and Marshak 2016).

This fell outside the traditionally accepted boundary of *kiwa ekile*. In other words, it challenged the principles of *kiwa ekile* and the importance of the survival of communal life and lives over individual ideas of right and wrong and ownership. In response, contrary to *kiwa ekile*, the Karamojong took to exposing perpetrators – condemning and discrediting what community members perceived as socially and culturally immoral behaviour.

Participants frequently used some local Ngakaramojong words that have been adapted and used to denounce the unacceptable behaviour of a section of youths. Words such as *'Ata lonetia'*, which in Ngakaramojong denotes petty theft; or '*Ngiwonyoi'* which refers to 'hooligans', a group of violent criminally minded youths were frequently used. The community's adoption of these words reflected the violence and *apalago* (vulnerability) this group of young men exposed their victims to.

A former warrior in Nakapelimoru Sub County, Kotido District said:

> ... Those days,[6] it was not bad for someone to go for raiding or even to kill another person in the process of raiding because we were all raiding and killing each other. We used a slogan "*Kiwa ekile*" [hide the man], but now, we cannot hide the man anymore, we now capture and hand them over to the authorities.[7]

Participants in the research reported concerns that, the region's public authorities appeared to be struggling to contain and cope with this rising new pattern of theft. The issue here is whether this perceived threat of insecurity and vulnerability confirms failure on the side of the state to deliver the safety and security promised by the KIDDP. For instance, an elderly man in Nadunget Sub County, Moroto District said:

> Initially, during raids, it was important for intelligence of planned operations to be kept secret from the community, restricted to very few privileged people. Once animals were raided, the spoils were shared, and it benefitted the entire community. Community members shared the loss from such raids equally. However, today the concept of hiding the truth at all costs is no longer relevant, there is no fear because guns are no longer there; besides, it is easier to protect yourself from an unarmed person than it is with an armed one. Yet, this still requires communities' and authorities' willingness and ability to support and protect. [8]

It is evident that the government, rigorous though it has been in its drive to control the use of firearms, does not exercise a monopoly over judicial violence in Karamoja or the delivery of public goods and services (Hopwood *et al*. 2018). There is currently a dilemma in Karamoja when it comes to the provision of security to the population. Hopwood *et al*. (2018) best capture this dilemma:

> Even if the police and judiciary were motivated to perform their official roles, they might still struggle to do so. According to police and court personnel, complainants and witnesses, if they are willing to come forward at all, are threatened and sometimes killed by the family of the accused. If this hurdle is overcome, parties are likely to object to the slowness of the procedure, lack confidence in the integrity of the process and the actors, and have cultural and practical objections to giving evidence publically on matters that should be confidential to particular communities or families, in particular the size and location of a party's cattle herds, or their lack of guns, which would make them vulnerable to raiding.(Hopwood *et al*. 2018, p. S147)

This dilemma captures the concept of *kiwa ekile's* applicability in the everyday life of Karamojong at its best. It also demonstrates the parallels between governments second objective of the KIDDP of 'establishing law and order in Karamoja' (OPM 2007, p. xiii) and the local population's everyday experience with *kiwa ekile*. The dilemma was clear in the FGDs as participants grappled with the best possible ways of dealing with *ata lonetia*. One elderly former warrior in Nakapelimoru Sub County, Kotido District said

> . . . the authorities need to round up all the thieves in our community and lock them away or even kill them so that theft will never exist in our community again. [9]

This seems to assume the collapse of *kiwa ekile* and presumes the dominance of formal state authority in the region. However, an elderly woman in Moroto identified the core of the problem:

> The challenge for us is that these *ata lonetia* . . ., they steal our chickens, ducks and the sorghum in our granaries, yet what we are faced with, imagine, is our very own children. How are we supposed to deal with these challenges?[10]

In other words, how do you move from defending your own children with your life to now killing or handing them to state authorities – the very people you once protected, for similar or even worse actions. Rather than seeing it from the perspective of the local population's refusal to utilise the formal institution of the state due to fear of *apalago* resulting from the information they provide in regards to animals (Hopwood *et al*. 2018), our findings suggest that existing institutions seem to be ill-suited to addressing their current challenges.

Whilst the local population appears to be ready and willing to move away from some of the cultural practices and norms made irrelevant for coping with disarmament-related challenges, the absence or inadequacy of alternative institutions such as functional justice, law and order institutions seems to frustrate rather than facilitate post-conflict recovery. In short, current

alternatives on offer to the population by government and its development partners to facilitate post-conflict recovery and boost the region's resilience capacity do not reflect the Karamojong's day-to-day realities.

'Ngimaaniko Lu Apolok' (Identified with Fat and Healthy-looking Cattle) to 'Ata Lookoroi' (Mere Chicken Men)

Over the years, academics have documented the role and importance of initiation of youths into a social organisation called an age-set among the different cattle-keeping communities of the East African plains (Gulliver 1958, Lienard 2016). An age-set is a social system in which groups of young men born within a specified period of time, or groups of men who are otherwise defined as being of the same age, are instituted by the collective, in a ceremony called initiation into warriorhood (Ritter 1980, Lienard 2016). Age-sets are mostly found in societies (1) with limited presence of formal state institutions and infrastructure; (2) frequently engaging in warfare; in which (3) seasonal kin groups significantly vary in size and composition. This it hard for descent groups to rely on their dispersed male members to quickly muster war parties whenever defensive, retaliatory, preemptive, or predatory military activities demand it (Ritter 1980, Lienard 2016). The institution of age-set therefore produced warriors and was synonymous with warriorhood.

The Karamojong viewed warriors as formidable, fearless, and admired fighters culturally trained through the age-set/initiation mechanism and seasoned by raids and battles – individuals whose primary role was to fight for, provide and ensure the security of their communities against enemies facilitated by *kiwa ekile*. However, disarmament deprived a significant proportion of young men of their traditional roles and related resilience capacity as warriorhood was made irrelevant in the new political economy.

Being a warrior drew a far deeper meaning to the local population than just a specialism in violence, encompassing economic, sociocultural and identity perspectives. It was an important way to mobilise contingents of unrelated men when sociocultural and economic conditions did not permit reliance on the cohesive action of corporate kin groups (Lienard 2016). In FGDs, young men who aspired to become warriors described their frustration and inability to acquire such social identity and the humiliation of not being able to achieve formal initiation. Warriors who lost their social status to disarmament expressed their sense of severe loss of masculinity. They attributed it to the loss of animals and sense of protection to their families and community but also to the significance of warriorhood in Karamoja.

Stites and Akabwai (2010) confirm these concerns as they document how the loss of daily control over animals and transfer of protection duties to the military by Karamojong men shifted the way men were viewed within their communities. That is, previously celebrated warriors were being 'reduced to women' (Stites and Akabwai 2010, pp. 32–33)

Our research found general feelings of discontent among former warriors that current development interventions seem to weaken their social positions and limit their opportunities. One former warrior in Kaabong North notes that:

> A challenge we face as former warriors is that the educated have higher chances of gaining politically elected positions of influence. The educated also have access to government and NGO aid or grants meant for everyone in the community but these people tend to focus only on their own people leaving us out. Today, the very community that adored and respected us now prefers to listen to and respect the educated instead. We as warriors most times feel irrelevant in the current order.[11]

For many former warriors, the loss in social status was so great that they believed they had been reduced to *ata lookoroi* (mere chicken men) selling chickens, a traditionally feminine activity. A former warrior in Lobalangit in Karenga mentions this amidst mixed feelings and soft laughter:

> As warriors, we were respected and even worshiped; and we used to trade in '*ngimaaniko lu apolok*' [fat and healthy cattle]. However, just look at me today, I now sell chickens. This business has earned most of my friends and myself the name "*ata lookoroi*" [mere chicken men]. Yet this is socially degrading and frustrating but we are learning to live with it.[12]

The term 'reformed warrior' has emerged and is routinely used, mostly by humanitarian–development actors in Karamoja including Mercy Corps (2018) with reference to former warriors in their interventions. However, 'reformed' by definition implies having relinquished an immoral, criminal, or self-destructive lifestyle (McIntosh 2013). NGOs often define 'reformed warriors' as young people who have given up violence and the means to violence in Karamoja to become actors in peace through a reconciliation and reintegration process (Mercy Corps 2018, SOMIRENEC 2021). Even in circumstances where development interventions engage with local concepts such as warriorhood, they have only done so from their own narrow perspective of the concept, void of local context.

By adapting a position that views only from the perspective of the exercise of violence and looting or as hooligans disturbing peace and stability, who could be reformed and turned into promoters of peace, development interventions failed to make a fundamental link between warriorhood and other vital concepts and practices such as 'kiwa ekile' and initiation.

This paper finds that humanitarian-development processes in the region have not been effective in boosting the Karamojong's capacity to cope with recurrent crisis and stressors. We attribute this to the conflicting understandings and views of everyday realities between foreign actors and the local population that consequently affects the appropriateness, relevance and outcomes of post-conflict resilience driven interventions.

'Eyakatar Ngikial' (They Have Got Teeth): Market and the Changing Sociocultural Identity

In many FGDs, participants highlighted that prior to the disarmament, exchanges in the region were largely non-monetary involving interpersonal relationships built on people's ability to share and pool resources during both good and challenging times. This included resources such as labour, sorghum, animal products (milk, blood, and meat), animals from marriages, gifts from friendships, spoils from successful raids, and cohesion-building items such as *ngagwe* (local brew). In other words, community and individuals' survival and resilience capacity emphasised collective or group actions and responsibilities over individuals' (*kiwa ekile*).

Participants often presented this mode of transaction and social relationship as driven by the concept of friendship, trust, love and anticipation of blessings of good fortune for both the giver and recipient, emphasising collectivism. An elderly man from Lorengedwat Sub County in Nakapirit said:

> In the past, having cattle and sorghum at the same time ensured good life for the community members. Because people had cattle and sorghum, every community member was free to take their calabash to draw the blood. In Narisae,[13] for instance, there were people who did not have animals and so they would come with their calabashes to our home to draw blood from our animals. My family would give them not just blood but also some milk. My father would warn us never to let anyone who came asking for milk or blood to go home empty-handed. Therefore, life was good when people had wealth.[14]

As Mercy Corps and WFP, through their GHG and ERKP programmes, respectively, embarked on expanding economic opportunities through market development, food items gained monetary value and began to be traded outside the old social platforms that ensured traditional coping mechanisms. The new platform in this case represents the market. The ability to access basic and fundamental resources such as milk, blood, meat and sorghum in the market increasingly became the only and most viable survival option available to the local population during lean times. A group of mixed elderly men and women in Nakapiritpirit stated that:

> Life these days comes with a lot of changes and newer challenges because in the past people had cattle and sorghum at the same time. Community members shared it without ever thinking of or needing money. However, the cattle that we relied on have since vanished because of insecurity. Even the sorghum is no more because of rainfall inconsistency - prolonged droughts and flash floods. There is increased poverty due to lack of cattle and crops at the same time, which has dramatically changed the idea of good life in our area. Those still with animals would rather sell their milk and blood than offer it free to community members who have nothing to eat.[15]

Market development and improvement in economic opportunities which was supposed to be a blessing now means that only *'ngulu eya ngikial'* ('those with teeth') can access and participate in the new social order in a way community members in Karamoja consider 'decent'. The concept of *'ngulu eya ngikial'* in this case refers to an emergence of a social class with the means to access and participate in the market, or afford education, good health care and food security. A group member from Lokopo Sub County in Napak District explains that:

> In our community here in Napak, if someone says, in reference to a family that *"eyakatar ngikial"* [they have got teeth], it means that the family have got cattle, or educated children or have got mature boys in their household and that all is well with them[16]

With the move away from pastoralism and home crop production to market purchases and growth in the cash economy (Stites and Huisman 2010, p. 4), the importance of *'having teeth'* for households cannot be overstated. To emphasise the importance of 'having teeth' in their community, a middle-aged man from Nakapiripirit said:

> He who is capable of offsetting hunger and diseases, or educating his/her children, is one who possesses cattle which (s)he can drag and sell in the market and later use the money to buy food for his/her family. However, for you without animals, you head to the bush to cut down trees for charcoal or firewood or break stones for sale in the market to buy food for your household.[17]

Like in the pre-disarmament period, cattle remain the most important and valuable resource for sustainable livelihood in Karamoja. Participants consider those still in possession of animals as the most resilient and better placed to participate in the market. Those who have lost their animals now have to face either selling their labour; exploiting natural resources; turning to brewing local alcoholic beverages; or farming in order to participate in the market.

Alternatively, a new migration pattern provides a coping option as families send their children to major towns within and outside the region for street begging so they can send home money and other material items to support

the family. Whilst migration has historically been one of the predominant coping strategies in the region, recent migrations represent a new coping strategy.

As part of the disarmament campaign, the government together with its development partners constructed several dams in Karamoja, most significantly Kobebe, Nakicumet and Namatata in Moroto, Napak and Nakapiripirit Districts respectively (Wanyama 2011, Mugerwa *et al*. 2014). These were constructed as convergence dams with the aim of bringing various and previously competing pastoral ethnic groups together in one place to promote inter-communal resource sharing and engender peace and stability amongst the *ateker*.[18] Kobebe dam for instance, brought together several ethnic groups including Jie from Kotido District, Turkana from Kenya, Tepeth and Matheniko from Moroto District during the dry months from around October to March.

One of the most important aspects of these convergence dams is location, constructed along traditionally seasonal migratory routes taken by pastoralists for water and forage. This was a move primarily aimed at restricting historical pastoral migration into neighbouring Teso, Lango and Acholi lands.

In the past, women, children and the elderly stayed in the safety of *manyatta* all year round, while the men migrated with their herds, following water and fresh pastures. Following the dam projects, traditional migration practices ended. However, our findings, in line with other studies in the region by Nangiro (2018) and Mercy Corps (2016), highlight a shift in participation and the pattern of migration i.e., from rural-to-rural migration relating to pastoralism, primarily practised by men, to rural–urban migration. In the new migration configuration, women and children are the main participants (Nangiro 2018). Once in urban centres, these migrant women and children engage in a range of activities, the majority of which expose them to exploitation and unhealthy relationships (Mercy Corps 2016). These activities range from street begging to "casual labour, like housemaids," to prostitution and child trafficking at the extreme (Nangiro 2018).

One explanation for this role change is the nature of relationships between Karamojong warriors and neighbouring communities before disarmament. FGD participants point out that women and children are considered more likely to receive acts of kindness and generosity compared to the former warriors. Whilst migration can represent a positive adaptive strategy for a minority of individuals and households (Mercy Corps 2016), the majority utilising these survival strategies fall on a spectrum of *apalago* (vulnerability) (Nangiro 2018).

A shifting migration landscape and pattern in the region as a coping strategy highlights a vulnerable section of society with very limited space for raising their issues within development interventions (Mercy Corps 2016). This is because there is an element of persistent yet catastrophic

disregard of the local population's perspective and their involvement within development programming and implementation processes (Stites and Akabwai 2010, Mugerwa *et al*. 2014, Otim and Charles 2014).

For instance, in the convergence dam projects, Mugerwa *et al*. (2014, p. 64) highlight a general lack of community involvement at the time of dam construction. Decisions on the construction of the dams were taken by technocrats and contractors employed by foreign donors and non-governmental organisations, with minimal consultation with local communities. Both Mercy Corps' market system development programme and WFP's ERKP programmes were centred around the dams' anticipated potential (Mugerwa *et al*. 2014, pp. 58–66).

Because of their limited involvement in the process, communities perceive themselves merely as recipients and the development actors as providers (Mugerwa *et al*. 2014). On the side of interventions, development actors failed to understand local concepts such as warrior, *kiwe ekile* or *apalago* and how they impact people's understanding of their resilience and vulnerability. Design of interventions does not seem to have recognised new coping mechanisms discussed such as *'ata lonetia'*, *'ata lookoroi', 'eyakatar ngikial', or rural – urban* migration of women and children.

Consequently, rather than understanding and addressing reasons why Karamojong women and children find themselves on the streets of Kampala, the government has pursued a negative approach towards these migrants. Actions taken included rounding up children on the streets and detaining them in juvenile remand homes without any criminal charges (Nangiro 2018) or forcibly returning migrants to Karamoja, primarily aimed at stopping the trend of out-migration.

Interventions restricting traditional coping strategies as well as actions towards Karamojong responses to interventions highlighted in this section confirm what critics have long highlighted of resilience as a deeply problematic concept that distorts and de-politicises development problems, ignoring global, national and local power dynamics and structures of inequality. It passes responsibility for survival after crises onto local victims (Cooper and Wheeler 2015). Market development and sedentary agriculture, which are being pushed as boosters to communal resilience capacity, continue to amplify systematic exploitation of the poorest and weakest sections of society, particularly women and children as a labour force. It destroys rather than boosts their resilience capacity.

'Echuet' (The Art of Brewing): Coping with Market Development

In Karamoja, women were traditionally responsible for social relationships and the production of *ngagwe (*local brew) was central to communal cohesion building. The process of brewing *ngagwe* is *echuet*. However, as earlier

noted, the market is increasingly changing previous social relations from being based on survival of the collective such as *kiwa ekile* to individually driven survival such as *eyakatar ngikial*. Sorghum, an important item for brewing found itself among other traditional items traded outside the old social platform.

The few individuals who still own or have access to sorghum and animal products like milk, meat, and blood, the '*ngulu eya ngikial*', would rather trade them in the market than give them to vulnerable members of the community, a practice that had ensured collective survival. Many former warriors, whose identity was reduced to '*ata lookoroi*' (mere chicken men) took to *echuet* (local brewing), an emerging business venture in post-disarmament Karamoja.

Traditional meanings associated with *echuet* as a feminine responsibility had to be overcome to avoid the risk of any such name as *ata lookoroi*. New words such as '*ebooking*[19]', and *'buze-out'*[20] have emerged to distort traditionally feminine attributes of *echuet*.

Ebooking and *buze-out* are derived from the English words 'booking booze' and 'taking booze out of town' respectively. Men and women from the villages travel to urban markets to get local brew at slightly cheaper prices and transport them to the villages for resale. In contrast to the pre-disarmament period, *ebooking* has become synonymous with market and urban centres and former warriors.

Although women retained their position as the main actors in *echuet*, participants note that it was only *ngulu eya ngikial*, the financially better off, who could participate in *ebooking* as most ingredients could only be purchased for money in the market. This created a divide between the very poor and the emerging *ngulu eya ngikial* in the region. In resilience terms, participants pointed out that the emergence of *ebooking* did not only shift resources to the urban market but destroyed the processes of communal cohesion building crucial for collective response during crisis or shocks.

The movement of *echuet* to the market had implications for social dynamics, with men and the more affluent benefiting. For instance, Stites and Huisman (2010) report an increase in reliance on consumption of residue from local brew for survival. However the challenge was that, unlike the pre-disarmament period when it was offered for free, residue can only be 'acquired through the barter of firewood or as payment for casual labour (generally by women)' (Stites and Huisman 2010, p. 3).

To understand how local products such as 'echuet' ended up in the newly developed market, we must look at Mercy Corps' market systems development (MSD) programme in the Acholi and Karamoja sub-regions between 2012 and 2017. In Karamoja, MSD worked 'through public and private sector actors to address the underlying systemic constraints that hindered target populations' access to, and participation in, the market' (Mercy Corps 2017). Mercy Corps asserts that MSDs success requires firstly, identifying which

shocks and stresses pose the biggest threats to relief, recovery or development goals. This is then followed by a light-touch approach to, 'creating linkages between market actors and stimulating market systems to deliver the selected product or service (Mercy Corps 2017). So, although MSD does not target *echuet* directly, it did invest a lot of resources into developing and enhancing the platform in which these commodities are now traded (the market).

For the former warriors or *'ata lookoroi'*, the movement of *echuet* to market offered an alternative route to reinstating their masculine identity. As earlier noted, most emerging coping mechanisms adapted by the Karamojong, seem to heavily rely on gender inequality and unhealthy relationships particularly harming women and children. Similarly, women either occupy the unprofitable section of the *ebooking* (brewing business) or provide labour quarrying, or collecting and selling firewood, only for their husbands to have the decision-making powers over how the proceeds are spent.

In contrast, the new sector of *ebooking* business predominantly occupied by men is far more lucrative, and men wield a disproportionate advantage to the women who are involved in the unprofitable sector of producing the brew. However, even where a few women have taken to participating in *ebooking*, because they do not own or ride bicycles, they can only carry one 20-litre jerry can for several kilometres on their heads. In contrast, their male counterparts with their bicycles carry between three and six 20-litre jerry cans offering them a commanding advantage.

Market development, promoted by some humanitarian-development actors as significant for bolstering and ensuring community, household and individual resilience capacity as seen here, is polarising communities into a small elite of *ngulu eya ngikial* and the majority who are impoverished. In other words, while there is a small section of the population who are increasing their capacity to participate and access resources in the market hence becoming more resilient, there are many more who are increasingly constrained in their abilities and opportunities.

Market development for the Karamojong presents a situation in which *ngulu eya ngikial* continue to accumulate more and more wealth through livelihood differentiation, urban residency, and engagement with traditional livelihood systems (Caravani 2017, p. 3). The poor on the other hand, with increasing *apalago* are barely meeting their day-to-day needs.

Conclusion

In our contribution towards what we see as a limited representation of the perspective of conflict-affected communities in the main academic literature about resilience in disciplines connected to post-conflict contexts, such as international development, critical geography, culture, and psychology.

We opted to examine whether resilience is what humanitarian-development processes in post-conflict settings in practice work for or against. To achieve this, we used the Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda as our case study, examining some key vernacular concepts that reflect the local populations' understanding and everyday experience of notions of resilience and vulnerability and what this means for resilience-driven humanitarian-development processes.

These concepts begin with *apalago* (vulnerability) which examines the changing landscape, meanings and experience of vulnerability. *'Kiwa ekile'* (hide the man) examines the changing notion and practice of resilience from survival of collectives to individualised survival. *'Ngimaaniko lu apolok'* (identified with fat and healthy cattle) and *'ata lookoroi'* (mere chicken men) reflect issues of identity and the shifting masculinity landscape. Lastly the concepts of '*ngulu eya ngikial'* (those with teeth) and *echuet* (the art of brewing) explore the changing class dynamics in the region driven mainly by market and development-oriented policies.

We highlight that, since the Ugandan government concluded its disarmament campaign in the region in 2011, the concept of resilience has become a driving paradigm of humanitarian-development interventions; so much so most development interventions in the region incorporate resilience or elements of it. The Government and its humanitarian-development partners in the region paint a picture of improving resilience capacity characterised by improved security, market development, accessibility, and mobility.

Our findings paint a different picture of a region that demonstrates regression in its resilience capacity. They show a region whose distributive and justice issues such as poverty, inequitable income and resource access and distribution, and exploitative relationships have been exacerbated. The Ngakaramojong concepts discussed in this paper are largely unseen, ignored or misinterpreted by humanitarian-development interventions seeking to boost the local population's resilience capacity.

Even in situations where interventions appear to engage with local concepts, they have only done so from a very narrow perspective. We posit that understanding local concepts is fundamental for interventions that seek to genuinely bolster communities' capacity to cope with crisis or shocks.

Resilience driven interventions in the region, as were being applied at the time of our research do not seem to advance the resilience of the communities they target. Rather, these interventions appear to work against those aspects of communities that make them resilient to fundamental changes to their sociocultural, economic and livelihood strategies in the first place. The market development promoted in

Karamoja has provided an environment for *those with teeth* to accumulate wealth while generating increasing *apalago*, vulnerability, for the poor.

Notes

1. In Moroto.
2. Karamojong are known for their consumption of a mixture of raw defibrinated blood and milk.
3. An enclosure for cattle or sheep.
4. FGD former warriors, Kaabong District, August 2019.
5. FGD mixed youth, Nakapelemoru, Kotido District, September 2019.
6. Before the disarmament exercise.
7. FGD former warriors, Kotido, August 2019.
8. FGD elderly men, Moroto, August 2019.
9. FGD former warriors, Kotido, August 2019.
10. FGD mixed elders, Nadunget, Moroto, August 2019.
11. FGD former warriors, Kaabong District, August 2019.
12. FGD former warriors, Kaabong District, August 2019.
13. A village in Lorengedwat.
14. FGD elderly men, Nakapiripirit District, August 2018.
15. FGD mixed elders, Lorengedwat, Nakapiripirit, August 2018.
16. FGD mixed group, Lokopo Sub County, Napak District, August 2018.
17. FGD mixed youth, Nakapiripirit, August 2018.
18. An Ngakaramojong word referring to a group of pastoralist communities with similar language, beliefs, norms and customs.
19. In the case of Moroto.
20. In the case of Napak, Bokora and Kangole.

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