

The Proliferation of Guns and Rustling in Karamoja and Turkana Districts: the Case for Appropriate Disarmament Strategies – By Dr. Nene Mburu

Abstract

The article is written against the backdrop of the attempt in 2001 by Uganda to disarm the Karamojong ethnic community. It briefly traces the significance of arms bearing in the customs of the agro-pastoral Karamojong and their neighbours particularly the Turkana of Kenya. Considering previous governments have failed to disarm the community, the article argues that there is need for Uganda to co-ordinate its disarming efforts with Kenya and Sudan. Failure to do so will leave some communities vulnerable and make those resisting the disarmament find sanctuary in the neighbouring countries. Most importantly disarming should go hand in hand with economic development, improvement of security in rural areas, control of illegal trade in arms and ammunition, and genuine efforts to bring all ethnic communities into mainstream society.

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The Proliferation of Guns and Rustling in Karamoja and Turkana Districts: the Case for Appropriate Disarmament Strategies

In January 2001 the government of Uganda embarked on an ambitious exercise to disarm its Karamojong ethnic group. Considering there had been six previous attempts to compel the community to lay down arms, what would make the current initiative a success where others had failed? It is important to realise that in Africa today guns are more sophisticated, cheaper, easily obtainable, and more than ever before they promote organised lawlessness in direct challenge to the legitimacy of fragile democracies. The disarmament programme envisaged by Uganda's President Museveni in 2001 was in three phases. First it would deploy the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (hereafter UPDF) to Karamoja region to gather intelligence and through local opinion leaders persuade the communities to disarm peacefully. In the second phase the government would form and arm a local cadre that would continue disarming their ethnic community after the departure of the military. Lastly, if these two phases failed, the UPDF would be deployed for unspecified period to conduct military sweeps and armed patrols to target specific sub-tribes and counties. Uganda's efforts are laudable but its strategy is short-termist and unlikely to succeed without fully grasping the significance of ethno-military identity of the Karamojong and their agro-pastoral neighbours, particularly the Turkana of Kenya. Ultimately, to achieve enduring peace the authorities should address factors that have led to the failure of disarmament in the past and involve neighbouring ethnic communities of Kenya and Sudan.

This study argues that before the Turkana, Karamojong and other pastoral communities permanently lay down their arms there must be an international effort to limit the freedom enjoyed by arms dealers in the region and genuine collective effort by regional countries to stop the flow of arms and ammunition to the herders. Since livestock rustling is motive for arming, disarming must go hand in hand with altruistic policies that could improve existing and provide alternative livelihoods. The brief study is more descriptive than analytical and is informed by the author's fieldwork and military experience disarming pastoral communities in northern Kenya.

The Turkana and the Karamojong People.

A brief exploration of the physical and human geography of the area of study provides an important backdrop to the agro-pastoral communities under discussion. The Turkana are a Nilotic community that relates to the Karamojong of Uganda in language and lifestyle.¹ They are estimated to be 340,000 and live in north-western Kenya, north-eastern Uganda and southern Sudan. In Kenya, they are close in language and custom to the Luo of the Lake Victoria basin and the Chamus ethnic group inhabiting the area between Lake Baringo, Kerio Valley, and Lake Turkana.² They refer to their homeland as E Turkana. Their northern neighbours are the Toposa and Inyangatom of Sudan, the Dassanech of Ethiopia and Kenya are to the north-east and the pastoral Samburu of Kenya are their neighbours to the east.³ The southeast is their soft underbelly but the near extinct El Molo ethnic group does not present a corporate security threat.⁴ Their southern neighbours are the Pokot of Kenya and Uganda and the Marakwet ethnic community of Kenya. Traditionally the Turkana were organized in a generation set system and the community's military dominance before the nineteenth century owed much to the charisma of its religio-military leadership.⁵

Karamojong is a generic term that refers to a group of people from the Nilo-Hamitic ethno-linguistic repertoire living in north-east Uganda.⁶ Their region is popularly known as Karamoja and their language is Akaramojong. The cultural group comprises five sub-tribes totalling about 12% of Uganda's population. Amongst the five, are the Dodoth who separated from the Karamojong proper in the mid-nineteenth century and moved into the mountainous territory which provides better physical security and is suitable for dry season cattle grazing. The

¹ Major R.F White, (1920), "Notes on the Turkana" *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. III, p. 217-222; Major H.H Austin, (1903) With MacDonald in Uganda, Edward Arnold: London.

² Kenya National Archives (hereafter, KNA): DC/ISO/2/1/15 'Northern Frontier Handing Over report for 1957 from District Commissioner Moyale'; KNA:K967.6203 TUR, 'Memorandum on Turkana Affairs by R.G. Turnbull'. A more recent study is, Paul Spencer, 'Age systems and modes of predatory expansion' in Esei Kurimoto and Simon Simons, Conflict, Age and power in North-east Africa, James Currey: London, 1998.

³ See a detailed discussion of the Toposa in Beaton, A.C., (1950) "Record of the Toposa tribe" *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. XXXI, p. 129-132. There is a detailed analysis of the Dassanech in, Uri Almagor (1978) Pastoral partners affinity and bond partnership among the Dassanech of south-west Ethiopia, Manchester University Press: Manchester.

⁴ With less than 500 people, and decreasing, the El Molo is probably Africa's smallest ethnic group. Their diminishing population is partly attributed to in-breeding and a single diet of fish, see, KNA: PC/NFD1/1/2 'Annual Report NFD 1914-1922'.

⁵ Nene Mburu, (2001) "Firearms and Political Power: The Military decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900-2000" *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 2, p.148-162.

⁶ Colonial Office Public records Office London (hereafter CO) CO 822/3050, 'Visit to Karamoja by E.G. Le Tocq to K.A. East Esq. Commonwealth Relations Office of 8 April 1963'.

Karamojong are linguistically intelligible with their southern neighbours, the Iteso of Kenya and Uganda, and their history and culture closely interlocks with that of the Turkana in the east.⁷ Their women cultivate small plots of land along dry river valleys for millet and maize to supplement their monotonous diet of milk and animal blood. They live in patrilineal clans where they share responsibility for livestock and equitably distribute animal produce. Cattle are crucial not just for subsistence but also for the payment of bride price, which is the basis of establishing bond partnerships. The community constructs their grass-thatched huts closely together to form a fortification around the kraal leaving a small gap that serves as the entry and exit for the livestock.

The greater parts of Turkana and Karamoja districts experience very little rainfall annually. When it falls, it is erratic, reduced in time and space, and unlikely to yield maximum benefit to herders, cultivators, or gatherers due to rapid ground run-off, transpiration, and evaporation. Both communities practice multi-purpose food procuring strategy where they raise cattle, camels, sheep, and goats and as well as grow grain for subsistence especially sorghum and millet. Notwithstanding, the unseasonality of the rains reduces their capacity for strategic planning either as cultivators or as herders. As herders, the Turkana and Karamojong have increasingly resorted to epicyclical movement instead of the traditional transhumance.⁸ The unreliability of land has further influenced the economic orientation of others from gathering and sedentary agriculture to pastoralism and raiding. Unfortunately, ecological limitations further force pastoralists to choose breeds which may not necessarily be profitable in milk, blood, and meat yield but they can persevere extreme drought and survive long distances to the cool mountain ranges along the Kenya-Sudan-Uganda border regions that have reliable browse.

The Turkana and Karamojong: Ethno-Military Identity.

For a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of arming and rustling in Turkana and Karamoja, it is important to briefly trace the history of organized violence in the region. The history of private armies in Eastern Africa is difficult to sketch although organized raids and predatory expansion predate European colonialism of the nineteenth century. Before colonialism,

⁷ CO 927/161/5 'Anthropological and sociological research study of the Turkana and Jie peoples of Kenya and Uganda by P.H. Gulliver 1952', pp. 326.

⁸ In this study transhumance is the periodic movement of livestock and settlement to conform to seasonal demands. In contrast, epicyclical translocation is the erratic and constant mobility to wherever herders will find pasture and water.

pastoralists of the region had been accustomed to the independence and freedom of openly carrying firearms they had for many decades obtained from Ethiopian gunrunners and Arab and Swahili slave traders, poachers and merchants from the east African coast.⁹ There were sprawling gun markets in Maji, south-western Ethiopia, before the 1855 partition of Africa by west European countries to the extent that ammunition was used as local currency. In the first half of 1888, the East African coast had been the conduit for as many as 37,441 assorted firearms, mainly Breech-loaders and Winchester rifles.¹⁰ By 1910, private armies operated in Turkana borderlands with Ethiopia and Sudan, which were organized in units of between six hundred and one thousand fighters. They were mainly armed with single shot rifles and they operated in smaller tactical units.¹¹ Therefore Britain had to ‘pacify’ Karamoja and Turkana regions before it could claim full administrative control of its sphere of influence.

After the transfer of Uganda’s Rudolf Province to Kenya in 1926 created the republics of Kenya and Uganda, as they are known today, Britain tried to confine the Turkana and Karamojong within the newly created states. Before the colonial delimitation sliced through their grazing areas arbitrarily the Turkana and Karamojong had lived within the Rudolf Province where they shared natural resources through the extant system of social reciprocity.¹² These transhumant peoples were expected to respect the invisible meridians that delineated the newly created states. In order to get protection from the coloniser each ethnic community was expected to lay down arms they had acquired over many decades and stop cross-border livestock rustlings. After they refused to surrender guns peacefully, Britain conducted a disarming campaign codename ‘Operation Tennis’ from the Turkana side of the Kenya/Uganda common border.¹³ On the ground the operation was unsuccessful for lack of proper co-ordination and the evasive agro-pastoralists simply re-located to rugged mountainous terrain out of reach of colonial patrols. Nevertheless, Karamoja and Turkana regions were declared ‘closed districts’ where movement within and outside was restricted without a valid pass. The draconian

⁹ The Earl of Lytton, (1966) The stolen desert, MacDonald Press: London. Also consult, Major Darley, H., (1926) Slaves and ivory, H.F. & G Witherby: London.

¹⁰ Beachey, W (1962) ‘The Arms Trade in East Africa in the late Nineteenth Century’ *The Journal of African History*, Vol. III, No. 3, pp. 453.

¹¹ Robert O Collins, (1961) “The Turkana Patrol, 1918” *The Uganda Journal*, Vol. 25 No. 1, p.16-33; Harold Marcus, (1994) A history of Ethiopia, University of California Press: California USA.

¹² The most informed study on colonial boundaries in Africa is Sir Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, Vol. II, London: His Majesty’s Stationery, 1896. In the context of East Africa see Alec C McEwen, International Boundaries of East Africa, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

¹³ See KNA:K.967-6203 ‘Memorandum on Turkana Affairs’ by Turnbull, R.G. also, CO 533/421/4 ‘Disarmament of Frontier Tribes’.

legislation was ostensibly to contain the spread of livestock diseases down south particularly rinderpest and pleuro-pneumonia. In addition, by restricting transhumance the policy had the impact of sedentarizing and pauperising the two communities who previously had a thriving agro-pastoral economy and barter trade in grain, ironware, and livestock. It also insulated them from mainstream nationalism and fervour of patriotism raging in the southern half of each country.

A brief exploration of the impact of the Second World War in the region will broaden an understanding of the contemporary situation. It may be claimed that although private armies operated along the Kenya/Uganda/Sudan border region before 1910 the arms race between the Turkana and Karamojong people took concrete form after the Second World War. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Britain recruited heavily from the Karamojong and the Turkana ethnic communities in recognition of their ethno-military culture. During the war with Italy in Ethiopia, Britain deployed many Turkana in the front line in recognition of the community's existing dexterity with firearms and knowledge of their harsh physical terrain.¹⁴ Actually, the 25 East African Brigade that was deployed to spearhead the invasion of Abyssinia was garrisoned in Turkana district. Similarly, the Karamojong had served with distinction as *Askari* for the Kings African Rifles during military campaigns conducted in Africa and Asia. From the 1940s, the two pastoral communities strengthened their raiders using the weapons and skills gained in the colonial wars to revitalise the tradition of dynastic raids and predatory expansion.

Apart from providing troops for imperial policing duties, Turkana and Karamoja regions remained economically deprived having the lowest literacy rate and highest infant mortality unlike the hinterland of each country. The two communities lacked road communication and infrastructure that could generate local employment. After political independence from Britain in the early 1960s the authorities of Kenya and Uganda continued to exclude the northern regions from the social, economic and political changes that were taking place in the south. Hence the two communities failed to gravitate to the rhythm of statehood and instead strengthened their primordial identity as tribal enclaves within the newly formed states. Today the insulation is so strong that when Kenyan Turkana travel to their district headquarters they say they are visiting Kenya as in another country. These deprived people simply do not connect

¹⁴ Mburu, Firearms and political power.

with the state.¹⁵ This is the case because their primary loyalty is to 'Eturkana' their tribal nation within the nation-state. Neglecting these two peoples has strengthened gun culture, which they see as a source of security, livelihood and status symbol. On the one hand, communities which have not benefited from government supplied arms feel the gun is a safeguard from domination and dispossession not just by the immediate pastoral neighbour but also by the predatory state.¹⁶ On the other hand, failure by each state to pro-actively stop lawlessness and banditry when perpetrated by specific ethnic communities has led to the accusation that arming and violence are often state inspired under the pretext of tribal customs.¹⁷

Arming has also been motivated by a need to control natural resources and conversely disarming is unlikely to succeed unless it is accompanied by a consensual mechanism for sharing the existing natural wealth. It is important to note that in theory, customary law within the state and across the international boundaries governs pastoral land where individuals, clans and bond partners share the natural resources according to their needs. In practise, however, entrepreneurs from 'outside' have expropriated pastoral land for commercial use without benefiting the local people. Uganda recognises this problem and promises cultivable land to people who surrender guns voluntarily.¹⁸ The strategy is plausible as long as the long-term objective is the provision of an alternative livelihood and not to convert agro-pastoral Karamojong into pure sedentary cultivators. Alongside this initiative there is need to revive altruistic mechanisms for communal resource management that were destroyed by British colonial administration. People focussed economic reforms could involve land tenure to minimise resource conflicts, better range management, and opening rural based agro-pastoral industries to improve livestock productivity and create local employment. The authorities should also revive the tourist industry which collapsed in Karamoja district during the presidency of General Idi Amin and ensure the proceeds benefit the local rural populace. Most importantly disarmament should be calculated to win the hearts and minds. Therefore non-conflictual strategies through economic investment and persuasion are likely to succeed over coercive measures using the security forces. Other holistic strategies should include political education and human rights awareness to counter practices such as female genital infibulations

¹⁵ See Nene Mburu, (1999), 'Contemporary banditry in the Horn of Africa: Causes, history, and political implications' *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8 (2) pp. 89-107.

¹⁶ Increased economic instability of the Karamojong due to scarce water is briefly discussed by 'Bullets not guns are the problem in Karamoja' *The Monitor*, Kampala, February 20, 2002, Editorial.

¹⁷ See David Mugonyi, 'Ex-MP says government abetting rustling' *Daily Nation*, Nairobi, 13 March, 2000; Gitau Warigi, 'Who's fuelling cattle rustling by the Pokot?' *the East African Standard*, 14 February 2000.

and murder of 'enemy' warriors as a *rite de passage*, which thrive in defiance of the civil order prescribed by the post-colonial state.

It may be claimed that arming by the two communities is a product of domestic political instability. The case of the Karamojong will highlight this point. The community started acquiring guns in large quantities in the 1970s following the routing of President Idi Amin's army in Uganda by an alliance of Tanzanian People's Defence Force and Ugandan exiles. One major source was the Moroto barracks which the fleeing Ugandan dictator abandoned intact thus allowing the Karamojong to help themselves to unlimited quantity of small arms and ammunition. Be as it may, in the context of the Karamojong and Turkana people, the current governments of Uganda and Kenya are also part of the problem. For instance, having liberated Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni initially allowed the Karamojong to keep some firearms for self-defence against the Turkana and Pokot cattle thieves of Kenya and Uganda and the Toposa of southern Sudan. However, the Ugandan government underestimated the community's perception of security needs and centrality of weapons in the remote regions of Uganda. Consequently, the Karamojong have, through raiding and dealing, increased their arsenal with more than 150,000 illegal firearms.¹⁹ The Karamojong accept they have guns, which they acquired through barter for their livestock. They are willing to surrender them on condition the Ugandan government compensates them 20 cows for each gun. This has not been the case and Ugandan communities who do not want to disarm simply walk across the boundary into western Kenya or southern Sudan.

In Kenya, the Pokot started acquiring guns in 1967. These were heavy, cumbersome, somewhat outdated, and cost 60 heads of cattle each.²⁰ In 1986 an assault rifle such as the German make G.3 or HK 21 cost 15 cows. In 1991 seven goats bought a new AK 47 Kalashnikov that was lighter, user-friendlier and carried more ammunition.²¹ In 2002 the price is inestimably low particularly along the porous borders from disparate sources. Similarly the Turkana have gone through the same trend of arming. In the 1980s and 1990s the Kenyan government covertly armed pro-government Turkana with Kalashnikovs through a former cabinet minister in President Moi's government. It is unclear whether the arms were for

¹⁸ 'Surrender gun, win yourself land' the *East African Standard*, May 19, 2002.

¹⁹ Integrated Regional Information Network (*IRIN*) "Uganda focus on growing tension in Karamoja" A Report by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 22, March 2000; Borzello, A., "Ridding the Karamoja of guns: For personal, non-commercial use" BBC News, January 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

²⁰ Karl Vick, 'Small arms global reach uproots tribal tradition' the *Washington Post*, July 8, 2001.

²¹ Consult Oscar Oketch, & Antony Lokwang, '20 cows per gun' *New Vision*, Kampala, October 25, 1999.

destabilising Uganda, and for politically motivated livestock rustling as claimed by some, or for Turkana's self-protection.²² It is alleged the government-supplied weapons came from disarmed Shifta bandits operating along Kenya's frontier with Somalia, and from previous confiscation of arms imported by Idi Amin's government before it collapsed. The Turkana have, like their linguistic cousins in Karamoja, increased their arms through illegal purchases, barter and raiding. There are no reliable estimates of the quantity or types of guns currently possessed by the Turkana of Kenya. However, it may be deduced that their ability to intimidate their Markwet and Pokot neighbours who are estimated to have 20,000 guns, and occasional forays into eastern Uganda, Southern Sudan and south-western Ethiopia indicate they have a significant quantity and quality of firearms.²³ Furthermore, although military patrols are common in Turkana the post-colonial government in Kenya has not carried out an organised disarming campaign to augment Uganda's effort across the common boundary.²⁴ Paradoxically, due to the lack of frontier policing unilateral disarmament creates a security vacuum, which makes vulnerable communities to rearm.

External factors have also increased the instability of ethnic groups inhabiting remote regions of eastern Africa. In particular, political fragmentation and civil wars have had domino effect on the Karamojong and Turkana. They have played host or been caught up in armed conflicts between various factions. Specifically the civil war in southern Sudan, sporadic rebel movements in north-eastern Uganda, the fallout from the fragmentation of Siad Barre's Somalia, low-intensity conflicts in Ethiopia during Mengistu's rule, Rwanda, and the contemporary situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo have all affected the military balance among pastoral communities of the Kenya/Uganda/Sudan borderlands. Both the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the government in Khartoum have been arming the pastoral communities purposely to use them for the 19-year civil war in southern Sudan. In the last two decades the SPLA have overtly distributed arms into the region. For example, in July 1988, SPLA factions close to Sudan's border with Uganda and Kenya were logistically over-stretched and desperate to replace combat losses. However, their poor discipline at the time discouraged volunteers from enlisting and they dished firearms indiscriminately to the Turkana and Karamojong amongst other pastoral nomads of the Uganda-Kenya-Sudan border region to gain

²² Author's fieldwork in Turkana District in 1997 & 2000.

²³ Human Rights Watch 2002, New York. See also Robert Muggah and Eric Berman, 'Humanitarianism under threat: The humanitarian impact of small arms and light weapons' *Small Arms Survey*, Geneva, 2001' p. 66.

²⁴ Author's fieldwork.

popularity and to recover their combat losses in the ongoing civil war. In direct competition with the SPLA the government of Sudan has in the last decade supplied more than 50,000 rifles to the Toposa ethnic community alone.²⁵ Overall it is estimated the government in Khartoum has injected more than 250,000 small arms excluding landmines to prop-up pro-government ethnic communities in an effort to destabilise areas of southern Sudan controlled by the SPLA.²⁶ The Kenya-Sudan border region is so awash with small arms that one ethnic group will use guns for part payment of dowry when taking a bride from the other.²⁷ Whereas cattle have a symbolic role in marriage and in the social-political and economic life of herders, their substitution with modern firearms indicates arms' bearing has acquired a significant role in the spiritual and material culture of the pastoral nomads of eastern Africa.

The arms race amongst the Turkana, Karamojong and their pastoral neighbours is motive for bonding and raiding in the belief there is security in numbers. Cattle rustlers are so well armed and operate in such large numbers that regional governments are reduced to ineffectual witnesses of low-intensity ethnic cleansing. A few randomly selected incidents will illustrate the severity of the problem. In September 1997, fifty Turkana were killed in a 4 a.m. raid by a combined force of Kenyan Pokot and Ugandan Tepe ethnic communities numbering one thousand. The Pokot-Tepe alliance was armed with AK 47 assault rifles and stole 7,000 cattle.²⁸ In March 1999, one thousand Pokot gunmen from Kenya attacked a Turkana village killing 30 people before escaping with 2,000 heads of cattle.²⁹ Five months later, the Turkana of Kenya formed an alliance with the Karamojong in a raid that massacred 140 Dodoth of Uganda. What was most disturbing was the fact that the Turkana-Karamojong alliance burned food crops; gang raped women, set huts on fire and threw seventy children into the flames.³⁰ Later, an attack in February 2000 by the Ugandan Karamojong on Kenyan Pokot killed one hundred people and stole 1,800 cattle and 5,000 sheep.³¹ The psychological and economic impact of such devastating raids and bloodletting cannot be overstated yet neither Kenyan nor Ugandan

²⁵ See 'Illicit firearms proliferation and the implications for security and peace in the Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda border region: report of the research carried on the Sudan side of the common border', *AFRICANEWS* Vol. 68, November 2001.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Author's fieldwork. See also, Hiroshi Matsuda, 'Annexation and assimilation: Koegu & their neighbours', Katuyoshi Fukui & John Markakis, (Ed) *Ethnicity & Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, James Currey: London, 1994.

²⁸ "Slaughter in Turkana" *The Weekly Review*, Nairobi 26 September 1997.

²⁹ "Will police ever control rustlers?" *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi 9 March 1999; "Cattle rustling sparks famine" *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi 11 August 1999.

³⁰ 'Cattle raiders kill 140 in Uganda' *BBC Online*, 11 August 1999 <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

³¹ Gitau Warigi, "Who's fuelling cattle rustling by the Pokot" *The EastAfrican*, Nairobi, 14 February 2000. See also, Tim Wanyonyi, "The changing nature and scope of cattle rustling" *The Daily Nation*, Nairobi, 26 December 1998

authorities have so far arrested any of the perpetrators.³² It is therefore not surprising that despite good logistical support and a take-charge approach by President Museveni personally, very few guns have been surrendered in Karamoja.³³ Over the same period the appeal for disarmament by Kenyan authorities to their people has yielded a grand total of one firearm.³⁴ Furthermore, due to the devastation of pastoral productivity by ecological changes, it is harder than before for animal keepers to recuperate immediately from heavy losses of livestock. Hence, it is logical to hide their guns, which they use to engage in reciprocal raids not only to repair their warriors' shattered pride but also to replace what has been physically stolen.

³² Author's fieldwork.

³³ See table.

³⁴ Vick, 2001 Op cit.

Estimated quantity of guns recovered in Karamoja counties as on 25/04/2002.

County	Male population 15-50 years old	Total population	Guns recovered
Bokora	12,039	81,180	1,782
Matheniko	18,144	105,517	756
Dodoth	33,783	176,071	2,275
Jie	17,630	95,185	1,601
Labwor	17,308	76,120	408
Chekwii	16,737	88,025	735
Pian	8,135	55,352	1,001
Pokot	4,359	24,642	531
Total	128,172	702,091	9,089

Source: kcd@Karamojadata.org

Disarmament: Problem Integration.

Learning from the author's experience disarming Somali Shifta bandits of Kenya's North-eastern province, coercive methods are unlikely to produce long-term success as the initiative ties down the military in protracted engagements where local people view them as an army of occupation.³⁵ In the immediate term, arms could be surrendered but these will be in trickles contrary to what the Ugandan authorities hope to achieve with a limited budget of three million American dollars. In any event, after military operations commence pastoral people avoid confrontation by simply crossing the porous boundaries to join their relatives and allies until it is safe to return. There is equal pessimism that Uganda's proposal to buy guns from the Karamojong will not only create a motive for raiding but also enrich underworld gunrunners of Nairobi, Mogadishu and the Democratic Republic of Congo that are currently the main conduit

³⁵ The author draws on his military experience disarming organised Somali bandits in Kenya.

for firearms into the region.³⁶ Without identifying and neutralising the illegal gunrunners collective disarming of any ethnic community will be an impossible mission.

Governments of the region could try out participatory disarming where local vigilantes peacefully disarm cattle thieves they only know too well because they are from their clans and territorial sections. After the Kenyan government started using the strategy in the former Northern Frontier District (NFD) village militia have proved to be a better vehicle for disarming cattle rustlers than conventional soldiers.³⁷ Care must be taken to ensure the militia is properly trained, armed, and rewarded to prevent them from using the weapons supplied by the government to steal livestock for themselves. The policy should be spontaneous and involve grassroots level and be conducted concurrently in the affected areas. Local militia could also provide human intelligence to facilitate pro-active appeasement measures by the authorities to thwart collective arming and rustlings before they occur. At the local level, the Kenyan and Ugandan governments are blamed for belated deployment of security troops whenever victims of raids call out for help. Secondly, commercialisation and politicisation of rustling are catalysts to arming and organised lawlessness in the region. There should be transparency in the application of the law so that underworld warlords who currently include politicians, regional administrators, businessmen and serving security forces personnel, face trial for inciting their ethnic communities to arm. Third, confiscating livestock belonging to suspects in order to force them to surrender firearms, which both Kenya and Uganda have tried in the past, is a bit of a forlorn hope. The strategy is bound to fail because of punishing innocent animal keepers. Herders often surrender old weapons whose ammunition or repair parts are no longer obtainable and keep newer automatic rifles. Furthermore, in both Uganda and Kenya, corrupt government officers have been known to enrich themselves with the private sale of confiscated animals. The policy could succeed if livestock branding precedes it. In this regard, the authorities could, in conjunction with grassroots leaders, seize livestock that does not bear distinct clan branding which should be promptly returned to the rightful owners in a manner that is transparent. Fourth disarmament should primarily be a battle for the hearts and minds. The authorities should carefully consider all legislation to ensure they are necessary, humane and practicable. For instance, in 2002 the Ugandan government banned Karamojong men from wearing their

³⁶ Andrew Muriithi, "Gun controllers land in Africa" *The Libertarian Enterprise* Vol.68, 31 March 2000. Also consult, Press conference on small arms, "United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small arms and Light Weapons in al Aspects" 19 January 2001, www.fas.org.

traditional *khanga* (loin cloth) because they could conceal firearms. In 1964 the Kenyan government made a similar legislation in the NFD banning the Somali community from owning transistor radios because they could listen to hostile propaganda from the Republic of Somalia.³⁸ Such ridiculous legislation is recipe for disaffection with the post-colonial state whose history in Karamoja and Turkana has been characterised by a breakdown of trust. Fifth, the authorities should consider a non-conflictual approach to security. They should acknowledge that disarming has failed in the past and the state has failed to provide the periphery with any respectable form of security. Isn't it time they allowed people, as in the United States of America, to bear arms that are registered and accountable? Such a policy could undercut illegal arms trade and provide people with security. Along this strategy, there should be enforceable gun control legislation by the world community to seriously monitor and restrict the transfer of military technology to developing countries.

Concluding Reflections

The international society should treat gunrunning by organized cartels as seriously as drug trafficking. Modern weapons have increased the opportunity and means for inter-community reciprocal raids, cross-border warfare has become more devastating, and militarism has influenced the nature of political relationships between the Karamojong, Turkana and their pastoral neighbours. The easy availability of quality firearms poses a threat to regional security and tests the survivability of fragile democracies of Africa. Whereas there is a laudable attempt to disarm the Karamojong people of Uganda, successful disarmament will depend on the employment of appropriate disarmament strategies. These should be people focussed, include long-term economic development of the neglected regions and involve all communities within each country and across the international boundaries. Most importantly each state should strive to connect with the periphery, cultivate mutual trust, and consider all sub-tribes inalienable elements of the nation-state. If these steps are not taken disarmament will be resisted for being punitive and confrontational, unilateral, and short-termist.

³⁷ Nene Mburu, (2000) 'The Shifta conflict in Kenya 1963-68' unpublished PhD Thesis in War Studies, University of London, Chap.10.

³⁸ Ibid.