

## Strength, Creativity & Livelihoods of Karimojong Youth

**N**ovember 2011 has been a good month in Moroto and Napak Districts of Karamoja Sub-Region, Uganda. Rain and peace have returned. People have sorghum, beer and milk and they are in an optimistic mood even as they are struggling with hard times. This is what a team of 13 Karimojong researchers, young men and women of Matheniko, Bokora and Tepeth, found when they visited 16 settlements and kraals to learn about the life and livelihoods of Karimojong youth.

Their purpose in designing, implementing and reporting on this research is to help reduce the misunderstanding that separates their world from the outside. It is also to strike up a debate among the people of Karamoja about the future, and the work and role of youth. Their findings are distinctive, their voices clear, their energy and commitment unmistakeable. The analysis they offer throws a new light on how Karamoja should be understood.

The research team comes from rural and urban areas of Moroto, Napak and Nakapiripirit. Some have been to school, some have not, some have been to university. This combination of those who read and write and those who speak and hear is the strength of the team – they have gained access to people, knowledge and ideas that would not have been possible otherwise. Their record keeping was meticulous, their approach respectful. The team members already understand poverty and hard graft. When not researching, their daily income comes from a dizzying combination of mining, quarrying, digging murram, brewing,

herding, photography, growing sorghum, peace work, hunting, making doughnuts, granaries, liquid soap and jewellery, business and NGO work. This experience, courage, ingenuity and hard work means that they understand what they are hearing and their questions are pertinent.

Their journey took them through six sub-counties of Moroto and Napak districts where they conducted 378 interviews; meeting and discussing life and livelihoods with more than 500 people and taking hundreds of photographs over a period of three weeks. They asked young men and women how they are making a living, what is influencing it, what makes it good, and how it has come to be so. They asked older people how they are guiding youth. People answered questions and told stories of their

**"When people saw our team together – a mix of trouser and sheet (the schooled and the non-schooled), they got courage. They spoke free. They told their stories."**



**"We lost our cows and we resorted to hard and risky work in mines, quarries and murram pits. But we have not left the culture of livestock keeping behind. We are working hard to buy animals."**

lives. Approaching them with courtesy, the young researchers made friends, told stories of their own lives, helped with whatever the people were doing, explained their purpose and answered questions.

The analysis of the research and the preparation of the book involved detailed collation, analysis and rigorous interpretation of findings against the evidence. The selection of photographs, stories and sayings, and the precise wording of the book and its conclusions belong to the team. Here is the team's message about their work.



**"O**ur research catches people's own voices. We want it to be useful to our people. We researchers come from the community and we ask our own questions and find our own answers. We will take the book back to the community so people can use it. We will call our brothers and sisters, to strengthen our friendship and encourage them that there is something to be done.

We also want to give this book to others who are interested to learn about how life is today for young people in Karamoja and what has caused this to be. The book has our findings, analysis and conclusions. It shows the strengths of the young Karimojong: our respect for others, strength of mind, flexibility, carefulness and knowledge, and respect for law and tradition. We suggest that when outsiders come to work in the region, they should please read our book. Then they will respect our strengths and work with them. They will find out what we have to say. We Karimojong have our culture and it cannot be detached from us."

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*For a copy of the book, "Strength, Creativity and Livelihoods of Karimojong Youth" and the separate methods paper, please contact Restless Development Uganda at Plot 6 Acacia Road, P O Box 1208, Jinja, Uganda.*

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