

Karimojong embrace agriculture

KOTIDO

By Paul Watala and Hope Mafaranga

Karamoja youth and women have turned to communal farming as the only way to improve their livelihood and beat hunger.

In groups of 30 to 40, members with short-hand hoes descend on maize and sorghum gardens as early as 7:00am and keep at it, until 4:00pm.

The members, with bed-sheets wrapped around their necks and waists, till each other's gardens and celebrate by drinking local brew at the end of each day.

The drinking ritual is meant to attract more members of the community to join them in carrying out agricultural activities.

Anna Chilla from Kokoria women's group in Kacheli sub-county, Kotido district, said traditionally, women and youth would join the men in cattle raids, but after the disarmament exercise, they became redundant.

Chilla said extension workers from Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) approached her because of her fame in the villages and asked her to mobilise women so they could get into development activities.

"For a long time, we depended on the World Food Programme (WFP) for our daily meals and on our cattle. I never imagined that we could actually produce our own food and have surplus for selling. It is amazing how our mindset has changed, after being organised by ADRA," she said.

She noted that the men have also started responding positively to agriculture, as some of them have started farming.

"It has not been a smooth



(Left) A communal farming group weeding a garden, while (above) a group of women spreading sorghum seeds to dry



A group of youth and women shortly after participating in community agriculture in Kotido district. Photos by Paul Watala

journey to convince men to be part of our farming groups. ADRA had to call them for meetings and constantly remind them that it was the only way to solve the problem of famine in the region," she said.

She said the organisation provides them with seeds for planting and has linked them to markets, where they sell their produce.

Seven months after they

formed their group, they had their first harvest. The members were so excited. The harvest was a big motivation for other members of the community to join.

"From the proceeds, our members have invested in other businesses, such as roasting meat. Women have bought grinding mills," Chilla said.

"We can now put food on our tables, take our children

to school and meet other demands in our households because we have embraced agriculture," she added.

Challenges

Semi Akidi from Conopwonya Development Association in Abim district said their challenges include the armyworm, long dry spells and lack of technology, such as irrigation schemes to water their crops.

"With help from ADRA, we have been taught about climate change patterns. Now, when it rains, we tap and store

water, which we use during the drought season to irrigate our crops," she said.

Kotido LC5 district chairperson Ambrose Lotukei said as leaders, they are encouraging community members to get involved in development activities.

"Karamoja sub-region faces long dry spells that sometimes cause the dams to dry up. Our people, who are mostly cattle keepers, are forced to cross into other districts, looking for water and pasture," he said.

"We appeal to the Government to provide

irrigation technology, so that we can grow crops all year round," said Lotukei.

George William Kiberu, the ADRA programme manager for the DANIDA-funded Action for Social Change (ASC) Programme, currently being implemented in northern Karamoja, said: "Karamoja is one of the sub-regions with the potential to become a food basket for this country."

He said because the area has fertile soils, the Government should avail modern technologies and intensify Operation Wealth Creation programmes, so that the region can develop.

Kiberu further reported that group members have also embraced village savings and loan associations, where they save and access loans for their income-generating activities, including agribusinesses.

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