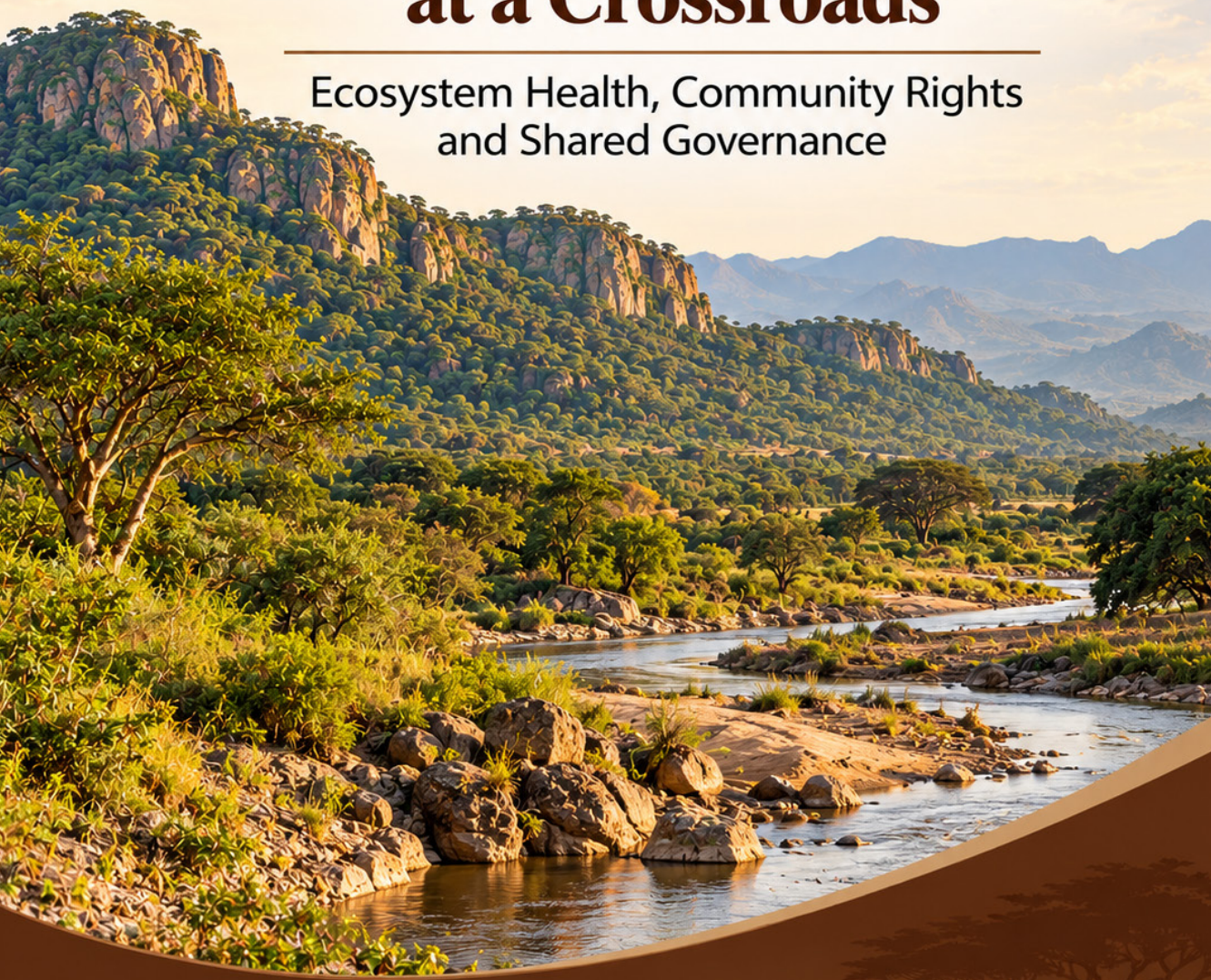
Karamoja's Natural Resources at a Crossroads

Ecosystem Health, Community Rights and Shared Governance



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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **III**

ACRONYMS ..... **IV**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... **V**

1.0 INTRODUCTION **1**

1.1 Background 1

1.2 Main Objective 4

2.0 METHODOLOGY **5**

3.2 Literature Review 5

3.3 Review of Policy and Legal Frameworks 5

3.4 Joint Field Monitoring of Selected Natural Resources 6

3.5 Composition of Monitoring Teams 6

3.6 Data Collection Methods 6

3.7 Data Analysis and Validation 7

3.8 Scope of the monitoring assessment 7

3.0 POLICY, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK **9**

4.0 PRESENTATION OF MONITORING FINDINGS **13**

4.1 Natural Resources Monitored 14

4.2 Access to Natural Resources and User Rights 16

4.3 Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Resource Use 25

4.4 Natural Resource Governance 35

4.5 Gender and Inclusion 52

5.0 CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN KARAMOJA **55**

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS **59**

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS **65**

7.1 Conclusion 65

7.2 Recommendations 66

REFERENCES **71**

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Natural Resource Type Visited per District 6
Table 2: Institutional responsibilities and coordination 11
Table 3: Good Practices in Natural Resource Management 50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A herd of cattle grazing in Moroto Forest in Karamoja 18
Figure 2: Nakonyen vast rangeland with a cattle crush..... 20
Figure 3: A section of Timu Central Forest Reserve with a maize garden.... 26
Figure 4. Trees planted near a homestead in Kotido. The photograph does not establish rangeland restoration..... 29
Figure 5: A section Timu Forest Central Forest Reserve in Kabong..... 34

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ACRONYMS

ACODE	Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment
AfDB	The African Development Bank Group
ALCs	Area Land Committees
CCLAP	Climate Change Leaders Advancing for Peace
CFM	Collaborative Forest Management
CLAs	Communal Land Associations
CLIRK	Climate Innovation for Resilience in Karamoja
CMCs	Catchment Management Committees
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CWMA	Community Wildlife Management Area
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
KAPDA	Karamoja Peace and Development Agency
KCWMA	Karenga Community Wildlife Management Area
KHH	Karamoja Herders of the Horn
MEMD	Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoLHUD	Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
NFA	National Forestry Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PWD	Persons With Disabilities
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Karamoja's wetlands, forests, rivers and rangelands sustain pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods, household food and water security, cultural practices and resilience to climate variability. The Karamojong's conditions and land use are shaped by customary tenure, seasonal mobility, statutory management, competing economic interests and the capacity of public institutions to coordinate decisions. The joint monitoring exercise did identify significant resource-management concerns at selected sites, alongside community and government initiatives that could support more sustainable and inclusive management. The central message was that environmental protection, secure user rights and fair participation deserved to be pursued together.

Purpose and approach

This report examines the natural-resource health, community access and user rights, and resource governance arrangements in Karamoja. It draws on a joint monitoring exercise conducted in August 2025 at nine purposively selected sites across eight districts and Moroto Municipality. The sites covered wetlands, forests, rangelands and rivers, reflecting different ecological conditions, ownership arrangements and management structures.

The exercise adopted the use of a qualitative, participatory approach that combined site observations, interviews and community discussions with a review of relevant policy, legal and administrative documents and materials. District technical officers, civil society representatives and local resource users participated in the monitoring exercise. The findings provide a comparative account of the locations visited. Important to note is that this assessment never had an aim of establishing statistically representative assessment of the whole of Karamoja. The exercise did not establish long-term ecological trends or measure the prevalence of reported disputes.

Key findings

Access to resources is shaped by rights, rules and season. Communities were relying on customary arrangements for shared access to pasture, water and other resources; including seasonal livestock mobility. Forest reserves, wetlands, protected areas and mineral sites were also subject to statutory rules, licences and management agreements. Physical entry during those site visits did not establish a secure legal right, equal access for all users or the ability to use a resource when it

is most needed.

The visited sites illustrated this variation. Customary arrangements guide access to the Nakwanamoru–Kapus and Nakonyen rangelands, while seasonal flooding does limit movement at Achorichor Wetland in Amudat. Forest rules apply at Timu and Mt. Kadam. In Abim, respondents reported disputes over access to Angaro Wetland and the sharing of benefits there from. In Kaabong and Moroto, reports raised concerns about forest boundaries, mineral access and overlapping community and statutory claims. The report also identified barriers affecting women, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities, refugees and mobile users.

Environmental pressures require follow-up, but regional trends have not been measured. Respondents or monitoring teams identified concerns including cultivation and settlements near forests and wetlands, tree cutting and mining pits around Timu Forest, pressure on grazing areas, sand extraction and riverbank disturbances along the Omaniman River. Concerns were also raised about agrochemical use near wetlands and urban pressures along the Lia River. These findings signal risks at the sites assessed. The exercise did not measure long-term forest loss, wetland change, water quality, extraction volumes, rangeland carrying capacity or biodiversity trends. Therefore, this report cannot establish the scale of change across Karamoja or attribute changes to particular activities.

The report cautions against treating livestock presence as proof of overgrazing. Rainfall variability, soil conditions, water-point distribution, land conversion, insecurity and restrictions on mobility all affect grazing patterns and vegetation. Pastoral mobility distributes pressure across available landscape. Comparable observations across seasons and years are needed to distinguish between temporary and permanent conditions from lasting degradation.

Community initiatives offer potential, but their results need verification. Community patrols, customary rules, forest pruning rather than felling, micro-catchment committees, tree planting, agroforestry and restoration activities were reported at selected sites. These initiatives may support stewardship where communities have clear responsibilities, adequate resources and agreed access rights. Their presence does not, by itself, demonstrate ecological recovery or equitable benefit-sharing. The report recommends verifying implementation, agreements, ecological outcomes, costs and effects on legitimate users before expanding interventions.

Governance responsibilities are shared but distinct. Natural-resource

governance involves customary authorities, community groups, local governments and central government agencies. Their powers are not interchangeable. The National Forestry Authority manages central forest reserves; the Ministry of Water and Environment leads water-resource and catchment management; the National Environment Management Authority coordinates environmental management and compliance; and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development supports land administration, including customary and communal interests. District and lower local governments integrate environmental responsibilities into local planning, coordinate departments and act within their statutory mandates.

The monitoring identified community structures and coordination arrangements in some locations, but their authority and effectiveness need confirmation. For example, Angaro and Odongi micro-catchment committees had been documented, but their current membership at the time and activity required verification. Respondents identified management plans in Kaabong and Moroto, but the exercise did not establish whether these plans were approved, current, funded or implemented. Similarly, the presence of a committee or customary forum did not establish that it had a legal mandate, represented affected users or resolved disputes fairly.

Gender and inclusion

The report finds that women, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities and refugees use natural resources, but access does not necessarily give them secure rights, influence over decisions or an equitable share of benefits. Women's ability to assert their land rights under communal tenure arrangements still seemed to be largely constrained by customary and patriarchal norms; while men continued to dominate some resource-management forums. The report also identified mobility, economic and social barriers can restrict access for people with disabilities and refugees, particularly in border areas.

Site-level findings illustrate how inclusion concerns intersect with resource use. In Abim, respondents reported the presence of disputes over access to Angaro Wetland and the dilemma of sharing of benefits. At Nakwanamoru–Kapus in Kotido, non-resident users could be subject to annual ground rent of UGX 50,000 to 100,000. The report does not disaggregate who pays or how these arrangements affect women, poorer households or mobile users. Along the Omaniman River, women, young people and persons with disabilities were reportedly participating in sand mining. Respondents also raised concerns about

limited awareness of rights, delayed payments, unsafe night operations, child labour and school dropouts. These accounts point to the need to examine who receives income, who bears risks and whether children's protection and education are affected. The monitoring did not provide disaggregated data on earnings or working conditions.

The report also described reported incidents of sexual violence in the context of resource-related conflicts in Kaabong. These accounts were not independently verified by the monitoring exercise and should be handled through confidential, survivor-centred protection and justice channels. More broadly, the report provides limited evidence on whether women and other groups can influence committee decisions or obtain remedies. Participation should therefore be assessed by who speaks, whose claims are considered, who benefits and whether people can raise concerns safely.

Climate justice

Climate justice in Karamoja requires a fair distribution of costs and benefits of resource management, meaningful participation in decisions and recognition of customary and collective and seasonal rights. Climate variability affects the timing and location of water and pasture. Climate variability also effects interaction with land-use decisions, restricted mobility, tenure insecurity, extraction and institutional capacity. Climate stress alone did not seem to explain resource degradation or conflict.

Local governments were central to climate-responsive planning because they prepared local plans and budgets, coordinated departments, engaged communities and monitored site conditions. Their responsibilities must be carried out alongside the statutory mandates of central government agencies, especially where resources are state-owned, protected or managed under national law. Co-management requires clearly documented roles and agreements, not an assumption that community participation gives a group formal authority.

For climate action to be just, affected users should be involved before decisions are made about conservation restrictions, water infrastructure, restoration or extraction. Plans should identify who may lose access, how seasonal routes and water use will be affected, how costs and benefits will be shared, and how complaints can be resolved. District and sector agencies should also fund repeat ecological monitoring, publish relevant budgets and follow up on permits, inspections and grievances. Assess adaptation investments for maintenance costs and unintended effects, including concentrating livestock around water

points or shifting resource pressure to another site.

Recommendations

a) Establish a verified register for each priority site. Local governments should record boundaries, legal status, rights holders, seasonal users, applicable plans, permits, responsible authorities, ecological baselines, and complaint routes. Develop the register with customary representatives and relevant sector agencies.

b) Clarify rights and responsibilities before enforcement or investment. The MDAs and local governments should conduct participatory mapping to document overlapping claims, grazing routes, water points and permitted uses. Verify the mandate and legal status of committees and management agreements.

c) Strengthen local planning, monitoring and follow-up. The district local governments should cost priority actions in district plans and annual budgets, including transport for inspections. The local governments should conduct regular ecological measurements in comparable seasons and report outcomes, such as changes in vegetation, water quality, and access, alongside completed activities.

d) Improve accountability for extraction and revenues. The MDAs and local governments should verify approvals, map extraction and riverbank uses, monitor environmental effects, reconcile revenue records and disclose how community benefits or restoration funds are determined for natural resource sites such as Lia and Omaniman.

e) Make participation and grievance redress systems accessible. The MDAs and local governments should include women, young people, persons with disabilities, customary and seasonal users in planning and monitoring. They should sensitise communities on the grievance-handling mechanism, clarify which institution handles each complaint, how referral and appeal processes work, and how users receive feedback.

f) Align financing with demonstrated need and results. Support costed, locally owned plans and a common monitoring framework. Assess climate-finance proposals against local vulnerability, customary access, maintenance costs and measurable adaptation outcomes.

The monitoring provided and still provides a basis for prioritising verification and coordinated actions at the selected sites. Sustained

improvement will depend on clear rights and mandates, reliable financing, evidence of ecological change and arrangements that enable local governments and central agencies to act together while remaining accountable to affected communities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Karamoja, in north-eastern Uganda, is a dryland sub-region whose livelihoods depend on livestock, rain-fed cultivation and access to shared rangeland resources. It is part of the wider Greater Karamoja Cluster, which also includes adjoining areas of Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia. This distinction matters because cross-border livestock movements and agreements over pasture and water affect resource use within the Ugandan districts, while this report's monitoring findings concern Uganda's Karamoja sub-region (FAO, 2019; Stites et al., 2014).

The condition of rangelands, forests, wetlands, rivers and water points shapes both livelihood options and the costs of drought. Natural resource health cannot be inferred from vegetation cover alone. Forage availability depends on rainfall and soils as well as grazing rules, herd concentration, mobility and security. A Karamoja study combining remote sensing with pastoralists' ecological knowledge found that restrictions on movement and conflicts were among the factors associated with perceived forage availability (Egeru et al., 2015). This report examines resource health, access and user rights together, drawing on the August 2025 joint monitoring exercise across the nine districts of Karamoja and Moroto Municipality. Site observations are interpreted as evidence of the places visited, not as a statistically representative measure of change across the entire sub-region.

1.1 Background

Karamoja's natural resource endowment coexists with severe deprivation. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimated that 85 per cent of Karamoja's population was of multidimensional poor in its 2022 MPI report, with an average intensity of 68 per cent among those identified as poor. These figures describe overlapping deprivations, not the monetary poverty rate, and should not be treated as a direct measure of environmental degradation (UBOS, 2022). Mineral extraction can create income, but its distributional and environmental outcomes depend on land rights, consultation, regulation and benefit sharing. Research on gold, limestone and marble mining in Karamoja shows that conflict may arise when customary surface and collective rights are insufficiently recognised in decisions over extraction (Rugadya, 2020).

Pastoralism and agro-pastoralism use seasonal movement to match livestock with variable pasture and water. FAO's livestock assessment documents locally developed practices, including changing grazing locations, adjusting watering regimes and combining livestock species

according to available forage (FAO, 2014). The wider cluster connects users across borders, but access is negotiated through customary institutions, intercommunity agreements and public authorities. FAO's cross-border work identifies coordinated movement and shared decisions on water and grazing as practical ways to reduce conflict and sustain drought resilience (FAO, 2019). Mobility is therefore an ecological and governance issue, not simply a response to scarcity.

Climate variability compounds existing livelihood risks, but drought alone does not explain resource pressure or food insecurity. Where insecurity, land conversion or access restrictions concentrate herds near settlements and water points, grazing pressure may rise locally even if forage remains available elsewhere. Research in Karamoja links forage conditions to mobility, governance and conflict alongside biophysical factors (Egeru et al., 2015). The implication is that restoration and water investments should be assessed together with safe access routes, agreed grazing rules and animal health services, rather than evaluated solely by the number of facilities or hectares treated (FAO, 2014; FAO, 2019).

Households combine livestock, crops, forest products and, in some areas, artisanal mining in different proportions. These strategies are not interchangeable. Rain-fed cultivation is exposed to rainfall failure, while livestock systems depend on access to dispersed pasture, water and markets (Stites et al., 2014; FAO, 2014). Describing all grazing pressure as 'overgrazing' without observing vegetation, season, stocking patterns and the ability to move risks confusing a local symptom with its drivers. Unless the monitoring analysis distinguishes the observed condition of each site from reported causes and from changes; that would require comparable measurements over time (Egeru et al., 2015).

Formal conservation, forest management, mining and land administration overlap with customary systems of collective use. The resulting decisions can alter access even where legal ownership does not visibly change. Rugadya (2020) argued that addressing mining conflicts requires recognition of the full bundle of customary rights, rather than relying on individual titling alone. This has practical implications for mapping grazing corridors and dry-season reserves, documenting legitimate users and negotiating consent and benefit arrangements before allocating land to competing uses. Local ecological knowledge can improve these processes when it is considered alongside field observation and spatial data (Egeru et al., 2015).

Access is differentiated within communities. Oxfam's Karamoja

programme identifies women and young people as facing disproportionate constraints in access to land, cattle and income opportunities (Oxfam, 2020). A resource may therefore appear available at landscape level while being inaccessible to a particular household because of tenure, mobility, safety, fees or decision-making rules. Therefore, the monitoring findings should specify whose access is affected, in which season and through which mechanism. This distinction is especially important for water points, wetlands, forest products and communal grazing areas (FAO, 2019; Oxfam, 2020).

The analytical focus on user rights includes rights to enter and use resources, to participate in management decisions, to exclude others under agreed rules and to claim benefits or remedies. Customary rights can be recognised in law yet remain insecure in practice when boundaries are disputed or when users lack an effective voice in licensing and land allocation. Karamoja mining research illustrates how poorly recognised collective and surface rights can generate conflict over sub-surface extraction (Rugadya, 2020). The monitoring exercise should thus examine both the formal designation of a resource and the actual ability of different users to exercise and defend their rights.

Taken together, resource health, access and rights form a linked explanation of natural resource outcomes. Ecological deterioration may reduce what is available; restricted access may shift use to fewer sites; and insecure rights may weaken incentives or authority to manage those sites. These relationships should therefore be tested against site-specific evidence rather than assumed to operate equally across Karamoja. The report uses the joint monitoring observations to identify plausible mechanisms and practical governance questions, while recognising that causal attribution and sub-regional trends require repeated, comparable ecological and social measurements (Egeru et al., 2015; FAO, 2019).

This report examines the status of natural resources management in the Karamoja sub-region, focusing on three interconnected dimensions: the health and condition of natural resources; access to those resources and the benefits they provide; and the rights, institutions and governance arrangements that shape the natural resources' use and management. The assessment seeks to identify key trends, challenges and inequalities and to highlight opportunities for strengthening sustainable, inclusive and rights-based natural resources management in the region.

1.2 Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine sustainable use and conservation of natural resources in Karamoja sub-region with a particular focus on the health of the resources, access and use rights by communities in the region.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

The monitoring exercise was guided by the following objectives; -

a) To document the current state of the natural resource health in Karamoja

b) To ascertain the management, access and user rights across key natural resource sites in the region and document best practices and irregularities in natural resource use in the region

c) To examine the key projects / interventions in Karamoja that address sustainable use and conservation of natural resources - operationalization of sustainable utilization/access and user rights

d) To generate recommendations for improving natural resource governance in the region.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Monitoring Approach and Design

The study approach adopted a qualitative, participatory, and multi-stakeholder approach to examine the health of natural resources, access arrangements, and user rights in the Karamoja sub-region. The methodology combined desk-based review, key informant interviews, site visits, focus group discussions and community consultations. This mixed approach enabled triangulation of findings and ensured that both technical assessments and community perspectives informed the analysis.

3.2 Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to provide contextual understanding and inform the design of the field monitoring exercise. The review covered national, and sub-regional studies on natural resource management, land tenure, climate change, and community livelihoods in the Karamoja sub-region. Sources reviewed included government reports, policy briefs, academic studies, reports from development partners and humanitarian agencies. The literature review helped to identify prevailing trends in resource degradation, access and user rights challenges, drivers of conflict, and institutional gaps, as well as to situate the study within existing evidence and policy debates.

3.3 Review of Policy and Legal Frameworks

The study included a review of relevant legal, policy, and institutional frameworks governing natural resource management in Uganda. This review examined constitutional provisions, sectoral laws, regulations, and policies related to land, forests, wetlands, water resources, wildlife, climate change, and decentralised environmental governance. Particular attention was given to provisions relating to community access, tenure and user rights, institutional mandates, and enforcement mechanisms. The review also considered Uganda's commitments under relevant international and regional environmental agreements. This analysis provided a basis for assessing how policy and legal frameworks are applied in practice at the local level and how gaps in implementation affect sustainable resource management in Karamoja sub-region.

3.4 Joint Field Monitoring of Selected Natural Resources

The joint field monitoring exercise covered 9 purposively selected natural resource sites across 9 districts in the Karamoja sub-region, as presented in Table 1. Site selection was undertaken by district officials in consultation with KHH and ACODE. Selection criteria included the ecological and livelihood importance of the resource, levels of vulnerability to degradation, reported cases of mismanagement and/or encroachment, and relevance to community access and user rights concerns.

Table 1: Natural Resource Type Visited per District

	District	Site / Name of Natural Resource	Resource Type
1.	Abim	Angaro Micro-Catchment Wetland	Wetland
2.	Amudat	Amudat Wetland (Achorichor)	Wetland
3.	Kaabong	Timu Forest	Forest
4.	Kotido	Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland	Rangeland
5.	Moroto	Nakonyen Rangeland	Rangeland
6.	Moroto Municipality	Lia River	Water Body (River)
7.	Nabilatuk Town Council	Nataa River	Water Body (River)
8.	Nakapiripirit	Mt. Kadam Central Forest Reserve	Forest
9.	Napak	Omaniman River	Water Body (River)

3.5 Composition of Monitoring Teams

Qualitatively agile multidisciplinary monitoring teams were constituted for each district to ensure technical rigour and community inclusion. Each team comprised of five members, including two district technical officers (with the District Natural Resources Officers serving as team leader), one civil society representative trained by ACODE and KHH, and one representative from a local natural resource user group. This composition facilitated collaboration between duty bearers and rights holders and strengthened the credibility of findings.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Prior to fieldwork, the monitoring teams participated in virtual preparatory meetings to agree on the study objectives, data collection modalities, and tools. Through co-creation sessions, a standardized monitoring tool was developed to build consensus on key indicators related to natural resource health, access and use rights, governance arrangements, and management practices. At the selected sites, data collection employed a range of qualitative methods, including guided transect walk-through assessments of natural resource sites, direct observation of resource conditions and use practices, focus group discussions with community members and natural resource user groups, and key informant interviews with district officials, community leaders, and natural resource managers. The use of multiple and complementary methods enabled exhaustive and effective triangulation of data and enhanced the credibility and reliability of the study findings.

3.7 Data Analysis and Validation

Information collected from field monitoring was triangulated with earlier, other findings from the literature. Following the field exercise, a second virtual meeting was held between ACODE and district teams to review submitted monitoring reports and provide technical feedback. The findings, were then synthesized into one report, highlighting common trends, key issues, and governance gaps across the sub-region. A stakeholder validation meeting was subsequently convened, bringing together district officials, civil society actors, and community representatives to review and validate the findings. Feedback from this process was incorporated into the final report prior to publication.

3.8 Scope of the monitoring assessment

Geographically, the assessment spanned eight districts and one municipality in the Karamoja sub-region, namely: Abim, Amudat, Kaabong, Kotido, Moroto District, Moroto Municipality, Nabilatuk, Nakapiripirit, and Napak. Within these locations, the assessment focused on selected priority natural resource sites that reflect the diversity of ecosystems and tenure arrangements in the region. These included; - the state-owned Angaro micro-catchment wetland in Awach Sub- County, Abim District; the communal Achorichor (Amudat) Wetland in Achorichor Sub- County, Amudat District; and Timu Forest, a gazetted public forest located in Lokinene Sub- County, Kaabong District. The assessment also covered key rangeland systems, namely the privately owned Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland in Kotido District and the communally owned Nakonyen Rangeland in Tapac Sub- County, Moroto District, situated approximately six kilometers from Elukaangor

Trading Centre.

In addition, the assessment covered major water resources such as the Lia River in Moroto Municipality, which forms part of the Lia micro-catchment and the upper Lokere catchment; the Nataa River in Nabilatuk Town Council, which serves as a key source of water for domestic and livelihood use; and the Omaniman River, originating from Mt. Moroto and traversing multiple sub-counties across Napak and Nabilatuk as a large state-owned river catchment. Finally, the scope incorporates the Mt. Kadam Central Forest Reserve in Moruita Sub-County, Nakapiripirit District, a state-managed forest reserve of significant ecological and livelihood importance.

In terms of content, the assessment focused on three main thematic areas. First, under natural resource access and user rights, the study examined community physical access to resources, primary uses, and the existence and awareness of customary or legal user rights. The study also considered inclusivity of women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and refugees; payment requirements for access; the influence of traditional norms; external actor interference; disputes or complaints; and any restrictions on access, including seasonal or group-specific limitations.

Second, under resource health and sustainable use, the assessment first covered visible signs of environmental degradation, and reviews of community involvement in conservation or restoration initiatives. It also examined the existence and observance of community by-laws or rules, as well as community participation in monitoring and reporting illegal or unsustainable resource use and the barriers to such participation.

Finally, under resource governance, the assessment analyzed the presence and functionality of community-led management structures, coordination mechanisms with local and central government, and conflict management systems, including the nature of resource-related conflicts, the role of local structures in dispute resolution, and community awareness of formal reporting channels for conflicts or resource abuse.

3.0 POLICY, LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Uganda's framework for protecting natural resources and biodiversity combines constitutional obligations, environmental regulation, sector laws and local government responsibilities. In Karamoja, these instruments govern resources that often support several uses at once. A wetland may provide cultivable land, grazing, water and habitat, while a forest or rangeland may also be subject to customary access arrangements or mineral interests. Effective protection therefore requires clarity about each site's legal status, the rights of its users and the authority responsible for management.

Constitutional and environmental protection

The Constitution guarantees every Ugandan the right to a clean and healthy environment under Article 39. Article 237(2)(b) requires government or a local government, as determined by law, to hold natural lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest reserves, game reserves and national parks in trust for the people and protect them for the common good. Article 245 provides for laws to prevent environmental abuse, pollution and degradation (Government of Uganda, 1995). These provisions establish a duty to protect ecosystems while requiring decisions about access and use to follow the applicable legislation.

The *National Environment Act, Cap. 181* is the principal law for environmental management. It assigns coordinating and regulatory functions to the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and provides roles for district and urban councils, environment officers, and district environment and natural resources committees. It also establishes requirements for environmental and social assessment of activities likely to have significant effects. Where an assessment is required, impacts on biodiversity must be considered and the mitigation hierarchy applied before an offset is considered (Government of Uganda, 2019a; NEMA, 2023). For the monitored Karamoja sites, this means that reported mining, sand extraction, construction and other potentially harmful activities should be assessed against the approvals and conditions applicable to the specific activity and location.

The *National Environment (Wetlands, River Banks and Lake Shores Management) Regulations, 2000* provide more specific controls for sensitive aquatic ecosystems (Government of Uganda, 2000). Their application to Angaro Wetland and the Lia and Omaniman rivers

requires accurate identification of ecological boundaries, existing uses and applicable approvals. A local agreement about access or revenue cannot replace a statutory environmental authorization where one is required (NEMA, 2023).

Forests, wildlife, water and land

The *National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, Cap 160* provides for forest management plans and collaborative forest management. The Ministry of Water and Environment manages central forest reserves, while the responsible body for any other forest must be established from its legal designation. A collaborative arrangement requires defined responsibilities and benefits between the responsible body and a forest user group (Government of Uganda, 2003). At Timu and Mt Kadam, the report verified the reserve boundary, responsible institution, status of the management plan and existence of any signed collaborative agreement. The presence of a conservation group alone does not establish a formal management mandate.

The *Uganda Wildlife Act, Cap. 135* provides for wildlife conservation areas, the functions of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and specified forms of community participation and wildlife use rights (Government of Uganda, 2019b). Where a monitored site borders a conservation area, its gazetted boundary and lawful access rules should be distinguished from customary use claims and community concerns. A community initiative should not be described as a legally designated wildlife management area without verifying the instrument that established it.

The *Water Act, Cap. 152* and associated regulations govern the development, use and protection of water resources. The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) oversees relevant water permits and promotes planning and coordination at catchment level (MWE, n.d.). Catchment planning is important in Karamoja because upstream abstraction, vegetation loss or changes to water storage may affect downstream wetlands, grazing and domestic water access. Site assessments should therefore consider hydrological connections beyond an individual wetland or river segment.

The *Land Act, Cap 236* recognizes customary tenure and provides for communal land associations. It also requires landowners and occupiers to manage and use land consistently with applicable forestry, mining, environmental, water and wildlife laws (Government of Uganda, 1998). Documenting communal rights can strengthen local management, but mapping and registration must account for seasonal grazing routes, water points and other legitimate users. Research on mining

in Karamoja shows that tensions may persist when formal decisions do not adequately address the range of customary land and resource claims (Rugadya, 2020).

I*nstitutional coordination and implementation*

The institutions responsible for a site may have different but connected mandates. NEMA oversees environmental compliance, MWE addresses water and catchment management, and manages central forest reserves, UWA manages wildlife conservation areas, and land institutions administer tenure processes. District and lower local governments have environmental planning and management responsibilities within their statutory powers (Government of Uganda, 2019a). For example, a proposal to extract sand from a river may require separate consideration of land access, extraction rights, environmental approval, effects on water and district revenue. Coordination is necessary because approval from one body does not automatically satisfy the requirements administered by another.

Table 2: Institutional responsibilities and coordination

Institution	Principal role relevant to the report
MWE	Leads water resources and catchment management and supports wetland and related ecosystem management. Manages central forest reserves, prepares forest management plans and may enter collaborative forest management arrangements.
MLHUD	Administer land tenure processes, including mechanisms for documenting customary and communal interests.
NEMA	Coordinates environmental management, oversees applicable environmental assessments and compliance, and works with lead agencies and local governments.
UWA	Manages wildlife conservation areas and implements the wildlife framework.
District and LLGs	Integrate environmental responsibilities into local planning, coordinate relevant departments and address matters within their statutory mandates.

These mandates intersect at many monitored sites. A riverbank extraction proposal, for example, may raise questions about customary surface use, a mineral or extraction right, environmental approval, water impacts and district revenue. The responsible institutions should therefore maintain a shared site record that identifies boundaries, rights holders, permits, management plans, inspections and complaint routes. The *National Climate Change Act* also requires district climate

change action planning, providing a basis for connecting restoration and water management to climate risk planning (Government of Uganda, 2021).

Implications for biodiversity health in Karamoja

Uganda's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan III, 2025–2030 provides a national policy framework for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. Its priorities need to be translated into measurable conditions at Karamoja sites, such as wetland extent and flow, riverbank stability, forest cover and regeneration, habitat condition, and the continued availability of seasonal grazing and water access. National policy commitments or the presence of a committee are not evidence that these conditions have improved (NEMA, 2025).

For this monitoring report, the most useful legal and institutional assessment is therefore site-specific. Each site profile should establish its legal designation and mapped boundary, the relevant customary and statutory rights, the lead and supporting authorities, the status of required plans and approvals, and the route for complaints and appeals. It should then compare documented management actions with repeated ecological observations. This approach permits the report to identify an enforceable governance gap without assuming that every reported activity is unlawful or that every established institution is functioning effectively.

4.0 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The monitoring covered selected wetlands, forests, rangelands and rivers in eight districts and Moroto Municipality. The strength of this approach was the comparison of observed pressures, reported access rules and management arrangements across contrasting sites. This was a purposive site assessment, not a baseline of ecosystem condition or a representative survey of Karamoja. The report identified concerns requiring follow-up, but could establish rates of forest loss, water contamination, carrying capacity or causal change. Published land-cover and forage research provides context for interpreting these observations, while showing why season, location and mobility matter (Egeru et al., 2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

Across the sites, resource condition was linked to the rules governing access and use. Customary grazing arrangements enabled herders to use spatially dispersed pasture and water, while statutory designations and mineral rights may have created overlapping claims. The Land Act recognises customary tenure, yet recognition of ownership does not by itself settle seasonal passage, collection, watering and benefit rights. Evidence from mining communities shows that the full bundle of customary rights must be considered in land and mineral decisions (Rugadya, 2020; Obaikol, 2014).

Reported access constraints were analysed site and resource, rather than attributed uniformly to conservation or mining across Karamoja. Protected-area boundaries, mining licences and local land allocation potentially affected different user groups in different ways; the monitoring did not measure the area excluded or document all decisions leading to exclusion. A useful follow-up would map legal boundaries against seasonal use areas and record the terms of consultation, compensation, access and grievance redress (Rugadya, 2020; FAO, 2019).

Gender and age also shaped who could exercise collective rights. Oxfam has previously identified unequal access to land, cattle and income opportunities among women and young people in Karamoja. The analysis should therefore ask who speaks for a communal landholding group, who can use a resource, and who receives proceeds or compensation. Presence at a site is weaker evidence of effective rights than participation in decisions and control over benefits (Oxfam, 2020; Rugadya, 2020).

4.1 Natural Resources Monitored

The joint monitoring exercise covered a diverse range of natural resources across the Karamoja sub-region, including wetlands, forests, rangelands, and river systems, reflecting the ecological diversity and livelihood dependence of communities in the region. These resources are held under public/state, communal, and customary ownership arrangements, with varying management structures and levels of community involvement. The nine monitored locations represent different ecological and governance settings, including two wetlands, two forests, two rangelands and three rivers. They were purposively selected for a joint monitoring exercise. The site descriptions below identify reported ownership and management, but those designations should be checked against gazette notices, land records, reserve maps and catchment plans before they are used as definitive legal findings (Obaikol, 2014; NEMA, 2024).

In Abim District, the monitoring focused on the Angaro Micro-Catchment Wetland, a state-owned wetland held in trust by government. Although legal ownership rests with the state, surrounding communities particularly those around Odongi Wetland are actively involved in its use and management through local management committees. These committees support planning, monitoring, and sustainable use practices, demonstrating a co-management approach where community participation complements statutory oversight.

In Amudat District, the assessed resource was the Amudat (Achorichor) Wetland, which is communally owned and managed at the local level. The Parish Environment Management Committee was reported to provide oversight within the district's environmental framework. Management efforts focused on regulating access, preventing encroachment, and promoting conservation through community awareness and enforcement of district guidelines.

In Kaabong District, monitoring covered Timu Forest, a gazetted public forest reserve under the mandate of the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE). Despite its legal status, communities inhabited parts of the forest, with settlements and social institutions such as schools and health facilities located within or adjacent to it. Resource management was strongly community-driven through the Timu Environmental Conservation Group (TECG), which conducts patrols, leads community sensitization, and promotes sustainable practices. With technical support and training from former NFA (MWE), communities practice selective tree pruning rather than clear-cutting, thereby preserving key species such as Ficus for beekeeping, and

apply controlled early bush burning to reduce wildfire risks. Community associations also were promoting tree planting and proper waste management within the forest landscape.

In Kotido District, the monitoring focused on the Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland, which is managed under customary tenure systems. Although detailed management arrangements were not formally documented, access and use were guided by traditional norms governing grazing patterns, seasonal mobility, and shared responsibility among pastoralist communities.

In Moroto District, the Nakonyen Rangeland was assessed. This rangeland is communally owned, primarily by the Tepeth community of Tapac Sub- County, and is used mainly for livestock grazing. Management is based on communal agreements that regulate access and support pastoral livelihoods.

In Moroto Municipality, monitoring focused on the Lia River, a publicly owned water body and a key ecological feature of the municipality. The river originates from the Lia natural spring in Nabuin Village, flows westwards, and merges with the seasonal Nadukon River, forming part of the wider Lokere catchment system. The Lia River provides multiple ecosystem services, including water for domestic use, livestock, and urban livelihoods, while supporting riparian forests characterized by evergreen species such as Faidherbia albida, Acacia nilotica, Tamarindus indica, and Kigelia aethiopica. Wildlife, including crocodiles upstream, was also reported. However, increasing urbanization within Moroto Municipality is placing growing pressure on the river ecosystem.

In Nabilatuk District, the monitored resource was the Nataa River, a public/state-owned water body that supports local livelihoods through livestock watering, domestic use, and small-scale economic activities, although detailed management arrangements remain limited.

In Nakapiripirit District, the assessment covered Mount Kadam Central Forest Reserve, a public forest reserve managed by the National Forestry Authority. The forest is held in trust by the Government of Uganda and managed to conserve biodiversity, ecosystems, and habitats, while sustaining the economic, social, health, and cultural benefits of the resource. Management objectives include soil, water, and air conservation, protection of natural heritage, and preservation of the forest's aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual values.

Finally, in Napak District, monitoring focused on the Omaniman River, a state-owned river system originating from Mount Moroto and traversing multiple sub-counties, including Lotome, Ngoleriet, Kangole

Town Council, Matany, Lopeei, and Lokopo. The river supports a range of activities such as livestock grazing and watering, domestic water use, charcoal burning, harvesting of thatching grass, and sand mining. The monitoring team visited active sand-mining sites in Morulinga Parish (Matany Sub-county) and Naremaregae Parish (Lotome Sub-county), which attract miners from surrounding villages. These activities highlight the river's economic importance, but also raise concerns about degradation of the catchment if extraction remains poorly regulated.

4.2 Access to Natural Resources and User Rights

Access depends on more than the physical ability to reach a site. Customary tenure, seasonal grazing agreements, forest or wetland rules, mining rights and costs can each affect who may enter, use, manage or benefit from a resource. The Land Act recognizes customary rights, while research on Karamoja mining shows why collective and surface use rights should be documented alongside formal mineral decisions (Obaikol, 2014; Rugadya, 2020).

The following subsections compare actual use, payments, restrictions, disputes and knowledge of rights at the visited sites. Absence of a complaint during a visit is not evidence that no dispute exists. Records from customary leaders, local governments, agencies and grievance channels would allow reported experiences to be checked (FAO, 2019; Rugadya, 2020).

4.2.1 Recognition and Exercise of User Rights

Customary tenure is a legally recognised form of ownership in Uganda. The Land Act also recognises third-party and communal use interests, and provides for certificates of customary ownership and Communal Land Associations. A lack of registration should therefore not be equated with an absence of rights (Government of Uganda, 1998; Obaikol, 2014). At each site, the report distinguishes ownership, entry, extraction, seasonal grazing, management and benefit rights. For a forest reserve, the gazette instrument and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act govern activities, with any agreed collaborative forest management arrangements specifying permitted community use (Government of Uganda, 2003).

Respondents described collective customary use of pasture, water and forest resources, while also reporting uncertainty where statutory designations or mineral interests overlap. Research on Karamoja mining

shows that recognising only titled ownership can miss the collective and surface rights affected by extraction (Rugadya, 2020). This is a reason to document right holders and secondary users, boundaries and seasonal use before allocation decisions. The monitoring did not review specific licences, consultations or consent records. Therefore, the report could not conclude that every reported allocation breached a legal consent requirement. A rights audit should inspect the relevant instruments, notices, consultation records, compensation or benefit arrangements, and grievance outcomes. Women's membership and influence in collective governance also merited separate examination (Lakidi Achan, 2020).

4.2.2 Awareness of rights

Respondents perceived greater awareness of customary or legal rights in Abim, Kotido and Moroto than in Amudat, Kaabong and Nakapiripirit. The weakness to write-home about was that the exercise did not administer the same questions to a comparable sample of actors in each site. What was done was the reliance on qualitative impressions rather than measured district differences.[1] Awareness could have been separated into knowledge of a customary rule, a statutory right, the responsible authority and an available remedy (Obaikol, 2014).

An assessment could ask each user group to explain, without prompting, who may enter, harvest or graze, which conditions apply, where a complaint goes and whether a previous complaint received a response. The answers were disaggregated by sex, age, disability and resident status and checked against published rules. Oxfam's Karamoja programme identifies unequal access to productive assets for women and youth, while the Communal Land Association study shows that membership and influence in decisions need direct measurement (Oxfam, 2020.; Lakidi Achan, 2020). Rights awareness matters when enabled informed use and accountability, not merely when people recalled the name of a law.

4.2.3 Physical Access of Community Members to Resources

Respondents described physical access at many visited locations, including some formally managed resources. The findings concerned practical entry challenges at the time of observation. Findings did not establish legal entitlement, unrestricted use throughout the year or equal access for all users. Forest reserves, wetlands and mining areas required site-specific checks of permitted activities and management agreements (Obaikol, 2014; NEMA, 2024).

1 Joint monitoring exercise, 2025.

Reports of charcoal making, cutting, hunting and mineral extraction should be recorded with locations, dates and the applicable rules. Open entry alone does not prove that access causes degradation. Land-cover and forage studies suggest that outcomes depend on use intensity, mobility and wider land-use change (Egeru et al., 2015; Nakalembe et al., 2017).

The evidence supports three analytically useful categories namely: negotiated customary access, legally regulated access, and contested access where claims overlap. These categories may coexist at one site. For example, customary grazing rights and statutory forest management may apply to the same landscape, making boundary maps and agreed use arrangements important (Obaikol, 2014; Rugadya, 2020).

Communities in Karamoja widely access communal natural resources such as grazing land, water points, and seasonal pastures under customary tenure systems. A clear local example is in Nakapiripirit and Moroto districts, where pastoralist communities move livestock seasonally to access communal grazing areas and valley tanks managed through clan elders and customary norms. These resources are accessed collectively without individual ownership, guided by traditional rules on timing, herd size, and reciprocity, especially during dry seasons. This form of access remains central to livelihoods and resilience in Karamoja's semi-arid environment and is legally recognized.[2]

Figure 1: A herd of cattle grazing in Moroto Forest in Karamoja



2 https://www.iied.org/challenging-social-norms-drylands-uganda

In contrast, protected areas such as national parks and wildlife reserves significantly restrict community access. For example, Kidepo Valley National Park in Kaabong District is a fully protected area managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority, where grazing, hunting, firewood collection, and settlement by surrounding communities are prohibited by law. Although some collaborative arrangements exist, access to natural resources inside the park is highly limited, and communities can only benefit indirectly through tourism-related opportunities or negotiated resource access agreements. These restrictions have historically contributed to grievances, especially where protected areas overlap with former customary grazing lands.

A third category is regulated or contested access, particularly in areas affected by mining and external investments. In places like Rupa Sub-County (Moroto District), communities access minerals such as gold through artisanal mining, but this access is increasingly restricted by licensed mining companies holding exploration or extraction rights. While the law requires compensation and surface rights agreements, communities often report limited consultation and reduced access to land and water resources once concessions are granted. This has created tensions between customary users, investors, and government authorities.[3]

Overall, physical entry was reported at many sites, but this should not be described as uniform or unrestricted access across Karamoja. The relevant measures are whether each user group can exercise a defined right in the season when it is needed, under clear rules and with a remedy if access is denied (FAO, 2019; Oxfam, 2020).

4.2.4 Resource uses and Competing Demands

The monitored wetlands, rivers, forests and rangelands support overlapping domestic, productive and cultural uses. The environmental question is not whether several uses occur, but whether their location, season and intensity are compatible with other ecological functions and with the rights of other users. FAO documents livestock mobility and variable watering and grazing practices as adaptations to uneven forage and water availability. A fixed allocation of grazing land or water can therefore have different effects in dry and wet seasons (FAO, 2014; Egeru et al., 2015). The monitoring recorded activities at selected sites but did not measure abstraction volumes, extraction rates, biomass removal or cumulative impacts.

3 https://nilepost.co.ug/news/120384/karamoja-locals-want-a-share-of-the-mineral-riches-in-the-sub-region

Grazing, cropping, fishing, fuelwood collection and timber use were reported at different sites. The relevant trade-offs vary. Cultivation in a wetland may alter vegetation and access to seasonal grazing; tree cutting can affect regeneration where harvesting exceeds replacement; and livestock concentration near a water point may increase bare ground and bank disturbance. These are hypotheses for site-level testing, not demonstrated effects of every activity observed. Land-use research in Karamoja shows that agricultural expansion and policy choices must be considered alongside charcoal production when explaining landscape change (Nakalembe et al., 2017). Site plans should map use zones, seasonal routes, sensitive habitat and agreed restrictions.

Figure 2: Nakonyen vast rangeland with a cattle crush.



The Lia, Nataa and Omaniman river sites were reported to support domestic water collection, livestock watering and commercial or construction uses. In Napak, respondents described sand removal and concern about extraction near a drift or bridge. The report did not measure channel depth, bank retreat or water quality. Therefore, the report may not attribute physical change to a particular operator. An assessment should record extraction coordinates and quantities, river cross-sections, bank condition, seasonal flow, permitted areas and restoration obligations. The Ministry of Water and Environment links wetland degradation nationally to hydrological and water-quality effects, but those national findings do not establish an effect at these river reaches (MWE, 2022).

The monitoring also recorded cultural value attached to particular trees

and places. Such uses should be mapped with community consent and treated as part of the resource's value when decisions are made about extraction or access. The relevant question was which people can maintain these practices and whether a land-use decision would interrupt them. Customary institutions continue to influence resource decisions, although studies report that their authority and links with local government have changed (Carlson et al., 2012; Obonyo & Muhumuza, 2021).

> *At Omaniman, respondents reported farming, livestock use and seasonal sand extraction. They also reported a UGX 50,000 charge per tipper lorry and a UGX 500 charge per bucket in Nasinyonoit, alongside concerns about extraction near the bridge and delayed payment to miners by buyers. These are distinct transactions. The first two appear to be extraction or sale charges, rather than a fee to enter or collect domestic water. The collector, legal authority, receipt, remittance, pricing unit and destination of proceeds were not verified by the exercise. Women, young people and persons with disabilities reportedly participate in sand work, but the interviews do not show who controls the proceeds or bears occupational risks. Seasonal river flow constrains extraction, and any safety restriction should be described separately from a legal ban.*[4]

The implications are operational. District and sub-county authorities should distinguish resource access, commercial extraction rights, public revenue and private sale prices in a site register. They should assess the cumulative effect of multiple users, rather than evaluating each activity in isolation, and publish clear rules that protect domestic water needs, safe passage, pastoral mobility and culturally significant places (FAO, 2014; MWE, 2022; Nakalembe et al., 2017).

4.2.5 Differentiated access for women, Youth and Other Groups

Women, young people and persons with disabilities were reported to take part in some activities, including sand extraction, but participation did not establish control over land, decisions, income or compensation. A Karamoja study of Communal Land Associations found that women's inclusion in governance and sensitisation could narrow some family-level gaps, while stressing that communal and family rights that differ

4 Joint monitoring exercise, September 2025.

and that context-specific baseline indicators were needed (Lakidi Achan, 2020). Oxfam likewise had identified unequal access to land, cattle and income opportunities for women and youth (Oxfam, 2020). The monitoring did not systematically sample by sex, age or disability, so it cannot estimate the size of these gaps at its sites. Follow-up should record who holds membership and voting rights, who can use dry-season resources, who receives extraction income or compensation, and who can safely complain. It should distinguish married, unmarried and widowed women and avoid assuming that all members of a category share the same rights. No site-level evidence was supplied to support a conclusion about refugee access (Lakidi Achan, 2020).

4.2.6 Payments and Conditions of Access

There was a reported absence of entry fees at most sites, which implies free physical access. However, this does not mean that all uses are free. At Nakwanamoru–Kapus, respondents described annual payments of UGX 50,000–100,000 by non-resident users, while at Omaniman; they reported charges per lorry and per bucket of sand. The latter related to commercial extraction or sale, not necessarily entry to the river. The monitoring did not inspect receipts, by-laws, contracts or revenue accounts. Each charge should therefore be recorded by resource, payer, collector, legal or customary basis, unit, season and use of proceeds (Joint monitoring exercise, 2025). A charge may finance management, but it may also exclude mobile herders or poorer users if imposed without a negotiated rule. FAO's work on cross-border resource sharing shows why agreed terms for non-resident use and dispute resolution matter in pastoral areas (FAO, 2019).

4.2.7 Customary Access Norms

Respondents described customary rules for seasonal grazing, shared water and forest use. These arrangements can coordinate access across a variable landscape, but their authority and inclusiveness could not be presumed from their existence. Research in Karamoja found that governance rules, conflict and ease of movement were associated with perceived forage availability (Egeru et al., 2015). A study of customary authority found that elders remained important for some forms of redress, while their influence had changed with livelihood and security conditions (Carlson et al., 2012). Obonyo and Muhumuza (2021) found that traditional and local government institutions often operate in parallel. The site assessment should identify the actual rule, decision forum, eligible users, seasonal exceptions and appeal routes,

and test whether women, youths and visiting herders have a voice. Where a local by-law is claimed, its text and adoption record should be checked rather than treating an oral rule as a statutory instrument.

4.2.8 External Claims and Changing Access

About 70 per cent of the respondents in Kaabong and Moroto described changes or interference affecting local access; no comparable report was recorded at the other visited sites. The term "external actor" can cover a reserve authority, a mining licensee, a commercial buyer or a neighbouring user group, each with a different mandate and claim. Research on mining in Karamoja shows that overlapping mineral and customary surface rights, weak recognition of collective interests and benefit disputes can generate tension (Rugadya, 2020). Older land governance assessments had also documented concern about the interaction of forestry, wildlife and mining concessions with customary tenure, but their historical findings could not establish the status of, for instance a current site (Obaikol, 2014). For each alleged interference, the report should identify the actor, decision date, mapped area, licence or gazette instrument, affected use, consultation record and remedy sought. This would separate a lawful, negotiated restriction from an unverified allegation of exclusion.

4.2.9 Disputes and complaint channels

The exercise recorded complaints in Abim, Kaabong and Moroto. In Abim, respondents described disagreement over wetland access and benefit sharing. There was a finding that disputes were more prevalent in these districts would require comparable complaint records across all sites. Absence of a reported dispute elsewhere may mean only that none was documented during this visit.

In Kaabong, respondents described tension over residence and use within or near Timu Forest and concerns about forest boundaries and mineral access. These were accounts of claims, not a determination that a particular household occupies a gazetted reserve or, that a named community encroached, or that mining rights have been issued. The next step is a joint review of the gazette and boundary map, settlement history, management rules, any resource-use agreement and the status of mineral licences, with the affected Ik residents and neighbouring users represented. This is consistent with research showing that overlapping resource rights require recognition and a workable forum for resolution (Obaikol, 2014; Rugadya, 2020).

Moroto respondents similarly reported disputes about mineral access and boundaries. A case-by-case approach should identify the

landholding group, surface user, mineral right holder, specific activity and remedy requested. Formal adjudication may be necessary for titles or licence questions, while negotiated access and compensation may address some use conflicts. The report should avoid treating customary mediation and statutory decisions as interchangeable. Studies in Karamoja describe the continuing relevance of customary redress alongside an incomplete alignment with local government institutions (Carlson et al., 2012; Obonyo & Muhumuza, 2021).

An actionable complaints register would record date, location, claimant group, alleged impact, applicable rule, forum, response time, decision, appeal and whether the remedy was implemented. Disaggregate cases by sex and user status and protect complainants' confidentiality where needed. This enables the report to distinguish the incidence of reported grievances from their resolution, and to test whether customary and formal channels are accessible to those with weaker bargaining power (Lakidi Achan, 2020; Rugadya, 2020).

4.2.10 Seasonal, legal and social restrictions

The monitoring identified three different sources of restricted access. Seasonal flooding at Achorichor would make passage unsafe without changing legal rights. Conditions reportedly applied to non-resident users in Nakwanamoru–Kapus and Nakonyen concerning social permission or payment. Forest reserves are governed by statutory rules and any applicable management or collaborative use arrangements. These mechanisms require separate analysis because a physical impediment, a negotiated customary rule and a legal prohibition call for different responses (FAO, 2019; Government of Uganda, 2003).

Respondents in Kotido and Moroto distinguished resident from visiting rangeland users. The assessment did not establish whether every visitor must obtain approval, who issues it, or whether the reported charge applies to grazing, settlement or another use. In pastoral systems, access to dispersed pasture and water is particularly valuable in dry seasons; a rule that appears minor in a wet-season visit may determine whether herds can move when forage is scarce (FAO, 2014; Egeru et al., 2015). A follow-up should document the rule in both seasons, the decision forum, duration, exemptions, receipts and dispute route, and interview non-resident herders as well as host communities.

Abim, Nabilatuk, Napak and Moroto Municipality did not report a restriction at the locations and time assessed. This is not evidence that all users can enter throughout the year. Site-level access does vary with flow, weather, safety, harvesting rules and the user's social position. Repeat interviews and direct observations in contrasting seasons

should record who was turned away, by whom, on what authority, and with what remedy (Joint monitoring exercise, 2025; FAO, 2019).

The implication for resource health is that restrictions can protect a sensitive area or displace use to another site. Both outcomes need assessment. A seasonal wetland closure may allow vegetation recovery, while an unplanned barrier to a dry-season grazing route may concentrate herds around fewer water points. Monitoring should pair access maps and user accounts with vegetation and soil indicators before attributing degradation or recovery to an access rule (Egeru et al., 2015; MWE, 2022).

4.3 Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Resource Use

Ecosystem health here refers to the capacity of a resource to maintain its ecological functions and support use through time. A visit can reveal bare soil, tree cutting, cultivation near a wetland, exposed river banks or mining pits. However, it cannot by itself measure a change in biodiversity, water chemistry or long-term forage production. Karamoja studies combine vegetation indices, land-cover analysis and pastoral ecological knowledge to capture seasonal and spatial variation (Egeru et al., 2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

National wetland assessments link degradation to changes in biodiversity, hydrology and resource provision, but a visible disturbance is only an initial indicator of such effects. For the monitored wetlands, repeat vegetation and boundary mapping, water-level observations and agreed use records would clarify whether reported conservation activity is protecting function over time (MWE, 2022). For river sites, dry- and wet-season sampling should accompany observations of erosion and possible pollution.

The analysis therefore separates three levels of evidence: directly observed physical signs; respondent accounts of causes and practices; and ecological or health outcomes that require measurement. This avoids treating an untested risk, such as agrochemical runoff, as confirmed contamination (MWE, 2022; NEMA, 2024).

The site comparison examines visible harm and local management and restoration efforts. It highlights where baseline measurements are needed, particularly forest-cover change, wetland extent, rangeland vegetation and soil condition, sediment load and water quality. Published regional studies inform the choice of indicators but do not substitute for site-level measurements (Egeru et al., 2014; Nakalembe

et al., 2017).

4.3.1Visible Environmental Pressures and their Implications

The monitoring recorded no conspicuous harm at the visited points in Moroto District and Moroto Municipality during the assessment. This does not establish that those ecosystems are healthy. In Abim and Amudat, respondents raised concerns about agrochemical use near wetland cultivation; no water or soil samples were analysed, so pollution remains a risk to test. In Kaabong, the team documented cultivation or settlement near forest areas and reported tree cutting and open mining pits, which warrant mapped boundary checks and repeat forest-cover assessment. Kotido respondents described pressure on grazing areas, but the record does not quantify vegetation change. The sites and seasons of observation should be reported alongside these findings (Joint monitoring exercise, 2025; MWE, 2022).

Figure 3: A section of Timu Central Forest Reserve with a maize garden



Regional evidence helps to explain why a single visit can mislead. Satellite-based research found substantial spatial and seasonal variation in forage and vegetation across Karamoja. A dry-season bare patch does not, on its own, demonstrate a long-term decline; a trend requires comparison with the same season over multiple years and ground checks of species, biomass and soil exposure (Egeru et al.,

2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

Tree cutting and land conversion should be analysed separately. Nakalembe et al. (2017) show that agricultural expansion and policies affecting land use are relevant to Karamoja's landscape change. The monitoring reports, charcoal production and construction timber demand at some locations, but does not measure their relative contribution to forest loss. Geo-referenced imagery, harvest records and forest inventories have the potential to distinguish these pressures from cultivation and settlement (Nakalembe et al., 2017; NEMA, 2024).

Concentrated grazing damages sensitive sites, particularly where insecurity, restricted mobility or scarce watering points keep animals in the same area. Yet pastoral mobility can distribute pressure and make use of variable forage. The assessment should record stocking and use by season, access routes, distance from water, vegetation composition and erosion before diagnosing overgrazing or reduced carrying capacity (FAO, 2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

At the monitored water points, competing domestic, livestock and commercial uses raise management questions. Shared use is not proof of contamination. Risk assessment requires source protection observations and tests appropriate to the suspected hazard, including microbial indicators for drinking water and parameters relevant to sediment or chemicals. National wetland evidence documents potential water-quality consequences of degradation, but does not provide measurements for these rivers (MWE, 2022).

Where bank erosion, exposed soil or sediment plumes were observed, the report identifies the precise reach, adjacent land use and date. Subsequent wet-season inspection and sediment or turbidity measurements can test whether runoff is worsening. Climate variability may influence flow, but attributing a particular erosion event to climate change requires a longer rainfall and hydrological record (NEMA, 2024; MWE, 2022).

Wetland cultivation and vegetation removal may reduce habitat and alter hydrological function, depending on their location and extent. The joint monitoring findings justify a mapped inventory of encroachment and comparison with wetland boundaries. MWE's national wetland assessment provides a framework for evaluating ecological and livelihood effects, while local hydrology and vegetation data are needed to determine the condition of Angaro/Odongi and Achorichor (MWE, 2022).

4.3.2 Sustainability Assessment and Evidence Gaps

The exercise elicited favourable assessments of use at several visited sites and more concern at Mt Kadam and Omaniman. These are site perceptions, not sustainability scores for entire districts. Sustainable use would require evidence that resource functions and legitimate livelihoods can be maintained over time. The minimum indicators differ by ecosystem, including wetland extent and vegetation, forest regeneration and extraction, rangeland species and forage availability, and riverbank stability and water quality. Measurements need a baseline, seasonal comparability and repeat observation. Karamoja forage research shows substantial spatial variation, so a dry-season photograph or a planted tree cannot establish a landscape trend (Egeru et al., 2014; Egeru et al., 2015; MWE, 2022).

At Angaro and Odongi, respondents identified committees, seasonal rules, planting, boundary marking and alternative livelihoods. Wetlands International documents the establishment of micro-catchment management committees for Angaro, Odongi and Loyoroit with Abim District and MWE, as well as catchment planning work (Wetlands International, 2021a; Wetlands International, 2020a). This corroborates the existence of a governance platform, but not the draft's claim that wetland edges have stabilised. The assessment should verify plan approval and implementation, map the wetland boundary, measure vegetation and water condition, and record whether users retain agreed access.

Partner-supported tree farming and beekeeping have been documented in the Angaro, Loyoroit and Odongi catchments (Wetlands International, 2021b; Wetlands International, 2020b). Such activities do diversify income and supply wood outside natural habitats, but the exercise did not establish household uptake or reduced extraction from the monitored wetlands. Evaluation should compare survival of planted trees, income and harvesting behaviour, as well as management costs and the participation of women and poorer households. District oversight and committee activity should be documented through meeting minutes, work plans, inspection logs and budget releases rather than assumed from institutional mandates (MWE, 2022).

In Kaabong, pruning rather than felling was reported while customary grazing and shared water arrangements were noted in Kotido and Moroto. These practices may support regeneration or distribute pressure, but their effect depends on harvest frequency, species and seasonal mobility. The visit did not quantify forest regrowth, grazing intensity or mining impacts. Repeat vegetation plots, livestock-use

records and mine-site inspections are required to judge ecological outcomes (Egeru et al., 2015; NEMA, 2024).

Figure 4. Trees planted near a homestead in Kotido. The photograph does not establish rangeland restoration



In Amudat, respondents identified local committees and a mix of crop, tree and livestock practices intended to manage rainfall risk. The report avoids presenting all reported practices as adopted by all Pokot or host households, or as proven conservation outcomes Forage studies indicate that mobility and local knowledge help herders respond to environmental variation, but restrictions on movement can change the distribution of grazing pressure (FAO, 2014; Egeru et al., 2015). Monitoring should establish which households use each practice, the management rule at Achorichor, and whether vegetation, water and livelihood indicators improve over successive seasons.

Mt Kadam forest and Omaniman River present different risks. For the former, verify harvest locations, reserve boundaries, permits and regeneration; for the latter, record sand removal, bank profiles, flow and any restoration conditions. The exercise reports concerns, not measured rates of deforestation or river degradation. Prioritising these indicators would turn a qualitative alert into a defensible site assessment (NEMA, 2024; MWE, 2022).

The apparent contrast between reported sustainable practices and visible pressures is not necessarily contradictory. A committee or customary rule may operate alongside extraction that exceeds regeneration. Conversely, a disturbed patch may recover through

seasonal rest. The causal pathway to test is whether governance changes the timing and intensity of use and whether ecological condition responds. Land-use change, mobility and tenure all affect that relationship in Karamoja (Nakalembe et al., 2017; Egeru et al., 2015; Rugadya, 2020).

4.3.3 Community initiatives for restoration and conservation

The joint exercise identified wetland and catchment committees, planting, customary rules and volunteer reporting, with the most detailed account from Angaro and Odongi. Wetlands International independently describes catchment committees and planning in these Abim systems (Wetlands International, 2021a; Wetlands International, 2020a). This supports the existence of initiatives; it does not verify every reported activity or demonstrate ecological recovery. The report should record the responsible group, membership, authority, plan, financing and dates for each action. A claimed by-law requires a copy and adoption record, while a no-harvest area requires a mapped boundary and agreed user rules.

Partner and district support can provide seedlings, training and technical oversight. The Angaro experience includes support for tree farmers, and the broader Abim catchments include beekeeping initiatives (Wetlands International, 2021b; Wetlands International, 2020b). To assess whether these reduce pressure on wetlands, monitor seedling survival and suitable species, household uptake and net income, and any change in cutting or cultivation at the target site. Attribution remains difficult where rainfall, prices and access conditions also change; comparison sites or repeated measurements would strengthen the claim (MWE, 2022).

In Amudat, the exercise reports community awareness meetings, tree maintenance and customary controls over wetland or grazing use. These accounts should be verified against committee records and interviews with different user groups. A restoration initiative should specify the ecological problem, area treated, land and use rights affected, expected result and indicators. Practices such as crop diversification or livestock mobility are livelihood adaptation strategies, but they should not automatically be classified as restoration of Achorichor Wetland without evidence of a local ecological effect (FAO, 2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

In Kaabong, respondents described seedlings and agroforestry support, while Kotido and Moroto Municipality accounts were less detailed. The monitoring did not verify the implementing organisations, numbers planted, survival or resource condition, so a comparison of

the strength of initiatives across districts is premature. For forests, community participation should be assessed against the applicable management plan and any signed collaborative forest management agreement, not inferred from tree planting alone (Government of Uganda, 2003). Record who decides species and sites, who maintains seedlings, and whether local users receive agreed benefits. This can reveal whether an initiative is genuinely community-led or merely implemented in a community.

A common results framework would compare baseline and follow-up wetland extent, native vegetation, forest regeneration, fire or cutting incidents, rangeland cover and access for legitimate users. The national wetlands report links community management with conservation, but locally verified outcomes are needed before asserting that the monitored resources have recovered (MWE, 2022). Angaro's catchment planning provides a practical starting point for a dated, mapped monitoring series (Wetlands International, 2020a).

Restoration should also be assessed for distributional effects. A new boundary or temporary closure may protect habitat while removing a seasonal use on which poorer households depend. Document the users consulted, any agreed alternative access, complaints and the effects on women and non-resident herders. This connects ecological results with the tenure and participation issues identified in Karamoja studies (Rugadya, 2020; Lakidi Achan, 2020).

The exercise did not compile comparable budgets, treatment areas or ecological outcomes for the different initiatives. The report therefore records their reported existence and proposed mechanisms, while reserving claims about effectiveness for a future evaluation with a baseline and verified implementation data.

Where collaborative forest management is proposed for Timu or Mt Kadam, the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act provides a legal basis for agreements. Effectiveness should be tested against a signed agreement, a current management plan, represented user groups, permitted uses, benefit provisions and joint monitoring records (Government of Uganda, 2003).

Community leadership is meaningful when users have a documented role in decisions, resources to implement them and a route to challenge restrictions. Membership alone cannot demonstrate influence. Women's roles within Communal Land Associations in Karamoja illustrate why representation and control over decisions should be measured separately (Lakidi Achan, 2020).

For each initiative, maintain a register with the site and mapped area, baseline, responsible institution, community representatives, start date, activities, costs, ecological and access indicators, measurement dates, results and grievances. This creates a basis for comparing outputs with changes in resource condition (MWE, 2022; NEMA, 2024).

4.3.4 Community monitoring and reporting of harmful use

Respondents described community monitoring in Abim, Kaabong, Kotido and Moroto and weaker or less visible participation in Amudat, Moroto Municipality and Nakapiripirit. The assessment did not count monitors, patrols, reports or official responses, so it cannot rank district performance or attribute non-participation to weak enforcement alone. The presence of a committee should be distinguished from its ability to detect, document and obtain a response to a harmful activity. Catchment committees established in Angaro and Odongi offer an institutional channel, but their current operational record should be checked (Wetlands International, 2021a).

A practical reporting chain begins with an accessible local channel, a dated and georeferenced observation where safe, referral to the responsible district or national authority, a recorded verification decision and feedback to the complainant. Separate suspected breaches from confirmed offences, and protect people who report influential actors. Community ecological knowledge can help locate changing forage or resource pressure, while technical measurements and statutory review establish the nature of harm or breach (Egeru et al., 2015; NEMA, 2024). Track reports received, verified, acted on and closed, disaggregated by site and reporter group. Without these records, claims of effective monitoring remain untested.

Community by-laws and Adherence

Respondents reported customary rules or local by-laws in several sites. The existence of a rule, its legal status and adherence are separate questions. The exercise did not use systematic observations or enforcement registers to calculate compliance, so “generally high adherence” is not supported. Record each rule’s source, scope, season, sanctions and evidence of application, including whether women, non-resident herders and other users were involved in setting it (FAO, 2019; Egeru et al., 2015).

Customary institutions can coordinate access to variable pasture and water. Research in Karamoja found that grazing rules, conflict and ease of access were associated with perceived forage availability. This is evidence for assessing how rules function, not proof that any particular

by-law has restored vegetation at a monitored site (Egeru et al., 2015).

Customary governance in Karamoja is recognised under Ugandan law so long as it does not conflict with the Constitution, and it continues to influence how communities manage their resources in practice. For example, elders and traditional committees play important roles in mediating access to land and negotiating movement across territories, acting as de facto resource governance mechanisms.[5]

In efforts to formalise community rules into written instruments, projects involving communal land associations (CLAs) in parts of Karamoja have supported communities to document traditional rules for managing communal land and grazing areas. In some cases, these documented rules have been incorporated into local ordinances, such as a communal land management ordinance passed in Napak District in 2020, which seeks to provide broader legal recognition and enforceability for what were previously oral customary norms at the community level.[6]

Despite these initiatives, the adherence to both customary and formalised community rules are challenged by several factors. The influence of customary systems has weakened due to changing land tenure dynamics, government involvement, and external pressures such as mining interests and land concessions, which disrupt traditional patterns of resource governance and reduce community control over resources. In addition, enforcement capacity of formal local by-laws remains limited, and official governance often does not fully involve or align with community-driven processes, leading to limited compliance and persistent resource pressures.[7] In summary, while community initiated rules and customary norms to guide resource use exist and have historically governed access and use in Karamoja, their formalisation as written by-laws and consistent adherence remains inconsistent, with most governance still grounded in customary practice and facing pressures from formal state systems and external economic interests.[8]

5 https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Tradition-in-Transition.pdf
6 https://land-in-uganda.org/shared-files/1541/?Lessons-from-the-Field-CLA-registration-in-Karamoja-final.pdf
7 https://www.acdivoca.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Natural-Resources-Management-Karamoja.pdf
8 Ibid

Figure 5: A section Timu Forest Central Forest Reserve in Kabong



In Kotido District, the monitoring focused on the Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland, which is managed under customary tenure systems. Although detailed management arrangements were not formally documented, access and use are guided by traditional norms governing grazing patterns, seasonal mobility, and shared responsibility among pastoralist communities.

In Moroto District, the Nakonyen Rangeland was assessed. This rangeland is communally owned, primarily by the Tepeth community of Tapac Sub-county, and is used mainly for livestock grazing. Management is based on communal agreements that regulate access and support pastoral livelihoods.

In Moroto Municipality, monitoring focused on the Lia River, a publicly owned water body and a key ecological feature of the municipality. The river originates from the Lia natural spring in Nabuin Village, flows westwards, and merges with the seasonal Nadukon River, forming part of the wider Lokere catchment system. The Lia River provides multiple ecosystem services, including water for domestic use, livestock, and urban livelihoods, while supporting riparian forests characterized by evergreen species such as Faidherbia albida, Acacia nilotica, Tamarindus indica, and Kigelia aethiopica. Wildlife, including crocodiles upstream, was also reported. However, increasing urbanization within Moroto Municipality is placing growing pressure on the river ecosystem.

In Nabilatuk District, the monitored resource was the Nataa River, a public/state-owned water body that supports local livelihoods through livestock watering, domestic use, and small-scale economic activities, although detailed management arrangements remain limited.

In Nakapiripirit District, the assessment covered Mount Kadam Central

Forest Reserve, a public forest reserve managed by the National Forestry Authority. The forest is held in trust by the Government of Uganda and managed to conserve biodiversity, ecosystems, and habitats, while sustaining the economic, social, health, and cultural benefits of the resource. Management objectives include soil, water, and air conservation, protection of natural heritage, and preservation of the forest's aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual values.

Finally, in Napak District, monitoring focused on the Omaniman River, a state-owned river system originating from Mount Moroto and traversing multiple sub-counties, including Lotome, Ngoleriet, Kangole Town Council, Matany, Lopeei, and Lokopo. The river supports a range of activities such as livestock grazing and watering, domestic water use, charcoal burning, harvesting of thatching grass, and sand mining. The monitoring team visited active sand-mining sites in Morulinga Parish (Matany Sub-county) and Naremaregae Parish (Lotome Sub-county), which attract miners from surrounding villages. These activities highlight the river's economic importance, but also raise concerns about degradation of the catchment if extraction remains poorly regulated.

4.4 Natural Resource Governance

Governance of natural resources in Karamoja operates through overlapping customary rules, statutory institutions and project-supported committees. Elders and other customary authorities negotiate grazing and water access, while district governments, the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) and land institutions hold distinct legal mandates. Their authority and legitimacy vary by place and have changed with settlement, livelihood diversification and state intervention (Carlson et al., 2012; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2021).

This overlap can create both useful links and uncertainty about who may authorize use, enforce a rule or settle a dispute. A named group or consultation event therefore does not by itself establish a valid mandate, representative membership, a current plan or effective oversight. Communal tenure and mineral development add further questions about consent, access and benefit sharing (Government of Uganda, 1998; Rugadya, 2020).

The joint monitoring exercise provides reported observations across sites, rather than a census of institutions or a verified administrative inventory. This section compares those reports with documentary evidence, distinguishes customary practice from legally constituted arrangements, and identifies records needed to establish whether

governance mechanisms work. Climatic stress can affect resource access, but conflict also depends on land-use change, tenure, political decisions and security; a direct scarcity-to-violence explanation would be incomplete (Abrahams, 2021).

The assessment considers the recognition and terms of management arrangements (5.1), the existence and use of plans (5.2), community structures (5.3), coordination with government (5.4), awareness of those channels (5.5), and reported conflicts (5.6). Findings should be read at the observed site and time. The key tests are whether responsibilities are documented, community members can participate and seek redress, decisions are implemented, and outcomes can be checked against records.

4.4.1 Availability of known management arrangements for the resource

Respondents reported recognizable arrangements in Kaabong, Kotido, Moroto and Moroto Municipality, including former NFA involvement in Kaabong. They described a community forestry arrangement in Nakapiripirit, but its legal status was not verified. An affirmative response is evidence of local recognition, not proof of a signed collaborative forest management (CFM) agreement or a current management plan. For each site, the monitoring team should record the resource boundary, responsible authority, instrument or customary rule, date, signatories and who can access or challenge decisions (NFA, 2024a).

Statutory and customary arrangements must be identified by resource and jurisdiction. Under the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act, a forest reserve is managed through the responsible forest authority and a management plan, while CFM requires an agreed relationship with an organized community group. A project-supported forest group or customary access agreement should not be labelled a formal CFM agreement without the signed instrument (Government of Uganda, 2003; NFA, 2024a; NFA, 2024b).

Participatory land-use planning is an emerging governance process rather than proof of an adopted plan. IGAD and Ugandan counterparts documented community mapping and discussion of competing uses in Kacheri, Kotido, in 2025. Its relevance to the monitored resource depends on whether the resulting draft was approved, publicly accessible and reflected in district decisions, including provision for seasonal livestock mobility (IGAD, 2025).

At catchment scale, MWE has supported management organizations for the Lokere and Lokok catchments. Wetlands International reported

community micro-catchment committees in Angaro and Odongi. These institutions operate at different scales: a catchment committee cannot be assumed to manage every wetland parcel, and a local committee cannot substitute for the statutory water authority. Membership lists, meeting minutes, decisions and referral records would establish the working relationship (MWE, 2017; Wetlands International, 2021a).

CFM can specify access, restoration, monitoring and benefits; but the arrangement and the relevant forest reserves need to be verified site by site. The national forest-plan inventory shows that plan currency is a substantive issue: NFA reported 18 of 55 management planning areas with valid plans in 2024. That national figure cannot be used as a Karamoja estimate (NFA, 2024a; NFA, 2024b).

Civil-society support may help convene dialogues, map claims and train committees, yet a project platform is not an enduring public authority. The monitoring record should identify the implementing organization, duration, funding and handover arrangements before treating a forum as a standing management mechanism. This is especially relevant where the arrangement spans pastoral, agricultural and mineral uses (Rugadya, 2020).

Customary arrangements remain important for negotiating dry-season grazing, water and mobility. Their practical authority can differ among communities and may exclude some women, young people or newcomers from decisions. Assessment therefore needs both the rules recognized by users and evidence of who participates, whose claims are heard and how an appeal reaches formal institutions (Carlson et al., 2012; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2021).

Overall, "availability" should be reported as a graded finding: locally reported practice; identifiable group and rules; documented agreement or legal mandate; and evidence of implementation. A site may have several overlapping arrangements with different purposes. A governance map showing boundaries, rights holders, public authority and dispute route would make the reported variation interpretable.

4.4.2 Availability of the natural resource management plan

During the reporting, the monitoring identified plans in Kaabong and Moroto; the latter being described as a recent initiative supported by KADEP. Respondents in Amudat, Kotido, Abim, Nabilatuk, Moroto Municipality, Nakapiripirit and Napak did not identify a plan for the resource discussed. These are reports of awareness or availability at sampled sites, not evidence that no district, reserve, catchment or wetland plan exists. The exercise did not collect plan titles, approving

bodies, dates, boundaries or implementation records; it cannot calculate plan coverage or quality.

Planned status should be verified against a dated, approved document and mapped resource boundary, then checked for community consultation, budget, implementation and periodic review. Forest-reserve plans are required by the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act; NFA's 2024 national inventory demonstrates that a plan may exist but have expired. MWE catchment structures and Angaro/Odongi micro-catchment work show planning at other scales, while the 2025 Kacheri exercise documents a planning process, not an adopted site plan. These examples should be linked to a monitored site only after checking geographic overlap and approval status (Government of Uganda, 2003; MWE, 2017; NFA, 2024a; Wetlands International, 2021a; IGAD, 2025). A useful plan register would distinguish no plan found, draft, approved, current, expired and implemented, and record whether pastoral access and competing land uses are addressed.

4.4.3 Availability of community led structure for managing the natural resources

Respondents identified community wetland and micro-catchment committees in Abim, describing planning, mobilization and reports of encroachment or burning in Angaro. This is consistent with Wetlands International's account of elected Angaro and Odongi micro-catchment committees in 2021. Their existence at that time does not establish current activity, statutory enforcement powers or ecological impact. Confirm membership, representation, meeting frequency, resource maps, referred cases and feedback from authorities (Wetlands International, 2021a).

Kaabong respondents described community conservation and micro-catchment groups; Kotido reported community arrangements; Moroto respondents named the Nakonyen Rangeland Committee and elders; and Moroto Municipality and Nakapiripirit reported groups, including an informal forestry arrangement in the latter. These are locally reported structures, with differing mandates and verification status. References to volunteer patrols in Abim should be tested against dated observations and agency responses, while potentially unsafe enforcement should remain with authorized officers. The monitoring exercise did not establish that all members know their mandate or that each group is representative.

Community governance can be assessed through four distinct forms: customary institutions, resource-user committees, legally registered communal land associations and formal agreements with a public

resource authority. Their responsibilities and powers differ. The Land Act provides for communal land associations, while forest CFM depends on an agreement with the responsible body; neither status follows merely from a group's name (Government of Uganda, 1998; Government of Uganda, 2003; NFA, 2024b).

Elders and pastoral institutions can negotiate reciprocal grazing and water use and mediate disputes across seasonal movements. Their authority is neither uniform nor static, and formal local-government structures operate alongside them. Document how decisions are recorded, whether affected users consent, and how women, young people and mobile herders can seek a hearing (Carlson et al., 2012; Obonyo and Muhumuza, 2021).

For conservation sites, verify the protected-area designation, management authority and actual agreement before ascribing management rights or benefit sharing to a community group. Wildlife participation, consultative representation and legal control over a protected area are different propositions. The present monitoring record does not substantiate a legally established "Karenga Community Wildlife Management Area."

Catchment and micro-catchment bodies provide a route for community input into water and wetland planning. MWE reported Lokere and Lokok catchment organizations, and Wetlands International documented the election of Angaro and Odongi micro-catchment committees. The evaluation should link each body to its founding record, jurisdiction, local-government contact and decisions implemented rather than treating all committee types as equivalent (MWE, 2017; Wetlands International, 2021a).

Communal land associations can formalize collective decision making under the Land Act, but registration and the extent of protected rights must be confirmed from the association constitution, register and land records. Especially where grazing corridors, water points or mineral interests overlap, map customary users and seasonal access before interpreting a title or agreement as resolving competing claims (Government of Uganda, 1998; Rugadya, 2020).

Project-supported farmer, savings or rangeland groups may mobilize restoration and monitor resource use. Their presence should be recorded separately from a legal management mandate. Compare participation by gender, age and livelihood, resources available for work, completed actions and the ability to refer unresolved concerns. This prevents committee counts from being mistaken for evidence of improved natural-resource health.

4.4.4 Coordination mechanisms between the groups, the local or central government

The findings indicate that coordination mechanisms between community groups and local or central government structures are present but inconsistent across the districts. Abim, Kaabong, Moroto District, Moroto Municipality, and Nakapiripirit reported the existence of some form of coordination with government actors. However, in Kaabong, these linkages remain weak, with reporting systems described as unclear and the absence of well-defined coordination platforms. In Moroto District, coordination is more structured, operating through formal linkages at parish, sub-county, and district levels, with active involvement of committee chairpersons and elders' council representatives. In contrast, Amudat, Kotido Nabilatuk and Napak reported no coordination mechanisms., the findings point to a need for clearer coordination frameworks, defined reporting pathways, and regular interface platforms to strengthen collaboration between community groups and government institutions across the sub-region.

Literature indicates existence of coordination mechanisms between community groups and both local and central government actors regarding natural resources in the Karamoja sub region of Uganda, although such mechanisms vary by sector and often operate through multi stakeholder platforms and committees:

Catchment Management Committees: The Ministry of Water and Environment established Catchment Management Committees in Karamoja (such as for the Lokere and Lokok catchments) to bring together local government leaders and community representatives to plan, monitor, and coordinate sustainable water and related natural resource use. These committees develop work plans, submit proposals, and report on progress, linking community voices with district and national authorities on resource management.[9]

Participatory Land Use Planning Platforms: Under support from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and Uganda's Ministry of Lands, participatory land use planning exercises have been conducted in areas like Kacheri, Kotido District, bringing community members into planning processes alongside government officials to map natural resources, address land conflicts, and shape sustainable land and resource use priorities.[10]

9 https://allafrica.com/stories/202409300680.html
10 https://www.fao.org/in-action/kore/good-practices/good-practices-details/en/c/1254370/

Cross Border and Multi Level Dialogue Platforms: Efforts facilitated by organizations such as FAO, IGAD, and local authorities have created dialogue and coordination spaces that include pastoral communities, traditional institutions, and government actors to negotiate livestock mobility, shared access to water and grazing, and natural resource sharing agreements, strengthening links between community practices and government planning.[11]

Multi Stakeholder Interest Groups such as Initiatives like the Karamoja Interest Group on Mining bring together local government representatives and community level organizations to engage on mineral resource governance issues, fostering collaborative engagement, information sharing, and advocacy between community actors and government officials.[12]

These mechanisms Catchment Management Committees, participatory land use planning forums, multi level pastoral resource negotiation platforms, and multi stakeholder governance groups serve as coordination bridges between community groups and government at district, national, and even regional levels, aiming to integrate community needs and knowledge into natural resource planning and decision making in Karamoja.

4.4.5 Awareness of coordination mechanisms

Respondents reported awareness of coordination channels in Abim, Kaabong, Moroto District and Moroto Municipality, and lower or absent awareness in Amudat, Kotido and Nakapiripirit. The exercise did not use a standardized knowledge test or representative household sample, so these observations cannot support district-level awareness rates. Awareness should mean that a person can name the relevant body, identify its contact, explain when and how to report a concern, and describe the expected response. Test this with women, youth, herders who move seasonally and resource users outside committee membership.

Participation in a consultation is a plausible route to information, but attendance does not establish durable understanding or access to a decision. The Kacheri participatory mapping process and FAO-supported cross-border resource-sharing dialogue illustrate possible

11 https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/best-practice/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-practice-facilitating-peaceful-inter-community and https://www.fao.org/in-action/kore/good-practices/good-practices-details/en/c/1254370/

12 https://resourcerightsafrica.org/campaigns-alliances/karamoja-interest-group-on-mining-kamig/

interfaces between communities and authorities; neither measures population awareness across Karamoja (IGAD, 2025; FAO, 2019). Publish simple local-language notices of mandates, meetings, decisions and appeal routes; then measure recall and actual use, including whether complainants receive feedback. Compare awareness with documented referral outcomes rather than counting sensitization events alone.

4.4.6 Resource-based conflict in the sub region

Respondents described tensions over use of Angaro Wetland in Abim and reported disputes around gold extraction, settlement and conservation access in Kaabong. Their accounts included allegations of serious violence around Mutunan and concern about wildlife-related restrictions. The assessment did not obtain incident registers, police records or independent corroboration. Allegations of armed attacks and sexual violence should therefore be documented through appropriate confidential safeguarding and protection channels, without attributing acts to an ethnic community or presenting them as verified findings.

Kotido respondents associated disputes with dry-season access to water and grazing. Moroto respondents described meetings and district involvement in resolving some cases, but the monitoring did not measure recurrence, compliance or satisfaction, so it cannot conclude that conflict was effectively contained. No recent incidents were reported by respondents in Amudat, Moroto Municipality, Nakapiripirit, Nabilatuk and Napak; absence of reports is not evidence of absence of conflict. Record period, location, parties, type, severity and source for every case.

The literature identifies interacting mechanisms rather than a single resource-scarcity cause. Seasonal variability changes the distribution of forage and water; tenure and land-use decisions affect access; livestock mobility connects sites; mining can reshape claims to land and benefits; and insecurity changes whether negotiation is possible. Local conflicts may intensify when these processes overlap, but their sequence must be established in each case (Abrahams, 2021; Egeru et al., 2015; Rugadya, 2020).

For water and grazing disputes, assess the resource's seasonal condition, access rules, herd movement, blocked routes, negotiated reciprocal use and any reported coercion. Drought can increase pressure while shared-access institutions can reduce it. A conflict record should separate the environmental trigger from the institutional decision and the violent act, rather than assume every dry-season movement produces violence (FAO, 2019; Abrahams, 2021).

Conservation disputes require a map of the protected-area boundary and the affected customary or permitted uses, together with the relevant legal decision and consultation history. Record crop or livestock losses, access restrictions and complaints separately. Without this evidence, reported concern about a wildlife intervention cannot establish a specific protected-area breach or a causal link to violence (Government of Uganda, 2003; Carlson et al., 2012).

Mineral-related tensions involve more than the discovery of a deposit: tenure claims, licensing, compensation, environmental harm and distribution of benefits can all shape grievance. Rugadya's research on Karamoja emphasizes the incomplete recognition of customary rights within the mineral economy. Compare community accounts with license boundaries, land records, environmental approvals and incident reports before attributing a particular conflict to mining (Rugadya, 2020).

Cross-border mobility and livestock raiding should also be distinguished. Herd movement for negotiated access may support drought resilience, whereas raids and attacks require security responses and protection of civilians. FAO documents cross-border dialogue and customary resource-sharing arrangements as routes to cooperation. For monitoring, triangulate community testimony with administrative or humanitarian incident records, track effects on access and livelihoods, and record whether mediation yields an implemented agreement (FAO, 2019; Abrahams, 2021).

4.4.7 Involvement of local structures n resolving the conflict

Respondents identified elders, committees or other local actors involved in disputes in Abim, Kaabong, Kotido, Moroto and Moroto Municipality. In Kaabong they described meetings convened by elders; in Moroto they reported engagement by local structures. The exercise did not count cases, identify outcomes or interview all parties, so "involvement" should not be equated with effective resolution. For each mechanism, record who initiates it, the resource and disputants covered, referrals to government, agreement terms, and whether a decision is carried out.

Evidence from Karamoja supports a qualified role for customary authority. Carlson and colleagues found that customary institutions remain important and can be preferred for compensation and restoration of relationships, while their influence has changed with livelihood shifts and expanding state institutions (Carlson et al., 2012). Mercy Corps documented village peace committees that, in principle, linked to district bodies, but found misaligned priorities, limited

resources for district committees and little representation of women in village bodies at the time of its 2016 assessment (Mercy Corps, 2016). These earlier studies explain possible institutional constraints, not the current performance of a named committee.

Resource disputes may also cross community and district boundaries. FAO describes negotiated coordination of seasonal livestock movement and shared pasture and water in the Greater Karamoja Cluster, with traditional leaders, communities and public authorities engaged at different levels (FAO, 2019). An elder-mediated grazing agreement is most credible when the relevant host and visiting users agree on routes, timing, water access and remedies, and district counterparts can act if a breach escalates. Record whether women, youth and mobile herders participate in the negotiation.

The appropriate route depends on the case. Local mediation can address a voluntary access dispute, but allegations of violence, sexual abuse, coercion or criminal conduct require safe referral to competent protection, police or judicial authorities. Mediators should not investigate or compel settlement of such allegations. Track referrals and implementation without publicly identifying survivors. Recent research in Kotido and Kaabong underlines both the potential of inclusive mediation and the need to test whether women's participation changes outcomes (Mercy Corps, 2026).

4.4.8 Availability of conflict resolution mechanisms in the community

Respondents described established or familiar dispute mechanisms in Abim, Kaabong, Kotido, Moroto and Moroto Municipality, including micro-catchment committees in Abim and negotiation in Moroto. Amudat and Nakapiripirit respondents did not identify a widely used formal mechanism. These observations cannot establish community-wide access or trust, because the exercise did not survey a representative range of users, compare complainants and non-users, or independently verify case outcomes. A committee's election by consensus does not alone establish inclusion, impartiality or jurisdiction over a dispute.

Accessibility and trust are distinct. A mechanism is accessible if affected people know where to go, can travel or communicate safely, can use their language, can afford the process and can appeal. Trust requires confidence in impartiality, confidentiality, protection from retaliation and implementation of decisions. Customary forums may offer locally intelligible remedies, but their authority and reach vary, and women's concerns can receive lower priority (Carlson et al., 2012;

Mercy Corps, 2016). Assess these dimensions separately for women, young people, mobile herders and groups with weaker land claims.

For a grazing or water dispute, establish whether both resident and visiting users accept the forum and whether its decision recognizes seasonal access. An accessible village-level hearing may still fail if the opposing group is across a district or national boundary. FAO's cross-border practice illustrates the value of linking community dialogue to government and regional arrangements, though its published examples do not demonstrate that every local agreement remains effective (FAO, 2019).

Availability should be verified through a dated roster, mandate, regular meeting record, case register and clear referral path. Measure the share of disputes acknowledged, heard, agreed, implemented and reopened within a defined period, alongside confidential feedback from each party. Report unresolved cases and the reasons, rather than using the number of committees or dialogues as a proxy for peace. Mercy Corps' assessment found that nominal links between village and district committees could falter when district structures lacked resources (Mercy Corps, 2016).

Recent Mercy Corps research in Kotido and Kaabong examines inclusive natural resource management and mediation, including women's agency. It reports stronger agency among women in program communities than comparison communities but no aggregate improvement in household empowerment, illustrating that participation and substantive influence require different measures (Mercy Corps, 2026). A local assessment should ask who speaks, whose proposed terms are adopted, and whether people can reject an unfair settlement without retaliation.

Mediation should complement, not displace, statutory recourse. Land registration, forest management, protected areas and criminal allegations involve authorities with different legal powers. Provide a written explanation of each forum's scope, a contact for escalation and a record of any transfer. A reported "trusted mechanism" should remain a respondent perception until confidential user interviews and case follow-up corroborate it (Government of Uganda, 1998; Mercy Corps, 2016).

In summary, compare reported presence, practical accessibility, perceived fairness and observed resolution at the same site and time. This makes it possible to identify whether the binding constraint is lack of a forum, exclusion from it, delayed referral or non-implementation of an agreement.

4.4.9 Community awareness of external reporting channels for conflict resolution and reporting abuses

Respondents reported knowledge of external channels in Abim, Amudat, Kaabong, Kotido and Moroto, mentioning district structures, agencies and civil-society organizations. Kaabong respondents described monthly reports by Community Development Officers and a sub-county grievance committee; Moroto respondents cited extension workers and Community Development Officers. Respondents in Moroto Municipality and Nakapiripirit did not identify a channel. These are site accounts, not measured district awareness rates. The monitoring did not verify committee records, reporting frequency or whether complainants received a response.

Reporting channels have different mandates. An environmental or wetland complaint can be referred to the responsible district environment office, MWE or the resource-management authority; land-rights claims need an appropriate land or judicial process; threats or criminal violence require police and protection referral. An NGO may support documentation and accompaniment but does not acquire statutory enforcement power. The MWE–UNDP wetlands project publishes a tiered village, sub-county, district and national grievance route for project-related concerns, with escalation and feedback, while expressly distinguishing allegations requiring formal investigation. Its route applies to that project, not automatically to every monitored site (UNDP Uganda, 2026).

Test awareness by asking residents to name an actual local contact, explain how to lodge a report without payment or retaliation, identify where an unresolved case goes and describe how feedback arrives. Disaggregate by sex, age, disability, mobility and resource use. Publicly posted contacts and meeting attendance are useful inputs but do not establish that women, remote households or visiting herders can use the channel. Mercy Corps' 2016 assessment of gender imbalance in village peace bodies is a reason to check these access barriers directly (Mercy Corps, 2016).

A minimum case record should include date, location, issue, receiving body, consent and confidentiality requirements, referral, acknowledgement, action, closure date and complainant feedback. Publish only aggregate figures for reports received, referred, resolved, overdue and reopened; protect identities and sensitive locations. For allegations of sexual violence or intimidation, prioritize survivor choice and specialist protection rather than a public dialogue or community-mediated settlement. Compare administrative logs with confidential

user interviews before claiming a reporting system works.

The practical result sought is a closed feedback loop, from a safe entry point through a competent authority to a reasoned response and an appeal option. Training and awareness campaigns should be evaluated by demonstrated knowledge and use, not by event counts. A project grievance mechanism may help resolve project impacts, but it must not be portrayed as a substitute for courts or other formal remedies (UNDP Uganda, 2026).

4.4.10 Key Projects and Interventions for Sustainable Natural Resource Management in Karamoja

There are interventions by Government, NGO, CSO, and development partners promoting sustainable natural resource management (NRM) in the Karamoja sub-region. These include the following:

(a) The Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Karamoja project. This is a collaborative initiative led by the Government of Uganda (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry & Fisheries (MAAIF), UNDP, and FAO. The project focuses on enhancing ecosystem resilience by promoting sustainable land and pasture management, climate-smart agriculture, natural regeneration of degraded areas, and the development of water-for-production systems to strengthen food security in the region. Key activities include the restoration of ecosystem services, rehabilitation of rangelands, implementation of improved farming practices, construction and maintenance of water infrastructure for livestock and irrigation, and the provision of inclusive agricultural extension services. The project operates across Moroto, Kotido, Kaabong, and Nakapiripirit districts.[13]

(b) The Karamoja Agro-Pastoral Resilience and Empowerment Project (KAREP). This is implemented by Oxfam in Uganda in partnership with the Warrior Squad Foundation. The project focuses on promoting climate-smart agriculture, sustainable livelihoods, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, and community-based rangeland management, while integrating Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) to strengthen financial resilience. KAREP is specifically implemented in Kotido District[14].

13 https://www.undp.org/uganda/news/govt-undp-and-fao-project-boosts-food-production-karamoja

14 https://uganda.oxfam.org/what-we-do-programmes/thematic-goal-1-resilient-livelihoods/karamoja-agro-pastoral-resilience- and

(c) ***The Resilience, Inclusiveness, Sustainability and Empowerment of Communities in Karamoja (RISE K).*** This project is implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with Resource Rights Africa (RRA), NAWOU, CARITAS Moroto, and TUNADO. The initiative focuses on enhancing climate-sensitive disaster preparedness, promoting food and income security, strengthening governance and rights, and building inclusive community resilience. RISE K operates in Moroto, Amudat, and Nakapiripirit districts.[15]

(d) ***The Karamoja Peace and Development Agency (KAPDA)-Climate & NRM initiative.*** This focuses on climate change adaptation, promotion of climate-smart agriculture, water conservation, and sustainable grazing practices. The project also aims to reduce resource-based conflicts through the establishment of community agreements and leadership engagement. KAPDA's interventions are implemented across the Karamoja sub-region, typically covering multiple districts through community-based approaches.[16]

(e) ***The IGAD-Supported Participatory Land Use Planning initiative.*** This is led by IGAD in partnership with the Uganda Ministry of Lands and the Embassy of Sweden. The project focuses on participatory land use planning to promote sustainable land management, reduce land use conflicts, and strengthen community land governance. This initiative is implemented in Kacheri Sub-County, Kotido District.[17]

(f) ***The Eco Christian Organisation (ECO Uganda) – Natural Resource & Mining Livelihoods project.*** This focuses on natural resource management in the context of mining and livelihoods, providing capacity building for responsible mining and offering policy support for sustainable mining practices and environmental safeguards. The project was implemented in Tapac and Rupa sub-counties, Moroto District. Although the project period was 2016–2019, it remains a relevant precedent for natural resource management interventions in the region.[18]

15 https://uganda.oxfam.org/what-we-do-programmes/thematic-goal-1-resilient-livelihoods/resilience-inclusiveness-sustainability
16 https://kapdaug.org/environment-climate-change-and-natural-resource-management/
17 https://igad.int/igad-supports-uganda-in-advancing-participatory-land-use-planning-in-the-karamoja-cluster/
18 https://ecouganda.org/promoting-natural-resources-management-for-sustainable-livelihoods-pnrm4sl/

(g) ***The Karenga Community Wildlife Management Area.*** This is a community-led initiative supported by the local government, Uganda Wildlife Authority, and conservation partners. The project focuses on managing wildlife sustainably, protecting ecosystems, and promoting sustainable rural livelihoods linked to grazing management and overall natural resource governance. It is implemented in Karenga, Kaabong District.

(h) ***The Water and Food Systems for Resilient Communities project.*** This focuses on integrated water and food security improvements, empowering communities to manage water resources, mitigate climate and livelihood shocks, and support sustainable agriculture across watershed zones, including those in the Karamoja sub-region. The initiative operates across multiple catchments in Karamoja, with a focus on water and land management.[19]

The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) has established Catchment Management Committees (CMCs) in Karamoja's seasonal river catchments (e.g., Lokere and Lokok) to coordinate water management activities, improve access, boost agricultural production, and enhance soil and water conservation practices across catchments in Moroto, Kaabong and Kotido districts.[20] Civil society organisations such as UCOBAC are developing a range of strategies to protect women in pastoralist communities, including legal empowerment, collective land registration, inclusive governance and efforts to change social norms that perpetuate inequality.[21]

4.4.11 Good Practices in Natural Resource Management

The monitoring identified practices that may protect resource health at selected sites. Their classification as "promising" reflects a plausible conservation pathway and a reported activity, not an evaluated ecological outcome. Evidence is strongest for the establishment of Angaro and Odongi micro-catchment committees, independently described by Wetlands International in 2021. Elsewhere, the exercise did not provide baselines, measured changes, dates or independent verification of implementation (Wetlands International, 2021a).

19 https://www.iwmi.org/projects/wfsa-uganda/
20 https://allafrica.com/stories/202409300680.html?
21 https://www.iied.org/challenging-social-norms-drylands-uganda

Table 3: Good Practices in Natural Resource Management

District / Municipality	Resource / Ecosystem	Reported practice and verification needed
Kaabong District	Timu Forest	Community patrols, agroforestry and beekeeping were reported near Timu. Verify authorization, patrol logs, survival of planted trees, forest-cover change and household benefit. The site claims remain monitoring accounts (NFA, 2024a).
Kotido District	Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland	Customary rules and tree regeneration were reported at Nakwanamoru–Kapus. Map dry-season grazing access and compare vegetation cover in the same seasons; verify committee and land-body records before claiming effective protection (FAO, 2019; Egeru et al., 2015).
Moroto Municipality	Lia River Ecosystem	Riverbank planting and wash-bay controls were reported along Lia. Verify permits, planting survival, effluent treatment and upstream/downstream water quality. Paving alone does not demonstrate pollution reduction (NEMA, 2024c).
Nabilatuk District	Nabilatuk Forest	Half-moons, contour bunds, mulching and natural regeneration were reported in Nabilatuk. Record plot locations, maintenance, soil cover, infiltration and seedling survival against comparable sites before attributing restoration.
Napak District	Omaniman River	Community dialogue and a proposed sand association were reported at Omaniman. Verify operator approvals, revenue receipts, riverbank condition and any adopted limits on mechanized extraction. A proposed association is not a permit (NEMA, 2024b).
Abim	Angaro Micro Catchment Wetland	Wetlands International documented elected Angaro and Odongi micro-catchment committees in 2021; monitoring respondents also described patrols and mapping. Check current membership, minutes, wetland extent, water flow and referrals before inferring ecological improvement (Wetlands International, 2021a).

District / Municipality	Resource / Ecosystem	Reported practice and verification needed
Amudat	Amudat wetland (Achorichor)	Awareness work, local committees and water-harvesting or agroforestry practices were reported at Achorichor. Verify committee activity, uptake, maintenance, wetland extent and access effects; the report has no outcome baseline.

The table separates what respondents described from the outcome that would need to be tested. A practice is transferable only if the responsible institution, resource rights, operating cost and ecological response can be established. For pastoral sites, restoration must preserve negotiated seasonal mobility rather than assume that excluding grazing is always beneficial (Egeru et al., 2015; FAO, 2019).





For Angaro and Odongi, water storage and livelihood activities should be assessed alongside wetland flow, sediment and downstream access. Wetlands International reported micro-catchment committees and support for beekeeping, but those activities do not in themselves demonstrate improved hydrology or biodiversity (Wetlands International, 2021a, 2021b).

4.5 Gender and Inclusion

The monitoring and literature reviewed in the draft indicate that women, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities and refugees use natural resources in Karamoja, but access does not necessarily translate into secure rights, influence over decisions or an equitable share of benefits. The findings point to differences shaped by customary norms, tenure arrangements, mobility, economic resources and representation in local institutions. The following findings present qualitative evidence and issues for follow-up. The findings indicate that access to natural resources is not distributed equally across social groups. Women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities and refugees use natural resources, but their ability to secure rights, influence decisions and benefit from resource use is shaped by customary norms, social status, mobility, income and participation in local institutions.

Women's land rights and influence remain constrained. The report's synthesis identifies customary and patriarchal norms that can limit women's ability to assert land rights under communal tenure arrangements. It links this insecurity to reduced access to land-based production and credit. The report also notes that men continue to dominate some natural-resource forums, limiting women's influence over rules, land allocation and benefit-sharing. Although women participate in resource-related livelihoods, participation alone does not establish that they control the resources or benefits.

L***ocal findings point to unequal access and benefit-sharing.*** In Abim, communities around Angaro Wetland reported complaints about inequitable access and sharing of benefits among neighbouring users. In Kotido, the Nakwanamoru–Kapus Rangeland applies an annual ground rent of UGX 50,000 to 100,000 to immigrant users, depending on the size and location of the land accessed. These examples show how local allocation and payment rules can affect who uses a resource and on what terms. The report does not identify the sex, age or income profile of those affected, so the distributional effects on women, poorer households and mobile users require further investigation.

Participation in livelihoods does not necessarily mean equal or safe benefits. At the Omaniman River in Napak, the monitoring report states that women, youth and persons with disabilities participate in sand mining. It also records limited awareness of rights, a UGX 50,000 charge per tipper lorry and delayed payments to sand miners by companies. The report separately raises concerns about unsafe night operations, child labour and school dropouts in the area. Together, these findings point to a need to assess who receives the proceeds, who bears occupational risks and whether children's education and protection are affected. The available evidence does not disaggregate income, working conditions or risk by sex, age or disability.

People with disabilities and refugees face barriers that may be missed by general access assessments. The report's literature review identifies mobility challenges, limited economic power and social exclusion as constraints for persons with disabilities and refugees, particularly in border areas. This complicates broad findings that communities have physical access to resources. Being able to enter a site does not show whether people can reach it safely, use it on equal terms, participate in its governance or claim benefits.

Indigenous communities' claims intersect with land and resource disputes. The report describes disputes in Kaabong involving local Ik communities, neighbouring groups, forest restrictions and mineral discoveries around Mutunan Forest Reserve. These accounts highlight the importance of recognising Indigenous users and their claims in decisions about forest access, settlement and mining. The report does not provide a detailed, disaggregated account of how women, youth or other groups within affected communities participated in these disputes or decision-making processes.

Conflict and insecurity carry specific risks for women. The report describes reported incidents of sexual violence in the context of resource-related conflict in Kaabong. These accounts are serious, but the monitoring report does not independently verify them. They should be handled through confidential, survivor-centred protection and justice channels, with care to avoid exposing survivors or presenting allegations as established findings.

Participation in community structures is uneven. The report identifies some entry points for inclusion, including Abim's micro-catchment committees and consensus-based elections, which it describes as attentive to gender inclusion. It also refers to peace committees and community initiatives involving women and youth. However, it provides limited evidence on committee membership by sex,

age or disability, or on whether participation translates into influence over decisions. Coordination mechanisms also vary by district, leaving some communities with fewer formal channels for raising concerns.

These findings suggest that gender and inclusion should be assessed through rights, decision-making power, safety and distribution of benefits, as well as physical access. The monitoring evidence would be stronger with consistent data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and residency status, and with specific questions on who participates, who decides, who benefits and who can obtain a remedy.

Implications

These findings have five implications for natural resource governance in Karamoja.

1. ***Measure access, voice and benefits separately***. Future monitoring should distinguish physical access from secure rights, participation in decisions, control over income and access to remedies. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age, disability and residency or refugee status, while protecting confidentiality.
2. ***Strengthen women's influence over communal resource decisions.*** Land-use planning, communal land registration and resource-management arrangements should document women's rights and interests, include them in decision-making roles, and provide accessible ways to raise objections and appeal decisions.
3. ***Design participation to address practical barriers.*** Consultations and committee processes should account for mobility, timing, accessibility, language and information needs. Representation should be assessed by whether participants can influence decisions, not only by attendance.
4. ***Improve protections in resource-based work.*** For sand mining and other livelihoods, authorities and community structures should clarify applicable rights and fees, improve payment transparency, monitor occupational safety and refer child-protection concerns to competent services. Livelihood interventions should be assessed for who controls the income and whether they reduce or shift environmental pressures.
5. ***Use appropriate safeguarding and accountability channels.*** Reports of violence, exploitation or discrimination require safe, confidential referral and follow-up. Community mediation can support dialogue over resource access, but it should not replace formal protection or justice responses to serious offences.

5.0 CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN KARAMOJA

The monitoring reports recurring constraints at particular wetlands, forests, rangelands and rivers. They should be interpreted as site observations and respondent accounts, not statistically representative rankings of districts or measured causal effects. The main analytical question is how finance, tenure, seasonal resource access and statutory mandates interact at each site. National evidence on wetland loss or forest planning provides context but cannot be substituted for a local baseline (NEMA, 2024; NFA, 2024a).

Inadequate Financing, Logistics, and Institutional Capacity

Respondents in Abim described inadequate funds for Odongi wetland restoration and demarcation. Amudat, Kaabong, Nabilatuk, Nakapiripirit and Napak also reported resource constraints, but the exercise did not compare approved budgets, actual releases or expenditure. The operational gap should be quantified as the cost of a site management plan, transport, technical staff, monitoring and follow-up against resources actually available. This avoids treating all failures to act as a financing problem when a missing mandate or disputed boundary may also be decisive (MWE, 2017; World Bank, 2024).

Officers reported difficulty reaching remote wetlands, forests and river sites, and limited forest staff and logistics around Mt Kadam. These accounts support a plausible monitoring constraint, but do not establish the number of undetected offences. A risk-based inspection schedule should specify sites visited, travel time, observations, agency referrals and responses, while using community observations as leads rather than delegating coercive enforcement to volunteers.

Weak Policy Implementation, Governance, and Enforcement

Respondents cited weak dissemination and application of environmental rules in Amudat and Nabilatuk. The assessment did not test knowledge or review prosecution files, so “weak enforcement” needs a clearer measure. Track permits issued, inspections, notices, remedial orders, prosecutions and compliance after action, matched to the authority responsible. NEMA describes separate requirements for sand extraction and riverbank activities; statutory approvals cannot be inferred from a local association or by-law alone (NEMA, 2024b;

NEMA, 2024c).

In Kaabong, reported uncertainty over boundaries and the roles of NFA, UWA and local government may delay decisions, but the monitored reserve, protected-area status and plan validity must be checked individually. NFA's inventory reported 18 of 55 forest management planning areas with valid plans as of 2024, a national figure rather than a Karamoja rate. Abim respondents described uncertain wetland boundaries, while Kotido respondents questioned the functionality of local land bodies. A joint site map, agency mandate matrix and current plan register would identify the precise gap (NFA, 2024a; Government of Uganda, 1998).

Respondents also perceived inconsistent political support in Abim and Nabilatuk. This is a governance hypothesis that requires evidence from council resolutions, budgets, enforcement decisions and interviews with affected users. Publicly record how contested decisions were reached and provide an appeal route. This is especially important when conservation or extraction shifts costs onto households with little bargaining power (Rugadya, 2020; Mercy Corps, 2016).

Land Tenure Insecurity, Boundary Demarcation, and Encroachment

Boundary and tenure disputes should be disaggregated by ecosystem. Abim respondents identified wetland cultivation and uncertain limits; Kaabong accounts concerned forest, settlement and mineral claims; Lia and Omaniman respondents described riparian cultivation, dumping or sand removal. A wetland boundary, a customary grazing claim, a forest reserve and a mineral licence confer different rights and involve different authorities. Joint participatory mapping should record seasonal users and overlapping claims before markers or enforcement are imposed. Rugadya's Karamoja mining study shows why formal land documentation alone need not settle the full bundle of customary resource rights (Rugadya, 2020; Government of Uganda, 1998; NEMA, 2024b).

Livelihood Pressures, Poverty, and Environmental Degradation

Respondents associated wetland cultivation, charcoal production and extraction with livelihood pressure. These activities have different economic drivers and environmental effects, so a generic "alternative livelihood" prescription is insufficient. In rangelands, localized concentration around water points can stress soil and vegetation, but grazing effects depend on timing, rainfall and mobility; remote

sensing combined with pastoral knowledge provides a better test than inferring degradation from livestock presence alone (Egeru et al., 2015; FAO, 2019). Oxfam's RISE-K program illustrates attempts to link livelihood options with rights and accountability in mining and pastoral communities, but its existence is not evidence of reduced pressure at the monitored sites (Oxfam in Uganda, 2020).

Climate Variability, Fire, and Ecosystem Stress

Variable rainfall and dry spells alter the timing and location of pasture and water. Monitoring should compare vegetation, soil cover and water availability in the same season across years and distinguish climatic fluctuation from lasting degradation. Fire can damage woody cover or settlements, yet its effects depend on frequency, intensity, season and the vegetation affected; the report did not measure those attributes in Moroto or Kotido. A locally negotiated fire and grazing plan is more defensible than a blanket claim that every burn causes irreversible decline (Egeru et al., 2014; Egeru et al., 2015).

Community Awareness, Participation, and Social Challenges

Reported gaps in outreach and consultation in Amudat, Nabilatuk, Kaabong and Mt Kadam should be tested by asking resource users to explain the applicable rule, forum and remedy. Women, young people and mobile herders may face different barriers even where a committee exists. Mercy Corps research found that village peace bodies previously had limited representation of women; its more recent work in Kotido and Kaabong distinguished gains in women's agency from household empowerment (Mercy Corps, 2016; Mercy Corps, 2026). Allegations of violence or child labour around mining require confidential safeguarding and competent investigation, not attribution to a site without corroborated incident records.

Extractive Activities and Revenue Governance Gaps

Napak respondents described delayed payments, unclear prices and remittances, and mechanized sand extraction along the Omaniman River. These are material governance risks, but the assessment did not audit contracts, receipts, permits or extraction volumes. Compare operator registration, applicable NEMA approvals, district revenue records and community agreements, then measure bank condition and sediment upstream and downstream. NEMA identifies environmental approval and riverbank protection requirements for sand mining; a local revenue arrangement does not remove those obligations (NEMA, 2024b; NEMA, 2024c).

Security, Infrastructure, and Access Constraints

Insecurity and poor road or communication access were reported as obstacles in Kaabong and remote sites elsewhere. The effect on natural resources is indirect, through interrupted inspection, reduced ability to negotiate access and weaker complaint response. Record cancelled visits, travel restrictions and unresolved cases, while protecting staff and community monitors. UNDP's Karamoja BRICK program illustrates investment in water access and peace infrastructure, but project outputs at its sites should not be presented as evidence of improved conditions throughout the sub-region (UNDP Uganda, 2026).

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This discussion synthesises the zero draft and the revised joint monitoring report. The zero draft provides a broad account of natural-resource access, ecosystem pressures and governance, while the revised report more explicitly distinguishes direct observations, respondent accounts and issues that require verification. Where the reports differ in how strongly they state a finding, the discussion below follows the revised report's more cautious treatment of the evidence. The monitoring covered selected sites, so its findings should not be treated as representative measurements of conditions across all Karamoja.

Access to Natural Resources and User Rights

Reports show that access in Karamoja is governed through overlapping customary, statutory and site-specific arrangements. Pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods rely on seasonal access to pasture and water; often negotiated through customary institutions and reciprocal arrangements between communities. At the same time, forests, wetlands, protected areas and mineral sites may be subject to statutory restrictions, licences or management agreements. Access is therefore not simply a question of whether people can physically enter a site. It also concerns who may use which resources, for what purpose, in which season, under whose authority and with what means of redress.

The sites monitored illustrate this variation. Access to the Nakwanamoru–Kapus and Nakonyen rangelands is shaped by customary norms and conditions on non-resident users. Seasonal flooding can restrict passage at Achorichor Wetland in Amudat, while forest rules at Timu and Mt. Kadam apply under statutory management. In Abim, respondents reported disputes over access to Angaro Wetland and the sharing of its benefits. In Kaabong and Moroto, reports of disputes concerned forest boundaries, mineral access and the relationship between local users and statutory authorities.

The examples above show that physical access is generally available although uneven and sometimes contested. Respondents reported that they may be able to enter a site during a visit without having a secure legal right all year around, and have equal influence over management and/or getting a fair share of benefits. The distinction matters for pastoral mobility. A restriction intended to protect an ecosystem may displace use to another site or concentrate herds around fewer water points. The agreed seasonal restrictions may protect a sensitive

area while preserving access at other times. Management decisions therefore need to consider both ecological objectives and their effects on customary users, including mobile herders and groups with weaker claims.

Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Resource Use

The findings identify pressures requiring site-level investigation, including cultivation or settlement near wetlands and forests, tree cutting, mining pits, pressure on rangelands and sand extraction along river systems. The findings indicate that the observations and accounts from monitors indicate risks, but a site visit alone cannot establish long-term ecosystem decline or determine the cause of a change.

At Timu Forest in Kaabong, the reports describe cultivation or settlement near the forest, tree cutting and open mining pits. At Angaro and Achorichor wetlands, concerns include cultivation and possible agrochemical use. Along the Omaniman River, respondents reported un regulated sand mining while Lia River faces pressure from the expansion of urban areas and pollution. At rangeland sites, respondents described pressure on grazing resources, but the reports did not quantify vegetation change, herd concentration or carrying capacity. Concerns about agrochemical pollution were not tested through water or soil sampling, and the reports did not provide measurements of extraction volumes, forest-cover change, riverbank erosion or biodiversity trends.

The evidence is cautions not to attribute rangeland degradation to grazing alone. Rainfall variability, soil conditions, water-point distribution, land conversion, insecurity and restrictions on mobility can and do affect where livestock concentrate and how the vegetation responds. Pastoral mobility can help distribute grazing pressure across a variable landscape. Diagnosing "overgrazing" without comparing similar seasons and documenting access routes, livestock use and vegetation condition risks treating a visible local symptom as its cause.

Community patrols, customary rules, pruning rather than felling, restoration activities, micro-catchment committees and reported tree planting, offers potential management pathways. Their presence, however, does not establish that ecosystems have recovered or that communities benefit equitably. The reports call for repeated ecological measurements and verification of management agreements, implementation records and maintenance costs. This is essential for distinguishing activities, such as planting or establishing a committee, from outcomes such as improved vegetation, water quality or maintained dry-season access.

Natural Resource Governance

Natural-resource governance in Karamoja involves local governments, central government agencies, customary authorities, community structures and development partners. These actors do not have interchangeable powers. The revised report identifies distinct responsibilities for national bodies, including the National Forestry Authority for central forest reserves, the Ministry of Water and Environment for water resources and catchment management, and the National Environment Management Authority for environmental coordination and compliance. Land administration and documentation of customary and communal interests involve the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development and Local Governments. District and lower local governments integrate environmental responsibilities into local planning, coordinate relevant departments and perform functions within their mandates.

This division of responsibilities makes coordination and clear documentation essential. For example, community wetland or micro-catchment committees in Abim may provide a platform for local planning and monitoring, but their current membership, authority, activity and referral links need to be confirmed. Customary elders can negotiate seasonal grazing and water access, but their decisions do not replace statutory decisions on forest reserves, mineral licences or criminal offences. Similarly, a community group's presence near a forest does not establish a formal collaborative forest management agreement.

This report identifies management plans or coordination arrangements in some locations, while also recording gaps in awareness, coordination and planning. However, these findings should be interpreted carefully. A respondent's inability to identify a plan does not prove that no plan exists; nor does the reported presence of a plan establish that it is approved, current, funded or implemented. The same distinction applies to conflict-resolution mechanisms. Elders and committees were reported to be involved in disputes in several districts, but involvement does not establish that cases were resolved fairly, decisions were implemented or women and mobile users could participate safely.

A functional governance arrangement requires more than a list of institutions or committees. For each site, authorities and affected users need to be able to identify the boundary, applicable rights, lead institution, management instrument, permitted uses, inspection responsibilities and complaint route. Where central and local government bodies share responsibilities, the arrangement should specify how they coordinate decisions, exchange information and

follow up reported violations.

Challenges to Effective Natural Resource Management

This report points to mutually reinforcing constraints. These include inadequate financing, limited staff and transport for monitoring remote sites, unclear boundaries, weak documentation of customary and communal rights, inconsistent coordination, gaps in awareness of rights and reporting channels, livelihood pressures, climate variability and insecurity. They also identify pressures arising from competing uses, including farming, settlement, conservation, mining, charcoal production and sand extraction.

These constraints interact. Unclear boundaries can delay enforcement or intensify disputes between users and public authorities. Limited transport can prevent inspections and follow-up even when responsibilities are formally assigned. Livelihood dependence can make restrictions costly for households, while the benefits from resource use may not be transparent or equitably shared. In Napak, for example, respondents reported delayed payments and unclear arrangements associated with sand extraction along the Omaniman River. The revised report notes that permits, receipts, extraction volumes and revenue remittances were not audited, so these accounts point to governance risks that require verification.

The report also shows why environmental stress should not be treated as a sufficient explanation for conflict. Drought may intensify competition by changing the distribution of pasture and water, but conflict can also reflect land-use decisions, unclear tenure, licensing, restricted mobility, insecurity and the distribution of costs and benefits. Distinguishing these pathways matters for selecting an appropriate response. A grazing-access dispute may require negotiation between users and local authorities, while a statutory boundary, environmental compliance or criminal allegation may require action by a competent government agency or formal justice institution.

Implications for Climate Justice in Local Governments

Climate justice in Karamoja requires attention to how environmental risks, management decisions and adaptation benefits are distributed. Local governments are central to this work because they plan and budget for local priorities, coordinate departments, engage communities and monitor site conditions. Their role must be exercised alongside the statutory mandates of central government agencies, especially where resources are state-owned, protected or managed under national law. Co-management should therefore be based on clear roles and

agreements rather than assumed from community participation alone. The discussion makes the following observations on climate justice:

a) Distributional justice requires attention to who bears the costs and receives the benefits. Conservation restrictions, land allocation, extraction and restoration can affect households differently. District plans and site decisions should identify which users may lose access, whose livelihoods may be affected and how benefits, compensation or alternative access will be addressed. Local governments should make budget allocations, releases and expenditure visible, while coordinating with the responsible central agencies on permits, compliance and benefit-sharing arrangements.

b) Procedural justice requires meaningful participation and effective remedies. Consultations should occur early enough to influence plans and decisions, include women, young people, persons with disabilities, customary and seasonal users, and provide information in accessible forms. District and community grievance channels should make clear which body receives a complaint, how it will be referred, the expected response time and how an appeal can be made. Serious allegations of violence or abuse require confidential referral to competent protection and justice bodies, not resolution through environmental committees or customary mediation alone.

c) Recognition justice requires decision-makers to account for customary, collective and seasonal rights. Local land-use plans and resource registers should document customary users, grazing routes, water points, culturally significant places and the different rights attached to land, forests, wetlands and minerals. This documentation should inform the work of local governments and relevant central agencies, while preserving the distinction between local customary arrangements and formal statutory authority.

d) Climate-responsive planning requires evidence and coordination. Districts and relevant agencies should agree on site-level baselines and repeat measurements of wetland extent, forest regeneration, rangeland condition, water quality and riverbank stability. Monitoring should compare similar seasons and distinguish climate variability from land-use change and other pressures. Adaptation investments, including water infrastructure and restoration, should be assessed for maintenance costs and for possible unintended effects, such as concentrating livestock or restricting seasonal access.

The local governments can convene the relevant actors and integrate

community priorities into local plans and budgets. Central government agencies must continue to exercise their legal mandates over the resources they manage and provide the technical, regulatory and enforcement functions assigned to them. Joint site registers, mapped responsibilities, shared monitoring and documented referral arrangements can connect these roles. This would make climate action more accountable to affected communities while improving the evidence available for sustainable management.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

Natural resource management in the Karamoja sub-region remains central to the survival, resilience, and livelihoods of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. The health of key resources, particularly rangelands, forests, and water sources, has continued to decline due to a combination of climate variability, environmental degradation, population pressure, and competing land uses. These pressures have reduced the availability and quality of natural resources, increasing vulnerability among communities that depend almost entirely on them.

Access to natural resources in Karamoja is increasingly constrained. Traditional systems that once allowed flexible and shared use of grazing land and water are being weakened by the expansion of protected areas, mining activities, settlement growth, and formal land administration processes that do not fully recognise customary practices. As a result, pastoral mobility has been restricted, leading to localized overuse of resources and heightened tensions among users.

User rights over land and natural resources remain poorly defined and inadequately protected. Although national laws recognise customary tenure, limited documentation and weak enforcement leave many communities exposed to land loss and exclusion from decision-making. Women, youth, and poorer households are particularly affected, as they often have less influence over resource governance structures and benefit-sharing arrangements.

In spite of these challenges, there are positive efforts underway. Community-led conservation initiatives, customary by-laws, participatory land use planning, and support from local governments and civil society organisations offer opportunities to improve sustainable resource management. Strengthening these approaches while aligning them with formal legal frameworks can help restore resource health, secure equitable access, and protect user rights.

Overall, sustainable natural resource management in Karamoja will require an integrated approach that balances environmental protection with livelihood needs, recognises and safeguards customary user rights, and promotes inclusive participation of communities in decision-making. Without such efforts, continued degradation and competition

over resources will undermine both environmental sustainability and social stability in the sub-region.

7.2 Recommendations

The report makes the following recommendations for improvement of natural resources management and eco-system health in Karamoja sub-region.

7.2.1 District Local Governments (District, Municipal, and Sub-County Levels)

- On an annual basis the district and municipal natural-resource offices should publish a register for each monitored site, recording boundaries, rights holders and seasonal users, lead authority, applicable plan, threats, permits, complaints and baseline condition. Agree the register with relevant customary representatives and sector agencies. Report the number of sites with verified records, not simply the number of meetings (Government of Uganda, 1998; MWE, 2017).
- The Local Governments should cost and incorporate priority actions in district plans and annual budgets, starting with inspections of high-risk wetland, river and forest sites, safe transport, and follow-up of identified damage. Compare approved allocations with releases, expenditures and completed visits. Do not label an allocation "ring-fenced" unless the applicable budget instrument actually protects it (Government of Uganda, 2025; World Bank, 2024).
- Develop or update site plans with the competent authority and affected users. Specify permitted uses, dry-season routes, restoration zones, measurable ecological indicators, financing, review date and grievance route. Develop plans for community consultation as part of the approved and implemented plan (NFA, 2024a; FAO, 2019).
- For Lia and Omaniman, jointly map riverbank uses and confirm applicable approvals before taking action. Monitor dumping, sand extraction, bank stability and water quality, with recorded notices and follow-up. Reconcile sand revenue from receipts to district accounts and disclose the basis for any community benefit or restoration expenditure (NEMA, 2024b; NEMA, 2024c).

- The Local Governments should invest inter-district collaboration in conservation and natural resource management where natural resources stretch beyond the jurisdiction of one district.
- Invest in feeder roads, supply field equipment, and transport to improve access for monitoring and enforcement in remote areas.

7.2.2 Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MoLHUD)

- Work with districts, Area Land Committees and customary rights holders to document overlapping claims at the monitored sites, including seasonal grazing routes and water points. Verify each committee's appointment and mandate before assigning it a task. Use the Land Act's communal tenure options where communities choose them, while recording dissent and an appeal path (Government of Uganda, 1998; Rugadya, 2020).
- Support participatory land-use plans that reconcile farming, livestock mobility, forests, conservation and extraction. The 2025 Kacheri exercise is an example of consultation, but formal adoption and implementation should be separately verified (IGAD, 2025).

7.2.3 National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)

- NEMA should lead risk-based compliance checks for extraction, pollution and riverbank disturbance with district environment officers and the appropriate sector agency. Publish site-specific permit status, inspections, corrective orders and closure, while protecting sensitive personal information. Apply the statutory approval route to sand extraction rather than assuming an operator's local registration suffices (NEMA, 2024b; NEMA, 2024c).
- Provide technical protocols for repeat measurements of riparian vegetation, erosion, turbidity and waste at Lia and Omaniman, and agree with MWE which authority acts on each result. Report verified non-compliance and remedy, not only enforcement visits (NEMA, 2024).

7.2.4 Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE)

- MWE should support catchment and micro-catchment bodies to connect wetland and river restoration with upstream land use. For Angaro and Odongi, verify whether the committees documented

in 2021 remain active and whether plans, minutes and monitoring results exist (Wetlands International, 2021a; MWE, 2017).

- Co-design water investments with herders and downstream users. Assess flow, maintenance costs and dry-season routes before siting storage, and monitor both household access and concentration of grazing pressure. Where fire or reseeding is proposed, establish a baseline and test ecological response rather than treating the technique itself as an outcome (FAO, 2019; Egeru et al., 2015).
- The MWE should verify the status and mapped boundary of each monitored central forest reserve and make its current management plan available locally. Prioritize plan renewal where needed and publish annual actions and monitoring results. The national 2024 plan inventory cannot establish a particular Karamoja reserve's status without checking the underlying register (NFA, 2024a).
- Where forest-adjacent groups seek collaborative forest management, the MWE should negotiate a written agreement that identifies rights, responsibilities, benefits, dispute resolution and review. Verify consent and representation, and distinguish the agreement from an informal conservation group (NFA, 2024b; Government of Uganda, 2003).

7.2.5 Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD)

- MEMD should make the relevant mineral and sand extraction licence boundaries and conditions accessible to districts and affected communities, with a joint inspection route for NEMA and local authorities. Record who holds land, mineral and surface-use rights before negotiating access or compensation (Rugadya, 2020; NEMA, 2024b).
- Require documented, accessible consultation and a functioning grievance mechanism in project-affected communities, with explicit attention to women and customary users.
- Audit resettlement and compensation payments and rehabilitation obligations against licence conditions.

7.2.6 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- CSOs should support independent documentation of resource condition, budgets, permits and grievances, while safeguarding complainants and referring offences to competent authorities.

Include women, youth and mobile users in consultations and publish aggregate follow-up results (Mercy Corps, 2026;).

- Pilot livelihoods such as apiculture or agroforestry with clear access rights, market assumptions and baseline income and ecological measures. Wetlands International's Angaro and Odongi beekeeping activities offer a relevant program model, but replication should depend on measured household and catchment results (Wetlands International, 2021b).

7.2.7 Community resource institutions and customary leaders

- Record the membership, mandate and decisions of each committee or customary forum, and invite women, youth and seasonal users to verify access rules. Refer disputed statutory boundaries and serious offences to the competent authority. Track whether negotiated grazing and water agreements are implemented in both wet and dry seasons (Carlson et al., 2012; FAO, 2019).

7.2.8 Development Partners

a) Development partners should finance a small number of costed, district-owned plans and a common monitoring protocol rather than parallel committee structures. Condition continuation on transparent budgets, inclusion and repeat ecological measurement. World Bank guidance on locally led climate action emphasizes devolved decisions, community knowledge and accountability (World Bank, 2024).

b) Support independent evaluation that compares intervention and similar non-intervention sites where feasible, documents unintended displacement of grazing or extraction, and publishes findings. Scale only practices with feasible operating costs and verified benefits for resource health and users.

7.1.9 Security and Judicial Institutions

- Police and judicial bodies should respond to reported violence, intimidation, sexual abuse and environmental offences according to their legal mandates. Establish confidential referral paths, protect complainants and record investigation and disposal without substituting community mediation for criminal justice (UNDP Uganda, 2026).

7.2.10 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED)

- MoFPED should require districts and sector ministries to cost priority sites and disclose budget, release and expenditure against plan outputs. Consider predictable multi-year funding for approved restoration and monitoring activities within existing public finance rules, linked to auditable reporting (Government of Uganda, 2025; World Bank, 2024).
- Assess climate-finance proposals against vulnerability, customary access, maintenance cost and measurable adaptation outcomes. The World Bank's Uganda climate analysis argues for coordinated, locally responsive resilience investments, but finance claims should follow a funded instrument and verified eligibility (World Bank, 2025).
- Publish a common annual dashboard with site baseline and trend, plan status, inspection follow-up, grievance closure, inclusion and expenditure. Disaggregate site, season and user group. Review adverse outcomes, including displaced extraction or restricted mobility, before expanding an intervention (World Bank, 2024; FAO, 2019).

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ABOUT ACODE

The Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) is an independent public policy research and advocacy think tank based in Uganda. ACODE's work focuses on four programme areas: Economic Governance; Environment and Natural Resources Governance; Democracy, Peace and Security; Science, Technology and Innovation. For the last eight consecutive years, ACODE has been ranked as the best think tank in Uganda and one of the top 100 think tanks in Sub-Saharan Africa and globally in the Global Think Tanks Index Report published by the University of Pennsylvania Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP).

ABOUT KHH

Karamoja Herders of the Horn (KHH), formerly the Karamoja Development Forum (KDF), is a prominent civil society and research organisation based in Moroto, Uganda. It champions the rights and livelihoods of pastoralist communities across the Horn of Africa. KHH works at the intersection of climate action, cross-border peacebuilding, and land governance, actively securing communal grazing rights and traditional resource-sharing frameworks. KHH promotes community-led action research and regional dialogues to bridge the gap between marginalised grassroots herders and national policy, fostering sustainable resilience to severe climate shocks and regional insecurity.

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