



ENHANCING RESILIENCE, LIVELIHOODS AND CLIMATE JUSTICE IN KARAMOJA AND WEST NILE

Post - Uganda Water and Environment Week (UWEWK) 2025 Statement

1. INTRODUCTION

Uganda's socio-economic and political landscape presents a complex reality of progress. The Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), West Nile District Association (WENDA) and Karamoja Herders of the Horn (KHH) are honoured to prepare this Statement for the post 8th Uganda Water and Environment Week (UWEWK 2025) under the theme *"Water and Environment Resources for Enhanced Resilience and Improved Incomes and Livelihoods."* ACODE, WENDA and KHH are dedicated to promoting sustainable development through evidence-based policy advocacy. Over the years, ACODE has actively engaged in water and environmental governance, recognizing the critical role these resources play in achieving Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP IV) and Vision 2040. This statement focuses on the Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions, two areas that face unique and pressing challenges in water and environmental management. These regions are not only ecologically fragile but also socioeconomically marginalized, making them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, resource degradation, and inequitable access to water and environmental resources. By addressing the specific issues in Karamoja and West Nile, this statement aligns with the four sub-themes of UWEWK 2025 and provides actionable recommendations to enhance resilience, improve livelihoods, promote climate justice and sustainable development in these regions.

1.1 Background on Karamoja and West Nile Sub-Regions

Karamoja, is one of the most marginalized and least developed regions in the country. It is characterized by a semi-arid climate, with erratic rainfall patterns and frequent droughts. The region is home to approximately 1.2 million people, most of whom rely on pastoralism and subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods (UBOS, 2023). However, environmental degradation, overgrazing, and climate change have severely impacted the region's natural resource base, leading to food insecurity, poverty, and resource-based conflicts. Karamoja's water resources are limited and unevenly distributed, with only 39% of the population having access to clean water (MWE, 2023). The region's reliance on seasonal rivers and unprotected water sources exacerbates water scarcity, particularly during dry spells. Additionally, deforestation and land degradation have reduced the region's resilience to climate shocks, further compounding the challenges faced by local communities.

On the other hand, the West Nile sub-region, located in north western Uganda, has a tropical climate with two rainy seasons, but it has experienced increasing variability in rainfall patterns due to climate change. West Nile is home to over 3 million people, including a significant refugee population from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR, 2023). The influx of refugees has placed immense pressure on the region's water and environmental resources, leading to tensions between host communities and refugees. Access to clean water in West Nile is also a concern, with only 55% of the population having access to improved water sources (MWE, 2023). The region's reliance on subsistence agriculture has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and declining agricultural productivity. Furthermore, inadequate waste management systems have resulted in pollution of water bodies, affecting both human health and ecosystems.

1.2 Justification for the Statement

The focus on Karamoja and West Nile in this statement is justified by the unique challenges these regions face, which require targeted interventions to ensure sustainable water and environmental management. Both regions are critical to Uganda's development agenda, yet they remain underserved and underrepresented in national policy discussions.

- a) *Marginalization and Vulnerability:* Karamoja and West Nile are among the most marginalized regions in Uganda, with high levels of poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to basic services. Addressing water and environmental challenges in these regions is essential for reducing inequality and promoting inclusive development.
- b) *Climate Change Impacts:* Both regions are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall patterns. These climatic shocks have severe implications for water availability, agricultural productivity, and livelihoods, making climate action a priority.
- c) *Resource-Based Conflicts:* Karamoja has a history of resource-based conflicts, particularly over water and pasture, while West Nile faces tensions between host communities and refugees due to competition for scarce resources. Promoting peaceful and sustainable resource management is critical for social cohesion and stability.
- d) *Economic Potential:* Despite their challenges, Karamoja and West Nile have significant economic potential, particularly in agriculture, livestock, and eco-tourism. Sustainable management of water and environmental resources can unlock this potential, contributing to improved incomes and livelihoods.
- e) *Alignment with National and Global Agendas:* Addressing the challenges in Karamoja and West Nile aligns with Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP III), Vision 2040, and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

1.3 Purpose of the Statement

Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions are at the forefront of Uganda's water and environmental challenges, yet they also hold immense potential for sustainable development. By focusing on these regions, ACODE, KHH, and WENDA seek to contribute to the discourse beyond the UWEWK 2025 and advocate for targeted interventions that address the unique needs of these communities. This statement provides a roadmap for enhancing resilience, improving livelihoods, promoting climate justice and promoting equitable and sustainable resource management in Karamoja and West Nile, in line with the sub-themes of UWEWK 2025.

2. THEMATIC FOCUS

This statement aligns with the four sub-themes of the UWEWK 2025 highlighting the Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions, two ecologically fragile and socioeconomically marginalized areas facing unique and pressing water and environmental management challenges. These regions are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, resource degradation, and inequitable access to resources. By addressing the specific issues in Karamoja and West Nile, this statement provides actionable recommendations to enhance resilience, improve livelihoods, promote climate justice and sustainable development in these regions.

2.1 Sub-theme 1: Water and Environment for a Peaceful and Sustainable Future

Management of Water and Environment resources is critical for development. However, its potential can only be harnessed through inter -sectoral cooperation and engagement. Therefore, there is need for integrated approach in planning, management and development of water resources beyond the current program arrangement. Karamoja is one of the most water-stressed regions in Uganda, with only 39% of the population having access to clean water (MWE, 2023). The region relies heavily on seasonal rivers, unprotected springs, and boreholes, many of which are non-functional or overstretched. During dry seasons, communities often travel long distances in search of water, leading to conflicts over access to these scarce resources. Women and children, who are primarily responsible for water collection, bear the brunt of this burden, spending hours each day fetching water instead of engaging in productive activities or attending school.

In West Nile, access to clean water is slightly better but still inadequate, with 55% of the population having access to improved water sources (MWE, 2023). However, the region faces unique challenges due to the influx of refugees from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The refugee settlements have placed immense pressure on existing water infrastructure, leading to overuse and degradation of water sources. This has resulted in tensions between host communities and refugees, as both groups compete for limited water resources.

SDG 6 (Target 6.1, 6.4, and 6.5) emphasise the importance of equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, improved sanitation, and sustainable water resource management. However, the current levels of access to clean water in Karamoja and West Nile fall far short of the SDG 6 targets. In Karamoja and West Nile, only 39% and 55 % of the population respectively have access to clean water, compared to the national average of 70% (MWE, 2023).

Both regions suffer from inefficient water use, particularly in agriculture and livestock management, leading to over-extraction and depletion of water resources. Karamoja and West Nile lack comprehensive Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) frameworks, resulting in fragmented and unsustainable water management practices. Women and girls in both regions are disproportionately affected by water scarcity, as they are primarily responsible for water collection. This limits their opportunities for education, economic participation, and overall well-being, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

To promote peace and sustainability, ACODE, KHH and WENDA recommend:

- a) Strengthening community-based natural resource management systems to ensure equitable access to water and pasture.
- b) Establishing conflict resolution mechanisms that involve local leaders, cultural institutions, and government agencies.
- c) Promoting reforestation and sustainable land use practices to restore degraded ecosystems and reduce resource-based conflicts.
- d) Enhance Gender Equality: Ensure that women are actively involved in water management decisions at the community level. Provide training and resources to women to empower them as agents of change in water and environmental management.
- e) Strengthen participation of security agencies, cultural and religious institutions, and media in fostering water and environment in promoting peace and risk reduction and conflict resolution.

2.2 Sub-theme 2: Water and Environment for Climate Action

Climate change poses a significant threat to water and environmental resources, particularly in vulnerable regions like Karamoja and West Nile. These sub-regions are already experiencing the adverse effects of climate change, including erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and increased frequency of extreme weather events. These climatic shocks have severe implications for water availability, agricultural productivity, and livelihoods, making climate action a critical priority. This sub-theme aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13, which calls for “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.” It also intersects with SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), emphasizing the need for integrated approaches to climate resilience and sustainable resource management.

Karamoja’s semi-arid climate makes it particularly vulnerable to climate change. The region has experienced a 30% decline in water availability over the past decade due to prolonged droughts and environmental degradation (MWE, 2023). Erratic rainfall patterns have disrupted agricultural activities, leading to food insecurity and loss of livelihoods. Additionally, deforestation and overgrazing have exacerbated land degradation, reducing the region’s capacity to cope with climate shocks.

West Nile, while relatively more humid than Karamoja, has also been affected by climate change. The region has experienced increased variability in rainfall, with more intense rainy seasons leading to flooding and soil erosion, followed by dry spells that reduce water availability (NEMA, 2024). The refugee population in West Nile further compounds these challenges, as the increased demand for water and land resources strains the region’s already fragile ecosystems.

Karamoja and West Nile face significant challenges to climate action due to limited climate-resilient infrastructure, including water storage and flood

control, hindering adaptation to climate shocks; environmental degradation through deforestation and overgrazing, weakening ecosystem resilience; inadequate funding and resources, impeding the implementation of crucial climate projects; and weak institutional frameworks, leading to fragmented and ineffective climate initiatives.

Thus, ACODE, KHH and WENDA propose the following actions:

- a) Scaling up climate-resilient water infrastructure, such as rainwater harvesting systems and small-scale irrigation schemes.
- b) Enhancing early warning systems to help communities prepare for and adapt to climate-related shocks and mitigate the impacts of droughts, floods, and other climate-related hazards.
- c) Integrating climate change adaptation into local government development plans, with a focus on water and environmental sustainability.
- d) Mainstream climate change adaptation into local development plans, with a focus on water and environmental sustainability.
- e) Build the capacity of local Governments for effective climate action.
- f) Advocate for increased funding from national and international sources to support climate adaptation and mitigation projects in Karamoja and West Nile.
- g) Empower local communities to take ownership of climate action initiatives by involving them in decision-making processes.
- h) Support community-based organizations and cooperatives to implement climate-resilient projects, such as water harvesting and sustainable agriculture.
- i) Polarise innovative financing mechanisms for climate actions e.g carbon credits.

2.3 Sub-theme 3: Equitable and Sustainable Use of Water and Environmental Resources for Improved Incomes and Livelihoods

The equitable and sustainable use of water and environmental resources is critical for improving incomes and livelihoods, particularly in marginalized regions like Karamoja and West Nile. These sub-regions face significant challenges, including water scarcity, environmental degradation, and limited economic opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that promotes inclusive resource management, enhances livelihood diversification, and ensures that the benefits of resource use are shared equitably. This sub-theme aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (No Poverty), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasizing the need to leverage water and environmental resources for socioeconomic development.

Karamoja and West Nile face severe challenges. In Karamoja, only 39% of the population has access to clean water (MWE, 2023), with women and marginalized groups disproportionately affected. West Nile fares slightly

better at 55% access, but refugee populations experience added strain due to overcrowding and resource overuse (UNHCR, 2023). Environmental degradation through deforestation, overgrazing, and unsustainable agriculture diminishes vital resources and exacerbates soil erosion and food insecurity in both regions.

Economic vulnerabilities are high, as both areas depend heavily on climate-sensitive agriculture and pastoralism. Limited market access and financial services impede economic diversification. Gender inequality further compounds these issues, with women and girls bearing the primary burden of water collection and facing restricted economic opportunities due to limited participation in decision-making.

To address these challenges, ACODE, KHH and WENDA recommend:

- a) Promoting gender-sensitive water and environmental policies and approaches to ensure inclusive resource management to ensure that communities benefit from Uganda’s rich natural resources.
- b) Supporting livelihood diversification programs, such as agroforestry, beekeeping, and eco-tourism, to reduce dependence on natural resources.
- c) Investing in water-for-production initiatives, such as irrigation and livestock watering points, to enhance agricultural productivity and incomes.
- d) Enhance Gender Equality where women are actively involved in water management decisions at the community level.
- e) Provide training and resources to women to empower them as agents of change in water and environmental management including river basins and among natural resource adjacent communities.
- f) Strengthen financial services, such as microloans and savings schemes, to support livelihood diversification and entrepreneurship.

2.4 Sub-theme 4: Water and Environment Innovations, Knowledge, and Capacity for Empowering a New Generation

Empowering a new generation through water and environment innovations, knowledge, and capacity-building is essential for achieving sustainable development in marginalized regions like Karamoja and West Nile. These sub-regions face significant challenges, including water scarcity, environmental degradation, and limited access to education and technology. These sub-regions lag behind in adopting modern technologies and practices due to limited capacity and inadequate funding (MWE, 2024). However, they also hold immense potential for innovation and youth-led solutions that can transform water and environmental management. This sub-theme aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), emphasizing the need to harness the creativity and energy of young people to address pressing water and environmental challenges. Innovation and knowledge-

sharing are critical for addressing the water and environmental challenges faced by Karamoja and West Nile.

Karamoja and West Nile face stark developmental challenges, with limited access to education and technology forming a critical barrier. In Karamoja, literacy rates languish at a mere 35% (UBOS, 2023), and primary school enrolment is only 56% (UNICEF, 2022), compounded by internet access below 10% and mobile phone ownership at 15% (Uganda Communications Commission, 2023). West Nile, while slightly better with a 68% literacy rate (UBOS, 2023) and 85% primary enrolment (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023), still falls below national averages, and internet and mobile phone access remain limited at 25% and 40%, respectively (Uganda Communications Commission, 2023). These digital and educational deficits severely constrain opportunities for youth in both regions.

Youth unemployment and underemployment further exacerbate these challenges. Karamoja's youth unemployment reaches a staggering 65% (UBOS, 2023), with many resorting to unstable, low-paying informal work (World Bank, 2023) and facing a brain drain due to migration (ACODE, 2022). In West Nile, youth unemployment is around 50% (UBOS, 2023), compounded by the influx of refugees increasing competition for scarce jobs (UNHCR, 2023), and similar migration patterns (World Bank, 2023). The lack of robust capacity-building programs further compounds these issues. Only 5% of Karamoja's youth have access to vocational training (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2023), with funding constraints hindering program expansion (ACODE, 2022). West Nile fares slightly better, with 15% access (Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2023), but refugee influx strains existing resources (UNHCR, 2023).

Gender disparities are deeply entrenched in both regions, significantly impacting girls' and women's opportunities. In Karamoja, girls' primary enrolment is 20% lower than boys, with high dropout rates due to early marriages (UNICEF, 2022). Women constitute less than 10% of innovation program participants and face severe limitations in accessing resources (ACODE, 2022; World Bank, 2023). West Nile mirrors these challenges, with girls' enrolment 15% lower, higher dropout rates due to pregnancies (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023), and women comprising only 20% of innovation program participants, further hampered by cultural norms and financial access limitations (ACODE, 2022; UNHCR, 2023). These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the multifaceted challenges in Karamoja and West Nile.

Important to note is that Karamoja and West Nile possess significant opportunities for innovation and youth empowerment in addressing water and environmental challenges. Digital technologies offer promising avenues, with mobile applications and GIS/remote sensing enabling effective water resource monitoring and environmental change tracking. Youth-led entrepreneurship

can drive the development of practical solutions like water purification and renewable energy systems, supported by tailored training and funding. Community-based innovation hubs can foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and access to resources, empowering young innovators to test and scale their ideas. Education and skills development are crucial components. Integrating water and environmental education into curricula raises awareness, while vocational programs equip youth with practical skills in water engineering, conservation, and renewable energy. Gender-inclusive programs are essential for ensuring equitable access to education and technology, specifically targeting girls and young women to overcome cultural barriers and promote their leadership in water and environmental management.

To harness the potential of young people in Karamoja and West Nile, ACODE, KHH and WENDA recommend the following actions:

- a) Establishing innovation hubs to promote the adoption of water and environment-related technologies, such as solar-powered water pumps and drought-resistant crops.
- b) Strengthening partnerships between academic institutions, private sector actors, and local communities to enhance knowledge exchange and capacity building.
- c) Empowering youth through training programs on sustainable water and environmental management to foster a new generation of resource stewards.
- d) Establish entrepreneurship programs in Karamoja and West Nile that provide training, mentorship, and funding to young innovators. Create incubation centres and innovation hubs to support the development and scaling of youth-led solutions.
- e) Implement programs that specifically target girls and young women, providing them with access to education, technology, and innovation opportunities.
- f) Address cultural barriers and promote the participation of girls and young women in water and environmental management.
- g) Foster partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and the private sector to support youth empowerment and innovation.
- h) Ensure youth inclusion in climate Actions where they are integrated youth, and children into the water and environment sector. Local-National Level engagements with the youth and MDAs should be strengthened to facilitate their participation in decision making processes.

CONCLUSION

The Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions are at a critical juncture, where sustainable management of water and environmental resources is essential for resilience, peace, and improved livelihoods. ACODE, WENDA and KHH call on the government, development partners, and other stakeholders to prioritize these regions in national and international water and environment agendas. By addressing the specific challenges outlined in this statement, Uganda can achieve its vision of sustainable socioeconomic transformation as outlined in the National Development Plan III and Vision 2040.

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