



## USAID Karamoja Resilience Support Unit: Turning evidence into action



### Fighting alcoholism in Karamoja

#### The challenges

Following disarmament in Karamoja, north east Uganda, which began in 2010 and continues to date, the consumption, production and sale of alcohol experienced a dramatic increase. Consequently, health, household wealth and relationships have been significantly affected as a result of the negative effects on communities and individuals.

A variety of explanations have been provided as to why and how relative peace following disarmament was associated with higher levels of alcohol intake. For example, reduced livestock raiding meant that individuals no longer needed to be as vigilant in the evenings and could spend more time drinking. The development of urban and peri-urban markets and increase in availability of homemade and cheap liquors (particularly *waragi*, a type of gin) has also led to greater consumption.

The period following disarmament has also seen a decrease in those relying on livestock for their livelihoods: following the introduction of protected *kraals*, families reported losing large numbers of their herds, which had taken them a long time to develop. So, they began looking

#### Key messages

- The government-directed disarmament within Karamoja has increased peace and security within the region. However, this newfound restfulness has encouraged the introduction of hard liquor to the area, as outside markets have been able to filter in.
- In turn, there has been a sharp increase in the amount of alcohol being produced and consumed; negatively impacting the health, wealth and relationships of those in the region.
- In 2018, KRSU launched a research project to investigate the issues and recommend approaches that can be taken to tackle alcoholism and related insecurities in Karamoja.
- The Moroto Catholic Diocese found KRSU's research supported their own findings and used KRSU suggestions to steer their programme in tackling alcoholism; which the KRSU team also provided technical support for.
- The Embassy of Ireland in Karamoja were aware of issues relating to alcohol, but KRSU's research highlighted the severity of the issue and prompted them to provide funding for the Moroto Dioceses' programme.

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*– Valentina Lokol, Karamoja Liaison Officer at the Embassy of Ireland*

to alternative income sources; with women especially turning to brewing, as alcohol production is recognised as being a 'relatively stable and lucrative economic activity'.

However, increased physical health issues, such as weight loss, frailty and even death; enhanced rates of domestic abuse, divorce and broken families; and greater economic insecurity, as household cash typically used for essential purchases was instead being used to buy alcohol, have become a significant cause for concern.

### **What did KRSU's research entail?**

To help develop a better understanding of exactly how alcohol is impacting those in the Karamoja region, the Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU) launched a research project in 2018. The project, which received financial support from USAID/Uganda and Irish Aid, also aimed to highlight approaches to tackle the associated negative outcomes.

Interviews were used as the primary means to assess the level and impacts of alcohol consumption: with the KRSU team speaking to 503 individuals (40% women) across five districts in Karamoja, through a combination of focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual conversations. In addition, some FGDs (127 participants in total) were involved in other participatory methods – including creating diagrams and calendars – to provide researchers with more specific, data-led insights. A further 42 key informants – including those in government and healthcare – were also interviewed.

Following data collection and analysis, KRSU published a series of recommendations – aimed at policy makers, government officials and non-governmental organisations – to help drive positive behavioural changes around alcohol production and consumption. These included:

- Providing greater support to local initiatives working to assist those affected by alcohol abuse (including skills-based training to provide alternative employment opportunities), enhance understanding of alcohol-related diseases (among local communities, healthcare workers and other government workers), and change alcohol-related legislation.
- Supporting additional evidence gathering and learning to continue developing understanding around the impacts of alcohol in the region, and identify gaps in

programmes designed to reduce alcohol-associated activities.

- Using evidence to advocate for policy improvements, particularly around taxes related to the sale of alcohol.

KRSU's research findings, along with the resulting recommendations, have been taken up and used by a number of organisations – including the Moroto Diocese and Embassy of Ireland in Uganda – in the development and implementation of further studies and activities.

### **Use of evidence by implementing partners: the case of the Moroto Catholic Diocese Health Department**

Established in 1993, the health department of Moroto Catholic Diocese provides healthcare and education to five districts in south Karamoja: Amadut, Moroto, Nabilatuk, Nakapiripirit, and Napak. Services provided to communities in these areas include vaccinations and physiotherapy, home-based care for patients with HIV/AIDs, and providing diagnoses and relevant treatments. The department also plays a key role in education and sensitisation, and coordinates with the Ugandan Ministry of Health.

A key Community Health Programme focuses on tackling alcoholism in Karamoja. "Since 2017, the Diocese has been involved in trying to fight the increasing problem of alcoholism in the region," explains Dr Pier Luigi Rossanigo, a medical doctor and advisor in the Diocese's health department. "Up to now, Moroto Diocese is almost the only actor which has been working to tackle the plague of alcoholism in Karamoja."

The Diocese welcomes any additional support that could be used to enhance their activities. "We looked at the Tufts University research in 2018 as a support to our efforts [and] really appreciated it," Dr Rossanigo states.

Dr Rossanigo believes that the KRSU research marked an important shift in mind sets and attitudes towards the scale of the problem and the urgency required in tackling it. "The fact that KRSU was requested by donors, multilateral agencies and the Office of the Uganda Prime Minister to carry out research to understand the causes and consequences of increased alcohol consumption in Karamoja, shows an important step toward understanding the real magnitude of alcoholism and its impact on people's health and on society," he explains.

Shortly after the publication of KRSU's research into alcohol consumption and production in Karamoja, the Diocese released their own study, '*Local Development and Alcohol Abuse: the Case of Karamoja*', which was published in the magazine PHRG (Peace, Human Rights and Governance). While Dr Rossanigo recognises the differences in focus for each organisation – "the Diocese emphasises the health aspects, while Tufts University's research is mainly on the social and economic aspects" – "all these aspects are important."



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Together, the recommendations of these two studies are being taken up by the Diocese to steer their current project – ‘Fighting alcoholism in Karamoja through the Health Department and the Justice and Peace structures of Moroto Diocese’ – which received €50,000 in financing from the Embassy of Ireland. The current phase, launched in August 2021 and predicted to run for 12 months, aims to increase awareness on the ‘danger of alcohol abuse on health, economy and social life’ among communities within Karamoja. While the entire population – over 1.1 million individuals – is anticipated to ultimately benefit from the Department’s programme, more at-risk individuals have been targeted via programmes such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

Technical support has also been provided by KRSU as part of the successful rollout of the Diocese’s project, including disseminating information to implementing partners and donors. They have also supplied a variety of advisory services, such as providing inputs to policy, regulatory and legislation during Diocese-organised dialogues with local governments and sharing experiences from neighbouring pastoralist areas in Kenya to enhance the Dioceses’ knowledge base.

Looking ahead, Dr Rossanigo shares that, “following the publication of the research of Tufts University, the Diocese is trying to follow the recommendations” – and this will

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apply to both the current project with the Embassy of Ireland and their future endeavours. Ultimately, statistics and insights from research, such as that conducted by KRSU, is crucial to the Diocese in achieving its goals. “[Our] attention has always been focussing on the collection of evidence-based data, on the sensitisation of the communities and of the local authorities, and on the treatment and rehabilitation of alcoholics,” states Rossanigo.

Positive outcomes are already being seen. For example, according to Ministry of Health data, a 12% decrease has been seen in the number of outpatients being treated for alcohol abuse-related conditions. Four new Alcoholics Anonymous groups have also been established, doubling the number of groups in the region. Finally, district councils in Karamoja have approved new ordinances and bylaws in relation to alcohol abuse. For example, the government has banned the production and sale of alcohol in quantities under 200ml, and also introduced the National Alcohol Control Policy – designed to further such regulations and provide alcohol abuse-related support and interventions.

### **Use of evidence by donors: the Embassy of Ireland**

Active in Uganda since 1994, the Embassy of Ireland provides support to the Ugandan Government at national and local level. Managing a number of assistance programmes focussing on enhancing areas such as education, social protection, HIV/AIDs treatment, and governance and accountability, a particular focus for their roll out is placed on Karamoja. A more specific element of the governance and gender-related projects has placed emphasis on fighting alcoholism in this target region.

Although the Embassy of Ireland team were generally aware of issues relating to alcohol production and abuse, they relied on the KRSU paper’s findings and

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recommendations to reinforce insights they had received previously from the Moroto Diocese. “[The KRSU] report indicated consumption of crude alcohol in Karamoja was actually very high,” explains Valentina Lokol, Karamoja liaison officer at the Embassy. “We learnt from KRSU that alcoholism is a silent gun in Karamoja.”

The research encouraged the Embassy to support Moroto Diocese in tackling alcohol-related issues. “We gave the Diocese €40,000 in funding for phase two of their project,” explains Lokol. This partnership proved so successful that the Embassy decided to provide funding for phase three of the Diocese’s project, too – and Lokol states that they plan to offer a €50,000 grant that will help continue the Dioceses’ activities through to summer 2023.

In helping tackle alcoholism in Karamoja, the Embassy supports the Diocese in three main areas: policy influencing and advocacy, rehabilitation and therapy, and sensitisation and community mobilisation. Within these, activities include talking to policy makers, MPs and local councillors; organising sensitisation meetings within communities; collecting data from health centres to help guide future actions; working with local authorities to crack down on sellers of crude alcohol; and sharing information with stakeholders to increase awareness. The Embassy also uses KRSU’s research to help understand how alcohol production and abuse impacts their own activities. “[Alcohol is] not only affecting the lives of the people, but also the projects being implemented in Karamoja,” Lokol reveals. For example, “the stipend provided for social

protection, they are using the money to consume alcohol – and that is destroying their lives.” Education is also affected, because teachers and learners are drinking.

Lokol reveals that research and recommendations, such as those from the Embassy, KRSU and the Diocese, are critical in helping implement and change government policies related to alcohol use and production – which are crucial if lasting change is to occur. “The law is not helpful to us, as there’s currently few regulations around unprocessed and undistilled waragi – and that’s where we need to push the policymakers to really make a change,” Lokol shares. “[Then] we will be able to move and reach more.”

However, positive change as a result of the research is being seen. For instance, “there has been a lot of wider sensitisation that alcohol is really killing people,” she explains.

Looking ahead, the Embassy continues to support KRSU’s alcohol-related work – especially as KRSU have proved to be an important partner in disseminating information. For instance, in February 2022, the KRSU team shared insights around alcohol abuse at a Karamoja Development Partners Group meeting, and contributed to a discussion around alcoholism at an internal Embassy learning event. KRSU also advised the Embassy to organise a regional symposium on alcoholism in Karamoja, to ensure awareness and discussion around the issue continues.



## **USAID Karamoja Resilience Support Unit (KRSU)**

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For more information about the KRSU:

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