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Karamoja Rural Economic Transformation:

The “ERRE” and “AWUI” Model Transiting from Crisis to Economic Growth



Theme: Harnessing the potential of “Erre” production systems for wealth creation and sustainable socio-economic transformation

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1.0. Introduction

The Karamojong rural people live a communal lifestyle of extended family socio-economic networks but with distinct provision for private individual, or separate family spaces and property ownerships enclosed in very large homesteads (*erre/ngireria*). It is common to find a cluster of many separate *ngireria* in a neighborhood. Each *erre*-sharing a common fenced perimeter of thorny stockades, a big entrance gate (*ekidor*) and wooden internal fences demarcating spaces for each separate individual household. Thorny fences and wood encircle the “*erre*” for protection against raids from other cattle rustlers and wild animals. Livestock pens (*atamanawui*) are located in the centre of *erre*, where men set campfires and keep guard overnight.



The ‘*erre*’ is an institution of learning where skills pass on to generations through imitation and participation by keeping close to specialists in different fields. Each person in the ‘*erre*’ plays a social role basing on age, gender, expertise, skills, experience and other fields. Women and girls are home makers and do most of the chores in the homestead including active participation of erecting and renovation of home structures. The women cultivate land ‘*kamais*’ to grow food crops in rainy season, process dairy products, fetch water from watering holes and prepare meals for the family. Boys and men tend the livestock; reaching out to the traditional grazing areas

looking for fresh pasture to graze near the watering holes and salt licks and establishing temporary settlement camps called “Awui” or “Ngawuyoi”. A sizable number of Ngawuyoi settle in a given grazing area are called ‘Alomari’ and a number of ‘Ngalomarin’ are called ‘Adakari’. Each level of ‘Awui, Alomari, Adakari’ has a corresponding kraal leader, higher in status, reflecting the level of Ngawuyoi settlements or grazing associations.

Whereas ‘Awui’ is a temporary camp for cattle belonging to a particular ‘erre’ or a combination of Ngireria, the Alomari and Adakari could be a combination of cattle from many ‘Ngawuyoi’ belonging to a Parish, Sub- County or District and can even include ‘Ngawuyoi’ (Cattle Camps) belonging to grazing associates from secondary and tertiary resource user communities. These may include cattle owners such as Turkana, Pokot or people from other neighboring districts of Karamoja.



Each “erre” settlement has a headman (leader), for which each ‘erre’ is personally identified with. The ‘erre’ therefore derives its name from the name of the headman (Erre of Pulkol). The ‘erre’ Headman commands respect and exercises administration and welfare responsibilities over all people and their property who reside in that particular ‘erre’. He is listened to and obeyed by all members of the ‘erre’. In the discharge of his duties and responsibilities he is supported by other male household

heads in that *'erre'*. He issues orders and assigns duties to all in the different residents of the *'erre'* depending on the common activities taking place in that particular season.



The women in each *'erre'* are also organized according to a hierarchy of senior women based on age, marital status, and age-set standing of their respective husbands in the clan or sub-clans. These rankings are usually identified by the color of the metallic necklace and wrist bangles worn by the married or widowed women. Unmarried women or girls do not put on such.

'Erre' production systems are an integral part of the Karimojong way of life and defines socio-economic relations, informal leadership structures, resource use and management. The *'erre'* production systems consists of different roles assigned in the breeding and management of livestock in extensive and free range grazing systems. These roles and responsibilities are assigned according to different age sets. These systems are deeply rooted in the history, cultural norms and practices of people in *'erre'*.

This concept paper aims to;

- i. Describe the different functional features of *'erre'*,
- ii. Provide interpretation of the different *'erre'* features and their significance in relation to production, environmental protection and sustenance of livelihoods.

- iii. Outline The Potential of the ‘erre’ production system in enhancing food security and integrating rural based households into the cash economy
- iv. Propose possible strategies and interventions for transforming ‘erre and awui’ production systems so as to transition Karamoja into a more settled and commercially productive society.



1.1. Features of “Erre”.

- i) “Atamanawui”- General cattle pen for ‘erre’. All ‘ngikalya’ congregate their cattle into this cattle pen for security and protection. It is normally located in the centre/middle of ‘erre’ and surrounded by the different ‘ngikalya’.
- ii) “Ekal” -Household. An average of 10 (ten) ‘ngikalya’ are found in ‘erre’. Each ‘ekal’ owns its own cows for milking. These are basically allocated to the mother of that ‘ekal’ as her resources.

iii) “Ekeno” - place for cooking food. It is comprised of three cooking stones with an enclosure of small sticks.

iv) “Aluket” - an enclosure for young calves. Each ‘ekal’ will keep calves of milking cows in ‘aluket’ when the rest of the cattle are taken to grazing areas for water and pasture. Upon return in the evening, each ‘ekal’ will release its calves into ‘atamanawui’ in order to harvest the milk from their milking cows.

v) “Edula” - Granary. General storage facility for food in ‘ekal’. Each ‘ekal’ owns its own granaries.



vi) “Kamais” - Small household land for agriculture.

vii) “Apeero” - Large/sizeable land for the ‘erre’ households.

1.2. Interpretation of “Erre” Features.



- i) "Atamanawui" represents the commonwealth held by the 'erre' production system together with its joint security provisions.
- ii) "Ekal" denotes the singularity and individualness of the occupants of "erre". It is an expression of private ownership and custodianship of the "erre' production systems.
- iii) "Ekeno" is the place where the final products of the "erre" production systems are brought together and refined for the "ekal" to consume and enjoy the fruits all "erre" production systems. Once this refinery as it were, is not functional, then it means that "Ekal" has no resources; is most vulnerable in the entire "erre". This will trigger and stir up concern from other "ngikalya" of the plight of this "ekal" whose "ekeno" is not seen to function, normally observed through smoke or fire being lit.
- iv) "Aluket" represents the "Ekal" individual and personal holding ground and treasury for the "ekal" animal resources. The bigger the size of the "aluket", the larger the milking cows owned by that "Ekal".
- v) "Edula" portrays the capacity of "ekal" to maintain its means of survival throughout the year in terms of food security. The more the number and bigger the size of "ngidulae" the more that "ekal" is food secure. It is very easy to tell which "ekal" has more food reserves by just opening its "edula" or "ngidulae". This can be viewed as "ekal" personal 'bank account'. When the "edula" has surplus grain, it can be exchanged for livestock or taken to the market for cash.

vi) "Kamais" represents the "ekal" individual production asset (factor of production). This land which belongs to "ekal" is normally 4-6 acres. It can only be shared between the mother in "ekal" with her daughter-in-law as the latter is a new member of that "ekal".

vii) "Apeero" represents the "erre" available resources for large scale/commercial farming. It is communally owned and has multiple users. It can be a grazing land while at the same time providing other resources such as wild fruits, edible roots, medicinal herbs, vegetables, building materials, etc. "Apeero" may range in size from 300-400 acres.

1.3. The Potential of the 'erre' production system in enhancing food security and integrating rural based households into the cash economy

This concept paper aims to explore the potential of 'Erre' production systems in promoting sustainable household food security and integrating the majority of Karimojong who reside in erre and awui settlements into the cash economy through utilizing the land around their settlements (Ngireria and Ngawuyoi) for commercial crop and livestock production and environmental conservation.

There is need for the new 10-year Karamoja Regional Development Plan to majorly focus on channeling resources, program interventions and critical inputs to the 3 main localities where production occurs, namely;

- i. The 'Erre' (Homesteads/Households);
- ii. The 'Awui' (Kraals in the Rangelands/Grazing Areas) and;
- iii. The 'Elain' (Urban/Trading Centers)

These Typologies of localities Where the Karimojong live and organize and carry out their daily livelihood-production activities need to be properly targeted, resources allocated and appropriate interventions properly identified and implemented.

In harnessing ‘erre and awui’ production systems, it is proposed that the new KRDP utilize the traditional Karimojong settlement patterns, with their resilient capabilities, coupled with existing natural resource and land use management structures to improve the following:



- i. Household Incomes and Household Food Security (Small Household farms and gardens 4 acres average)

At Parish Level establish 2 Erre Based Commercial Enterprises (Block Farms)
(Kakomongole etc. SBDI like Initiatives based on Cooperatives Business Model)



- ii. At Sub-County Level establish 3 Awui Based Livestock Production and Marketing Cooperatives/SACCOs, support Artisanal Miners Cooperatives/SACCOs, support Community Based Eco-Tourism Enterprises and Facilities



- iii. At District/Urban or Elain Level support individuals, groups and business enterprises to establish storage and Value Addition facilities, marketing and other Cottage Industries.

Possible Strategies and Interventions

To enhance the sustainability of 'Erre" production systems, several strategies and interventions can be considered:

a) ***Strengthening Land Tenure Security***: Ensuring secure and equitable access to grazing lands and water resources is crucial for the sustainability of 'Erre" production systems. Governments and policymakers should establish clear and enforceable land tenure rights, recognizing the traditional 'Erre" land-use systems and protecting them from encroachment and conflicts with other land users.

b) ***Sustainable Rangeland Management***: Encouraging sustainable grazing practices, such as rotational grazing and rest periods, can promote rangeland health and prevent overgrazing. Implementing community-based rangeland management plans, with the active participation of 'Erre" communities, can facilitate the adoption of sustainable land management practices.

c) ***Diversification of Livelihoods***: Supporting 'Erre" in diversifying their livelihoods can reduce their dependency on livestock production alone. This can include promoting non-farm income-generating activities, such as agro-pastoralism, handicrafts, eco-tourism, and services related to 'Erre" culture and traditions.

d) ***Capacity Building and Knowledge Exchange***: Providing 'Erre" settlements with training and technical support on sustainable livestock management, improved animal husbandry practices, and climate-smart agriculture techniques can enhance their productivity and resilience. Facilitating knowledge exchange platforms, such as workshops, farmer field schools, and community-based learning initiatives, can also promote the sharing of best practices and innovations among 'Erre" settlements.

e) ***Access to Markets and Value-Chain Development:*** Improving market access for 'Erre"s is crucial for enhancing their income and economic opportunities. This can be achieved through the development of appropriate infrastructure, including roads, market centers, and storage facilities. Additionally, supporting the establishment of collective marketing initiatives, cooperatives, and value-chain development can empower 'Erre" settlements to fetch fair prices for their products and capture a larger share of the value-added chain.

f) ***Policy Support and Institutional Framework:*** Governments and policymakers play a crucial role in supporting 'Erre" production systems. Establishing appropriate policy frameworks that recognize and protect the rights of 'Erre", allocating adequate resources for investments in infrastructure and service provision, and integrating pastoralism into national development plans can create an enabling environment for sustainable 'Erre" production systems.

I. Conclusion

'Erre" production systems have traditionally played a vital role in supporting the livelihoods and cultural identities of 'Erre", while also contributing to environmental sustainability. However, these systems face numerous challenges, including climate change, land degradation, limited resource access, and market constraints. Recognizing the significance of 'Erre" production systems and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions can unlock their potential for sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation.

Addressing land tenure security and promoting sustainable rangeland management practices are crucial for ensuring the long-term viability of 'Erre" production systems. Diversifying livelihoods, building capacities through knowledge exchange, and facilitating access to markets and value-chain development are essential for enhancing the income and economic opportunities of 'Erre" communities. Furthermore, policy support and institutional frameworks that recognize the rights of 'Erre"s and integrate pastoralism into national development strategies are vital for creating an enabling environment.

By harnessing the potential of 'Erre" production systems, the Karamojong can not only strengthen the resilience and well-being of 'Erre" communities but also ensure the conservation of unique ecosystems and cultural heritage. Sustainable 'Erre" production systems should be recognized as an integral part of sustainable development agendas, and efforts should be made to support and empower 'Erre" communities in their preservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

In conclusion, 'Erre" production systems are valuable and resilient socio-cultural and economic systems that have the potential to contribute to sustainable livelihoods. However, these systems face significant challenges that need to be addressed through targeted interventions and policy support. By strengthening land tenure security, promoting sustainable land management practices, diversifying livelihoods, building capacities, and facilitating access to markets, 'Erre" communities can enhance their resilience and prosperity. Additionally, recognizing the importance of 'Erre" production systems in national development strategies and providing the necessary policy frameworks and institutional support will be crucial in harnessing their potential. By doing so, we can ensure the long-term sustainability of 'Erre" production systems, preserve cultural identities, and protect the unique and valuable ecosystems they rely on. It is essential for stakeholders, including governments, policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners, to collaborate and invest in the development and promotion of 'Erre" production systems as a sustainable pathway towards livelihood security and sustainable development.