

Technology linking Karamoja to services

MOROTO

By Lawrence Mulondo

The Karimojong are an ethnic group in the northeast of Uganda whose lives mainly depend on pastoralism.

They regard cattle as precious animals which they use for rituals, marriage and wealth.

The Karimojong move long distances from their habitats in arch of pasture and water for their cattle, especially in the dry seasons.

they move through the mess, pastoralists lose with their relatives

back home, security officers, authorities, veterinary officers and other service providers.

Sukari Ngorok, 60, from Moroto district moves as far as the Teso region.

Ngorok's family does not know the number of cows they own because culturally the Karimojong do not count animals in their kraals because of the belief that they could die if counted.

Ngorok said as they move in search of water and pasture, their animals mix with animals in other areas and contract diseases.

"Before, we would lose many

Pastoralists are trained in the use of social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook

animals to diseases as we trekked in search of pasture because there were no veterinary doctors in the fields," he said.

"Contacting security officers over cases of theft was a problem since their offices were far away."

Mobile technology

Ngorok's situation and that of

other pastoralists in the region is changing; they are embracing mobile technology to connect with veterinary doctors, district leaders and security officers in case of emergencies.

To strengthen, encourage and support the use of mobile phone technology in the region, Karamoja Development Forum

(KDF), a non-governmental organisation involved in research and advocacy for land, pastoralism and governance in the area launched the Pastoralist Information Centre (PIC) in 2014.

On top of phone calls and messages, the pastoralists are trained in the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to connect to people associated with pastoralism such as traders across the country, to whom they sell livestock products.

KDF under the PIC programme initiated a 24-hour toll-free number (0800201400) that

pastoralists call to get in touch with veterinary officers, leaders and security personnel for help.

A total of 32 focal persons from Amudat, Napak, Moroto and Nakapiripirit were trained in smartphone usage to help pastoralists with communication in their villages.

The focal people were district veterinary officers, kraal leaders, sub-county chairpersons and market masters.

Each of the focal persons was given a smartphone and a solar-powered light for use in communication and lighting, especially during late night births.