

Border residents appeal for end to cattle rustling

MOROTO

By Olandason Wanyama

Border communities on the Kenya-Uganda border have asked both governments of Uganda and Kenya to find an end to the rampant cattle thefts.

The communities say massive raids ended five years ago, but what bothers most people are the endless animal losses.

Lopeimat Acuka, a Moroto elder from Rupa sub-county, said the thefts were overwhelming the communities.

"On a daily basis, animals are stolen by criminals roaming the grazing grounds," he said.

Acuka made the remarks during the handover of 275 head of cattle and two donkeys that were recovered by locals with the support of the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF).

Turkana pastoralists received 78, Matheniko who hail from Moroto district got 105, while the Jie herders from Kotido district got 92 head of cattle.

The exercise that involved the Turkana, Jie and Matheniko herders was held at Lokisilei village, Rupa sub-county in Moroto district at the weekend.

Acuka asked both Kenya and Uganda governments to find means of prevailing over the armed gunmen who were stealing animals for quick cash.

Mzee Ekeno, a Turkana pastoralist, who actively participated in the recovery of 78 Karimojong cows, compared the rustlers to antelopes.

BETWEEN THE LINES: Appeal made

Residents asked both the Kenya and Uganda governments to find means of prevailing over the armed gunmen who were stealing animals for quick cash.

"These people are so energetic that you cannot confront them," he noted.

Ekeno said: "There is need to follow the thieves and arrest them. Communities at the border should be asked to track them."

He urged the leaders and the youth to find means of sustaining the relative peace between the Karimojong and the Turkana.

Kotido district chairperson Ambrose Lotukei asked his community to commit themselves to peace. "Why can't we expose the thieves among us? Can we handle the issues of thieves so that Karamoja communities get rich in the years to come?"

Matheniko county legislator John Baptist Looki commended the army for their huge burden towards tracking stolen animals and recovering them.

"The UPDF has done a good job both for Karamoja and Turkana," he said, adding that sustaining peace was not a simple activity.

He said since the East African Community (EAC) has undergone integration, the local communities also need to work together. "So, let us use the process initiated by our heads of state in EAC to ensure we get rid of criminals," Looki said.

The 3rd Division UPDF commander, Brig. Gen. Richard Otto, said: "Looking after animals was not a job for the army. He said the army had done a tremendous job for the border communities, adding that it was time for the residents to fight cattle theft in their respective areas.

"This is an issue that can be jointly handled by leaders in Karamoja and Turkana," Otto said.

He, however, said the number of animals recovered by the UPDF had increased.