

Kenyan pastoralists remain in Uganda as dry spell persists

AMUDAT

By Olandason Wanyama

The unpredictable weather pattern in Turkana and Pokot counties in western Kenya have delayed the return of pastoralists to Kenya.

Although rains in Karamoja has also remained unreliable, they have eluded most of the Turkana and Pokot areas, forcing pastoralists to halt migration activities.

The Amudat resident district commissioner, David Ssempe, said 85% of the Pokot pastoralists are still in Uganda.

He explained that the delay by the pastoralists to return home has been worsened by the bad weather.

Ssempe said security agencies are also on high alert: "We have not had cases of theft as the Pokot migrate from Teso region to Amudat."

He appealed to the pastoralists to be calm as they wait for the weather back home to get better.

Pastoralists speak out

Chepsang, a Pokot pastoralist who arrived in Uganda in March last year, said he has not seen his family in a long time. "I have been in Uganda for 17 months," he said.

Chepsang added that he crossed from Teso to Karamoja but now reports indicate the weather at home has remained hostile.

He explained that going back home will only affect his livelihood, adding that he will return home when the weather conditions improve.

Chepsang said he plans to settle in Moruita grazing area on the boundary of Nakapiripiri and Amudat.

Mariko Longole, a Turkana pastoralist from Kakuma, some 200km north west of Moroto town, has a similar experience.

He said his woes on climate are not about to end, because the bad weather has pushed them to the wall, adding that he will stay in Uganda longer.

"The recent drought caused a lot of losses," Longole said, adding he lost over 200 head of cattle. He explained that the rainfall pattern has changed over years and it is becoming difficult to predict because at the beginning of January they used to drive their cattle home.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Although rains in Karamoja have also remained unreliable, they have eluded Turkana and Pokot.

"Upon arrival in February, we would begin clearing gardens, plough and plant in March," Longole said.

Joseph Lolepo, the administrator of Lokiriamia ward in Turkana, Kenya acknowledges failure of 90%.

"Most of our people who migrated with livestock have never returned home for fear of the unpredictable weather," he said.

The Moroto resident district commissioner, Joseph Osoto, said most of the pastoralists are still holed up in the district.

"We expect them to return home to cast their ballots in Kenya's August general elections," Osoto said.

Close to 35,000 Pokot and Turkana families are roaming Karamoja grazing areas in search of pasture and water.



Turkana pastoralists resting in Kobebe grazing area, Moroto district. Photo by Olandason Wanyama