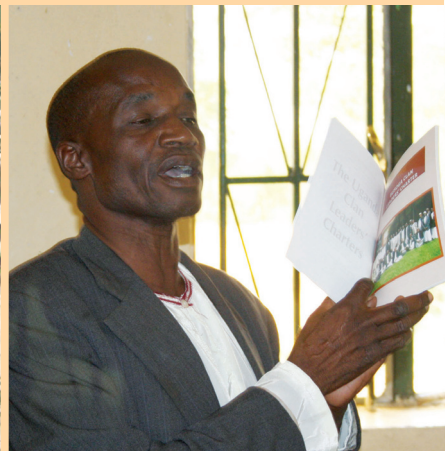




# Clan Leaders at work in Alur, Lango, Pokot and Tooro



2013

# Clan leaders and governance

We are frequently told that Uganda is making much progress – new roads, new health centres, regular elections - the signs are many and diverse. We are also often reminded that this progress is at risk of being undermined by (among others) corruption, the yawning gap between the rich and the poor, the failure of government to provide adequate services, and unemployment, especially for the youth.

These grave risks are frequently ascribed to ‘governance deficits’ or even ‘governance failure’. Much attention is then devoted to strengthening institutions and practices to foster a more democratic and responsive way to govern ourselves. Elections are held, civil society is called upon to hold leaders to account, parliament sits and passes laws, anti-corruption agencies swing into action. And yet, little progress seems to be registered: dissatisfaction prevails, ‘good governance’ proves elusive.

If we however recall that governance is an evolving process through which people organise themselves to build the kind of society they aspire for, we find that

our new institutions are often divorced from our traditions and ancestral values, and that this makes it difficult to ‘own’ and recognise them as central to our well-being. With distance, come disaffection, corruption and undemocratic tendencies.

Yet, we have governed ourselves, if not always perfectly, for centuries and clans have been central to this. Today, most Ugandans belong to clans but they seem to have become absent from our contemporary governance agenda. This is in spite of their continued role, in most of our communities, as custodians of culture and values we often much treasure, and as responsible for security, leadership, conflict mediation, and enforcing customary laws that regulate most aspects of social life.

This short publication has been prepared with the conviction that, given the central and legitimate position of clans, and given their resilience as local governance actors (in spite of their limited recognition by the state) the roles of clan leaders should be recognised and supported.

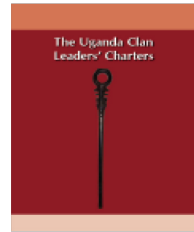
In 2011, the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU) facilitated a process through which clan leaders articulated their role in governance by bringing together clan leaders from Busoga, Alur, Tooro, Pokot and Lango to discuss issues of democracy and good governance from a cultural perspective. To clarify their roles and responsibilities, Clan Leaders’ Charters were developed the following year by 355 clan leaders from these five regions.

These charters were much discussed, nationally and at local level, not only by clan leaders, but also by local government officials, other representatives of civil society, religious leaders, journalists



and community members. These discussions indicated that clan leaders are not only pivotal in managing local communities; their collaboration is actively sought by other stakeholders in addressing community concerns.

The development of clan leaders' charters was however not an end in itself. It merely provided guidelines – in terms of values to be followed, a code of conduct, roles and responsibilities – to support clan leaders' on-going work: this publication is meant to showcase this work in practice.



## Managing our most precious resource

Where would our clans be without land and other natural resources? It is little wonder that clan leaders consider the management of natural resources as one of their main responsibilities, not only for the present well-being of local communities, but also as resources in trust for future generations. It is this long term, culturally rooted perspective on natural resources that informs the action of many clan leaders.

In Alur, for instance, clan leaders must take all reasonable and practical steps to prevent harm to the environment, and this has recently become all the more important with the discovery of oil deposits and the potential conflicts in their wake.

### ***“We want our legitimate share”: defending people’s land rights***

*“As clan leaders, we help to manage resources found on land. Oil has just been discovered in my area and already it is bringing complications. We feel the need to be involved.*

*“Recently as clan elders we petitioned the National Resources Committee of Parliament to give us between 6%-12% of the oil revenues, that is, to the people from each locality. The Bunyoro leaders were also there and we agreed as elders, that the oil belongs to the whole of Uganda but a special percentage should be given to areas where oil activities are taking place.*

*“As different stakeholders of the area we have created a board that includes NGOs, Area MPs, district people and cultural leaders to form the Oil Task Force. We realised that as cultural leaders we need to work with others if our communities are to benefit.*

*“Government needs to be transparent with us in managing this resource as we are the right path of information to the community. We don’t want power but information so we can update our community so that they don’t become chaotic, thinking that strangers are stealing from their backyard.” - Chief Charles Ombidi, Panyimur Kwonga*



## Promoting unity and dealing with conflicts

With land and other natural resources come conflicts. If land management is at the heart of communities' life and if clans leaders play an important role in managing this resource, especially where it is owned communally – it is no wonder that they also play a critical role in conflict and dispute resolution. They are also at the core of a village's success in achieving peaceful co-existence.

This they do through building consensus, mediating and fostering reconciliation whenever possible. Clan leaders ensure that no matter the nature of the conflict, it is resolved by meeting at least each side's needs and addressing their interests. They provide an accessible, culturally recognised form of justice and, where a conflict goes beyond their capacity to mediate – such as when dealing with a criminal offence - clan leaders will refer conflicts to the Police or other appropriate authorities, as stipulated in their charters.

### ***“Trust and stability for my clan”: resolving family conflicts***

*“I have been a clan leader for six years. This means I am a contact person for the people in my clan; they view me as responsible for resolving a number of issues from land disputes, marriages and even raising school fees.*

*“A clansman left a will in my care. He left a widow who hadn't borne any children in that family. However, she had worked hard with her husband to add to their wealth. The will thus did not favour the children in the home. All the assets were left to the widow and a grandchild who was the heir. The children used the grandchild to try and cheat the widow out of her inheritance. It is then that as a clan leader I intervened. It was a very big conflict and I had to involve other clan members and elders. We then resolved that it was best that the widow sells the land to avoid any conflict with the children in future.*

*“My office is one of trust and stability for the clan so I am positioned to be a source of strength. I bring positive values and influence the group to reach a common goal, a goal to develop our clan and region” - **Rwakijuma Kantu, Mulisa Clan, Tooro***

### ***“The work these cultural elders are doing cuts across religious sects”.***

*“At the Muslim Council, we work with cultural leaders because they have values and principles. They are knowledgeable and have experience, so we work with them in peace building and sharing information. They understand our history and know how we can exist in harmony for the future of our children.*

*To consolidate our partnership and unity, the Muslim District Council constructed a borehole at the Lango Cultural Centre in Lira. Many people have asked why we built there and not in the villages, but for us putting it there is a sign of unity.” - **Hajji Bashir Ahmed Johar, General Secretary, Lango Muslim District Council.***



# Collaborating with Government to benefit all

While clan leaders are the product of cultural values and ancestral governance systems, they have had to adapt to a changing world. Many are now involved in activities that go beyond their traditional roles, such as collaborating with government on development initiatives.

For government, given the influence of clan leaders and the respect accorded to them by their communities, this also makes much sense. This involvement may take the form of convening village assemblies, of facilitating consensus building on local development priorities, or of overseeing the distribution of government inputs.

## ***“A cock can’t start crowing away from its home”: clan leaders’ involvement in community-based programmes.***

- *“In our region, the Office of the Prime Minister used the Clan Leaders in Lango to implement the Peace and Recovery Development Plan (PRDP) to distribute agricultural inputs. The communities felt represented by clan leaders and the programme has achieved much success. This is because clan leaders are instrumental in bringing people together and have that traditional authority that is valued by rural people.*

*“As an NGO we have learnt that a cock can’t start crowing away from its home and it’s important that clan leaders are consulted to help us identify contentious issues and how to best reach the community. We compared PRDP 1 and 2 and it is evident that PRDP2 worked better in Lango because the clan leaders actively played a role. They were able to embed the principles of community participation, consultation and consensus through their open clan/village consultative meetings.” - Charles Ebunyu, Program Officer, Lira Ngo Forum.*

- *“As a clan leader I have worked with government on various projects but mainly NAADS (Agricultural Development) and NUSAF (Northern Uganda Social Development Programme) in my community. The Office of the Prime Minister directly consulted us before implementing NUSAF. They mainly used our input to assess what was best for the community. As elders, we decided on the most urgent need for our community, which in the case of Parombo was boreholes as our wives and children travelled several miles to access water. We then engaged with them and together we laid out a plan and identified the land that was to be used for this particular purpose.*

*“In my opinion, ministry and district officials specifically involve us, as opposed to Local Council Officials, because they realise our land is communal and we can speak and act on behalf of the community with unquestionable authority.”- Rwot Muzinga Patrick Ojobo, Parombo*



## Tackling difficult cultural issues

Collaboration with government is not always straightforward. In some cases, laws and policies demand that clan leaders take positions that may seem counter to traditional beliefs and practices. With exposure, training and persuasion, because of their influence, they can however prove to be formidable allies in curbing harmful cultural practices that violate human rights.

### ***“They have authority”:* Working with clan leaders to fight female genital mutilation**

*“We have worked with clan elders as a church mainly on the fight against female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages. This is because once a girl is circumcised, even as young as 9 years, she is married off to an older man. FGM is a deep-rooted cultural practice among the Pokot. It is a ritual used to initiate all girls from childhood to adulthood. The practice, though part of our culture, is cruel, inhuman and degrades young girls. We decided to openly stand against it as a church because our girls undergo it without their consent, and it puts their lives at risk.*

*“Elders who live near Amudat have been open and once they learnt the negative aspects of FGM, they are really supportive and help us to spread the message. Because of their hand in this campaign, stigmatising of uncircumcised girls has reduced and several elders have married uncircumcised women.*

*“Because the elders have authority, they have helped us in our campaign by setting a new trend. We are about to launch the next stage where we can use elders to come out openly and stop young men from marrying circumcised girls. The Pokot are united and believe in the collective, so we will continue to use the elders who have power in our campaign”.*

**Rvd. Jane Chorey, Christ Church Amudat, Karamoja Diocese**



## Looking after the most vulnerable

The Clan Leaders' Charters highlight 'equity and inclusiveness' and 'concern for the vulnerable' as important values that guide the selection, behaviour and work of clan leaders. A clan leader must therefore be impartial and show respect to all.

In practice, this translates in concern for the vulnerable and the disadvantaged in the community and taking on a special responsibility for what has become known as 'social protection': ensuring that all in the community, including the very poorest, have adequate access to food, shelter and services. In some communities, women clan leaders have been especially active in this respect.

### ***"Looking out for each other": Women clan leaders supporting orphans in their community***

- *"I work in Katumba village, bringing women groups together and reminding them to be respectable mothers of the nation. In the last year, as a responsible clan elder, I was approached about possible funding from the government for orphans, and together with other clan leaders in my county, we wrote a proposal that was accepted. Traditionally in our culture we are meant to be one, looking out for each other so you can imagine my joy when the proposal was approved. This came in the form of mattresses, basins, jerry cans and stationery. The community looked to us as elders to distribute the items."* - **Constance Kamara, Mulisa Clan, Tooro**



- *"Two years ago, we were consulted as elders to assist with a child-headed family that had lost their parents to the AIDS epidemic. The eldest, a boy, had deserted his family by the time we intervened. The next eldest, a girl of 14, was running the home. Her two young siblings were going to a nearby UPE school, and she cared for them as a mother does. As a clan we solicited funds, got a foster parent, a widow who was part of our Savings and Credit Society to move in with the children. We also got school fees for the 14-year-old girl. This year she will be doing her Primary Leaving Examinations"*.- **Thereza Katorogo, Mugahi Clan, Tooro**

## A critical role in educating the youth

Do clan leaders belong to the past? Many youths might think so, but few clan leaders would agree and many of their actions illustrate their strong desire to ensure that the younger generations are well equipped, not only in terms of cultural values, but also to survive in the modern world, mostly through education. For some, it is their personal struggle to secure education that has worked as a powerful example in their community.

***“As an elder I vowed to be an example to my community by educating all my children”***



*“I am happy that I lived to see the day where about three quarters of my people are taking their children to school. When I was growing up, education was not important; our parents did not see its benefits. My father sent me to school because my mother pushed for it but I did not go further than primary school because, in his opinion, it was a waste of money and he needed to teach me what really made a man: herding and accumulating cattle. By the time I left school in Primary Six, I was at a stage where it had however awakened a hunger in me and I decided my dream would not die as I would pass it on to my children.*

*“Thus as an elder I vowed to be an example to my community by educating all my children. It has not been easy, especially as some elders still oppose education. However, because I didn’t give up, many are starting to join in and educate their children. I have seen the fruits of education in the younger generation. In families where children are educated the cycle of poverty has been broken. It is these homes that have motorcycles to show not from selling cattle but from earning an income from formal jobs.*



*“I am happy too that the government is compelling people to educate their children. Much as by being an elder I contributed to the rising numbers of young ones getting educated, the hand of the government has been stronger in the increase of people sending children to school in the last five years. I have also been blessed that I double as the Local Council Chairman (LC1) in my village. I have used my function as LC1 to report to the government where we need help and the Resident District Commissioner has worked with me and other like-minded elders to promote education in our area. I am happy that as an elder I have led an exemplary life and others emulate me”.* - **David Lomonyang, Lochengenge Village, Pokot**

For others, a more systematic approach has been used, at times involving the mass media, such as radio talk shows, with a strong emphasis on reaching the youth and sharing with them the relevance of cultural values in the modern world.

### ***“Where have you been?”: assisting and inspiring the youth***

- *“What I and my fellow clan leaders have done is to re-introduce the Isaazi. This is a council of elders that sits together with the community and shares information. In my grandfather’s time this was done under a tree shade, where people of different generations sat and fellowshiped in the spirit of safeguarding traditional values.*

*“Today obviously, the tree shade wouldn’t be so effective and so we organise some talk shows specifically for the youth to bring them back to their fathers’ ways. We realised that many elders are dying and our population has a significant majority of young people. The Isaazi was introduced on Better FM to revive the old cultural setting.*

*“On a recent show, a youth called asking for advice; he had just inherited land which he wanted to sell and buy a Machala (motorbike) to generate income. As elders we advised him against buying the bike and used the time to educate him and other youth on the value of land. For me it was a lesson that it is never too late and the young people have been missing this link with the elders.*

*“In this session alone, we were able to convince the audience that life isn’t about chasing money but working together as kin and community. I used the example of how I have used my land, also inherited from my grandmother, to do fish farming. The caller was so impressed and made an appointment to see how this project of fish farming works. When he visited I was able to share with him how it works. Together with him we agreed that it takes time but it’s more sustainable than buying a motorcycle and the land can be preserved for future generations”.* - **Tom Boyinjana, Bagaya Clan, Tooro**



- *“Traditionally in Tooro Kingdom, everything done is to keep society as an entity. We believe that what is mine also belongs to my brother and to my kin. We therefore front the ideology that a problem shared is a problem halved.*

*“My role as a clan leader is to ensure that this culture does not die out, through calling educative clan meetings. It is through these meetings that we get ways to help our clansmen. A case in point is when we lost a clansman, he had left one son born outside of wedlock and the widow did not feel the need to educate the child. As a clan we negotiated with the headmaster at Nyakasura Secondary School, one of the prestigious boys’ schools in our region, and we were able to get a place for this boy. This year he is in S.3. - Isaac Rwaboni, Mubito Clan, Tororo*



## Clan leaders in the modern world

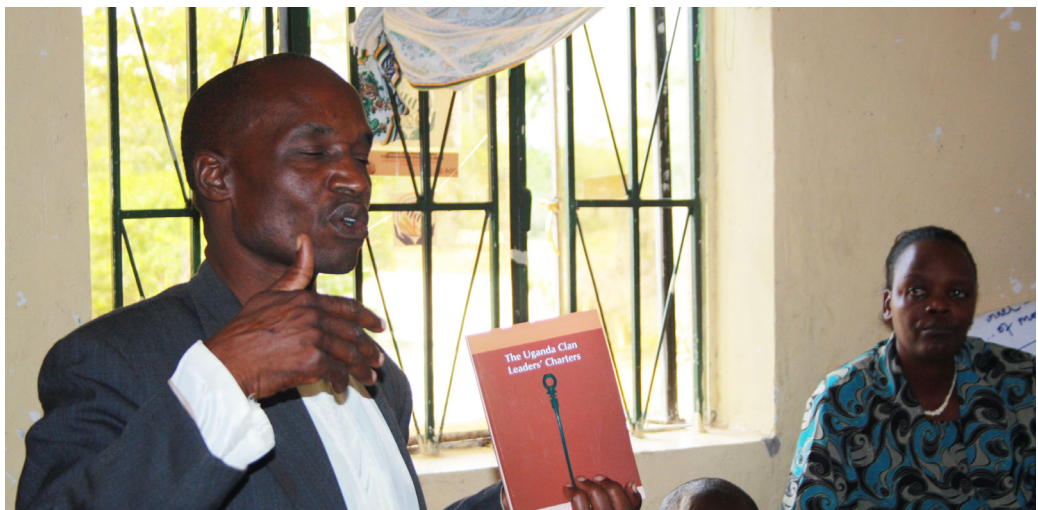
These stories illustrate that, in many parts of the country, people continue to turn to clan leaders for guidance, justice, as a font of inspiration, wisdom and unity, and as a source of solutions for their day-to-day problems, conflicts and development challenges.

Recognising this relevance and influence, Government, NGOs and religious institutions are keen to enlist their active cooperation, either to provide social services, to tackle issues related to rights, physical and spiritual well-being, or to prevent social exclusion.

The roles and responsibilities of clan leaders have therefore much changed over time. Clan leaders have had to re-invent themselves, while remaining true to the ancestral values they represent. This has not always been easy and, in the light of this evidence, we:

- ⇒ Urge government and other development actors to recognise the important role played by clan leaders in tackling the governance and development challenges our country faces and therefore involve them actively in relevant processes.
- ⇒ Must recognise that clan leaders need assistance to 'move with the times' in order to play their role in a manner which is consistent with human rights and other legally recognised norms and practices.
- ⇒ Must assist them in refining and extending the important mentoring and counselling role they play to foster the development of families and a young generation in tune with their cultural heritage, able to play a constructive and law-abiding role in nation-building.
- ⇒ Must recognise the critical role that clan leaders play in steering their local communities and resolving conflicts, in terms of capacity-building, and linking with the 'modern' justice system.

In Uganda and elsewhere, it is now increasingly recognised that traditional leaders have an important role to play in mobilising, guiding and inspiring their communities. Let us support our clan leaders to make their rightful contribution to our national well-being.



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