

Hungry boys who dream of a chance to feed their minds



Young farmers are being offered hope of a brighter future, writes **Rosemary Bennett**

The young herdsmen drive their cattle into the corral at the end of another long day in the bush. Dressed in traditional robes and feathered caps, they hunker by a campfire to chat before bedding down for the night on the ground out-

side this vast cattle camp. Their simple nomadic life seems like a pastoral paradise.

But the reality for these "kraal boys" is far from idyllic. Forced to walk for miles each day in the searing heat to find grass in this arid land, it is a harsh existence. Milk is the only food on offer for the boys, mixed with a little blood expertly harvested from the cattle.

Malnutrition rates are among the highest in Africa, with little effort made by communities to diversify into other crops, such as the obsession with cattle.

And life is dangerous as well as bleak. Cattle among the Karamojong is virtually a religion. The herds bestow status, wealth and a badge of bravery on all who own them.

Rival tribes, armed with knives and guns, routinely and brutally raid one another for their herds. Thousands of children have been orphaned or killed by cattle rustlers and the kraal boys live in constant fear of attack.

The Ugandan Government has recently woken up to the bloodshed taking place in this remote north-eastern corner of the country. It deployed troops forcibly, and often violently, to disarm the kraal boys of their AK47s and other weapons. But that has left them at the mercy of more organised rustlers from neighbouring Kenya and South Sudan. During one recent raid in Kaabong more than two thousand cattle were taken and never traced.

John Longole, 15, was a kraal boy all his life until raiders stole the family's cattle in a vicious attack four years ago, killing his father in the process. The "uncles" at the Kraal planned for him to return to the bush to tend another family's cattle. But War Child, the British charity that helps children whose lives have been blighted by conflict, had arrived in Kaabong. Suddenly



TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER, RICHARD POHL

Ugandan soldiers now offer protection

to farmers at the mercy of violent raids from rival tribes intent on cattle rustling



John Longole, 15, a former kraal boy

erished region thanks to War Child, one of the charities to benefit from *The Times* Christmas Appeal. But the charity's work is far from easy, or without controversy.

"We have been accused of social engineering and destroying the traditions. Some of our staff have been threatened, even though they are from the area," said Ebrima Saïdy, programme director of War Child in Uganda. "But there is no doubt this lifestyle cannot be retained. The number of cattle is depleting. The conflict itself has led to fewer animals, so many are lost in the raids. And the raids are becoming more organised, with cattle disappearing over the borders. "Drought is making the grazing

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Christmas Appeal Rosemary Bennett

Readers of *The Times* have helped to raise £446,417.68 so far in this year's Christmas Charity Appeal. Donations are coming in and there is still time to support the work of War Child, Greenhouse and the Alzheimer's Society. **Jeremy Hughes, chief executive of the Alzheimer's Society, said that the money had helped to secure frontline services. He**

said: "We are incredibly grateful to *The Times* and its readers for their generous support, particularly in this tough economic climate." **Michael de Giorgio, chief executive of Greenhouse, the smallest of the three charities, said that the appeal had raised the organisation's profile. "This money is fantastic and will allow us to set up new programmes to change the lives of**

disadvantaged young people," he said. **Nigel Wilson, chief executive at War Child, said that the money "will provide sanctuary in our drop-in centres for girls in Goma, DRC, where they receive education and training. It will provide numeracy and literacy classes for children in Uganda." To make a donation, please fill out the coupon below left, or visit thetimes.co.uk/timesappeal.**

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