



## Seers Research

In 2008-2009 a team from the Feinstein International Center carried out research and photo-documentation on pastoral seers or diviners in Karamoja, Uganda and Toposaland, South Sudan. The research sought to document how seers help their communities function and maintain outward relations among the different groups.

We found that seers in these regions serve essential functions. They provide protection for their communities, they also act as healers, peacemakers, advisors, war makers, and rainmakers. Males and females, youth, adults and elders can be seers. For some, their skills are inherited from their father or mother, while others are chosen to become seers by their god. They receive communication from their god through dreams or from rare skills involving the use of stones or leather shoes. They can decipher meaning from animal intestines and recognize signs or patterns within the natural world that concern the wellbeing of their people and animals.

For seers, understanding and communicating to their people what the future will bring is often not enough. A seer must also be skilled at manipulating that future event if it is considered undesired or harmful. Seers must possess the ability to clearly understand the *ajulat* – or remedy – to a particular threat or calamity. This highly revered skill of not only foreseeing but engaging any harm is essential to the early warning systems that seers have practiced for many centuries in dealing with challenges, whether those challenges are security threats to a community or the anticipation of a specific illness.



## Travelling Outdoor Photo Exhibitions

Researchers from Feinstein International Center returned to the region in 2010 to hold a series of outdoor photography exhibits at local cattle markets to share their research on the pastoral seers of Karamoja and Toposaland. Thousands of local people visited the exhibitions, giving them an opportunity to discuss the work of seers and also related issues concerning peace, security, animal health and livelihoods.

The exhibitions generated huge crowds and lively discussions. While the research team initially guided viewers through the images, people were quick to ask questions and provide their interpretations of the photographs. Most importantly, people in attendance engaged in thoughtful discussions about what they were seeing with others in attendance including neighbors, government officials, clan leaders, traders, herdsman, schoolteachers, army soldiers and the police.

People were particularly interested to see the images of neighboring groups, people with whom there is often tension and reduced contact. They talked about themselves in relation to the images, and recognized the common challenges that they and other groups in the area face such as peace, security, livelihoods, animal and human health. At each location, local people requested that the photographs return to further stimulate thinking and conversation around important pastoral issues. In part, we responded to this request by publishing a hardbound book with color photographs for free distribution throughout Karamoja and Toposaland.

