Agriculture ministry told to re-open land boundaries

PADER

By Arnest Tumwesige

The commission of inquiry into land related matters in the country wants the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries to urgently re-open boundaries of all the land for projects under the ministry.

George Bagonza, the commissioner who led the team that was in Acholi sub-region on a fact-finding mission, said the Government is losing a lot of land in the country and most of it under the agriculture ministry.

Bagonza asked the duty bearers to take up the responsibility immediately. He added that while the population in growing, the land whose boundaries are not clear will be encroached on.

"Ironically, government loses land easily, but when it wants to secure land for any activity, it is hard," Bagonza said.

He made the remarks last week at Acwa ranch that is located in Angagura sub-county, Pader district.

Bagonza was accompanied by Robert Ssebunya and technical staff of the commission.

Patrick Mwesigwa, the in charge of the ranch, informed them that the ranch sits on 132 square miles but on the periphery, it has been encroached by locals.

Mwesigwa acknowledged that the boundary is not clear to the National Animal Genetic Resource Centre (NAGRC) that manages the ranch.

"We do not have any land title about this ranch. We only have a presidential request written to us to re-open the ranch boundaries," Mwesigwa told the commissioners.

If the surveyed size of the ranch is to be maintained during the boundary opening, it will stretch from Pader to Kitgum and Agago districts.

Similarly, the commissioners were surprised to learn of huge encroachment on a non-functional Acholi ranch measuring 20 square miles. It shares a boundary with Acwa ranch.

Wilberforce Kiffude, the technical production manager at NAGRC, said there are 11 government ranches in the country and most of them have been encroached on.

Kiffude identified Njeru ranch in Jinja, which has so far lost 200 acres, Ruhenjere ranch in Kiruhura, which has lost 250 acres and Sanga ranch in Mbarara which has lost one square mile.

The production manager informed the commissioners that if 132 square miles are to be consolidated, Achwa ranch can hold 40,000 head of cattle.

Acwa ranch started in the 2013/2014 financial year with 1,000 head of cattle and now has 15,000. At inception, NAGRC requested sh30b, but only sh20b was released.

"If all government farms are facilitated well, they have the potential to supply the existing abattoirs in Uganda," Kiffude noted.



A herdsman at Acwa ranch. Photo by Arnest Tumwesigye

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