Protect Bugoma Central Forest Reserve for our future

THIS week, a crucial exercise commenced in western Uganda: the physical marking of the boundaries of the Bugoma Central Forest Reserve. This is commendable.

For conservationists, local communities, and every Ugandan who values the natural heritage of our country, the sight of surveyors and National Forestry Authority (NFA) officials demarcating this vital ecosystem is a statement that the rule of law is being re-established in a forest that has, for too long, been under siege.

Bugoma is not just another patch of trees. It is one of the last remaining natural forest corridors in Uganda. It acts as a critical corridor linking the northern Albertine Rift with the Budongo Forest. It is a water tower, a carbon sink, and a sanctuary for biodiversity, including the endangered chimpanzees that draw researchers and eco-tourists from around the globe.

For the communities living on its edges, it is a cultural landmark and a shield against the devastating effects of soil erosion and unpredictable weather patterns.

NEW VISION

EDITORIAL

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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC);
Company listed on the Uganda Securities Exchange
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However, in recent years, Bugoma has been under intense threat from encroachers. The boundary marking exercise, therefore, sends an unambiguous message that Bugoma is, and remains, a protected area.

For years, some encroachers have claimed ignorance of where the reserve ends and private land begins, demarcation removes that excuse. It establishes a clear legal and physical reality for adjacent landowners and would-be encroachers alike.

It equips the NFA and local authorities with the precise tools needed to enforce the law and evict those who have illegally settled within the reserve.

Secondly, it is a deterrent. The visible act of marking boundaries signals ongoing vigilance. It tells those who might be tempted to grab a plot of forest that the Government is watching and is prepared to act.

However, while we applaud this critical step, we must recognise that it is just the beginning, not the end, of the journey. Marking a line on a map and on the ground is essential, but that line will only hold if it is defended.

The history of forest conservation in Uganda is littered with examples of well-demarcated boundaries that were slowly crossed, ignored, and erased over time. The real test for Bugoma will come in the months and years ahead. For now, let us protect Bugoma, along with all our other forests for posterity.