

240 households commit to protect Queen Elizabeth park

MITOOMA

By Chris Mugasha

A total of 240 homes in 21 villages bordering Queen Elizabeth National Park in Kiyanga sub-county, Mitooma district, have received 240 goats worth sh64m, declaring their commitment to guard the park.

The funds are part of the money that the district received from the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) under its 20% revenue-sharing programme with the communities which neighbour the park.

The district natural resources officer, Naboth Tumwiine, said the district had received sh89m in July last year, but it had not been used due to technical procedures, until recently when the district contracted Tamsak Development Link to procure the goats.

Speaking at the handover ceremony which took place on Friday at Kiyanga sub-county headquarters, Jackson Badwaniza, the chairperson for Kiyanga Resource Users Association, said residents were committed towards fighting against illegal activities in the park, especially poaching.

"We commit ourselves to guarding the park by monitoring everybody's activities around the park," Badwaniza said.

Their commitment comes at a time when the relationship between UWA and some communities in the park is strained over the killing of 11 lions around Hamukungu fishing village in Kasese district, which some sources blame on pastoralists grazing in the park.

In Kiyanga, it was reported that the relationship between game rangers and the communities had turned sour, with UWA withdrawing its staff from the public.

Tumwiine said it was unfortunate that despite UWA's social and economic interventions in communities, people had continued to be enemies of the park. He said some of the interventions were beekeeping, excavation of trenches in some communities bordering the park to stop animals, especially elephants from straying and



Residents of Kiyanga sub-county in Mitooma district waiting to receive the goats under UWA's 20% revenue-sharing programme. Photos by Chris Mugasha

opening of roads in some communities.

"The money that UWA shares with you (communities) depends on how many tourists visit the national park. Now that the lions, which have been the key tourist attractions have been killed, we should be worried," Tumwiine said.

He called for intensification of engagements between all stakeholders to conserve the natural resource.

Corporal Dorovico Asimwe, the officer in charge of Kigezi Wildlife Reserve, told residents that they seemed to be ungrateful because despite what UWA had invested in them, some of them still continued with their illegal activities in the park.

While responding to the concerns about two people who disappeared in the park, Asimwe said: "Wild animals will always defend themselves once you enter their territory."

He urged the residents to join UWA in promoting local tourism and advised them to facilitate their school-

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going children to go on study trips in the park.

"Queen Elizabeth National Park is the best centre for learning social studies. It has the savannah grassland, lakes, rivers, the Kazinga Channel... but surprisingly, your children fail

questions about such topics because you do not take them there," he said.

"Let us take our children to the park so that they grow up appreciating it," he said.

The Mitooma district acting chairman, Silvester Tumukurate, told the residents to be proud of neighbouring such a natural resource.

"Other districts do not have such an opportunity to share the resources from the national park directly," he said.

Tumukurate appealed to UWA to reinstate community conservation rangers so that they can continue sensitising people. He warned the residents against waging war against rangers, saying rangers were not their enemies, but were helping to conserve the natural resource.

The Kiyanga sub-county LC3 chairperson, Deo Tukwasibwe, called on UWA to allocate funds towards the excavation of trenches along the boundaries of the park neighbouring the communities.

BUIKWE

By Henry Nsubuga

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