

Farmers threaten to kill park animals

KASESE

By John Thawite

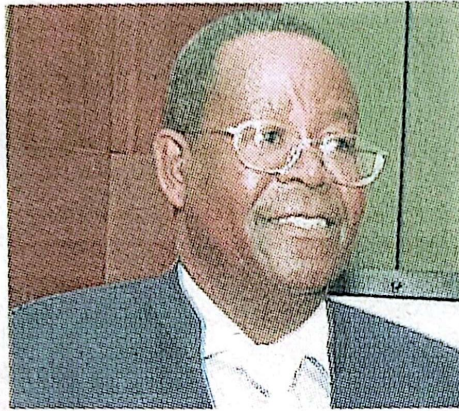
Furious farmers in Karusandara sub-county in Kasese district have vowed to kill animals that stray from Queen Elizabeth and Kibale national parks and destroy their crops.

The farmers who included the area district councillor, Godfrey Kasozi Dembe, stormed the Kyondo rangers post on Saturday afternoon, expressing their dissatisfaction with park authorities who they say have always preferred to protect the animals instead of the people.

"Elephants are killing us. We shall kill them in return. Our children are dropping out of school because the elephants are making us poor," their messages, written on manilla placards, read. The farmers said they spend nights guarding their gardens.

Karusandara borders the two parks that have elephants, kobs and buffaloes that raid the sub-county.

They demonstrated after the animals invaded Godfrey Dembe Kasozi's farms, destroying maize crops estimated at millions of shillings. An angry Kasozi said



Ephraim Kamuntu

the farmers had resolved to start killing the elephants regardless of the consequences.

He also said the money that the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) gives to the communities as compensation is peanut compared to the damages caused.

One of the residents, Robert Bitariho, said they spend sleepless nights guarding their crops and this was beginning to affect their personal lives.

Another resident said their spouses were beginning to suspect them of having extra-marital affairs because they spend nights outside their houses.

One of the women, only identified as Monica, said children in the area

have also dropped out of school, following the destruction of their livelihoods.

The threats to kill the park animals comes after UWA tranquilised, captured and returned an elephant to Queen Elizabeth National Park after it had destroyed maize gardens in Kihara ward, Kasese municipality.

While inaugurating the first governing council of the Uganda Wildlife and Research and Training Institute, based in Katwe-Kabatoro town council, the tourism minister, Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu, admitted that the animal-human conflict was becoming a socio-political problem.

He said wild animals were straying into people's gardens partly because the invasive plant species, including lantana camara and spear grass, were eating up grazing areas in the parks and thus chasing away some of the herbivorous wild animals, including elephants.

Kamuntu said some politicians were using the conflicts to seek political office promising to end the problems of the animals.

He challenged the new officials at the research institute to partner with conservationists to design measures of eliminating the invasive plant species.