

Seeking solutions. Residents of Lapono Sub-county show UWA officials some of the gardens destroyed by stray elephants in September. PHOTO BY STEPHEN OKELLO

Acholi king orders for killing of elephants

Complexity. The custodian of Acholi culture finds himself torn between protecting his people's cultural love of elephants as an Acholi emblem and guaranteeing their livelihood and survival as the beasts are destroying crops and forcing them into starvation.

BY JOLLY TOBBIAS OWINY
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

GULU. The Acholi paramount chief has taken a drastic decision to hunt and kill elephants and is drafting a letter to President Museveni to warn of his unlicensed all-out attack on the already endangered beasts.

Rwot David Onen Acana II made his unilateral dictum clear at the weekend at his palace just outside Gulu Town while delivering his Christmas and New Year message to journalists.

The paramount chief made the tough declaration as he blamed the elephants for the destruction of farmlands in Nwoya, Amuru, Kitgum and Agago districts and reducing his subjects to what he called food beggars. "It is very sad that after months of hard work and sweating, elephants come and destroy all the crops. I am writing a letter to President Museveni and the responsible bodies to notify them of my action that will soon start at any time," Rwot Acana said.

He insisted that the chiefdom will not wait for government to drive back the elephants, considering that their earlier cries to the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has not yielded any action. He criticised UWA for making empty promises that trenches would be dug around the Murchison Falls National Park line to contain the beasts. Rwot Acana insisted he is ready to defend his people even when his actions violate the law. "We are aware it is against the law to kill those elephants, but if we are victimised and prosecuted, we will have saved ourselves from hunger," Rwot Acana said.

In September, stray elephants from Kidepo National Park also destroyed more than 400 acres of farmland in Kaket village in Lapono Sub-county, Agago District. "The Acholi never begged for food in the past or went to work on other people's farms as it is the case now. They can't even afford to support their children in schools or provide family needs since farming as a source of income has been damaged by elephants," Rwot Acana said.

The stray elephants have been roaming in Koch -Goma, Lii, Purongo and Longulu sub-counties in Nwoya District and making forays into Amuru District where thousands of acres of crop fields have been destroyed while in East Acholi, Lapono Sub-county in Agago District is worst hit.

Speaking to *Daily Monitor* on Tuesday, Mr Jossy Muhangi, and the UWA spokesman, said the proposed action by the Acholi paramount chief is illegal and would not solve their current problems. "We are aware of these roaming elephants in Nwoya, Agago, Amuru and parts of Kitgum. The park areas are too wide and we only tried and dug trenches at hot spots. Their action is uncalled for," Mr Muhangi said. He added that while the Acholi were confined in camps during the almost 20-year-old LRA war, the elephants and other wild animals found their way into such areas and have almost made them their corridors. "We have conservation outposts in all these areas, instead of killing these animals that are economically benefitting them, they should engage us and we deploy more wardens and scouts," he added.

BACKGROUND

People fleeing. In September 2011, *Daily Monitor* reported that elephants went on the rampage and left at least 4,000 people from Koch-Lii, Coo-rom, Koch-Kalang and Agonga parishes all in Koch-Goma Sub-county in Nwoya District stuck without shelter and food after they fled their homes following repeated attacks by the elephants from nearby Murchison Falls National Park.

Battles. Since 2006, when the government directed former IDPs to return to their villages, the communities around the park have been battling the wild animals that on average destroy about 10,000 acres of crops in the area every year.

Old solution. In 2010, an attack by elephants in the same area left one person dead and 11 others seriously injured. Care International, an NGO, then collaborated with the wildlife body to dig trenches around the park to stop the elephants from straying into settlement areas but the trenches are now silted.

Scanned with CamScanner