

# Commission probes ranch giveaway

**Complaints.** The land commission heard that residents are not benefiting from the ranch and its boundaries are illegally extended.

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**GULU.** The Commission of Inquiry into land matters sitting in Gulu Town has kicked off investigations into controversies on the operation of Aswa Ranch which lies in the neighbouring Pader District.

The seven-member commission headed by Justice Catherine Bamugemereire yesterday began hearing testimonies from the prime minister of Acholi chiefdom, Mr Ambrose Olaa.

Mr Olaa said although the ranch should benefit residents, it has been given away to top government officials for cattle rearing and timber logging.

He also said the ranch boundaries are being illegally extended, which is affecting the surrounding areas, adding that they have been extended to cover some parts in Kitgum and Lamwo districts.

Aswa is a government ranch measuring about 134 square miles currently under management of National Animal Genetic Resources Centre and Databank (NAGRCDB) for breeding cattle for commercial production.

But earlier this year, President Museveni directed that the ranch, among others, owned by the State be leased to private investors.

In February, the planned giveaway of government ranches triggered a clash between the executive director of NAGRCDB, Dr W.W. Kifudde and Minister of Agriculture Vincent Ssempijja, whose ministry sanctioned the giveaway to the ruling NRM party



**Under dispute.** Aswa Ranch in Angagura Sub-county, Pader District, is currently used for cattle rearing. PHOTO BY JULIUS OCUNGI

and other private beneficiaries.

Under the giveaway scheme, Aswa Ranch and Nshaara in western region will for the next 49 years be in the hands of the NRM and private individuals.

However, the President's directive to give away Aswa ranch has enraged locals, cultural and political leaders in Acholi who say it is a ploy to steal people's land and deny them opportunity to invest in commercial cattle rearing.

Mr Olaa testified that various fraudsters are claiming parts of the ranch through questionable land titles purportedly issued by the defunct Uganda Livestock Industries (ULI).

Mr Olaa said despite the expiry of the 49-year lease granted in 1967 by the Acholi District Council to Uganda Livestock Industries, a fake lease extension of 99 years

## ABOUT THE RANCH

Aswa ranch was popular for meat, milk production in the 1960's before it was looted by Idi Amin's regime in the 1970s. The government later began restocking cattle on the ranch in 2014.

under the defunct ULI has been made indicating they still own the ranch.

He said the ranch is heavily guarded with armed security personnel and on several occasions, people who attempt to enter the land are either stopped or beaten.

"My lord, our people are unsure of what is happening on the ranch because of the heavy security personnel in and around the ranch. Some of our leaders under the Joint

Acholi Leaders Forum and Acholi district chairpersons have been stopped in the past from accessing the ranch," Mr Olaa testified.

He requested the commission to investigate the activities in the ranch and revisit its demarcation to reflect the original owners and boundaries.

The Acholi prime minister also asked the commission to stop security operatives from blocking people to access the ranch and illegal extension of its boundaries.

Mr Robert Ssebunya, a commissioner, advised the Acholi cultural institution to intensify dialogue with the locals, saying some of the misunderstandings could be coming from individuals.

Justice Bamugemereire said the commission has taken up the matter for investigation.