

Report on Mubende evictions out

By Pascal Kwesiga
and Saphira Nahabwe

As he speaks, Charles Masengere, occasionally breaks down in pain and anger. The resident of Kitumbi sub-county in Mubende district says he has been evicted from the over 642 acres he inherited from his father.

"If the President went to the bush to fight for us, why can't we be protected from land grabbers. We are about five million people who have lost our land," Masengere stated during the launch of a report on land evictions in Mubende.

Authored by the Witness Radio, an online advocacy information dissemination platform, the report indicates that a staggering 190,000 families were evicted from their land last year.

According to Witness Radio, the report is a 12-month long investigation that examined the extent of land evictions in Mubende. The latest census shows that there are 684,337 people in the district. If each family had three or four people, it means the entire district population was displaced last year.

Yet there were earlier alleged evictions which were not covered by the Radio Witness study. The platform's team

leader, Ssebagala Wokulira, said the evictions have been carried out, in, among others, Kitumbi, Madudu and Bukuya sub-counties. He was speaking to journalists at Speke Hotel in Kampala over the weekend.

Funded by the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa, the study claimed that over 1,975,800 hectares of land in Mubende were grabbed from the helpless local people by

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Mubende district police commander Charles Magoola disputed the allegations that 190,000 families were evicted because that is too high a number.

businessmen.

According to the report, the Police, army and individuals holding public offices aided the evictions.

"It is clear that a cartel of economically powerful and politically connected individuals are assisted by public institutions to grab people's land," he added.

"All the land that has been grabbed was registered, but titles on table were issued for the grabbers (upon approval of their application documents) by the district

land board and courts were used to issue eviction orders," Wokulira added.

The report states that during the evictions, the evictees were tortured and thrown into detention facilities to break their resistance. It claimed that the land in question is currently unoccupied, yet some of its former owners now live on the streets while others have relocated to other districts.

Mubende district Police commander Charles Magoola said there was no eviction involving the large numbers of families cited in the report last year. He explained that even the evictions of illegal miners from the gold mines of Mubende last year did not involve large numbers.

"190,000 families? There are sub-counties that do not even have those families. You see the contradictions in the report? To be honest with you, no other eviction took place, apart from evictions from the gold mines," he noted.

However, Florence Beyunga, who has been the Mubende Resident District Commissioner, was recently suspended by the President over land related issues. The complaints about alleged land-grabbing in Mubende were recently brought to the attention of the commission of inquiry into land.