

# Legislators oppose recovery of 4,981 hectare forest land

**Occupancy.** Affected residents have lived on the land for more than 60 years.

BY JOSEPHINE NNABBAALE  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

**MUBENDE.** The planned restoration of 4,981 hectares of forest land in three sub-counties of Mubende District has suffered a setback after two area legislators urged residents not to vacate the land.

The MPs, including Ms Benny Bugembe Namugwanya, the Mubende District Woman MP and her Kasambya County counterpart, Mr Louis Gafa Mbwatekamwa, argued that the planned restoration of the forest land will render more than 60,000 residents homeless and asked government to instead degazette the forest land.

The forest reserves which NFA wants to restore include Kasolo Forest Reserve in Kigando sub-county, covering 3,244 hectares; Muyinayina Forest Reserve (1,067 hectares) in Kasambya Sub-county and Lusiba Forest Reserve (670 hectares) in Nabingoola Sub-county.

According to Mr Mbwatekamwa, some residents occupying the disputed forest land have stayed there for about 60 years and there are no existing forests that the NFA officials are claiming to protect. "It's absurd that NFA is trying to restore forests that only exist on paper yet on ground there is nothing to prove the existence of any forest reserves. A lot

of infrastructures like roads, schools and hospitals have been set up on that land by government and if NFA turns up now to evict these people, all that investment will be put to waste, which is unfair," he said while meeting the affected residents at Kigando Sub-county headquarters last week.

Ms Namugwanya, who is also the State minister for Kampala, said: "We don't know their intention to evict 60,000 people in a bid to restore what did not exist in the first place. We, therefore, appeal to government to de-gazette this piece of land so that residents in this area can be able to acquire land titles."

But Mr Alex Tumwesigye, the NFA sector manager in charge of Mubende and Mityana districts, insisted that residents in the three sub-counties occupied the disputed land well knowing that it was forest land and are responsible for cutting down all the trees in the area.

"These forests were destroyed as far back as 1980 when people invaded the forest reserves in these areas. It is high time we restored the depleted forests. We have, therefore, issued a 90-day ultimatum to residents to vacate our land," Mr Tumwesigye said.

While meeting the affected residents recently, Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, Gen Kahinda Otafiire, said although government is keen on restoring the depleted forests, it must ensure that the affected families are resettled well.

"It is true massive destruction of forests has led to global warming and climate change which has greatly affected our farmers, but since you claim that it is not you who cut down the trees, Cabinet will sit and determine your fate," he said.

Over the recent years, large tracts of government forest reserves have been cleared and the President has on a number of occasions publicly expressed displeasure at the performance of NFA.



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## REPORT

A 2016 Joint Water and Environment Sector Review Report revealed that Uganda's forest cover had reduced from 24 per cent in 1990 to just 11 per cent in 2015.