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KAMPALA. The National Forestry Authority (NFA) top leadership has given out land belonging to the only national seed centre at Namanve in Mukono District to a private company, this paper has learnt.

Correspondences seen by this paper chronicles dealings between NFA board and its executive director, Mr Michael Mugisa, to give out the 21 hectare land to Dembe Trading Enterprises Ltd in which the line minister expressed shock "since the board and executive director do not have powers to do so".

In one of the letters dated February 1, 2017, Mr Mugisa invited Dembe Trading Enterprises to survey the land and ascertain its acreage before the eventual giveaway could happen.

"...NFA presents its compliments to you and wishes to refer to yours [letter from Dembe] dated 5th December 2016, seeking permission to survey Namanve Tree Seed Centre (NTSC) in order to ascertain and or confirm the acreage on the ground" a letter written by Mr Mugisa to the said company reads in part.

Earlier last year, Dembe Trading Enterprises and NFA officials met on September 15, after "several correspondences" with intention to acquire the said land.

According to the company's website, Dembe Trading Enterprises was founded in 1994 in Uganda by Mr Anil Damani, a 3rd generation Ugandan.

In one of the letters, the company wrote: "Regarding our interest and subsequent acquisition of the above mentioned land, and more specifically your suggestion that we provide land in exchange, we have identified two pieces of property suitable for your activities and are suitable as exchange lands," a letter dated February 20, 2017 written by Dembe Trading Enterprises Ltd, reads in part.

The company listed Kyaggwe Block 281 plot 114 and Kyaggwe Block 158 plot 68 as possible replacement of the prime seed centre land.

The NTSC, according to NFA website establishes and manages seed sources and promotes research on species.

NFA gives out only seed centre to investor, ministry not notified



Given out. Workers attend to nursery beds at Namanve Tree Seed Centre in Mukono District recently. National Forestry Authority has given out part of the land to a private company. FILE PHOTO

The centre also carries out private trainings on tree seedlings handlings and sells trees to private individuals.

The centre was launched in 2004 then handling about 70,000 seedlings but as of now, it produces two million seedlings annually.

As of now, the centre's main emphasis is on tree species such as pine, eucalyptus, musizi, terminalia, araucaria, mangoes, avocados, budded oranges, pawpaw, jackfruit and passion fruits.

Mr Mugisa confirmed the giveaway when pressed in a recent conservationists meeting organised by Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) but said the move was "strategic" and an exchange.

"As board of directors, our role is to think strategically. The future of the seed centre should it be like the way it is? It is like a kitchen somewhere. It is not a national seed centre which has

"The board has no powers to give away that land. That is something we are going to investigate certainly and can result into their suspension,"

DR MARY GORETTI KITUTU, STATE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

a reflection of a nation," Mr Mugisa said.

He said the board wants to transform Namanve Seed Centre into something better, but the land is small.

"We agreed that if there is an idea where we can have an established seed centre, wide, big demonstration nurseries and the like, would be a better idea. So people applied for it," Mr Mugisa said.

However, State minister for Environment, Dr Mary Goretti Kitutu, pro-

tested the move saying the ministry was not notified about the development and even if they did, it is only Parliament that can okay the giveaway of the said land since it is still part of Namanve Forest Reserve.

Mr Mugisa maintained that there is nothing dirty about the move and people needed to "analyse these issues" properly.

He said by virtue of government degazetting part of Namanve Forest Reserve to pave way for the establishment of an industrial park in 1999 "technically, it ceases to be part of Namanve permanent forest estate".

"It is not the first time government has done such things. Chief of Military Intelligence was in Mulago but now Mbuya in modern buildings.... as long as I am in NFA, I will change the seed centre to a bigger, better place," Mr Mugisa said.