

NFA halts evictions over foot and mouth disease

Time line. The authority says it will effect the eviction exercise once the area is cleared of the disease

BY MOSES MUWULYA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

GOMBA/SEMBABULE. Masaka his The National Forestry Authority (NFA), has suspended eviction of hundreds of herdsmen in Kalombi and Nsowe central forest reserves in Maddu Sub-county, Gomba District in a bid to control the spread of foot and mouth disease that has ravaged the area.

The authority had late last year ordered more than 400 herdsmen to vacate forest reserves in the area.

The herdsmen were given a one-month ultimatum to relocate their animals and families for allegedly breaching the grazing permits.

According to the authority, the herdsmen had erected permanent houses as well as cut down trees in the forest reserves to create space for cultivation, which is against the grazing rules.

However, Mr Michael Mugisa, the NFA executive director, says much as the authority is keen on restoring the depleted forest reserves, they have resolved to suspend the eviction until the two cattle corridor districts are declared free of the foot and mouth disease.

Foot and mouth disease is a fatal viral disease that affects animals, including cows, goats and sheep. The virus is spread through cow dung, milk, meat and air.

"We realised that it would be dangerous to allow herdsmen to migrate since there is a quarantine that bars movement of cattle in the area" Mr Mugisa told Daily Monitor in a telephone interview at the weekend.

Instead, Mr Mugisa said they will soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding with local leaders and herdsmen, intended to guide the latter on how to sustainably use the reserves in the interim period as they await eviction.

Herdsmen in Gomba, through their chairperson Mr James Gumisiriza, welcomed the devel-



Intervention. Mr Steven Bagonza, the NFA law enforcement officer (left), and other officials talk to some of the encroachers of Kazooba Forest Reserve in Sembabule District recently. PHOTO BY MOSES MUWULYA

opment, saying they had earlier pleaded for a grace period of one year.

This, he reasoned that it would give them ample time to sell off their cattle and get money to buy land for relocation in other places.

However, Mr Leo Twinomuhangi, the NFA range manager in-charge of Lake Victoria shores, maintained that as soon as the area is declared free of the disease, the affected herdsmen will have to leave the forests.

"We are already doing an assessment to see what type of trees can be planted in those forests to allow them regenerate," he added.

Kalombi and Nsowe forests are catchment areas for River Katonga with a coverage of 3,836 and 5,097 hectares respectively.

Gomba District has 17 forest reserves.

Mr Mugisa explained that the suspension of eviction, also applies to more than 1,000 encroachers in Kazooba Forest Reserve in Lwemiyaga Sub-county,

Sembabule District who had in December last year been served with an eviction notice.

Mr Stephen Bagonza, the NFA law enforcement officer, had given the said encroachers, a three-week ultimatum to demolish all their houses and vacate the 28 square central forest reserve.

1,000

THE NUMBER OF ENCROACHERS ON KAZOوبا FOREST RESERVE

"Although the Lwemiyaga scenario is largely about illegal settlers, it also lies in the cattle corridor and some of the victims have cattle. But most importantly, the authority doesn't want abrupt evictions," Mr Mugisa noted

The two districts have a small eco-system which deserve to be jealously protected so as to mit-

igate the risks that come along with destroying it.

Sembabule District heavily depends on the two rivers, Kyoja and Katonga, but due to massive encroachment on forests in the area, both rivers, are slowly drying up.

River Katonga water levels, have drastically reduced and one can cross it on foot from Boma in Sembabule to Mubende, according to Mr Francis Byarugaba, the Sembabule Natural resources officer.

Mr Byarugaba says when he participated in developing a wetland inventory in 2008, maps of 1991 showed that places near Katonga had rich forests, but today, one either finds tree stumps or bare ground. "If we continue like this, in 20 to 40 years, we may not even get rainfall, unless we undertake mitigation measures," Mr Byarugaba says.

He adds that deforestation has also affected biodiversity because Katonga area no longer has the black- and -white Columbus monkeys.