

Concern. Residents say the decision to give Fersdult Engineering Company exclusive rights to fish from the crater lakes is unconstitutional.

BY FELIX BASHIME
& ALEX ASHABA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Residents, investor clash over Kabarole crater lakes

KABAROLE. Mr James Rukampena, a farmer, no longer earns from growing maize and beans as he is lame and walks on crutches.

Mr Rukampena, a resident of Mwitampungu Village in Kasenda Sub-county, Kabarole District, who used to earn Shs1 million a month from farming, was allegedly shot by guards of Fersdult Engineering Company while in his banana plantation that is a few metres away from Mwitampungu crater lake.

"One day, while I was moving around my gardens, I met three policemen with guns and they asked whether I had seen people who were carrying out fishing in the crater lake," he narrates.

"I said I had not seen any and they went ahead to ask me if I had made a will for my children and I kept quiet. One of the police men said can you sit down, and in a moment he shot both of my legs," he adds.

Mr Rukampena and other residents that depend on the 52 crater lakes in the district for a livelihood had high hopes in 2013 that Fersdult Engineering Company would change their lives through its corporate social responsibility.

"When we heard that there is an investor who had come to develop our crater lakes, we were happy, knowing that our area was going to develop because they promised us many things such as electricity, schools and better roads," Mr Rukampena says, adding that little did he know that he would lose his leg in the land wrangles later.

He has since been nursing wounds in different hospitals until last year when his leg was amputated at Kilembe hospital in Kasese District.

"I was helped by the community members in my village who took me to Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital until I was referred to Kilembe Hospital where my leg was amputated at a cost of Shs300,000 paid by Twerwaneho Listeners Club, non-governmental organisation," he says.

Effect

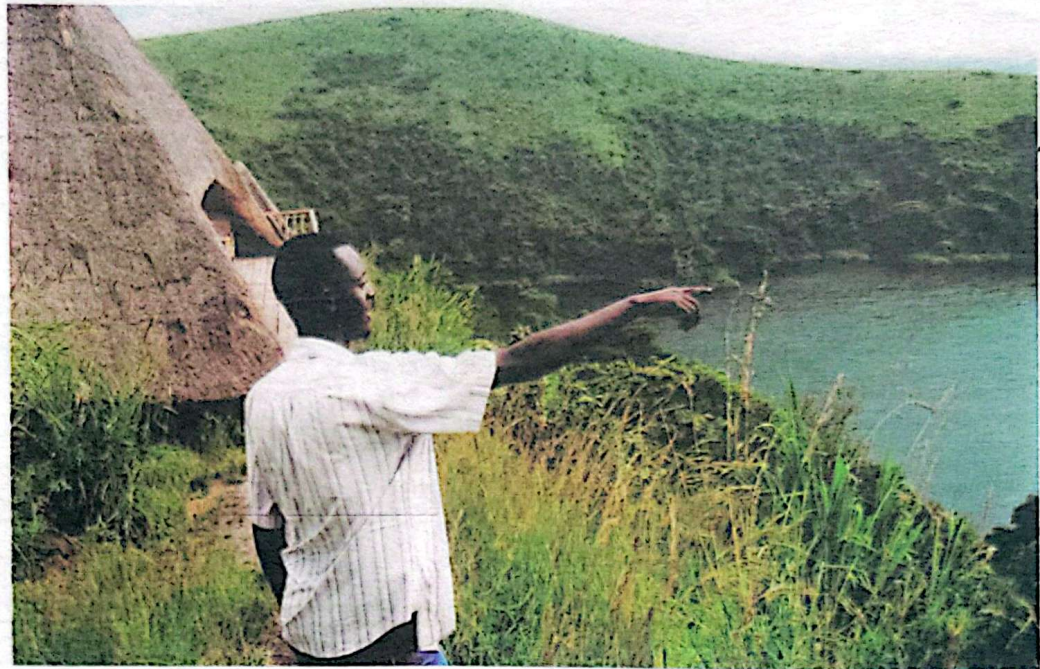
He says his children have since dropped out of school because of lack of school fees.

"I no longer do farming as I used to do. Now my wife is in charge of every responsibility in the family. I am just seated, watching," Mr Rukampena says.

Since the incident which occurred in September 2016, he says the company has never compensated him but that it instead blamed him for the incident. He now wants government to look after his family and the company to stop its activities in the district.

Mr Rukampena is not the only one suffering the consequences of the investment agreement between Fersdult Engineering Company and Kabarole District administration.

In Kichwamba Sub-county where Saka Crater Lake is located, the company's



Magnificent Lake Kyaninga, one of the crater lakes in Kabarole District. PHOTOS BY FELIX BASHIME

guards of beating them up.

"In 2015, we were told by Mr Charles Busingye, the sub-county chairperson, and other local leaders that the lake was bought by Fersdult Engineering Company. Since then, we have been facing challenges such as being beaten by security guards of the company and we have not had peace," JOHN OWOMUKAMA, RESIDENT OF BUHARA VILLAGE, KICHWAMBA SUB-COUNTY

Engineering Company, said Mr John Owomukama, a resident of Buhara Village, which neighbours the lake. "Since then, we have been facing challenges such as being beaten by security guards of the company and we have not had peace," he adds.

Mr Owomukama says they have been depending on the lake for fishing and water for domestic use.

He adds that the company had promised to construct for them good roads, extend electricity and clean water but up to now, none of the promises has been fulfilled.

Ms Annette Kemigisa, another resident, says the company has been terrorising the community by beating up their children confiscating their animals, fishing nets and boats.

Another resident, Mr Boaz Iumba, says his wife eloped with one of the company's security guards and she left him with young children that he is looking after.

The company directors were not immediately available for



Helpless. Mr James Rukampena, whose leg was amputated after allegedly being shot by guards of Fersdult Engineering Company.

a comment. However, in 2016, the residents together with Twerwaneho Listeners Club, a human rights non-governmental organisation operating in the district, successfully sued Kabarole District authorities, Fersdult Engineering Services and the Attorney General.

The applicants asked court to terminate the company's and declare its activities illegal, unlawful and a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution.

In 2015, the district had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Fersdult Engineering Services, in which they were given exclusive rights to fish in the crater lakes for 30 years. However, area residents contested the move.

In his ruling, Justice Anthony Oyuko Ojok cancelled the MoU after finding that the rights of the fishing communities were infringed on.

LAND PROBE'S ROLE

Last week, the Justice Catherine Bamugemereire-led Commission of Inquiry into land matters heard that Fersdult Engineering Company was operating illegally in Kabarole District. The commission found that the documents Fersdult tendered in to defend itself before the commission were forgeries and had no permit to operate in the district.

Justice Bamugemereire ordered for the arrest of the company proprietor, Mr Ferdinand Mugisha, for further investigations. The commission also found Fersdult was operating on the lakes without environmental and social impact assessments.