

# MPs question size of Aswa ranch

PADER

By Arnest Tumwesige

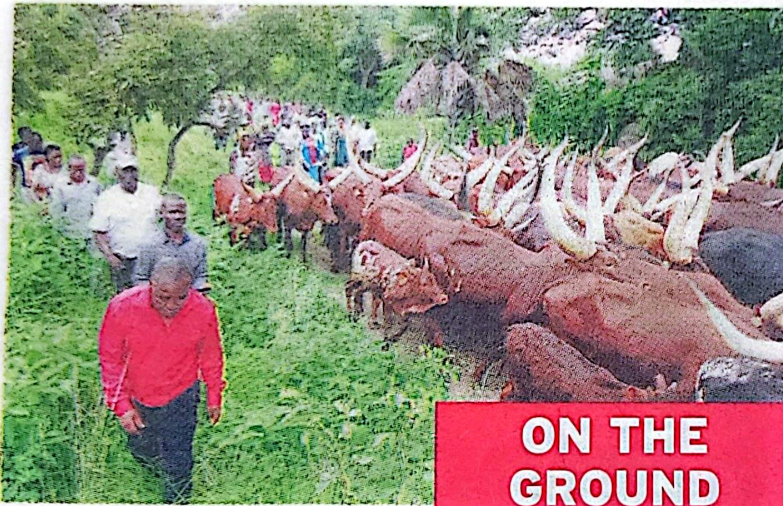
MPs on the agriculture, animal industry and fisheries committee were astonished by what they described as the unrealistic size of Aswa ranch in Angagura sub-county, Pader district.

During their tour of the ranch last week, the MPs were told by Patrick Mwesigwa, the general manager, that after a survey that was conducted recently, the actual size of the ranch is 154 square miles.

Jalia Bintu Lukumu, the acting chairperson of the committee that had 20 MPs, said if the current size is maintained, it will cover parts of Kitgum, Agago, Lamwo and Gulu districts.

According to testimonies given by some elders who were also former employees, the ranch did not have any land title and instead, it was renting the land from the then Acholi district at sh12 per month.

Donus Ocakacon, a former records clerk at the ranch, said the original size of the ranch was 3,600 acres and



**MPs and district leaders inspecting Aswa ranch.** Photo by Arnest Tumwesige

it started with 33 head of cattle.

"This ranch was first at Bulobo Primary School, but the management requested to set up this one," Ocakacon said. The 72-year-old added that the current location of the office block is where his main house

was before relocating.

Ocakacon's testimony corroborated that of Janan Onek, 85. Onek said the ranch did not have any land title and its boundary was only marked by barbed wires.

Onek also said by 1985, the ranch had only 400 head of cattle, but they were looted by fleeing rebels and that marked the collapse of Uganda Livestock Industry (ULI) which managed the ranch.

"This ranch has put our children and wives in danger. Whenever they are seen carrying hoes heading to the gardens, they are accused of trying to harm the animals," he added.

The ranch, which has 1,472 head of cattle since the 2014/2015 financial year when it was restocked, is being managed by National Animal Genetic Resources Centre (NAGRIC). Mwesigwa submitted that the ranch boundary is still not clear, which is jeopardising their relations with the surrounding community.

He claimed that ULI still holds the title and it has refused to hand it over to NAGRIC. This submission was queried by MPs, who noted that ULI

is defunct and the 49-year leasehold had expired.

"If a lease hold title expires, the land automatically reverts to the owner and in this case it is Pader district, which was then Acholi district," Odonga Otto, the Aruu South MP, district explained.

Bintu, the session chairperson, said the ranch was allocated sh2b by Parliament, but that nothing had changed. Mwesigwa said they used sh1b to purchase 1,030 head of cattle, procured a tractor with its implements, constructed staff houses and recruited 14 herdsmen.

Prof. Zerubaberi Nyira Mijumbi, the MP for Buruli county in Masindi district, wondered how the local people would benefit when they are being blocked from accessing the ranch by the army.

Godfrey Oringa Largo, the district chairman, said they were not aware of any development taking place in the ranch as they were always sidelined.

"As people of Pader, we want development but it should be in a good way. For it to succeed, people must embrace it," he added.

## ON THE GROUND

■ **Joyce Oyella, a resident, says during the war, her family lived on other people's land. She worries that as a disabled widow, she will have nowhere to go if the Government evicts her.**

