

**Innovation.** Nwoya District spends between Shs5 million to Shs10 million monthly to facilitate magistrates from Amuru Grade One Magistrate's Court to hold the mobile sessions twice a month in Nwoya District.

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# Nwoya leaders using mobile courts to settle land disputes

**NWOYA.** Nwoya District authorities have resorted to hiring magistrates to hold mobile courts in order to swiftly settle thousands of land dispute cases.

Daily Monitor has learnt that the district now spends between Shs5 million to Shs10 million monthly to facilitate magistrates from Amuru Grade One Magistrate's Court to hold the mobile sessions twice a month in Nwoya District.

Mobile courts consist of a judicial officer, prosecutor, and paralegal lawyer who can seat in any place and conduct court business as opposed to usual sitting at one permanent court building.

Mr Patrick Okello Oryema, the Nwoya District chairman, told Daily Monitor that the move is aimed at reducing cases of land wrangles that have resulted into many locals being evicted and violence leading to the death of several people.

"We can't watch when our people kill themselves over land because we don't have a court to mediate between them. We have resorted to mobile courts and the district spends this money in facilitating magistrates from Amuru District to come to Nwoya," Mr Oryema said.

He said the district started the initiative four months ago.

"The mobile courts are held twice a month. It involves many things ranging from the magistrate's transport and other logistics to mobilise residents in the area where the conflict is," he said.

Mr Oryema added that in a sitting, 10 to 15 cases are handled.

## No court building

He, however, decried the delay in constructing a court building in Nwoya District. The construction of the court building has stalled for one year now.

Mr Oryema added that the district officials had contacted the Justice ministry and the Judicial Service Commission over the matter but have not received any reply.

"Reply from neither the Justice ministry nor the Judicial Service Commission has reached us," he said.

Mr Simon Peter Ocwa, the Nwoya District senior land officer, admitted that his office is currently overwhelmed by the number of land related conflicts reported daily.

"The conflicts are too many and many of them are from the poor who are unable to regularly follow up court proceedings in Gulu or Amuru courts but would seek alternative violent approaches," he noted.

Mr Ocwa added that everyday three to five cases are registered at the lands office.

Recently, Amuru Grade Two Magistrate Joseph Angole blamed



**Disgruntled.** Ms Esther Ayat before a mobile court in Alero Sub-county, Nwoya District recently. She said 60 acres of land was grabbed from her. PHOTO BY TOBBIAS JOLLY DWINY

the poor administration of justice in both Amuru and Nwoya districts on the absence of transport means for his office.

"It is difficult to rule without seeing the land in question as the law demands because right now we don't even have a vehicle to travel to a contested land as far as Longulu, 70km away," he said.

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**THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE KILLED OVER LAND IN NWOYA DISTRICT IN LESS THAN THREE YEARS.**

Recently, judicial officers gathered at the High Court premises in Kampala and voted to strike should government fail to address their welfare issues, including lack of vehicles for the lower bench officers.

According to Mr Angole, Amuru court has been spending at least Shs120,000 per day in hiring a van for its operations.

Mr Solomon Muvita the Judiciary

senior communications officer, in an interview with this reporter, said the firm which was given the contract to construct the court building delayed in executing its job and its contract was terminated.

"There is an advert already seeking to get a better contractor who will begin from where the first one stopped. We are also encouraging the chief magistrates in the area to identify a suitable premises that can be hired for now as the court premises get completed," Mr Muvita said.

He, however, lauded the community for the positive working relationships with the Judiciary.

Last year, State minister for Lands Persis Namuganza launched the certification of customary land ownership in Nwoya District. The Land Security and Economic Development project was piloted by ZOA, a non-governmental organisation.

Mr Wilfred Babanga, the programme officer of the project, said they have been limited by disputes during the process, adding that others took the project to be political.

"At some point we waited till the disputes were settled whereas in some places it took time for the community to trust the project when

## Voices



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SOLOMON MUWITA, JUDICIARY'S SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

others labelled it a ploy to take away their land," Mr Babanga said.

The certification process has been limited to Alero Sub-county (Kal and Panyibono parishes) and Lungulu Sub-county (Panokrach and Bajere parishes).

In the pilot areas, 24704.4 acres out of 45870.3 (53.8 per cent) was demarcated last year while 871 parcels of land were demarcated out of 1,003 applications received and 851 had their certificates processed and issued this year.

Last year, a family of five was burnt to death when their house was set ablaze at night in Kochgoma Sub-county in a crime suspected to have been related to land conflict.

The Kochgoma tragedy brings to 23 the number of people killed over land in Nwoya District in a space of less than three years.

As Nwoya District strategises to come up with innovations on how to resolve land conflict cases swiftly, there is a land probe commission that is inquiring into the effectiveness of law, policies and processes of land acquisition, land administration, land management and land registration in the country.

The commission is headed by Court of Appeal judge Catherine Ramugamara