



CALL FOR TOLERANCE

Turkana's plea to govt

A Turkana pastoralist grazes cattle in Kotido District recently. Officials from Turkana County in Kenya have appealed to the Ugandan government to allow the Turkana to continue grazing their animals in Karamoja despite increased cases of cattle rustling involving the armed pastoralists.
PHOTO BY STEVEN ARONG

3,000 residents defy NFA directive to vacate forest

Justification. The forestry authority says the 617-acre forest reserve is facing extinction over indiscriminate cutting of trees.

BY RICHARD MUZAALE
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

JINJA. More than 3,000 residents living in Butagaya Forest Reserve in Jinja District have defied a directive by the National Forestry Authority (NFA) to vacate, arguing that they have not been given alternative areas of settlement.

Last week, the National Forestry Authority (NFA) issued a 30-day notice to the residents to vacate or be forced out. The notice, issued by the NFA range manager for Kyoga region, Mr Bonnie Maramba, indicated that the

extinction over farming activities that has led to the indiscriminate cutting of trees.

However, in several meetings held at the weekend, affected residents said they will not leave as the forest reserve is their only source of income.

In one of the meetings held at Lumuli Primary School and chaired by Mr Isabirye Kasimu, the residents said they derive their livelihood from farming in the forest reserve and have nowhere to go.

The affected villages include Bubugo, Itanda, Buwala, Lumuli, Kalugo and Nakakulwe in Butagaya Sub-county.

They also resolved to petition the NFA executive director over the matter. Ms Phoebe Nabirye, a resident of Lumuli village, said the forest has been a source of food and school fees for her children.

THE REPORT

An NFA encroachment situational report for 2015 indicates that by 1990, Uganda had a forest cover of 3,347,150 million hectares of forest but that by 2015, there was only 827,695 hectares.

dent, said he has spent 17 years in the forest and has nowhere to go, adding that he has never had any conflict with NFA.

Other residents said NFA did not consult them before taking the decision and asked to be given at least one year to allow them relocate. They also asked NFA to issue them with permits, allowing them to plant trees as they farm in the forest reserve.

The former district vice chairman, Mr Moses Batwala, said the forest reserve has been the residents' only source of income.

"Since it is government's policy to fight poverty, NFA should not evict farmers from the forest which has been their source of income lest they remain poor," said Mr Batwala.

He said government should give the residents ample time to relocate

briefly

Man held over theft

JINJA: Police in Jinja last Friday detained a 20-year-old man for allegedly snatching woman's handbag containing Shs150,000. The suspect, according to the district police commander, Mr Martin Mbabazi, was arrested at Narambhai Primary School in Jinja Town where he reportedly snatched the handbag. Mr Mbabazi said they arrived on time to rescue the suspect whom locals had started beating up, adding that investigations into the matter are ongoing before taking the suspect to court to face charges of theft. [Abubaker Kirunda]

Suspect survives lynching

JINJA: A suspected cattle thief at the weekend survived lynching in Kimanto Village, Bukanga Sub-county, Jinja District. The suspect is said to have been part of a gang believed to be stealing cows in the district. The suspect had allegedly gone with a colleague to steal cattle from Mr Laston Lubale's kraal when he was caught. He was saved by Bukanga LCIII chairman George Kagwari who handed him over to police.

Locals defy NFA directive to vacate forest reserve

FROM PAGE 7

before issuing eviction threats.

However, Ms Naguti said the residents' plea for more time might not be considered and that they should comply with the directive.

She advised them to collaborate with NFA under the collaborative forest management approach.

Voices

"Since it is government's policy to fight poverty, NFA should not evict farmers from the forest which has been their source of income lest they remain poor,"

MOSES BATWALA,
FORMER JINJA
DISTRICT VICE
CHAIRMAN

"Our work has stalled due to high court injunctions because

people have misinterpreted them. Although the court injunction state the status quo remains, the encroachers use them to massively encroach on the NFA land."

JULIE MUBI, NFA
SPOKESPERSON

506

THE NUMBER OF FOREST RESERVES ENCROACHED ON IN THE COUNTRY

"What we are doing now is to continue educating them about the approach," Ms Naguti said in a telephone interview.

The forest reserve, which is on the shores of River Nile, sits on 617 hectares. Last month, armed security men reportedly raided the forest and cut down crops worth millions of shillings, causing insecurity in the area.

Campaign

In 2014, NFA rolled out a campaign of evicting people illegally occupying government forest reserves around the country to allow the forests regenerate naturally and save the country from future negative effects of climate change.

The campaign followed President Museveni's directive to evict people threatening the existence of the forests by cutting down trees. Uganda has about 506 central forest reserves that have been encroached upon.

NFA says high court injunctions restraining eviction of people who have settled in central forest reserves have accelerated encroachment and stalled their activities.

"Although the court injunction state the status quo remains, the encroachers use them to massively encroach on the NFA land," says NFA spokesperson Julie Mubi.

briefly

Doctor found