...ility is tied to economic reforms, respect for the rule of law, removal of trade ... AGOA," Kwabwogo wrote on X. "African ambassadors, civil society partners, and the Bennet Group team joined hands with ... exporters into damage-control mode.
"When Uganda was suspended in January 2024, we ... AGOA. But the era of taking ... over.

'We Live in Fear': Lwera wetland activists cry out

DEVON SSUUBI

LWEZA – When eight environmental activists walked into the headquarters of Uganda's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) last October, they believed they were exercising a basic civic right. They carried a petition. They came peacefully. Their demand was simple: stop what they called the state-backed degradation of Lwera wetland.

By nightfall, they were in custody.

The activists had hoped to draw attention to what they say is the steady destruction of Lwera wetland, a fragile ecosystem stretching nearly 20 kilometres along the Kampala–Masaka highway. Instead, police arrested them at NEMA's offices, charging them with causing a public nuisance. The following day, they were taken to court and remanded to prison, where they spent a full month before securing bail.

For them, prison was not the end of the ordeal. It was the beginning.

Since their release, several of the activists say they have been threatened, assaulted, and intimidated into silence. Unknown callers, they say, have warned them to abandon the Lwera campaign. Others claim they have been attacked physically, raising unsettling questions about who stands to gain from the continued exploitation of the wetland.

"I was coming back from the shop at the trading centre when I found some strangers," said Zaina (second name withheld), one of those arrested at NEMA. "They beat me up and took my phone. All they were asking was why we were persisting with the Lwera wetland issue and what interest we had in it."

Zaina says the threats have left her and others living in constant fear.

"We are still struggling with the charges they put on us, and now people are threatening us as well," she said. "Please help us—we live in constant fear."

FLOODED GARDENS, SICK VILLAGES

For residents living near Lwera, the wetland is not an abstract environmental issue. It is tied directly to their livelihoods and health.

Fiona Nalusiba, another activist, said the illegal activities, especially sand mining and rice farming, have worsened flooding in nearby villages.

"These days we are very vigilant," she said. "We have received many phone calls telling us to drop the Lwera issue once and for all."

Nalusiba explained that wetlands naturally act as buffers, trapping excess water and preventing floods.

"But when sand is mined from the lake shores, those natural barriers are removed," she said. "During the rainy season, all the water floods into our gardens."

She added that chemicals used in rice farming have compounded the problem.

"The chemicals contaminate the water shared by residents," she said. "On the days they spray rice, you find the whole village, children and adults, suffering from runny stomachs."

She accused the Uganda Wildlife Authority of ignoring warning signs. "Sometimes you find heaps of dead birds after drinking from the same water," Nalusiba said. "That should show there is a problem. But no one seems to care."

THE COST OF SPEAKING OUT

For some activists, the price of protest has been economic as well as physical.

Nasser Jafali, a resident of Kamuwunga in Masaka, said that after returning from prison, he discovered he had lost his job at a factory run by Chinese managers.

"By the time I came back, my colleagues told me I had been fired," he said.

Jafali insists the injustice ... are not the ones degrading ... he said. "Yet we are the ones ... He pointed to his family's ... mother's clinic was destroyed ... caused by illegal sand mining ... wetland."

THREATS BEYOND THE ...

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Joachim Mumbere, ... of Weka Afri Sustain... Food Security Found... received anonymo...

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He claims cal... bribes to silen...

"They told ... drop the Lw... Mumber... are issuin...

"Most of ... through ... follow ... envir...