

Farmers invade chimps forest



Part of Kalinzu Forest cut down at Nswazi to plant eucalyptus trees. Photos by Gerald Tenywa

BUSHENYI

By Gerald Tenywa

Kalinzu Forest in western Uganda, which is home to chimpanzees and a migratory route for elephants will never be the same if replacement of the natural forest with eucalyptus continues.

Investigations by the Environment Protection Force (EPF) attached to the National Forestry Authority (NFA) have confirmed that parts of the 14,000-hectare natural forest have been illegally replaced with eucalyptus trees.

"I can confirm that there are illegal activities in Kalinzu, but I cannot share my report with you," Xavier Nshekanabo, the Police officer under EPF, said, adding that he has already submitted the report to higher authorities at NFA.

Over the weekend, *New Vision* encountered large parts of the natural forest that were cleared at Nswazi, and have been replaced by eucalyptus. There were also expansive swathes of the forest being cleared by local residents who retreated to their villages when they noticed the team from *New Vision*.

At Kiyanga, facing the ridges of Bunyaruguru, is a place known as Kusunju, where expansive clearing of the slopes of Kalinzu has taken place in recent weeks.

In addition to Nswazi and Kusunju, the Police investigating the expansion of planting eucalyptus into the natural forest also inspected Nyarugote and Kibaale. Eucalyptus tree planting has been taking place for the past seven years and that it has been stepped up in recent weeks, with the massive clearing of land at Kusunju, according to sources.

RDC Intervenes

Bushenyi resident district commissioner Peter Mugisha said there was growing hostility



Part of the riverine forest being cleared at Nswazi

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between the communities and NFA over Kalinzu.

"I have discovered that some people were allocated land to plant trees, but most of them come from outside the community," Mugisha said, adding that after planting the trees, they sold them to rich people.

Mugisha said the forest was under threat.

"Conservation of the forest will not be possible because communities want to turn the forest into a money-making venture," he said.

He said he convened meetings at Nswazi and Kusunju, where the communities expressed bitterness and cited corruption as one of the factors driving

the suspicious allocation of land in the forest. "I told the communities not to encroach on the forest and I want the top leadership at NFA to resolve the matter," Mugisha added.

Asked to comment on the matter, Juliet Mubi, the acting public relations manager at NFA, said some of the investors and communities authorised to plant trees were expanding into new areas that were not allocated to them.

"It is true that encroachment is taking place, but investigations have not been concluded," Mubi said.

Migratory corridor in danger

Simon Nampindo, the executive

director of the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society, said replacing the natural forest with eucalyptus endangers the 250 chimpanzees that call Kalinzu home.

He also pointed out that converting Kalinzu into a plantation will completely destroy the migratory corridor.

"Kalinzu is connected to Maramagambo in Queen Elizabeth National Park to the south and Kashoha-Kitomi forest reserve in the north, which is an important migratory corridor for elephants," Nampindo said.

CSOs say no way

Gaster Kiyingi, a conservationist and an environmental activist, condemned the planting of eucalyptus in Kalinzu, pointing out that it is one of the few remaining natural forests in the country.

President Yoweri Museveni imposed a ban on the allocation of land in forest reserves to plant trees in 2009 and lifted the ban last year. It means that the allocation of land to tree planting in forest reserves within the last eight years has been done outside the law.