

Climate change poses threat to forgotten people

The cost of conservation and climate change has been felt by forest dwelling communities who were displaced to set up two national parks, Bwindi and Mt. Elgon. Three decades after being displaced, the Batwa and Benet who are considered the forgotten people, are still landless. Today, climate change has created benefits to keepers of forests. Will the indigenous people benefit from this initiative? writes GERALD TENYWA

"I had never suffered from malaria until we were evicted from Mt. Elgon," said Batya Moya, an elder among the Benet at Suam in Bukwo district near the Uganda-Kenya border.

He spoke of how much life had changed for the Benet ever since they were evicted from their ancestral land in Mount Elgon National Park, more than three decades ago.

Moya said they had become landless and that repeated promises by the Government to resettle them have not been kept.

This situation is repeated at Bwindi Impenetrable National



A maize garden in Teso that was affected by drought

Park in south western Uganda, where the Batwa, a group of endangered pygmies, were forced to give up their ancestral land for the sake of forest conservation. The Batwa have been wallowing in misery in an attempt to live outside the forest.

More than half a Century ago,

swathes of rangelands such as Queen Elizabeth National Park, were grazing lands for pastoralist communities like the Basongora in western Uganda.

Changing climate

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has described climate change

as "inevitable" in view of the numerous changes observed in the temperature of the atmosphere, oceans and sea ice, in addition to some extensive changes in the climate cycle over the course of the 20th century.

The IPCC report also points out that the most vulnerable people will be hit hardest by climate change.

The Batwa and the Benet, who were forest dwelling people, became displaced more than 30 years ago to pave way for creation of protected areas, according to Nathan Makuregye, the deputy executive director at Pro-Biodiversity.

Hope

According to Samuel Cheptoris, the Minister for Water and Environment, a fresh initiative that could help to enhance conservation and also increase forest cover, the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) strategy, is here.

This is a global climate change effort to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests, encouraging creation of policy approaches and positive incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands.

Uganda is developing a national strategy for addressing deforestation and forest degradation, thus enabling the country to benefit from the REDD+ strategy.

As part of the preparations to implement the strategy, a study was conducted to build the capacity of indigenous people to actively participate in both preparation and implementation phases of the REDD+ process.

The researchers, led by Gertrude Kenyange, a private consultant, discovered that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was not yet domesticated by Uganda.

In addition, the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 is yet to be ratified by Uganda.

Also, the study realises that the Tree Fund has never been established more than 10 years after the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act came into force.

The National Forestry and Tree Planting Act does not assign any specific responsibility to local governments in the management of central forest reserves and does not provide for effective participation of Indigenous people, according to Kenyange.