

NFA SAID ONLY 40,000HA HAD REMAINED AND THAT WAS WHAT THEY WERE GIVING OUT TO INDIVIDUALS

By Pascal Kwesiga

The National Forestry Authority (NFA) is doling out 40,000ha of land to various individuals and companies in central forest reserves (CFRs) to establish commercial tree plantations.

The 40,000ha is part of the 200,000ha that NFA set aside several years ago for commercial tree plantation development in the CFRs before President Yoweri Museveni suspended issuance of tree planting licences in 2008.

Museveni suspended the programme on grounds that the licences were being abused. The suspension was lifted about two years ago after NFA reportedly told the President that his decision was not informed by the true picture on the ground.

According to NFA, out of the 200,000ha, 110,000ha had already been given out to commercial tree planters before the President suspended the programme. The NFA said it has also established commercial tree plantations on 50,000ha of the 200,000ha earmarked for commercial tree planting.

"Only 40,000ha had remained and that is what we are giving out to individuals to plant trees. It is not free land because people are paying for the licences and it does not belong to them," Paul Buyera Musamali, the acting NFA executive director, said.

Over 1,000 individuals and companies have been given licences to plant trees on the

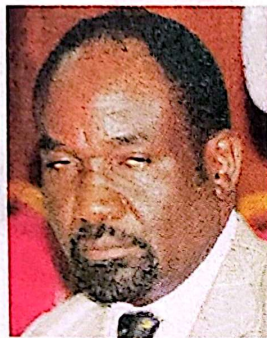
# NFA gives out land to commercial tree planters

40,000ha, according to the list published by NFA recently. Applications for licences were submitted last August. The unsuccessful applicants have questioned the evaluation exercise, arguing that it was marred by irregularities, including bribery of NFA staff by some applicants to get endorsed for licences.

Many of the licensees are commercial tree planters and will mainly plant eucalyptus, pine and teak and some indigenous varieties. Others will receive licences for stone quarrying, beekeeping, biomass, ecosystem and restoration. The licences, according to NFA, have been given out for depleted parts of the national forests and areas covered by grassland in CFRs. NFA manages 205 CFRs currently covering 1,260,000ha.

### Rationale

In the current phase, the authority said each successful applicant has, on average, received 25ha. There are 2.4 acres in a hectare, bringing it to (60 acres) per applicant.



Paul Buyera Musamali

The licensees will pay between sh15,000 and sh30,000 in annual ground rent for each hectare to the authority, depending on the location of the land, with the one located near Kampala being the most expensive (sh30,000).

Buyera said licensing depleted parts of the forests and grassland for commercial tree planting is informed by the ambition to engage the private sector in environmental conservation and satisfy the increasing demand for forest products in the country as well as easing pressure on

indigenous trees in CFRs.

"The construction sector is growing and the demand for forest products is increasing. One way of reducing pressure on natural forests is to encourage commercial tree planting on grassland and depleted parts of natural forests. We are doing this under the public-private partnership," he said.

The partnership, according to NFA, creates a win-win situation for the Government and the private sector, with the latter making money from commercial tree planting and the former scoring on conservation and easing pressure on natural forests.

One of the people who has been endorsed by NFA for a licence for tree planting said commercial tree planting is an expensive venture and that explains why some people got land previously in CFRs, but failed to put it to use.

"We are paying the Government ground rent per year. Then planting one hectare and looking after it takes millions. It is an expensive

investment and someone should not say we are getting free land," he said.

### Stone quarrying

Buyera said individuals and companies that have been endorsed for stone quarrying licences will have to conduct environmental impact assessment studies for their activities before getting the licences.

He said NFA will rely on geologists at the energy ministry to establish the rock mass (volume) and nature of the (rock) before determining the price. The authority said it was considering sh20,000 per tonne of rock mass.

One of the successful applicants said in some areas the communities around the forests were hostile to commercial tree planters, especially if they are individuals coming from outside that particular community.

But NFA said it was alive to that challenge, and that was why it had been implementing the collaborative forest management to enable the

communities adjacent to CFRs take part in tree planting and deriving a benefit from them.

"The communities should manage to get licences to put the land to use in terms of the licences. There are 53 groups and they are doing ecosystem management for forests including planting in the boundaries, beekeeping and they participate in patrolling the forests," he said.

### Evaluation

The authority also said that it issued application and evaluation criteria to applicants. However, some of the applicants did not answer the questions on the forms satisfactorily, while others submitted incomplete forms.

"The process was fair to people who got licences on merit," NFA spokesperson Aisha Alibhai said.

The authority evaluated applicants on technical and financial grounds as well as their experience in commercial tree planting.