

Gomba cattle keepers told to vacate forest reserves

GOMBA

By Jeff Andrew Lule

Cattle keepers in Maddu sub-county, Gomba district, have been given an ultimatum of two months to vacate Nsowe and Kalombi central forest reserves.

Kalombi and Nsowe forest are catchment areas for River Katonga covering 3,836 and 5,097 hectares respectively.

The ultimatum was issued by the district leadership and the National Forestry Authority (NFA) following a meeting to discuss action plans towards the restoration of the degraded two forests.

The team, accompanied by the environment Police and Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) soldiers attached to NFA, first carried out a field visit on the two forests to ascertain the state of the forests.

The team comprised the NFA boss, Michael Mugisa, Lake Shore manager Leo Twinomuhangi, the resident district commissioner, Fred Nayebare and district chairperson Vincent Kiviri.

Many parts of the forest reserve were found degraded due to overgrazing cultivation and settlements with semi-permanent houses.



A homestead of some of the cattle keepers in Kalombi forest reserve in Gomba district. Photo by Jeff Andrew Lule

There are over 300 cattle keepers grazing in the forests.

During the meeting at the district headquarters, the team resolved to stop cultivation in the forests with immediate effect.

"We should only allow those going to harvest their crops.

"Those found cultivating from now should be apprehended," Nayebare noted.

He alleged that majority of the encroachers in the forests are from

keepers have places of origin or can use some of their accumulated wealth to buy land elsewhere for settlement.

Twinomuhangi told the meeting that the two forests are key catchment areas for River Katonga, which also feeds Lake Victoria.

They gave encroachers up to November 30 to have vacated the forests voluntarily or be forced out.

"There are also some illegal land titles in Nsowe. We are going to work with the district land office to verify all titles near the forest reserves," he noted.

Twinomuhangi said the two reserves are woodland forests within the cattle corridor, which is why they gave out grazing permits to cattle keepers during the dry spell.

He explained that the increasing population of cattle and people has put pressure on the forests, thus affecting their multifunctional ecological functions.

Nsowe and Kalombi forests are part of the Greater Mpigi, made of 50 reserves, which are conserved for the River Katonga and adjacent wetlands feeding Lake Victoria.

All the 50 reserves cover a total of 31,095 hectares in Gomba, Wakiso, Mpigi and Butambala districts.

The two forests are also home to many reptiles, especially tortoises.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

The National Forestry Authority gave encroachers up to November 30 to have vacated the forests voluntarily or be forced out.

Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

Nayebare stressed that all cattle