

Issue. Residents and their leaders say UWA should instead devise better plans of driving away animals from their farmlands.

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Residents reject UWA proposal to turn area into game reserve

AGAGO. Following several years of destruction of crops in Kaket Parish in Laponi Sub-county, Agago District, by elephants straying from Kidepo Valley National Park, Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) officials now want the area be turned into a community game reserve.

The Kidepo wildlife Conservation area manager, Mr Walter Odokorwot, says UWA is proposing that the locals should abandon the area that is regularly being invaded by elephants and other wild animals so it can be developed into a community wildlife reserve.

Mr Odokorwot says Kaket Parish has been a wildlife corridor and most animals that stray from Kidepo Valley National Park roam and mate in the same area.

"This place has many elephants which are more than those in Kidepo [Valley National Park]. We keep on driving them back to the park but they return because of that attachment," he says.

Kaket Parish in Laponi Sub-county, Agago District has 17 villages with an estimated 9,000 people.

Mr Odokorwot says they will not turn the entire parish into a community reserve, but only the most affected villages.

Recently, UWA turned a community land in Karenga, Kalongo Sub-county, into a community wildlife reserve arguing that animals were frequently invading the area.

"Just as it was done at Karenga in Kalongo Sub-county, it would be a good idea [here too] because most of these elephants were born here and are not been habituated to the park, but it is within your villages that they seek survival while they produce more," Mr Odokorwot says.

But the proposal has not gone down well with the residents and their leaders who are accusing UWA of displacing them from their ancestral land instead of devising clever plans of driving away animals from their farmlands.

Complaints

The residents claim UWA has failed to patrol the area despite constant reminders as the elephants continue to roam the area and destroy food crops.

But Mr Odokorwot accuses the residents of politicising elephant attacks and failing to protect their own gardens. "You people complain because politicians now use you to fight their wars against development. Some of you want scouts removed from the area so that you poach animals easily," Mr Odokorwot said.

However, Ms Esther Lawino, one of the residents of Kakira village, Kaket Parish, says since August 2016, she has failed to save anything from farming after the elephants destroyed her gardens despite assurances by UWA that game scouts have been deployed to the area.

Ms Lawino says several gardens



Inspection. Uganda Wildlife Authority rangers and residents walk through the destroyed farmlands in Agago District recently. PHOTO BY STEPHEN OKELLO

Voices

"You people complain because politicians now use you to fight their wars against development. Some of you want scouts removed from the area so that you poach animals easily,"

WALTER ODOKORWOT,
AREA MANAGER,
KIDEPO WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION

"Have they secured land for us before they talk of turning the place into a community wildlife reserve? The recent one they established is now a problem; the animals keep on straying into community land and destroying crops,"

ESTHER LAWINO,
KAKET PARISH
RESIDENT

also been destroyed by the marauding elephants from Kidepo National Park and the Karenga Community Wildlife Reserve.

"We are now at risk of being hit by hunger. All our crops have been destroyed by elephants and my three children couldn't return to school since I failed to raise their fees as farming is my only source of livelihood," she says.

Ms Lawino challenges UWA to secure better technologies of driving away the animals instead of asking them to leave their ancestral land.

"Have they secured land for us before they talk of turning the place into a community wildlife reserve? The recent one they established is now a problem; the animals keep on straying into community land and

Mr Walter Opiro whose daughter was recently wounded by a stray elephant while playing in their compound, accuses UWA officials of failing to help them whenever animals from the parks roam into the community land.

"Now we know what they have in mind that is why on many occasions they even deploy rangers and scouts without equipment for repelling elephants because they want the land to be turned into a wildlife reserve," he says.

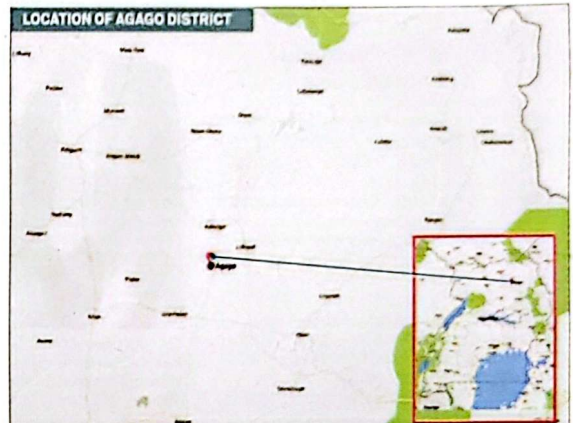
Mr Opiro adds that scouts were trained in the sub-county but not given tools for their work. Whoever the elephants invade; no one helps a local person to drive them back and they freely ravage the gardens.

Mr Mathew Lagen, the Laponi Sub-county chairperson, says gardens of crops worth millions of shillings were destroyed last year and this year.

"There is nothing that was given to the people as compensation for the destroyed crops and we are still crying out for the losses made last year. This year, it's the same thing," Mr Lagen says.

"As we talk now, more than 100 elephants are within the communities. Apart from destroying the gardens people lives are also at a risk," he adds.

"Our valuation shows that at least 200 acres of millet, sorghum, peas and sunflower crops had been destroyed by December 2016 and we are compiling more data for this year. This is a huge economic setback to our people,"



He insists that UWA should put in place compensation plan in case any wildlife destroys any crops and injures people.

The Agago District Council chairperson, Mr Leonard Ojok, says they are carrying out documentation of the destruction wreaked by elephants to be presented to Parliament so that the victims are compensated.

"All these animals are government assets and it has to take responsibility and make sure these damages by elephants are compensated," Mr Ojok said.

Other affected sub-counties are Paimol, Omiya Pachwa, and Kalongo; all in Agago District and Alerek in Abim District.

From January to date, several gar-

leading to the loss of worth an estimated Shs150 million even as the valuation is ongoing.

Earlier incidents

In 2016, elephants destroyed farmlands worth an estimated Shs500 million.

In 2015, farmers in the sub-counties of Paimol, Omiya Pachwa, and Kalongo also lost crops worth millions of shillings.

Recently, the Acholi Paramount Chief, Rwot David Onen Acana II, threatened to mobilise his subjects to kill elephants that frequently invaded their areas.

Rwot Acana claimed the raids by elephants in Nwoya, Amuru, Kitgum and Agago districts had reduced his