

**THE ATTACK**

*Agaba said he was attacked by UPDF soldiers at Matiri forest reserve in Kyenjojo on the orders of a forest supervisor at Kagora*

By Gerald Tenywa

Tuhaise Agaba, a community-based volunteer who had been tracking illegal timber logging, is fighting for his life after a nasty encounter recently with UPDF soldiers at Matiri forest reserve, Kyarusozzi in Kyenjojo district.

Agaba said two armed UPDF soldiers were acting on the orders of Joselyn Kanweri, a forest supervisor at Kagora station under the National Forestry Authority (NFA). "I felt death close as they pounced on me like dogs," Agaba said, adding that as the soldiers rained blows on his head, they also threatened to kill him.

Although Agaba counts himself lucky for surviving, it has, however, left his ears damaged.

Consequently, hearing and movement have been impaired, according to a medical report from Buhinga Health Centre. This was further confirmed after medical examination over the weekend at Mulago Hospital in Kampala.

Agaba was brought to Mulago after falling into a coma last Friday. Doctors specialising in ear, nose and throat at Mulago confirmed that Agaba's left ear and head had been injured.

"We had to return to Fort Portal because it was too expensive to stay in Kampala," Agaba said.

**Origin**

Agaba got into trouble last month when he detected illegal harvesting of timber in Matiri. He reported the matter to Kanweri. He later took the patrol team and Kanweri to the scene of crime, where they recovered 392 timber pieces. It is reported that Kanweri promised Agaba sh100,000 as a reward for exposing the illegal activities in the forest.

However, when the activities did not stop, Agaba thought it was not wise to go back to Kanweri and reported to the sector manager who oversees Kanweri.

Agaba went for another fact-finding mission with Kanweri's boss and according to sources, the sector manager later grilled Kanweri on why illegal activities were thriving under her watch. She also ordered her to give Agaba his reward immediately. Kanweri called Agaba later on the



Agaba, a member of community monitoring group on forests, was beaten for reporting illegal logging in Matiri forest reserve

# Forestry whistleblower beaten into coma

**NFA INVESTIGATING**

"I have ordered the range manager to investigate and I expect this to be done by end of this week," said the acting executive director at NFA, Paul Buyera. Action from NFA is expected within two weeks since they have to conduct a disciplinary hearing depending on the

outcome of the investigation. Aisha Alibai, the NFA public relations manager, said the communities had given NFA an opportunity to work with them to protect the forests. "We will take action after the investigation."

pretext of giving him the reward. However, when Agaba got to the meeting, Kanweri told him that they had something to discuss first.

As Kanweri engaged Agaba, two UPDF soldiers came out of a house nearby. They started beating Agaba and demanded to know why he had reported Kanweri to her boss.

**Police case**

Tuhaise Agaba reported a case at Katooke Police Station and there is a case file CRR30/2018 (Tuhaise Agaba vs Joselyn Kanweri and two soldiers.

**Community based monitors**

Sam Nyakojo, a co-ordinator of a forest programme under Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE), said whereas citizens who work as community-based monitors help to provide information about illegal forest activities some NFA officials connive with illegal timber dealers.

JESE is a local NGO funded by CARE International to promote forestry governance in western Uganda.