

Locals await Kyalubanga forest land giveaway, seven years later



Locals at Kyalubanga Forest Reserve in Nakasongola District after they were reportedly attacked by a rival group over boundary disputes in 2023. PHOTO/ DAN WANDERA

The President wants displaced residents to take over the forest land in Nakasongola District as a remedy to historical injustices they have endured.

BY DAN WANDERA

When President Museveni ordered the allocation of Kyalubanga forest land in Nakasongola District to landless locals in 2019, more than 1,800 families were relieved.

Mr Museveni accompanied the directive with a letter directing the concerned technocrats to follow the prescribed procedures (degazettement) before handover to the beneficiary communities.

The May 15, 2019 letter was copied to the office of the vice president, prime minister, Nakasongola members of Parliament, among other leaders.

However, six years later, the degazette-

ment of the forestry land is yet to occur. The landless families are still waiting for the implementation of the directive.

This publication has also learnt that five individuals were arraigned before the Nakasongola Chief Magistrate Court on April 2 on multiple criminal charges linked to fraudulent allocation, malicious damage to property, and unlawful confinement after they allegedly distributed portions of the Kyalubanga forest land.

The State House Anti-Corruption Unit, acting on the directive of President Museveni, caused the arrest and prosecution of individuals who allegedly used their authority under the Land Allocation Committee for Kyalubanga to solicit bribes and illegal-

ly evict people residing on the forest land, among other irregularities.

The five suspects were remanded until April 14 as inquiries into the matter continue, according to records at Nakasongola Chief Magistrate Court.

The Nakasongola District Council Speaker, Mr Sunday Rogers Bwanga, told this publication that efforts by the district council to follow-up on the de-

gazettement process from the period the President issued the directive were complicated by the government bureaucratic processes.

"We tried our best as Nakasongola District Council to make repeated reminders but it is now almost six years without much success. There were attempts to have this land illegally distributed to persons who were originally not part of

BACKGROUND

The Kyalubanga forest reserve land measures about 8-square miles and is shared by the sub-counties of Lwabiya, Naki-toma, Nabiswera and Lwampanga in Nakasongola District.

In 2019, President Museveni, while addressing a public rally in Nakasongola District, revealed 'that he had been approached by Nakasongola leaders over the issue of the landless population and those living on Kyalubanga forest land. He revealed that the forest was no longer in existence after

encroachment by displaced persons.

"It is upon this background that I direct that a formal degazettement process is undertaken to allow only the landless groups to occupy Kyalubanga land. The displaced people of Buruli are not under this situation out of their own making but because of historical injustices. I myself remain a strong advocate of the environment," he said at the rally, which was held at Nakayonza Primary School in Lwabiya Sub-county in 2019.

the beneficiary communities," he told *Daily Monitor* at the weekend.

The Nakasongola District Chairperson, Mr Sam Kigula, said the district local government has no powers to initiate the degazettement process of Kyalubanga Forest land.

"The President directed the Office of the Prime Minister in 2020 to initiate the process. Our people anticipated quick relief after the presidential announcement made at a public rally addressed by President Museveni in Nakasongola District in 2019," Mr Kigula said at the weekend.

In October 2023, fights erupted between people residing on the forest land at Kabuye Village in Lwabiya Sub-county over boundary disputes.

It took the deployment of the police and Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) soldiers to stop the fights.

Several houses were burnt and other properties destroyed.

Mr Robert Kawa, the then chairperson of people residing on Kyalubanga forest land, blamed the violence on alleged reckless statements attributed to a section of leaders in Nakasongola.

"At one of the public rallies, one of our leaders incited a section of the tenants to chase away people he claimed were not original settlers on the forest land. This was followed by the fights and violent actions against innocent and defenceless tenants," he claimed.

Daily Monitor could not independently verify the alleged statements attributed to the leaders at the time.

Nakasongola leaders had also sought to use the Kyalubanga forest land to resettle families that were displaced after Lake Kyoga burst its banks between 2021 and 2024. But Mr Kigula said the plan has not yet been finalised.

"This land is big and measures about 8-square miles. We had plans to settle about 1,800 families that permanently got displaced by the Lake Kyoga floods. We believe that when the government processes are finalised as promised, this will help resettle the flood-hit victims," he said.

Asked about the current status of the degazettement process, Mr Kigula revealed that Mr Museveni during his presidential campaign in December last year, said he had instructed the minister for Lands, Housing and Urban Development to expedite the Kyalubanga land process.

Lands minister Judith Nabakooba told this publication that the Kyalubanga land issue is a priority and will be resolved as directed by the President.

"It is true that the Nakasongola Kyalubanga land is being handled by the Lands ministry as earlier directed by His Excellency the President. We are working with the relevant government departments and the district leaders on this particular matter," she told *Daily Monitor* by telephone on Monday.

1,800
FAMILIES TO
BENEFIT