

Promoting Community Land Rights And Nature Rights



A Profile of NAPE's Advocacy Work on Land Grabbing in Uganda

58th Edition, June 2017



Funded by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

EDITORIAL

Land grabbing is about overall control of individual or community land without prior informed consent of the owners. Land grabbers can control large areas of land in several ways including leasing land (sometimes through long-term leases from governments called concessions), or through having tenant farmers or sharecroppers, or actually owning the land. Land can also be controlled through quota and supply contracts that force people to use the land in a specific way for the benefit of the land grabber.

Land grabbing occurs when land that was previously used by local communities is leased or sold to foreign investors, including corporations and governments bureaucrats. Typically, the land is taken over for commodity crops to sell on the overseas market, including for agro-fuel, food crops and lucrative minerals. Land grabbing also occurs to clear land for tree plantations (grown for carbon offsets). Conversion of protected reserves and mineral hotspot often result from speculative investments when government predicts a high rate of return from land investments.

Communities in resource-rich areas have suffered most. Although rural communities' customary land rights are protected under the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, in practice, these rights are often violated. Communities have been displaced, losing vital community resources including land for farming, firewood, forest products and in some places, water supplies. Important culturally sites have been destroyed and local traditions and customs are lost as the local populations are forced

to migrate.

Government of Uganda is keen to attract foreign investment, and has allowed foreign companies to move onto large areas of community land for a range of projects, including the development of large scale agribusiness projects such as oil palm plantations, carbon offset tree plantations and for oil drilling following the discovery of crude oil in Bunyoro, North East, and Karamoja regions among others.

Land grabbing in Uganda is aggravated by populist politics and weak enforcement of policy and legislative frameworks. In some cases, local people find it easy to encroach on natural forests and protected areas because they are facilitated and protected by political elites. NAPE has been working with communities affected by land grabbing to raise awareness on community land rights, and also influence policy on biodiversity conservation. NAPE has carried out research on land grabbing in Uganda and developed policy briefs to inform policy formulation on land rights.

However, advocacy on community land rights and nature rights is not an easy task. It requires a certain level of bravery as it involves stepping on the toes of powerful elites with political backing, and multinational companies with money. For this advocacy work NAPE was named anti-development, economic saboteurs.....But this has not deterred the organization from doing its work and to some extent, good results have been realized as some communities now can defend their land rights and demand accountability from duty bearers.

A snapshot of community resistance to land grabbing in the Uganda's oil region



A woman displaced by oil development activity vows not to leave her land until she is compensated adequately



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Structural Violence: Government of Uganda Plans to Compulsorily Take-over People's Land Without Prior Consent



Land Grabbing: A Bulldozer destroys People's crops in Kalangala and adequate compensation was not not given for the both the land and food destroyed

Government of Uganda has drafted an amendment to the Land Law that seeks to provide for compulsory acquisition of land for government development projects such as roads and other infrastructure. Government says the law is intended to shorten the processes involved by allowing government to start the projects pending negotiations on compensations with the affected persons. She said she will soon table the amendments in Parliament. The minister is expected to address a press conference today on the same matter.

According to Article 273 of the Constitution, all land in Uganda belongs to the people. Article 26(2) stipulates that: "No person shall be compulsorily deprived of property or any interest in right over property of any description except where taking possession is necessary for public use and, or, is made under the law after prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation.

The current Land Acquisition Act, 1965 (sec) 226, which govern the compulsory acquisition of land for public purposes, succinctly provides the circumstances under which land can be acquired and the compensation accruing thereof.

Many Ugandans are concerned that a shift from it

would be a human rights violation of depriving people of their source of livelihood. The World Bank Policy on Involuntary Resettlement articulates that displaced persons should be assisted in their efforts to improve their livelihoods and standards of living at least restore them to levels prior to the beginning of project implementation. In the same vain property rights in Uganda are constitutionally protected! Which ideally should ensure that government compensates people or communities whose land has been compulsorily acquired for public purpose. With over 80% of the Ugandans living in rural communities and primarily relying on agriculture for their livelihoods, large scale acquisitions of land for infrastructural projects is threatening the lives of many especially those in the resource-rich areas including the oil-rich region of Uganda.

The reality today is that residents are often evicted from the land on which they rely on for food without adequate compensation or resettlement and their complaints are often ignored by government. Despite the procedures for compulsory land acquisition and compensation present in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the Land Act cap 227, the Land Acquisition Act cap 226, the Electricity Act and International Standards. The

government deliberately ignores these important processes and the affected communities are ignorant of these processes and cannot ably defend their right to compensation. The inevitable result is forced land evictions without clear and affordable mechanism of redress for the project affected persons.

The acquisition of land must be for public purpose

Article 26 (2) (a) of the Constitution provides that the taking of possession or acquisition is necessary for public use or the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health. The land acquisition Act (1965) provides that land can be acquired for Public purposes and for matters incidental thereto and connected there with. Ugandan courts have interpreted these provisions to mean that property must be used to promote the general interests of the community not the particular

interests of any private individuals or institutions. Such lists typically include transportation uses including roads, canals, highways, railways, bridges and airports, public buildings including schools, libraries, hospitals, factories, public utilities like water, sewage, electricity, dams.

However, in Uganda, the government usually makes the initial determination of whether the proposed land acquisition is in Public interest. Often the process is informal and not open to the public. In many cases the government justifies the acquisition of people's land by simply declaring intent to construct a road, an oil region refinery or waste plant etc. However, the government should justify that the taking over of land is in public interest. The situation is worsened by the absence of a definition under the existing law of what constitutes public purpose.

Compulsory land acquisition is Land Grabbing

The office of the Government Valuer is not established

under any particular law, it operates in line with a number of subsidiary legislations that clearly spell out its statutory mandate and obligations. In discharging its functions, the office of the Chief Government Valuer is guided by the Articles 26 and 237 of the Constitution of Uganda, 1995 together with the Land Acquisition Act, 1965, Cap. 226, Land Act 1998, Cap. 227, Mining Act, 2003, The Registration of Titles Act Cap. 230 and the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act, 2000, Cap. 150.

Of particular importance is the Constitutional obligation that requires acquiring authorities to comply to "prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation, prior to taking possession or acquisition of the property". This constitutional requirement puts pressure on the Chief Government Valuer to act hastily so that the acquiring authority takes possession as required.

But when a land owner and an acquiring authority are unable to negotiate the purchase of the land, the Valuer General is required to independently determine the amount of compensation to be paid by the acquiring authority to the former land owner. However, in this case where the valuer is employed by government, he will have to ensure that the interest of his/her employee takes precedence whether the land owner 'agrees with the compensation offered or not'.



Sugar Cane Growing Destroys Bugoma Central Forest Reserve in Hoima District

Uganda is an agrarian economy, and the value of land is naturally high as a strategic socio- economic asset where wealth and survival are measured by control of, and access to land. As a wealth and survival asset, it is a central element in the most basic aspects of subsistence for many, particularly among the rural poor communities. Land is the single most important determinant of a rural family's livelihood and well-being.

Insecure land tenure is putting communities at risk of losing their land to outside interests driven by profits. This mainly because land in Uganda is governed under four tenure systems: customary, mailo land, freehold, and leasehold. Customary land refers to rural land governed by unwritten customary rules and traditions of a specific area. Mailo land is land that was granted to individuals and churches primarily in central Uganda during the colonial period. Use of Mailo land is subject to agreement of bona fide or lawful occupants, who may not own the land but have the right to reside there. Leasehold land is land leased by freeholders and is most commonly used by foreign investors.

The vast majority of land and natural resources like natural forests in Uganda are under customary tenure. Customary land is owned communally and has no titles, which makes it vulnerable to land grabbers. Increased demand for agricultural land, especially from foreign

companies is putting pressure on property rights systems. Sadly, communities are not able to effectively defend their land rights.

Although Uganda's Land Act and legal frameworks recognizes customary land tenure, the challenge is in the implementation of the laws and policies due to authoritarianism, corruption and lack of political will at the national level, and the lack of political and economic power to effectively use these provisions by communities.

Government of Uganda is keen to attract foreign investment, and equate foreign direct investment with promoting economic growth. As a result, communities have been kicked off their land to make way for hydropower plants, agro-industrial plantations, mining operations, and other large-scale projects. There have been attempts by government to back foreign investors to convert community resources such as natural forests into monoculture crops for profits.

A recent case in point is the Bugoma Central Forest Reserve in Hoima district that government attempted to give to Hoima Sugar Ltd to convert into a Sugar cane plantation. NAPE is concerned that replacing part of the forestland with sugarcane plantation will destroy key ecologies beneficial to biodiversity and important livelihood services such as water supply, food security and stable climate. NAPE has engaged with the investor - Hoima Sugar Limited that has since 2016 targeted degrading 8000 hectares of forest cover which is



Parts of Bugoma Forest Destroyed in preparing for Sugar Cane Growing

about 20% of the entire Bugoma forest reserve for Sugar cane plantations.

NAPE has also engaged other stakeholders who are central to the Bugoma forest issue, mainly National Forest Authority (NFA), Collaborative Forest Management Groups operating in and around Bugoma Forest, and made analytical research that maps out parts of the forest that is threatened by the sugarcane operators and supported dialogues with concerned parties including civil society, district leadership, the police and the judiciary to privatize conservation and sustainable management of the Bugoma forest ecosystem.

Bugoma forest is one of the most important tropical forests in Uganda for biodiversity. Bugoma forest is crucial for the development of tourism in Uganda. It is home to endangered and internationally protected chimpanzees as well as a home to thousands of primate species like the endangered Mangabeys.

Activists including NAPE can now celebrate as the legal system have now determined the rightful owners of the forested land. The leasehold of Hoima Sugar Limited, previously acquired in August, 2016 remains on halt. NAPE's position as an environmental advocacy group is that this important ecosystem must be protected to conserve IPGs (water supply, Food security, climate resilience and biodiversity) in this landscape.



The endangered Mangabey Monkey in Bugoma Forest Reserve



Community Land Rights Threatened by Oil Development Activities in Buliisa & Hoima Districts



Communities displaced from their ancestral land live in settlement camps with no amenities. Their land rights have been unsupported by multinational oil Companies and powerful elites with political connections

Land acquisition for development projects by government, private investors and land speculators is a critical source of tensions, disposition and conflicts in the Uganda's Albertine Graben. The oil exploration activities, such as the digging of seismic wells and drilling, have already led to changes in ownership of land, conflict, and displacement as well as an influx of migrants vying for opportunities in the Albertine Graben.

Oil discovery and exploration similarly have a history of altering food security and agriculture. Communities in Buliisa district are dependent on crop agriculture, livestock rearing, hunting, fishing and forestry, all of which are impacted by oil exploration and drilling.

Oil in the Uganda's Albertine Grabe has brought about unprecedented interest in land as people rush to position themselves for potential benefits from the oil either directly or indirectly. There has been increase of land titling, especially in Buliisa area as well as land conflicts. The oil has pitted the elite and resource rich individuals, companies and government on the one hand against the poor uninformed citizens of the oil region on the other.

The resources has attracted investors and land speculators who are acquiring chunks of community land to strategize how to profiteer from the nascent industry. Land speculators take advantage of the absence of documentary evidence of ownership of land to circumvent traditional norms and values about communal land ownership. Consequently, investors continue to acquire land for oil-related projects such as oil waste treatment plants, central processing facilities, pipelines, industrial parks and other petroleum- related investments. This has raised the stakes for land ownership and the rights of customary land owners are at risk as the wealthy and influential elites attempt to gain titled land in the Albertine graben.

Communities do not have the capacity to effectively defend their land rights. NAPE has engaged government, local leadership in Bunyoro region and companies on good business practices, and released reports on exploitative and land-related investments in an effort to improve land governance and investment practices in the Albertine region. NAPE has conducted evidence-based research (Action Oriented Research) on the more controversial issues—transparency in the oil sector, compensation

and reparations for land acquisitions and sales, political and legal reform, and protection of human rights.

Respecting community land rights is not corporate philanthropy. It is effective risk management, good business and the right thing to do. Where land rights are inadequate or poorly governed and enforced the community and individual land owners and users suffer, like in the case of the rich-oil region of Uganda. Secure rights spur investments in the land, increase environmental stewardship, and add significantly to household wellbeing.

Effective and secure land rights must be legally and socially recognized, well-defined, enforceable, long-term, transferable, and able to withstand changes in the structure of families and communities.

NAPE has been raising awareness on land rights among host communities and families that have been directly affected by the oil development activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of communities to defend their land rights. In collaboration with other civil society working on land and human rights in the Albertine region, displaced communities living in confined settlements (internally displacement camps) have petitioned government and dragged land grabbers to court over forceful displacements and taking over their land without compensation.

As a result of civil society advocacy campaign, 53 families

out of 250 that were evicted from their ancestral land Rwamutonga village, in Bugambe Sub-county in Hoima District by McAlester Energy Resources Ltd to pave way for the construction of an oil waste treatment plant in August 2014 regained their land rights after the court ruled in the favor of the evictees.

The land grabber, Bansigaraho reached an understanding with the affected families to restore them on the land at Chief Magistrate Court in Hoima when he acknowledged that he wrongly included the land of the 53 families as he processed his certificate of title with an assumption that upon receiving money from McAlester Energy Resources Ltd, he would convince the families to accept compensation for their interests on the land.

Bansigaraho entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the affected families in the presence of Justice Centre Uganda that represented the evictees. The remaining 197 families are still living in resettlement camp as they wait for justice to prevail over their case. It is NAPE's hope that all the people who were evicted will either be restored on their land or adequately compensated so that they can begin a normal life elsewhere.



*Representative
s of the 53
families with
their witness
at the signing
of the MoU to
restore the
land
ownership
status*

Flower Industry Degrades Lutembe Ramsar Wetland in Uganda



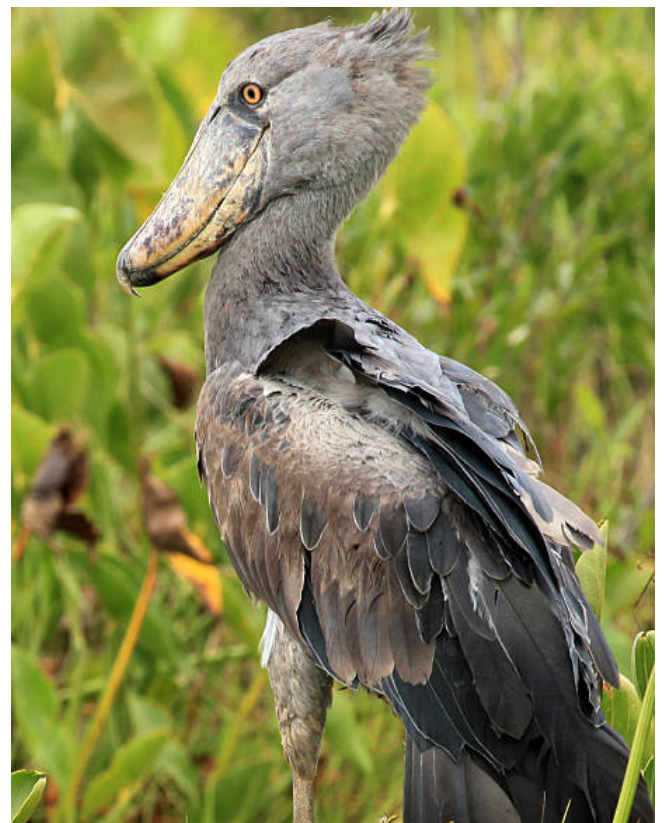
A section of Lutembe Wetland: Communities fish and harvest

Lutembe wetland is one of the few Ramsar sites in Uganda that are among the world's most productive environments. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, and they are biodiversity havens, acting as breeding grounds and habitat for aquatic animals including birds, fish, papyrus used for craft industry, tourism purposes and other wildlife.

The Lutembe Ramsar wetland is the main migration stop-overs for various bird species migrating from different countries in Africa and Europe. The spectacular site is best Eco-tourism site in Lake Victoria Basin visited by various tourists while on their bird watching tours.

The wetland supports globally threatened species of birds, fish and butterflies, including some rare ones. It also plays a crucial hydrological role, with the swamps acting as natural filters for silt, sediments and excess nutrients in surface run-off, wastewaters from industries, and sewage from Kampala City.

Lutember Ramsar wetland was designated as a wetland of International Importance and the Ramsar Convention



A Shoe Bill, endangered bird species at Lutembe Ramsar Wetland

came into force on the 15, September 2006. The Ramsar Secretariat was pleased that the country could afford extra protection to the habitats of endangered species such as the globally vulnerable Shoebill, the Papyrus Gonolek, and the Sitatunga which constitute important tourist attractions. However, this expectation has not been realized for the Lutember Wetland.

A few years after its designation, the wetland started being threatened by development activities. Parts of the wetland are being reclaimed for commercial flower growing authorized by government. Flower farming is a chemical-intensive agricultural venture which requires high volumes of water for irrigation, and pollutes the surrounding environment with chemical residues from the flower firms. Chemicals are also discharged into the lake poisoning aquatic life therein.

Uganda is a Contracting Party to the Convention, and government is obliged to domesticate the convention and ensure its implementation. However, the wetland has continued to decline both in area and in quality without efforts of government to curb the degradation.

The ecosystem services that the wetland used to provide to society have diminished.

In 2012 NAPE started taking drastic measure to force government and policymakers to take immediate actions to meet the Ramsar Convention's objective to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of the wetland.

NAPE conducted a series of dialogue meetings with government and local leaders around Lutember and the management of Rose bud Flower farm to discuss the unsustainable development in the wetland. NAPE also conducted several awareness workshops for the communities around lutembe to sensitize them about the importance of the wetland and the ecosystem benefits to society, especially communities in the vicinity of the wetland. NAPE also conducted media campaign against the activities of Rose Bud Flower firm., but with little success.

Eventually NAPE dragged to court Rose Bud Flower farm, which was reclaiming parts of the wetland to expand its flower investment. The High Court in Kampala ordered Rose Bud Flower farm to stop its activities in the wetland. For now reclamation of the wetland has stopped, but the court case is on-going.



At the background: Parts of the Lutembe Ramsar Wetland being filled with murum in preparation for flower growing by Rose Bud Flower Farm, 2013

Privatized Market-Based Carbon Project Fueling Land Grabbing in Bukaleba, Uganda



Land grabs, food insecurity, and the destruction of community's livelihoods are side effects of the fight against climate change

The pretext: The communities living within and adjacent to the project lease area have no legal rights to the land on which they live. Consequently, they are designated as “illegal intruders or encroachers” by both the authorities and the company. In essence the authorities and company want everyone to believe that they only asked the encroachers to go away

The Ugandan Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to expanding Uganda's capacity and participation in the global carbon economy. The forest sector has been liberalized, and many carbon market-based projects have been initiated by foreign investors with government backing in many National Central Forest Reserves.

Bukaleba Central Forest Reserve is one of the forest reserves leased out under this scheme. Green Resources was awarded the license in Bukaleba, Mayuge district in 1996 for 4500 hectares. This plantation is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and was validated and verified as an Afforestation and Reforestation project

under the Verified Carbon Standard in 2012.

Carbon trading is one of the biggest weapons touted by governments and business in the global fight against climate change. Countries most vulnerable to climate change effects, especially in the global South are supported to mitigate effects of climate change via carbon credit mechanisms to make up for carbon emissions in the global North.

Private international investment in plantation forestry for carbon offsetting is being supported to respond to the country's environmental crisis. Uganda is highly vulnerable to climate change and variability. Government has embraced “green

Carbon Markets have been created as an instrument to tackle climate change. The commodity traded on the carbon market is a licence to pollute – a carbon credit. But does one tone of carbon emitted in one place, say in a coal power plant in Sweden really equal one tone of carbon somewhere else like in Bukaleba Central Forest Reserve?



economic development” mechanism - global carbon markets as solution to mitigate climate change and driver of positive development outcomes for local communities.

However, the land deal of the Carbon-based plantation forestry is characterized as eliciting structural and direct forms of violence with outcomes that have criminalize the livelihood activities of subsistence farmers and indigenous peoples within and adjacent to the plantation leased area.

In Bukaleba communities testify a long-standing connection to the land now licensed to Green Resources that date back to the 1960s. The communities indicate burial grounds and cultural sites, as well as housing and trading centers, as evidence of their long-term connection to place.

There has been deep entrenched structural violence embedded in expanding the carbon forestry industry in Uganda, tying agro-capitalism with aggression, dispossession and the hash law of the corporate frontier.

The forceful take- over of community land and dispossession is directly tied to land grabbing, as well as the denial to resource access, user rights, and serious impact to peoples’ livelihoods.

The Walumbe tree, a sacred tree where communities used to conduct prayers to their gods is now a no-go zone to them. The tree is now within the leased area of the project.

In Bukaleba the land tenure situation is precarious, the community lives in an area classified as public land. The communities face numerous internal threats, include highly centralized decision-making that is susceptible to corruption and compromise, and the lack of capacity and resources to fully pursue and defend their rights. External threats jeopardize communities’ land tenure and food sovereignty.

NAPE, through International Forest Coalition has worked with the communities and facilitated them to develop community representative structures that should be strengthened to develop a collective community vision, and knowledge sharing needs between communities to learn and develop conflict management structures and biocultural protocols.

NAPE has also facilitated community dialogues, and raised awareness on community land rights aimed at strengthening the capacity of the community to fight for, and defend their community land rights. NAPE has also helped to create a platform for communities to share experiences, and develop collective solutions to address issues of climate change and food insecurity.

Authorized Land Grab in Kalangala Islands for Oil Palm Plantation Hurts Small-Scale Farmholders



A Bulldozer clearing Community land in preparation for establishing an Oil Palm plantation.

Wilmar International, one of the largest oilseeds corporations in the world, is developing palm oil plantations on highly biodiverse islands in Lake Victoria. Key partners in the project include the government of Uganda, the International Fund for Agriculture Development and Kenyan oilseeds company BIDCO, a company in which Wilmar International has a controlling interest.

A large proportion of the palm oil plantations are in areas previously covered by natural forest. About 3,600 hectares of forest have been destroyed to make way for the palm oil plantations. In addition to severe environmental and climate impacts, this deforestation has robbed islanders of their food, medicine, and livelihood.

The project has thrown people out of their land with inadequate compensation, in violation of national laws and international norms, degraded water sources and severely impacted food security. In addition, of 1800 workers employed, almost 95 percent are foreign, and wages are extremely poor. Affected communities are demanding the return of land improperly taken, guarantees for the protection of community land rights, compensation for crop damage, and long term protection of community

forests, water, and other natural resources.

The agreement binds the government of Uganda to acquire land ‘free of encumbrances’ under a 99 year lease, and the parties to the agreement claim the land will come from willing landowners on a “willing buyer-willing seller” basis. But Bidco/Wilmar has been very aggressive in the land acquisition process – a process that has included a visit by the President of Wilmar International to the Islands to ‘pave the way for rapid land acquisition.’

With the help of NAPE, Small-scale farm holders in Kalangala launched a legal challenge against all the parties involved in the said land grabbing in 2015, after three years of dialogue with the government and the company which has failed to bring them justice. The court case is still on-going. The land grab occurred in 2011, leaving at least one hundred small-scale farmers landless. Displaced smallholders received little compensation, if any.

The flagship oil palm project received initial seed money from the World Bank, which subsequently pulled out. Several governments also provided

funding via the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Wilmar International receives money from several European banks and financiers.

In 2016 NAPE and the affected small-holder farmers lodged a complaint with the UN Social and Environment Compliance Unit to investigate Bidco's activities in Kalangala. The Compliance Unit carried out its investigations, faulted Bidco on several accounts, noting that while UNDP's vetting of Bidco identified several controversies, including allegations of land-grabbing, poor labor standards, deforestation and tax impropriety, "UNDP did not characterize these risks accurately – or clearly follow up in a satisfactory way. The Compliance Unit suggested that the world body's vetting procedures be revamped to prevent controversial companies like Bidco from joining U.N. initiatives without more stringent checks. For example, in one policy that assesses private sector partners, only three "exclusionary criteria" are listed: two relating to the manufacture of armaments and one relating to marketing of breast milk substitutes contrary to World Health Organization guidelines. "It omits the human and labor rights-related criteria from exclusionary criteria.



Parts of the Oil Palm plantation extending up to almost the shores line of Lake Victoria. The Company has not respected the Buffer Zone.

NAPE and the Small-holder farmers also filed a complaint with the Office of the Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman (CAO) which is the independent recourse mechanism for IFC and MIGA, the private sector lending arms of the World Bank Group about Bidco's activities in Kalangala. The CAO also found the complaint of small-holder farmers about Bidco's violation legible. The CAO has embark on investigations and will take appropriate actions. This is currently on-going alongside the legal suit.



Parts of Natural Rain Forest has been cut down in favour of Oil Palm

Mabira Land Grab: Sacrificing Natural Forest in the name of Development



Mabira forest, a home to rare bird species

Mabira forest is one of the 65 Forest Reserves in Uganda covering an area of 29,974 ha legal 518ha of which are fall under Strict Nature Reserve.

Strict nature reserves are areas which are maintained in their natural state without any form of exploitation to act as benchmarks against the activities and operations of silviculture and management.

Mabira is not like any other forest. It is a tropical, natural forest with rich biodiversity. It is irreplaceable. Its value is incomparable to sugar cane growing. A rainforest like Mabira is simply too intricate and delicate a body to slice apart. It will be unable to perform these functions if land use is changed. Mabira Forest is a natural rainforest area covering about 300 square kilometres (about 30,000 hectares) in Uganda. It has been protected as Mabira Forest Reserve since 1932. It is home for many endangered species.

Mabira forest is a core conservation area for critical biodiversity, a hub for ecological and environmental conservation, a habitat to many animal and plant species, a water-catchment protector for the many rivers and streams that feed the lakes in East Africa, a recharger for underground aquifers, a crucial component of micro-climate moderation in the region (which aids agricultural production), a necessary catalyst for carbon sequestration in the region, and an economic boon to Uganda's eco-tourism industry.

In 2006 government of Uganda announced plans to convert the natural rain forest to sugar can plantation. NAPE and other conservationists within Uganda and beyond vehemently opposed the plan. NAPE was concerned about the vital ecological services the forest provides such as water shed protection, flood control, food security, carbon sequestration, climatic control, tourism benefits among others. Mabira Forest is a vital shared resource and source of livelihoods for thousands of local communities living near the forest.

To government, giving forest land to a foreign investor for Sugar cane cultivation would create jobs for unemployed youth and put more money

into the government treasury, in other words this was 'development'.

To NAPE, Mabira as a water catchment area, it controls the water levels and flow of Lake Victoria and the River Nile, which give a livelihood to millions of people in not only the East African region but also in countries that share the Nile downstream- Sudan and Egypt. In the event that the ecology of Mabira is disrupted, the future of Ugandan dams like Bujagali and Nalubaale would equally be at stake.

A change in land use of one third (7,100 hectares) of natural forests to sugarcane may reduce the water retention capacity of the watershed and eventually affect water flow and water levels to the lakes and rivers in the East African region.

On the tourism front, many compartments of Mabira forest reserve are important for recreational purposes. Ecotourism is among the best non-consumptive uses of the Tropical High Forest (THF) if carefully planned and regulated according to the available forest resources and the number of users.

One of Mabira's strengths lies in the large number of birds which may be seen from the visitor's centre. Flowering trees in the clearing attract a variety of sunbirds such as green, Little Olive, Blue throated, brown, Green throated, olive bellied and superb sunbirds.

Ecotourism is a promising economic option for communities living near the forest. The Mabira Forest receives two-thirds of all tourists who visit forest reserves in Uganda, making them an important source of revenue for the government and local communities.

Government and government bureaucrats have little appreciation of the fact that the goods and services accruing from forests will only continue if forests are conserved, and that forest degradation actually has a cost element to our national economy. There are strong links between economics, biodiversity conservation and the forces leading to forest biodiversity loss. Poor understanding of these linkages is partly contributing to the conversion of natural forest into mono-cultural business /degradation of

forests to pave way for mining activities, construction of roads and other infrastructure developments in the country.

Government, natural resource managers and economic planners and decision-makers need to take cognizance of the economic potential that the forest sector represents, and understand the great economic opportunities that will be foregone if Ugandan forests are lost. Most of the forest landscapes in Uganda are being targeted for conversion into monoculture agribusiness fronted by government.

Overall, usurping people's rights over land and all its natural resources is new slavery. It is a slavery of another kind. While in the orthodox slavery people were sacrificed to foreigners, in this slavery land is sacrificed and local ownership is lost along with local sovereignty. The political elites who facilitate the land grab what everyone to believe it is development.



H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, last year on his national tours to Eastern Uganda stopped in Mabira Forest to enjoy fresh air in the forest. In 2006 announced plans to convert parts of the forest into Sugar Cane plantation but the plan met stiff resistance from conservationists including NAPE. The plan was later abandoned.

NAPE's Achievements in the Fight Against Land Grabbing & the Rights of Nature

Kalangala land grab under investigations

In 2016 NAPE and the affected small-holder farmers successfully lodged a complaint with the UN Social and Environment Compliance Unit and the World Bank's Compliance Advisor, the Ombudsman (CAO) of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to investigate BIDCO's activities in Kalangala. Both institutions have faulted BIDCO in several counts. Currently the CAO is in Kalangala in a joint pre-mediation meeting with all the parties in community land acquisition for oil palm plantation. It is our hope that affected community will get justice.



Pre-mediation meeting between the CAO and parties in the land grab case, July 2017

53 Evicted Residents in Kigyayo get their land back

NAPE launched a vigorous campaign against the forceful eviction, and in collaboration with Civic Response on Environment and Development (CRED) formed the "Albertine Rift Land Platform" where local authorities and the community in Hoima and Buliisa would discuss issues of community land rights. As a result, communities with support from CRED dragged the land grabber, Mr. Bansigaraho to Court. In 2016 Bansigaraho acknowledged having included the land of 53 families as he processed a certificate of title. He accepted to give back the land and signed an MoU with the affected families.



Representatives of the affected families with the witness during the signing of the MoU, 2016

Reclamation of Butembe Ramsar Halted

NAPE dragged to court Rose Bud Flower farm, which was reclaiming parts of the Lutembe Ramsar Wetland to expand its flower investment. The High Court in Kampala ordered Rose Bud Flower farm to stop its activities in the wetland. Reclamation of the wetland has been put to halt. However, the court case is on-going.



Parts of the Wetland that was being reclaimed. Rose Bud's Activities was halted in 2015

Plan to Covert Mabira Forest Reserve Abandoned

Sine 2007 NAPE has maintained advocacy campaigns against government's unsustainable plan to convert Mabira forest into sugar cane plantation, and together with other conservationists in Uganda and beyond intense pressure was put on government to respect and implement national and international instruments related to biodiversity conservation, some of which Uganda is a party. Government now appreciates the benefits of Mabira forest, and has abandoned it earlier plans.



H. E. President Yoweri Museveni sittig in Mabira Forest.

Bellow are Institutions that Supported NAPE in the Fight Against Land Grabbing & Abuse of Human and Nature Rights





A Publication of the National Association
of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)

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