

BLACK MONDAY

Newsletter

Citizen Action Against theft of our money without SHAME!

EDITORIAL

After decades of waiting, bargaining, negotiating, consulting and fidgeting, Uganda finally has a land policy. But, what is a policy in a country well known for formulating good policies and programs on paper with little or perverse commitment to implementation?

First of all, why has it taken us so long to complete the process when responsible persons recognize that land, as observed by Hon Daudi Migereko, minister for lands, housing and urban development, "is arguably the emotive, culturally sensitive, politically volatile and economically central issue in Uganda"?

While other government programs target specific groups of Ugandans, the land question drags us all into one lot characterized by what are proving to be incompatible interests.

Haven't we seen enough bloodshed, loss of livelihood, family disintegration and violation of the land rights of indigenous groups due to greed within the organs charged with dispensing land justice?

The country's top leadership is said to be at the centre of illicit land allocations to superficial investors who seek to enrich themselves. Natural resources including forests and swamps have not been spared in these fraudulent allocations. Some of the so-called investors are alleged to be agents acting on behalf of government officials.

The country has witnessed widespread evictions of ordinary citizens by armed forces deployed by those who have acquired land using stolen public funds. What a shame! Land administrators are focusing more on fraudulent land deals from which they earn commissions instead of delivering quality services.

Now that the National Land Policy is in place, every citizen must rise to the occasion to demand for and contribute to its implementation to the letter, because land is our life, our dignity and our future.

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Land Grabbing is Robbing Citizens of Life and Dignity!



LOSS OF DIGNITY: An old woman with pieces of her property after eviction from Naguru housing estates.

The constitution vests the radical title to all land in Uganda in the citizens of Uganda, and the state exercises residual sovereignty on behalf of and in trust for the citizens of Uganda. Ironically, this valuable asset of Ugandans has become a problem that is placing citizens between a rock and a hard place. Our source of livelihood has become a death trap.

To begin with, how can you explain the persistent conflicts over land, which become rife every dawn day? From every border of the country to the centre, people are living in fear due to tenure insecurity.

While historically Ugandans blame the country's land problems to colonialists, a few powerful people have played a very key role in perpetuating injustices over land. Land grabbing is a practice associated more with those who wield power than foreigners or ordinary citizens. Where foreigners have acquired land and displaced citizens without fair compensation, the process has been

facilitated by Ugandans, usually for selfish gains.

Transparency has continued to elude most players in the land sector to the detriment of ordinary citizens. This probably explains why former public land has been turned into freehold with individuals acquiring full rights without considering the interests of occupants on such land. A closer examination of such transfers will reveal a network of individuals conniving to identify and allocate public land to themselves and their relatives.

The central region has been hit by forgery of land documents, sometimes with assistance of land administrators. In such deals, administrators effect necessary changes to land documents after receiving a bribe or a piece of the land in question. Is it by coincidence then that many land administrators own land that is way beyond what they could afford with their income?

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NOT FOR SALE

It's absurd that government can break down a training school to put up a hotel for CHOGM guests staying for only 4 days — Hon. Rhoda N. Kalema

A senior citizen, woman leader and former minister; Hon. Rhoda N. Kalema speaks out about the land history of our country and how our leaders have betrayed us by selling public land to private investors in the guise of development. Below we bring you her interview.

1. Who is Rhoda N. Kalema?

Rhoda N. Kalema is a former Member of the National Consultative Council, Junior Minister of Culture and Community Development, Deputy Minister for Public Service and Cabinet Affairs and a former member of the Constituent Assembly.

I am now 84 years old; retired from politics but not retired from serving my country, community and family.

2. As a senior citizen, how would you describe the manner in which Uganda's land tenure has evolved over the years?

In my opinion the land tenure system of our country should have been left to evolve naturally if the ruling governments had been stable. The governments should have realized that the land tenure of Uganda was historical. Land was always shared and people lived in harmony. After signing the 1900 Buganda Agreement, there were a number of changes in the land tenure system. It made it possible for one to buy land and get a title.

However, it is important to note that there were some people (landlords) who benefited so much from this system but they never evicted the tenants. Agreements were made amicably between tenants and landlords. The tenants paid nominal fees and were allowed to develop the land that eased harmonious living; to an extent that they could bury their people on those same lands. The government allowed the tenants to buy from the landlords through clear legal processes and besides the landlord was always willing to sell.

3. The land Policy has finally been passed. This will work alongside the Land Act which is still being amended. Do you think that the land laws and policies in Uganda are helping in solving the land challenges we have to date?

The policies are being rushed without consulting the people. Government needs to consult the citizens about the opinion on policies most especially those that are key like land. There must be good will from the people. Secondly, people at the grassroots have not been educated on how these laws and policies will be implemented. Remember people are partners with government in developing their country.

Worse still this law has been biased and favors the rich than those who initially owned the land. It is a forced law.

4. Government has been giving out land to investors as a way of attracting Foreign Direct Investments. This has left many people being evicted and homeless. Some of our leaders have warned peasants who are refusing to give out land to these investors and for industrial growth. What's your take on this matter?

I am aware that the law grants government permission to genuinely buy land from individuals to put up social service development towards the common man's benefit. For instance, at one time I had to sell some of my land in Kiboga to the Police and Town Council to put up a Police Barracks and Town Council respectively...although the barracks has never been put up. I was ready to lose such prime land for the sake of developing my home town.

5. How about when key public properties including schools are being given away in the current land bonanza to these same investors in the name of promoting investment and industrialization moreover with government officials have been implicated in these cases?

For government to give out such land to private investors in the guise of promoting development is ironic. It is a shame because government must be faithful to the ideals of the country, its people and social services. It is absurd that government can break down a training school to put up a hotel for CHOGM guest staying for only 4 days. The best investment for any country is in the human resource. Those who are being given our land are educated and because of them our children are being thrown out of school. An uneducated population can never appreciate or benefit from development. This means that these investors will end up bringing skilled people from their countries to manage these investments. No non-Ugandan would except those who are selfish would allow to invest in a land where a school or hospital has been broken down. Government should come up and invest in the social welfare of the people like proper housing, education and health.

6. Your last words for the citizens of this country on this 51st Independence Day Celebrations

Every citizen is represented by 2 MPs: a woman MP and a constituency representative. The government should use these MPs to sensitize the people with no partisan emotions. Once people understand these policies, they will eventually accept them. Ugandans don't have any other country therefore; it is their government's obligation to ensure that they are a priority. Policies must be made and implemented in the people's favor. We cannot afford to have our people living in exile because of poor policy formation and implementation.

Finally, government should prioritize educating its nation. No amount of policing or arrests will stop crime on our country unless people are educated and well employed. I leave you with the words of Barack Obama (Nov, 2012), "The World will Judge you not by what you can build but by what you have destroyed."

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AT A GLANCE RHODHA N. KALEMA

- Junior minister of Culture and Community Development
- One of the two women on the National Consultative Council
- Deputy Minister for Public Service from 1989 to 1991
- National Resistance Council representative for Kiboga
- Member of the Constituent Assembly



Incompetence and delays attract backlash for digital land registry

When Richard Barigye, a tech-savvy land dealer and professional surveyor heard about the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development embarking on a process of digitalizing the Uganda Land Registry, it was good news.

The hustle and bustle of waiting for a land title for weeks and months was finally over, he imagined.

"It was very tiresome to access a land title in the analog system and I saw this as a milestone," he says.

However, six months before the ministry adopts the new digital format, land owners and dealers like Barigye are already complaining about the loss of business and wastage of time due to the never-ending breakdowns and complexities of the new system. Some are even wishing the analogue system was still here.

Uganda had been with the print system for about 113 years. The Uganda Land Registry is adopting an all-digital format this year thanks to the World Bank funding of Shs 63.3bn.

It was hoped that efficient land administration would be achieved through digitalization of land titles, re-engineering and modernization of the registry procedures, and establishing a digital system able to give up-to-date mapping.

In his explanation about the new system, Daudi Migereko,

Minister for Lands, Housing and Urban Development, says that the new system despite being expensive is worth it.

"It will help us have a clear, accurate and reliable computerized registry that is accessible," Migereko says, "we want to have a system that can simplify government's work in decision-making."

Migereko adds that the new initiative will also help and simplify the work of financial institutions and people dealing in land transactions. "If the ministry keeps land information that is reliable and accessible, it is easy for the banks to eliminate cases of fraudulent transactions."

Meanwhile, he adds, the general public will have clear knowledge about their land ownership and this will help in eliminating cases of fraud and forgery.

According to Transparency International there is rampant corruption in the land sector which is basically attributable to the failure in Uganda's governance.

Concerns

But as the new digital system rolls out in the first six districts where it is assumed that 85% of the land is registered with titles, land owners and dealers have started to vent mixed feelings about the system.

Wills Kasisa, a lawyer who deals in land transactions at Kattutu & Co Advocates, says that the new system is good to detect

fraud and if everything is clear as fed in the system it is easier to get feedback in time.

But Biregye disagrees.

"For instance, they claim that one can have access to the title within two days but it is not true as the process can take weeks or a month," says Biregye.

As a land dealer who also helps people to register their land, Biregye says that in the old system one would take much time to get a title but the situation is not different in the digital system despite being expensive.

"Actually, in the old system one would even have intervention, but in the new systems there are no interventions if a title takes long to be got," he said.

Incompetent staff

According to a source at the ministry of lands, the cause in the delay is attributed to computer-illiterate registry staff that cannot operate the new system.

"The system was set up but the staffs are still getting to know how it is operated," says one officer at the registry.

Minister Migereko says that the ministry is trying to build capacity for its staff. "Obviously, we are trying to train our staff to see that they are acquainted to the new system," he said.

But amidst all this, there are still concerns that the digital system might not do much about the fraud that has wrecked the sector

for a long time. Critics cite the issuance of multiple land titles for one piece of land that has led to deadly land wrangles. Due to this fraud, the Land Ministry had embarked on a title recalling drive. This frustrated many land dealers and owners and caused a lot of losses.

New system to sanction fraud

Commenting about the new system, Dr Rose Nakayi, a lecturer of land law at Makerere University says that the new system is not a solution to fraud.

"What I know is that it will even sanction new fraud," Nakayi says, "The only best way to make people enjoy their land rights is to put in place better policies and laws and having the political will to implement them without regard to

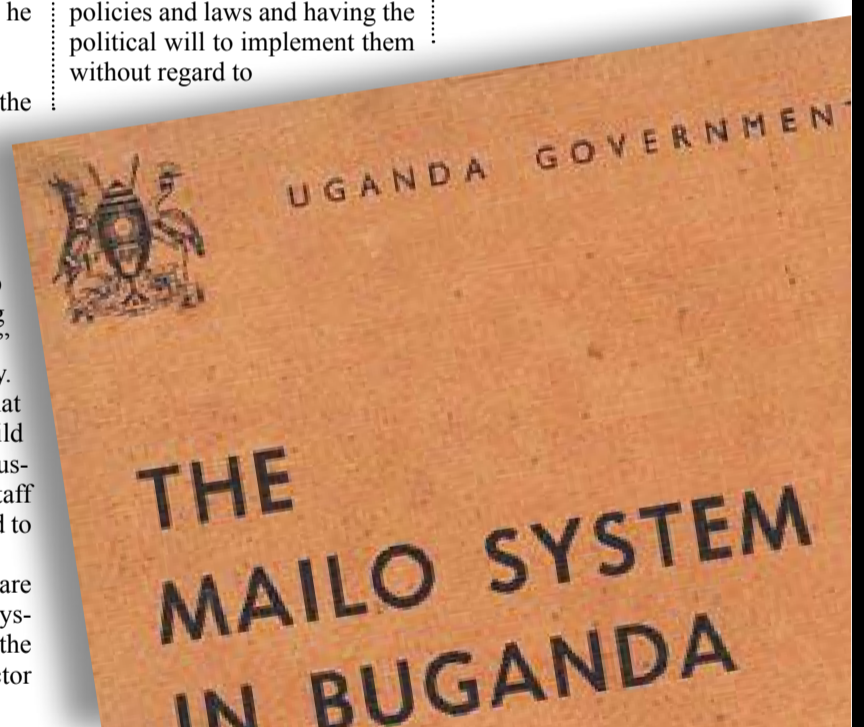
political expediency."

Nakayi's reasoning is hinged on the corruption malaise that has eaten deep into almost all government institutions.

"If they [government officials] can steal money from the treasury through beating the IT system," Nakayi asks, "What of land? In my view I think that land requires a holistic approach."

Some ministry staff are concerned about the titles that are being given from the new system because contrary to the manual titles, the new ones will not show the history of ownership.

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Land Grabbing is Robbery of Our Life and Dignity!

FROM PAGE 1

In Karamoja region, the elite are turning against their clansmen to deprive them of land, which is the people's only source of livelihood as pastoralists. Today, district officials in many of these areas own more than 500 acres each and no longer allow pastoralists to access the land for grazing.

In addition to the speculative acquisition of land in Karamoja, a lot of activities are taking place in the region without visible benefits to the indigenous people. Valuable minerals

are extracted from the area but Ugandans can only guess who is behind the mining industry that is 'booming'.

Attempts by government to de-gazette land and allocate it to vulnerable and minority groups have benefited more leaders than peasants. Those responsible for facilitating resettlement and land acquisition processes for such groups turn

into primary beneficiaries, leaving the landless more desperate.

Different studies have indicated that poverty levels in the northern part of the country are high and reconstruction efforts yielding so little. While funds allocated for reconstruction of the area were misappropriated, land, which is the only asset that remained after the civil war, is slipping by. Large expanses of empty land are attracting unscrupulous individuals who are personalizing customary land.

The formal land justice system is grossly challenged by corruption which

is manifested in bribes, fraud and forgery to the extent that a judicial officer enters a false consent judgment over land to cheat a client. Land cases are sometimes made so complex and protracted leaving parties in such matters with no option but to bribe the judicial officers.

We are living in an era of insatiable greed for land. Land giveaways have served to promote slavery and exploitation of citizens than improve their welfare as employees of investors. It is high time Ugandans regained mandate over their land if we are to achieve transformation and development.

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Where is my future? A child wails after his home is destroyed during the Naguru estates eviction.



Land theft, life theft and suffering

Butabika Hospital Land

Butabika Hospital land meant for the expansion of the mental health patients' facility was parceled out to wealthy individuals. In a Report to Parliament's Public Accounts Committee, then Chairman of the Uganda Land Commission stated that 212.5 out of 356 acres was illegally allocated to private interests.

The rest of the land was given to up to 158 individuals including political leaders and some members of the first family.

In 2003, the Government allocated 356 of the 656 acres of land at Butabika to purported investors.

Kololo Secondary School

Kololo SS which sits on 10 acres of land first lost 2 acres in 2007 to an investor who constructed housing units. In 2010, the school lost 2 more acres to another investor, and today it stands to lose 3 acres. More than half of Kololo SSS land has been taken by 'powerful' people with connections to State House. The investors whom the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Education, Xavier Lubanga offered part of Kololo SS land "because it was a wetland which would be hard for the school to develop" include Kalahari Investments Ltd and Himalaya Traders, which were allegedly fronted by people linked to State House.

The school had secured a US\$2 million (approx. Shs 4 billion) grant from the African Development Bank to build 12 modern classrooms but its Board of Governors says the school is now left with no land to build classroom blocks for the rising number of students under the Universal Secondary Education programme.

Nakivubo Blue Primary School

Some of the land belonging to Nakivubo Blue Primary School was taken over by 200 illegal settlers and another Col. Chris Mugenyi. In 2008 Nakivubo settlement and Nakivubo Blue Primary school was grabbed by city traders and turned into a car washing bay and a part time lodge. Initially it had over 18 hectares of land but KCC and its successors have over the years allocated most of it to 'investors' and army veterans.



INSENSITIVE: A woman and her child look on helplessly after their home is destroyed in the Naguru eviction.



NOT JUST AN URBAN PROBLEM: Even the rural poor are targeted by the selfish, greedy and well connected.



WHERE IS GOV'T AS ALL THIS HAPPENS? It's only a greedy government that can allow and use its state machinery like the police to destroy its people's future.



GO LIVE IN THE FOREST, BUT WE SHALL ALSO EVICT YOU FROM THERE: After being evicted from your home without an alternative, what else can you do?



SPARE OUR EDUCATION AND FUTURE: Children of Kitante Primary School look on in confusion as their school land is grabbed by Dr Tamale Sali to set up a private enterprise.



EDUCATION GENOCIDE: How can a sober government destroy a school for a private shopping mall? Is it fair for one individual to benefit as we all lose?



THIS IS WHAT WE SHOULD ALL DO: We should all rise up and defend our right to land like these Iteso did.

Makerere University land

An 'investor' Ramez, the managing director of Ramezco Company (U) Ltd, claims he wants to erect a five star-hotel at \$17 million (Shs39b). Janice Amayo, who reportedly bought the land from the university at Shs100 million in 2002 is on the run. She allegedly sold the property to the Lebanese businessman in December last year at \$3.5 million (Shs8b). President Museveni directed that the prime land belonging to Makerere University in Kololo, an upscale city suburb, be given to a Lebanese investor to erect a five-star hotel.

As with Shimoni School's land, the hotel is yet to be constructed.

The University however says that the land was obtained fraudulently and still belongs to it. The land is on plots, 34 and 36A on Prince Charles Drive as he began construction works on what he claims is a \$17 million (Shs39b) hotel. Ramez then took his case before the President who wrote on September 1, directing police chief Kale Kayihura to ensure the investor "gets vacant possession of his land" to go ahead with the project.

CMI land

The giving away of the CMI land to Sudhir Ruparella was arbitrary. Sudhir says he acquired the land title after fulfilling all the lease requirements including payment of sh150m as ground rent and sh3bn to relocate CMI. defence minister Crispus Kiyonga, told Parliament that the city tycoon never acquired ownership of the prime land. Kiyonga told the defence and internal affairs committee that the Government had given the land to the Kenyan government in exchange for a piece of land Uganda received at the coastal port of Mombasa. Sudhir who was supposed to construct a 5 star hotel on the premise is now planning to construct a University on the land.

Uganda Railways land

Part of the land that has been given to private developers is the 57 acres in Nsambya, which the Government's valuer estimated to be worth sh70b. Cabinet is said to have discussed and approved the disposal of the land. Several URC estates and plots of land in Luzira have also been sold off under dubious and unclear circumstances.

Coffee marketing board land

The premises were freely given away to a yet-to-be-identified investor on the directives of Ashton Kajara and the President. A one Kihembo said he was ordered Kajara in 2012 to dispose of the premises – including buildings, land, machinery and equipment among other things – to an investor he declined to name.

Kihembo promised to furnish the committee with details in that regard in writing at an appropriate time.

According to the petitioners, the properties were valued at shs33 billion shillings in 1995 but four years later lost value to about 6 billion shillings.

The properties were valued by a private valuer, Bageine Property Holdings, instead of a government valuer. The land and property was first offered to Tristar Apparels to make garments destined for US under the African Growth Opportunity Act, but the project failed.

Entebbe

- Court in Entebbe recently charged Ms Elizabeth Muller Nabatazi over allegations of trying to forge signatures of Mr Grace Ibingira to grab his 28 acres of land at Nkumba near Entebbe.

- An 'investor' also acquired land belonging to the Fisheries Training Institute. Kitubulu Forest Reserve near Guda landing site, Social Centre in Katabi Ward, Botanical Gardens area, Nakivogo landing site, part of the mayor's gardens, Lugonjo swamp, Ssessanga gardens, government-owned Kigungu Primary School and Kigungu landing site land and Katabi-Busambaga swamp were acquired by different people irregularly.
- Land belonging to Civil Aviation

Authority (CAA) was unscrupulously issued to purported private developers by Wakiso District Land Board.

- More land belonging to the CAA allocated to Proline Soccer Academy 30 acres was carved out of 132 acres of land belonging to CAA under LRV 3159 Folio 8 and allocated to Proline Soccer Academy.

- In another simmering heist, a title (LRV 4407 Folio 12) was issued to Masindi Hotel Ltd within the stipulated 200 meter NEMA buffer zone. The land in question was believed to be part of the Fisheries Training Institute but was found to be outside the same.

Politics is ruining poor people's chances of profiting from land

In Amuru, a festering spat over land has been going on. The Madhvani Group wants about 42,000 hectares of land to set up a sugar plantation under Amuru Sugar Works.

The corporation's plan has the backing of President Museveni and mostly ruling party-leaning politicians from the area, but it is bitterly opposed by many opposition politicians from the wider Acholi sub-region, who say it is a ploy to grab people's land.

Gilbert Olanya, the MP for Amuru, is particularly popular over his stance against the plan to put the land to sugar growing under Amuru Sugar Works. Olanya and others have mobilised the people to resist the planned sugar plantation and President Museveni's various meetings with residents of the area and numerous trips to Amuru have not softened the ground enough for Amuru Sugar Works to take off.

But as a number of opposition politicians oppose the sugar project, Prof. Ogenga Latigo is a rare exception. He says the sugar project should go on because it has the potential to improve the people's lot.

Prof. Latigo, former MP for Agago County and Leader of Opposition in the last Parliament, estimates that only about 17% of the land in Acholi is currently under cultivation.

Putting substantially more chunks of land under cultivation, Prof. Latigo says, would provide jobs for many and improve food security in the area, the country and the entire region.

Prof. Latigo is himself a prominent farmer in Acholi, tilling hundreds of hectares in Nwoya district. He says to oppose projects like



Commercial sugarcane growing: Once such a plantation is established in Amuru, many citizens might be left landless.

Amuru Sugar Works is to "play politics with poor people's lives."

Wrong enterprise

But Livingstone Okello-Okello, also a former MP, says sugar growing is the wrong enterprise for the people of Amuru. He says that there is no evidence that plantation agriculture, sugar growing in particular, has improved the livelihoods of the people in areas where it has been practiced for decades.

He points to Busoga, where some out growers for sugar plantations complain that they earn less than a million shillings per year from their land, making them ill-suited to compete in today's world.

Okello-Okello and like-minded politicians say the people of Amuru and other areas

should be free to choose what to do with their land without any pressure from the political leaders.

Part of the fear in Acholi is occasioned by a suggestion made in the 1990s by Mr. Museveni's younger brother, Gen. Salim Saleh, that Acholi's land could be used to turn the area into a food basket for the region. But many are convinced that there is a plan to grab the Acholi people's land and keep them perpetually impoverished.

Where is the leadership?

President Museveni and others blame their counterparts like Olanya for fomenting such "regressive" feelings among the people of Acholi. But, it is important to note, suspicions over land grabbing are wide-spread across the country. And many associate land grabbing

with regime-associated individuals.

But as the leaders bicker among themselves, the ordinary people's lot, particularly for those who rely on land, has been worsening. Failure to turn around the agricultural sector – small-holder farming in particular – has left youths unable to be meaningfully absorbed into the sector, driving them into urban joblessness.

The government has done precious little to support rural small holder farmers in any form possible. The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), by the President's own admission, failed in its duty to stimulate improvements in the agricultural sector, despite billions being sunk into it.

For any fundamental changes to happen in the agricultural sector, many would agree, there needs to first be reforms in the way land is owned and used. But, unfortunately, the current political environment makes it practically impossible to realise these reforms.

There are deep-seated suspicions against the current government in many parts of the country, robbing the authorities of the much-needed goodwill to carry out the necessary reforms.

Unfortunately, very little has been done to repair this image and restore the confidence of the people that politics can be a force for good as regards land reform.

Instead of politicians from across the political divide seeking to work on compromises necessary for better utilisation of land, they seem more preoccupied with exploiting quarrels over land for electoral and other gains.

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Farmer Exploitation behind Busoga Sugar Factory Boom

It is not farfetched to say that if Busoga is at the centre of sugarcane growing in Uganda, then Jinja is Busoga's sugarcane growing capital.

In this small district no crop has swallowed up the district's land more than sugarcane—thanks to perfect soils and weather conditions for the crop.

Decades ago, cotton and coffee were the main cash crops but these have now given way to sugarcane with more sugar processing plants opening up in the region to buy up the crop.

Back then, cotton and coffee had many advantages. For instance, intercropping with food crops like beans and maize was possible. This is not the case with sugarcane.

The Madhvani Group's success over the past half century has in recent years attracted other investors into the sub-region to set up smaller sugar factories.

Over the last five years, besides Kakira Sugar Works, in Jinja's neighbourhood, Mayuge Sugar Industries Limited set up shop while Sugar Allied Industries in Kaliro was followed closely by Bugiri Sugar Company, Kamuli Sugar Limited and Kenlon Sugar factory.

The factories have descended upon the sub-region—in some instances defying the sugar policy that requires companies to set up shop within a radius of 25 km between each factory, besides having a nucleus of about 500 hectares of sugarcane.

All these factories have contributed to development but behind this sugar lure is a tale of land conflicts, poverty and looming hunger in the sub-region.

But this has not stopped Madhvani from asking for more land to grow sugarcane.

In 2001, Butamila Forest Reserve, the largest forest reserve in Jinja was

the centre of a battle between civil society and over 8,000 families, and the government. Madhvani won that battle as he got the land with assistance from the government.

Madhvani has also enlisted the services of many farmers surrounding the estate. Thousands of farmers in adjacent villages to Kakira such as Mafubira, Lwanda, Busedde, Namulesa, Kyomya and Busalama have abandoned food growing to concentrate on sugarcane growing—a state of affairs that has had leadership at both local and national level worried.

In August, Mayuge District Chairperson stopped short of introducing a by-law in the district council that would prevent farmers in his district from using up their land for sugarcane growing.

"We are facing a big challenge where people are devoting their whole land for cane growing and leaving people hungry," he said,

"Even those with one acre of land are growing sugarcane for sale instead of growing food crops which could help them feed their families."

Busoga as a region used to be a major food producing region that ensured food sustainability for its people but also sold tonnes of its surplus to other regions of the country. It was a major producer of maize, potatoes and cassava among other food crops.

But the recent upsurge in sugarcane growing has relegated food production leaving many households on the brink of starvation as less food is being produced across the sub region.

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), food production in Busoga region grew by only 1.1% in the 2011/12 financial year compared to sugarcane growing which increased by 16.2%.

UBOS also noted that the production of staple foods like beans, cas-

sava and sweet potatoes dropped by between 3-10%.

But do not tell this to people like Michael Nabongo, a seasoned farmer from Kyomya village in Budondo sub-county, Jinja District. He says for decades, he grew maize, beans and vegetables which he would sell in Jinja town but he struggled to buy a 'mere' bicycle.

Changing climatic patterns coupled with the emergence of pesticide-resistant pests frustrated his efforts until he reverted to growing sugarcane only four years ago. He has never looked back.

Experts say sugarcane companies have dangled incentives to farmers to grow more sugarcane without addressing food security challenges. But while more cash is now within the reach of many ordinary farmers like Nabongo, the money is not enough to sustain their livelihoods in terms of purchasing food and meeting other nutritional requirements.



Inside Mabira forest

Massive corruption, deforestation threaten Uganda's forests

Every year, Uganda loses about 90,000 hectares of forests. This is the equivalent of three Mabira forests. If this trend was to continue, the country would not have a single forest in the next 40 years.

Yet forests are very critical for rainfall formation and the survival of animals and human beings and nature.

The tragic loss of forests is already the reason, experts say, there is an increase in the incidences of erratic rains, killer landslides and floods, which are all causing economic loss.

For instance, according to the Department of Disaster Management's Integrated Rainfall Variability Impacts, Needs Assessment and Drought Risk Management Strategy, the 2010/11 rainfall deficit caused an estimated loss and damage value of

2.8 trillion (US\$ 1.2 billion), which is an equivalent of 7.5% of Uganda's GDP in 2010 alone.

Apart from the loss in disasters, Uganda's massive forest sector economic value has been lost to plunder and corruption.

The country's forests, which in 1900 accounted for 45% of the total land area, have been decimated to less than 18% (2005).

Experts blame mismanagement, corruption and underfunding for depriving the forest sector's full contribution to Uganda's development.

Although the government acknowledges that forests are central to the three pillars of sustainable development, critics say, there has not been enough efforts to ensure proper management of the sector.

Players in the forestry sector note that plunder such as illegal timber

trade, encroachment (cultivation and illegal logging in forest reserves) and high level corruption thrives amongst forest management officials.

The National Forest Authority (NFA), a government body mandated to manage the sector, has in recent years been rocked by big corruption scandals and illegal land giveaways.

For instance, four years ago NFA's former executive director Damian Akankwasa hit headlines after Shs 900 million, tucked under his bed, was stolen by his wife. Akankwasa, who claimed the money belonged to one of his brothers in Mbarara, was interdicted from the post and dragged to the Anti-corruption court, a move that tainted the image of the forest authority.

Akankwasa's case opened up a chain of corruption tendencies that eventually led to the arrest of some senior NFA board members over abuse of office.

Indeed, an independent study sanctioned in 2009 by the ministry of water and environment, confirmed that lack of transparency and massive corruption at NFA hampered progress in the forest sector.

As a result of such rot in NFA management, vital natural resources in forests have become major causes

of conflicts among communities and accelerated environmental degradation.

Experts lament that while Uganda's forests' total economic value is at Shs 600 billion per year, only half of the income is realized at household levels. It is worth noting that over 90 per cent of Ugandans use firewood (charcoal) from forests as their main source of energy.

In the end, Uganda's forest cover has dangerously decreased and poses great risk of natural degradation effects.

According to a 2010 report, 'REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and Sustainable Development—Perspective from Uganda', independent researchers noted that the cover has dropped from 24 percent in 1990 to 18% in 2005.

This means Uganda lost approximately 88,000 hectares or 1.8 per cent of her forests cover every year. At this rate, the country will lose its forest cover in the next 40 years. While about 80,000 hectares are lost on private land, 7,000 hectares are lost in areas managed by NFA and UWA.

Also, the process to fill the lucrative NFA executive director job further polarized the sector for almost two years after Akankwasa was interdicted. The executive director's post guarantees control over NFA's non-taxable revenue collections, amounting between Shs 15 and 20 billion (from issuing permits for private tree-planting, ecotourism services and sale of forest products such as timber) annually.

It took the political intervention of President Museveni who directed in December 2011 that Michael Mugisa, a former Kabale district chairman, be appointed the new NFA boss.

After one-and-half years in office, Mugisa says he has steered the NFA boat out of danger by engaging all stakeholders and communities.

"Our image has improved because of increased transparency in all things we do," says Mugisa, stressing that NFA jobs have been advertised and activities such as marking forest borders are widely publicized.

In a bid to reduce encroachers

on forest reserves land, Mugisa explains that they have ensured communities and other stakeholders to participate in NFA programmes like tree-planting.

According to Mugisa, NFA has, for instance, given out five million tree seedlings in the last one year to encourage afforestation.

However, Mugisa notes that forests' protection was not given the due attention over the years and still remains one of NFA's main challenges. Mugisa points out that 30 per cent of forest reserves have been encroached on by either cultivators or animal herders.

Cutting of trees for the illicit timber trade, despite the prevailing government ban, has persisted.

In response, Mugisa says NFA has intensified enforcement measures by recruiting more staff (they recently recruited over sixty forest supervisors) to support the environmental police.

Mugisa says that as many as three hundred offenders in the last two months have been charged and prosecuted under the National Forestry and Tree-planting Act.

But some of the forest sector's stakeholders, particularly donor countries like Norway, have lukewarm reception towards the President's intervention.

In 2011, Norway withheld financial support towards the \$3.6 million jointly fund World Bank project that NFA supervises in efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

During Akankwasa's reign, the NFA board then used to draw money from the donor fund account for sitting allowances on daily basis, which aroused suspicion.

But Mugisa is optimistic that donor funding would return to the NFA fold soon.

"We need at least 80 billion shilling per year to effectively manage and protect the forests. Now that our house has been put in order we expect to get that kind of financing from outside," Mugisa states. However, one thing is clear. For Ugandans to benefit from the forest sector, its governance must improve tremendously.

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Nabongo disagrees, saying that you are most likely to find hungry families that do not grow sugarcane than in his own home.

On his six acres of land— four of which he rents from his neighbour— Nabongo has bought a motorcycle, built himself a permanent house and comfortably pays school fees of his children—thanks to sugarcane.

He says his fortunes changed the day he made a decision to engage in sugarcane growing in 2009. He is one of the over 10,000 out-growers currently attached to the nearby million tonne sugarcane-crashing Kakira factory.

The out-growers are divided into what the factory calls aided and unaided farmers. Aided farmers are those farmers with land but without or minimal means to grow sugarcane.

Whatever their name is, these farmers are part of the phenomenon that has taken root in the developing world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa called contract farming—where a buyer like Madhvani often makes an agreement with the farmer so that the buyer provides input and technical assistance on credit, while the farmer agrees to sell to the buyer and repay at harvest time.

In a paper presented at the African

Agricultural Market Programme in 2011 in Kigali, Rwanda on Contract farming in Africa, Nicholas Minot, a researcher at the US-based International Food Policy Research Institute argued that contract farming exploits small scale farmers because of the unequal relationship between farmers and large agri-business firms.

For instance, he said, some farmers lack liquidity or credit to purchase inputs there is often inadequate information about how revenue would be shared. On the other hand, poor infrastructure raises costs of inputs and lowers revenue from crop sales.

Minot further argued that besides contract farming excluding small farmers because buyers prefer to work with medium and large scale farmers, the additional income from contract farming creates inequality, friction within the community, and disputes within households.

Nabongo belongs to the category of unaided farmers who recoup more income from the sale of their cane when the crop matures in 18 months. However, it is often tricky for the other category, the aided farmers.

A tonne of sugarcane currently goes for Shs 74,000. Therefore an acre of

land yields 40 tonnes which fetches about Shs 3m within 18 months compared to coffee that takes two and half years and can fetch Shs 2.8m.

In the office of the Busoga Sugarcane Growers Association, point five written on the yellow manila paper of the association's strategies for the welfare of its members is on food security but there is no explanation of how the association achieves this. David Ojwang, the Chairman of Busoga Sugarcane Growers Association says farmers grow at least two acres of food crops alongside sugarcane.

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