



SAVE BUGOMA FOREST CAMPAIGN 2020

PROTECT UGANDAN CHIMPANZEES,
FOREST' LIFE MATTERS

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NEMA MUST BE HELD CULPABLE IN BUGOMA FOREST FAILINGS

Current and former National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) officials whose actions have caused biodiversity and social crises in the country due to the destruction of Bugoma forest must be investigated by parliament, the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC) says.

If found culpable, these officials must be penalised.

The SBFC is making the above call following the death of a forest elephant that was found in Bugoma forest on August 28, 2021. While investigations on the cause of death are still being undertaken by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the National Forestry Authority (NFA), the environmental and social crises occasioned by NEMA's reckless and illegal actions as regards Bugoma forest cannot be denied.

“Elephants are classified as [vulnerable](#) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN]. Every effort must therefore be made to conserve and protect them. In Uganda, UWA is working hard to protect elephants and put in place the [2016 to 2026 Elephant conservation action plan for Uganda](#),” Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the chairperson of the SBFC, says.

He adds, “Unfortunately, NEMA is actively working against UWA's efforts to conserve biodiversity. Well knowing that the elephant population in Uganda is low, and that Bugoma forest is part of the Murchison-Semliki conservation area that has over 49 species of concern such as elephants, chimpanzees, Nahan's Francolin and others, NEMA allowed Hoima Sugar to destroy 8,000 hectares of Bugoma forest.

This endangered biodiversity and we see elephants dying today. Communities have also reported increased conflicts between communities and chimpanzees since destruction of Bugoma forest by Hoima Sugar Ltd commenced. This has not only endangered community food security but the chimpanzees as well. NEMA must be held responsible for causing such a crisis.”

According to UWA, Uganda has a population of [5,564 elephants](#), up from 2,000 in the 1980s. Efforts by UWA have increased the elephant population. Majority of the elephants are found in Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls national parks. Forest elephants are found in Kibaale National Park as well as Budogo and Bugoma forests. Before 2016 however, it was not known that forest elephants existed in Bugoma forest. It is therefore unfortunate that shortly after discovery of the elephants' existence, NEMA allowed one of their key habitats to be destroyed.

“Well knowing the conservation importance of Bugoma forest, UWA and NFA objected to Bugoma forest being given away for sugarcane growing. Their objections were made in the comments that the entities submitted to NEMA before the authority approved Hoima Sugar Ltd’s Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report and issued the company with a certificate of approval to destroy Bugoma forest. NEMA ignored UWA and NFA’s protestations. Today, we see elephants dying,” Mr. Bashir Twesigye, a lawyer and member of the SBFC, says.

He adds, “NEMA violated environmental laws prior to issuing Hoima Sugar with the ESIA certificate of approval in August 2020. Despite the destruction of Bugoma being a controversial issue requiring public hearings per environmental laws, NEMA hid behind excuses such as COVID-19 and avoided organising public hearings. If public hearings had been held per Regulation 21 of the 1998 Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA] regulations, Ugandans would have told NEMA to boot Hoima Sugar’s sugarcane project and save Bugoma forest”.

Ms. Janepher Baitwamasa of the SBFC Bunyoro taskforce adds, “The ESIA that NEMA used to approve the sugarcane growing project in Bugoma forest is no good. Social conflicts between communities and Hoima Sugar have arisen as communities accuse the company of grabbing their land. Consequently, in August 2021, the Kikuube district security committee stopped Hoima Sugar Ltd’s activities for two weeks.

Moreover, a land bonanza in which rogue community leaders are illicitly selling some remaining parts of Bugoma forest land at three hundred thousand shillings [UGX 300,000/] has arisen. There have also been reports of the rights of Hoima Sugar Ltd workers being abused. The labourers work without safety gear and operate in deplorable conditions. The ESIA report that NEMA approved was shallow and did not address these challenges.”

Ms. Adah Mbabazi, a leader of the SBFC community taskforce says, “The people who allowed Hoima Sugar in our area have created for us big problems. Women used to access herbs and firewood from the forest but they can no longer do so. Hoima Sugar Ltd’s security, which includes UPDF, stops them. Elderly women are also being raped by unknown people from the areas surrounding Hoima Sugar’s operations. We are worse off since this project was approved and its absurd that NEMA approved the project without consulting us the leaders and our local people. They also ignored the views of our district leaders.”

CONCLUSION

To save Bugoma forest, the SBFC recommends the following:

- Parliament and police should investigate NEMA’s actions in the giveaway of Bugoma forest. The responsible individual current and former staff who allowed the destruction of Bugoma forest should be prosecuted. ***The SBFC is meeting the Speaker of Parliament on September 9, 2021 and will also make this recommendation during that meeting.***
- The ongoing destruction of Bugoma forest should be immediately stopped by the president.
- The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) should be directed to open up the Bugoma forest boundaries to ensure that no sugarcane growing is allowed in the forest. The boundaries should be opened by an independent body to avoid corruption by the ministry that issued illegal titles to Bunyoro Kitara Kingdom (BKK) and Hoima Sugar Ltd (HSL).
- UWA expressed interest in turning Bugoma forest into a national park to better conserve the forest. The entity should be supported to realise this vision.
- UWA identifies the goals of preventing encroachment on elephant ranges by 2022 and regulating developments in elephant range protected areas by 2021. However, it seems that

the entity has not been supported to stop or regulate developments in Bugoma forest. This wrong must be righted.





- In addition, during the ongoing cancellation of land titles issued in forests, MLHUD must cancel the titles issued to HSL and BKK. If all options fail to cancel the titles, government should compulsorily acquire the said land to save Bugoma forest.

ENDS

ABOUT THE SBFC

The SBFC is a coalition of civil society and private sector actors who are working together to protect Bugoma forest from land grabbing, oil and sugarcane threats.

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