

A PROCEEDINGS REPORT OF THE MEETING BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE SBFC TEAM



May 3rd, 2022

At the EU offices, Kampala

1. INTRODUCTION

Bugoma forest, located in Kikuube district in Bunyoro sub-region is being exterminated by Hoima Sugar Ltd facilitated by questionable actions of some government officials from Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), National Forestry Authority (NFA), the Judiciary, the Uganda People Defense Forces (UPDF), the Uganda Police Force (UPF) and others. Hoima Sugar Ltd is destroying Bugoma forest with impunity based on illegal land titles, ESIA certificates of approval, and others and protected by security forces of the government.

Since 2016, the Save Bugoma Forest Campaign (SBFC) has been engaging different stakeholders to stop threats to Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR) including the giveaway of 8,000 hectares of Freehold land title to Bunyoro Kingdom which was later leased to Hoima Sugar Ltd to grow sugarcane, the Freehold land title to MZ Agencies, corruption in the ministry of lands, human rights violations by the police against the members of SBFC and others.

Before the ESIA certificate was issued, however, AFIEGO and our SBFC partners held a meeting with the European Union (EU) head of delegation to Uganda, H.E. Attilio Pacifici, and his team. We discussed how the EU could support efforts to protect Bugoma forest.

And it is against this background that the SBFC team met with representatives of the unit for the environment and sustainable natural resources from the EU headquarters in Brussels. This was a validation meeting to update them on the current state of affairs in Bugoma forest and discuss ways how to strengthen the efforts to save Bugoma forest. The EU is preparing a document/programme that is going to inform their activities for the next five years in the area of forest governance in Uganda. This meeting attracted 10 participants including representatives from the EU, SBFC team, AFIEGO, and Friends of Zoka.

2. PRESENTATION FROM THE CHAIRPERSON SBFC

First and foremost, Mr. Dickens Kamugisha, the chairperson SBFC team appreciated the efforts of the EU ambassadors towards the efforts to save Bugoma forest and went ahead to give an update on the current status of Bugoma forest.

He then informed the meeting that about 41,000 hectares of Bugoma forest, located in Kikuube district are being exterminated by Hoima Sugar Ltd facilitated by commissions and omissions of several actors including the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), National Forestry Authority (NFA), the Judiciary, the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF), the Uganda Police Force (UPF), the National Physical Planning Board, Kikuube district physical planning committee and others.

He noted that Hoima Sugar Limited is destroying Bugoma forest with impunity based on illegal land titles and the Environment and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) certificates of approval. He further explained that Hoima sugar Ltd is violating the Kikuube district physical plan 2020-2040 and others. He said it is very unfortunate that the ongoing Hoima Sugar Ltd's illegal activities in Bugoma forest are being protected by UPDF and other government agencies.

Mr. Kamugisha also noted that the lives of the communities are in danger since Bugoma forest is their main critical biodiversity resource that enables the people in the area to get enough rainfall for agriculture which is a source of our food and income, local medicine and other environmental, social and economic values.

He also stated that over 350 families from their homes in the villages of Tripona/Nyabongo and Muhangazima. In addition, over 3,000 people were evicted from their farmlands in the villages including Rwembaho, Rwenkobe, Karokarungi A&B, Wairagaza, Nsozi, Kikora and others.

In conclusion, Mr. Kamugisha said that Uganda has got good laws but the implementation of these laws is a challenge. Therefore, the EU needs to engage the government to have laws like the land development systems used appropriately. He also pointed out the need for the EU to encourage the government to play its role in protecting these forests since the government is part of these commitments.

Thereafter, Ms. Diana Nabiruma mentioned the fact that water and biodiversity are essential for human survival. She further explained that Bugoma forest is home to Uganda's Manga-bay monkeys.

She informed the meeting of the importance of the forest in the drainage of Lake Albert which is one of the largest fishing grounds in Uganda holding about 43.3% of fish in Uganda.

Ms. Diana noted that the EU needs to engage the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS). JLOS is supported by the EU and unfortunately, there is a lack of a judicial system in place hence the delay in hearing critical environmental court cases. For example, the case filed by AFIEGO and other partners CSOs pertaining to Bugoma forest has dragged on for too long.

3. SUBMISSIONS FROM REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE EU

Mrs. Chantal Marijnissen, the EU head of the unit for Environment and sustainable natural resources at the EU headquarters in Brussels appreciated all present for their efforts towards the conservation of forests in Uganda.



From the left; Ms. Chantal, the EU representative and Mr. Benedict Ntale and Ms. Diana Nabiruma of the SBFC team.

She further explained that AFIEGO and Friends of Zoka were chosen for the validation meeting to provide information as regards forest governance in Uganda. The EU wanted to know the challenges, and what recommendations we need to address these challenges so that Ms. Chantal and her team can assess if the document is responsive to the challenges being faced in regard to forest governance in Uganda.

Ms. Chantal noted that they are interested in corridor forests and they will determine where the programme will be located after seeing the landscapes.

She then encouraged those present to continue to engage the local people, government, and local leaders to focus on sustainable forest management like the roles of forests in climate change, biodiversity, and others.



Representatives from the SBFC team and Ms. Jalia Kobusingye of the EU after the meeting

Ms. Chantal informed the meeting that their cooperation will respect human rights and she agreed that is important to work with the judiciary and promised to find a way how to re-enforce the Judiciary. Fortunately, the team is committed to forest governance.

Ms. Jalia briefly informed the meeting that in the next six months, they will come up with concrete actions to direct the programme and this will also involve political and policy dialogue.

She further informed the meeting that they came up with three blocks including the economic value of forests, conservation and restoration efforts, and governance (strengthening the capacity of digital organisations like land agreements, demarcations and open boundaries, and anti-trafficking of resources).

Thereafter, the meeting came to a close.

4. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

No	Name of participant	sex	Organization	Contact and Email
1.	Dickens Kamugisha	M	SBFC	0782407055
2.	Nadia Cannata	F	EU	
3.	Chantal Marijnissen	F	EU	
4.	Benedict Ntale	M	SBFC	
5.	Jalia Kobusingye	F	EU	
6.	Diana Nabiruma	F	SBFC	0782 280 073
7.	Amanzuru William Leslie	M	Friends of Zoka	
8.	Rachael Amongin	F	SBFC	0781 411 528
9.			EU	
10.			Friends of Zoka	

