



The Socio-Economic and Ecological Value of Butamira Forest Reserve to Uganda's Development Policies

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A. Introduction

Poverty in Uganda, and the various challenges associated with it, is principally a rural phenomenon. This calls for economic development strategies that target the improvement of livelihoods in rural communities. The goals of rural development programmes should therefore be to reduce poverty, provide employment, combat malnutrition and inequality, via the introduction of positive rural land-use strategies that recognise the prime importance of food production, but at the same time safeguard soil and areas of natural ecosystems (Hanks, 1984).

This policy brief analyses the permitted use of Butamira Forest Reserve by adjacent communities to illustrate a unique effort by the Government of Uganda to encourage the sustainable use of a renewable resource in the alleviation of rural poverty. It focuses on the socio-economic and ecological implications of degazetting Butamira Forest Reserve and their bearing on the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the Forestry Policy and the National Environment Management Policy.¹

It is argued that the benefits of retaining Butamira Forest Reserve are numerous and in line with the government's poverty eradication strategies and its primary natural resource policy², which advocate for sustainable social and economic development while maintaining or enhancing the environment.

A number of government policies and plans have identified forests on both private and government lands as a key resource for the subsistence and economic development of many rural livelihoods. Access to Butamira Forest Reserve by the Buyengo community has resulted in raised incomes for its residents and has led to the improvement of their quality of life.

This brief will reveal that the proposed degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve, which will involve the eviction of area residents from the Reserve and the destruction of their source of livelihood, particularly income and employment, will set back the Buyengo community to its former enduring poverty. Furthermore, it brings into question the commitment of government to implement its natural resource policies and poverty eradication programmes.

¹ A second policy brief written by the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment focuses on the legal aspects of the proposed degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve.

² The National Environment Management Policy for Uganda, 1994

B. Background

Butamira Forest Reserve is a Central Forest Reserve located in Buyengo sub-county, Jinja District. It basically comprises a *Eucalyptus* plantation with an approximate area of 5 sq. miles.

Its derivation is a natural forest that was the property of the Busoga Local Government, and which was gazetted as a Local Forest Reserve in 1930. In 1949, the Busoga Local Government leased the Reserve to Muljibhai Madhvani & Company Limited (MMCL) for 49 years. Under the lease, MMCL was to clear the natural forest in the Reserve and replant it with *Eucalyptus* trees at a rate of 400 acres each year for the first seven years (Forest Department, 1956). MMCL used the Reserve as a source of firewood for its sugar factory at Madhvani Sugar Works Limited (Kakira Sugar Works).

When local governments were abolished in 1966, all their assets were taken over by the central government and, therefore, Butamira Local Forest Reserve became part of the Central Forest Estate. However, the MMCL lease remained in effect after this change.

In 1972, after Idi Amin expelled Asians from Uganda, the Custodian Board took over the management of Kakira Sugar Works (KSW) and inherited the lease. This remained the case until 1985 when the Madhvani's returned to Uganda, repossessed Kakira Sugar Works, and continued to use the Reserve under the terms of the lease.

When KSW changed its primary source of energy to bagasse in 1995, use of the Reserve as a source of firewood for the factory became less important. It was at this point that KSW envisioned expanding its sugar cane estate via the degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve.

Therefore, when its lease expired in 1998, Kakira Sugar Works sought and was granted, under irregular circumstances, another 49-year permit that illegally endorsed the change of land use in the Reserve to general purposes. As a result of this and other irregularities in the Forest Department, the permit-issuing officer, The Commissioner of Forestry, was retired in public interest in accordance with the recommendations of the Ugandan Parliament Select Committee on Forestry (Parliament of Uganda, 2000). Furthermore, the permit issued in 1998 was revoked, but only after KSW had cleared over 700 hectares of the Reserve and extended its sugar cane estate.

In October 2000, the Government of Uganda through its Forest Department issued permits to 148 groups and 30 individuals from the Buyengo community to plant *Eucalyptus* trees as well as crops on approximately 700 ha of the

Reserve cleared by KSW. Plots managed by the permit holders range between 3.5, 7 and 10 ha. In order to ensure the reforestation of the Reserve and in keeping with the government's obligation to maintain a Permanent Forest Estate (PFE) in accordance with its Forestry Policy, the permit holders were required, *inter alia*, to plant trees before food and cash crops such as beans, soya and maize.

As of August 2001, the Buyengo community has established a tree nursery, planted *Eucalyptus* trees on approximately 500 ha of the Reserve and began selling tree seedlings and harvesting maize, beans and soya. Therefore, the Buyengo community is now engaged in commercial agriculture and improving its socio-economic status while, at the same time, maintaining a renewable resource and government's commitment to a PFE.

However, in spite of these achievements, government remains inclined to degazette Butamira Forest Reserve for the benefit of KSW and the expansion of its sugar estate, against the wishes of the Buyengo community and the Busoga Kingdom.

C. The Socio-Economic Value of Butamira Forest Reserve

The Buyengo community consists of 16 villages adjacent to the Reserve with a total population estimated at 8,000 people. Each of the 148 groups permitted to use the Reserve comprises 10 individuals responsible for families ranging from approximately 5 to 8 people.

Investigations carried out in the Buyengo community reveal that the socio-economic implications of degazetting Butamira Forest Reserve are large and diverse. In addition to its current permitted use, the Reserve has been the source of several products and activities for the impoverished residents of the community and beyond including fuelwood, building materials, water sources, hunting, fishing, traditional medicinal plants, and handicraft materials. Without taking into account all these products and activities, the true socio-economic value of the Reserve to the Buyengo community cannot be fully comprehended.

The Reserve has proven to be increasingly central to the prospects of improved livelihoods for the Buyengo community as an income-generating, recreational and subsistence resource. The following, therefore, is an indication of the past and present socio-economic condition of the Buyengo community and the prospects of improved livelihoods for its residents as a result of permitted use of the Reserve.

a) Population Growth and Land Scarcity

One of the conspicuous characteristics of the Buyengo community is its high population density, which has led to land scarcity. Interviews with residents of this community reveal that many households reside on an average plot size of 1,600 square feet.

Subsistence agriculture practiced on these plots barely supports the needs of these households. As a remedial measure, many of the residents of the community used to rent land from landlords in Bussedde, Buwenge and Buyengo sub-counties in order to meet their household requirements; a practice that entailed commuting daily for several miles.

Therefore, the decision by government to permit the Buyengo community to plant trees as well as cultivate food and cash crops in the Reserve has eased land pressures in Buyengo considerably and brought renewed hope of food security, improved incomes and employment to the villages adjacent to the Reserve.

b) Employment and Income Generation

Visits to the Buyengo community reveal an impoverished population that survives on extremely low incomes. Due to land scarcity, coffee wilt disease, low coffee prices and lack of extension services, most of the residents have resorted to looking for employment as casual labourers, barely earning US\$ 1,000 per day.

Access to the Reserve has increased employment opportunities since most residents of the Buyengo community now engage in small-scale commercial agriculture and tree planting. The employment opportunities and income generated from these activities has transformed the livelihoods of villagers living adjacent to the Reserve.

John Isabirye, 30 years, Butamira, Bubanda village

"I'm a father to seven children. I dropped out of school in Primary Four. Employment is scarce in this area and with my poor education, I've found it difficult to get a job. My father gave me a 40 sq. foot piece of land where I could only fit my house, leaving very little space for cultivation. I resorted to working as a casual labourer, which would earn me 1,000/= on average every five days and yet I regularly incurred debts of 2,000/= and above. I could not afford to pay graduated tax. When Madhvani destroyed part of the forest we got concerned. We then got an opportunity to plant trees and food crops on 3 hectares in the reserve. I am a member of Baatalanga group that consists of 8 women and two men. We have planted 6,500 seedlings. The earnings have changed my way of life. I have paid my graduated tax and have a steady source of income that I use to look after my family."

Residents involved in tree planting are able to earn income from selling their Eucalyptus tree seedlings. So far, two million seedlings have been planted by the permit holders, of which 1.2 million have been sold at US\$ 100 each to customers from as far as Jinja, Iganga, Mukono and Western Kenya. Therefore, in less than one year, the permit holders have earned US\$ 120 million from the selling of tree seedlings alone.

Noah Mugabi, 20 years, Butamira, Musisi village

“I am a student in Senior Two. I assist my father who is a permit holder. I also personally have 3 nursery beds of Eucalyptus, which contain approximately 2,500 seedlings each. I have sold 700 seedlings so far and earned 70,000/=. I used the money to buy clothes, chicken broilers and seven iron sheets. I intend to build a house from my earnings. I also earn up to 3,000/= per day assisting other permit holders, which allows me to purchase household items such as paraffin and salt.”

Furthermore, every acre planted with Eucalyptus trees can potentially earn the permit holders US\$ 5 million after 4 years. Residents are also able to earn income from the surplus food crops that they have grown in the Reserve. As a result of these new sources of income from the Reserve, permit holders are able to look after their daily household needs, pay school fees for their children, and afford medical care.

c) Nutrition

The ability of permit holders in the Buyengo community to grow food crops in the Reserve has greatly improved the quality of their nutrition. Residents that used to survive on one meal a day, consisting primarily of a sweet potato, now eat a healthy, balanced diet of maize meal, beans, groundnuts and vegetables. They can also afford to buy eggs and meat, which were previously rare luxuries.

Yafesi Mulondo, 62 years, Butamira

“We can now afford to buy meat and eggs for our families because of the money that we get from the tree seedlings.”

D. The Ecological Value of Butamira Forest Reserve

Environmental conservation and poverty alleviation are central to the ecological considerations of any development decision, particularly in rural areas. It is well acknowledged that environmental conservation and rural development are intricately linked. This is basically due to the fact that rural dwellers are largely dependent on the environment for their survival and the improvement of their livelihoods.

Butamira Forest Reserve primarily comprises a single, exotic species, *Eucalyptus spp*, but is an intricate ecosystem whose ecological value ranges from watershed protection to providing livelihood sustenance in the form of handicraft inputs for the Buyengo community. The Reserve provides a clear demonstration of a rural community sustainably using a renewable resource for the improvement of its livelihood while maintaining that resource and its ecological value.

In its efforts to alleviate poverty while maintaining environmental quality, the government should adhere to and consolidate the legal framework for sustainable land use and environmental conservation. The government should also encourage the efforts of local communities attempting to employ sustainable systems of land use based on the use and conservation of renewable resources. Ultimately, in order to be successful, any development effort must support the aspirations of local communities as well as follow government conservation and development objectives.

Ecologically sustainable development requires, firstly, meeting the basic needs of local communities, particularly the poorest; secondly, encouraging local community food security using local knowledge; and thirdly, taking into account the ecological limitations of local ecosystems (Hanks, 1984). None of these requirements will be met by the degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve.

a) Soil Protection

The living root system in Butamira Forest Reserve protects soil by reducing break-up of soil aggregates and hence erosion. Its tree biomass above ground reduces wind speeds and the possibility of wind erosion. It also reduces the rate of soil drying and improves infiltration, which reduces run off.

The decision to permit KSW to clear 700 ha of Butamira Forest Reserve using heavy machinery, which led to increased siltation of streams in the Reserve is evidence of the role played by the forest in soil protection. The use of rudimentary tools, such as those currently being employed by the Buyengo community to cultivate the 700 ha previously cleared for the sugar plantation, has shown much lower adverse impact to the soil.

b) Rainfall and Water Quality

Residents of Buyengo have observed a decrease in rainfall since 1998 after 700 ha of Butamira Forest Reserve were cleared to extend the sugar cane plantation. Local residents also believe that the increasingly erratic rainfall patterns over the same period are related to the felling of 700 ha of forest cover.

However, it is scientifically debatable whether the community's observations on rainfall can be linked to the loss of 700 ha of forest cover.

Siltation caused by poor riverbank and forest management is an issue that the President of Uganda has expressed concern about on several occasions. Unfortunately, water stream widths and depths on the 700 ha of cleared land in the Reserve have decreased considerably as a result of increased siltation. Since these streams flow into the Kyiko River, this may have reduced the volume of the river as well.

c) Biological Diversity

The area surrounding Butamira Forest Reserve is under subsistence and commercial agriculture and therefore offers little biological diversity. Although Butamira Forest Reserve is a plantation forest, its canopy and undergrowth are home to several species of plants, birds, mammals, reptiles and insects. Therefore, there is no doubt that the degazettement and subsequent conversion of the Reserve into a sugar plantation will result in a significant loss in the biological diversity of the Buyengo ecosystem.

d) Carbon Storage

Globally, forests hold about 75% of the carbon stored in vegetation, and their soils store about 70% of all soil carbon (Sawyer, 1993). Although carbon sequestration may not be a major quality of the Butamira Forest Reserve, its approximate area of 5 sq. miles and its status as the largest and only existing forest in the area makes it a significant carbon reservoir in Buyengo sub-county.

Additionally, the use of forest timber for construction purposes and electricity poles, as is often the case with Butamira Forest Reserve, allows carbon to be stored for considerably longer than sugar cane, which is regularly harvested and processed resulting in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Therefore, in its own small way, Butamira Forest Reserve contributes towards global efforts to mitigate climate change, including those to which Uganda is legally committed under international conventions.

e) Source of Livelihood

The importance and role of forests in rural development has become increasingly recognised over the last couple of decades. Homesteads in the Buyengo community exist on small plots of land that are increasingly unable to meet the nutritional and socio-economic demands of the families living on them. Butamira Forest Reserve satisfies essential community needs and activities such as fuelwood, building materials, water sources, hunting, fishing, traditional medicine, handicrafts, etc.

For example, due to its extensive sugar cane estate, Jinja District has a biomass energy deficit of 311,685 m³/year (Byarugaba, 2001). This deficit is being met through harvests from gazetted forest plantations such as Butamira and firewood illegally obtained from natural forests such as Mabira. Therefore, degazetting the Reserve in order to extend a private sugar cane plantation will have significant adverse effects on the remaining woodlands and natural forests in the district, which would be excessively exploited by local communities for fuelwood.

Additionally, vital non-timber forest resources used by the Buyengo community such as forest ponds and streams for fishing, small mammals for hunting, traditional medicinal plants, and plants used for handicrafts would be lost after degazettement. Already, siltation caused by the use of heavy machinery to clear 700 ha of the Reserve by KSW has destroyed one of the sources of fish for the Buyengo community. Another consequence of clearing 700 ha of the Reserve is that wild pigs, rats and monkeys that previously inhabited the cleared area search for food in the homestead gardens of the Buyengo community.

Furthermore, permitting the residents of Buyengo to engage in the sale of *Eucalyptus* seedlings and timber from the Reserve has significantly raised the prospects of improving their livelihoods. Therefore, as the sole remaining forest reserve in the area, Butamira Forest Reserve is a crucial nutritional, socio-economic and cultural resource for the Buyengo community.

f) Mitigating the Externalities of Sugar Cane Processing

Plantation sugar cane adjacent to Butamira Forest Reserve is processed into cane sugar at Kakira Sugar Works. Emissions from this process include particulate matter, combustion products, and volatile organic compounds (VOC). Combustion products include nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), and sulfur oxides (SO_x) (EPA, 1997).

In addition to these emissions, KSW releases effluent such as cane wash, cellulose matter, cane juice molasses waste, alcohol and sulfur into the Kyiko River without a wastewater discharge permit from the Directorate of Water Development. As a result of this effluent, Kyiko River is malodorous and has developed a dark brown color. Kyiko River is also devoid of living organisms up to 30 kilometers downstream of the effluent discharge point (Ministry of Natural Resources, 1994). Consequently, increasing sugar production by degazetting the reserve will concomitantly increase air and water pollution in the area.

Therefore, Butamira Forest Reserve, as the largest forest in the area, contributes to the sequestration of carbon emitted by KSW. Additionally, streams from Butamira Forest Reserve contribute to the volume of Kyiko River

and are a factor in the dilution of effluents from KSW before the river empties into River Nile. These streams are likely to dry up or considerably decrease in volume after degazettement and clearing of the forest cover.

E. The Implications of Degazettement on Government Policies.

One of the major responsibilities of any government is the creation of an enabling environment for economic development. However, the Government of Uganda tends to advocate for economic development independently of other policies that would ensure its sustainability. For example, the Government has generally failed to reconcile the vision for Uganda's forests within the context of its economic development efforts:

“A sufficiently forested, ecologically stable and economically prosperous Uganda.”

Recent events concerning the Butamira Forest Reserve reflect the inherent contradictions in the implementation of government policies on forestry, poverty alleviation, environment management and modernisation of agriculture. For example, the overall policy goal of the National Environment Management Policy of 1994 is:

“Sustainable social and economic development which maintains or enhances environmental quality and resource productivity on a long-term basis that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.”

The community in Butamira is already implementing the government plans and policies and is engaged in land-use practices that conserve and enhance land productivity in an environmentally sustainable manner. Unfortunately, the government is making attempts to compromise their efforts.

Government has often used the immediate monetary gain to the nation from development projects, in the form of taxes, as leverage over the current and future invaluable and inexhaustible benefits obtained through economic development via sustainable natural resource utilisation.

The communities adjacent to the Reserve have identified the constraints that contributed to their poverty prior to their grant of access to the Reserve. The constraints included:

- lack of access to the Reserve
- large families and scarcity of land
- illiteracy
- lack of opportunities for gainful employment (the limited alternatives for employment include casual labourers on the sugar cane plantations of outgrowers, or being a "slave" on the KSW sugar cane estate)
- absence of agricultural extension services
- food insecurity leading to poor diet and disease
- lack of accountability and transparency, both at local and central government levels

Government has developed various policies and plans (National Environment Management Policy, Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, Poverty Eradication Action Plan, and the Forestry Policy, 2001) that are geared towards the eradication of poverty, transforming subsistence farmers to commercial farmers and the sustainable utilisation of natural resources. However, it is unfortunate that their implementation remains a challenge as is reflected in the case of Butamira Forest Reserve.

a) Forestry Policy 2001

Since the colonial period, management and access to forest reserves has been to the exclusion of local communities. However, the Forests Act³ permitted Africans (read Ugandans) to take some forest produce free-of-charge for their personal use. However, in the case of Butamira, local communities that sought to gather firewood and medicinal herbs from the Reserve were denied access by KSW.

“If any of the KSW askaris found you in the Reserve, they would tie you up and beat you severely. If they found our women, they would rape them. So we also had to go with our women to the forest so as to protect them.” **S. Kigenyi, Butamira.**

The forestry sector has undergone changes with the approval of the Forestry Policy 2001, which advocates for the inclusion of the various stakeholders in the wise utilisation of the forest resources for economic development, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

One of the principles that guide the Policy, which is part and parcel of the government development priorities of poverty eradication and good governance, is the improvement of livelihoods. The Forestry Policy clearly advocates for the improvement of livelihoods in all its strategies for the development of the forest sector, so as to contribute to poverty eradication. It is unfortunate therefore, that Government plans to deny forest resource-dependent communities access

³ S.15 Forest Act

to Butamira, which is tantamount to abandoning these communities to perpetual poverty.

The Forestry Policy provides for the protection and sustainable utilisation of a Permanent Forest Estate⁴ (PFE) under Government trusteeship. This estate will be set aside permanently for the conservation of biodiversity, the protection of environmental services, and the sustainable production of domestic and commercial forest produce.⁵

Butamira Forest Reserve is part of the PFE, whose benefits set out in *Policy Statement 1* (Forestry on Government Land) have been identified and are being executed by the Buyengo community.

“We obtain firewood, handicraft-making materials, medicinal herbs, edible rats and fish from the forest, which supplement our diet and incomes. The forest brings us rain and has helped to keep wild animals, such as monkeys, away from our backyards and gardens. We also sell eucalyptus seedlings and have already harvested the bulk of our beans, and anticipate a great maize harvest.” **R. Nakato, Butamira.**

Under *Policy Statement 3* (Commercial Forest Plantations), the private sector’s role in developing and managing commercial forest plantations is recognised. This is attributed to the Government’s limited financial and human resources to engage in such activities.

Over the years, the Forest Department has had financial limitations in its efforts to engage in plantation forestry. However, in recent years it has received assistance from donors - for example, the NORAD-supported Peri-Urban Plantation Project. The Forest Department has also extended plantation forests through the granting of permits to the private sector. The major use of these plantations is as a source of poles and fuelwood. Therefore, the degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve could be environmentally harmful and an expensive undertaking for both Government and the private wood farmers, as was the experience with the degazettement of Namanve Forest Reserve.⁶

Government is expected to put in place regulatory mechanisms and play a supportive role in the development of commercial forest plantations.⁷ In the case of Butamira Forest Reserve, Government has recognised the role of the wood farmers and has regulated their operations in the Reserve through the permit system. Therefore, the proposed degazettement would be an action that backtracks on Government’s commitment to developing commercial forest

⁴ The Permanent Forest Estate is defined in the Forestry Policy 2001 as land set aside for forestry activities in perpetuity.

⁵ Policy Statement 1 on forestry on government land, p.15, Forestry Policy 2001

⁶ The degazettement of the Reserve in 1997 to develop an industrial estate led to the eviction of the wood farmers, whom the Government had to compensate to the tune of Shs 3 billion. To date, only one industry, Coca-Cola, has established a presence in Namanve.

⁷ Policy Statement 3 on commercial forest plantations, p.17, Forestry Policy 2001

plantations. Such contradictions are a reflection of Government's lack of commitment to develop the forest sector and its ignorance of the ability of local communities to sustainably use forests for the improvement of their livelihoods.

In essence, the proposed degazettement will result in a breach of the Forestry Policy 2001 and brings into question the commitment of Government to implement other related policies.

b) Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture

The Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) provides a framework for eradicating poverty through multi-sectoral interventions that enable people to improve their livelihoods in a sustainable manner. The PMA recognises and includes forestry as one of the main sectors that contribute to the livelihoods of poor people, along with agriculture, fisheries and livestock.

Agricultural encroachment is one of the major threats to the forest estate. More often, such encroachments are devoid of natural resource sustainable utilisation and involve the complete destruction of the natural resources⁸.

The mission of the PMA is "eradicating poverty by transforming subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture."⁹ The scarcity of land in Butamira had relegated the community to subsistence farming, which included "borrowing" land for this purpose away from their homesteads. Commercial agriculture in Buyengo sub-county is largely restricted to sugar cane growing by KSW or the few outgrowers that have land to spare for that purpose.

However, the interesting and encouraging phenomenon in Butamira Forest Reserve is that local communities have shifted from purely subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture after the issuance of permits by the Forest Department that allow the growing of trees and cultivation of crops in the Reserve. The residents of Buyengo in Butamira Forest Reserve provide a living example of perhaps the first attempt to implement the PMA. These residents have been able to strike a balance between security of their livelihoods and the sustainable utilisation of a forest and its resources. Therefore, degazettement of the Reserve and the cancellation of their permits would revert the Buyengo community to food insecurity, unemployment and paltry incomes.

⁸ For example, sugar cane growing dictates that land be cleared of all vegetation and, therefore, the issue of sustainable use of natural resources through sugar cane growing cannot arise.

⁹ Page vi, Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture: Eradicating Poverty in Uganda.

(i) *Employment*

The PMA recognises that the agricultural sector presents a great opportunity for poverty eradication because it employs 80% of Uganda's labour force. A conservative estimate of the number of people employed and benefiting from the permitted use of Butamira Forest Reserve for agricultural and forestry purposes is 12,000.¹⁰ This large number of gainfully employed people and their beneficiaries in the Buyengo community has transformed the socio-economic status of the community from one of unremitting poverty to that of greater prospects of improved incomes and employment. Residents of the Buyengo community are now able to provide basic needs for their families and voluntarily contribute to the tax base.

Simon Odera, 35 years, Butamira, Butamako village.

"I have two wives and 10 children. I migrated to Busia in search of employment and worked as a motor cycle (boda-boda) operator. The living conditions were not easy and I returned and worked as a casual labourer for the outgrowers in their sugarcane farms. The earnings were very low. When the Forest Department granted us a permit to plant trees, I got an opportunity to improve my standard of living. I am now a member of the Ndiboogeza group and we have a permit to plant trees on 3.5 hectares. We have sold 6,000 seedlings. I have personally earned 300,00 on my first sale, 150,000 on the next and recently 110,000. I have bought a piece of land of 1 hectare and planted sugarcane."

Yafesi Mulondo, 62 years, Butamira.

"I am a father to six children. I own two local breed cows, which provide a few litres for our own consumption. I was a casual labourer on the sugarcane plantations. I am now employed by the permit holders and earn a minimum of 2,000/- per day. I am happy and request that the permit system remain."

Haji Suleiman Kigenyi, 70 years, Butamira.

"I am a farmer and used to own 6 acres of land, but when my family expanded, I granted the five acres to my children. I live on 1 acre and used to grow coffee from which I earned my income. My coffee plantation was attacked by coffee wilt and was destroyed. I now hold a permit for 3.5 ha in the Reserve and I'm responsible for the planting of the seedlings in the nursery. I earn income from the sale of seedlings."

(ii) *Governance Constraints*

Implementation of the PMA is constrained by factors such as insecurity, poverty, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, and poor delivery of basic public services. Ultimately, all these constraints negatively impact the

¹⁰ Permit holders include 148 groups each with 10 household heads. Each household is conservatively estimated to have 5 – 8 individuals, which gives a total range of 7,400 – 11,840 people. There are 30 individual permit holders, each representing a household of 5 individuals, which gives a total of 150 people. Therefore, permit holders and their households total up to about 12,000 people.

productivity of rural farmers and the economy in general and, therefore, exacerbate poverty.

The PMA seeks to ensure maximal consultation and participation of farmers in decision making and monitoring geared towards poverty alleviation. The proposed degazettement of Butamira Forest Reserve for extension of the KSW sugar cane estate is a glaring example of the lack of transparency and consultation by Government, which has created insecurity and despair in the Buyengo community.

“We saw bulldozers clearing the forest and burning the tree stumps. We questioned what was happening only to be told that the land had been granted to Madhvani.” **J. Kadoko, Minister for Works in the Kyabazinga Government.**

“We thought Government was assisting us to solve our poverty problems, but it seems the government is taking away our forest. We can also be investors. We can grow trees and food and then sell them. It is from those sales that we shall buy sugar from Madhvani.” **S. Odera, Butamira, Butamako village.**

“We cannot be proud of being alive when we do not have land.” **S. Kigenyi, Butamira.**

(iii) Food Security

The scarcity of land coupled with subsistence farming methods has contributed to food insecurity in the Buyengo community. Respondents mentioned that they had one meal a day and that “sugar was like medicine; you could only afford to buy a quarter of a kilo when you get an uncommon visitor.”

Food security is central to the PMA and is inextricably linked to the alleviation of poverty. The Butamira permit holders have already harvested their first crop of beans and confirm that almost every household has a minimum of two bags of beans. They can afford to sell a portion of the bag and remain with a guaranteed source of food. Permitted use of the Reserve has also freed the limited arable land around their homesteads for vegetable growing, thereby ensuring that the community has a more balanced diet.

(iv) Gender

The PMA recognises the barriers women face in respect of their earnings, access to resources, and the existing power relations that may prohibit their participation and benefit. As a result, the PMA observes that the operationalisation of the PMA will require special considerations to gender issues.¹¹

¹¹ p.9 PMA

The permitted use of Butamira Forest Reserve has lifted access barriers faced by women in the Buyengo community and allowed them to be equal beneficiaries with their male counterparts. Permits holders include exclusively women groups and groups of mixed gender composed of an equal or majority number of women. Women and children have benefited through employment and are earning income that they use to sustain their families and improve their standard of living. Several women from the Buyengo community have expressed their new-found independence.

Miriam Nanyonga, 30 years, Butamira.

“We are able to look after our children and supplement our husbands earnings. Our children attend school and the elder ones who work on the tree farms earn a living too.”

Ruth Nakato, 37-years, Butamira

“Before, we started working in the forest I earned less than 5,000 a month and yet was always indebted because of lack of a steady source of income. My husband is a retired civil servant so I am the breadwinner. We got skills and the permits to plant the trees from the forest department. We formed a group of 10 women and were allocated one acre of land to plant trees. We planted our trees in October last year. The trees will take four years to be harvested as poles. Meanwhile, most women work on the farms as they watch their investment increasing in value day by day.

We now have land to grow food such as maize, beans and ground nuts, which has led to improved food security in our homes. I earn about Shs 80,000 a month through weeding, watering and planting trees for the other tree farmers. I can afford to pay fees for my children and look after the family.

We are doomed if the forest is taken away from us because we had turned to tree planting as the main source of survival. The wilt disease has affected the coffee, which would have bailed us out of this situation.”

The above excerpt reflects the change in quality of life of the women through the grant of access to the Reserve. It also highlights the fear and helplessness the community will face if the degazettement is carried out.

c) The National Environment Management Policy (NEMP)

This policy provides the framework for the sustainable utilisation and management of natural resources. It takes cognisance of factors like development pressures, poverty, and population pressures that contribute to environmental degradation.

NEMP seeks to enhance the quality of life of all people in Uganda and promote long-term, sustainable socio-economic development through sound environment and natural resource management and use. It reflects a deliberate Government strategy to improve the quality of lives through sound natural

resource utilisation as is currently being practised by the Buyengo community in the Reserve.

On the other hand, while large-scale sugar cane growing is one of the recognised revenue earners, its development at the continued expense of forest reserves is not compatible with sound environment management. Therefore, attempts to degazette the Reserve to pave way for sugar cane growing would amount to a breach of this policy.

Unsustainable socio-economic activities have resulted in the depletion of plant and animal life in Uganda. Conservation of biological diversity including the protection of habitats within and outside the protected area system is provided for in this policy.¹² The clearance of 700 ha of the Reserve by KSW resulted in the destruction of plant and animal habitats and the displacement of wild species. This also had a negative effect on the communities in close proximity of the Reserve who had their crops destroyed by the animals, which were seeking for alternative habitats. With such experiences in evidence, there is no doubt that the proposed degazettement will create further reduction in the biological diversity of Buyengo sub-county.

Water is recognised as a major factor in the socio-economic development of Uganda. NEMP advocates for the promotion of sustainable management and development of water resources in a co-ordinated and integrated manner so as to provide water of acceptable quality for all social and economic needs.¹³ The Kyiko River plays a major role in the lives of the residents of Buyengo sub-county and the Busoga region. The river is fed by streams from the Reserve and is used by local communities as a water source for their livestock, domestic activities, fishing and irrigation.

Unfortunately, KSW discharges its effluent into the river thus contaminating it and reducing its quality for the local communities that use it. This is in breach of NEMP,¹⁴ which advocates for the control of pollution of water, land and air from industrial emissions and discharges. The Policy requires that discharges of substances that can be harmful should be minimised or prevented where possible. However, KSW's compliance with this objective is yet to be effected.

Degazettement of the Reserve will lead to an increase in water and air pollution from the sugar factory. Furthermore, this will compromise the rights of access by local communities to clean water resources and the benefits derived therefrom.

¹² p.10, National Environment Management Policy, 1994.

¹³ p.12, National Environment Management Policy, 1994.

¹⁴ p.20, National Environment Management Policy, 1994.

d) Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)

Poverty eradication is a fundamental objective of Uganda's development strategy. The Government has resolved to reduce the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty from 44% in 1997 to below 10% by the year 2017. Through the PEAP, Government undertakes to “promote good governance and security, directly increase the ability of the poor to raise incomes”¹⁵ and “to directly increasing the quality of life of the poor.”¹⁶

Security and good governance are recognised as conditions of poverty eradication. The government is expected to strengthen the democratic process¹⁷ and promote accountability. However, it is unfortunate that the democratic process, which includes public participation in decision making has been ignored in the initial efforts to degazette Butamira Forest Reserve. The Government has shown determination in ensuring that the Buyengo community remains ignorant of decisions concerning the fate of the Reserve.

Under *Goal 3* of PEAP, the Government recognises that the maximisation of economic growth in Uganda requires the participation of the poor. Government is, therefore, under an obligation to ensure access to productive assets that include land and make certain that the natural resource base can continue to support agricultural production.

The Government has made attempts to implement this goal through offering the Buyengo community access to the Reserve via permits. This is a positive step towards solving the problem of land scarcity in the area. However, it is unfortunate that, at the same time, the Government is attempting to withdraw the community's access to the land.

The Government is also expected under *Goal 3* to ensure that the natural resource base can continue to support agricultural production. Clearing the Reserve of forest cover and changing its land use after degazettement will contradict this goal. Expanding the KSW sugar estate requires the complete destruction and removal of forests. In contrast, the Buyengo community is engaged in the sustainable use of a renewable resource and is currently restoring 700 ha of forest cover that was destroyed by KSW.

The PEAP recognises that people's ability to accumulate assets and generate income in rural areas depends on access to land.¹⁸ The excerpt below clearly reflects the transformation that has been experienced by the Buyengo community in this regard.

¹⁵ Pillar 3, Revised Volume I of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan - PEAP. Final Draft. Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development, July 2000.

¹⁶ Pillar 4, PEAP

¹⁷ p.66, PEAP

¹⁸ p.51, PEAP

Dasan Luyita, 37 years, Butamira, Bukoloboza village

“I was previously employed as a casual labourer engaged in sugarcane extraction and cultivation. The earnings were very low. *Because of the scarcity of land, I reside on land, which measures 200 square feet.* I am now a tree farmer and have already benefited from a permit I hold in the Busegula Forest Reserve where I reaped enormous benefits from the maize, soybean and beans I harvested and sold, which has enabled me to build a house. I am a permit holder in Butamira Forest Reserve and manage 5 hectares personally. I have 9 nursery beds and have planted 5,000 trees so far. I have not yet made any sales because this is the first season, but I know I will have big harvests. My life has changed and I have an assured income and source of food, which I use to maintain my family.”

The Butamira community has taken the opportunity availed by Government permits to use the Reserve to raise their incomes and increase their quality of life. They hold five-year permits and have embarked on alleviating their poverty, however, they are insecure and under the threat of eviction because of Government efforts to degazette the Reserve. There is need for Government to consider the negative effect the degazettement will have on the policies that advocate for poverty eradication and natural resource conservation. There is a need to balance development needs without compromising the benefits future generations will derive from the natural resource base.

F. Conclusion

This policy brief accentuates the delicate balance that exists between economic development and environmental conservation. As is often the case, economic development efforts occur at the expense of environmental quality. Occasions in which a community experiences socio-economic progress while maintaining or enhancing environmental quality are extremely few and far in between. This is why it is important to identify such occasions when they become apparent and attempt to replicate and expand them where possible.

The Buyengo community’s permitted use of Butamira Forest Reserve is a clear example of an occasion in which a balance has been reached between the socio-economic progress of a community and the maintenance of environmental quality. The progress registered by the Buyengo community through the permitted use of the Reserve is also a clear example of Government’s current efforts to go beyond the attainment of impressive national economic growth rates by achieving socio-economic transformation in rural areas.

Therefore, the Government should make every effort to preserve one of the first cogent examples of the combined success of NEMP, PEAP, the PMA and the

Forestry Policy. It should also strive to replicate this success in other rural communities.

Whereas the value of KSW to Uganda's economy (particularly in the form of taxes and employment) is important to acknowledge, the externalities associated with the establishment of large sugarcane plantations as well as the processing of cane sugar should be factored in this value. Therefore, the net value of KSW to the Ugandan economy may be much lower than is currently revealed.

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