

PIAN UPE WILDLIFE RESERVE

Phase: During/Post-violation

Location

The Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve is located in the northeastern part of Uganda, in Nakapiripit, and can be accessed easily by road from Kampala. The journey from Kampala takes about 8½ hours, about 2½ hours from Mbale, and 6 hours from Pian Upe to Kidepo Valley National Park.

In 1964, this area was extended northward and it was named Pian Upe Game Reserve. This remarkable game reserve is composed of hot springs and it is cited as one of the sights capable of generating geothermal energy, along with mercury wells at Mount Kadam. This tremendous wildlife reserve derived its name from the Karamojong local dialect which denotes “friendly enemy.”¹

Overview/Context

The reserve is covered by wooded grassland and is home to two pastoralist tribes from whom it gets its name: the Pian, being part of a sub group of the Karamojong, and the Upe, being a Kalenjin-speaking people, more widely known as the Pakot within Kenya and Uganda.²

About 600 families have been evicted from Pian Upe Game Reserve in Amudat district, where they settled eight years ago. The families comprised of mainly Pokot agro-pastoralists were evicted by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).

The pastoralists are accused of degrading the reserve and increasing pressure on the environment through high concentration of illegal human activities. Uganda wildlife authority says such activities endanger the wildlife ecosystem.

Pokot tribesmen were first evicted from the area when the conflicts in Karamoja heightened in the early 1980s. Many fled to Kenya, but returned to their cradle land with the pacification of Karamoja. The 4,000-strong Pokot returnee community was instructed in 2015 not to carry on with cultivation and building new huts in the Reserve, under threat of eviction. Steven Nsubuga Bewaayo, the Resident District Commissioner of Amudat said that the wildlife staff have burnt some of the houses in the Reserve, destroyed food granaries and chased children from a school being constructed by the Save the Children under the Alternative Basic Education Programme.³ However, a *Uganda Radio Network* reporter⁴ in Moroto wrote that hundreds of them have resisted the directive, an issue that may cause a stand-off between the community and UWA.⁵

¹ “Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve,” *Uganda Parks*, undated, at: <https://www.ugandaparks.com/wildlife-reserves/pian-upe-wildlife-reserve/>.

² “Pian Upe Game Reserve,” *Insidew Kidepo Valey National Park* (2019), at: <https://www.insidekidepovaleynationalpark.com/pian-upe-game-reserve.html>.

³ “Locals thrown out of game reserve,” *Monitor* (19 July 2014), at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Locals-thrown-out-of-game-reserve/688334-2389468-view-printVersion-lc1yafz/index.html>.

⁴ Joseph Eigu Onyango, “UWA displaces 500 in Katakwi,” *Monitor* (1 August 2016), at: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/UWA-displaces-500-in-Katakwi/688334-3324808-7t3h4ez/index.html>.

⁵ Olandason Wanyama, “Returnee Pastoralists Evicted from Pian Upe Reserve,” *Monitor* (24 April 2015), at: <https://ugandaradionetwork.com/story/returnee-pastoralists-evicted-from-pian-upe-reserve>.

Encroachment on Conservation Areas

A study conducted by Uganda Human Rights Commission revealed cases of encroachment by the local communities on protected areas as one of the forms of land disputes. These were mainly noted in Karamoja, Bunyoro and Kayunga Districts affecting either the NFA or UWA. Cases of encroachment on a forest reserve were reported also in Tepeth County, Moroto District. The National Forestry Authority (NFA) claimed that the forest reserve within Tepeth County covering Mount Moroto, which was gazetted way back in 1948, had been encroached on by the natives. The community, on the other hand, asserted that the area in dispute was their ancestral land on which they were born and have known as their only home. The research revealed a rare scenario in Tapach Sub-County, Moroto District where a community was resisting the cutting of trees by the NFA in a protected area; a forest reserve in Kilipas that was reportedly planted by the former forest department during the colonial times.

The community argued that cutting the forest would distort their rain pattern, and they insisted that NFA had to plant new trees before cutting down the forest. The NFA justified their move to cut the trees, which they noted had become old and needed replacement.

In Nabwal and Nakayot Parishes of Iriir Sub County, Napak District, the Commission learned that disputes arising from encroachment on the Pian Upe Game Reserve had affected the enjoyment of social services offered by the district local government. The respondents in these two areas reported that, whenever the local authorities drilled a borehole or constructed a school, they would be destroyed by officials from UWA, claiming that they were in a game reserve. One respondent explained this:

“After disarmament, we wanted to settle down and engage in crop cultivation. We first settled at a place called Napuwa and Kolinyang then we moved to the current place when we found it more productive than where we were settled before.”

In Natirai Parish, Lolachat Sub-County in Nakapiripirit District, the locals claimed that UWA had extended its borders from Lokidotoro to their current settlement. One focus group discussion participant stated:

“We just realized that the authority had erected mark stones without any notice. If one is found digging within the area with mark stones, they are beaten and the farming tools are confiscated. Even the borehole that was sunk by Nakapiripirit local government was dismantled by the game ranger.”

In Amaler village, Apeitolim Parish, Lokopo Sub-County, Napak District, the community was living under a continuous threat of eviction by UWA, which claimed the people had settled in the protected areas. In Lomoruchubae village, Lolet Parish, Lorengechora Sub County in Napak District, 78 households had allegedly been evicted by UWA at gun point in 2016 and 800 huts destroyed.

The Commission noted that one of the biggest challenges was that most government owned land was not surveyed and this was making it susceptible to encroachment by local communities. This was also the case with Amoruongora primary school in Ngariam Sub County and the Asuret forest reserve in Omodoi Sub County in Katakwi District.

The Commission noted that, while the agencies concerned with conservation were rightfully exercising their mandate, the local communities in the districts sampled felt that they were being unfairly stopped from using their ancestral land. Coincidentally, for the case of Karamoja region, some of the land under contention was the most fertile in the region. This was affecting the livelihoods of some local communities who claim customary attachment to the said land.

Government Policy on Gazetting Conservation Areas

Some government policies, though well intentioned and backed by the law, were found to be detrimental to people's access to land. In Karamoja region for example, most of the disputes were attributed to the government policy of designating most of the fertile lands in the regions as game reserves, forest reserves or prison farms. Most respondents were of the view that government was giving more priority to the animals, without due consideration to the needs of the humans. One of the key informants interviewed in Moroto District explained:

"In Karamoja about 46 per cent of the land is gazetted as wildlife conservation areas. Coincidentally, these are the most fertile areas in the region. With the prevailing security situation, most people are moving to protected areas for cultivation hence leading to the conflicts. There is a lack of understanding of the way of life and source of livelihood for communities."

In Angisa parish, Magoro Sub County in Katakwi District, the respondents estimated that by 2016, about 57 families had been evicted from the 300 square kilometre piece of land located on Pian-Upe Game Reserve, along the borders of Karamoja and Teso. UWA insisted that, in 1939, when the reserve was demarcated, there were no people settled in the area, but the residents claim they inherited the said land from their ancestors.

Specific Women Affected

Women's Values at Stake

Remedy

Livelihood Restoration Strategy

Uganda Wildlife Authority needs to consider a peaceful coexistence of the community and the wild life. Since the community claims the reserve is the source of their livelihoods where they conduct farming, alternative income generating activities should be introduced to the community apart from farming.

Cash Compensation

Since UWA has interests in the land that the community claim was settled by their ancestors, there is need for compensation for the community to look for alternative land to settle in.

Relocation

UWA should acquire land somewhere, conduct a social impact assessment and relocate the community in Pian Upe.