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BY GEOFREY ACHORA . PAKWACH (</NEWS-A-ANALYSIS/PAKWACH>) . 29 JULY 2021

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District leaders and Paten community members during a recent meeting in Wadelai. PHOTO BY GEOFFREY ACHORA.

PAKWACH. A land conflict between the Paten clan and Pakwach district local government put the completion of Wadelai irrigation scheme completion and handover to the government under threat.

The district is seeking for an extension of 365 hectares of land for the irrigation project after observing that the initial part of 1000 hectares that the project required is occupied by Ragem government prison farm.

As an alternative, the district identified Adiri community land near the established scheme that the clan members are reluctant to offer on suspicion that the government intends to grab the community land.

The clan and community members argue that the land in question is an identity of the entire Paten clan members from which they derive their livelihood from by grazing animals, laying bricks and excavating sand for building houses from.

In the several unfruitful dialogue meetings with the community in Wadelai, majority of the clan members have distanced themselves from a list containing forty-seven members purporting to have consented to the giveaway to the government to fulfil the extension project.

Mr Santonino Daudi Onen, the traditional chief of the Paten community, disowned the fake list and the authenticity of the clan stamp used.

He said the community would be willing to offer land for the expansion of the irrigation but want a clear mode of compensation and the time period for the land usage clearly defined.

"As a clan head, the land is our cultural heritage and I'm holding it in trust of the Paten community, what the community want is let there be clear agreement for compensations where the canal would be constructed "

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"The stamp used in that fake list of names was stolen by one of my sons while I was taken to hospital," he added.

The rift has affected the time scheduled for completion of the work whose two-year contract expires September 2021.

Ms Bernadette Awori, the Wadelai irrigation scheme focal person, regretted the action of the community.

She said the project is set to benefit an estimated 3000 farmers but believes that someone is instigating the community to sabotage the huge government investment for the people.

"We are not grabbing land, the guideline is very clear, ownership of the land remains in the hand of the community and land would be hired from them for farming and the money goes directly to their group account", she said.

The work progress stands at 75 per cent, the district intends to seek for an extension period of the irrigation work construction from the ministry of water and environment.

The community has however threatened to sue the district on claims that they are being threatened and intimidated. They said some district officials have openly stated that the project will continue whether they consent or not on the disputed land.

The Pakwach Resident District Commissioner Mr Swaib Toko said "they delayed to sue us, we are waiting for the notice, we have a list of those giving the government a go ahead with the work".

Wadelai irrigation scheme located 46km from Pakwach district headquarters is aimed at contributing to poverty eradication and economic growth in Uganda through enhanced productivity and commercialisation of agriculture and is funded by Africa development bank.

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