



Business

Markets

World

Politics

Tech

Commentary

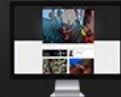
Breakingviews

Money

Life


REUTERS THE WIDER IMAGE

Photojournalism reimagined for every screen

[Explore Stories](#)


World | Sun Jun 19, 2016 9:08pm EDT

Related: WORLD

'All we ask is for is our land back': Uganda's Bugala Island farmers

BY [EVELYN LIRRI](#)

BUGALA ISLAND, Uganda (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Mariam Nakakeeto listened quietly to the grievances of fellow farmers gathered outside the grounds of a local church on Bugala Island, by the shores of Lake Victoria.

Nakakeeto, 35, is one of more than 100 farmers who say they were left landless in 2011 when Ugandan palm oil company Bidco Africa cleared their fields to make way for commercial palm oil agriculture.

"I lost 15 acres (six hectares). They just came and started clearing the land without our permission," said Nakakeeto, a mother of six.

"We were told the government had sold the land but we have lived here for two decades. We can't just lose our land like this," she added.

Farmers on Bugula Island, the second largest in Lake Victoria, are now locked in a legal battle with Bidco, which says it has not been involved in any land transactions.

"The Ugandan government was solely responsible for acquiring the land for the project," a company spokesperson told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"This was with the full involvement of all stakeholders and on a willing-buyer, willing-seller basis."

The farmers' case is one of many conflicts over land in the East African country, which lacks a nationwide tenure system, making it difficult to prove ownership.

Many people live and work on land for generations but without official titles or documentation they cannot prove tenure.

ADDRESSING POVERTY

The decade-old Kalangala oil palm project is a public-private partnership set up to address high poverty levels in the area and only a small area of land is disputed, the government said.

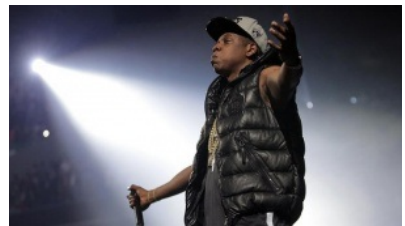
Under the deal, the government purchased 8,500 hectares (21,000 acres) of land, mostly from local landlords in the area, as its contribution to the partnership.

The Ministry of Agriculture said local communities were benefiting from the project, with 4,700 hectares of the plantation currently held by smallholder contract farmers.

"Out of the 8,500 hectares acquired for the project since 2000, only about 25 hectares...was ever in dispute and it remains a matter between tenants and the private landowner," the ministry said in statement.

"A total of 1,700 households are involved as our growers and they have

BREAKINGVIEWS



[Apple skips a few beats in streaming battle](#)

[Viewsroom: The art of sweet deals](#)

PICTURES OF THE MONTH



[SLIDESHOW](#)

INSIDE FALLUJA AFTER ISLAMIC STATE



[SLIDESHOW](#)

tremendously benefited from the project," the ministry said.

Farmer Nakakeeto used to grow a variety of crops before 2011, including coffee, avocados, bananas and cassava. Coffee was her main source of income, earning her 2 million Ugandan shillings (\$595) every season.

Now, with no land to cultivate, she said survival is a daily struggle.

"Without your own land, what more can you do? You find yourself working in other people's fields where you're paid 3,000 Ugandan shillings or less, depending on how much work you've done," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

COURT BATTLE

John Muyisa, 54, said he too lost his livelihood when 44 acres of farmland were taken in 2011.

"We had already planted crops on the land. Everything was destroyed without warning or compensation," said Muyisa, adding that he had lived on the land for over 30 years.

"Some of my children cannot go to school now because I cannot afford the high university fee," he added.

In 2015, Muyisa sued Bidco and his former landlord, Sylvia Nakato Sempa, in an attempt to retrieve his land and win compensation for lost income during the period that his fields were used by the company.

Although he did not hold any legal deeds to the land, Muyisa said he is the lawful owner and longterm occupant and therefore deserves the right to remain on the land.

Horatius Sempa, a spokesman for the landlord, said all squatters on the land under contention had been compensated before it was cleared to make way for the commercial palm production of palm oil, which is primarily used for cooking, cosmetics and producing biofuels.

"We valued the land and paid everyone who was on it but others like Muyisa wanted to be paid more. The matter is now before the courts, let's wait for the ruling," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview.

COMPENSATION DISPUTE

Land legislation enacted in 2010 stipulates that a person earns squatter's rights on land if they have occupied it for 10 years or more.

If a landlord comes to reclaim the land, the squatter occupants must be compensated at the current value of the land before eviction.

David Kureeba from Friends of the Earth Uganda, a charity supporting the smallholders' legal case, said affected farmers should not only have been consulted but also offered first priority to buy their fields before they were sold to Bidco.

"Because they're poor, the farmers' interests were not considered," Kureeba said. "Many were given as little as 100,000 Ugandan shillings. Would anyone call that compensation?"

Kalangala District Chairman Willy Lugolooobi said most of the disgruntled farmers seeking a return of their land sold it willingly.

"Because they sold it cheaply at the time, they want to be given back the land," he said. "But they signed documents stating they had willingly sold the land. It will now be hard to justify even in courts of law."

Lugolooobi said the project has benefited farmers and helped boost development in the district.

TRENDING ON REUTERS



Patents & Entrepreneurial

Universities

Measuring and evaluating academic innovation

- > Demonstrating Impact to Funders
- > Understanding your University's Rankings
- > Highly Cited Researchers: Mazen Omar Hasna

Sponsored Financial Content

Wie Deutschland sich arm spart! Das machen wir falsch. *Scalable Capital*

Why is there a rising popularity of Smart Beta strategies? *SSGA*

Trading Strategien kennenlernen. Verluste können Einlage übersteigen *IG*

Automation threatens India's IT services model *Financial Times*

Essential Guide to FOREX Trading - Free 5 page guide *Guardian Stockbrokers*

"Its an economic activity that every farmer wants to be part of, especially if they see how much others are earning from it," he said.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Desire Nsamba Kiggundu, 43, another farmer said that after he lost 13 acres, he decided to purchase a plot in another area where he is cultivating palm oil on contract.

"I did so to be able to make a living otherwise life would be hard. But I am still hoping that I can get back my land so I can expand the plantation," said Kiggundu.

He harvests up to two tonnes (2,000 kg) of palm oil every season and sells it to Bidco at 400 Ugandan shillings per kilogram.

Kiggundu said while the project is benefiting some farmers, many still have to bear the high costs of fertilizers and seedlings.

The lack of an alternative market to sell the palm oil poses another challenge to farmers.

"At the moment we only sell to Bidco but the prices are so low. We can't make good money from it," he said.

For small-hold farmers like Sam Mutawunga, making a little extra money - over and above that made by selling raw produce to Bidco - has proved difficult.

He now extracts oil from some of the fruit himself, allowing him in turn to sell it to local residents to earn an extra income. He sells a liter of his cooking oil for 4,000 Ugandan shillings.

"There's no difference between the oil I make and that which Bidco produces. It is clean oil and the residents like it," said Mutawunga.


The farmers petitioning Bidco said they are determined to get their land back - and Muyisa remains hopeful that the court will soon rule in their favor.

"All we are asking for is to be given back our land. We are not asking for money," he said.

(\$1 = 3,360.0000 Ugandan shillings)

(Reporting by Evelyn Lirri; Additional reporting by Katy Migiro. Editing by Paola Totaro and Astrid Zweynert.; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, which covers humanitarian news, women's rights, trafficking, property rights and climate change. Visit news.trust.org to see more stories)

From The Web

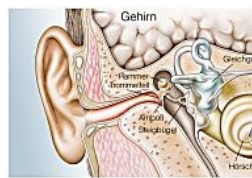
Sponsored Links by Taboola 



**Hausnotruf - Dank
Förderung ab 0,00€ im**
pfllege.de



**Jetzt sichern: Erste
offizielle 10-Euro-Münze**
MDM



**Forget 'Smart Drugs' -
this is the right method to**
NeuroNation



**Find Out Why Techies Love
This App. Friendly**



**Are you a strategic
thinker? Test your skills**



**Spiel mit Suchtfaktor:
Entdecke die neuesten**

More From Reuters

- **Bank of Israel buying 'hundreds of millions' of dollars: sources** | 4 Jul
- **China criticizes Japan over 'dangerous' jet scramble** | 4 Jul
- **A Brexit warning from Switzerland: beware votes on free movement** | 1 Jul
- **France threatens to stop applying EU law on seconded workers** | 3 Jul
- **Putin hints Russia will react if Finland joins NATO** | 1 Jul

Sponsored Financial Content (?)

- **Why is there a rising popularity of Smart Beta strategies?** SSGA
- **Automation threatens India's IT services model** Financial Times
- **Trading Strategien kennenlernen. Verluste können Einlage übersteigen** IG
- **Day Trading: 15 Secrets to Success - Capital at risk** Guardian Stockbrokers
- **Asia300 - News and Analysis On Listed Hong Kong Companies** Nikkei Asian Review

Sponsored Topics

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. Autos billig mieten | ▶ | 5. Günstige Auto |
| 2. Die sparsamsten Autos | ▶ | 6. Kostenlose Ge |
| 3. Die besten Investitionsideen | ▶ | 7. Billige Autos O |
| 4. Der niedrigste Hypothekenzinsen | ▶ | 8. Aktuelle-Hypot |

Follow Reuters:      

Subscribe: [Feeds](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Apps](#)

[Reuters News Agency](#) | [Brand Attribution Guidelines](#) | [Delivery Options](#)

Reuters is the news and media division of [Thomson Reuters](#). Thomson Reuters is the world's largest international multimedia news agency, providing investing news, world news, business news, technology news, headline news, small business news, news alerts, personal finance, stock market, and mutual funds information available on Reuters.com, video, mobile, and interactive television platforms. Learn more about Thomson Reuters products:

EIKON

Information, analytics and exclusive news on financial markets - delivered in an intuitive desktop and mobile interface

ELEKTRON

Everything you need to empower your workflow and enhance your enterprise data management

WORLD-CHECK

Screen for heightened risk in individual and entities globally to help uncover hidden risks in business relationships and human networks

WESTLAW

The most comprehensive solution to manage all your complex and ever-expanding tax and compliance needs

ONESOURCE

Information, analytics and exclusive news on financial markets - delivered in an intuitive desktop and mobile interface

CHECKPOINT

The industry leader for online information for tax, accounting and finance professionals

All quotes delayed a minimum of 15 minutes. [See here for a complete list](#) of exchanges and delays.

© 2016 Reuters. All Rights Reserved. [Site Feedback](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Advertising Guidelines](#) | [AdChoices](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)