



June 5, 2024

**COMMUNIQUE CALLING ON NEMA TO ENSURE THAT HOIMA SUGAR LTD RESTORES AND STOPS DESTROYING BUGOMA FOREST**

**Parliament and development partners should withhold funding to NEMA until the Bugoma forest restoration processes start.**

1. We, youth and women from 34 villages around Bugoma Central Forest Reserve (CFR), congratulate the Government of Uganda (GoU), on joining the rest of the world today to celebrate World Environment Day.
2. The day is being celebrated under the theme, *Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience*. The theme is close to our hearts because Hoima Sugar Ltd and other parties started destroying Bugoma forest in 2021.
3. The forest is dear to us because as host communities, we used to enjoy benefits such as rainfall and good weather as well as access to clean water, herbs and fertile soils, thanks to the forest. We also engaged in beekeeping, and were excited by the possibility of jobs being created from Bugoma forest tourism opportunities such as chimpanzee trekking, bird watching, forest walks and others.
4. Unfortunately, in August 2020, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) approved the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report for Hoima Sugar Ltd's (HSL) Kyangwali Mixed Land Use project.
5. Through the approval, NEMA allowed HSL to grow sugarcane and set up an urban centre among other degrading activities in a forest that we hold near and dear to our hearts. We were saddened by these events and since then, we have engaged in efforts including monitoring the forest, engaging our local leaders, using the media and petitioning the president among others to stop the destruction of our forest.
6. We have also engaged the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) starting in 2021 to open the Bugoma forest boundaries to stop HSL's encroachment on the forest.

7. We were happy that after our engagements, the MLHUD commenced on the Bugoma forest boundary opening processes in November 2021. We raised an alarm when the ministry failed to involve us in the boundary opening exercise and we are happy that when the boundary re-opening processes commenced again in February 2022, we were invited to a stakeholder consultation exercise in Kikuube district.
8. Todate however, the MLHUD is yet to publicly share the results of the boundary opening exercise. As the ministry delays, HSL continues to destroy the forest with devastating effects being experienced by women, children and others. First, while we used to enjoy mild weather (not a lot of sunshine) and good rains, we no longer enjoy these. We have been informed that our micro-weather has changed due to Bugoma forest being destroyed.
9. Women and girls also used to fetch clean water from rivers such as Hohwa that are from Bugoma forest. The water in the river became dirty since HSL started destroying the forest.
10. Moreover, a lot of illegal loggers, charcoal burners and others migrated to our villages and these have increased insecurity in the area and sexual based violence against women. Some elderly women have been raped while young girls engage in early relationships. The above-mentioned workers also don't have toilets and have created poor sanitation issues, which affect children and women.
11. We were happy when amidst the above, NEMA ordered HSL to restore Bugoma forest in September 2022. The order came after NEMA conducted investigations and discovered that HSL had destroyed areas such as the natural forested area and ecotourism site contrary to conditions that NEMA gave to HSL in the company's ESIA certificate of approval. HSL was supposed to submit a restoration plan to NEMA in 2022 after which the company would commence on restoring the forest.
12. Todate, the forest has not been restored and emboldened by NEMA's inaction, as well as the MLHUD's failure to disclose the Bugoma forest boundary opening report, people are engaged in illegal logging, charcoal burning and agricultural activities in the forest.
13. As the world celebrates World Environment Day therefore, we, women and youth that live near Bugoma forest, are calling on NEMA to

publicly disclose HSL's restoration plan for Bugoma forest. NEMA must also ensure that the restoration plan is effected immediately.

14. Further, we are calling on the MLHUD to publicly share the boundary reopening report for Bugoma forest. The report must ensure that land grabbers such as HSL are ejected from the forest.
15. We are also calling upon the Government of Uganda (GoU) to ensure that they use some of the funds allocated under the European Union-GoU Forest Partnership to ensure that Bugoma forest is protected for women, children and others' benefit.
16. Finally, should NEMA fail to ensure that Bugoma forest is restored, parliament and development partners should withhold funding from the agency until the restoration processes start. Financiers should also desist from providing finances for HSL, should the company continue to destroy Bugoma forest.

**Signed by:**

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