

Key issues limiting sustainable management of central forest reserves in Uganda; A case of Zoka and Agoro-Agu central forest reserves.

By Joshua Zake¹, Mosses Sekate², Wamagale Herbert³

¹ Executive Director, Environmental Alert

² Senior Program Officer, West Nile Program, Environmental Alert

³ Program Officer, Environment and Natural Resources, Environmental Alert

1.0 Introduction

The key issues limiting sustainable management of central forest reserves in Uganda, profiled in **Table 1** are based on experiences by Environmental Alert through engagements with major stakeholders in Zoka and Agoro-Agu central forest reserves (CFRs). These engagements focus on promoting sustainable management of the reserves through supporting collaborative forest management (CFM).

Particular interest is on strengthening institutional arrangements for forest adjacent communities for effective participation in CFM as provided for in the National forestry Policy, 2001 and the National Tree Planting Act, 2003.

This is advanced through the following Environmental Alert's programs/projects:

(i) Community Empowerment for Improved Food Security and Income, implemented in West Nile region (including Moyo, Adjumani and Yumbe districts) with financial support from Bread for the World – Protestant Development Services;

(ii) Promoting pro-poor Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation plus (REDD+) Principles and Rights-Based Approaches to strengthen the Conservation, Governance and Sustainable Management of Mt. Elgon and Agoro-Agu landscapes in Uganda. This is implemented in partnership with International Union for Conservation of Nature with financial support from DANIDA.



Figure 1. Sensitization on collaborative forest management facilitated by Environmental Alert targeting directly dependent forest adjacent communities in Zoka central forest. Photo by Mosses Sekate.



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For more information, contact: Dr. Joshua Zake (PhD), Executive Director, Environmental Alert.
Address: P. O. Box 11259, Kampala; Tel: 0414510547;
Email: ed@envalert.org;
Website: <http://envalert.org/>

Table 1. Key issues limiting sustainable management of selected central forest reserves in Uganda.

Name of Central Forest Reserve (CFR)	Key issues limiting sustainable management of the Central forest reserve
<p>Agoro-Agu Central Forest Reserve. It is located in Lamwo district in Northern Uganda, along the border between Uganda and Southern Sudan. The CFR is 26508 Ha in size and occupies the Agora Agu hills. The forest adjacent communities occupies the flat lands at its base of Agoro-Agu hills.</p> <p>In Lamwo district, it's hosted by two sub-countries-Agoro and Lokung. It was gazette as a CFR in 1937 for Biodiversity Conservation. Agora Agu is a largely intact forest apart from the enclaves where Barley is grown by communities with support from Nile breweries; the settlement around the Prison community and the periphery where most settlements are located.</p>	<p>a) Inadequate staff capacity for that National Forestry Authority to conduct regular and effective monitoring and surveillance of the reserve;</p> <p>b) Limited security for NFA staff on Forest Patrol duties exposes them to risk of attack by illegal timber dealers;</p> <p>c) Unclear boundaries for the reserve and community resulting into encroachment and conflicts among the community and the duty bearers;</p> <p>d) Encroachment on the reserve through implementation of unregulated/illegal activities (lumbering, settlement, agriculture – particularly wheat and barley production) by adjacent community and private sector from within and outside the forest;</p> <p>e) No clear benefit sharing mechanisms or schemes between NFA and the forest adjacent communities as incentives for collaborative and sustainable management of the reserves;</p> <p>f) The reserve does not have an updated management plan</p> <p>g) Soil fertility depletion in arable land around the reserve and related community mindset and practice of encroaching on forest land/soils for agricultural production.</p>
<p>Zoka Central Forest Reserve. This reserve is found in Adjumani district in West Nile. This is the main biologically diverse forest in the district, with a size 6741 Ha. The forest is affected by accelerated rate of deforestation, for which the key drivers include: commercial agriculture production; charcoal burning; unregulated harvesting of forest products; weak law enforcement</p>	<p>a) Inadequate staff capacity for that National Forestry Authority (NFA) to conduct regular and effective monitoring and surveillance of the reserve.</p> <p>b) Unclear boundaries for the reserve and community resulting into encroachment and conflicts among the community and the duty bearers.</p> <p>c) Encroachment on the reserve through implementation of unregulated/illegal activities (lumbering, settlement, agriculture) by adjacent community and private sector from within and outside.</p> <p>d) Unregulated bush burning especially during the dry season. This results in the destruction of trees and forests.</p> <p>e) Collaborative forest management was initiated by NFA, however it fully operational and has not yet yielded results due to limited resources by NFA.</p> <p>f) No clear benefit sharing mechanisms or schemes between NFA and the forest adjacent communities as incentives for collaborative and sustainable management of the reserve.</p> <p>g) Limited involvement of the district leadership (both technical and political) in rolling out the eviction of encroachers from the CFR.</p>



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2.0 Conclusion and recommendations

Uganda's forest and woodland cover has drastically reduced from 25% of the total land area in the 1990's to the current 9% of the total land area (i.e. about 1,836,386 Ha) in 2016 (FAO, 2016). The rate of deforestation in Uganda is escalating and currently it's estimated at 120000-200000 Ha per year (MWE, 2016). This loss is happening on both gazetted, private and community forests. At this rate, forest cover in Uganda will be no more 18 years later from 2016 (i.e. by 2034), if there are no ambitious targets and actions for tree growing among other strategies for afforestation. Forest loss and degradation is happening on these reserves and the key issues contributing to this are profiled in **Table 1** are the major drivers. Were as these issues are profiled for Zoka and Agoro-Agu CFRs as case studies, they are similar to issues limiting sustainable forest management across several other CFRs in the country. According to NFA, (2016), there exists 506 CFRs in various parts of the country. Thus, the forest cover in the CFR represents about 15% of the total forest cover in Uganda.

These issues should be addressed in the short, medium and long term. The following are some of the possible practical strategies for consideration:

- a. Strengthening the institutional capacity of NFA (in terms of human resources and funding) to effectively deliver of its role in as far as sustainable management of the CFRs as stipulated in the several forest policy and legal frameworks.
- b. The management plans for the central forest reserves should be reviewed and updated in integrate the emerging socio-economic issues.
- c. Collaboration and coordination should be strengthened between NFA and the Local Government stakeholders (e.g. district forest services, political leaders, civil society and the private sector) to deliver on the shared roles and responsibilities in the management of the CFRs.
- d. With due consideration that the forest adjacent and dependent communities directly depend on forest and natural resources for the livelihoods, their institutional capacities should be strengthened for their effective participation in collaborative management initiatives. Through this, their issues and concerns will be integrated.
- e. Models for benefit sharing among key stakeholders at different levels should be piloted and clarified considering that the benefits are key incentives for sustainable management of the reserves.
- f. Need to support and promote appropriate livelihood options within the forest landscapes such as forest based enterprises (bee keeping, aco-tourism, agritourism, fruit trees), aquaculture, intensive agriculture production of high value crops, livestock production for income generation thereby



Figure 1. Members of Agoro-Agu Forest Landscape, Environmental Alert and members of forest adjacent communities monitoring deforested parts of Agoro-Agu CFR in Lamwo district. Photo by EA.



reducing the pressure exerted on the forest resources by forest adjacent and directly dependent communities.

About Environmental Alert

Environmental Alert (EA) was founded in 1988 and has developed and transitioned to into a leading National Non-Governmental organization contributing to an enabling policy environment for sustainable agriculture and sound environment and natural resources management at community, local, national and international levels. EA is officially registered with the NGO Board as a Ugandan non-governmental organization (NGO), incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. EA is governed by an Independent Board that is responsible for providing strategic oversight of the organization including ensuring its integrity as a voluntary service organization.

EA is a **1st prize winner** of the Energy globe award for environmental sustainability-2005 under the category, earth. EA is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and a Member of The IUCN National Committee for Uganda.

EA envisions, ***'Resilient and dignified communities, managing their environment and natural resources sustainably.'***

EA's mission is to, ***'Contribute to improved livelihoods of vulnerable communities by enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainable natural resources management.'***

Program and institutional Components:

1. Environment and Natural resources management;
2. Food security and Nutrition;
3. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene;
4. Finance and Administration;
5. Resource mobilization and Investment.

Scale of Implementation:

EA operates in selected districts for generation of evidence to inform policy engagements on agriculture, environment and natural resources at National and International levels. EA undertakes area wide targeted awareness on selected issues in agriculture, environment and natural resources engagements

EA is a Secretariat for following networks:

- a) The Network for Civil Society Organizations in Environment & Natural Resources Sector (ENR-CSO Network);
- b) Uganda Forestry Working Group;
- c) The Standards Development Group; and
- d) Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resources management (PROLINNOVA-Uganda Network).



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