

## Weekly

Sept 5 — 11



Dear Reader, Last week, the Benet Women, painfully and emotionally demanded that their land be excluded from the Mt Elgon National Park Boundaries. They are tired of being raped by UWA officials, they say. Welcome to this edition of the Weekly!

### The sad tale of Bennet Women; We want our land!



**Above: Left-Right:** The Benet Women, braved the one hour climb on the slopes of Mt Elgon and placed the red flags on the red line with a demand that Govt excludes the 2500 hectares from the UWA boundaries.

**Below** are women creeping to the Mt slopes. The journey to their access and ownership of land is as steep as the journey to the slopes of Mt Elgon.

Holding on to a stick, Juliet Chemutai struggles to walk or make any other movements. The 30 year old, born and raised in the Benet resettlement area in Kween district, is a mother of six.

She is a victim of the land struggle and controversy regarding the Benet Resettlement area. On a fateful day in April 2016, Juliet suffered an injury in her right upper leg while trying to run away from a forest ranger who she believed would attack her.

“That morning while my colleagues and I were collecting firewood, we heard gun shots. A few moments later we saw a forest ranger approaching us with a gun,” Juliet narrates.

She vividly recalls that when they tried to run away, her right leg got trapped by shrubs in the forest. Although she was later rescued by her colleagues, she suffered a great deal of pain which would later limit her ability to move.

Juliet is not the only woman that has fallen victim of forest rangers' harassment in the Benet region. So far, 20 cases of rape have been reported to police. While claims have been made that forest rangers are the key suspects in this matter, Eddie Kulanyi, the Police Liaison Officer, Kween district says that investigations are ongoing while the suspects are also being traced.

The Benet were resettled by government in 1983 into what is known as the Benet Resettlement Area, to pave way for the establishment of Mt. Elgon National Park. However, because government did not survey the resettlement area, it degazetted only 6000 hectares, cheating the Benet people over 2500 hectares.

The Government evicted around 6,000 people residing in the extra 2,500 hectares. It went ahead to draw the National park boundaries to include the 2500 hectares.

The Benets have since then lived in conflict complaining of harassment and intimidation from Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) rangers who manage the park.

Construction of permanent structures is prohibited on the condemned hectares. Whereas there is a handful of primary schools in Benet, there is only one secondary school in the entire region. Children not only have to travel very long distances to attend school but also have to compete for the little resources available for learning purposes.

In October 2005, the Uganda High Court in Mbale ruled that the Benet were the “historical and indigenous inhabitants” of parts of Mount Elgon National Park. The ruling stated that the Benet should be allowed to “carry out agricultural activities” in the areas to which they have historical claim. The ruling has been ignored by UWA.

In a 2013 dossier to Daily Monitor, Lillian Nansubuga, the Public Relations Officer of UWA said that the Benet were given land for settlement.

She wrote: “Unfortunately, the civil servants and district leaders who were in charge of distributing the 6,000 hectares among the landless Benet-Ndoroobo people instead parceled out the land to themselves and their friends. Other Benet who were lucky enough to benefit from this land ended up selling their allotment to the rich civil servants, and then chose to encroach on the national park. The decision by the Benet to sell their land allotment and encroach on the remaining part of the park caused over 1,500 hectares of land to be lost”, it partly reads.

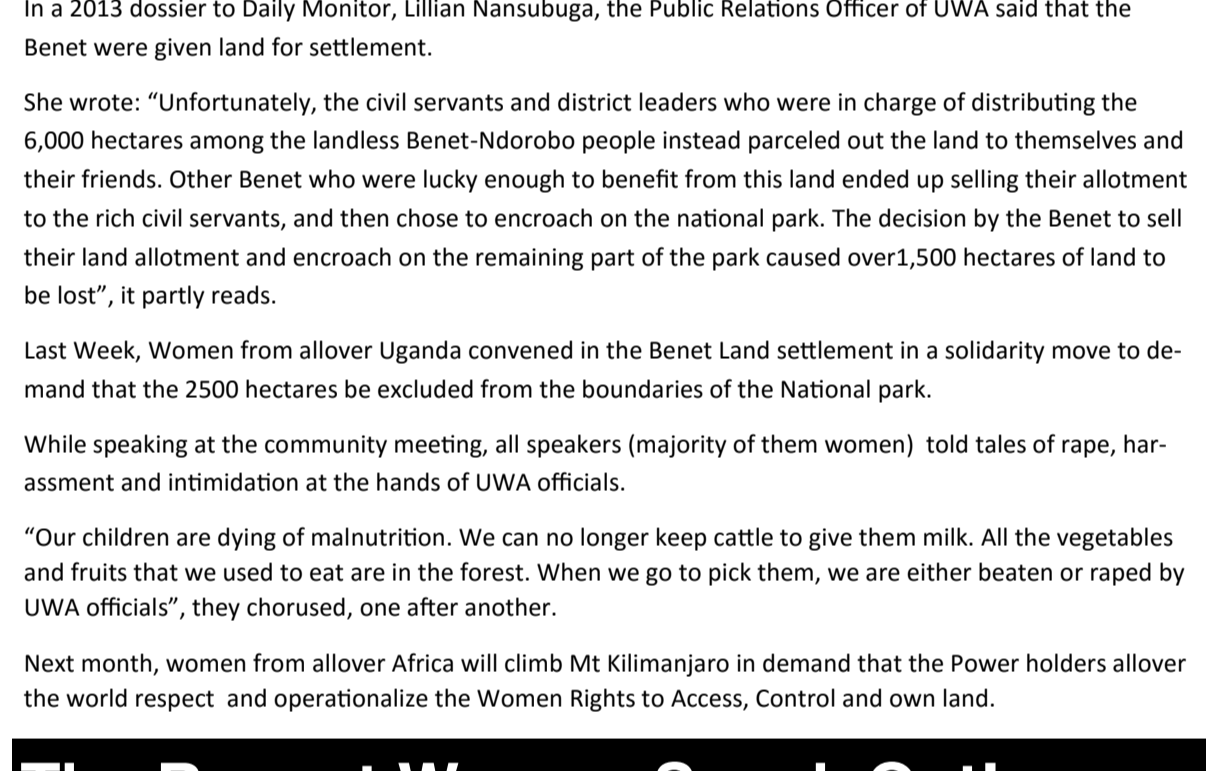
Last Week, Women from all over Uganda convened in the Benet Land settlement in a solidarity move to demand that the 2500 hectares be excluded from the boundaries of the National park.

While speaking at the community meeting, all speakers (majority of them women) told tales of rape, harassment and intimidation at the hands of UWA officials.

“Our children are dying of malnutrition. We can no longer keep cattle to give them milk. All the vegetables and fruits that we used to eat are in the forest. When we go to pick them, we are either beaten or raped by UWA officials”, they chorused, one after another.

Next month, women from all over Africa will climb Mt Kilimanjaro in demand that the Power holders all over the world respect and operationalize the Women Rights to Access, Control and own land.

### The Bennet Women Speak Out!



Its not easy living with two husbands, one at home and one from Uganda Wildlife Authority. The rangers rape us day and night. When we report to police, they tell us to narrate how the rape happened. You just keep quiet and go home. (45 year old Cheptoyek Rose)

Our children are not going to school. UWA has refused us from constructing schools and health centers on our land. They keep reminding us that it's a park and we should relocate. Some of our children are malnourished. We cant keep cattle to get milk because UWA officials shoot them

While collecting firewood with my colleagues, we heard some one coughing a gun. We knew UWA had come. We started running but I unfortunately fell on a log that dislocated my hip bone. I have not got treatment because there is no health facility here. (Juliet Chemutai)

### #Women2kilimanjaro-What is it?



Uganda will send a deligation of over 50 rural women to join their colleagues in demnding for their right to access, control and own land.

The Kilimanjaro Initiative is a rural women's mobilisation across Africa towards an iconic moment at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro in October 2016.

With access to and control over land and natural resources as an entry point, four regional caravans are expected to depart simultaneously from the North, South, East and West, culminating in a mass African rural women's assembly and a symbolic ascent by a delegation of women. The women plan to proclaim a charter of principles and demands specifically on women's access to and control over their land.

The Kilimanjaro Initiative was conceived during a meeting of rural women and civil society organisations in 2012, held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

This initiative aims to create space for rural women to be able to participate in decision making processes about issues dear to them. Mt. Kilimanjaro powerfully symbolises the challenge of their climb, and represents a starting point to spreading a message throughout Africa. The year 2016 coincides with the end of the MDGs, marking the first year of the SDGs, and the need to ensure continued support for women's equal access to and control over land.

With 2016 declared by the 26th African Union Summit as “Africa Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women”, coupled with the transition from MDGs into SDGs, our focus on rural women's right to land and natural resources towards a food and nutritional secure continent could have never been timelier. The Kilimanjaro initiative offers a unique window of opportunity to unify and amplify the struggles of rural women in a politically correct climate.

It is expected that the campaign will strengthen the agency and movement of rural women in claiming and defending their land and natural resource rights not just in Uganda but Africa. Over 100000 rural women from 20 African countries are expected to take part in climbing the tallest mountain in Africa.

If you cannot physically join them to climb, join them on twitter and support their cause using #Women2kilimanjaro! See you there.

### WEEK AHEAD:

- ActionAid together with the Women4Uganda Platform will hold a sit down protest at parliament today at 1pm and later walk around Parliament to protest against the absurd proposal to remove age limits for Judicial and Electoral Commission officials which will ultimately culminate in the removal of the Presidential age limits. Ladies, please join this Nobel cause. Throw on your white dress or T-shirt and be at National Theatre at 12:30PM today.

Gentlemen, join this campaign by tweeting about it. Together we can!