

THE BIG READ

FORCED EXILE | The returnees from Tanzania are now landless and poor

Crying for justice 60 years after eviction

200 families from Nandi Hills were evicted from their ancestral land and forced to migrate to Tanzania in 1951, where they lived till 1991 when the Government forced them out

BY ELLY WAMARI
ewamari@nationmedia.com

They were forced out of Nandi Hills and adjacent areas by colonial administrators, who relocated them to a settlement in Tanzania and took over their fertile land. About 40 years later, they were evicted from Tanzania and asked to return home. Since then, finding home has been elusive.

Amon Kosgei Chumo, 78, is tired, confused, bitter, angry, and with little hope of ever experiencing a settled life. He has been landless for 60 years, because of other people's misjudgments. That has drained him.

His dejection runs deep, if he means every word he utters when he says: "I don't have much energy left. I am now waiting to die. I don't see much hope. We have experienced enough problems. This is not a small matter."

That matter dates back to 1951. Between that year and 1955, about 200 Nandi families were forced by the British colonial administration to migrate from their prime lands in Nandi Hills to moderate and tsetse fly infested settlements in Musoma and Serengeti districts in northern Tanzania.

In 1991, they were ordered out by Tanzanian authorities and told to return to Kenya, and because they were not allowed to cross back to Kenya with their possessions, they returned as paupers.

They have since been landless and are desperate.

Chumo is one of the Kenyan returnees from Tanzania, as they are referred to.

The other is Elijah Kimely Keshio, 55, whose parents also migrated to Tanzania in 1955, the same year he was born.

He hasn't given up hope to the extent that Chumo has, but his emotion over their land problem is equally profound.

"After the colonialist went away,



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who pocketed our heritage?" he asks.

The migration and relocation of more than 200 Nandi families to northern Tanzania started after the Second World War, when the infiltration of former British soldiers into the Nandi Hills for settlement increased. The fine climate and hilly fertile lands were the attraction.

By then, the colonial administration had introduced a policy of pushing the natives to peripheral areas that had been classified as "reserve land", to pave the way for other developments.

In Nandi Hills and the surrounding lands, the colonialists were interested in settling in for large-scale farming.

The coming in of the soldiers who had had fought in the Second World War intensified the process. More communities were being pushed to the "Nandi reserve", which was getting overpopulated.

Chumo was about 18 when his father couldn't bear the thought of being squeezed into the thinning reserve land. It was a humiliating experience to many, and so his father took the option of migrating to northern Tanzania.

They left with their 30 head of

cattle, joined by other families, and took the long trek through Kisii, South Nyanza, and eventually into Tanzania.

"It took a whole month," Chumo recalls. "There were days it would rain a lot, causing floods. We would wait for the water levels to go down before proceeding. We were moving in groups but with about 2,000 head of cattle in total."

Eventually, they entered Musoma district, and the reception wasn't as straightforward as anticipated. Several chiefs expressed reservation about their arrival, and Chumo believes it's because the people of Musoma thought the visitors were not different from the Maasai, who allegedly kept stealing their cattle.

"One of them was (Julius Nyerere's brother," says Chumo. Records indicate that around the time, Edward Wanzagi, Nyerere's elder brother, was the chief of the Zanaki people, having inherited the role from his father, Chief Nyerere Burito.

Others perceived their arrival differently. Chumo's humorous side comes out when he explains what eventually happened.

"A number of them understood we were Nandi and welcomed us, but little did we know they had realised we would occupy the space between them and the Maasai, and therefore act as a shield in their favour.

"We found ourselves being the people to face off with the cattle raiders once in a while. We must have done well because the raiders started asking; 'Na hawa ni akina nani (who are these people)?"

The cool weather, the rolling topography, the lush vegetation, and now the abundant tea estates, give Nandi Hills a pleasant scenery and an aura of freshness. But underneath the beauty lies a sad history concerning hundreds of families who, in the early 1950s, were exiled to northern Tanzania.

According to records from the Kenyan National Archives, Ushashi area and the Nata/Ikoma Settlement Area, where most of the Nandi from Kenya were settled, bordered the expansive Serengeti plains, the home of the Maasai in Tanzania.

Their stay in Tanzania, say Chumo and Kimely, was generally without much interruption after that, except, they claim, that their children were not allowed to attend school beyond Standard Seven.

It was after Kenya got independence in 1963, two years after Tanzania did, that signals stated coming through that it was time they thought about returning home.

The messages would come in form of jokes by then President Nyerere, according to Chumo. He says: "In 1964, Nyerere told us something like; 'You were sent away by the colonialists, right? They have now gone away, why not return home?"

"We thought he was joking, but it turned out later that he was serious. You know, Nyerere was a jolly fellow. He cracked a lot of jokes. You would easily think he was joking even when he was serious."

Nyerere had been a frequent visitor in the settlements, which were close to his home town, Butiama, and everything seemed alright.

But then, according to Kimely, their presence in Tanzania would become a subject of wider discussion when the country embarked on constitutional reforms, beginning 1972. Part of it, says Kimely, was because their parents

200

The number of families from Nandi Hills that were forced into exile in northern Tanzania by the colonial government.

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After the colonialists went away, who pocketed our heritage?"

Amon Kosgei Chumo, who is landless after being forced to return to Kenya from Tanzania, where his family was exiled to in 1951