

## Basongora

### Profile

A pastoralist group traditionally hailing from Kasese in Western Uganda, estimated 11,000 (2002 census) their traditional way of life has been heavily affected by the civil wars in the area, and the loss of land through conservation measures.

### Historical context

The Basongora have traditionally occupied the plains in the neighborhood of Imaramagambo forest in western Uganda. After the out-break of sleeping sickness and rinderpest in Busongora in Western Uganda in the 1920s, the Basongora population and that of their herds of cattle were greatly diminished.

According to the Uganda Land Alliance, much of Basongora communally owned grazing lands were gazetted as Queen Elizabeth National Park by the colonial administration in the 1950s. This left only limited lands for the pastoral Basongora. Although some remained in the park - albeit illegally, according to the Ugandan government - others moved across the border with their herds into the Virunga National Park in the DRC, in search of pasture. Insecurity in the region has driven other ethnic groups - particularly the Bakonjo - from the high lands, to the low lands. This has also increased pressure for land, and led to tribal clashes in the area.

### Current issues

IN 2006/2007 Basongora began to move back into QENP with their herds of cattle, after being driven out by the Congolese authorities, from the Virunga mountain range. However, Uganda's wildlife authorities were anxious about damage done to the park. The Basongora pointed out that their traditional pastures had been in the territory now protected as the QENP, but they had been evicted upon its creation in 1954. In September, wildlife officials once again tried to evict them. But after claims that excessive force was being used, the government eventually offered the Basongora alternative land outside the park. It also stated that it recognised that it had an obligation to address the historical injustices and post-independence marginalization of the Basongora. However this settlement has also proved problematic: there were reports of the forcible removal of small-scale farmers to make way for the Basongora. Basongora claim the land given to them has been insufficient, and that they are living in 'deplorable' conditions.