

Uvinje Project

The Background of the Dispute

The land rights dispute between the Uvinje villagers and TANAPA stretches back decades. In the 1990s, when TANAPA began the process of turning Saadani Game Reserve into Saadani National Park, TANAPA allegedly redrew the boundaries of the National Park to include Uvinje land. The Uvinje felt particularly aggrieved by this alleged redrawing of boundaries, as the village had a long history of helping with conservation efforts – in 1974, for example, the Uvinje village voluntarily ceded two-thirds of its lands to the Saadani Game Reserve.

The Uvinje have sought to prove both that this redrawing of boundaries occurred, and that it was unlawful. As such, in February 2016 the Uvinje approached a Tanzanian government ombudsman, the Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG). In May 2017, this ombudsman ruled in favour of the Uvinje villagers:

‘Uvinje hamlet has never been part of the Saadani Game Reserve, therefore its inclusion within the boundaries[sic] of National Park is unlawful and contrary to the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania...’

The ruling further urged that a new land survey should be conducted, showing the correct boundaries of the National Park. The Uvinje, who only heard about the judgement in August 2017, hope to build their legal case on this ruling and the evidence that underlies it. CHRAGG’s full ruling can be read [here](#).

In September 2017, a committee formed of representatives from TANAPA and other government authorities carried out their own investigation into this land rights issue. This committee opposed CHRAGG’s ruling by re-asserting TANAPA’s ownership of the land and declaring that the Uvinje villagers must vacate the area within 28 days. The parties claimed that the Uvinje villagers *‘will understand that it is a National Reserve, and as a national reserve then it is about national interests, so every citizen has to cooperate so that the Government can make a clear investment’*. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism’s report on the matter can be read [here](#). It is rumoured that the government’s sudden urgency in the Uvinje land rights matter is connected to the expected arrival of substantial foreign investment for the Saadani National Park.

The Uvinje are deeply concerned by the recent actions of the Tanzanian authorities. This situation is critical and time sensitive. From past experience in Tanzania, the eviction which is threatened may involve intimidation of the community by police forces, accompanied by bulldozers and lorries, in the early hours of the morning.

Once the villagers are evicted and the land is fully possessed by the state and/or other parties (external investors, for instance) then there is justifiable concern not only that the villagers will lose their lands, but also that the Uvinje community will be lost forever.

What is Protimos doing to help?

Protimos' aim is to enable the Uvinje to use the law to assert their rights. In order to achieve this aim, Protimos has taken a number of practical steps:

- Protimos is providing funding for a local team of lawyers to act on behalf of the Uvinje.
- Protimos is coordinating an international team of legal specialists, who are providing expert advice to the local legal team.

'I will never forget in all my life, the help Protimos gave us, and I hope, will continue to offer us... I find it hard to comprehend that people from so far away can be so kind and so caring about us, a small village in Tanzania' – Hoseni Salehe Akida, Elected Chairman of Uvinje

Protimos is taking action with specific objectives in mind:

1. To ensure that TANAPA and other government agencies abide by correct legal processes in their dealings with the Uvinje community.
2. To use the CHRAGG ruling as a justification for the Uvinje community to take this issue to court.
3. To create a judicial precedent for the lawful assertion of community land rights. A precedent that a number of threatened communities in Tanzania could draw upon.

These objectives are achievable. They have the potential to safeguard the future existence of not only the Uvinje, but also many other vulnerable communities in Tanzania.

However, these objectives can only be realised if the Uvinje community receives the legal support it needs at this critical juncture.

What can you do to help?

Donate to Protimos [here](#)

Protimos is the only *legal* organisation that is currently supporting the Uvinje community's lawyers. Without further donations, these lawyers will be unable to bring the Uvinje's case to court.

Raise awareness

Tell your colleagues, friends, and family about the injustice faced by the Uvinje.

Tweet using the hashtag #SaveUvinje.

Stay informed

Sign up to Protimos' newsletter and follow Protimos on [twitter](#) and [facebook](#) for further information about this project.