

Because of livelihood pressures in communities around Kasungu National Park (Malawi), the Park and its buffer zone face an existential threat from encroachment for farmland, firewood, and other resources. These photos, captured on 18 Sept 2021, tell the grim story.



This gleaming new electric boundary fence, courtesy of USAID thru IFAW, has not stopped the assault on the Park and its buffer zone



As Chairman of the local Community Conservation Association, I was personally briefed by Park officials on the pervasive encroachment



Precious miombo forests around the buffer zone are under assault to give way for farmland and for firewood for curing Virginia tobacco





Sadly, some powerful political forces and local chiefs, are instigating the wanton destruction of this natural heritage and carbon sink



That all this destruction is happening right inside a legally designated protected area (the Park and its buffer zone) is dumbfounding and confirmation of the involvement of powerful local political forces in illegal land allocation/sales to gain cheap popularity and votes





The illegal beacons below helped Park authorities to arrest the perpetrators and the case is in the local magistrate court. That these encroachers could have the temerity to install beacons inside a protected area tell it all about the powers-that-be behind the carnage





It is humble Virginia tobacco barns like this one dotted around the buffer zone, and other tobacco producing areas in Malawi, that have devoured, billions of tons of precious miombo woodlands initially in communal forests but now increasingly on protected areas





As people encroach, or settle close to protected areas, human-wildlife conflict (HWC) escalates: here elephants have visited this banana plantation for three days in a row. Ironically this farmer illegally moved into the buffer zone 3 years ago and is facing eviction





Standing dry Virginia tobacco stems testify to the existence of a tobacco farm just about 50 meters from the boundary of the Park and most likely illegally encroaching the Park for firewood. Park official told me this tree with fruits is listed as endangered by CITES



After touring the destruction in the buffer zone Park official and I took time to brief the local chief, GVH Linyangwa, extreme left, about the massive encroachment and what it means for his natural heritage



Another encroachment meeting/briefing but now at the Kasungu District Council offices on 24 September 2021 attended by community leaders, District Council officials, Police, and Park officials. Unless we resolve the underlying livelihood issues, meetings may not help





Note: Photos and narrative by Malidadi Langa, Chairman of KAWICCODA, a local community conservation association, and a member of the Community Leaders' Network for Southern Africa (CLN).

The End