

# Setting the Record Straight About Evictions & Abuses to Expand Ruaha National Park

In recent weeks, the Tanzanian government has undertaken a concerted media campaign to discredit the Oakland Institute's findings about egregious human rights abuses and forced displacement, carried out to expand Ruaha National Park (RUNAPA) as a "tourism asset." Not surprisingly, the Tanzanian Association of Tourism Operators (TATO), whose lifeline is safari tourism and hunting, joined the chorus of blatantly false claims in defense of the government's actions. The Oakland Institute stands firmly by its findings, which were also confirmed by the World Bank's own field investigation that led to its April 2024 decision to [suspend disbursements for the REGROW project](#).

The main points of the disinformation campaign are debunked below.

CLAIM 1 **X FALSE**

## Villages are allowed to stay in the expanded park

“Mbarali District Council’s land official Faraja Nkwera said the land still belonged to the village as stipulated in the 1999 Land Act, as there was no directive yet to change its use. “In case there’s need for changing the use of the land, there are procedures, rules and regulations to adhere to,” Nkwera said.”  
– *Tranquility News*

“Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) Senior Assistant Conservation Commissioner and Commanding Officer of Ruaha National Park Godwell Ole Meing’ataki said conservation laws were not applied in the village. “We have been directed to leave the communities within the park,” said Ole Maing’ataki.”  
– *Tranquility News*

### FACT

Tanzania’s [National Parks Act](#) clearly states that “all human settlement (with the exception of essential TANAPA personnel, essential authorized researchers and advisors and essential hotel or permanent tented camp employees) will be prohibited in all National Parks.” As a result of GN 754, the government considers these villages to be illegally within a National Park. Until the boundaries of the RUNAPA are officially changed, or the National Parks Act is amended, these villages are at imminent risk of eviction.

This was made clear in October 2022, by the Minister of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development (MLHSD), Dr. Angeline Mabula, who [officially announced](#) that five villages (Luhanga, Madundasi, Msanga, Iyala, Kilambo) with a population of 21,252 and an additional 47 sub-villages from 14 villages would be evicted – with their legal registration cancelled. She warned locals, “If you continue to be there and the village is delisted it means you are breaking the law.” This official announcement was followed by GN 754 in 2023.

Impacted communities have received no official assurances they will be allowed to remain in their villages. An unofficial directive given to the Commanding Officer of Ruaha National Park will not provide these impacted villagers with any security of their land tenure in light of the government’s past actions.

CLAIM 2 **X FALSE**

## Only a few villages are now considered inside RUNAPA and they have consented to the decision

“Assistant Conservation Commissioner and Conservation Commander for RUNAPA, Godwell Meing’ataki said: “The new gn spares many areas. Only five villages remain in the park; Iyala, Madundasi, Msanga and Kilambo. As of now these are within the park.”  
– *ITV*

“The government recognizes that conservation efforts cannot succeed without the support and participation of local communities. By involving them in decision-making processes and ensuring they benefit from conservation initiatives, the government fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among the residents.”  
– *Pan African Visions*

### FACT

These claims are false. According to GN 754 boundaries, at least 23 villages are now considered inside RUNAPA. On December 19, 2023, 855 residents from 23 villages facing evictions in Mbarali District filed a case (Reference 45 of 2023) in the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) against the Attorney General of Tanzania to nullify GN 754. The case was brought to the regional court since efforts to stop the expansion of RUNAPA in Tanzanian courts have been delayed and failed to provide justice. Sworn affidavits from the impacted villagers reveal that they were not consulted regarding the decision that will devastate their lives and force them out from their homes.

During the World Bank management’s visit to impacted villages in June 2024, communities confirmed to them they did not provide their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent to GN 754.

Legally registered villages in the Mbarali District that face eviction from GN 754 include:

Mahango, Mkunywa, Iheha, Nyangadete, Magigwe, Vikaye, Igunda, Ivalanji, Ikanutwa, Nyeregete, Mwanavala, Ibumila, Songwe, Warumba, Ukwavila, Kapunga, Iyala, Luhanga, Madundasi, Msango, Simike, Kilambo, and Udindilwa.

A review of RUNAPA’s new boundaries from GN 754 reveals that dozens of additional sub-villages will also now be located within the park, leading to the eviction of thousands more.

### CLAIM 3 X FALSE

## Pastoralists and farmers are not affected by the expansion of the park

“So far no villagers have been required to vacate their homes or farms to pave way for conservation, said the District Commissioner, who however pointed out that park laws must be respected and therefore grazers will not be allowed to take livestock into the nearby Ruaha National Park or adjacent water sources.”  
– *Tanzania Times*

### FACT

As extensively documented by the Oakland Institute, TANAPA rangers have not just prevented cattle from going into the park. They have seized cattle, grazing in legally registered land, to destroy livelihoods and thereby force people to move out. [Between 2022-2023](#), thousands of cattle were seized near RUNAPA, decimating herders' livelihoods. During the pre-investigation, the Inspection Panel [heard testimonies](#) directly from pastoralists who were brutally attacked during cattle seizures by TANAPA rangers, while grazing cattle within their legally registered land. Despite the ongoing investigation by the Inspection Panel, TANAPA has audaciously continued seizures in recent months:

- On March 24, 2024, TANAPA rangers captured 549 cattle and three donkeys belonging to “Joe”<sup>i</sup> a █████ pastoralist from █████ village. The animals were seized in █████ village and driven into the park near Madundasi. On March 26, the Mbarali District Court sold the animals as unclaimed property. Since the murder of his son by TANAPA rangers in 2019, “Joe” has been living in fear that rangers will retaliate against him for his past attempts to seek justice. He is currently in hiding and fears for his life (information redacted due to fear of retaliation against “Joe.”)
- On April 20, 2024, 809 cattle were seized by TANAPA in Iyala village. The herders were forced to pay over TSh 120 million [~US\$45,000] to reclaim their herd despite the fact they never broke any laws and were in village land when the seizure occurred.

Additionally, farmers in several villages are prevented from planting their fields by TANAPA rangers, who also [confiscated farming equipment](#) at the start of the rains in January. The enormous financial strain induced by TANAPA's cattle and farm equipment seizures is destroying livelihoods of the villagers.

### CLAIM 4 X FALSE

## The World Bank's investigation contradicts the Oakland Institute's findings

“The World Bank's delegation was in the district last month [June] to investigate the Oakland Institute's allegations only to see villagers going on with their day-to-day schedules.”  
– *Tranquility News*

“The three-day [World Bank] investigation revealed that no one had been forcefully evicted, people continued their activities, and the government maintained essential services... The World Bank delegation acknowledged that their findings contradicted Oakland's report.”  
– *Pan African Visions*

### FACT

The *Tanzania Times* and *Tranquility News* articles both willfully ignore the World Bank and Inspection Panel's findings from earlier visits that launched an official investigation and led the Bank to suspend REGROW project funding. The World Bank has not published the findings from their June 2024 visit as Pan African Visions incorrectly asserts nor has it contradicted the Oakland Institute's findings.

The Oakland Institute has never claimed that widespread evictions have already occurred. What it has documented is how the government is forcing people to leave the area through livelihood restrictions and horrific abuses by paramilitary TANAPA rangers. Enforcement of the new GN 754 park boundaries is also increasing hunger and poverty in the communities – with the intent of forcing them out of the area. Tens of thousands of lives are currently on hold as communities struggle to survive.

The Tanzanian government blatantly violated World Bank safeguards when it moved forward with its October 2022 eviction announcements and GN 754 without consulting impacted communities or preparing a resettlement plan as required by the World Bank project agreement. When World Bank management suspended disbursements to the project, [it cited](#) “noncompliance with the Project's Financing Agreement in relation to safeguards requirements namely, resettlement procedures and compensation,” as the Institute previously documented in the [Unaccountable & Complicit](#) report.

CLAIM 5 **X FALSE**

## Social Services have continued for impacted villages

“Under the directive of President Samia Suluhu Hassan, the community has been able to maintain its social services, a vital aspect of the residents’ well-being.”

– *Pan African Visions*

“Madundas Village<sup>11</sup> Chairman Seni Nimka confirmed that they were still in the village carrying out their productive activities despite a last year’s directive to relocate them outside the park. “No valuation has so far been conducted for us to be compensated, and education, health and other essential social services are still in place,” Nimka said.”

– *Tranquility News*

### FACT

During the pre-investigation, [the Inspection Panel observed](#) houses and structures marked for demolition and the cessation of new power grid connections. Schools had fallen into disrepair, and community attempts to rebuild them were stopped by the government after Minister Mabula’s October 2022 announcement. As a result of looming evictions, many children have stopped attending school.

The ongoing case by villagers in the East African Court of Justice lists several schools that have been impacted by GN 754, including: Manga Primary School, Madundasi Primary School, Luhanga Primary School, Luhanga Secondary School Buildings, Iyala Primary School, Mkondeko Primary School, Mwanavala Primary School, Magwalisi Primary School, Mlonga Primary School, Kilambo Primary School, Ifushilo Primary School, among others.



Government halted community efforts to build a secondary school in Luhanga Village after Minister Mabula’s eviction announcement in October 2022.

CLAIM 6 **X FALSE**

## All relocations in Tanzania are conducted voluntarily, with considerable incentives and care given to those affected

“Tanzania deserves global recognition for its unwavering commitment to conservation and responsible tourism,” TATO asserts, citing instances where the government has necessitated relocations for conservation interests, TATO emphasizes that these moves have always been conducted voluntarily, with considerable incentives and care given to those affected.”

– *The Citizen*

### FACT

This blatantly false claim is appalling and severely undermines TATO’s credibility. In recent years, Tanzania has been subject to [global condemnation](#) for its human rights abuses to boost tourism. In 2022, in response to the government’s [eviction plans in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area](#) and [violence in Loliondo](#), the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, nine United Nations Special Rapporteurs and numerous international human rights groups all issued statements condemning the government’s actions. The 2022 [US State Department Human Rights Report](#) bluntly stated that Tanzania “does not recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples...[who] may face forcible evictions from traditionally Indigenous lands for conservation or development efforts.”

In 2024, the government [further escalated](#) its campaign against the Indigenous across the country through violence and cattle seizures. The [long history of illegal evictions](#) and abuses in Tanzania to expand protected areas and boost tourism has been well documented over the years. See for instance a [2016 report from IWGIA](#) which details evictions, human rights abuses and loss of livelihoods as well as government’s contempt for national laws and court decisions.

CLAIM 7 **X FALSE**

## Human activities threaten the Great Ruaha River

“As a result of increased human activities in the Usangu flood plain, the Great Ruaha River began drying out for between one and six months in 1990s, causing chronic power outages countrywide.” – *Tranquility News*

“To ensure continuous water flow into the Ruaha River and power generation, human activities in these areas must cease.” – *Pan African Visions*

### FACT

There is extensive [evidence](#) that small farmers and pastoralists are not responsible for the Ruaha River’s degradation or reduced energy generation. A 2010 [statement](#) from James Ananya, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, cited numerous studies that showed the “increased irrigated cultivation during the dry season by large farms in the area” was responsible for environmental degradation. [Other studies](#) have shown the power cuts experienced in the 1990s were actually due to the mismanagement of the two dams rather than a significant reduction in the annual flow of the Great Ruaha River.

CLAIM 8 **X FALSE**

## The government protects the park against encroachers

“In 2008, authorities issued a Government Notice Number 28 aimed at protecting the wetlands, but the move did not prevent the farmers, herders, anglers and the business community from encroaching on the wetlands.” – *Tranquility News*

### FACT

The government did not consult or seek the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of the local communities before issuing GN 28, which intended to double the size of RUNAPA from 10,300 km<sup>2</sup> to approximately 20,226 km<sup>2</sup>. Efforts by the Mbarali District Council and legal challenges prevented evictions following the 2008 announcement. Local communities remained in the area as GN 28 was neither implemented nor enforced. Villages considered inside the GN 28 boundaries were not delisted and retained their legal status. As a result, people have not been “encroaching” on the area as it remains their legally registered land.

CLAIM 9 **X FALSE**

## The government has actually expanded the land available for local communities

“Last year, a Government Notice Number 754 withdrew over 400 square kilometers of the national park’s area and handed it over to 28 out of 33 villages that were residing in the park for them to carry out their productive activities.” – *Tranquility News*

### FACT

The park size created by GN 754 may be 400 square kilometers smaller than GN 28, but given that GN 28 was never implemented nor enforced, GN 754 is actually a massive expansion from the pre-2008 boundaries of the park that are currently recognized by the communities. GN 754 is a renewed attempt by the government to expand the park to now include at least 23 legally registered villages – home to over 21,000 people.

CLAIM 10 **X FALSE**

## The government’s efforts are focused on conservation, not tourism revenue

The Tanzania Association of Tourism Operators (TATO) statement says: “It is understood that Ruaha National Park receives few visitors and its management is a drain on the resources of the country; that is a fact and contradicts the Oakland Institute’s claims that its expansion was for tourism revenue.” – *The Citizen*

### FACT

The Tanzanian government has been very open about its [goal](#) to attract five million tourists and bring in US\$6 billion from the sector annually by 2025. While RUNAPA is currently less visited than the overcrowded northern destinations, the government is actively working to change this. Current efforts closely follow a [2015 strategy document](#) that USAID produced for the government as the path that will bring in millions more in revenues annually from the Southern Circuit.

# Tanzanian Government's Escalating Propaganda to Resume World Bank Funding

The author of several of the articles, [Patty Magubira](#), is a former Publicity Officer for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism. Though he is correspondent of *The East African*, he rather published the two articles challenging the Oakland Institute on the much smaller and lesser-known *Tranquility News*.

*Tranquility News* is an unfiltered mouthpiece for the government. In the past, the website has tried to discredit other reputable human rights organizations. In June, it published: "[The reason Human Rights Watch should revisit its report on deaths at North Mara Gold Mine](#)," challenging a Human Rights Watch report linking Tanzanian police to six murders at the North Mara gold mine. The articles published by *Tranquility News* are unabashedly pro-government.

As the Tanzanian government goes into a desperate frenzy to save its face amidst allegations of horrific human rights abuses, the truth is that its days of impunity are finally coming to an end. In June 2024, the European Union [removed Tanzania](#) from the list of countries eligible for its upcoming €18 million conservation grant in East Africa as a result of abuses against the Indigenous Maasai. Now scrambling to resume REGROW project funding, the Tanzanian government has resorted to planting these easily debunked stories in state media. Instead of focusing on discrediting the Oakland Institute, it will be better for the government to address serious human rights violations by its agencies, adhere to international laws and norms, and immediately cease all evictions across the country to increase tourism revenues through fortress conservation schemes.

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i <https://tranquilitynews.com/unnamed-researchers-misled-oakland-institute-world-bank/>; <https://tanzaniatimes.net/news-ruaha-national-park-allows-five-villages-to-thrive-on-its-seceded-parts/>; <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/business/tanzania-association-of-tour-operators-says-oakland-institute-s-claims-are-baseless--4660376>; <https://tranquilitynews.com/no-research-no-right-to-speak-tourism-players-furious-against-rights-abuse-charges/>; <https://panafricanvisions.com/2024/07/debunking-western-myths-ruahas-revival-balances-conservation-and-tanzanias-community-growth/>

ii Joe's identity is concealed for his own protection.

iii The article in *Tranquility News* incorrectly refers to Madundasi village as "Madunas."