

Outrageous!



PRIME MINISTER

ADM/9/01
6 March 2015
The Minister
Ministry of Water and Environment
Kampala

Dear Colleague

**PETITION BY RESIDENTS OF
KATIKARA KYAKABAMBA IGUNDA IN
KYELEGWA DISTRICT**

I have been petitioned by several persons, residents of the above mentioned area over a long standing problem of eviction by NFA without compensation. The petitioners aver that the process of eviction from their ancestral land, their property was destroyed and over 12 people were killed by police while some women were raped.

Prime Minister summons NFA over evictions



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editor's word

The leadership of the National Forestry Authority (NFA) has been locked up in meetings to produce an official position on human rights abuse in its forests.

This follows a demand by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, for an official explanation of the situation after activists complained about the manner in which forest encroachers were evicted from Matiri central forest reserve in western Uganda.

The prime minister's office says there was a petition by 'several persons, residents of Katikara Kyakabamba, Igunda in Kyegegwa district, over a long standing decision by NFA to evict the encroachers without compensation.'

The petitioners say that in the process of eviction from their ancestral land, their property was destroyed and over 15 people were killed by police while some women were raped.

First, it is important to note that these people sued the NFA and lost the case before they came up with the accusations.

In October last year, NFA evicted over 500 people from the forest, following Justice David Batema's July 25, 2014 dismissal of two cases. In one, Patrick Kalubanga and 40 others sued NFA claiming ownership of the forest land neighbouring Mukonomura enclave. This was followed by another by Omuhereza Rwakaboyo and 119 others in 2009. Both law suits were dismissed with costs to the defendants.

However, the NFA has never come up to claim its costs incurred in these court battle and the damage the encroachers inflicted on the forest reserve. Instead it is the plaintiffs (the encroachers) who are demanding for compensation from government!

In a letter signed by five people, including Pauline Kanyabuzana, Basaliza Ochaki, Ibrahim Kajura, Joseph Baryagenda and Allen Kobusinge, the petitioners claim that NFA used brutal means, injuring 15 who later died.

Shockingly, among the petitioners seeking compensation is a one Mrs. Moses, listed as dead, after sustaining a miscarriage. There is no information about the so called Mrs. Moses, outside of the petition, indicating that it could be anybody! Many of those on the list have just one name, but the police have not registered any deaths in the area, nor are there any graves where the so called deceased are buried!

When someone dies, the whole village should know, yet only the petitioners seem to know the deceased victims. Indeed many of the residents neighbouring the forest say they have never heard of such killings.

Bonifence Mwesige, for example, says there was no death and cases of rape during the eviction exercise.

"People were given enough time to vacate. They didn't force anyone. People left on their own," Mwesige says.

Sam Nyakoojo, the forest governance project coordinator for Joint Effort to Save Environment (JESE), a nongovernmental organisation with a keen interest on forestry issues based in Fort Portal, says he monitored the eviction. And he swears that it was the most peaceful eviction he has ever witnessed, with most evictees voluntarily removing iron sheets from their houses.

During the eviction, our own members of WEMNET were part of journalists that NFA took to Matiri to witness the exercise. And it was a peaceful exercise, with people voluntarily vacating the forest reserve.

From this petition, it is evident that the petitioners are taking advantage of a new prime minister who has no knowledge of what transpired. This sort of behaviour should be discouraged with the heavy sanctions it deserves.



Uganda should shift from poor-power to 'poo-power'



BY EDDIE OKETCHO

Every healthy human or animal that has a meal every so often has the capacity to produce poo. It is estimated that the average human being produces up to 72.5kg of faecal matter annually. As for cattle, when fully matured, one can produce up to 29.5kg of feces daily, which is about 10 tons a year.

In many communities in both the developed and the developing world, the power of waste from animals, such as cattle is going untapped while some communities have already seen the light.

Much has been written about the energy potential from animal and other forms of waste (biogas). This alternative technology is

no stranger to especially conservation organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) which has implemented and supported biogas interventions in areas with limited access to other forms of energy.

For example, with funding from the UNDP, WWF in Uganda has been implementing a project on Strengthening Sustainable Environment and Natural Resources Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in Uganda. The project aims to pilot initiatives that are environmentally friendly and promote better management of natural resources in the country.

To this end, the project has piloted installation of biogas units (domestic and institutional), constructed energy saving cook stoves (institutional and domestic) and installed so-

lar cookers in the districts of Manafwa, Bududa, Wakiso Kasese, Manafwa and Masindi.

The energy produced from one biogas system, with at least one cow producing the waste, is now providing cleaner, healthier, cheaper and more environmentally friendly energy for cooking and lighting in several homes. According to testimonies from most of the beneficiaries, the energy from biogas has proven to be more beneficial as compared to the traditional dirty wood-burning 3-stone fire places and kerosene lamps.

This alternative (biogas) is especially beneficial to women and girls who would otherwise spend long hours in smoky kitchens and in the forests collecting firewood, which exposes them to various forms of risk.

However, it is easy to conclude that tapping into the benefits of waste may only be applicable to the developing world like Uganda and just in the context of cow dung. If you thought so, you thought wrong.

In a recent article on *The Guardian* (Poo power: fuel, lampshades, paper and other useful things made from waste) it emerged that 'poo-power' can also be tapped from animals like pandas and rhinos and can be used to power buses (UK), raw material for water purification (Senegal) and other 'useful things'.

For example, the article observes that the Panda's ability to naturally convert material into the type of sugars that can be fermented into bioethanol is a sharp contrast to the current carbon-intensive options.

Therefore, as climate change and carbon emissions continue to occupy the minds of world leaders and Uganda's own Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, one step in the right direction is perhaps to intensify discussions on utilising animal and human waste. Ugandans should consider taking the discussions of poo-power from the 'small rooms' and bring it to boardrooms.

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Prime Minister summons NFA

BY SIMON MUSASIZI

The Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, has summoned National Forestry Authority (NFA) over allegations of human abuse during the eviction of encroachers from Matiri central forest reserve.

In a letter to NFA dated March 6, the prime minister says his action follows a petition 'by several persons, residents of Katikara Kyakabamba, Igunda in Kyegegwa district over a long standing problem of eviction by NFA without compensation.'

"The petitioners aver that in the process

of eviction from their ancestral land, their property was destroyed and over 12 people were killed by police while some women were raped. This is outrageous and unacceptable," the letter reads.

"I request you to take up this matter with relevant ministries and give me a brief in one month."

In October last year, NFA evicted over 500 people from the forest, following Justice Batema's July 25, 2014 dismissal with costs of two cases where Patrick Kalubanga and 40 others, and Omuhereza Rwakoboyo and 119 others had in 2009 sued NFA claiming ownership of the forest land neighbouring Mukono-

mura enclave.

As a result, on November 12, 2014, people calling themselves residents of Katikara Kyakabamba, Igunda, Balete/Kanyabatoole and Bibaija villages in Kyegegwa district petitioned the prime minister.

In a letter signed by five people, among which is Pauline Kanyabuzana, Basaliza Ochaki, Ibrahim Kajura, Joseph Baryagenda and Allen Kobusinge, the petitioners claim NFA used brutal means 'with heavily armed police commanded by the regional police commander and military police under the UPDF command of Lt Atuhire. They claim 15 were severely injured and later died. Among them are Nam-



pumuza Basaliza, Julius Kishija, Byamugisha, Dues Bossi, Emanuel Hakiri, Manturumayo Byarugaba and Mrs Moses who got a miscarriage of twins.

"The racket and saga was being manipulated by the Resident District Commissioner in connivance with Mr Kagoro Kaijomulubi, Mr Birijamu Kyenjojo, Mr Boniface Kamanyire, Mr John Irumba, the district chairperson land board and Mr David Rusa who is alleged to be an operative of State House –Special Forces under the strong aid of Mr Chris Kabwizi, the chairperson LCIII Kakabara sub county and Mr Norman KB Birungi, the chairperson LCV Kyegegwa who are suspected to have sold the said land in dispute to the above earmarked government officials," reads the letter to the prime minister.

"[They] severely tortured and looted our livestock, households and harvested our gardens and grabbed our houses where they are staying now. This is a manifestation of an illegal agenda. After the eviction, the very people brought their livestock for grazing, are busy logging trees and cultivating."

The petitioner want the prime minister to help them recover their land plus 302 iron sheets, 1856 acres of Irish potatoes, 1,721 goats, 417 cattle, 6,004 chicken, 638 pigs, 121 rabbits and 3,000 mattresses among other property lost.

However, NFA's Muzizi range manager Robert Owinyi rubbishes the allegations,

saying the encroachers are only taking advantage of the fact that the prime minister is new in office and has no idea of what transpired.

"This is utter false information and I appeal to all leaders to treat it as baseless intended to hoodwink and get some favours, which may jeopardize the forests of this country... because if we don't treat it that way, it's going to set a bad precedence. You do the right thing and someone turns around to accuse you," Owinyi says.

"When someone dies, the whole village should know. How come it's only known to these people? When did these people die, where were they buried, why didn't they report to police."

According to Owinyi, the eviction exercise was done with a lot of care and it followed a clear strategy designed by several stakeholders under the umbrella of Kyegegwa district forest protection taskforce, which includes: district political leaders and civil servants, NFA officials, police, office of the RDC and other security agencies. Among the things that were first done before the eviction was the sensitization and mobili-

sation of the encroachers. They were then given four months to voluntarily vacate the forest. This was on top of NFA reopening of unclear sections of the forest boundaries.

"I was there. I saw the eviction; it was the most peaceful eviction I have ever witnessed. People voluntarily removed iron sheets from their houses,"

Sam Nyakoojo, the forest governance project coordinator for Joint Effort to Save Environment (JESE), a nongovernmental organisation with keen interest on forestry issues based in Fort Portal.

"Before the boundary opening, we were with the community because it was hard to know where the forest ends. But the boundary opening was made transparently and we found that people were inside the reserve. They were sensitised and asked to leave."

Encroachment in Matiri sector has a long history stretching far in the 1980s and 1990s when it intensified, but by last year when court pronounced itself, it had reached alarming levels. While the 2005 encroachment survey showed that there were 255 people living on 908 hectares of Matiri CFR alone, by August 2014, 2,652 hectares (48.3 per cent) of the 5,431 hectares of the forest had been encroached on by over 550 people.

According to Owinyi, by November last year, NFA had recovered all these areas from encroachers.

"We thought we had concluded the work and it was time to rest, only to be shocked with fresh petitions. These people reorganised themselves and I think they are being organised by people who intend to aspire politically, and they think by identifying with people who appear to be needy, they will be assured of some votes," Owinyi says.

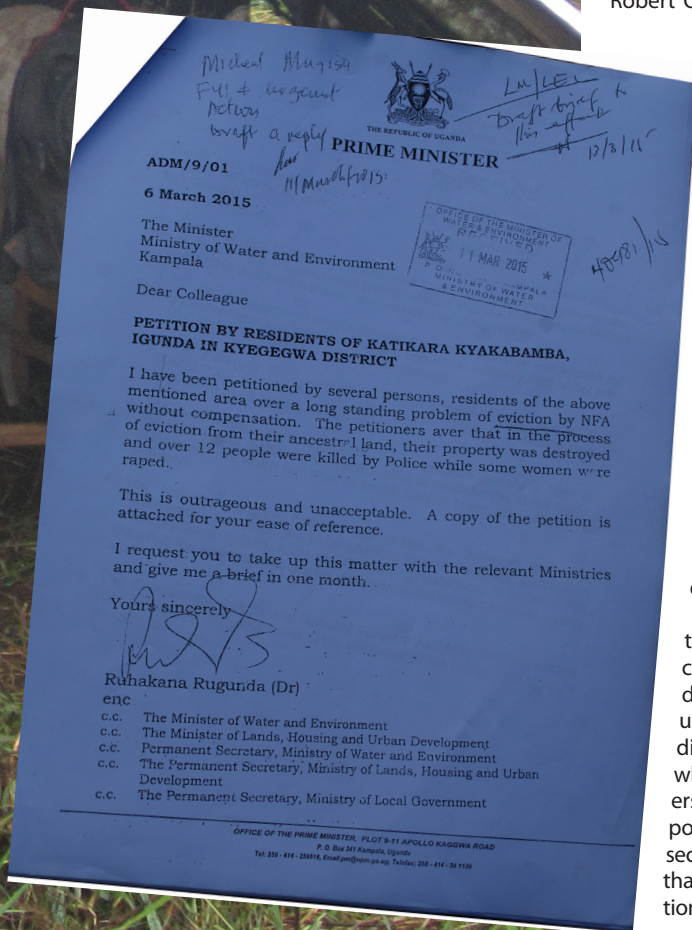
"Fortunately, these allegations are labelled against several government bodies: NFA, police, office of the RDC. You can imagine these three offices engaging in this kind of activities and the whole world just keeps quiet because the document is dated November 2014, much later when people had vacated the forest."

Boniface Mwesige, a resident neighbouring the forest also agrees with Owinyi and Nyakoojo.

"There was no death, no cases of rape. People were given enough time to vacate. They didn't force anyone. People left on their own," Mwesige told The Observer.

The coordinator of Matiri Natural Resources Users and Income Enhancement Association (MANRUIA) says they are dismayed by people coming from as far as Kabale destroying a forest they have preserved for years. It's on that background that the association is developing a memorandum of understanding with NFA that will authorise them to jointly protect the forest.

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NEMA to implement ban after legislative

BY SOLOMON LUBAMBULA

Over five years since Parliament passed a ban on production polythene materials, below 30microns; there has never any significant action to implement this resolution.

Despite the environmental, agricultural and health related dangers of the polythene materials commonly known as 'Kaveera' upon which the ban was passed, the manufacture and importation of the material into the country has continued.

The ban was issued to protect the soils and general environment since these materials are not biodegradable.

The failure to enforce this ban for the last five years contravenes the legal provisions in the constitution, regarding the protection of the environment.

Article 245 of the Constitution states that Parliament shall by law provide for measures intended to protect and preserve the environment from abuse, pollution and degradation.

The same article also mandates Parliament to provide laws to manage the environment for sustainable development.

And indeed Parliament passed the Finance Act 2009, which bans the importation and production of all polythene materials of less than 30microns, as announced by the then Finance Minister, Syda Bbumba in the 2009 budget.

Secondly, these materials in some instances have blocked drainage channels which eventually results into the unclean and unhealthy environment, yet Article 39 of the Constitution spells out that every Ugandan has a right to enjoy a clear and healthy environment.

Fortunately the subject has not fully died or even buried. Recently the concerned Lawmakers resurrected the matter when they tasked the relevant authorities to implement the ban regardless of the political and economic arguments usually given.

Interfacing with the officials from the Ministry of Water and Environment, MPs on the Natural Resources committee expressed their dismay over the weak economic and political reasons advanced as excuses for not enforcing the ban on 'Kaveera' polythene material.

The bitter reaction of MPs came after the Minister for Water and Environment, Ephraim Kamuntu, told the parliamentary committee on Natural Resources that the implementation of this ban has always been hampered by the economic concerns.

Some in the business community had complained to the government that the ban would affect investors behind the polythene making business.

CASE OF ELECTIVE POLITICS

This unfortunate argument is usually supplemented by the excuse that these businesses contribute taxes to the economy so they need to be protected.

Prof Kamuntu further pointed out that elective politics also obstruct the enforcement of the ban of the dangerous polythene materials especially when the public gets politically charged ahead of the general elections.

The Minister admitted that they had been slow in enforcing the 'Kaveera' ban. Prof Kamuntu attributed this to public concern by National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) over a politically charged matter.

"Because in a period when you are going for elections the guys affected are your voters, are our votes let me say this," Prof Kamuntu said.

The Minister's arguments were backed by the deputy director of the

t Kaveera rs' call

NEMA, Dr Godfrey Sawula, which angered the lawmakers.

However, the lawmakers said that the ban was approved by the Parliament, also made up of politicians, so political reasons were unnecessary.

However, the passionately speaking Kyankwanzi District Woman MP, Ann Maria Nankabirwa, said that despite the life threatening and environmental effects of the polythene materials, there is no political will from the authorities to enforce the ban passed by parliament back in 2009.

"Maybe NEMA cannot come up to tell us where they get the problem but for me; I'm seeing the problem is the political will because if you hear the line minister giving political excuses that we are going to the elections yet we have talked about

this Buveera since we come to parliament to me am offended because this is one way of intimidating us not to talk about it," said Nankabirwa.

She stressed that MPs are mandated to guide this country and the people who entrusted to them with power that the 'Kaveera' harms the economy of the country.

"Why is it that the 'Kaveera' is not smuggled to Rwanda? I think it is an issue of government will; why do we pass laws that are never implemented? Today it is not NEMA, but the issue is with you our political head if you say that ban the 'Kaveera' I know NEMA will implement tomorrow," Nankabirwa said.

Fort Portal municipality MP Alex Ruhunda attacked NEMA for not executing its duties as expected, even when it is empowered by the law.

Ruhunda challenged NEMA to emulate KCCA and impound all the banned polythene on the market because the material exposes lives of Ugandans to danger.

"Can you imagine from the seventh parliament then the eighth, the ninth of course, we are at the border crossing the tenth ... I do not know; Are these people in NEMA scientists? Do they really love their

Article 245 of the Constitution states that Parliament shall by law provide for measures intended to protect and preserve the environment from abuse, pollution and degradation.

job?" Ruhunda asked. "Because for me if I was working in NEMA I would have resigned in case someone was failing me."

Ruhunda further assured Prof Kamuntu that the scenario was really sinking the country.

"The country is dying slowly because Ugandans have gotten used to barking dogs ... we only just come up and show that we have the laws that are never implemented," Ru-

hunda said.

Andrew Barayanga Aja (MP for Kabale municipality) added that the other government agencies had not executed their duties as expected. He pointed out that a lot of the polythene materials below the 30microns are smuggled into the Ugandan market from the neighboring Kenya. Aja said that the 'kaveera' would be found on the Kenya market, which also meant it is produced for the Ugandan market where laws are lax.

However, following the grilling by MPs, NEMA has committed itself to enforce the ban on polythene bags. NEMA says the implementation was scheduled to start in April 2015.

While appearing before the parliamentary committee on Natural Resources recently, NEMA Executive Director Dr Tom Okurut said that the enforcement of the ban on 'Kaveera' will start with supermarkets before it rolls out to other places.

Okurut noted that the supermarkets had agreed phase out the use of polythene bags. According to Okurut the supermarkets also embarked on scheme for customers to return of used polythene bags.

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Is it too late to save River Rwizi?

BY VENEX WATEBAWA
& HERBERT WERE

River Rwizi is a vital lifeline for western Uganda, beginning its journey in the lush Buhweju hills and heads hundreds of miles away in the Lake Victoria.

Apart from being an important water source for thousands of farmers in South Western Uganda, who use its contents to water their gardens, it supports herds of livestock along its course.

It is also a major source of water for both domestic and industrial use especially in the urban centres dotted along it. River Rwizi is an important water catchment and covers 8,000 square kilometres across nine districts.

Over two million people depend on this river and its tributaries for their livelihoods and survival. Its significance and importance in the region thus cannot be under-estimated.

Unfortunately over the last ten years unregulated human activity has severely affected River Rwizi, degrading its catchment area, resulting in shrinking its volumes.

According to Richard Musota, the team leader Lake Victoria Water Management Zone, who works with the Directorate of Water Development in the Ministry of Water and Environment, a water risk assessment was recently done by the Lake Victoria Water Management Zone. This study revealed that the river gets sufficient rainfall water only for it to flush through rapidly due to degradation of the catchment areas.

The degradation of River Rwizi has taken place despite the existence of regulations, laws and policies to protect Uganda's natural and environmental resources. These protocols include the Climate Change Policy (2012), recently approved by cabinet. The others are the National Water policy; the National Environment Management policy (NEMA

and the National Policy for the Conservation of Wetlands. The latter have been in existence for at least 20 years.

Out of these policies, the Water Resources Regulation; the Water discharge regulations and the sewerage regulations of 1998 and the 1999 water supply regulations are also in existence. Besides this the Water action plan of 1995 decentralised water resources management into Water Management Zones.

These are meant to enable the management and development of Uganda's water resources in an integrated and sustainable way.

Musota asserts that all this is aimed at providing sufficient quantities and quality of water for all socio-economic needs.

Besides this, each district in Uganda has a Water and Sanitation coordination Committee.

CHALLENGES

However despite their existence, River Rwizi still faces severe degradation in the last ten years. The problem is blamed in part on insufficient human resources and facilitation to make them effective. In addition, district water and sanitation coordination committees rarely have clearly spelled out technical water resources management functions. They also have limited interaction with the Directorate of Water Resources Management in order to be effective on the ground. It is no wonder that the River Rwizi faces a bleak future if nothing is done to stem the threats.

Speaking to *The Eco-Guardian*, the Chairman of the Rwizi Water Catchment Management Committee Ignatius Byaruhanga, says "the river has been reduced to a narrow channel in many parts and its worse downstream in the districts through which it flows. Not only that, it also faces an uncertain future if nothing is done to mitigate and stem the situation".



Byaruhanga, who is also the Chairman of Isingiro district, attributes the damage and decline of River Rwizi to two major causes. These are degradation of its water catchments and tributaries that supply it, as well as unregulated human activity along its course. This has led to

its pollution a
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Wetlands a



and silting. 10 per cent of the River Rwizi catchment is covered in wetlands while forests cover another 2.5 per cent. Wetlands are important in capturing water and retain-

ing and releasing it slowly into the river.

Forests on the other hand stem erosion and the flow of sediments into the river bed. But these vital resources have suffered encroachment and have been wiped out in many areas.

Encroachment of wetlands that support the River Rwizi catchment is a major problem. This is responsible for reduced outflows that should naturally feed the River.

R. Rwizi threatened but it's not too late to save it

The western Uganda NEMA focal person, Jockonius Musingwire, says pressure on existing agricultural lands and rapid population growth are some of the causes that lead to encroachment on wetlands as farmers seek for more land. Musingwire, also the Mbarara district Natural Resources Officer, adds that poor farming methods are also responsible for the decline of farmlands. This pushes farmers into the wetlands surrounding the river.

Poor farming methods speed up erosion of the surrounding areas into the river, thus leading to siltation. In the process of reclaiming wetlands, many farmers use illegal methods.

Musingwire adds that some farmers reportedly used chemicals to quickly dry up swamps in order to set up dairy farms and other agricultural activities. This method introduces deadly chemicals into the soils.

And during rain seasons, runoff water dissolves these chemicals into River Rwizi, causing chemical pollution.

"On paper, water source protection guidelines exist and are mandatory. But they are not always respected. Many practices and lifestyles in the region are not environment friendly," said Musingwire.

Subsistence farmers have encroached on wetlands, while richer individuals are draining them to set up dairy farms. In simple terms, richer and more educated members of society are the architects of wetland depletion instead of safeguarding and helping to protect them.

Vivid examples are the wetland in Katara in Buhweju. An influential member of the community there has since applied chemicals to dry it up and turned it into a zero grazing farm. "People like these are not ignorant of the law. They are simply acting with impunity despite the grave problems that can arise out of destroying wetlands and the local ecosystem. This situation is no better in the tributaries that supply and feed the River Rwizi," adds an area observer.

In the upper River Rwizi unregulated gold mining activities is a major threat. Water is an important component of the gold mining process. It is used to wash out solid wastes to leave behind gold dust.

The rudimentary gold mining is responsible for the degradation of Kibimba, a critical wetland in Buhweju district where the river begins its journey downstream.

This is compounded by the heavy metals directly discharged into the water system that are dangerous to human life.

The environmental and natural resources

management regulations of Uganda prevent human activity within the river bed and buffer zones.

Unfortunately activities such as brick making are taking place because of the ready access to water. Brick making is responsible for damage to river banks. Besides that, silting of the river is another consequence.

MORE EMERGING PROBLEMS

Research by the global International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) along the river Rwizi catchment area found a new and more recent threat to River Rwizi - sand mining. This activity is a direct menace to the river flow and responsible for damage to the river bed. The removal of sand affects the smooth flow of water downstream.

But much as the degradation of River Rwizi is adverse, the situation is not helped by the increasing demand for water by the population that lives in its catchment.

The outcome of these activities is mainly pollution and the discharge of unprocessed waste.

Indiscriminate disposal of effluent and waste into water bodies is in Contravention of National Environment Management regulations and policies.

In most of the emerging urban centres in the region, numerous abattoirs have cropped up to meet the demand for meat and other livestock products.

Unfortunately all these activities lead to continuous discharge of wastes and effluent directly into the river.

The Rakai District Natural Resources officer, Jameru Kiyinji asserts that the vegetation cropping up adjacent to the abattoirs manifesting along the river bank is gospel evidence of the high concentration of the bacteria's which subsequently have a trace of the river contamination.

The abattoirs are not equipped with requisite holding ponds or lagoons to filter the residues before they are released into the environment. It is thus no coincidence that most of the abattoirs are adjacent to the river banks and wetlands as a quick and cheap fix.

The implications for this are immense for large urban centres like Mbarara municipality. The town relies on River Rwizi as its sole source of water for domestic and industrial use.

As Mbarara grows in economic importance, so has the challenge posed by the growing amounts of waste and effluent discharged by its growing industrial sector in to the River Rwizi.



The degradation of River Rwizi has taken place despite the existence of regulations, laws and policies to protect Uganda's natural and environmental resources. These protocols include the Climate Change Policy (2012), recently approved by Cabinet.

Some 120,000 people are served through 11,000 connections by the National Water and Sewerage Corporation. Thus providing cheap reliable clean water is getting harder. The continued pollution and silting of the river Rwizi means that the cost of treating the nine million litres required for human consumption keeps going up each day says the national water and sewerage corporation manager Mbarara David Opoka.

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seems well at Amos Dairy. The Lake Mburo National Park charges raw effluent into the life in the area. Unrestrained discharge also contaminates water during the wet seasons. A lot of chemical contamination of the vegetation. It is the only guilty one here. Along Mbarara- Kampala, it discharges effluent and. It is another. It directly discharges into the River Rwizi. Plants such as water to sustain their are thus under legal obligation to protect water sources in order to produce healthy products. The University of Science and Technology at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital are leading examples, the quality of poor waste disposal. Protection by the Rwizi River Water Quality Monitoring Committee found out the quality of medical and other waste discharged directly into the river. People who live in communities downstream rely on their domestic water con-

sumption. Medical waste should ideally be handled in specialised or using specialised equipment before it is discharged into the environment due to the danger of spreading disease.

LESSONS TO BE EMULATED

However, the much larger Nile Breweries plant, located outside Mbarara town uses huge volumes of water from the river and is setting an example of good practice, owing to its heritage as part of SabMiller group. These volumes cannot just be discharged back into the River Rwizi without being treated first. Nile Breweries discharges effluent into the river after every two hours. To deal with these volumes, the company has invested in high tech equipment to ensure that its waste is safe.

Isaac Ngura the plant manager Nile Breweries Mbarara says that the waste from the brewery is passed through an equalization tank before it is put again in a clear scheme. The resulting waste is considered safe enough not to contaminate the River Rwizi downstream.

The decision to set up a waste purification plant followed an environment impact assessment study on the quality of water which produced grave consequences. Today as the result, the brewery meets the highest legal compliance requirements.

NEED FOR CHANGE

Despite the presence of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation in the area, waste management in Mbarara Town is still a major challenge. Many houses are not connected to the sewage line and indiscriminately discharge into the environment. The lagoons, largely insufficient in size are discharging directly into the river with little filtration. Dr. Callist Tindimugaya, a commissioner with the Directorate of Water Development (DWD) asserts that there is need to change people's attitudes and individuals that perpetuate the degradation of the river. The ministry of water and environment, which is in charge of water resources management in the country, is aware of this challenge. It has now engaged local leaders in the region through which the River Rwizi flows, to address the problem and the challenge in providing sufficient water for the communities that live along it.

In Mbarara, one of the solutions to the problem of the high cost of treating water is the proposal for landscaping. It would go a long way in reducing the cost of treating water as the National Water and Sewerage Corporation Manager for Mbarara David Opoka, explains.

Dr. Callist Tindimugaya adds that the ministry is serious about saving the River Rwizi catchment. Leaders in the nine districts of the River Rwizi basin have teamed up to limit the human activities that threaten the existence of the River Rwizi system. The nine districts are Mbarara, Rakai, Ntungamo, Isingiro, Rakai Lwengo, Lyantonde, Buhweju and Kiruhura. According to Dr. Tindimugaya, "under a public, private partnership arrangement between the Directorate of Water Resources management, GIZ and Coca Cola system, a lot has been done to stem the damage to River Rwizi". Under the catchment management plan, four wetlands previously degraded have now been fully restored. These wetlands, which cover 280 acres, include the four hotspot micro-catchments of Nyakambu, Nyakaikara, Maseruka and Bujjaga. When fully regenerated they are expected to store rain water and

release it gradually into river Rwizi thus curbing flooding during the wet season.

For instance the Nyakambu wetland had been turned into an area for rearing animals, before it was reclaimed and restored.

Under the law wetlands cannot be owned by individuals. Consequently, local leaders in affected districts are using these laws to save the river Rwizi, by also stopping commercial activities in the area.

Besides the restoration of these micro-catchments, revolving environment funds for alternative livelihoods have been introduced in order to encourage the communities around them to take part in their sustainable management.

The villages have also been mapped and will soon be provided with alternative safe water sources as part of conservation incentives, to save the river. Under this arrangement, the upper parts of the Rwizi catchment are to be provided with 28 gravity flow schemes. This will provide safe clean water and also reduce water runoff on the hills.

However the Catchment Management Plan needs to go hand in hand with sensitization and attitude change. For instance many brick makers prefer to work in the river bank buffers. But they do not know that this is illegal. Some well-intentioned farmers have also attempted to develop tree nurseries adjacent to river beds. This is also illegal.

Studies are also underway to determine whether the River Rwizi can support industrial growth along its banks, where industrialists need its waters. The setting up of the Rwizi Catchment Development Committee and the approval of a Catchment management plan whose primary objective is to restore the river are important first steps in this direction.

Some experts have now decreed for the long term solution in saving River Rwizi will require a change in attitude, that assures the public that the river is not just a problem and challenge for the western region of Uganda, but one the entire country should address.



Matiri evictions in pictures





Forest land in Kagombe, Kibaale turned into farmland. WEMNET - UGANDA PHOTO



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