Budongo is Uganda’s largest surviving natural forest, with a total surface of approximately 825 square km. It is the home to endangered and lucrative mahogany trees, and a habitat to critical populations of chimpanzees and other primates. But it is under threat from encroachers, including recruits at the Police Training School, Kabalye.

Police activities destroying forests

PLUS: How population pressure on land in Rwanda impacts on forests in Uganda
table of contents

It is illegal to develop a wetland, says court ................................................. 5

Looming catastrophe as factory pollutes river ................................................. 6

Uganda’s forest under threat due to weak laws – activist ................................ 8

Police activities leave devastating impact on forests ..................................... 10

Is the ban on kaveera a lame duck? ................................................................. 12

Ray of hope for water in kamwenge ............................................................... 13

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This publication has been made possible by the generous support and cooperation of Independent Development Fund - IDF
When the law men become the law breakers

Budongo Forest in Masindi district, arguably Uganda's largest natural tropical forest, is home to the endangered and priceless mahogany trees. However, it is in very grave danger of being wiped out by encroachers and illegal timber harvesters, including sadly among them, their number, the police. The police have continually invaded the forest to indiscriminately cut trees for poles, logs and firewood without the authorization of the National Forestry Authority, the body charged with protecting Uganda's central forest reserves. Their illegal activities have been witnessed by alarmed residents of Bulvango village in Karujuba division in Masindi district, from where they have made numerous incursions to harvest poles for their mock guns, and for building their huts or mama ngele poles, to be used during training at Kabalye Police Training School. They also make trips to Kabanyo, to be used during training at local conservation efforts. Local communities have been taught to enter Budongo Forest only in planned excursions, local efforts like the Masindi District Forestry Organisation in Masindi, while at the national level, the population is being encouraged to plant three trees for every one that is cut. Ironically, the NFA books no excuses when carrying out operations against illegal timber harvesters and encroachers of forest lands, arresting and arraigning them before the courts of laws. The local communities are therefore not at all surprised that the police recruits who are illegally harvesting in Budongo forest are not held to account. Because of this, they are reporting increased illegal timber harvesting and charcoal burning in this pristine tropical forest. They say the illegalities have been encouraged because the police, at the forefront of illegally harvesting in Budongo in disregard of the NFA, is important that the police lead by example and learn to respect and live by the laws in place to safeguard and save what little remains of Uganda's natural tropical forests. Budongo Forest is an important habitat to the critically endangered chimpanzees and other primates, besides offering ecological security for the population. Uganda being largely an agricultural country, forests play a critical role in nurturing the favorable climate and rains that feed our agriculture. It does not matter that the Kabalye Police Training School students are still trainees. They are in training at Kabalye Police Training School. They are in training at Kabalye Police Training to enforce the law later on. Indeed, among their lot will be the numbers that will be assigned to the environment police which was set up to enforce environment regulations and laws.

According to locals, this illegal activity in Budongo forest is carried out every time there is a massive training of police recruits. Currently some 4,000 police recruits are undergoing training there. And when they invade the forest they come in their thousands, leaving hundreds of trees destroyed or cut down indiscriminately. This is disheartening to local and national conservation efforts. Local communities have been taught to enter Budongo Forest only in planned excursions, local efforts like the Masindi District Forestry Organisation in Masindi, while at the national level, the population is being encouraged to plant three trees for every one that is cut. Ironically, the NFA books no excuses when carrying out operations against illegal timber harvesters and encroachers of forest lands, arresting and arraigning them before the courts of laws. The local communities are therefore not at all surprised that the police recruits who are illegally harvesting in Budongo forest are not held to account. Because of this, they are reporting increased illegal timber harvesting and charcoal burning in this pristine tropical forest. They say the illegalities have been encouraged because the police, at the forefront of illegally harvesting in Budongo in disregard of the NFA, is important that the police lead by example and learn to respect and live by the laws in place to safeguard and save what little remains of Uganda's natural tropical forests. Budongo Forest is an important habitat to the critically endangered chimpanzees and other primates, besides offering ecological security for the population. Uganda being largely an agricultural country, forests play a critical role in nurturing the favorable climate and rains that feed our agriculture. It does not matter that the Kabalye Police Training School students are still trainees. They should take forestry laws seriously. When they do not respect the laws governing forests, then how should they expect the population to follow suit?

BY EPHRAIM KASOJI

I t is now everyone’s responsibility to protect forests after the environment court in the first court of the land ruled that protecting the environment is commanded by the Constitution.

“This is a matter that is of interest to and impacts on the community as a whole. The individual’s interest must be viewed in the context of that larger interest of society as a whole and in the context of the Constitution and the laws made thereunder,” the Supreme Court held.

In the 6-1 majority decision, that dismissed an appeal in which Kampala Central Division boss, Amooti Godfrey Nyakaana was challenging the legality of National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) in demolishing his house over a decade ago, Chief Justice Bart Katureebe held that the right to a clean and healthy environment enshrined in the Constitution must be protected by the state.

“Individual developers putting up houses in such a critical wetland unregulated by the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) may have grave consequences in future,” he further stated.

Justice Katureebe.

“We are dealing with a grave matter of protecting the environment as mandated by the Constitution,” Justice Katureebe ruled. Activists say that members of the public including civil society organisations can use the courts to protect the environment and advocate for legally approved friendly developments.

Frank Muramuzi, the Executive Director of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) describes the court decision as a precedent. “Putting up structures in a wetland is unlawful,” he says.

He says the court has set guidelines on how we protect the environment and also empowers NEMA to erase down structures constructed in wetlands as required by law.

Those people developing structures in wetlands are doing it outside the requirements of the law. And we are glad that NEMA is now given more strength to deal with what they themselves have been considerable to implement,” says Muramuzi, adding, “Also how helps to protect the environment and property and development of the country.”

Awareness drives

According to Muramuzi, activists will now use the court decision to carry out awareness sessions to equip the people with skills to challenge authorities (government) and investors on projects that compromise the environment.

“This is a matter that is of interest to and impacts on the community as a whole. The individual’s interest must be viewed in the context of that larger interest of society as a whole and in the context of the Constitution and the laws made thereunder,” the Supreme Court held.

“With this judgment, people can tell those encroaching on wetlands to vacate,” he adds.

The court decision stems from an appeal in which Nyakaana faulted the Constitutional Court for deciding that the controversial land on Plot 8 Plantation Road, Bug陋bi in Nakawa Division is a wetland. Court records indicate that Nyakaana obtained a lease from the then Kampala City Council (RCC) for purpose of building a residential house, and subsequently applied for and obtained the necessary approvals for the said construction and commenced work.

In June 2004, environmental inspectors from NEMA carried out an inspection of Nakivubo wetland in Nakawa Division and discovered that Nyakaana’s house had been erected in a wetland.

Court heard that NEMA held a meeting with all residents including Nyakaana but could not reach an agreement on how to handle the situation. Court ordered the demolition of the house.

“The restoration order required the appellant (Nyakaana) to comply with certain conditions including demolition of the house within 21 days. He failed or refused to do so, consequently NEMA demolished the building on January 8, 2005,” the court document read.

The land, according to NEMA, is comprised in Nakivubo Wetland, a critical swamp in Kampala, a city of over two million people.

Nyakaana was grieved with the action taken by NEMA leading to a petition which the Constitutional Court decided in favor of the NEMA and other parties including the Attorney General.

Through his lawyers, Nyakaana wanted court find out if his property was in a wetland subject to management of NEMA. He argued that the method and procedure of located his house and stopping him from using his land in disregard of the law.

Chief Justice Katureebe observed that although one has a right to own land through one of the systems of land tenure, there are situations which necessitate the government either to take over that land or regulate its use for purposes of promoting and protecting the environment for the good of the all people.

“The law is the instrument that the state has to use to protect the environment from abuse, pollution and degradation. A person cannot do anything that is of interest to and impacts on the community as a whole. The individual’s interest must be viewed in the context of that larger interest of society as a whole and in the context of the Constitution.”

The other justices ruling with the Chief Justice held, in a judgement that upheld the 2009 decision of the Constitutional Court which ruled that NEMA had the right to demolish Nyakaana’s house.

The other justices ruling with the Chief Justice are Benjamin Odoki, John Wilson, Tiekoonko, Galindo Okello, Jotham Tumwebisey and Stella Arach Amoko.

However, Justice Esther Kasaijye disagreed with her colleagues and observed that since NEMA demolished Nyakaana’s house without due process of the law, his rights were infringed upon. She said that he is entitled to compensation for the value of the house and other such rights arising from NEMA’s conduct.
A 7-year-old’s life has never been the same ever since she did over a wooden bridge and fell into a stream a year ago. It started with her legs itching severely. It felt so bad that she had to change clothes with the clothes she was chewing her fingers. Today, Luka can’t move on her own without being supported.

Luka is a resident of Kityedo village in Bwijanga sub-county, Masindi district, who is convinced that her illness was caused by the stream’s polluted water. “I almost lost my baby after taking contaminated water,” she said.

The Mugeye-Kaborogota-Nyamasoro-Ntooma River Nile, one of the tributaries of River Kafu, which pours into Ntooma valley in Hoima district. Ntooma is one of the villages that has been heavily degraded by these profligate distillers polluting wetlands in the sub-region.

According to NEMA’s PRO Naome Karekaho, “This [August] used to be a rainy season but it is dry. We expect them to have taken action, or reported it to the central (NEMA), which they haven’t done.” According to William Nsimira, the district environment officer. "This is Kinyara sugar factory, which has also had great impacts on our forests and wetland degradation in the sub-region. As children, we used to fetch water from that spring well, but now it’s turning black. It’s pungent water, but also they are cutting down for trees for burning firewood,” he said.

Edward Mihiretu, the executive director Masindi District NGO Forum says Byensi has been previously advised by one of his workers that they could ask for permission from Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) to pour the molasses waste on the murram roads. The molasses is sticky and can help to reduce the dust. However, Byensi said it is an expensive venture that would require them to transport the molasses. Byensi, instead proposes that if he gets finances, he would rather buy a digester that would turn the waste into fertilizers.

A village councilor for Bwijanga sub-county, the affected area, said NEMA should ensure that the waste-water/effluent discharge from the distilling plant, and other small scale distillers polluting wetlands in the sub-region. As children, we used to fetch water from that spring well, but now it’s turning black. It’s pungent water, but also they are cutting down for trees for burning firewood,” he said.

The major driver for breweries setting up base in Kinyara sugar factory, which has also had great impacts on our forests and wetland degradation in the sub-region. As children, we used to fetch water from that spring well, but now it’s turning black. It’s pungent water, but also they are cutting down for trees for burning firewood,” he said.

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Uganda’s forest under threat due to weak laws – activist Sarah Kintu

While the world is battling with devastating climate change effects resulting from poor environmental conservation, Uganda’s forests are bearing the brunt of encroachment. Eco-Guardian’s VENEX WATEBAWA caught up with SARAH KINTU an Activist and Programmes support Manager at the Independent Development Fund-IDF during her visit to Matiri Central Forest Reserve (CFR) in Kyenjojo and Kagombe Central Forest in Kagadi- Kibale. Below are some excerpts of their conversation.

Qn: You took time off to visit the central forest reserves in western Uganda. What was your mission?
Ans: Yes I took off time to undertake a familiarization of the forests where we are supporting an organization –Water and Environment Media Network Uganda WEMNET-U, which is making a forest governance intervention in Matiri and Kagombe CFRs. And I must say it was quite revealing experience for me, as I’m in unlearning the understanding of what it means and what we are doing to destroy forests and the environment as citizens. I was able to observe the extent of forest degradation - which has reached alarming levels. I can say it was quite an exciting moment for me, but also saddening.

Qn: You say what you witnessed during your visit was saddening and also interesting at the same time. What do you mean?
Ans: What was interesting is that IDF, we have been supporting human rights and governance issues. But issues of safe guarding the environment have not been really core to the kind of interventions we have been supporting before. Therefore this project is somehow a unique project that is rewarding, that is really going to create positive impact and in particular the area that WEMNET-U is targeting. What was interesting is that the proposal was really forthcoming when we saw the kind of project that was pitched. But at the same time the saddened bit is the experience I got about these forests. Did I not expect the diverse rat- ing encroachment levels that I encountered as it showed to me that people do not care about the environment and it is sad.

Qn: Did you bother to ask why this is happening that way?
Ans: People in the [CFRs] for various reasons. But of course as a country, I think we see there is scarcity of land which people are looking for land for settlement and farming. I think those are the push factors forcing those people to come and oc- cupy the forest land. Otherwise, they should not be doing this. But also I think we have weak laws. The community is look- ing on, the law enforcers are looking on and government as well as people are coming in to destroy the trees that will take very long to grow again; the forest cover is really being destroyed. So as much as there is population pressure that is pushing people to oc-

cupy protected forests for selfish reasons; what is government doing about it? The laws are not really supportive.

Qn: Is it a problem with the laws, or law en-forcers not doing their job, or the land tenure system in these areas?
Ans: There is a big problem of ownership of land in this country, where it belongs to just the few. For instance, in some villages the poor have been ripped off their land, [which has been] taken away by government for development. Women have been deprived of the land by either their husbands or in laws and are rendered landless. But also there is the challenge of uncontrolled illegal immigration; be-cause of such people end up in forests, which they look at as free land.

Qn: You are suggesting that people see pro- tected areas as free land to grab?
Ans: Sure there is lack of appreciation of the en- vironment by the community. We are forgetting what it used to be like in the older days. We are for-getting what we studied in schools for some of us, or what we have seen in society and relating what the environment contributes to our everyday life. It is [part of] general knowledge to know that the natural forests cover is maintained, we will be able to have the rains; we will be able to have the fruits and herbs and medicines that are characteristic of natural forests and all other benefits. But because of greed we put all this aside and we look at food for today, and forget about the rest of our lives and generations to come.

Qn: In what way can this state of affairs and environmental degradation be reversed then?
Ans: It all starts with individuals. First of all the community, citizens should appreciate the role of forests in our everyday life. We should also refocus our sensitization efforts to sustainable use-of-forest products. But again the encroaching communities are aware and infringe forests to play. What government should do, is to [prevent] communities living adjacent to forests reserves from encroaching. But especially important, the law enforcement unit of NFA should be vigilant and use the law to counter the political pronounce- ments and work with CSOs who compliment their work, who are vital in sensitizing the population about the benefits that forests provide.

Qn: I see that you are suggesting that en- forcement of the law is what is lacking?
Ans: True, what should happen is to engage the judiciary such that when encroachers are pro- duced in court, heavy sentences should be passed. The politicians in districts, who make uninformed pronouncements to their electorate, should be sensitized about the laws that govern the envi- ronment. This will help to defend each one’s role in safeguarding the environment because NFA alone cannot win the war against encroachment and therefore the need for joint efforts.

Qn: Looking at the levels of degradation in your own description, where are we headed?
Ans: As a country we are headed for a disaster if we don’t take action now. Looking at what is hap-pening with crop production for those who practice farming, the yields are not matching the investment. There are variations in weather patterns. The time you expect the rains, they do not come and when you get them sometimes they are destructive and there are indications of climate change. Our fore parents used to tell us the months when we would receive rains, which is not the case anymore. When we destroy the forests the entire rain cycle is de-stroyed. While the developed world is polluting, the developing world of which Africa is part, is absorb-ing the industrial pollution and it is the trees that help us play the role of carbon sinking. And my piece of advice is that in whatever we do, we should do it responsibly and not looking at the world like it is ending with our generation. I must salute the community around Matiri CFR, who saw sense in conservation of course after a lot of sensitization and they took it upon themselves to voluntarily vacate the central forest reserve and today you see regeneration of the forest is on course.

Qn: Any specific message that you would like to pass to the country on safeguarding our for- ests?
Ans: To All Country men and women, the future of this country lies in our hands. Let our actions not affect our innocent children. When you destroy a wetland the water system is endangered, when you cut forests the entire ecological system is endan-gered such that you will see increased problems, animal conflicts, reduction in water bodies will be registered which in the long run will cause regret-table challenges.

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Trees that have been felled in Budongo. WEMNET - UGANDA PHOTO

Qn: Who do you particularly fault for all that is going on in the central forest reserves you visited?
Ans: During the exposure visit to Kagombe CFR, I found out that there was a court order issued. But it was disappointing because the court order only favors the encroachers. It suggested that people shouldn’t continue staying in the forest and not open up new gardens. This has instead deterred conservation efforts and the encroachers are taking advantage of the court order to encroach further. If court was fair, it should have asked both parties to move away from the contested land to give way to the opening of the boundaries. The court order has completely disadvantaged the NFA in addition to lack of resources that would enable NFA to properly monitor such no fresh gardens are opened.
Police activities leave devastating impact on forests

Dennis Opida recently witnessed something unusual when hundreds of unfamiliar people entered Budongo central forest reserve at the site of a forest poaching incident in Kabalye, a Masindi district.

It was a long queue of people entering the forest. For all the time I have worked here, I had never seen this before,” Opida said.

This was a genuine fear of people entering the forest. They were like planning to overthrow the government,” Simon Mwesigwa, said.

They are such a huge line of people entering the forest – with the sound of trucks moving, sirens blaring, flashing lights on. They made such a huge clearing, indiscriminately,” Mwesigwa says.

“Government talks of planting trees; cut down hundreds of unfamiliar people entering the forest,” the project assistant Bosco Nek, who is mobilizing fellow villagers to plant trees, says.

These guys are usually looking for poles, which they use for building their huts (manyattas) and for firewood,” Nek.

“They are going from place to place to cut trees, says Frank Mwesigwa, said: “Do they know their responsibility? They are denying dry wood, why would poachers plant trees?” he added.

“They are not allowed to plant trees, says the forest which has conducted a survey of population, but they cut them indiscriminately,” Mwesigwa says.

The community has complained that if they are denied dry wood, why would poachers plant trees,” says Elisha Tho, the secretary LCI Bulwango.

“Government talks of planting trees; cut one, plant three. But it is instead the vice versa, it is instead the police at the forefront of destruction,” Elisha Tho.

And just when the community thought it was a one-off, the recruits came back for the second and third time in a period of two months.

According to Jenesio Opaa, whose home- stead is 500m away from the forest, the po- lice action has opened up fresh wounds for illegallity in the forest.

“Charcoal burning in the forest has sky- rocketed. I hear them passing by my house every night, ferrying charcoal out of the for- est. I had the power of arresting, I would arrest many,” says youthful Opar.

“Now, you hear trucks moving, flashing lights, they are going in and out. They are going one mile in and ten miles out,” Tho.

“The forest is going. All the big trees are being cut. At least more than five trees are cut every day. And if it continues, what will happen?” he adds.

Indeed, when the writer entered the for- est using one of the routes claimed to have been used by the police, the level of de- struction was alarming. Yes, outside, the for-

est looks intact, but inside, it’s just empty – with several trees standing tall. While here, you should expect to see human activities going on in the forest – with the sound of someone cutting a tree coming through. On a slight pursuit of the sound, we discovered several huge trees just cut down and cut into logs, perhaps ready to be put on the timber cutting tools or piled up in charcoal barns.

Increased illegal activities.

“Without security, we couldn’t manage. However, it was evident there is so much going – with the forest littered with glass and broken circuits. On the boundary, there are abandoned logs, now drying up. “This is a crime, without the police, they would be putting in charcoal barns.”

About two months ago, three trucks loaded with timber were captured.

On another night, you hear trucks mov- ing, they hear you,” Elisha Tho.

“The police are so many, I can’t say. They are getting away with what they do. They are pulling out logs, and they say they are carrying them to build homes,” Tho.

“It was a long queue of people entering the forest. For all the time I have worked here, I had never seen this before,” Opida said.

“We agreed with police that poachers have been invading the forest,” the project assistant Bosco Nek, the project assistant of Masindi District NGO Forum and also coordinator of Masindi District Forest Forum said.

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But they must also con- fess to anything, they have made their lives difficult. If you are found out, you are put in prison. They seem to have come up with a new strategy. They are now operating in the forest reserve, they will go into the forest reserve, they will go into the forest reserve,” Tho.

“The community has complained that if they are denied dry wood, why would poachers plant trees,” says Elisha Tho, the secretary LCI Bulwango.

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CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS SAY NOT ENOUGH IS BEING DONE TO ENFORCE IT

IS THE BAN ON KAVEERA A LAME DUCK?
BY SOLOMON LUMAMBULA & VENEX WATEBABA

Civil society activists are concerned that the total ban on polythene carrier bags, also known as Kaveera, will ever be effectively enforced. The ban was recently passed by cabinet. But going by recent pronouncements, activists say it is difficult to see any commitment by government in upholding the ban. A case in point is the latest cabinet ministers’ meeting which resolved to support the ban on polythene carrier bags.

In June the prime minister who is also the head of government, put a halt on the enforcement of the Kaveera ban which attributed criticism from sections of society.

While the head of Action Coalition on Climate Change a None-Governmental Organization, Enock Nimpamya has welcomed the move, it is reservations. Nimpamya says given the adverse environmental implications resulting from the use of polythene materials, a total ban on polythene bags is a good direction by government. However he is cautious whether the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) can enforce it.

For over six years, there was inaction from government on the enforcement of the ban that prohibited the production and importation of polythene plastic carrier bags of less than 35 microns, in Uganda.

In this article, the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) suddenly started enforcing the ban.

Recent reports from Uganda’s environmental protection agency NEMA show that the ban is being effectively implemented. He believes that NEMA will not give up on enforcing the ban.

However the struggle to protect the environment is not limited to the enforcement of the ban, it is unfortunate that the same politicians usually frustrate the enforcement of such resolutions. He notes that for a long time they (activists) have been calling for a total ban on Kaveera to protect the environment in vain.

Speaking passionately about environmental protection, Nimpamya says the politicians in this government directly and indirectly benefit from the plastic manufacturing industries. He says this explains why they are so soft on the enforcement of the Kaveera ban.

Some of these plastic manufacturers finance the political campaigns of the politicians who in turn frustrate the enforcing agent NEMA.

Nimpamya cites Rwanda where the Kaveera ban has been effectively (NEMA). He believes that there is a need for political will in Uganda to help NEMA and other government agencies enforce the ban.

"President Museveni should pronounce himself on the matter, to give a good example to the other leaders and even the manufacturers will appreciate that this is a serious resolution that must be strictly enforced," he says.

Nimpamya had no kind words for the Plastic Manufacturers who are calling for more sensitization of the public on usage of polythene materials and suggesting that they are not necessarily a solution to environmental degradation.

On the way forward, Nimpamya says that production of the polythene bags must be completely stopped before the NEMA stretches its hands on the supermarkets to other marketplaces.

He adds that there is need for deliberate effort to increase funding towards the National Environmental Management Authority to recruit the required staff. Nimpamya says that less than 50% of the positions at the authority are occupied, yet the organization is supposed to serve a population of 34 million.

Effective enforcement of the ban would require empowerment of the Uganda National Board of Standards that controls the border points in order to stem the smuggling of dangerous plastic materials into the country.

He further believes that the cabinet ministers must also handle environmental related cases. Nimpamya points out that having special court sessions on Environmental degradation in the country’s Judiciary will render the infringement of environmental protection to the people’s health and the economy.

However the struggle to protect the environment is not limited to government agencies. The public can also play a major role in enforcing the ban. Nimpamya advises voters to take advantage of this political season to scrutinize the different manifestos of the political organizations or candidates to see whether they can talk about climate change and those that are environmentally conscious to lead and build the capacity to lead and succeed. Water and Environment Minister, Prof. Ephraim Karamutu recommended the development of the water scheme saying it would reduce water scarcity and failure of the infrastructure. He said the decentralized water supply system easy to control and manage for prompt maintenance and sustainable service.

“Communities need long term support gradually reducing over the years. Together with our partners we have set out some principles that guide our approach at each level, in order to ensure permanent water and sanitation services for all,” she says.

Nimpamya has appealed to government to lead the efforts while external agencies like Water for People work in a way that supports, guides and builds the capacity to lead and succeed. Water and Environment Minister, Prof. Ephraim Karamutu recommended the development of the water scheme saying it would reduce water scarcity and failure of the infrastructure. He said the decentralized water supply system easy to control and manage for prompt maintenance and sustainable service.

“What we need to worry is bout climate change. We must keep wetlands and forest cover to have sustainable underground water,” says Karamutu.

For his part, Mr Simon Komasa says that before the coming of the water scheme, the people survived on traditional water ponds and very few shallow wells and springs. The search for water in Biguli, an area dominated by farming is such a hardship that has since cost human life.

Ray of hope for water in Kamwenge

BY SOLOMON LUMAMBULA

"Water for People" is not only a privilege to enjoy it safely. In Biguli sub-county, water is scarce and the few sources there are shared between people and animals, a situation that poses a health risk to the consumers.

Until recently, the situation at Biguli was not alien to Ugandans in many parts of Kamwenge District. Ms Cate N. Nimanya, the country director of Water for People, explains that the situation has changed for 53.4 per cent of residents, following a joint investment with Kamwenge District Local government.

She says that the piped water scheme worth Shs400 million was launched to cover 7km in Biguli and Kirinda, to serve over 7,000 people.

Local advocacy organisation, Water for People has invested over Shs 600 million to create a motorized piped water system, while the district local government has invested over Shs 15 million, including construction of over 9 water points serving communities within Biguli.

However, Ms Nimanya says the development comes with a cost to enable permanent water and sanitation services for all.

“Water for People for many of our approaches are market-based and we believe the private sector is a key player. Over 60 households have applied for a private connection. This shows that Ugandans want to close in their homes,” Nimanya says.

“We hope the operator (government) together with partners will fulfill their dream so they can spend other times doing more economical activities.”

Biguli sub-county’s Water Board in partnership with Water for People has since selected a local scheme operator, Biguli Traders Association to manage the system and enable people access the safe water at Shs 100 per pery can, compared to Shs 300 paid in the past, “and the cost will continue to go down once the area get alternatives for power”.

Ms Nimanya says that the initiative comes amidst the current economic difficulties present within our sector and this means that we need to get extra innovative.

She pledged support to the communities to ensure they get value for money. According to Ms Nimanya, Water for People has metered boreholes in the community which was
How population pressure on land in Rwanda impacts on forests in Uganda

BY FELIX BASISME

It is a bright sunny morning in a freshly opened up patch of land inside Kanaga Central forest reserve, deep in Kibaale district. The cleared up place is about 500 square meters, with the remains of beans, maize and cassava. Between the garden stands huge burnt out tree trunks and felled logs that appear to have been cut over a year ago.

A close walk reveals newly constructed makeshift hill-like structures scattered all over the heart of the central forest reserve. Most of the makeshift structures are covered with grass and old tar papers and provide the living quarters for the forest encroachers. In front of one makeshift tent lies a young girl, Trifonia Tumuramye, 13. She is lying on a mat and covers herself with a cloth. Dirty sauce pans and jerry cans are scattered around her. Her mother, Medathere Ntamuhera, 34 sits beside her daughter with a sorrowful look. Ntamuhera is one of hundreds of Rwandese, who found a soft landing in Uganda after fleeing land pressure in Rwanda.

Over the years, they have come to own property and some are now LC leaders who abet illegal settlement in Uganda’s forest reserves. The area is home to Uganda’s Bunyoro sub region, particularly Kibaale district. The area is a transit to Uganda’s 16 gazetted forest reserves.

“Every Sunday we return to Birungi, Nyamarundi where our family settled 16 gazetted forest reserves. We bought a piece of land little between Shs 150,000 and Shs 200,000. We bought a piece of land little,” she adds.

“I lost my husband in February here, he got sick and died without any medication, in March, we were chased from the forest reserve by NFA, I have nowhere to go, am just here waiting for my death,” she adds.

“Since then we have been on the run and fights with National Forest Authority (NFA) with evictions as we cannot trace the people who sold to us nor is there anyone who can come up to help us. I’m alone with two children and we were forced to stay away from the forest.”

Despite the other challenges like corruption faced by NFA to manage forests in Uganda in the timber trade and interference by local politicians, the country has weak systems that have failed to stem illegal migration coupled with the numerous refugee settlements scattered around the country, where refugees easily mingle with the locals.

Porous borders

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Uganda has porous borders that foreigners find it easy to cross and settle in Uganda unlike in any other neighboring country in the Great lakes region. Between 1995 and 2005, Hoima had a total of 61,170 hectares of forests. Statistics from the district forest office indicate that 38,000 hectares of forests were encroached on and cleared up place is about 500 square meters. Thus, the seasons have changed in the last 15 years of encroachment.”

The NFA Kagadi Sector Manager, Mr. Charles Aviani says, “This sector has 16 forests, but we found all forests were encroached on and cultivated with bananas, maize, sugar cane, tobacco and beans.” Aviani explains without being convinced by the excuses he receives.

“People said that they are hungry and have nowhere to dig, but we said no, you must return to where you came from before 1994 and so far over 1,000 people have left the forests.”

The forum brings together all key players in environment and natural resources for increased planning and voices in sustainable natural resources management.

In the last decade, civil wars in the neighbouring Rwanda and DR Congo have led to a steady stream of refugees in Uganda. The UNHCR has settled hundreds at Rwamwanja, Kyangwali and at Kyaka in Kamwenge, Hoima and Kyegegwa districts, respectively.

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“People said that they are hungry and have nowhere to dig, but we said no, you must return to where you came from before 1994 and so far over 1,000 people have left the forests.”

He adds, “we told them that whether you have 20 children or came from Rwanda or Kabale many years ago and you no longer know where you came from, you must move out of our forest.”

The deforestation problem cuts across the Albertine basin. At one way to stem this problem, the Rwenzori Anti-corruption Coalition (RAC) and Joint Effort to Save the Environment (JESE), NGOs based in Fort Portal but operating in the region have joined hands to help in the management of environment and natural resources particularly forestry resources.

“Forest resources remain a big challenge in the region and the country at large. This has been attributed to the manner in which these resources are managed both at national, district and sub county levels. This has caused immense destruction of these vital ecosystems especially in the Albertine region,” their joint report released in June reads.

Both NGOs have formed the Inter district Forests, Forests, proper accountability and advocating for increased investment in the natural resources sector in the three districts.

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And of late, hundreds of refugees have flocked into Uganda and have easily mingled with Ugandans and settled anywhere they find hospitable.

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Encroaching on Kagombe

Destroyed environment

CLOCKWISE:
Waragi in water bodies in Masindi District
The contaminated stream where Luka met her fate
Encroachers being sent on remand in Kagadi
The OC police Kagadi conspires with illegal timber loggers

NFA officials talking to an encroacher in Kagombe CFR.
A makeshift inside Kagome Central Forest Reserve - Kibaale
Encroachers being sent on remand in Kagadi
A forest in Kagombe CFR has been cleared for maize plantation
LDF Sarah Kintu takes a pose by the endangered Ngote tree in Kagombe CFR.
Some of the poles left behind by the police recruits inside Budongo Forest. 

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