

EDITORIAL

Tree planting and nurturing efforts should surpass tree harvesting

March 21 was International Forest Day. The day which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 is to raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests and of trees outside forests.

This year's theme is forests and economies. In many parts of the world, this theme has come to life. Trees have become a major source of livelihood, influencing growth in the economy. One such area is Bukedi Sub-region.

A story published in the *Daily Monitor* of March 25 titled "Concern over rampant tree felling in Bukedi" shows how tree cutting is now a lucrative business. It is reported that dealers move from village to village buying woodlots and transporting logs to an industrial park. That trucks loaded with freshly cut logs destined for the Sino Industrial Park from the villages can be seen making trips across Bukedi Sub-region.

A timber dealer in Budaka says a tonne of eucalyptus logs goes for about Shs85,000, while other species fetch around Shs75,000 per tonne.

The issue:

Tree planting

Our view:

The industrial park and other such establishments that have provided an increased demand for trees must be on the frontline of sensitising local communities about the importance of ensuring that the ecosystem is not damaged by actions such as deforestation.

And that an entire eucalyptus plantation can be sold for between Shs3 million and Shs4 million, depending on the size and maturity of the trees. It is estimated that more than 100 vehicles roll down to the factory on a daily basis. While this has its upside, as it means there's money in it for those who have trees to trade, it begs the inevitable question: At what cost is all of this to the environment?

Environmentalists warn that if the trend continues unchecked, the region could face increased soil erosion, declining agricultural productivity, and long-term ecological degradation. According to the National Forestry Authority, Uganda loses about 122,000 hectares of forest cover annually.

Budaka District Forest officer Mr Patrick Okiddi described the trend as alarming, noting that private forest cover is being depleted at a fast rate. Trees have a long list of benefits to our livelihood. They are a source of food, medicine and basically sustain the ecosystem while depletion of trees results in soil degradation, increased flooding, reduced agricultural

productivity, climate resilience, and that's only a bit of it. That is why trends or practices such as is happening in Bukedi Sub-region and many other parts of the country must not be ignored.

Tree planting efforts must match or even surpass the tree harvesting. And as highlighted by environmental experts, the planted trees must be nurtured to maturity if any real progress is to be felt and realised. The industrial park and other such establishments that have provided an increased demand for trees must be on the frontline of sensitising local communities about the importance of ensuring that the ecosystem is not damaged by actions such as deforestation. They must lead the tree planting and nurturing campaigns. Economic growth is great, and every community should aspire for it, but it should not be at the cost of the environment.

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