

THE PRESIDENT BLAMED THE THREE-YEAR DRY SPELL AND HUNGER IN KANUNGU TO ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

By Caleb Bahikaho

President Yoweri Museveni has urged the people who have invaded and settled in wetlands, forest reserves, river banks and lake shores to leave them peacefully and save the country from disaster.

Museveni was speaking at a public rally at Rushoroza Seed School in Kihhi sub-county, Kanungu district on Wednesday, shortly after his impromptu tour of Kameme village, which is worst hit by a drought and hunger.

The village also experienced a severe storm that destroyed vast expanses of agriculture land.

Museveni toured Ntungwa River in Kihhi sub-county, which separates Kanungu from Rukungiri districts and directed the State House Comptroller, Lucy Nakyobe, to immediately ensure the establishment of an irrigation scheme, using solar-powered water pumps, to enable the area practise agriculture all year round without relying on natural factors.

He also said the Government would construct valley dams in Kanungu, to boost water sources in the district.

Kanungu district has been hit by hunger as a result of long drought spells in the past three years degenerating into a humanitarian crisis.

Museveni delivered drought-resistant, quick maturing, high-yielding seeds to the district, to boost food security. The seeds included those of three types of cassava, three types of maize, millet, sorghum, Irish potatoes, pumpkins and four types of beans.

He said Kanungu, like many other parts of Uganda, has experienced an unprecedented drop in rainfall in the recent

Get out of wetlands, reserves – Museveni



WORST DROUGHT

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President Museveni touring Ntungwa River in Kanungu district. He directed Nakyobe (left) to ensure that an irrigation scheme is established there. PPU Photo

past due to the attack on the swamps, wetlands, forests, lakes and rivers that contribute 40% of the rainfall the country receives.

He said the drop in rainfall affected agricultural production in most parts of the country, creating an unprecedented hunger and famine.

Agriculture minister Vincent Bamulagaki Sempijja said the ministry has conducted

research and produced fast-yielding and drought-resistant crops that can mature in two to three months, which can avail food to the population in a short period.

He appealed to the local council leadership in the area at district and sub-county level, to pass strong by-laws against the misuse of seedlings provided by the Government. He also called for tree planting

campaigns to improve the environment and increase the chances of rain formation.

The bishop of Kinkiizi diocese, the Rt. Rev. Dan Zoreka, told the President that the assessment which the church did, shows that destroying the swamps and planting trees at the banks of rivers were contributing to the drought in the country.

Bishop Zoreka said the church

had already organised for relief food to 1,000 affected families in the sub-counties of Nyanga, Kihhi and Nyamirama, which will be distributed on Sunday.

Museveni noted: "Science shows that 40% of rainfall comes from swamps and small rivers. It is only 60% that comes from oceans. We have destroyed our 40% and are only relying on the 60% from oceans."

Kihhi sub-county chairperson Nelson Natukunda said the people who are most affected by food shortage are in Kibimbiri parish, Matanda, Kameme, Kyenabutongo, Kiruruma A and Rwerere A, B and C.

The Kinkizi West MP, James Kaberuka, said children and the elderly are the most affected by the hunger, as the other people abandon families to look for food in distant areas.

He said many children are not going to school due to hunger and the fear of dangerous animals, which come from the national park due to drought.

What the people say

A resident, CIPHER Kebirungi, said the Government should cater for the feeding of children at school so that they do not drop out.

Medard Timba of Kyenabutongo cell said most people have sold their land to buy posho.

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Charles Batambi said the Government should seriously penalise anybody found destroying the swamps, if it is true that it is the reason for the drought, so that the people can get food again.