



Pollution: Wastes from Kilembe Hospital dumped on the banks of River Nyamwamba in Kasese District. PHOTO BY MORIS MUMBERE

**THE POLLUTION**

**Mine wastes.** Stock piles of copper that were left behind after the closure of Kilembe mines in 1970s have been steadily flowing with contaminants draining into nearby water bodies, especially of recent, when River Nyamwamba bursts its banks.

According to the Department of Geological Survey and Mines, more than 15 million tonnes of stockpiles were produced by the mines between 1956 and 1980.

Water from deep underground tunnels has been oozing out of the mines carrying with it dissolved minerals into the river.

Hundreds of people and animals along River Nyamwamba depend on it for a living.

As different studies indicate, the discharges into the river contain heavy metals like Copper, Cobalt, Iron and Lead which creates a threat getting into the food chain where they accumulate over time.

**Government reaction.** According to Mr. Jeconius Musingwira, the western region spokesperson for National Environment Management Authority (Nema), government stopped Tibet Hima Mining Company Limited (THMCL), a mining company that took over Kilembe mines, from operating Kilembe mines to waste management issues.

"They [THMCL] were stopped mainly due to waste management issues. Some copper tailings and other wastes go down into River Nyamwamba and may have effect on flora and fauna downstream the management of the mines needs to first rectify this," Musingwira said.

In February 2016, NEMA wrote to the management THMCL about waste management.

"This authority notes with concern the despite numerous reminders and notices to you from Kasese District advising you to comply with environmental requirements applicable to the Tibet Hima Mining Company Limited, mine developments and operations, especially the management and disposal of mine tailings, THMCL has not addressed the issues as needed," the February 25, 2016 letter by the Nema executive director Tom Okurut, read in part.

However, Mr Alex Kwatampora Bineza the THMCL project manager, said: "a problem happened when the tailing walls broke down in December 2016 contaminating the water in the river

"People who have been exposed to such pollution tend to also suffer memory deterioration, prolonged reaction time and reduced understanding," Muganzi added.

He said this is likely to be a problem because Lake George is supplied to the entire region through the food chain, the metals are easily consumed by man beings.

The secretary of Kayin Management Unit (BMU) George in Kamwenge Di Nicholas Kabagambe, said breeding grounds at the Lake George have been a situation. He added that the area has been experiencing less fish for the last three or more years.

Should the pollution checked, there is a risk of ever drops in River Nyamwamba more likely to be carried to water bodies like Lake George channel, Lake Edward, Lake Albert, Lake Albert, River Nile as they all share the same sequence.

By Felix Basimwe, I

# Nyamwamba river pollution worries Rwenzori residents

**Impact.** The river empties into Lake George, the main source of fish for the community in the Rwenzori area, so any pollution in the river affects the fish quality downstream and thus the consumers.

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**KASESE.** Ms Oliver Biira is a farmer at St Peters village in Nyamwamba Division, Kasese District. She cultivates beans and vegetables near River Nyamwamba.

However, Ms Biira and other farmers face several challenges whenever River Nyamwamba bursts its banks.

"Whenever this river floods, a lot of water containing copper and other minerals from Kilembe mines spills over to our gardens and our crops wilt," she says.

She adds: "We who use water from River Nyamwamba for irrigation are just wasting time compared to those farmers who have high yields in the Mubuku irrigation scheme because the water they use is from rivers Mubuku and Isebwe, which is clean without any impurities," she reasons.

Mr Yasin Zadoki, a sand miner on River Nyamwamba in Rukoki Sub-county, says when he takes longer hours in the water in River Nyamwamba, his body itches and appears as if he has spent more than three or

**ABOUT THE RIVER**

**Main water source.** River Nyamwamba is the major source of water to residents of Kilembe and Kasese Town.

The river snakes through Kasese District downstream to Kamwenge District and empties into Lake George.



five days without bathing. Mr Zadoki observes: "The stones which are always white in colour turn brown when water levels in River Nyamwamba drop but those on the banks remain white, which is an indication that copper might have turned the stones to brown."

**The effects**

Ms Doreen Muja, a resident of Kanyangeya ward, says whenever they drink water from River Nyamwamba, her children develop abdominal complications.

"One of my children has developed problems with her intestines and when I took her to the clinic, the medical staff advised me to stop using water from the river," Ms Muja says.

When asked to comment about these issues, Dr Peter Muhindo, the Kasese Municipal medical officer, warned: "River water is not suitable for domestic consumption since it contains a lot of minerals such as copper and iron ore, which mixes with a lot of oils and garbage. People defecate in the river and others wash dirty clothes in it."

He added: "Others dig around

the rivers or spray chemicals on the crops, and when water moves through trenches and channels while irrigating their gardens, a lot of dangerous toxic materials are consumed without noticing".

"Basing on all these mineral ores, people's health and body conditions can react in any way since the nature of water and where it originates is a source of minerals which may be harmful to human health," he added.

He said there's a disease called Pneumoconiosis found in excessive mineral deposits, which mix in soils and water. Pneumoconiosis is an occupational restrictive lung disease caused by inhalation of dust, often in mines and from agriculture.

**The pollutants**

Dr Muhindo said as the river rolls down stream, it sweeps a lot of minerals in the area, including from Kilembe hospital, which is close to the river.

"There are many corrosive elements in the water from River Nyamwamba so people should desist from drinking it unless it is boiled and whoever feels any abnormalities on his body should immediately go

for checkup to get immediate treatment," he added.

The district health officer, Dr Yusuf Baseke, said: "We need to research more to establish if there are no other effects making the people's skins to itch other than the water from River Nyamwamba."

However, according to Natural Resources Defence Initiatives (NRDI), a non-governmental organisation (NGOs) based in Rwenzori Sub-region, the impact of pollution of River Nyamwamba is being felt in Lake George basin, a Ramsar site.

Lake George is a Ramsar site recognised as a breeding ground for several birds and fish species.

"The direct danger from the stock piles from Kilembe [mines] is felt and will continue to be felt in the greater Lake George basin," Mr Edgar Muganzi, the Coordinator of NRDI, said.

**Far-reaching impact**

"Through erosion, these wastes end up in Lake George and other water sources, which is one of the biggest breeding areas for different species in the Albertine region (fish and birds)," Mr Muganzi says.

He adds that the wastes contain heavy metals which have got adverse effects on human health and this could be the cause of the health problem cases in the area, including rampant kidney failures, discourages among pregnant mothers and animals (after consuming the effected fish), cardiovascular diseases, cancer-related diseases, heart diseases, sleep disorders and concentration disturbances in children.