

Hoima lacks funds to evict encroachers

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By Robert Atuhairwe

Lack of facilitation, inadequate manpower and the absence of the will by the political class is failing efforts to crack down on encroachers settling along River Kafu in Hoima district, *New Vision* has established.

It is now three years since the environment office ordered the over 200 encroachers to vacate, warning of an eviction for those who refuse to.

To date, however, none of them has complied and the environment office is looking on helplessly.

A team of Hoima district environment and natural resources committee on Monday made an impromptu field visit to the river at Rwemparaki village, Buhimba sub-county, where they discovered that part of the papyrus had been converted into acres of fresh gardens.

The settlers had planted acres of rice and maize gardens, among other crops. Hoima district environment officer Joseline Nyangoma said though the river remains the main source of water supply, she is finding it hard to push out the encroachers.

"The reason is mainly lack of finances to facilitate the manpower to enforce the eviction exercise because we would need to slash down the encroachers' gardens. The

BETWEEN THE LINES:

Hoima district environment officer Joseline Nyangoma, said the sh5m government allocates to the district's environmental department is not enough.

sh5m we get every financial year from government coffers to run the district's environmental department is not enough. The political class does not care about environmental conservation," she explained.

William Kyahurwa, a committee member and councillor for the elderly, said monitoring of the river is not done, since the environmental committee lacks a vehicle.

New Vision saw water flow diverted, vegetation cut and burnt and overgrazing, among other illegal activities in the areas of Rwemparaki, Ruhunga Parish in Buhimba sub-county.

At Kadiki in Kabwoya sub-county, the river is being polluted by alcohol distillers and part of the swamp has dried up due to encroachment.

Nyangoma said she would order encroachers to vacate the wetlands, but the tenants *New Vision* talked to, said they were hesitant to reveal the identity of their landlords.

The culprits alleged to be destroying the river



Nyangoma (left) with Hoima district environmental officers at River Kafu. Photo by Robert Atuhairwe

banks are George Bukenya, the chairperson LC1 of Rwemparaki and Ibrahim Ntezisigwe alias Biralisi, who is said to be hiring out land around the river banks to farmers.

Biralisi told the committee that he was processing a land title approved by the district land board.

Nyangoma, who ordered for a halt in the processing of Biralisi's title, added that Kafu, which is a seasonal river, is a breeding ground for hippos, but because the environment

has been disturbed, they have run away, a situation that has negatively affected tourism.

She said there are also crocodiles, snakes and birds, including crested cranes. Nyangoma, however, said, her office is conducting sensitisation for people to appreciate the dangers of settling near the river or its banks.

"The field visit is meant to find a master plan on how to evict the encroachers and that is why I have come with the political wing, so that it is a

multi-stakeholders' approach," she said.

Nyangoma observed that the effects of encroachment on the river are evidenced by the reduced water levels.

She added that the National Water and Sewerage Corporation has plans to draw water from the river or use it as a source of supply water in Hoima municipality, but their efforts could be failed in case the river is degraded.

Lawrence Bigirwa Kasangaki, the area councillor, said some landlords have of recent been

ferrying people from other places to come and cultivate along the river, a move he said angered the residents who had conserved the river for long.

"This act has forced the residents to also cultivate near the river, which escalates the already worse situation," he said.

Nebba Byaruhanga, the Buhimba LC3 chairperson, urged the government to allocate funds for the restoration of the degraded areas of the river.