

THE ENVIRONMENT SECTOR SUPPORTS UGANDA'S ECONOMY WITHOUT ADEQUATE INVESTMENT

BY GERALD TENYWA

Forestry sector: A case of milking the cow without feeding it

It is a case of reaping without sowing. The saying that a prophet is honoured everywhere except in his own hometown is being repeated in Uganda where the environment, particularly the forestry sector, gets crumbs when it comes to sharing of the national cake.

"The environment sector and forestry facilitate agriculture when it comes to making rain and storing water that replenishes farmland," Onesimus Mugenyi, the deputy director of Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), said, adding: "When you look at what goes into the environment and forestry sector, you do not see that it is an area that facilitates agriculture."

Budget for environment

In the last five years, the environment has been allocated between 2% and 2.9% of the national budget and that is down on the pecking order with security, health and education at the top, according to Mugenyi.

He also pointed out that most of the vote for environment is allocated to investment in water and sanitation, pushing forestry farther below.

"Forestry is important to the catchment, but when you look at the funding it does not demonstrate that it is important to the economy," Mugenyi said.

With climate change, ecological systems such as forests and wetlands are going to become important to help people to become more resilient, according to Mugenyi.

He said Uganda will have to re-think ways of funding the environment sector, particularly forestry, pointing out that this will help to shield the human population against the changing environment.

While opportunities at global and national level for the environment have been promising to deliver better funding, the forestry sector is yet to benefit.

Climate change

At the opening of a national consultative forum on the draft climate change policy, Chebet Maikut, a commissioner in charge of the climate change department in the environment ministry, said the Government had secured funding for preparing a strategy for REDD+. This has been funded by the World Bank in Uganda.

REDD+ stands for countries' efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and foster conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

As the Government re-structures the climate change agency, funding is going to be critical in sustaining commitments and obligations in terms of mitigating and adaptation to climate change.

The climate change funds are still in the pipeline, but there are also other sources of funding including the environment fund under the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the wildlife fund under the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA).



The environment minister, Sam Cheptoris, addressing tree farmers in Butologo forest reserve, Mubende district. Many natural forests have been suffered deforestation. Photos by Gerald Tenywa

However, there are challenges of accessing the funds under the top watchdog on the environment and top wildlife body. According to Robert Bakiika, the deputy executive director Environmental Management



Charcoal burners in Amuru district. One of the causes of deforestation is cutting down of trees for charcoal

FACT FILE

- The natural forest cover is currently estimated at 8%, according to National Forestry Authority (NFA)
- The forest cover was 9% in 2015 having declined from 11% in 2011. The forest cover was estimated at 24% in 1990 and this reduced from 45% of the land cover about a century ago
- Currently, the deforestation rate is estimated at 200,000 hectares every year, meaning that Uganda loses a forest, which is about the size of Mabira every year.
- Most of the deforestation is on private land but this is likely to put more pressure on the protected areas – forest reserves – to supply timber, poles and firewood and destroy catchment areas of rivers and lakes.
- NFA manages 15% of the forests under the concept of sustainable use and another 15% is managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which is the top conservation body in the country. The District Forestry Services used to manage 70% of the forest but this is where deforestation has been rampant. The forest on private land has reduced from 70% to 45% over the years

Where is the tree fund?

Government bodies and the environmental CSOs have been left to look at the National Tree Planting Act, which provides for a tree fund, but has never been operationalised. "We have over the years failed to operationalise the fund," Mugenyi said, adding that the Government has not put in place guidelines and a management structure for the fund.

He pointed out that there were concerns within the finance ministry over scattered efforts by different environment bodies to create funds and that they have challenges. He said it was better to put in place one fund for the environment for all environment bodies within government and outside government that implement environment management interventions.

Way out

Consequently, Cornelius Kazoora, a private consultant, has been hired to study the different funds in place and available options for funding the environment sector.

In neighbouring Rwanda, there is one trust fund for environment and forestry and it has started bearing fruit, according to Mugenyi. He also pointed out that there was need to build capacity among Ugandans, particularly environment institutions, that could help access the available funding at global level.

"Rwanda is doing very well and they got funding from the Global Climate Fund," Mugenyi said, adding that government bodies such as the Kampala Capital City Authority and NEMA should build capacity and write proposals in order to access such funding.

THE NATIONAL TREE PLANTING ACT PROVIDES FOR THE TREE FUND, BUT HAS NEVER BEEN PUT INTO ACTION

for Livelihood Improvement Bwaise Facility.

Part of the money charged by NEMA for conducting Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and conducting environment audits is invested in a trust fund. This, according to Bakiika, is used by the top environment body to undertake its activities and it is not accessed by most actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in the environment sector. They (CSOs) cannot also access the wildlife fund, which is under UWA.