

# Elgon region leaders want harsh penalties in climate change law

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**MANAFWA.** Leaders from the Mountain Elgon region have asked government to include harsh penalties in the newly proposed law that seeks to regulate human activities on natural resources to avert dangerous effects of climate change in the country.

Under the proposed Climate Change Bill, government seeks to protect the ecosystem threatened by population pressures and erosion that affect all those who depend on natural space.

The district leaders and Members of Parliament representing the area attributed the rampant degradation of the environment to the high population rates which they said have forced the local people to resort to cultivating on the hills and river banks at the detriment of ecological system.

"Our population is squeezed up by the mountains and that is why people are encroaching on the mountain for survival. We need strong penalties against people cultivating in the reserves and river banks because the rivers, especially Manafwa is silting. The water is very dirty and the flowing is taking away even the fertility our people will use for farming," Ms Rose Motonyi, the Bubulo West



**Eco talk.** The chairperson of Parliamentary Forum on Climate Change Uganda, Mr Lawrence Biyika Songa (2nd left), with State minister for Environment, Mary Goretti Kitutu (2nd right) at the launch of the legislators' handbook last week. PHOTO BY EPHRAIM KASOZI.

Constituency MP said.

Ms Mutonyi observed that due to population pressure, the soils have lost fertility hence making people find alternative fertile areas in the mountains for cultivation.

"Government should come up with a plan to relocate people to other places because they are squeezed and ready to go. Even if we sensitise people, the population is too high. You find a man has so many children and has nowhere to go. As a solution, they run to forest reserves and attack wildlife," she said.

According to Ms Mutonyi, as the new law comes in place, government needs to persuade people to create urban centres to have fewer farmers who can be educated for better yields to avoid burdening the environment.

Manafwa District chairman John Musila said: "We are fond of making good laws which are never implemented. Government must bring a law which would be enforced to guard river banks and all gazetted areas to protect the future."

Describing environment issues as matter of life and death, Mr

Musila asked the leaders to create awareness for their electorates to appreciate the benefits.

The leaders were speaking at a consultative meeting on the proposed climate change laws and guidelines aimed at identifying Mountain Elgon region preferred provisions in the bill.

The Parliamentary Forum on Climate Change in Uganda (PFCC-U) in partnership with Cordaid organised the dialogue for local leaders hosted by Manafwa District local government.

"We are seeking for views on what the women, children, youth and all stakeholders of Mountain Elgon region want to see in the new law and also to encourage the local community interest in addressing climate change," said Ms Christine Kaaya, the PFCC-U coordinator.

At the dialogue, the minister of State for environment, Ms Mary Gorrette Kitutu also launched the legislators' handbook which will guide MPs in monitoring the implementation of the climate change policy in the country.

In 2016, the country experienced hottest temperatures characterised by erratic rainfall and dry spells which affected production in agriculture leading to food shortage, death of animals, floods which destroyed infrastructure facilities like roads and death of people.