



Boat-building in Matoro village

Kenyan fishermen get boats from Sigulu Islands

NAMAYINGO

By George Bitu

As the ban on tree cutting in Kenya bites, Kenyan fishermen have opted to buy new boats from Bukhooli Islands in Uganda.

According to Moses Tabu, a boat builder on Sigulu Islands in Namayingo district, the demand for wooden boats has pushed the price to sh5m.

"In 2015, we used to make new ordinary fishing boats at sh3m. Nowadays, without sh5m and above, you cannot get one," Tabu said.

Anthony Wandera, the Sigulu sub-county councillor, expressed concern that the state of affairs could cause serious deforestation in the neighbourhood.

"As locals cut down trees to satisfy both local and foreign markets, our environment is being destroyed. There is need for stringent measures to control the worrying situation," Wandera said.

James Obwora, the LC3 chairperson, said the sub-county recently passed a bylaw requiring anyone

cutting down a tree to replace it with two plantlets.

"The sub-county has led by example as we have a *mvule* plantation outside the administration block. These, we hope, shall rejuvenate the natural forest cover that has been destroyed over the years," Obwora said.

George Abbot, the Bukhooli Islands MP, argued that the Kenyan and Ugandan island communities share a lot along the common border.

"Most sick people here simply use boats to access better facilitated hospitals in Kisumu. Even essential goods are often picked from there," Abbot said.

He suggested the enactment of bylaws similar to those in Kenya that deter locals from felling endangered tree species.

"When Kenya does not have enough charcoal, it is bought from Uganda. Now, the wooden boats are also from Uganda due to our laxity," he said.

Fred Busagwa, the district environment officer, urged residents to stop cutting down trees for the purpose of making boats.