

POLICE AND ARMY ARE ACCUSED OF AIDING THE ILLEGAL CUTTING DOWN OF TREES AND SALE OF LOGS

YUMBE

By Robert Ariaka

Yumbe loses over sh5b to illegal sale of timber

Yumbe district local government is making huge losses in illegal timber trade.

Swaibe Kama Abubakari, the district forestry officer, told *New Vision* yesterday that the district loses sh5b annually to illegal tree cutting for timber.

He said at least five trucks full of logs leave Yumbe district daily to Kampala and some end up crossing into Kenya. Already, 1,000 square kilometres of the forest have been destroyed in the sub-counties of Midgo, Kerwa, Kochi, Kululu, Romogi, Odruvu, Apo, Ariwa and Drajini.

Abubakari said they had passed a resolution in June last year, to deter the vice, but he had failed to implement it due to threats from the parties involved.

"The situation needs the intervention of the Government because I continue to get threats from the Police and army," he said.

In January, the district officer impounded 275 logs from trucks found heading to Kampala. The Grade One Magistrates' Court permitted the district to auction off the logs.

They also impounded seven other trucks loaded with logs of Afzelian Africana tree species which take between 300 and 500 years to mature.

"When I take action and intercept such trucks, I get calls from officers I do not know and they keep threatening me to stop following the trucks. This has crippled my work, making Yumbe lose its natural cover," he said.

Abubakari said the environmental Police was supposed to be part of the operations to impound trucks ferrying the logs, but they were located in Arua, making it difficult for them to operate.

Josephine Angucia, the Police



Seven trucks laden with logs of the Afzelian Africana tree species were impounded. The tree species take between 300 and 500 years to mature. Photos by Robert Ariaka

spokesperson for the West Nile region, said the region had only one officer in charge of environment who handled nine districts in the region.

The UPDF 4th Division spokesperson, Maj. Telesphor Turyamumanya, responded to the army's involvement allegations, saying leaders should report such officers to the Police so that they are apprehended for interrogation.

He appealed to the district security committee to make recommendations to the army for official deployment in case they need



Swaibe Kama Abubakari, the district forest officer

"When I take action to intercept trucks carrying illegal logs, I get calls from people I do not know,"

Kama Abubakari

special reinforcement.

Way forward

Abubakari said the district was planning to confiscate the equipment used in felling the trees, so as to stamp out the vice.

The district has also planted over 7,000 trees in a move to conserve the environment.

Wadia Manase, the resident district commissioner, who heads the district security committee team, said with support from the district forest department, they had resolved to arrest the drivers of the trucks found ferrying logs and take them to court.

He said they had started by arresting and charging those found transporting the logs, but that it did not deter them, forcing them to intercept trucks ferrying the logs, offloading them and levying a fine on the owners.

Yumbe district council imposed a penalty of sh3m on trucks found ferrying logs.

The LCS chairperson, Taban Yassin, urged the Government to intervene since the army and the Police were said to be aiding criminals. He said the matter was now beyond the authority of the district because the law was being disrespected.

ARMY RESPONDS

Maj. Telesphor Turyamumanya, the UPDF 4th Division spokesperson, said the people in charge should report such officers who engage in illegal log trade to the Police so that they are apprehended for interrogation. He said the district security committee should also make a recommendation to the army, if there is need for special reinforcement to fight the vice.

