

Namugongo chokes on waste

By Gerald Tenywa
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It is believed that being clean is a sign of spiritual purity, but when a team from *New Vision* visited Namugongo shrines in the aftermath of Martyrs Day, there was a nasty encounter with tonnes of rubbish littered all over the place.

The grounds on Sunday played host to hundreds of believers who thronged the Catholic and Church of Uganda shrines, to pay homage to the Uganda martyrs. The pilgrims, however, left the grounds with up to six tonnes of uncollected waste.

Not only did the rubbish cover the grounds, but also the road and storm water drains. The garbage included mainly plastic water and soda bottles, as well plastic bags used in wrapping chapattis.

Moses Musoke, who has a shop near the Anglican shrine, said the pilgrims were carrying up to six plastic bags, each time they visited his outlet.

"One of the shoppers picked an egg packed in a plastic bag, salt in another, bread in a separate plastic bag, soda and water in another plastic bottle," Musoke said.

"Do you know where all that ended? This is what is filling the storm water drains and the compounds of the shrines."

New Vision also encountered waste collectors picking empty mineral water bottles. They concentrated on plastic bottles because the bottles fetch more money than the bags.

Muhamood Mutyaba said a kilogramme of plastic bags costs about sh1,000 while that of plastic bottles goes for sh500.

Church initiatives

Francis Muwonge, the administrative secretary at the Catholic shrine, said they deployed a number of people during the celebrations to pick and dispose of the litter from the congregation.



Men searching for plastics among the rubbish littered along the road next to Catholic shrine in Namugongo, Wakiso district yesterday. Photo by Wilfred Sanya

"We are aware that littering destroys the environment, so we made sure that all the garbage was collected and disposed of," he said.

He also said with the help of Kampala Capital City Authority, garbage has been collected and taken to the authority's dumping centre in Kitezi on Gayaza Road.

Rev. Fr. Vincent Lubega, the rector of the Catholic shrine, said sanitation is key among their objectives.

"Before the redevelopment of the shrines, the place was home to a number of garbage skips, but they were removed to pave the way for the

construction of the place," he said.

"To improve sanitation, a number of toilets have been constructed at different points. We have built nine toilet blocks and each has 28 units." Fr Lubega said.

Sensitise the pilgrims

Baganda Nswa, a waste management expert, said management the both shrines was not prepared for the amount of the waste.

The people need to be guided on how to dispose of sorted waste and they will do as told.

"I do not think that they planned for

the waste," he said, adding that most people consider waste disposal to be about collection, transportation and dumping.

He said waste management, which is about reducing, re-using and recycling should be embraced by the population.

"People should be conscious about the environment. Why should one use plastic straws when they have a glass or why should you go for single-use plastic when you can get one which can be used for several times.

"We need to know that we use plastic bags and, therefore, we should

Baganda Nswa, a waste management expert, said handling need better planning. "I do not think the administrators at the shrines planned for the waste," he said, adding that most people consider waste disposal to be about collection, transportation and dumping, which he said was not the case.

He said waste management, which is about reducing, re-using and recycling should be embraced by the population.

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take responsibility in handling them," he said, adding: "We need to protect the environment from choking on plastics."

Observers say what was left at Namugongo is a mirror reflection of what takes place in our lives. It shows the burden which the population has imposed on the environment.

As the two shrines — Catholic and Anglican — are left struggling with the handling of the mountains of waste, people need to become better stewards of their homes and the entire community.

It is also an eye opener for the managers at the two shrines to advocate for a clean environment by spreading waste management in their neighbourhood.

Environmentalists suggest that every Sunday, the clergy should use opportunity to spread messages about better care for the environment and proper waste management.

This article is part of the one-month long campaign by *New Vision* to highlight the recycling of waste plastic bags, the challenges and recommendations